



BOOK REVIEW

Isabella, Maurizio. *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions*

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Maurizio Isabella's *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions* is an impressive book—both in number of pages and in terms of the scope of the book. Whereas transnational studies on the age of revolution, following Robert Palmer's two-volume classic work *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton, 1959 and 1964), usually take a transatlantic focus, Isabella has opted instead for the northern part of the Mediterranean. By comparing the revolutions in Portugal, Spain, Naples, Sicily, and Greece in the 1820s, he provides an entirely new interpretation of what is usually called the “age of revolution.” In this tour-de-force, France and Northern Europe are not the core but the revolutionary periphery. It was not the French or the American constitutions but the constitution of Cádiz of 1812 that proved to be the most influential model for the southern revolutionaries, who adapted it to local circumstances and needs.

In addition to its unusual geopolitical focus, the book stands out in terms of the enormous amount of research in archives and published sources in various languages (including Italian, Greek, Spanish, and Portuguese). A third merit of this book is that it discusses the counterrevolution jointly with the revolution, seeing these movements essentially as different sides of the same coin. Also commendable is that Isabella studies the various facets of the revolutions—personalities and institutions as well as ideas, ceremonies, and cultural factors such as singing—providing a much-needed panopticon of the era. In this sense, the book is exemplary of how revolutions and revolutionary culture should be studied.

The first part of the book discusses the close relationship between war, armies, and the revolutions of the 1820s. Many revolutionaries had fought in the armies of the Napoleonic Wars, and these experienced soldiers frequently comprised the members of the secret societies that played such an important role in revolutionary activities. Often the revolutions started with a *pronunciamento* or a public declaration of support for the revolution by a senior commander. The military was highly successful in mobilizing the population for the constitution, although—with the exception of Greece—attempts to turn the population against the foreign armies which intended to halt the revolutions, eventually failed.

The next three chapters describe the process of constitution making and the constitutional culture of the southern revolutions. Petitions were an important means for non-elites to take part in the political process. On the one hand, petitioning was an old tradition with roots in the *ancien régime*. On the other hand, by receiving petitions, the new revolutionary authorities were acknowledged and legitimized. Isabella underscores the ambiguous nature of the demands in the petitions that supported simultaneously the claims of the nation state and individuals as well as those of the corporations of the *ancien régime* and the traditional autonomy of local authorities.

The third part examines the making of a revolutionary and counterrevolutionary public sphere as an integral part of the revolutions of the 1820s. A fourth and final part foregrounds the crucial role played by religion in these revolutions. The final chapter discusses the question of success and failure of the revolutions and their overall legacies. Instead of regarding them as failures, Isabella points to the long-term consequences and effects of the southern revolutions through the prism of individual biographies.

The author's attention to innumerable primary sources, his particular coloring of the revolutions in the various regions, and his emphasis on the large role of individuals result in that some larger questions remain unsatisfactorily answered. For instance, the question of the revolutions' asymmetrical temporality: these revolutions took place thirty years after the revolutions in France and elsewhere in (the northern part of) continental Europe. How did this time difference affect the Mediterranean revolutions? What role did the memory of the various stages of the French Revolution and in particular the Terror play? What exactly is the interaction between the Restoration order in Europe at the time and the revolutions in Southern Europe? To what extent are the revolutions in Southern Europe different and in what way do they form part of the wider revolutionary culture of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century?

Moreover, although Isabella gives various examples of individuals crossing borders, most of his narrative is about the individual revolutionary theaters, usually comparing them in the chapter conclusions. I would have liked to have read more systematically about the transnational relations between the national theaters of revolution and the Mediterranean as a (counter)revolutionary space. Oddly, the international contexts and the international system, except in the introduction, recede to the background, resulting in that a discussion of the ways in which international and national factors interacted and shaped revolutionary events remains underdeveloped. This is also true for the extra-European and colonial contexts, which receive meager treatment. Very little, for instance, is written about the interaction with North Africa or North and South America. These omissions, however, do not diminish the accomplishment of Isabella: his book will no doubt become a standard work for future research on the age of (counter)revolution.