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Sallust and Jean Bodin: the Inevitable Loss of the Commonwealth

“If we should inspect nature more closely, we should gaze upon monarchy everywhere. To make a beginning from small things, we see the king among the bees, the leader in the herd, the buck among the flocks or the bellwether (as among the cranes themselves the many follow one), and in the separate natures of things some one object excels: thus, adamant among the gems, gold among the metals, the sun among the stars, and finally God alone, the prince and author of the world. Moreover, they say that among the evil spirits one alone is supreme. But, not to continue indefinitely, what is a family other than the true image of a state? Yet this is directed by the rule of one, who presents, not a fictitious image ... but the true picture of a king.”¹

It took less than a century for the ideal of civic sovereignty, so enthusiastically elevated into the conscience of the Renaissance man by authors such as Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) and Leonardo Bruni (1369–1444) in Italy or Lebègue in France,² to become dismantled and gradually abandoned for another ideal – namely that of the advantages of monarchic absolutism. At first glance, this seems to be the most obvious, natural and self-explicative consequence of the circumstances marked by the political and religious turmoil of the early 1500s, not only in France but more or less the whole of Europe.³ Yet looking at Bodin’s personal circumstance one is compelled to ask whether this is in fact the case.

1 *Nam si naturam proprius inspicimus, monarchiam ubique intueri licebit. Videmus enim, ut a minimis auspicer, in apibus regem, in armentis ducem, in gregibus hircum aut arietem secarium (ut inter grues ipsas unam reliquae sequuntur) et in singulis rerum naturis unum aliquid excellere. Sic adamantem inter gemmas, aurum inter metalla, solem inter sidera, denique Deum unum mundi principem et autorem: quin etiam inter malos genios, unum aliquem eminere aiunt, sed ne longius progrediamur, quid est aliud familia, quam vera Rei publicae imago. Haec tamen unius imperio continetur, qui non fictam ... Regis imaginem refert.* All Latin excerpts, including the present one (Bodin, 1610, 247) were taken from the 1610 edition; English translations by B. Reynolds (Bodin et al., 1969).

2 See Osmond, 1995, 106–110 for an extensive treatise on Salutati and Bruni; on Bruni and his “uses of the past” cf. also Ianziti, 2012; see Byrne, 1986, 47 ff. for Lebègue’s uses of Sallust.

3 An extensive biography of Bodin related to the historical unfolding of his time is provided by Lloyd in his *Jean Bodin, “This Pre-Eminent Man of France”* (2017), particularly pp. 6–66; another quite extensive and in-depth study of Bodin’s life was rendered by Lloyd in the “Introduction” to the *Reception of Bodin* (2013), 1–20. See also Blair, 1997, 9–13. An important review of Bodin’s life is rendered by Greengrass (2013) from Bodin’s “personal” point of view as perceivable in his texts. See Lassabatère, 2010, 405–406 for some recent archival discoveries regarding Bodin and his family.



To this day, William Dunning's characterization of Bodin remains perhaps the most fitting and poetic description of his humble person: "In the civil and religious strife of the times, Bodin was fitted neither by character nor by training to be a violent partisan." (Dunning, 1896, 85) Yet Bodin, a middle-class man from Angers, was no stranger to high politics – or uncertainty springing from religious allegiance.⁴ Having studied law in Toulouse, he entered the parliament in Paris in 1560, where he subsequently became increasingly involved in active political life. It was at that time (1566) that he published his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (the "Method for the Easy Comprehension of History"), which has some impact on our thinking in the context of this study: though it sounds as if the above-quoted passage from *Methodus* was written by a staunch royalist with something to gain from it, it should be noted that Bodin's brush with the crown was still to come.⁵

However, we won't be immersing ourselves into the fascinating biography of Bodin – which interests us only up until 1566 for the purposes of this treatise – nor shall we dispense with moral assessments of his literary abandonment of the Republic as an ideal model of shared sovereignty lest we fall victim to the retrojection of modern political clichés and dilemmas. Instead, we shall look into the relationship between Bodin's *Methodus* and the Roman historiographer Sallust, whose oeuvres Bodin frequently invokes as his role model in the form of more or less subtle allusions. This paper is therefore (mainly) about two things: the nature and possible aim of the political chapters in Sallust's monographs; and the early modern re-readings of Sallust's "political theory" if there is a thing that can be referred to in such terms.

