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Michalis Sotiropoulos, Liberalism after the Revolution: The Intellectual Foundations of the Greek State, c. 1830–1880

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Michalis Sotiropoulos,
*LIBERALISM AFTER THE REVOLUTION: THE INTELLECTUAL
FOUNDATIONS OF THE GREEK STATE, c. 1830–1880,*
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 299 + xii pages.

Michalis Sotiropoulos' *Liberalism after the Revolution* offers a richly researched history of ideas that reinterprets how the modern Greek state was intellectually conceived and built in the nineteenth century. The central question driving the book is how a new state, born from revolution, could establish its legal and political order on new foundations while severing ties with its Ottoman imperial past. Sotiropoulos approaches this task by focusing on the liberal intellectuals – especially jurists and legal scholars – who were instrumental in shaping Greece's institutions and ideology between the 1830s and 1880s, the formative decades after independence. Through extensive use of primary sources (treatises, pamphlets, parliamentary speeches, etc.), the author constructs intellectual biographies of these figures and situates their ideas within broader European debates, thereby illustrating the liberal currents that underpinned Greek state-building.

The book is organised into six chronological and thematic chapters, bracketed by an introduction and a conclusion that places Greek liberalism in a wider European context. Each chapter centres on a particular theme and often highlights one prominent jurist as a representative of that debate. For ex-

ample, chapter 1, "Mind the Legal Gap: The *Polizeistaat*, 'Enlightened Reforms' and their Liberal Critics (1832–1844)," examines the foundational policies of the Bavarian Regency (which governed Greece in the 1830s under King Otto) and the early absolutist framework they attempted to impose. Sotiropoulos engages with the thesis that the Bavarians tried to implement a paternalist "police state" model of centralised administration inspired by Prussian Cameralism. While acknowledging that Otto's advisors initially pursued these enlightened absolutist reforms, Sotiropoulos shows that Greek jurist-intellectuals quickly became critical of the Bavarian experiment. A key early conflict arose over the drafting of a civil code. The jurists, many trained in continental law, debated whether to adopt the French civil code or to base Greek law on Roman-Byzantine legal traditions. Sotiropoulos demonstrates that this legal debate was not a parochial quarrel but part of broader European liberal discussions about the role of law and the state. In tracing these debates, the chapter charts how initially loyal supporters of the monarchy evolved into advocates for constitutional limits, contributing to the movement that led to the 1843 insurrection and Greece's

first constitution in 1844. By the end of this chapter, we see the jurists pivot from endorsing enlightened absolutism to articulating an alternative liberal vision for the new state.

Chapter 2, “‘Romanist’ Jurisprudence: Liberty, Property and the Virtues of Agrarian Societies (1830s–1850s),” delves into debates over property rights and social ideals, with Pavlos Kalligas as a focal figure. Kalligas and other “Romanist” jurists drew on Roman law traditions in a somewhat subversive way to challenge the Bavarian absolutist approach. A major issue was the status of former Ottoman lands (the “national lands” expropriated by the new state). The liberal jurists argued that peasant cultivators who worked these lands should gain ownership – effectively promoting a nation of small landowners – whereas the monarchy treated these lands as state property to be sold or granted. Sotiropoulos situates this pro-peasant, agrarian vision within global debates, noting that questions of land ownership and the breakup of estates were key issues in many postcolonial and postfeudal societies (often paralleling arguments in contemporaneous colonial contexts). By championing the idea that broad property ownership would “nationalise” society and empower citizens, Greek liberals like Kalligas broke with any feudal remnants and further distanced the new state from Ottoman social hierarchies. This chapter thus highlights how liberal concepts of property and civil rights underpinned an inclusive vision of the Greek nation, pitting the jurists against the monarchy’s more elitist economic policies.

Chapter 3, “‘It’s More Than Economics, Stupid’: Political Economy and

the Limits of ‘Industrial’ Economics (1840s–1860s),” shifts focus to economic thought, centred on Ioannis Soutsos, perhaps the first professional economist in Greece. Soutsos and his colleagues grappled with how to develop the Greek economy and state finances in the mid-nineteenth century. Early Greek economic thinking had often been dismissed as naively liberal or simply derivative of Western ideas. However, Sotiropoulos presents a more nuanced picture of Greek political economy. He shows that Greek economists were conversant with French and other continental economic theories, and they applied these ideas to local realities of a small agrarian country. Notably, Soutsos criticised the unchecked industrialisation models of Britain and Belgium, fearing they would not suit Greek circumstances. Instead, despite being a liberal, Soutsos favoured a degree of state intervention and protection of property rights for the middle and lower classes. This chapter reveals that Greek liberals did not uniformly embrace *laissez-faire* dogma; rather, they sought a balanced economic liberalism that would strengthen the nation and avoid the social dislocation seen in early industrialising countries. In doing so, Sotiropoulos aligns the Greek economic debates with wider European discussions about political economy, free trade vs. protection and the social responsibilities of the state in the mid-1800s.

