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The Respublica Hebraeorum as a Scientific Political Model in Jean Bodin's 'Methodus'



Abstract: In his 'Methodus' (1572), Jean Bodin sets out to apply scientific method to politics and law, and to construct a complete and innovative treatise on these subjects. Bodin's method, designed to assure the scientific value of his study, includes comparative observation and historical context, and begins with a philologically impeccable examination of different bodies of legislation based on the widest possible range of juridical experiences and institutions throughout the world and in history. It is in this context that Bodin becomes the first to consider the Jews as a people deserving of historical attention due to their juridical, political, and institutional history. Moreover, he considers the Jewish institutions an exemplary model that brought about the longevity of the Jewish state. To get to the root of the legislation and politics of the Hebrews, Bodin justifies the study of Hebrew and emphasizes the importance of studying Jewish wisdom. Bodin's 'Methodus' anticipates the development of the literary genre of 'Respublica Hebraeorum,' and the deeper inquiry into the politics of ancient Israel that would follow in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Bodin's political theory, the study of the Israelite polity that begins in the 'Methodus' goes on to constitute some of the groundwork for the famous 'Six Books of the Commonwealth' (1576).

It is generally accepted that Jean Bodin was well versed in both the Hebrew language and the history of the ancient Hebrews. His study of Hebrew most likely began during his student years at the prestigious Collège des Langues in Paris, founded by Francis I,¹ or even earlier, during his first

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¹ Cf. "Biographical Note" in J. Bodin, *I sei libri dello Stato, Methodus*, ed. M. Isnardi Parente, vol. 1 (Turin: Utet, 1964), p. 101.

encounter with humanistic studies with the erudite bishop of Angers, Gabriel Bouvery.

Bodin's first published work (Paris, 1555)² was a broad commentary on Oppian's *Kynegeticon* and was dedicated to Bouvery. Bodin gratefully acknowledged Bouvery for having been his inspiring teacher and kind protector, and he defined him as *quasi honorarius arbiter* (an honest arbiter) not only in disputes among the *acutissimi* (keenest) theologians and philosophers, but also among those *Hebraicae et Graecae linguae peritos* (learned in Hebrew and Greek).³

By this point, Bodin had already declared his being engaged in *migliori* and *graviora*⁴ studies. Only a few years later, in the Toulouse *Oratio*, he elucidated the reasons for the unique connection between meticulous philological and linguistic skills and the improvement of judicial and political knowledge. The latter was clearly considered nobler, because it was possible to apply it to reality in order to achieve the well-being of the state, as well as the happiness of individuals, the community, and the whole of humanity.⁵

The famous introduction to the celebrated model for contemporary judges, *Jurisconsulti, hoc tam gravi nomine digni* (*Jurists Worthy of So Serious a Name*),⁶ which would be repeated in the *Methodus*' dedication to Jean Tessier,⁷ already contains a large part of Bodin's "scientific" program in a nutshell. Arguing in favor of the establishment of a college for humanistic studies in Toulouse, he stresses how it will complement the curriculum in the renowned Faculty of Judicial Studies. He believed that the preparation of a jurist (especially as a future servant of the state) should include the study of Greek and Latin, *quibus descriptae sunt leges* (in which the laws were written),⁸ in addition to the standard study of

² *Oppiani de venatione libri quattuor, Ioan. Bodino Andegavensi Interprete, Ad G. Gabrielem Boverium Andium Episcopum. His accessit Commentarius, varius et multiplex, eiusdem interpretis* (Lutetiae [Paris]: in Michaellem Vascosanum, 1555). (The royal privilege, however, is dated VII. Idus Februarii 1553.)

³ *Ibid.*, p. ii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁵ Jean Bodin, *Oratio de instituenda in republica iuventute ad Senatum populumque Tolosatium* (Toulouse, 1559), in Bodin, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. P. Mesnard (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), Latin text pp. 7–30 (henceforth, *Oratio*). On this topic, see pp. 16–18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ Jean Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem, ab ipso recognita et multo quam antea locupletior. Cum indice rerum memorabilium copiosissimo* (Paris: in Martinum Iuvenem, 1572), in Bodin, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, Latin text pp. 100–269 (henceforth, *Methodus*), p. 108b.

⁸ Bodin, *Oratio*, p. 108b.

Roman institutions and philosophers' doctrines on law and politics, along with a deep understanding of *omnes antiquitatis cognitiones* (all the ideas of the ancient world).

Clearly, given the circumstances and goals of his reasoning, Bodin could not suggest including the generalized teaching of the Hebrew language. Yet the importance of studying Hebrew is hinted at in the above-mentioned quotation on the practical importance of ancient knowledge. Furthermore, it is clear from the *Methodus* that such knowledge is not only seen as precious, even though many fundamental and recommended sources existed in Greek,⁹ but is also of extreme importance to study and penetrate the historico-judicial reality of the ancient world, such as the political history of the Jewish people. Bodin describes this history in one of his works, the one most focused on such history, using the term *Respublica Hebraeorum* in order to refer to its characteristic political norms, institutions, and judicial order. He also repeats, several times, the term *Imperium Hebraeorum*, which appears in the title of a long section near the end of chapter 6 of the *Methodus*, dedicated to the presentation of the *conversiones* (vicissitudes) of the Jewish state, as well as in the final index of *memorabilia*.¹⁰

The reasons for Bodin's intense interest in the history and institutions of ancient Israel in the *Methodus*, even before the beginning of the specific thread of the treatise concerning the *Respublica Hebraeorum* was developed by Bertram (1574) and Sigonio (1582),¹¹ are clarified in the

⁹ In particular, *Antiquitates Judaicae* and *Contra Apionem*, by Flavius Josephus (which were already available in Latin). Josephus was a historian whose credibility, culture, and honesty are particularly praised by Bodin in ch. 6 of the *Methodus*, pp. 138b–139a, along with works by Philo of Alexandria.