Let us therefore inspect more closely the most extensive passage from Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* which has produced by far the most ambiguous readings:⁶

The city of Rome, according to my understanding, was at the outset founded and inhabited by Trojans ... But the Romans, putting forth their whole energy at home and in the field, made all haste, got ready, encouraged one another, went to meet the foe, and defended their liberty, their country, and their parents by arms. [...]

They had a constitution founded upon law, which was in name a monarchy; a chosen few, whose bodies were enfeebled by age but whose minds were fortified with wisdom, took counsel for the welfare of the state. These were called

4 See Fontana (2009) on the rather problematic question of Bodin's conversion to Calvinism.

5 See Lloyd (2017), 115–117 and particularly Engster (1996) on the context of Bodin's fallout with Henry III in 1576.

6 Generally, longer quotes from Latin sources will be given in English translations only, whereas individual shorter textual excerpts will be given – in text – in Latin with English translations in brackets.

Fathers, by reason either of their age or of the similarity of their duties. Later, when the rule of the kings, which at first had tended to preserve freedom and advance the state, had degenerated into a lawless tyranny, they altered their form of government and appointed two rulers with annual power, thinking that this device would prevent men's minds from growing arrogant through unlimited authority.

Now at that time every man began to lift his head higher and to have his talents more in readiness. For kings hold the good in greater suspicion than the wicked, and to them the merit of others is always fraught with danger; still the free state, once liberty was won, waxed incredibly strong and great in a remarkably short time, such was the thirst for glory that had filled men's minds. [...]

But when our country had grown great through toil and the practice of justice, when great kings had been vanquished in war, savage tribes and mighty peoples subdued by force of arms, when Carthage, the rival of Rome's sway, had perished root and branch, and all seas and lands were open, then Fortune began to grow cruel and to bring confusion into all our affairs. Those who had found it easy to bear hardship and dangers, anxiety and adversity, found leisure and wealth, desirable under other circumstances, a burden and a curse. Hence the lust for money first, then for power, grew upon them; these were, I may say, the root of all evils. For avarice destroyed honour, integrity, and all other noble qualities; taught in their place insolence, cruelty, to neglect the gods, to set a price on everything. Ambition drove many men to become false; to have one thought locked in the breast, another ready on the tongue; to value friendships and enmities not on their merits but by the standard of self-interest, and to show a good front rather than a good heart. At first these vices grew slowly, from time to time they were punished; finally, when the disease had spread like a deadly plague, the state was changed and a government second to none in equity and excellence became cruel and intolerable.⁷

Though it has been widely acknowledged (see Osmond, 1995, 108 ff.) that *virtue* is central to the transformations of constitutional paradigms from monarchy and oligarchy towards republicanism – and vice versa – it seems an important aspect was neglected. The digression that (only seemingly) looks at Rome “from the outside” (Shaw, 2022,

7 Sall. C. 6.1–11.3. All Latin texts by Sallust as well as their respective English translations are from Henderson's edition (Sallust et al., 2005).

126 ff.) is still very central to the question of virtues from the narrator's viewpoint, applied to a historical argument.⁸ It makes for an essential part of a ten-chapter *Ringkomposition* (C. 5.1–14.7; cf. Pobežin, 2018) which begins (ch. 5) and ends (ch. 14) with the characterization of the paradigmatic villain Catiline. Serving as an extension of the moralist prologue in chapters 1.1–4.5,⁹ the whole passage concentrates on the central theme i.e., *virtus* in all its manifestations (we shall revisit them in the concluding chapter). Here, too, a pattern develops, beginning with an asyndetic string (a clear sign of heavy narrative involvement) of virtuous behaviour (C. 6.5.): *at Romani domi militiaeque intenti festinare, parare, alius alium hortari, hostibus obviam ire, libertatem, patriam parentisque armis tegere* ("But the Romans, putting forth their whole energy at home and in the field, made all haste, got ready, encouraged one another, went to meet the foe, and defended their liberty, their country, and their parents by arms."). This rather energetic string is framed within the simple observation that the "constitution was founded upon law, which was in name a monarchy": *imperium legitimum, nomen imperi regium habebant* (6.6). However, the most important emphasis of the passage laid out before us is that the subject bearer of *virtus* (expressed either in energetic terms such as *festinare, parare, ... hortari, ... obviam ire, ... armis tegere* or the deliberative *ingenii sapientia* associated with the *patres* in 6.6) is the *collective* – the *Romani*; here, the whole chapter is vindicated despite its historical vagueness: when "the rule of the kings, which at first had tended to preserve freedom and advance the state, had degenerated into a lawless tyranny, [the Romans] altered their form of government and appointed two rulers with annual power". A sense of inescapable necessity emerges from the brief report that "the rule of the kings ... degenerated into a lawless tyranny" (*regium imperium ... in superbiam dominationemque se convortit*). We shall return to what we can make of this below.