Chapter 4, “‘Let’s Talk about the Nation and the State’: Constitutional Liberalism, Sovereignty and Statehood (late 1840s–1860s),” examines the evolution of constitutional thought through the careers of figures like Nikolaos Saripolos, a pioneering constitutional lawyer. This

chapter covers the tumultuous period around the 1848 upheavals in Europe and the subsequent decade, when Greece itself underwent further political change. Sotiropoulos argues that Greek constitutional debates in the 1850s and 1860s were not isolated or backward but in fact carried broader European significance. After the liberal revolutions of 1848 were suppressed elsewhere, Greece became one of the few places where constitutionalism advanced – as seen in the liberal reforms culminating in the 1864 Constitution. Sotiropoulos provides a “view from the periphery” to show how Greek thinkers engaged with pan-European concepts of popular sovereignty, the separation of powers and the role of monarchy. For instance, Saripolos and his peers wrestled with the question of sovereignty: they supported the principle of constitutional monarchy but insisted that the monarch’s authority could never be absolute. The 1843 uprising that compelled King Otto to grant a constitution is interpreted not as an antimonarchical revolution, but as a demand that the king govern within constitutional limits. Even as they opposed Otto’s autocracy, Greek liberals remained committed to the idea of a king as head of state – just a constrained one. Sotiropoulos details how Saripolos articulated the notion that sovereignty resides in the nation and is delegated to the king and parliament under law, thus justifying the jurists’ stance against Otto’s personal rule without rejecting monarchy outright. By exploring these ideas, the chapter underscores the creativity of Greek liberal thought in reconciling national self-rule with constitutional monarchy, at a time when many European liberals were reeling from the failures of 1848.

Chapter 5, “The Law of Nations, Sovereignty and the International Autonomy of the Greek State,” turns to Greece’s external context and how liberal intellectuals responded to the constraints of Great Power domination. Throughout the nineteenth century, Greece’s sovereignty was limited by the oversight of Britain, France and Russia (the Powers that had helped create the Greek kingdom), and Greeks keenly felt the sting of unequal treatment in international affairs. Sotiropoulos draws on the work of scholars like Maria Todorova to note that Western Europeans often viewed Greece (and the Balkans generally) as semicivilised borderlands between East and West. Greek liberals were determined to challenge these prejudices and assert their country’s equality in the family of nations. This chapter highlights episodes such as the Don Pacifico affair (1850) and the Crimean War period (1853–1856), when foreign powers violated Greek sovereignty or national dignity. Sotiropoulos shows that these incidents galvanised Greek jurists to develop arguments in international law to defend the nation’s rights. Saripolos and others wrote legal critiques of doctrines like extraterritoriality (by which foreign nationals in the Levant claimed exemption from local laws). In doing so, they engaged in the emerging nineteenth-century discourse on international law and the rights of states. Thus, even in the international arena, Greek intellectuals embraced liberal principles – sovereignty, legal equality and nonintervention – positioning Greece not as an “oriental” protectorate but as a modern nation deserving full respect under European public law. The chapter thereby complements the domestic story by showing Greek liberalism operated on a global

stage, arguing against the very asymmetric power system that had enabled Greek independence in the first place.

Chapter 6, “Ideas into Practice: The ‘Lawful’ Revolution and the Building of a New Constitutional Order (1860s–1870s),” brings the narrative to its climax in the 1860s and 1870s. The “lawful revolution” refers to the ousting of King Otto in 1862 and the installation of a new monarch, King George, under markedly more liberal terms. Sotiropoulos describes how the liberal jurists were deeply involved in this transition: they helped draft the exceptionally liberal 1864 Constitution, and they framed the change of dynasties as a correction of course rather than a rejection of monarchy itself. Throughout the revolutionary process of 1862–1864, there were no serious calls to abolish the monarchy; instead, the focus was on curbing monarchical power through law. The 1864 Constitution emerged as one of the most liberal in the world at the time, enshrining almost universal male suffrage and a strong role for parliament. Sotiropoulos emphasises that even after 1864, the work of Greece’s liberal state-builders continued. He extends the discussion into the constitutional crisis of 1874–1875, when Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupis confronted King George over the latter’s interference in parliamentary government. Sotiropoulos provides a nuanced analysis of this episode, noting that despite the apparent conflict, both Trikoupis and the king eventually converged on a practical compromise that entrenched the parliamentary principle (the requirement that the government enjoys the confidence of Parliament). By the end of the chapter, we see how

the cumulative efforts of decades of liberal thought fundamentally transformed Greek political practice, producing a constitutional order that, while still a monarchy, was firmly grounded in liberal-democratic norms and far more advanced than what existed in much of contemporary Europe.