¹⁰ *Methodus*, p. 219a: the title, absent in the first edition of 1566, says: *status et conversiones Imperii Hebraeorum*; p. 264b, under *Hebraeorum Imperii status et conversiones*. Thanks to the notes of Margherita Isnardi Parente and Diego Quaglioni on the Italian edition of J. Bodin, *République* (cf. Bodin, *I sei libri*, vol. 3 [Turin: Utet, 1964–1997]), it is possible to understand the complete panorama of the sources Bodin succeeded in finding through his research efforts, which lasted over the decade between the drafting of the *Methodus* and the *République*. The present study owes much to the above-mentioned publication.

¹¹ Cf. Corneille Bonaventure Bertram, *De politia judaica, tam civili quam ecclesiastica, jam inde a suis primordiis... repetita* (Geneva: in E. Vignon, 1574); C. Sigonio, *De Republica Hebraeorum*, libri VII (Bologna: in J. Rossium, 1582). The two works are very different from each other, and that of Sigonio seems to ignore that of Bertram. On a first reading, neither of them seems to suggest a reference, even an implicit one, to Bodin's work on the *Respublica Hebraeorum*. Despite the success and vast circulation of an intriguing work such as the *Methodus*, there is no indication that the two scholars had any contact with it. Another question, as yet unresolved, relates to Bodin's knowledge of the two aforementioned books, and especially of *Moisis institutio reipublicae graecolatina* by Castellion (Basel, 1546). The work is mentioned by C.R. Ligota, *L'histoire à fondement*

explanation of his intentions and work plan that opens the text, in the dedication to Tessier. In particular, this clarifies his interest in the political typologies found in the different phases of ancient Israel's existence, as well as the original point of view that he adopts on this subject.

Clearly, already by the 1550s, Bodin had realized his ambitious project to revamp juridical knowledge by founding it on a method that would assure its scientific value. This would be based on the canons that, as Vasoli demonstrated in a seminal essay in 1981, humanists all over Europe had been analyzing in depth and updating for the previous ten years.¹² Bodin had also reached the conclusion, highlighted in the text of the Toulouse *Oratio*, that such knowledge is closely connected, through an interdisciplinary link, to the study of different aspects of human history in general, and in particular to political knowledge, which should itself be based on the most rigorous and extensive historical knowledge.

In the fields of both law and politics, a true science is attainable only when its object, design, fundamental concepts, principles, and propositions are the result of comparative observation and analysis of the universality of the paradigms and phenomena observed within the historical dynamics that such sciences seek to investigate. This is the premise from which Bodin starts as he describes to Tessier the immense task he has expected, and is willing to undertake, in order to construct a complete and innovative treatise on juridical science¹³ based on his

théologique: la République des Hébreux, in L'Écriture Sainte au temps de Spinoza et dans le système spinoziste (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1992), pp. 149–167.

Regarding the literary-political “genre” of the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, which was recently identified as such by historiography, and which was destined to achieve singular success from the mid-1570s, and especially over the course of the seventeenth century, as it assumes peculiar ideological emphases are of great interest for the history of political thought, see L. Campo Boralevi, “Introduzione” in P. Cunaeus, *De Republica Hebraeorum* (The Commonwealth of the Hebrews) (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1996), pp. vii–I, esp. pp. xii–xxxvi; “Per una storia della ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’ come modello politico,” in V.I. Comparato and E. Pii, eds., *Dalle ‘Repubbliche’ elzeviriane alle ideologie del Novecento: Studi di storia delle idee in età moderna e contemporanea* (Florence: Olschki, 1997), pp. 17–33; and the previously mentioned article by Ligota. I would like to thank Lea Campos Boralevi for drawing my attention to and providing me with a copy of Ligota's article, which briefly mentions the pages dedicated by Bodin to the “political system of ancient Israel,” highlighting the originality of his comparative approach. Cf. Ligota, *L'histoire à fondement théologique*, p. 162.

¹² Cf. C. Vasoli, “Il metodo ne ‘la République’ in la ‘République’ di Jean Bodin,” Proceedings of the Perugia Conference, November 14–15, 1980, *Il Pensiero Politico XIV* (1981), pp. 4–17. For a complete rereading of the *Methodus* from this specific point of view, see the more recent book by D. Couzinet, *Histoire et méthode à la Renaissance: Une lecture de la ‘Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem’ de Jean Bodin* (Paris: Vrin, 1996).

¹³ Cf. *Methodus*, p. 107b. The reference is to a first draft of the *Iuris universi distributio*, which Bodin published, with a dedication to Jean Nicolai, in 1578. This

schematic “table,” which already constitutes a kind of logical index. A condition essential to reach this objective is awareness of the need to carry out a preliminary, philologically impeccable study of different bodies of legislation throughout the known world. The effective development of such research must be based on the widest possible range of juridical experience and institutions, especially the most prestigious and significant ones.

It is clear from the beginning that Bodin’s reasoning is valid not only for juridical science, on which he failed to write the expected great theoretical work during his lifetime, but also for political science, “the science of governing states” (*reipublicae moderandae scientia*) or “civic education” (*civilis disciplina*), which constitutes the central, most important point of the *Methodus*, many of whose pages are repeated in the *République*.¹⁴

Explicitly rejecting any pretension to universalizing or absolutizing the Roman juridical and political experience, which was far from being a unitary whole, Bodin points to Plato’s positive exemplum: “who thought that there was only one system for creating laws and governing a state—to gather together all the laws of every republic, or of the more famous among them, so that thoughtful men could compare these with one another, and from these forge the best type of state.”¹⁵ Bodin declares himself ready and willing to dedicate his investigations and critical reflections toward a similar goal.