Another – almost opposite, as we shall try to argue in the conclusion – picture is painted in the following i.e., chapter 7:

Now at that time every man began to lift his head higher and to have his talents more in readiness. For kings hold the good in greater suspicion than the wicked, and to them the merit of others is always fraught with danger; still the free state,

8 It should be noted, that the content of this particular digression deserves the epithet "historical" only insofar as individual historical periods are mentioned i.e., the founding of Rome (6.1–6.2), the period of the Roman monarchy (6.2–7.2), the Republic until the fall of Carthage (7.3–9.5) and the subsequent gradual downfall (10.1–13. 5), which also forms the starting point of the central narrative. Very obvious generalizations point towards the lack of any ambition to render a serious historical account here. Even *the only* line that can be pinpointed with historical precision – the uprooting of Carthage (10.1) which, incidentally, represents the acme of the whole chapter and the *Ringkomposition* – is a historiographic originality, since it places, unlike other authors, the cause of eventual downfall of the Republic to the mid-2nd century BC (cf. Potter, 1999, 50–51).

9 See Earl, 1961 (particularly pp. 41–59 and 82–103) and Earl, 1972 on the role of the prologue in the construction of the moralistic grounds for the rest of the narrative.

once liberty was won, waxed incredibly strong and great in a remarkably short time, such was the thirst for glory that had filled men's minds.¹⁰

Here, too, the underlying ever-present theme is the collectively manifested *virtus*: *coepere se quisque magis extollere magisque ingenium in promptu habere* ("every man began to lift his head higher and to have his talents more in readiness"), which is further expounded in 9.1–2: *domi militiaeque boni mores colebantur; concordia maxuma, minuma avaritia erat; ius bonumque apud eos non legibus magis quam natura valebat. Iurgia, discordias, simultates cum hostibus exercebant, cives cum civibus de virtute certabant ...* ("good morals were cultivated at home and in the field; there was the greatest harmony and little or no avarice; justice and probity prevailed among them, thanks not so much to laws as to nature. Quarrels, discord, and strife were reserved for their enemies; citizen vied with citizen only for the prize of merit").

Full of narrative devices (chiasms and several asyndeta in 9.1 and 9.2), this passage achieves the effect of collectivizing and democratizing *virtus*, which revolves around a historically vague but rhetorically very effective idea that "kings hold the good in greater suspicion than the wicked, and to them the merit of others is always fraught with danger" (7.2: *Nam regibus boni quam mali suspectiores sunt semperque iis aliena virtus formidulosa est*). The *good* and the *wicked* in opposition to the kings contribute to this effect, which further drives the wedge not between the establishment and the others (meaning that the former *and* the latter can be either moral or immoral (McDonnell, 2006, 6)) but between two political systems embodied by this very opposition.

The idea evolving in 6.1–9.2 is one of perpetual growth and development, save for a brief "setback" in 6.7 *regium imperium ... in superbiam dominationemque se convortit*; the historical zenith (and the central moment of the *Ringkomposition*), according to Sallust, is "when Carthage, the rival of Rome's sway, had perished root and branch" (10.1), after which a clearly defined period of ambiguity is introduced (ending with Sulla's rise to power in 11.4) where *virtus* became subject to interpretation: *primo magis ambitio quam avaritia animos hominum exercebat, quod tamen vitium propius virtutem erat* (11.1: "at first men's souls were actuated less by avarice than by ambition – a fault, it is true, but not so far removed from virtue"). The gist of this line of thought may be briefly recapitulated in the following terms: yes, people went astray but only because "the noble and the base alike long for glory, honour, and power" (11.2: *gloriam, honorem, imperium bonus et ignavus aequae sibi exoptant*) the wedge of distinction being drawn between the *good* (*bonus*) and the *bad* (*ignavus*), the former striving for excellence (*se extollere*), the latter giving in to ambition (*ambitio*) and ultimately the worst of sins: avarice (*avaritia*).