Finally, in the Conclusion, Sotiropoulos explicitly situates Greek liberalism in a Europe-wide perspective. Here he confronts any temptation to treat Greece as an “exceptional” or isolated case. Instead, he argues that the Greek experience underscores the common dilemmas faced by postrevolutionary societies. Greek liberal jurists assumed that most nations emerging from revolution or reform grappled with similar issues – how to balance sovereignty, constitutional governance and the role of the executive. What makes Greece particularly interesting, Sotiropoulos suggests, is that its liberals retained a radical edge even as liberalism elsewhere (such as in France or Britain) became more conservative, statist or elitist by the late nineteenth century. In Greece, most (but not all) liberal intellectuals remained committed to principles like broad political participation (they were unafraid of enfranchising the masses) and staunchly antiauthoritarian attitudes. The conclusion thus reinforces the book’s overarching claim: the Greek state was founded on a vibrant liberal tradition, one that was deeply engaged with European thought yet distinctive in preserving the democratic, revolutionary spirit at a time when that spirit was fading in Western Europe. By recovering this forgotten legacy, Sotiropoulos not only enriches Greek historiography but challenges

the West-centric narratives of the nineteenth century that have long marginalised southern Europe's contributions to liberal modernity.

Liberalism after the Revolution is a formidable scholarly achievement with several notable strengths. First and foremost, it fills a significant historiographical gap. As Sotiropoulos himself and other historians have observed, nineteenth-century Greek liberal thought has been surprisingly neglected in both Greek and European historiography. Older narratives of modern Greece often focused on nationalism, church or Great Power politics, frequently dismissing Greek liberalism as either derivative of Western ideas or too weak to matter. Sotiropoulos overturns these assumptions. He demonstrates conclusively that Greece had its own homegrown liberal tradition, animated by highly educated jurists who were in active dialogue with (but not slavishly imitative of) foreign ideas. The book's originality lies in bringing these intellectuals to the forefront and showing that they were crucial drivers guiding the young Greek state from absolutism towards constitutionalism. By doing so, the author departs from the conventional narrative of Greek state formation – which often emphasises backwardness, clientelism or the primacy of nationalist ideology – and recasts it as part of the history of liberalism. This is a significant contribution, as it integrates Greece into the broader intellectual history of nineteenth-century Europe, challenging implicit biases that claim only the Great Powers generated important liberal ideas.

Another major strength of the work is its comprehensive use of primary sources and careful contextualisation. Sotiropoulos has mined an impressive array of writ-

ings by the jurists themselves – including academic treatises, newspaper articles, parliamentary debates and pamphlets – to reconstruct their ideas. The research is exhaustive: the bibliography and footnotes attest to a mastery of Greek archival sources and contemporary publications, as well as foreign influences the jurists were reading (from Constant, Say and Guizot to Mill and Sismondi). Yet, despite the complexity of these ideas, Sotiropoulos' prose remains accessible and engaging. The author provides enough background explanation of legal and political terms to guide even nonspecialist readers. This balancing act – writing a scholarly study that is also lucid – makes the book inviting to a wide audience, from historians and political scientists to general readers interested in modern Greece. The narrative is further enlivened by the biographical approach: by framing each chapter around intriguing personalities, Sotiropoulos allows the reader to follow intellectual debates as human stories of learning, ambition, rivalry and principle. For instance, we see Kalligas evolve from a young legal scholar supporting the monarchy to a reformer pushing for peasant land rights, and Ioannis Soutsos transforming classical political economy to fit Greek realities. These biographical threads give the book a cohesive storyline despite its analytical nature.