In the famous “table,” Bodin sketched a systematic chart of juridical science and its main divisions, along with postulates and definitions and brief references to the main Roman sources and their interpreters. He noted, “on the other hand I have gathered from all over *the laws of those peoples* that were famous for their competence in both military and civic matters.”¹⁶ At this point, for the first time, the Jews are mentioned as one of the many peoples deserving of historical attention, particularly within

work, which is contained in the collection edited by Pierre Mesnard (Bodin, *Oeuvres philosophiques*), can be read today in an Italian translation, in C. Pedrazza Gorlero, *La iuris universi distributio di Jean Bodin* (Rovereto: Edizioni Osiride, 1999).

¹⁴ Editor’s note: The reference here is to *Jean Bodin’s Six Books of the Commonwealth*, first published in French in 1576 under the title *Six Livres de la République*. Notes 1 and 10 above refer to a multivolume Italian edition of this work.

¹⁵ *Methodus*, p. 107b: “*qui legum tradendarum ac moderandae civitatis unam esse formam putavit, si omnibus omnium, aut magis illustrium Rerumpublicarum legibus in unum collectis, viri prudentes inter se compararent, atque optimum genus ex iis conflarent.*”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: “*ex altera parte leges populorum, qui militari urbanaque disciplina claruerunt, undique collectas.*” [emphasis added]

the framework of juridical history (but also, as revealed later in the work, owing to their political and institutional history).

According to Christopher Ligota's reconstruction, the rise of a specific European interest (earlier in time, though almost contemporary) in the institutions of ancient Israel, and in the theme of the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, should be seen in relation to typically Protestant religious visions. Meanwhile, Lea Campos Boralevi highlights its ideological traces of republican matrices, especially relative to Bodin's subsequent writings. His perspective does not diverge from these two lines, solely because of his fundamentally promonarchic reading of the history of Israel. Even though he did not produce an independent monograph on the subject, Bodin is the first thinker of the modern age to grant the dignity of being viewed as a scientific "political model" with a secular outlook, as explained in the *Methodus*, to the entire juridical-political experience of Israel. Thus, this model is not presented as superior and privileged because of its holy origin, as will be the case with later authors writing on the Hebrew *politeia*, and it is compared to other models with the aim of achieving a comparative study. All the models, including the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, are measured against the same scale, even though they are sometimes evaluated differently based on their political efficacy.

From the point of view of building a juridical science, one must explore the sources necessary for a reconstruction. As for the ancients, one must look at Roman legislation as well as that of the Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Jews. On this point, Bodin expresses his difficulties, some of which are linguistic in nature. At this stage, his research seems not to have crystallized, as evidenced by his dedication to Tessier. He writes about his goal of achieving great results from the study of the *Hebraeorum Pandectae* and, in particular, from the study of tractate Sanhedrin. Bodin here refers to the Mishna, of whose fourth order Sanhedrin constitutes the fourth tractate,¹⁷ and recalls the promises of help received from Jean Cinquarbre and Jean Mercier, *regi doctores* (teachers to the king) of the Hebrew language.¹⁸ The numerous references, presented in the *République*,

¹⁷ Cf. *Mishnaiot*, Italian translation with explanatory notes by V. Castiglioni, in *Ordine terzo e quarto* (Rome: Sabbadini, 1962), pp. 119–159.

¹⁸ At that time, Cinquarbre published the Latin translation of the *Targum* of Jonathan ben Uziel in 1556 and a handbook of *Institutiones in linguam hebraicam, sive Epitome operas de re grammatica Hebraeorum* (Paris, 1559). Jean Mercier was the author of *Tabulae in grammaticen linguae chaldaee quae et syriaca dicitur... Accessit ad calcem libellus de abbreviationibus Hebraeorum, quibus et in Masora et in Talmudicis... utuntur* (Paris, 1560).

to the norms and institutions of this juridical corpus, as well as some additions to the 1572 edition of the *Methodus*,¹⁹ show that the research was proceeding successfully.²⁰

Bodin then follows up with a comprehensive, and illustrative, list of contemporary peoples and states whose laws and legislation he intends to collect, analyze, and compare: the Spanish, British, Italian, German, Turkish, and, of course, French kingdoms.

The aim of establishing such a juridical science implies, as Bodin had already made clear in the Toulouse *Oratio*, a humanistic and interdisciplinary approach toward juridical reality, “for, in fact, in the history of all law, the most important part is hidden.”²¹ In order to arrive at a correct analysis, one must focus one’s attention on “the behavior of people and the origins, growth, forms, mutations, and collapse of republics” (*mores populorum ac rerum publicarum initia, incrementa, status, conversiones, exitus*).²² Hence, the need arises to delineate the “method”: to orient oneself and proceed in the field of historical knowledge, which is the object and goal of a work whose main theme is the “forms of republics” (*status rerum publicarum*), in relation to which “nothing is more productive than the fruits of historical study” (*fructus historiae nulli sunt uberiores*),²³ as Bodin himself brought to his readers’ attention.

This is a clear reference to chapter 6 of the work, whose opening repeats and develops these sentences, reiterating the necessity to continue the vast research on the different realities of the various states. The declared aim of this research is the construction and advancement of the *reipublicae moderandae scientia*. Here, Plato’s indication of the requirement to collect and compare the practices and customs of all the *Respublicae* is invoked.²⁴ Bodin includes this requirement and adds his wish to unite and confront “the disagreements of philosophers and historians on the subject of the State” and to “compare the empires of the ancients with our own, so that once everything has been compiled, the

¹⁹ The additions refer to specific contents of the Sanhedrin. Cf. *Methodus*, p. 219; and J. Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem libri sex* (Paris, 1566), pp. 332, 334.

