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Howell A. Lloyd, *Jean Bodin, 'This Pre-eminent Man of France': An Intellectual Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Xiv + 311 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. \$100 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780198800149

Review by Tom Hamilton, Durham University.

“Jehan Boudin” was accused of theft by the criminal chamber of the Parlement of Paris in 1589 and freed after he told the court that he had no part in stealing the bread and ham that went missing in Épernay, which was instead taken by two boys who lodged with him.[1] Jean Bodin was also a priest at Bourgeuil in the Loire valley, a merchant from Saint-Maurice, and a student at Angers (p. 262). Still another Jean Bodin was also the eldest son of Guillaume Bodin and nephew to Jean Bodin, the famous Angevin jurist of the same “unhelpfully common name” who is the subject of Howell A. Lloyd’s comprehensive, major new intellectual biography, the first such work, in Lloyd’s apt summary, “to consider his ideas contextually and in the round” (p. ix).

The large number of men in the sixteenth century carrying the name Jean Bodin is just one reason why no other historian has hitherto attempted a biography of this “pre-eminent man of France,” as Gabriel Naudé put it in his apology for Bodin as an advocate for witchcraft prosecution and a supporter of absolute royal authority.[2] Another major inhibition to a comprehensive interpretation of Bodin’s life and work is his controversial reputation. Joseph Scaliger called Bodin “very ignorant”—according to a report attributed to Jacques Auguste de Thou—because “he wrote many things which he did not understand,” a major offence for that severe philologist.[3]

Yet another challenge facing Bodin scholars is the diversity of topics that he wrote about in a sequence of important treatises published in the second half of the sixteenth century. The *Methodus ad facilem historiam cognitionem* (1566) set out a comprehensive, humanist approach to the study ancient and modern history. In the *Six livres de la République* (1576) Bodin applied that approach to construct a powerful, universal history of government that put forward his famous, indivisible conception of sovereignty. And Bodin’s *De la Démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) provided one of the most forceful justifications for the prosecution of witchcraft by any European jurist of his age. How is a historian to make sense of the diversity of Bodin’s interests?

Tackling this “Bodin problem” with assurance, at the core of Lloyd’s conception of Bodin’s intellectual life is the Angevin’s drive to approach every subject he addressed in universal terms. Bodin infused his writing on human, natural, and divine history with a deep sense of moral purpose that he hoped could tackle the crises that wracked France during the troubles of the

Wars of Religion that carried on throughout his adult life. Born in Angers around 1530, Bodin died in Laon during the summer of 1596, after Henri de Navarre converted to Catholicism in order to be crowned as Henri IV and two years before the publication of the Edict of Nantes. As Lloyd states most clearly in his conclusion, Bodin emphasised the importance of “harmony” throughout his works and deployed all of his learning in pursuit of “universality,” whether it be “universal history” or “universal religion.” Precisely what Bodin meant by “universality” is rather ambiguous and demands a range of particular answers, answers that Lloyd provides in detailed overviews of all of Bodin’s works, which provide an essential guide for readers either new to the Angevin’s work or already familiar with its complexities. Combining analysis of all of Bodin’s works in this intellectual biography, a similarly harmonious and comprehensive interpretation is the goal Lloyd sets himself in this biography.

Pursuing such a “universal” approach to Bodin’s diverse interests in history, law, politics, theology, and beyond is a Herculean task that requires collaborative research across different areas of expertise. Lloyd himself has already made a major contribution to Bodin studies through an important account of the reception of Bodin in a volume edited by Lloyd that brought together leading Bodin scholars from Europe and North America to establish the extent to which Bodin formed (or failed to form) in his image the intellectual life of the late Renaissance.[4] Foremost among the historians in that collection are Bodin specialists whose work underpins much of Lloyd’s interpretation in this intellectual biography. Ann Blair’s study of Bodin’s *Universae naturae theatrum* (1596) guides Lloyd’s view of this complex work of heterodox Aristotelian natural philosophy that Bodin composed after he retired from public life following the defeat of the Catholic League in Laon (chapter IX.2).[5] Mark Greengrass’s interpretation of Henri III’s project of moral and institutional reform of the French kingdom in the 1570s and 1580s underpins Lloyd’s reading of Bodin’s role in the Estates General at Blois in 1576 as well as Bodin’s broader view of royal authority and its limits (chapters V and VII).[6] Greengrass’s essay on “The Experiential World of Jean Bodin” also appears in dialogue with Lloyd’s approach to Bodin as a whole.[7] And Mario Turchetti’s ongoing research in preparing a bilingual edition of the *République*, as well as Sara Miglietti’s edition of the *Methodus*, reveals how Bodin worked between French and Latin and adapted his arguments for different domestic and international audiences.[8] These works underpin crucial aspects of Lloyd’s analysis and are generously acknowledged in his footnotes (and in-text Harvard style citations, which I found a little difficult to follow in parallel).