Importantly, Sotiropoulos' analysis is comparative and contextually rich. He consistently places Greek debates within transnational intellectual currents. Whether discussing civil codes, economic policy or constitutional design, he shows Greek thinkers engaging with French, British and German ideas – and sometimes innovating upon them. For example,

chapter 4's discussion of sovereignty underscores that Greek jurists were aware of how 1848 had faltered in Europe, yet they persisted in advancing constitutionalism, thereby contributing to liberal thought in a period when the centre of gravity had shifted to the "peripheries". The conclusion explicitly notes that the Greek liberal experiment demonstrates the diversity of nineteenth-century liberalism: it did not always follow a single Western European trajectory but had multiple pathways. In this way, the book "decenters" European liberalism, giving southern Europe its due. It resonates with a broader trend in historiography to challenge the old Francocentric or Anglocentric visions of the "Age of Revolutions" and its aftermath. Sotiropoulos' Greek liberals are fully part of this wider story – their preoccupations with small property ownership, or distrust of uncontrolled industrial capitalism, mirror concerns in contemporary France or Italy, even as their solutions sometimes differed. The author's ability to weave Greek and European threads together is a standout feature of the book.

Furthermore, *Liberalism after the Revolution* has the strength of timeliness and contemporary resonance. While firmly a work of nineteenth-century history, it implicitly speaks to current issues. The book appears at a moment when liberal democracy's fortunes are a matter of global concern, and Sotiropoulos reminds us that Greece's state was, at its birth, grounded in liberal-democratic ideals. In fact, the author notes that the liberal legacy of the 1830–1880 period has been largely forgotten. This pointed remark (from the book's introduction) gives to his story a modern relevance without Sotiropoulos being didactic. It

suggests that understanding how Greek liberals built a constitutional state under difficult conditions – foreign pressure, a weak economy, a largely illiterate population – might offer inspiration or cautionary lessons for today's world, where new democracies still struggle with similar issues of sovereignty, rule of law and inclusive governance. The subtle contemporary dimension of the study adds to its depth, making it not just an antiquarian exercise but a reflection on the liberal tradition as a living, if embattled, legacy.

Finally, it should be noted that the book's structure and narrative flow are well-crafted. Each chapter builds logically on the previous, roughly chronologically, but also thematically, which prevents the story from becoming a mere political chronicle. By the time the reader reaches the 1860s in chapter 6, they have a full picture of how ideas about law, economy and governance matured over time and converged to shape the pivotal events of that decade. The conclusion then effectively zooms out to reinforce the broader implications. This structure makes the book coherent and cumulative: earlier discussions (like the land question or freedom-of-the-press debates) are referenced later to show continuity and change. In all, these strengths make Sotiropoulos' work a landmark study of Greek intellectual history and a significant contribution to nineteenth-century European history at large.

While *Liberalism after the Revolution* is undoubtedly a major contribution, there are a few limitations and omissions that invite critical reflection. Most of these arise not from flaws in execution but from the ambitious scope of the project, which inevitably could not cover

every facet of nineteenth-century Greek thought. One such limitation is the book's selective focus on a "handful of actors" – the liberal jurists – to the exclusion of other intellectual currents of the time. Sotiropoulos intentionally foregrounds the liberals because his goal is to highlight their overlooked importance. However, this means that the book says relatively little about the conservative or reactionary ideas circulating in the same period. For instance, ultramonarchist voices, ecclesiastical conservatives or proponents of a more ethnoreligious vision of the Greek state appear only in the background, usually as foil to the liberals. Having illuminated the liberal side so well, the book indirectly shows that we still lack a similarly detailed study of Greek conservative political thought in the nineteenth century. This is less a criticism of Sotiropoulos per se than a suggestion that his work could be complemented by parallel research into the ideas of his opponents. Nonetheless, readers should be aware that *Liberalism after the Revolution* offers a partial view of Greek intellectual life (by design), one centred on a liberal elite rather than a complete map of all ideologies in play.

A related point is that the book focuses on Athens and the Greek kingdom while largely leaving out developments in other Greek-populated regions or diaspora communities. The period from 1830 to 1880 was one in which not all Greeks lived in the kingdom – significant communities thrived under Ottoman or British rule elsewhere. Scholars of the Ionian Islands (which were a British protectorate until their union with Greece in 1864) might find it a missed opportunity that Sotiropoulos does not explore the Ionian

liberal tradition in parallel with the Athenian one. The Ionian Islands had constitutional institutions and vibrant liberal advocates who arguably pushed an even more radical agenda under British rule. Bringing the Ionian story into the analysis could have strengthened the book's comparative dimension – perhaps showing how two Greek states (the kingdom and the Ionian State) interacted intellectually. Likewise, the rich liberal discourse among the Greek diaspora in Western Europe (Paris, London) or in Constantinople and other Ottoman cities is not extensively covered here, since the book concentrates on those who directly shaped the Greek state's institutions. Again, this focus is understandable, but readers interested in a transnational intellectual history of Hellenism might crave more. Including such material would, of course, have expanded the book significantly, and Sotiropoulos perhaps wisely kept a tight lens on his main narrative. Still, this choice marks a boundary of the study's coverage.