²⁰ For the various passages, see the references under “Mishna” in J. Bodin, *I sei libri dello Stato*, eds. M. Isnardi Parente and D. Quagliioni (Turin: Otet, 1997), vol. 3, *Indice dei luoghi e delle cose notevoli*, p. 731.

²¹ *Methodus*, p. 109b: “*et quidem in historia iuris universi pars optima latet.*”

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Methodus*, p. 167a.

history of all republics will be more clearly understood.”²⁵ This also aimed at a better understanding of how different forms of the state—monarchic, popular, and *optimata* (based on the rational best class of citizens, or *optimates*)—necessarily corresponded to different “laws.”

Following this short, introductory passage, Bodin continues with his comparative goals by adding examples from the institutional history of different peoples, aimed at clarifying and sustaining his definitions and thesis on the principal notions of *civis*, *magistratus*, *merum imperium*, and *summum imperium* (citizen, magistrate, unrestricted command, and supreme command) and at confuting the doctrine of a mixed state. Naturally, Roman institutions receive the most attention. Regarding Bodin’s pioneering role in the history of the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, one should note the comparison he draws between his own work and Sigonio’s work on Rome.²⁶ Throughout this rich chapter, there are many isolated references to the political institutions of other peoples: the Venetians, Florentines, Carolingians, Assyrians, Athenians, Spartans, and also the Jews.²⁷

The development of the themes of the forms and mutations of the state leads Bodin to elucidate the characteristics of the “major” political models, which are always named after the people who embodied them. They are described and identified with care, case by case, with the holders of the *summum imperium*, concretely illustrating each conception of sovereign power. The result is found in the many pages on the *Status Romanorum*,²⁸ on the *Status Lacedaemoniorum*,²⁹ and on the *Status*

²⁵ Ibid.: “*Philosophorum et historicorum de Republica disputationes inter se... maiorum imperiis, cum nostris comparare, ut omnibus inter se collatis, universa Rerum publicarum historia planius intelligatur.*”

²⁶ Cf. *Methodus*, pp. 173b, 178a, 178b, 179b, 180a. The work of Sigonio to which Bodin refers, without ever quoting it, seems to be the first edition of *De antiquo iure civium Romanorum* (1560). The critical notes of Diego Quaglioni’s edition of the *République* reveal that Bodin’s criticisms extended also to Sigonio’s subsequently published works. Cf. the different listed places and references under “Sigonio” in the index of names in Bodin, *I sei libri*, vol. 3, p. 695.

²⁷ Cf. *Methodus*, p. 174a: Writing on the absence of *imperium* in popes and priests, he quotes the *Libri Talmudici*, titulo Sanhedrim, ch. 3 (Mishnah), and the *Ad Ieremiam Caldeus interpres* (*Targum*), in order to demonstrate that Jewish priests had the power to execute death sentences, but that by the time of Jesus’ condemnation the Jews had lost the *imperium*. Hence, the affirmation that the priests were not allowed to kill was determined not, as wrongly assumed, by a Mosaic prohibition but rather by the fact that Judea had become a Roman province. The passage is repeated in another context in the first book of the *République*; cf. Bodin, *I sei libri*, vol. 1, p. 287.

²⁸ *Methodus*, pp. 177b–180a.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 180a–181a.

Venetorum.³⁰ As very different models of the *status popularis*, having little in common with that of the Spartans, the *respublicae* of the Venetians, the Athenians, and the Romans are carefully described and compared under a political-institutional profile.

In the following section, devoted to *Status optimatum* (government of the best men), which describes sovereign power controlled by a minority of *cives*, we find the *Respublica Hebraeorum* listed together with the Venetians, Ragusians, Genoans, Germans, and Spartans (after the fall of their kings), and the Farsalis before the arrival of Alexander. Here the *Respublica Hebraeorum* is reviewed during a very precise and short period in its history: that which precedes the institution of the monarchy. According to Bodin, this is an *optimate* model of the state, characterized by the concentration of power in a small group of “exceptionally virtuous” (*virtute insignes*) people. Bodin stresses the contrast with the negative models, where sovereignty is in the hands of “very few of the worst men possible” (*paucissimi et deterrimi*), and he gives a series of historical examples.

The reference to the *Respublica Hebraeorum* focuses on the authority and prerogatives of the “Senate” instituted by Moses and made up of seventy-one members (including Moses). This was a very small number compared to the weapons-bearing male population between the ages of twenty and fifty-five, which was estimated at around 622,000. The unique political form in which Bodin is interested, highlighting it in a completely typological way, is that of *aristocratia paucissimorum* (an aristocracy of very few men).³¹

Some pages later, the chapter on *Conversiones rerum publicarum* examines the circumstances that led humanity to institute the first states, and individuals to relinquish their full liberty to live as they pleased. Here Bodin affirms that those who received sovereign power *justitiae fruendae causa* (for the sake of securing justice) were called “judges” or “shepherds of the people.” These terms meant not “rule and command,” but “care, solicitude, government, and equality of judgment.” Bodin here reminds us that the seventy men *qui rempublicam Hebraeorum tenuerunt* (who governed the republic of the Hebrews) were called *shofetim*, which means “judges.”³²

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 181a–182b.

³¹ *Methodus*, p. 186a. This characterization is totally absent from the *République*, where Bodin mainly concerns himself with confuting the “aristocratic” reading of the *Respublica Hebraeorum* given by Flavius Josephus and by the monarchomachic and republican movements.

³² *Methodus*, pp. 191b–192a. The term is written in Hebrew characters.

