

*Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem.* Jean Bodin.

Ed. Sara Miglietti. Testi e Commenti 15. Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2013. 792 pp. €70.

---

This book offers an edition with Italian translation of the first great work of Jean Bodin, the *Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem*. The edition is based on the collation of two prints that appeared during the author's life: the first in 1566 and the second one

in 1572, both published in Paris by Martin le Jeune. The translation, accompanied by an agile apparatus of notes, profits from a comparison to the English version by Beatrice Reynolds (1945) and to the Italian translation by Niccolò Polizzi (1968). Curiously, however, it should be noted that it completely overshadows the debt to the Italian translation with commentary of Bodin's masterpiece, *Les six livres de la République* (3 vols., 1964–97), a seminal work that stands as the basis of most recent studies on Bodin. Miglietti never mentions it in her bibliography, in which the most important title in Bodin studies of the last fifty years, Margherita Isnardi Parente's introduction to volume 1, is also absent.

In his *Methodus*, Bodin offered a theory of historical comparison as a method of study in public law. In spite of its title, which invites us to think of it as a textbook on historical methodology, the *Methodus* constitutes the main effort by sixteenth-century legal humanists to place public law in a new system. Elaborated upon in the very cradle of French legal humanism, the University of Toulouse, the *Methodus* is a very difficult and complex work, which largely prefigures Bodin's masterpiece, *Les six livres de la République* (1576–86), and invites a close and constant comparison to it (especially for the concerns of chapters 6–9, which are transferred over to the *Six livres de la République*, particularly in books 4 and 5, relating to constitutional revolutions, astrology, chronology, the nature of peoples, and so on).

The editor strongly emphasizes the importance of a diachronic reading of Bodin's political thought. In fact, she thinks that the importance of the *Methodus* as an exemplary representation of Bodin's philosophical ideas is equal to if not greater than that of the *République*. For Miglietti, Bodin's changes and additions to the second edition of the *Methodus*, in 1572, form an intermediate step along the path that leads to the first edition of the *Six livres de la République* and to the new absolutist theory of sovereignty. However, the notion of sovereignty developed by Bodin is not just the result of a heightened legal and political radicalism, as Miglietti thinks, but is intertwined with political and religious elements that represent the convergence of different and conflicting traditions of thought. Miglietti's brief profile obscures this, in addition to other fundamental problems, such as the genesis of Bodin's topical method in the scientific debate of the mid-sixteenth century between Ramism and Melanchthon's topical method (C. Vasoli, 1974; M.-D. Couzinet, 1996).

There is no denying the usefulness of this work, which, at least for Italian readers, represents a significant step forward compared to the translation of 1968, which is quite unusable from a critical point of view. At the same time, greater attention to the legal-philosophical lexicon would have avoided several misunderstandings. To note just a few examples from the dedicatory letter: the "legitima studia" are not "oneste occupazioni" ("honest occupations," 66–67), but "legal studies," as rightly translated by Reynolds; the words "usuque diurno antiquata," on the tacit repeal of many Justinian laws, don't mean "una prassi consolidata" ("an established practice," 68–69), but the effects of the "long disuse"; "conturbarunt," referring to the legal sources, cannot be translated

“scompigliarono” (“they messed up,” 70–71) without betraying Bodin’s metaphor, which has to be translated “intorbidarono” (“they made murky [the waters]”); and, finally, “universum ius” doesn’t mean “diritto universale” (“universal law”), but “the law as a whole.” This is not a slender point: Bodin was far away from the conception of the *ius commune*, universalistic and pluralistic. He was pointing to “the law as a whole,” or, as we would say today, to a general theory of law that is a unified, scientific view, based on historical-institutional comparison.

DIEGO QUAGLIONI, *University of Trento*