Another minor critique concerns the range of source materials used. Sotiropoulos heavily relies on published writings of intellectuals (books, journal articles, parliamentary records), which is entirely appropriate for an intellectual history. However, the book gives less attention to newspapers and popular media, as well as to official government documents or correspondence that might show the practical impact of these ideas. The author is commendably interested in what he calls "practical intellectual history" – meaning he links ideas to their real-world context. However, liberal jurists often aired their views in the press or influenced public opinion through journalism, and one could ask

how their ideas were received by the broader literate public. Did newspapers of the day amplify or criticise the stances of Kalligas or Soutsos on land reform or constitutional questions? The book hints at public debates but mostly from the perspective of elite discourse. Likewise, while we see how jurists influenced the drafting of constitutions and laws, the book offers less on how those laws were implemented or contested in practice by various social groups (peasants, urban liberals, conservatives, etc.). To be fair, Sotiropoulos' aim was primarily to chart intellectual frameworks, not to write a social history of policy implementation. Still, readers curious about the wider reception of liberal ideas may find themselves wanting to know more about press debates, political party platforms or popular reactions, which lie mostly outside the book's purview. Perhaps integrating those elements would have diluted the focus; nonetheless, this is an area where the study's otherwise comprehensive approach shows some limits.

The most important problem is the lack of discussion of the intellectual pedigree of these liberal intellectuals. They did not appear out of nowhere, they were products of the Greek Enlightenment, but also of the Greek revolutionary experience. This is not necessarily the fault of the author. The Greek political enlightenment has been adequately covered by Paschalis Kitromilides, Roxane D. Argyropoulos and others, but not the Greek liberal revolutionary experiment. With the notable exception of Akritas Kaidatzis' recent book on Greek constitutionalism, there is no significant body of work that treats the revolution as a liberal uprising. Even though Soti-

ropoulos is more than familiar with the revolutionary period, he chooses not to elaborate, for example, on Polyzodis' background in constitution-making, declaration-writing, newspaper-editing and authoritarianism-fighting. Some references to the previous careers of some of the leading men, but also to the revolutionary experience of the masses and individuals, would strengthen the argument for the international audience, which is unfamiliar with the Greek Revolution and may see Sotiropoulos' story as an unstable no-roots and top-down attempt by the elite to transform a traditional agrarian society. Indeed, it was an agrarian and traditional society, but a radicalised one.

The book also occasionally raises intriguing points that it does not fully pursue. One example is the question of gender and liberalism. Sotiropoulos notes, almost in passing, that Saripolos (and possibly other liberals) even contemplated the extension of political rights to women at some future point – a remarkably progressive view for the nineteenth century. Yet this tantalising detail is only briefly mentioned (“an off-hand remark” by Saripolos) without deeper exploration of how gender figured in Greek liberal thought. Were Greek liberal intellectuals influenced by contemporaries like John Stuart Mill (who wrote *The Subjection of Women* in 1869)? Did they discuss education for women or changes in family law? The book doesn't say much about this. Similarly, topics like the role of religion in the state, which could be significant in a country defining its identity partly in opposition to an Islamic empire, do not get focused treatment. It seems the Greek Orthodox Church's stance on these liberal reforms (for instance, on secular legal codes

or constitutional limits on the monarch, who was nominally head of the church) is not thoroughly dissected. This might be because many leading jurists were themselves fairly secular in outlook, but it is another dimension where one wonders about pushback or alternate viewpoints. These omissions do not undermine Sotiropoulos' core argument, but they do highlight that the liberal project of the 1830–1880s had many facets, some of which are left for future scholars to examine in more detail. In essence, Sotiropoulos successfully sketches the main outlines of the liberal intellectual foundations; the finer details of how those ideas intersected with questions of gender, religion or social class remain open for further investigation.