By contrast, Lloyd tends to downplay his disagreements with other scholars, notably Paul Lawrence Rose who made a strong case for Bodin as a “Judaizer.”[9] For the most part Lloyd charitably presents his more conventional alternative interpretation—a prophetic, often Platonic aspiration to a harmonious Christianity in which good triumphs over malign forces in the universe—without engaging in extensive polemical criticism with Rose. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive discussion might have helped to clarify how far Lloyd is willing to go in terms of Bodin’s interest in Jewish scholarship. (pp. 259-61)

Another collaborative venture driven forward by Lloyd’s research, “The Bodin Project,” now a website hosted by Harvard University, provides some of the most revealing points of analysis in the book.[10] It hosts the “Sources Index,” a comprehensive list of references cited by Bodin in all of his major works compiled by Catherine Andreadis, Alastair D. McCann, and Kenneth D. McRae. Lloyd makes excellent use of these findings in detailed discussions of Bodin’s sources for the *République* (chapter VI.2) and the *Démonomanie* (chapter VII.4). It might come as no surprise that Bodin’s legal training is reflected in his heavy reliance on Roman lawyers in the *République*,

that his humanist inclinations led him to cite ancient historians more prominently than their modern successors, and that the *Démonomanie* with its focus on witchcraft led to a comparatively larger number of Biblical citations (pp. 121-8, 182). But what is most striking in Lloyd's discussion of Bodin's use of sources is just how far Bodin tended towards what Lloyd labels as a typically Renaissance form of compendious "plagiarism," as Bodin cited third-party sources from favourite texts without following up the references himself, especially in citing Greek or Hebrew authorities through primarily Latin texts (pp. 128, 183). These passages demonstrate the virtue in understanding Bodin's method from the inside, understanding how he read texts in order to mine them for references that he then deployed rhetorically in burnishing his arguments. It is less clear from Lloyd's text precisely how typical Bodin was in this enterprise. Many contemporaries viewed Bodin as an outlier for the content of his thought, but Lloyd argues that his methods were typically humanist and shaped by the "mental furniture" of his age (p. 121). More extensive comparison with his fellow scholars might have helped elucidate further what kind of humanism Bodin espoused and how he engaged with the controversies of methods in his time.

Overall, Lloyd's intellectual biography is scrupulous and clear in its organisation and analysis. It offers an outstanding go-to guide for advanced students and researchers interested in any aspect of Bodin's complex and wide-ranging thought. Provision of original French and Latin quotations is helpful to the reader in this sense. Successive chapters offer extensive summaries of all of Bodin's works, supported by specialist secondary literature. Although this solid intellectual biography lacks some of the interpretative reach of existing studies by Blair, Greengrass, and Rose, its conclusion provides much-needed perspective on Lloyd's vision of Bodin's "universalism," a fair if not especially novel characterisation that might have been more rigorously integrated into the chapters.

This criticism of the balance in Lloyd's work between detailed analysis and broader interpretation does not detract from the overall strength of this first intellectual biography of Bodin, which is a major achievement. This book does not aim to rethink Bodin in a fundamental sense, but rather to bring together all of the strands of his thought "in the round." Considered alongside Lloyd's collaborative work on *The Reception of Bodin* and "The Bodin Project," this intellectual biography makes Bodin accessible to new audiences and provides an authoritative assessment of the Angevin's life and work that will ensure his canonical status for future scholars.

I do not wish to detract from this praise by concluding with my hope that this study does not only encourage future research into Bodin but also into his wider intellectual world. While the reception of Bodin in the modern age has established him as a Great Thinker—an agenda that Lloyd's study endorses—in his own time Bodin was by turns viewed as a tireless scholar, a quack, and a social climber who never achieved his vast ambitions in the legal hierarchy of the ancien régime. In this sense, it is disappointing that Bodin's many contemporaries who surpassed him in the esteem of their contemporaries, especially in legal and scholarly communities—Barnabé Brisson, Louis Servin, and Jacques Auguste de Thou to name but a few—, and made major contributions to the many areas of learning to which Bodin himself contributed, have received far less attention from modern scholars than the Angevin. There are several reasons for this pre-eminent interest in Bodin among modern scholars, including the continued relevance of debates over his concept of sovereignty and enthusiasm for the history of early modern witchcraft and its intellectual justifications. Yet in his time Bodin was neither socially nor intellectually

considered to be the “pre-eminent man of France.” Future research would do well to follow Lloyd’s example and study not only Bodin’s thought but his intellectual world “in the round.”

NOTES

[1] Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris AB 10, 1589-05-13; Archives nationales X2A 956, 1589-05-19.

[2] Gabriel Naudé, *Apologie pour tous les grands personnages qui ont été faussement soupçonnés de magie* (The Hague: Adrian Vlac, 1653), 127-8, cited in Lloyd, *Bodin*, vii.

[3] Antoine Teissier, *Les Éloges des hommes savants tirez de l’histoire de M. de Thou*, 4 vols. (Leiden: T. Haak, 1715), iv, 272, cited in Lloyd, *Bodin*, vii.

[4] Howell L. Lloyd (ed.), *The Reception of Bodin* (Brill: Leiden, 2013).

[5] Ann Blair, *The Theatre of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997).

[6] Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576-1585* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

[7] Mark Greengrass, “The Experiential World of Jean Bodin” in Lloyd (ed.), *The Reception of Bodin*, 67-96.

[8] Jean Bodin, *Les Six livres de la République / De Republica libri ses, Livre premier – Liber I*, ed. Mario Turchetti with Nicolas de Arango (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013); Jean Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, ed. and trans. Sara Miglietti (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2013).

[9] Paul Lawrence Rose, *Bodin and the Great God of Nature: The Moral and Religious Universe of a Judaiser* (Geneva: Droz, 1980).

[10] “The Bodin Project,” <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/bodinproject>, accessed 24 May 2019.

[11] On sovereignty, see most recently Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), ch. 1. On witchcraft, see Virginia Krause, *Witchcraft, Demonology, and Confession in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015) as well as Alfred Soman, “The Parlement of Paris and the Great Witch Hunt (1565-1640),” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9 (1978): 37-8, which demonstrates how Bodin cannot be taken as a guide to the jurisprudence of early modern French criminal courts on witchcraft since he wrote the *Démonomanie* as a critique of the Parlement of Paris on this subject.

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