Before the institution of the Senate and the beginning of this aristocratic phase, Moses, as the legislator and *justissimus et sapientissimus princeps* (the most wise and just ruler), is embodied in the figure of the monarch at the beginning of the section dedicated to the *monarchiae status*, referring to his difficult relationship with the people of Israel. Here Bodin argues against Aristotle's thesis that he who rules against the will of the people is a tyrant.³³

Among the causes of *conversiones* and the ruin of states and peoples, Bodin cites *religionum varietas*, or "varieties of faith," and points out that ancient peoples tended to put different religions on the same level, apart from the Jews,³⁴ whose religious politics is exemplary.

One of the most important features of the scientific value of the political model represented by the Jewish state is its longevity. This is particularly significant for the politicalology from whose perspective Bodin conducted his study, and more generally for all contemporary political treatises of the time.

In these original³⁵ and complex pages, which are dedicated to the analysis of a possible relationship between the changes that befall a state (or even the "death" of a state) and certain specific temporal, numerical recurrences, Bodin also analyzes the chronology of Jewish history and cites different assertions on the subject from very respected sources. According to Philo, 1,717 years passed between the Deluge and the destruction of the [First] Temple and the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, while Flavius Josephus counted two hundred years more. Bodin, adopting Philo's hypothesis, *tum ex historiarum veritate, tum ex numeri praestantia* (because of both the accuracy of his narrative and the excellence of his calculations), adds eleven more years in order to reach the decisive *numerus magnus* of 1,728 years (*duodenarius cubus*, or "twelve cubed").³⁶ In the following passage, mentioning additional sources of his knowledge of ancient Hebrew history (sources previously unmentioned and absent from the list of texts suggested in the bibliography, in the final chapter of the work), Bodin writes about the duration of the monarchic phase, "*a Saule primo rege Hebraeorum, usque ad captivitatem*" (from

³³ Ibid., p. 186b.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 195a.

³⁵ It is the section of ch. 6 entitled "*Conversiones rerumpublicarum ad numeros collatae*" (*Methodus*, pp. 195a–201a) of whose originality Bodin is particularly proud: "*Sed mirum est omnibus Academicis tum Graecis tum Latinis, neminem hactenus numerorum praestantiam illam ac dignitatem, quae ad statum imperiorum pertinent, ullius civitatis exemplo docuisse*" (ibid., p. 196a).

³⁶ *Methodus*, p. 197a.

Saul the first king of the Hebrews until the exile), stating that it was 496 years, another “perfect” number and “*qui mirabiliter congruit conversionibus Rerumpublicarum*” (one which agrees remarkably well with the mutations of states.)³⁷ It does not matter that other respected Hebraists, whose works on this subject Bodin had obviously read, proposed different figures. Genebrard³⁸ adds three years, Gartz³⁹ adds ten years, and the Talmudists count one hundred years less but do not include a *necessariam rationem* for their affirmation. Bodin insists on the correctness of his calculations and affirms that “*a reditu populi, et secunda templi constructione sub Zorobabele usque ad eum annum quo Herodes a Senatu rex appellatus, sunt anni CDXCVI*” (from the return of the people and the building of the Second Temple under Zerubabel until the year that the Senate named Herod king was a period of 496 years).⁴⁰ Clearly, Bodin did not think twice about amending the dates, sometimes by only a couple of years, even contradicting very respectable sources, in order to support his “scientific” observations.

In addition to relevant examples taken from Roman history, Bodin notes that the relevance of the numbers seven and nine, and their multiples or cubes, in *conversiones rerumpublicarum* had been recognized by Moses. In fact, Moses took into account the number seven for the

³⁷ Ibid., p. 197b.

³⁸ A small volume by Gilbert Genebrard, a Hebraist and bishop of Aix (1537–1597), which came out in Paris in 1559, included *Eisagoghe... ad legenda rabbinorum commentaria* and *Meditationes rabbinicae* (Paris: apud M. Iuvenem). In 1564, the same publisher produced another volume, *Hebraicum alphabetum Gil. Genbrardi... fidelius quam antea expressum... Adjectus est Decalogus characteribus hebraicis et latinis*. But Genebrard was also the author of *Chronographia in duos libros distincta: prior est de rebus veteris populi, auctore Gilb. Genebrardo... posterior recentes historias praesertim ecclesiasticas complectitur, auctore A. Pontaco, nunc primum quidem in minorem formam redacta*. The copy owned by the National Library of Paris was published in Lovanio (Leuven) in 1570, but Bodin clearly refers to a previous edition (that I have, as yet, been unable to identify). It is worth noting that Genebrard was the editor and translator of a French version of the *History* by Flavius Josephus, which was published in Paris in 1578, *Histoire de Fl. Joseph... mise en francais, reveue sur le grec et illustree de chronologie, figures, annotations et tables, tant de chapitres que des principales matieres; Histoire de Fl. Joseph... de la Guerre, distruction et captivite des Juifs; un traite du Martyr des Machabees; La Vie de l'authheur escrite par lui mesme; L'Abrege de Josippe sur le mesme argument, reveue et corrige sur le grec par Gilb. Genebraud* (Paris, 1578). On Genebrard as a source used by Bodin in the *République*, cf. the passages indicated in Bodin, *I sei libri dello Stato*, vol. 3, under the entry “Genebrardo Gilberto” in the index of names, p. 667.

³⁹ Johannes Garcaeus (Garce, Gartz, 1530–1579). Diego Quaglioni and Margherita Isnardi Parente, citing the same quotation, which was repeated in the fourth book of the *République*, traced the passage to the work *Primus Tractatus de Tempore* (Wittenberg, 1563), p. 67. Cf. J. Bodin, *I Sei Libri dello Stato*, cited vol. 2, p. 444n.