Lastly, one might critique (or more properly, debate) Sotiropoulos' implicit assessment of Greek liberalism's legacy. The book persuasively shows that Greek liberals "preserved [liberalism's] radical edge at a time when it was losing its appeal elsewhere in Europe". By 1880, Greece had one of the most advanced liberal constitutions in the world. However, sceptics might point out that the decades after 1880 saw significant challenges: the liberal constitutional order did not prevent later political crises, coups and a slide into the National Schism in the early twentieth century. In other words, how enduring was the liberal foundation laid by Sotiropoulos' jurists? The book stops in 1880 and hints at a proud legacy, but it does not evaluate how that legacy fared in subsequent generations. Of course, covering later developments is beyond its scope, yet a reader might be left wondering if the author perhaps slightly idealises the coherence or strength of Greek liberal ideology in the

long run. The tension between liberalism and nationalism is a theme that Sotiropoulos addresses (he argues that nationalism did not entirely eclipse liberalism, contrary to standard views). Still, the late nineteenth century in Greece also saw the rise of the Great Idea (*Μεγάλη Ιδέα*) – the irredentist nationalist aspiration – which could sometimes conflict with liberal pragmatism, especially in foreign policy. We do not hear as much about how liberals dealt with expansionist nationalist fervour (except presumably by legalistic arguments). This is not so much a flaw as a reminder that even within the liberal camp, there were tensions between idealism and realism, between radical principles and the pull of ethnic nationalism. Sotiropoulos shows some of this, for example, in how jurists defended sovereignty but remained moderate regarding internal revolution. Yet, one could imagine an extended version of this study delving into how these liberal intellectuals responded to nationalist movements or economic crises beyond 1880. In sum, the critique here is that the book, by focusing on the constructive phase of Greek liberalism, leaves unaddressed the question of how that foundation weathered the storms of later history. This does not detract from the book's merits, but it frames an avenue for future research – perhaps by Sotiropoulos or others – to trace the trajectory of Greek liberal thought into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Sotiropoulos' work stands out not only in Greek historiography but also speaks to comparative studies of state-building and liberalism in the nineteenth century. To appreciate its significance, it is useful to compare it with similar studies

on the intellectual foundations of other modern nation-states. In recent years, historians have increasingly explored how ideas about liberalism, constitutionalism and sovereignty travelled and adapted outside the traditional core of Western Europe. *Liberalism after the Revolution* is very much part of this wave of scholarship that reconsiders the “Age of Revolutions” and nation-building from a transnational perspective.

One illuminating comparison can be made with Maurizio Isabella’s expansive study *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions* (2023). Isabella examines the interconnected liberal revolutions in Spain, Italy (Piedmont, Naples, etc.), Portugal, and Greece around the 1820–1821 period. His work, like Sotiropoulos’, aims to break the Franco-British monopoly on liberal revolution narratives by highlighting southern Europe. Isabella argues that these Mediterranean revolutions were influenced by Napoleonic disruptions and shared common liberal principles such as constitutionalism and the rejection of absolute monarchy. Sotiropoulos’ study can be seen as a kind of sequel or companion piece focused specifically on Greece’s postrevolutionary intellectual trajectory. While Isabella covers the revolutionary moment of the early 1820s comparatively, Sotiropoulos delves into what happened after a revolution succeeded (in Greece’s case) and how liberalism was implemented and sustained. Both works underscore the importance of constitutions – Isabella treats constitutions as crucial tools for legitimising new orders and resisting imperial domination, and Sotiropoulos shows Greek intellectuals continually refining the constitutional order through 1844 and 1864.

There is a (noncoincidental) convergence in their historiographical purpose: both seek to elevate the role of “peripheral” actors in shaping liberal modernity and to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these stories. Isabella’s broad comparative lens confirms that the 1820s revolutions were not isolated; Sotiropoulos’ focused lens shows how one of those cases (Greece) evolved over half a century. A key difference, however, lies in depth versus breadth. A critic of Isabella’s work might note that by covering so many cases, the analysis can become generalised, with less attention to the local context (for instance, Isabella’s treatment of the Greek War of Independence relies heavily on secondary sources and skims over unique social dynamics). Sotiropoulos, in contrast, provides granular detail on the Greek case, supported by primary sources in Greek, which gives his account a strong sense of authenticity and specificity. Thus, when placed side by side, Sotiropoulos’ Greece and Isabella’s southern Europe reinforce one another: the former adds texture and insider perspective to the Greek piece of the puzzle that the latter had highlighted in outline. Together, they contribute to a more inclusive picture of European liberalism, challenging the traditional focus on France’s 1789, Britain’s parliamentary evolution or the 1848 revolutions in Central Europe.