10 7.1–3 *Sed ea tempestate coepere se quisque magis extollere magisque ingenium in promptu habere. Nam regibus boni quam mali suspectiores sunt semperque iis aliena virtus formidulosa est. Sed civitas incredibile memoratu est adepta libertate quantum brevi creverit; tanta cupido gloriae incesserat.*

The issue of historical vagueness of chapters 9–12¹¹ – it has been suggested that these chapters exhibit some “sloppy writing” (McGushin, 1977, 91) and “sloppy thinking” (Conley 1981, 122) – actually compels us to treat the terms *ambitio* > *avaritia* > *luxuria* with some care and attention to detail, since it may mislead us to thinking (e.g., Earl, 1961, 13–15) that some kind of a loose temporal sequence is implied – if only history were *that* linear, but it probably isn’t. The most plausible line of thinking here is that vices are listed according to their severity and remoteness from true virtue (cf. Büchner, 1960, 320), which is in line with the scheme of virtues developed in the prologue 1.1–4.5 (Pobežin, 2019, 61–90).

The structure of the whole “second prologue”¹² therefore makes it clear that it is hardly a digression (Shaw, 2022, 96) but, in reality, very central to the argument *de virtute*, suggesting that while it could be omitted very easily from the historical point of view, it is essential to the whole underlying theme of the real and historically deep causes of the downfall of the commonwealth, the trajectory of which can be roughly summed up as follows: *a*) monarchy governed by laws and consulted by wise elders > *b*) the corruption due to unlimited authority > *c*) the Republic > *d*) the turn of fortune due to widespread vices among people.

As a recapitulation of moral values specified as *bonae artes* within the general concept of *virtus*, chapter 9 introduces the idea of an ordered, functional state (reiterating the vague formulation *imperium legitimum* from 6.6), exemplified in the paradigm *ius bonum*, which implies the rule of law as a natural state, which can only take shape in a moral, virtuous society: *ius bonumque apud eos non legibus magis quam natura valebat* (9.1: “justice and probity prevailed among them, thanks not so much to laws as to nature”). The opposite of this orderly rule of law is *Fortuna*: a state of absence of *virtus* when everything is left to chance instead of *ratio*: *sed ubi labore atque iustitia res publica crevit ... Carthago, aemula imperi Romani, ab stirpe interiit ... saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit* (10.1).

With Bodin’s *Methodus* history was given, perhaps for the first time, the status of an art with its own set of instructions and guidelines clearly synthesized in distinctive methodology (Franklin, 1963, 84; Couzinet, 2013, 40). The work is also a plan for the study of all things human, from natural history to the studies of the divine, touching upon a plethora of fields that a person concerned with the study of the past might come in contact with;¹³ but even more importantly, a premonition of ideology to come i.e., the notion of sovereignty ideally vested in hereditary monarch (Blair,

11 Only two historical episodes, the Fall of Carthage and Sulla’s *imperium*, are (superficially) elaborated.

12 Cf. Pobežin, 2019, 62 (footnote 200) for an extensive list of bibliography on the subject of Sallust’s prologues.

13 See Miglietti, 2013 (particularly p. 195 ff.) for the reception of Bodin’s *Methodus*.

1997, 10). The idea was fully expanded in the *Six livres de la République* (1576), marking a clear break with constitutionalism in France (Engster, 1996, 469), and this seems to have been motivated politically as much as it was thought out from a legal angle (cf. Franklin, 1963, 36–40). Innovative as it was (Lassabatère, 2010, 407), the idea reached its most elaborate form¹⁴ in the *République*; yet even if the idea of sovereignty hasn't been worked out yet, so that *puissance de la souveraineté* was still bridled by elements of the legislature (Engster, 1996, 407), the *Methodus* is, in some parts, preliminary to the *République* (but some elements – at least literary and stylistic ones – are evidently present, among them the likening of the commonwealth to the family; cf. Becker, 2013). Nevertheless, in *Methodus* Bodin still sounds constitutionalist, even when dealing with Roman history:

When they [*sc. decemvirs*] had been overwhelmed and killed, the people for a time ruled lawfully and moderately, until the state fell into the hands of men desirous of revolution. Hence ensued ochlocracy, or rather anarchy of the turbulent plebs, from the sedition of the Gracchi until the time of Marius and Sulla, who befouled the city horribly with the blood of its citizens. Finally, in the thirty-sixth year following the state was miserably harassed by Caesar and Pompey, leaders of parties, until it was brought into control by the *lawful dominion* of Augustus alone. (Bodin et al., 1969, 237)

The development of Bodin's political theory set aside, we return to the introductory statement of this paper i.e., Bodin's reading of Sallust that could fit into his definition of sovereignty. Sallust's influence on Bodin is clearly evident, and not only from his open statement in his fourth chapter (*De historicorum delectu* – “Choice of Historians”) that Sallust was “a most honest author [who] possessed experience of important affairs” (*De Sallustio ... integerrimum scriptorem et rerum magnarum usu praeditum fuisse constat*; Bodin, 1610, 56). The text, particularly chapter six, is interspersed with almost Tacitean allusions to Sallust, quite notably his own *archaeology*, which echoes Sallust's chapters 6–11 from *Catilina* (see above): “The most famous of all [*sc. republics*] is said to have been that of the Romans, *which for a time flourished under kings*, then lapsed into tyranny under the Tarquins. When these rulers had been driven out, it fell into the power of the optimates and patricians...” (Bodin et al., 1969, 236–237).¹⁵

14 See Bourke's extensive analysis of Bodin's concept of sovereignty in his introduction (Bourke, 2016) to the collaborative *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, and Franklin's influential paper on Bodin's rise of absolutist theory (Franklin, 2016); for a more general and comparative treatise of concepts of sovereignty, cf. Foisneau, 2013.

15 *Omnium autem clarissima fertur esse Romanorum [sc. Respublica], quae olim aliquandiu sub regibus florisset, in tyrannidem prolapsa Tarquiniorum deinde his exclusis in optimatum ac patriciorum potestatem ...* (Bodin, 1610, 215). Similarly in p. 227: *Maiores nostri sub regibus primum diutissime floruerunt [...] Cum autem reges impotenter dominarentur, optimates imperium susceperunt ...*

Beside cultivating the Roman-like persona of an effaced historical narrator (cf. Blair, 2013, 155), the *Methodus* exhibits a Ciceronian postulate that history should have the capacity to reuse the past for the needs of the present circumstance: “Now from history we shall compare with our own the alteration and decline of states which once upon a time were more famous, *in order that from both the truth may shine forth the more*” (Bodin et al., 1969, 236).¹⁶ It seems almost self-understood that in the time of crisis Bodin would reach – among other models – for the Roman historian of decline and fall (Syme, 2002, 56) who recoined and reshaped the Thucydidean *stasis* narrative, adapting it to the Romans’ present circumstances, thus becoming an ideal model for similar historical narratives of the Renaissance (Cochrane, 1985, 166).

Perhaps there is not a single “punchline” in the whole world literature that could describe the “flow of history” and the nature of historical unfolding better than the lament about the burden of historical heredity from the book of Jeremiah: “The parents ate the sour grapes, but the children got the sour taste.” (Jr 31,29) We import this line as an illustration of the polemic question – one which we won’t even try to answer here – as to the “sincerity” of political longing after the days of the Republic once it was done away with in 27/23 BC. As we’ve already hinted at above, it remains to be answered *when* was it that the Republic was steered on its course of self-destruction – and given the fact that there was little accord between ancient historians themselves, we may never have the definite answer. An explanation derived from Sallust’s *Bellum Iugurthinum* (41.6–9) hits close to home:

But the nobles had the more powerful organization, while the strength of the commons was less effective because it was incompact and divided among many. [...] The people were burdened with military service and poverty. The generals divided the spoils of war with a few friends. Meanwhile the parents or little children of the soldiers, if they had a powerful neighbour, were driven from their homes. Thus, by the side of power, greed arose, unlimited and unrestrained, violated and devastated everything, respected nothing, and held nothing sacred, until it finally brought about its own downfall.