⁴⁰ *Methodus*, p. 198a.

institution of the Jubilee; and from the victory of the Jews, with Esther's help, over Haman, to the victory over Antiochus 343 years elapsed. He also points out that both victories happened on the same day of the month of Adar and that from then on, the day has been marked with celebrations.⁴¹ From the exodus from Egypt to the destruction of the Temple and the *Respublica*, nine hundred years passed, a number which is composed of two squares: nine and one hundred.

Overall, this work highlights the remarkable longevity of the Jewish state along with its full correspondence to the natural laws (which, for Bodin, were attributable to divine providence), which preside over the lives of all states. The awareness that Moses and the prophets had of the number seven in the natural order of human events is presented as a manifestation of profound knowledge. The Hebrews considered seven a holy number and used it as the foundation for a series of celebrations and institutions: the festivities of the seventh day (the Sabbath), the seventh week (the Feast of Weeks), and the seventh month (the High Holy Days); the respite accorded the fields and the liberation of the slaves every seven years; and the great Jubilee every forty-nine years, with its cancellation of debts and the return of previously sold lands to their original owners.⁴²

A deeper study of the *conversiones* reveals a complex comparison of the institutional and political vicissitudes throughout the ages, as experienced among the different states in the world. Bodin's aim, as previously mentioned, was to widen the scope of his research as much as possible in order to include the largest number of states (called imperia, perhaps because he wished to embrace their entire history, which included different political forms). The research included the great and famous imperia of Rome, Athens, and Sparta, and that of the Germans, as well as the middling and minor ones, such as the small Italian states which, more than any of the others, witnessed changes and "revolutions." It includes imperia that vary in magnitude, from Swiss cities up to the great states of modern Europe.

⁴¹ *Methodus*, p. 198b. This is the holiday of Purim that is celebrated on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar. On the origins of this celebration, cf. C. Sigonio, *De Republica Hebraeorum*, 1. III, ch. 17, in Sigonio, *Opera omnia edita et inedita, cum notis variorum illustrium morum et ejusdem vita, a carissimo viro Antonio Muratorio serenissimi ducis Mutinae bibliothecarius conscripta, Philippus Argelatus Bononiensis nunc primum collegit, suasque animadversiones in aliquot ipsius Sigonii opuscula adjecit, necnon indicibus locupletissimis exornavit*, vol. 4 (Milan, 1734), cols. 159–160. The passage is repeated in the *République*, L. IV, ch. 2. Cf. the Italian version and its annotations: Bodin, *I sei libri*, vol. 2, pp. 445–446.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 200b.

The examination of each individual entity proceeds in a seemingly unordered fashion, which is a Bodinian order that interconnects the criteria of historical “fame,” chronology, politico-institutional conditions, and geography. From the description of the changes undergone by the imperia “*quae olim magis claruerunt*” (of the sort that were more illustrious in antiquity), such as Rome, Athens, and Sparta, he moves on to the imperia of the Western (Roman) Empire and the different political entities into which it was divided, all of which eventually again became monarchic regimes, except for a few which became popular, or optimate, regimes. To this latter class—the Swiss cities and their confederation, Genoa, Lucca, Ragusa, and Florence—Bodin devotes much attention. He praises the *Imperium Gallorum* as the one that “*diutius floruerit in eodem statu*” (flourished the longest without any changes). At the time Bodin was writing, monarchy in France had endured for twelve hundred years, a supreme achievement with profound implications for such a historical-political model.

The topic of the duration of the imperia led Bodin to consider the *conversiones* of the *antiquissima regna* of the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Persians, and the Parthians, and also to demonstrate that none of these political entities lasted longer than did the kingdom of France. Following a chronological line, and without mentioning the Jewish state, Bodin writes about the *Imperium Graecorum*, of the Arabs, the Poles, the Danes, the Swedes, the *Imperium Britannicum*, and the *Hispanicum* and concludes, “I pass over other empires whose history is obscure—those of the Tartars, the Muscovites, the Indians, and the Ethiopians. Yet, of those I have examined, it is clear that no empire has lasted longer than the French, and none has had less occasion for civil war.”⁴³

Although he candidly admits that many aspects of morals, laws, and customs are in need of improvement, Bodin specifies that the form of a republic that has been proven by such impressive stability cannot be changed without putting that state at the greatest possible risk.⁴⁴ He then recalls that Aristotle had warned not to change a single thing in that *respublica* that has been flourishing for a long time “*in eodem statu*” (in the same political form).⁴⁵

⁴³ “*Caetera, Tartarorum, Moschovitarum, Indorum et Aethiopum imperia, quae non sunt ex historia plane comperta praetermitto. Ex his tamen quae habemus explorata, perspicuum fit, nullum imperium magis diuturnum fuisse quam Gallorum, nec bellis civilibus minus opportunum.*”

⁴⁴ “*Status vero Reipublicae tanta diuturnitate probatus, sine gravissimo Reipublicae periculo mutari non potest.*”

⁴⁵ *Methodus*, p. 214a.

At this point, the ideological-political criterion, which Bodin understood was needed to develop his work, emerges. So it is not by chance that he here introduces the theme of the *optimus reipublicae status*, primarily to show the excellence of the monarchic type and to reject the supporters of both *respublica popularis* (such as Machiavelli) and the theory favoring the *potestas optimatum*.⁴⁶ As a function of his argument, Bodin inserts his analysis of the imperia, which, curiously, was missing from the previous presentation, namely, the *Respublica Venetorum* and the *Respublica Hebraeorum*. Hence, these two imperia play a primary role in his work on political models.

