The *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* was Bodin’s third published work after his commentary on Oppian’s *Cynegtica* (1555) and his oration supporting the establishment of a public college for the education of Tolosan youth (1559); and it was his very first work to enjoy wide and lasting success both in France and abroad. It first appeared in Paris in 1566, and was then reprinted six years later by the same publisher, Martin Le Jeune, in a revised edition which also included a large amount of authorial variants and additions; it was the text of this second, augmented edition that would later provide the basis for a number of new editions throughout all Europe (Basel 1576, 1579; Heidelberg 1583, 1591; Geneva 1595, 1610; Strassburg 1598, 1599, 1607, 1627; Amsterdam 1650). From 1591 the Congregation of the Index had declared the *Methodus* forbidden “until it is corrected (*donec corrigatur*)”;¹ yet, although Bodin never seems to have made any effort to meet the Congregation’s requirements, the Roman prohibition did not, by any means, prevent the *Methodus* from being read in Catholic countries such as Italy (usually with special permission from the Inquisitors), while Bodin’s anti-papal feelings, which clearly emerge from the text on many occasions, may in fact have been directly beneficial to his reception in the Reformed countries.

Modern critics have often tended to consider the *Methodus* a ‘minor’ or ‘preliminary’ work compared to Bodin’s political masterpiece, the *Six Livres*

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de la république (first French edition 1576; first Latin edition 1586); hence, I believe, a certain lack of specific interest in the history of its reception through the centuries. While it may be true that the Methodus was, at some point, overshadowed by the greater reputation of the République, and that Bodin’s name, even in his own times, was more easily associated with the latter, still it would be too hasty to conclude that the Methodus has never had a fortune of its own, either because it was rarely read, or because it only enjoyed the reflected glory of its younger but more successful sibling, the République. What I wish to show is not only that the Methodus was widely read, but also that its many readers tended to be more interested by those aspects which set it apart from the République, than by those which pointed to a deep continuity between the two works. While there are exceptions to this, the Methodus was usually understood as a distinct, independent work which owed little or none of its interest to the fact of its being the ‘ancestor’ of the République.

Conceived by its author as a ‘method’ or aid to the study of history, the Methodus covered, as such, a whole variety of related fields: dialectics, geography, numerology, astronomy (and astrology), medicine, law, Biblical studies, chronology, linguistics—and politics too, of course, though not with the same focus as that of the later République.

Because it offers extended treatment to so wide a range of subjects, the Methodus has appeared to more than one modern critic as an utterly discursive and erratic work. Strange fate indeed for a book devoted to

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4 On the significance of reading and annotation as an aspect of ‘reception’, see above, p. 27.