So, the period of the Gracchi tribunes (cf. Earl, 1961, 15) or, from a slightly broader perspective, the period of the Numantine war, which saw a meeting of major present and future oligarchical figures under one tent. From this point on and until – according

16 *Nunc ab hiftoria conversiones et exitus Rerumpub. quae oim magis claruerunt, cum nostris comparemus, ut ex utrisque veritas magis elucescat.* (Bodin, 1610, 215) Cf. Couzinet, 2013, 41.

to Sallust – Sulla’s military interventions in the east,¹⁷ the Republican virtues were rotting away, gradually deteriorating from *ambitio* to *avaritia* and finally to *luxuria*.

According to Coler, Sallust was a universally applicable thinker:

Of course, Cornelius Tacitus is a great, serious writer who can wipe our court scribes’ noses. I know what Lipsius thinks of him, and I do not disagree. But I myself have studied them at length, and even ventured to compare them; it seems to me that Sallust appeals to all, while Tacitus appeals only to the few learned people. The latter is more helpful for the study of the principate, the former for all forms of government. Sallust warns us, Tacitus teaches caution. Sallust advises us wisdom to learn, Tacitus to learn to be wise. What more can I say? Tacitus is certainly worthy of his teacher Sallust, and Sallust even more so of his student Tacitus.¹⁸

Although it is clear that Bodin uses Sallust with other political historians, it may also seem clear why Sallust is given precedence – but not in the spirit of (simplistic) biographical explanation. If it is to be thought that “as a historian, Tacitus had to be a Republican; in his life and his politics he was a monarchist” (Syme, 1982, 517) – and there is little cause to object such an ingenious observation – this goes towards literary strategy. In life, Tacitus “endured” monarchy and compared principate with the Republic (Strunk, 2017, 183) – what else was there for comparison? – yet he made clear that there was a definite discontinuity between the two (Syme, 1982, 3). Although he cultivated little illusion that the old Republic could be restored – *non omnia apud priores meliora, sed nostra quoque aetas multa laudis et artium imitanda posteris tulit* (Tac. Ann. 3.55,5) – he also made it clear that he wrote in the period *after the loss of liberty*, even if liberty restored was the motto of the Augustan principate (Gibbon, 1998, 53–55).

Whereas Tacitus only had second-hand experience of the Republic, for Sallust it was a genuine lived experience. Unlike Tacitus, he could only compare the Republic to a distant monarchy, reduced to a superficial historical example – and unlike Tacitus,

17 Ending in 133, the Numantine War is a prosopographical challenge. However, some major figures of present and future politics are known to have made Scipio Aemilianus’ military entourage, among them Jugurtha. By way of two references in *The War with Catiline* (5.6 and 11.4–8), Sulla is made to be one of the key figures in Catiline’s conspiracy – i.e., as one of the worst symptoms of decadence in stark contrast to past examples (11. 5: *huc accedebat, quod L. Sulla exercitum ... contra morem maiorum luxuriose nimisque liberaliter habuerat*). Such circumstances produced first Jugurtha and then Catiline who had distinguished himself in Sulla’s army even before 80 BC (Keaveney, Strachan, 1981, 364–365).

18 *Est certe magnus et serius scriptor Cornelius Tacitus et qui nostris aulicis nasum emungere egregie possit. De quo etiam scio quid Lipsius iudicet, nec repugno. Ego etiam aliquando utrumque inspexi et audebam alterum cum altero contendere. Videtur mihi Sallustius omnes docere, Tacitus paucos et doctos. Hic ad Principatum maxime, ille ad omnes rei publicae formas utilis esse. Ille monere, hic cavere. Ille sapere ut docearis, hic docere ut sapias. Quid multa? Dignus Sallustio magistro Tacitus, dignior Tacito discipulo Sallustius.* (Coler, 1599, 3–4)

he did not deplore the loss of liberty but the degradation of virtue from ambition to luxury, the former inducing the growth of the commonwealth, the latter expediting its demise. It seems natural, as we've already pointed out, that Sallust's *stasis* narrative fitted Bodin's line of thought more than that of other historians, but it remains to be answered what motivated his reading of Sallust – and also pointed out that some false equivalences occurred in this line of thought. One more quoted passage will be supplied *in extenso*, through which we shall examine traces of Sallust's ideas in Bodin's *Methodus*. The brief inspection of the kinds of change in the constitutional paradigm (*conversions imperiorum*) reveals, perhaps most tellingly, Bodin's line of thought in re-reading Sallust and the ancient political theory:

Changes of government are external or internal; it is necessary to make this distinction. External changes are made by foes or by friends. The latter form occurs when the state willingly yields to the rule of another [...] But this rarely happens, since the rule of strangers is endured with difficulty. [...] Similarly, an internal change may be one of two sorts; one without any violence at all, the other by force. *The former deflects from the right to the wrong without any effort, because the nature of men is such that they are wont to slip downward into vices...* (Bodin et al., 1969, 217)

Coupled with other passages (see above), the quote renders an image of Bodin the philosopher still dedicated to the idea of a sovereign bounded by the constraints of a legal system, but above all it echoes the Sallustian pattern of growth and downfall framed within the concept of virtue and vice. As we've already pointed out, Sallust's chapters 6–11 from *Catiline* form part of a *Ringkomposition*, the main historical units of which are the monarchy and the Republic. Within both historical stages, growth and decline are outlined, which fit perfectly into Bodin's scheme above: having defended their liberty and paternal *Lares* from external enemies, the Roman monarchy – with a constitution founded upon law (*imperium legitimum*) – was a project initially set on preserving liberty and the growth of the commonwealth (*initio conservandae libertatis atque augendae rei publicae*), but inevitably deteriorated into tyranny and failed due to the kings' innate suspicion of the good individuals and jealousy (*regibus boni quam mali suspiciores*). The Republic, too, was a failing system – precisely because men naturally “slipped downward into vices” (*propterea quod ea est hominum natura, ut deorsum ad vitia labi consuescant*; Bodin et al., 1610, 197). There is a pattern of rise and fall within both constitutional phases, and it could be argued that in both cases the cause of downfall is external (suspicious and jealous kings in the case of the monarchy, imported bad vices in that of the Republic); however, the seemingly logical deduction that both systems are conceivably equally good/bad, creates a false equivalence.

It seems self-explanatory that in times so turbulent and violent as Bodin's a man would turn to historical treatises with a similar gist, looking for clear conclusions. But such an explanation could also be an oversimplification. Did reading Sallust – even if “in the company of such ‘political’ historians as Tacitus, Machiavelli, and Guicciardini” (Osmond, 1995, 121) – really construct a good frame for a strong royal prerogative that stretched beyond mere literary strategy and style? Whereas reading Tacitus, as we’ve already pointed out, extinguished all illusion that the principate was in some way a continuation of Republican liberty, there is no way of *closely reading* Sallust that could yield a conclusion that *less liberty* could be a good solution for the politically volatile environment of the late Republic, but rather *more virtue* was needed.¹⁹ There seems to be an important oversight: *le peuple*. In Sallust, virtue is, as we’ve already pointed out, collectivized, which should block the seemingly evident (yet even biographically naïve) conclusion that under the stress of corruption, an absolutist in power would be a good solution.

Instead, another proposition may be accepted i.e., that in the context of his time, Bodin was looking for a “minimal point of universal and immutable order for politics” (Engster, 1996, 470–471). In the scope of this thesis, perhaps no better proposition can be made with regard to Sallust, either. This minimal point of universal and immutable order, when writing *Methodus*, was still human laws (and history), but within a constitutional frame of a constitutional monarchy – something Bodin would despair over ten years later (ibid., 471). The idea that Bodin proposed his ideas to combat the scepticism and relativism of his intellectual context (ibid., 472) overlaps with the gist of Sallust's ideology in which laws and history were substituted by *virtus*, itself (by way of Sallust's narrative) a universal, democratized and hopelessly unattainable ideal.²⁰

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19 This becomes perhaps most obvious in the close reading of Caesar's and Cato's speeches in the Senate (Sall. C. 50,1–55,6; cf. Pobežin, 2019, 155–166).