The pages he devoted to the secular history of the Republic of Venice were aimed, first of all, at contradicting the popular thesis that maintained that the republic was a superior political model. Bodin analyzes, with apparent objectivity, the merits of the Venetian political system and the reasons that guaranteed its stability. Yet he carefully points out all of the weaknesses, faults, and political mistakes that prevented Venice from reaching its potential, and in contrast, he gives a positive presentation of the various political institutions of the French kingdom. In a brief retrospective on the history of the Venetian state, Bodin highlights the insecurities of its foreign policy, the civil wars, sedition, and conspiracies, along with a high risk of the rise of anarchy. Here Bodin quotes a Polybian metaphor about a ship attempting to sail in a dead calm without a helmsman.⁴⁷ And to further criticize the optimate model, he mentions the civil and other wars that Germany had suffered because of the absence of a *regia potestas* (royal power) that could have easily led Germany to victory.

It is evident that Bodin believed the monarchic regime to be superior to that of the optimate. To further support his thesis, he turns to the Jewish state, arguing against the opinion of Flavius Josephus regarding a biblical passage in I Samuel 11–17 about the first king of Israel. Josephus and those who concurred with him claimed that God condemned the monarchy and instituted an *optimatum imperium* for the Jews. Bodin adopts and develops his own alternative interpretation, in line with some medieval exegetical and judicial literature, which viewed the divine condemnation as targeting tyranny. He uses philological arguments, based on the analysis of the meaning of the Hebrew terms *melech* (king, but also tyrant according to Bodin) and *mishpat* (law, but also customs and traditions according to him). In order to support the idea that the Holy

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 214a–215b.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 216b–219a.

Scriptures “not only reject the popular and optimate regimes” but also approve the *regia potestas*, he mentions the famous biblical passage on kingship in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. In this passage, the institution of a monarchy is announced and ordained for the people of Israel, as well as the rights and duties that a king “chosen by God” will have to respect.⁴⁸ Bodin also informs the reader that in tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 2,⁴⁹ “*regia majestas quae fuit apud Hebraeos copiose describitur*” (the royal power that was among the Hebrews is abundantly described). Under the heading “*status et conversionum imperii Hebraeorum*” (of the form and mutation of the Hebrew empire), he begins a description and a critical analysis of the last of the juridical-political models, as inferred from the unique and autonomous political realities that we find highlighted and studied in chapter 6 of the *Methodus*.

This might seem like a small treatise on the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, even though it is part of a larger work containing many other, often larger, treatises. Yet one might wonder whether it somehow foreshadowed (and perhaps influenced) the advent of this literary genre of *Respublica Hebraeorum* that would develop in the coming years with the increased interest in Hebraic studies. In this context, Bodin recalls Sigonio’s work, which he often corrects with regard to Roman institutions. It could be that Sigonio had been a particularly attentive reader of the *Methodus*. However, there is no textual proof to support this hypothesis, which an initial comparison with the *Respublica Hebraeorum* (as with Bertram’s *Politeia Biblica*) would seem to refute. There are many divergences between the three works with respect to content and form, as well as differences in ideological emphases. Still, there are many cultural and contextual elements, as well as a shared passion for humanistic and juridical studies, that connect them. Hence, one should not so easily abandon the effort to find a point of contact, even an indirect one, between the

⁴⁸ On the exegesis of I Samuel 8:11–18 and the debates and interpretations that developed in the late Middle Ages in a juridical-political mode, cf. D. Quaglioni, “L’iniquo diritto: ‘Regimen regis’ and ‘ius Regis’ nell’esegesi di I Samuele 8:11–17 e negli ‘specula principum’ del tardo Medioevo,” in *Specula Principum*, ed. A. De Benedictis (Frankfurt: Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1999), pp. 209–242. This essay offers an enlightening analysis of Bodin’s writing in book 6, ch. 4, of the *République*, retrieving verbatim these pages of the *Methodus* and introducing as new the thesis advancing the idea that in the period before the institution of the monarchy, God ruled directly over his people, implying that the Jews never had a real aristocracy or a real democracy and that the Senate of seventy-one (members) performed a judiciary role only. Cf. Bodin, *I sei libri*, vol. 3, pp. 492–498.

⁴⁹ Cf. Sanhedrin 2:2, in *Mishnaïot*, third and fourth orders, pp. 127–129.

three writers, within the circle of scholars studying ancient Jewish history, which could not have been very large.

Let us, however, return to Bodin's text, which points out that the first form of the Jewish state was a monarchy, with Moses concentrating all sovereign power in his hands. Thus, he made laws *injussu populi et optimatum* (without the consent of the people or the aristocracy), co-opted the elders of the Senate, and ordered the election of the magistrates, the nomination of the priests, and the suppression of seditious citizens (as yet, there were no judges). The monarchic institution continued with Joshua, whom Moses had designated as his successor, which is further proof of his sovereign power.

Upon Joshua's death, the senators first elected Othniel as their captain (*ducem*), and then Ehud. On this matter, Bodin shares Peter Martyr Vermigli's thesis that Othniel's election by the Senate marks the transition to an aristocratic regime. No doubt with a degree of reservation, Bodin adds "*quamquam placet interpretibus*" (although the commentators agree with this). This reservation disappears altogether in the *République*, where he makes nothing less than a volte-face by passing over the following assertion in silence: "*non humanis consiliis, sed jussu divino duces creatos*" (the leaders drew their authority not from human approval, but from divine commandments).