Another useful comparison is with studies of state-building in other new nations of the nineteenth century, such as Italy and the Latin American republics. Italy’s unification (Risorgimento) and subsequent state-building (1860s–1870s) share some parallels with Greece: a new state had to integrate diverse regions and political cultures, create institutions and

define its ideology. Italian liberalism, embodied by statesmen and thinkers like Cavour, Mazzini and Minghetti, tended to be a blend of moderate constitutional monarchism (in Piedmont and unified Italy) and, in Mazzini's case, a more democratic republicanism. One could argue that Italy's liberal elite after unification took a cautious approach, with a restricted suffrage and limited social reforms, which eventually left parts of the population alienated – a gap that later facilitated the rise of populist movements. By contrast, Sotiropoulos' Greek liberals seem to have been more socially inclusive (for example, championing peasant land ownership, embracing near-universal male suffrage early on). This suggests that Greek liberalism was in some respects ahead of Italian liberalism in democratic inclusion, even though Italy was a larger and more industrially developed state. Italian historiography has seen works like Silvana Patriarca's and Lucy Riall's studies on nation-building myths and elite ideologies, but perhaps no recent monograph has dissected Italian liberal statecraft in quite the way Sotiropoulos has for Greece. The Greek case, as presented by Sotiropoulos, might surprise scholars of Western Europe by showing that a small, relatively poor Balkan kingdom pioneered one of the era's most liberal constitutions in 1864, at a time when Italy was just adopting a fairly narrow constitutional monarchy and Britain still had property qualifications for voting. This comparison underscores Sotiropoulos' broader point: looking at the periphery can "deconstruct" the notion of centre and periphery in European history. Sometimes the so-called peripheries were incubators of remarkably progressive political experiments.

In the case of Latin America, there are instructive parallels as well. Many Spanish American countries gained independence in the 1810s–1820s and wrestled with how to implement liberal constitutions amid caudillo strongmen, social inequalities, and external pressures. Scholars like José Carlos Chiaramonte and Francisca Loetz (and earlier, Francois-Xavier Guerra) have analysed the adoption of liberal constitutional models in Latin America and the tension between liberal ideals and local realities. For example, Argentina's 1853 constitution and Chile's earlier constitutional experiments drew on US and French ideas, much as Greece's drew on French and English liberalism. One difference is that many Latin American states oscillated between liberal and conservative regimes throughout the nineteenth century, whereas Greece, as per Sotiropoulos' account, saw a more continuous, if contested, development of liberal institutions once the absolute monarchy was curtailed in 1843. Latin American intellectuals like Andrés Bello (a Venezuelan in Chile) or Juan Bautista Alberdi (in Argentina) played roles somewhat analogous to Sotiropoulos' Greek jurists: they crafted legal codes and constitutions, aiming to marry Enlightenment principles with new world contexts. A key theme in Latin America was how to create a sense of nationhood and legitimacy after Spanish rule, often elevating liberal constitutionalism as the new source of authority. This is analogous to Greece's challenge of legitimising itself as a state disentangled from Ottoman traditions, which Sotiropoulos describes in detail. Both cases involved a conscious effort to break with an imperial past – Spain for Latin America, the Ottoman Empire for Greece – and

to claim a spot in the “civilised” liberal world. In Greece’s case, as Sotiropoulos shows, this meant literally framing the state as the antithesis of Ottoman arbitrariness and aligning with European legal norms so assertively that Greek liberals even challenged the great powers on principles of international law. Latin American states similarly had to assert their sovereignty and often resented the tutelage or interference of European powers (like the Monroe Doctrine shielding them from recolonisation, or their struggle against the British informal economic empire).

Another comparison can be drawn with the Ottoman Empire’s own reform movement, the Tanzimat (1839–1876). While the Ottoman reformers were imperial officials, not revolutionaries, they too were influenced by liberal ideas to an extent – issuing edicts promising equality of all subjects, new civil codes, a short-lived constitution in 1876, etc. The difference is that in the Ottoman case, reforms were top-down and often fell short of true constitutional liberalism (the 1876 constitution was suspended after a year). Greece, having revolted, was in a position to actually implement a sustained constitutional system. Yet, intriguingly, some of the Greek intellectuals Sotiropoulos profiles had been born Ottoman subjects (for example, Saripoulos was born in Ottoman Cyprus). So, one could say Greece’s liberal state-building was a product of the broader Ottoman post-Napoleonic context too, siphoning off talent from the empire and benefiting from ideas circulating in the eastern Mediterranean. This ties into the point Sotiropoulos makes about many jurists being “imported” – born outside

the initial borders of the Greek state and educated in European universities. His study thereby also complements Ottoman studies like those by Şerif Mardin on the Ottoman intellectuals, by illustrating what one subset of Ottoman-educated intellectuals did when given free rein in an independent nation-state. It highlights a kind of intellectual cross-fertilisation: the Greek state benefited from the cosmopolitan education networks of the wider region, and in turn its liberal achievements demonstrated alternative paths that perhaps haunted the multi-ethnic empires next door.