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Sallust and Jean Bodin: the Inevitable Loss of the Commonwealth

Keywords: Jean Bodin, Sallust, the Roman republic, the Roman Empire, historiography, reception

One of the most recognizable thinkers of the 16th century France, Jean Bodin, wrote what is perhaps the first methodological treatise of instructions and guidelines on how to not only read and write but also understand history. With his universal interest in all things human, Bodin predated Marc Bloch's postulate that historians should ideally be interested in all forms of life if they were to perform their task as dutifully as possible. In 1566 Bodin published one of the most frequently reprinted works, the *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* – "The Method for the Easy Understanding of History". Although he expressed keen interest and good knowledge of a score of ancient historians, listing them in the fourth chapter of his work (*De historicorum delectu* – "On the Choice of Historians"), one of them was particularly close to his heart. The Roman historian Gaius Sallustius Crispus who is, according to Bodin, "a most honest author [who] possessed experience of important affairs", provided Bodin and many of his colleagues with a model (*stasis*) narrative for discussing a changing world in turmoil – something Bodin was no stranger to in the time of the French religious wars. However, the explanation that it was the rhetorically efficient model narrative that inspired Bodin to copy Sallust's argument seems unsatisfactory and biographically superficial. Instead, this paper closely analyses the Sallustian chapters that purportedly motivated Bodin's thinking and proposes that there are little grounds in Sallust for Bodin's legal and historical framing of absolutist sovereignty.

Ura minulih idealov: Salustij in Jean Bodin o propadu države

Ključne besede: Jean Bodin, Salustij, rimska republika, rimsko cesarstvo, zgodovino-pisje, recepcija

Eden najbolj (pri)znanih francoskih mislecev 16. stoletja Jean Bodin je napisal morda prvi metodološki traktat z navodili in smernicami, kako ne le brati in pisati, temveč tudi razumeti zgodovino. S svojim univerzalnim zanimanjem za vse, kar je človeškega, je Bodin prehitel Blochovo priporočilo zgodovinarjem, da bi se morali zanimati za vsakršno človeško stvarjenje, če naj svojo nalogo opravljajo kolikor le mogoče vestno. Leta 1566 je Bodin objavil eno najpogostejše ponatisnjenih del, *Methodus ad facilem*

historiarum cognitionem, »Metodo za lažje razumevanje zgodovine«. Čeprav je izražal živo zanimanje in dobro poznavanje številnih antičnih zgodovinarjev, ki jih je navedel v četrtem poglavju svojega dela (*De historicorum delectu*, »O izbiri zgodovinarjev«), mu je bil eden izmed njih še posebej blizu. Rimski zgodovinar Gaj Salustij Krisp, ki je po Bodinovem mnenju »najbolj iskren avtor z znanjem o pomembnih rečeh«, je Bodinu in številnim njegovim kolegom ponudil vzorčno pripoved za obravnavo spremenjajočega se in propadajočega sveta, kar Bodinu v času francoskih verskih vojn ni bilo tuje. Vendar se zdi razlaga, da je bila prav retorično učinkovita tipska pripoved tisto, kar je Bodina motiviralo, da je posnemal Salustijevo argumentacijo, nezadovoljiva in biografsko površna. Ta članek zato natančno analizira Salustijeva poglavja, ki naj bi bila podlaga za Bodinovo razmišljanje, in ponuja sklep, da je pri Salustiju v resnici razmeroma malo podlage za Bodinovo pravno in zgodovinsko utemeljevanje absolutne monarhične oblasti.

O avtorju

Gregor Pobežin je klasični filolog, čigar poglobljena raziskovalna zanimanja so grško in rimsko zgodovino, kulturna zgodovina in digitalna humanistika. Kot raziskovalec in predavatelj dela na Znanstvenoraziskovalnem centru Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (ZRC SAZU), na Univerzi na Primorskem (Fakulteta za humanistične študije, in na Univerzi v Ljubljani (Filozofska fakulteta). Ob študijah o grškem in (predvsem) rimskem zgodovino, je pomemben del svojih raziskovalnih naporov posvetil literarnemu izročilu humanističnih piscev pa tudi zbiranju, interpretaciji in digitalizaciji srednjeveške in zgodnjemodernoveške epigrafske dediščine.

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