

Andrei Constantin SĂLĂVĂSTRU  
“Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași (Romania)  
Institute for Interdisciplinary Research  
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Department

## **Royalist Rhetoric during the French Wars of Religion: Jean Bodin’s “Royale” Monarchy**

**Abstract:** The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) were the scene of the greatest doctrinal challenge the French monarchy had to face before the 1789 Revolution. While the medieval political theory had always accepted the idea of a royal power restrained by specific limitations, as the feudal character of the monarchy presupposed the existence of mutually-binding obligations between king and vassals and it involved the idea of consent by the ruled, the civil wars which devastated France during the second half of the sixteenth century brought with them the development, first by the Huguenots, then by the radical Catholics, of theories of popular sovereignty, which argued for a right of lawful resistance, for deposition of tyrannical kings and, in some cases, even for tyrannicide. But, in face of this challenge, the monarchy and the partisans of a strong royal power did not remain passive, but instead reacted with vigour, with political treatises and pamphlets of their own, which exalted the role of the king and bitterly attacked the arguments of their opponents. One of the most celebrated such treatises was Jean Bodin’s *Les Six livres de la République* (1576), which represented a seminal work in the development of early modern absolutism. Bodin’s book brought many significant contributions to the early modern understanding of the state and kingship, chief among them being the shift in the king’s main role, from that of supreme source of justice to that of legislator, and the definition of sovereignty as unique and indivisible – which turned the model of the “mixed constitution”, previously so much admired, into a corrupt form of state. But Bodin’s most direct answer to the dramatic circumstances of the 1570s and to the theories of popular sovereignty was to propose the so-called “royale” monarchy as the ideal form of the state – a monarchy where the absolute power of the king could coexist, without contradictions, with some limited

constraints on royal authority derived from the respect for natural justice and the king's own moral fortitude.

**Keywords:** Jean Bodin, France, Sixteenth Century, Monarchy, Wars of Religion