Next comes the election of Gideon, who promises that neither he nor his son will exercise dominion over his people, but will let God rule. Finally, when the behavior of the sons of Eli and Samuel becomes reproachful and the power of the optimates degenerates into factions, the angry people demand a king. The institution of the monarchy puts an end to the rebellions. Bodin quotes a passage from Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (part 3, chapter 47), according to which divine law prohibited the Jews from building a temple until they had a king, whose *imperandi potestas* (power of command) would put an end to the rebellions. This shows that God favored monarchic rule and condemned tyrannies.⁵⁰

Once the monarchy was instituted, the senators, deprived of *imperium*, would go back to their consulting function and judge only minor issues, in line with the original institution established by Moses (Numbers 11). On this topic, Bodin corrects the affirmation in the *Targum* according to which the Senate, also under monarchy, had the supreme power to ratify laws and to adjudicate. Bodin argues that its power was limited to promulgating laws and decrees. This is followed by a description of

⁵⁰ *Methodus*, p. 219a. This is an argument added to the classical dictate of Deuteronomy 17:15, which is present in the passage and remains exclusive in the treatise on the same theme that we find in book 6 of the *République*. Cf. note 43 *supra*.

the diverse judicial competencies of the Senate and the different judicial courts with particular powers, which were ordained by the Sanhedrin.⁵¹ He also points out that the senators were co-opted by the Senate itself, which had *perpetua potestas*. Here Bodin, always concerned to demonstrate the historical facts that support his definitions of sovereign power, warns, “*quae tamen omnia jussu regum sanciebantur*” (all of which were nevertheless sanctioned by order of the kings). Only the *decreta* were competencies of the Senate.

After Solomon’s death, his son becomes a tyrant and the people split into two kingdoms, or, as Bodin puts it, two tyrannies. The power of the Senate was limited by the wishes of the tyrants and never achieved sovereign power.

Concluding his treatment of this subject, Bodin calculates the duration of the different periods and regimes throughout the Jewish state’s history, which corresponded to many *conversiones*. There was a first monarchic phase of 160 years, followed by 244 years of an optimate regime, followed by 496 years of monarchy (which soon after its institution split up into two tyrannies), which in the end was overthrown by the Assyrians. The king of Samaria and the Ten Tribes were deported to Chaldea, followed by the deportation of the kings of Jerusalem, along with the remainder of the people. After seventy years of exile, the Jews returned to their homeland, and the state flourished under the kings and priests until, because of internal rebellions and wars with its neighbors, the Jewish state fell first to the Egyptians, then to the Greeks, and finally to the Idumeans. Eventually, it became a province of the Roman Empire, from which it freed itself one hundred years later. Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews in Asia and Africa became victims of massacres perpetrated by all the surrounding peoples. It seemed that these people were plotting to destroy the friendless people, leading to the fear of its complete annihilation. The survivors—and here Bodin writes with evident compassion—were reduced to slavery and are still wandering throughout the world.

The theme of the *Respublica Hebraeorum* is precisely introduced and defined, in the *Methodus*, in new terms that anticipate deeper developments. One can understand that this political model, although treated in relation to the thesis of the supremacy of monarchies, does not assume a particularly valued connotation and does not achieve a determining ideological function in support of Bodin’s political choices. The different ways and the argumentative contexts through which he presents it show that the *Respublica Hebraeorum* offers, along with other models, a “scientific”

⁵¹ This part is repeated verbatim in the passage of the *République* already mentioned; cf. note 43.

interest and a demonstrative function for the utility and practicability of the criteria of political analysis that is arrived at through the definition of the fundamental concepts of political science. This is particularly true for the concept of sovereignty and its effective applicability to the critical examination of historical institutions, types of states, and their variations.

In the *République*, Bodin develops his goal of reestablishing political science in a way that is consistent with the methodological propositions he had formulated ten years earlier. The fact that the political history, the legislation, and the institutions of Israel are a most significant part of the heritage of the political experience throughout the ages is accepted to the point that there is no further need to theorize upon it.

In almost every chapter of the “six books” of Bodin’s political magnum opus, he recalls examples and testimonies from the history and the normative corpus of ancient Israel, along with many other examples. The same applies to almost every page of chapter 6 of the *Methodus* and in his major work, where he draws on passages in the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, and reuses and distributes them in different places.

As Bodin’s life advanced, his knowledge of the stories and exempla regarding the Jews and their political experience, as well as their practical laws, expanded. The Italian version of the *République*, edited by Margherita Isnardi Parente and Diego Quaglioni, abounds with copious annotations that confirm the theory that Bodin became an increasingly competent connoisseur of Jewish historical sources, juridical tradition, and other relevant literature. It is worthwhile to point out some changes that took place over time in his attitude toward the Hebrew model. The most evident of these is the disappearance of the *Respublica Hebraeorum* as a political model (or, as we have seen, series of political models) that are endowed with autonomous value. The *Respublica Hebraeorum* seems to melt away within a sea of exempla. The “secular” attitude that guaranteed its scientific value seems also to have evaporated. Now, Bodin unhesitatingly accepts the theocratic interpretation of the first phase of Jewish history, thus defining all of Moses’ legislation as the “law of God,” and demonstrates how the switch to the monarchic institution was a precise act of divine will. Such shifts in Bodin’s thinking could be the result of his determination to disprove the aristocratic character of Israel’s constitution or, perhaps, because the divinity and religion became increasingly important both within his value system and in his efforts as a man and a scholar.

The reasons for these shifts merit further research and deeper study, which would go considerably beyond the scope of this essay. One can note, however, that on the one hand, Jewish history is still frequently resorted to in order to obtain evidence of scientific and comparative value,

and hence that the Jews are studied as one of many peoples that a scholar investigating political science should consider. On the other hand, the Jews are studied because of their unique relationship with God, and Bodin recognized their sacred position in the world and places them on a higher plane. This is proven by the new tone, full of respect and admiration, that often accompanies his description of their laws and institutions.

And so, in the *République*, the secular model of the *Respublica Hebraeorum* disappears, while the path is prepared for an affirmation of the superiority and excellence of Jewish institutions that will become the main and connecting motive for the unfolding treatise on this subject and, at the same time, the starting point of its political and practical understanding and use.

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