In summary, *Liberalism after the Revolution* holds a significant place in the historiography of nineteenth-century state-building. It can be read alongside other works that emphasise constitutional liberalism’s spread and adaptation – whether in southern Europe, eastern Europe or the Americas – and it provides a case study in how small nations could innovate politically. What emerges from these comparisons is a clearer understanding that the nineteenth century was not monopolised by a few “big” nations in terms of political thought. Smaller states like Greece (or Belgium, or Hungary, or Chile) were also laboratories of modern liberal ideas. Indeed, Sotiropoulos’ detailed exploration of Greece’s liberal jurists adds empirical weight to a growing historiographical consensus that the “peripheries” were often ahead of the curve in expanding political participation and redefining sovereignty. For instance, Greece’s 1864 constitution granted universal male suffrage – something Britain did not achieve until decades later and which even France only briefly had in 1848 and then again in the 1870s. Such

facts challenge any lingering notions that Greece was simply a backward client of the great powers; intellectually and institutionally, it was punching above its weight in the liberal era. Historiographically, then, this book helps to provincialise the core (to borrow a concept from subaltern studies): it provokes scholars to pay more attention to how ideas travelled to and from the margins.

Furthermore, Sotiropoulos' approach, focusing on legal and political thought, complements works in intellectual history that look at other dimensions (for example, Kitromilides' studies on the Greek Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century, or studies of nationalism by Benedict Anderson or Miroslav Hroch for small nations). It extends the story of the Greek Enlightenment and Revolution into the mid-nineteenth century, linking the liberal ideas of 1821 with those shaping the state decades later. In doing so, it also resonates with scholarship on the importance of jurists and legal scholars in nation-building – a theme applicable in many contexts. The book shows that legal experts were not merely technocrats; in Greece they were philosopher-statesmen of a sort, using jurisprudence as a vehicle for political transformation. This might invite comparisons to, say, the role of jurists in Meiji Japan's modernisation, or lawyers in postindependence India drafting the constitution – different eras but similar in that law becomes the language of reform.

Overall, Sotiropoulos' *Liberalism after the Revolution* stands as a historiographically significant work that not only enriches the specific field of modern Greek studies but is also in dialogue with broader studies of liberalism, national-

ism and state formation. It is a potent reminder that the intellectual foundations of modern states can be fully understood only by looking beyond the usual suspects and by paying close attention to local intellectual traditions and debates. By comparing Greece's experience with others, as we have above, we see both what was unique (the particular blend of radical and moderate liberalism in a small Orthodox Balkan kingdom) and what was common (the reliance on liberal constitutionalism as the scaffolding for a new nation). Sotiropoulos' contribution is to document the Greek case in compelling detail and thereby ensure that it will be included in future comparative histories, not left as an outlier.

For scholars of modern Greece, this book is now an essential reference, as it definitively demonstrates that liberalism mattered in nineteenth-century Greece – it was not simply a façade over clannish politics or a transplant that failed to take root. For historians of Europe, the book offers a case study that enriches our understanding of how liberal ideas were debated and implemented in a “new” state on Europe's margins, in dialogue with but also in advance of developments in the traditional centres. And for general readers interested in the evolution of liberal democracy, Sotiropoulos provides a compelling story of how universal concepts of liberty and constitutional government were interpreted in a specific cultural and historical context. We see how Greek patriots and intellectuals, having won independence, set out to ensure their state would embody the ideals of the age – and how they dealt with the inevitable challenges and setbacks in doing so.

The historiographical significance of the book is evident in the accolades it has received, including the 2024 Edmund Keeley Book Prize, which recognise its contribution to the field of modern Greek studies. As the prize committee put it, this book “masterfully weaves [the Greek] story into a broad, rich narrative of political thought that will have a definitive impact on future histories of southern Europe and beyond”. Such an assessment underscores that *Liberalism after the Revolution* is more than a national history – it is a work with wide-reaching implications for how we understand the nineteenth-century world.

In the end, *Liberalism after the Revolution* not only enriches our knowledge of Greek history, but it also invites us to reflect on the fragile yet powerful legacy of liberal ideas in shaping states. It reminds us that even a small group of committed intellectuals, in a beleaguered new country, can leave a lasting imprint on political culture – an imprint that, as Sotiropoulos shows, deserves to be remembered and studied with the seriousness and admiration evident throughout this outstanding book.

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