

PASCHALIS M. KITROMILIDES, *ENLIGHTENMENT AND REVOLUTION. THE MAKING OF MODERN GREECE*. CAMBRIDGE MASS. & LONDON: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013, 477 p.

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P. K. Kitromilides, Professor of Political Science at the University of Athens, is the foremost international specialist on the history of the Enlightenment in the Greek-speaking world. He defines the Enlightenment as “an affirmation of all the political consequences of the emancipation of the human mind from tutelage of authority: it proclaimed the rights of the individual; it fought resolutely against despotism, fanaticism intolerance and social injustice; it clamoured for the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity

in which it found a new religion of humanity”. Within this context, liberalism “which sanctioned the autonomy and the rights of the individual, became the foremost political expression of the new philosophy”. Absorbed by the theocratic and multinational Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century the societies in Mediterranean Europe entered the Enlighten-

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ment era with a backward social and economic structure, unprepared for its secularized European culture. Perceived as “a threat to the entrenched social order and its values”, the Enlightenment was gradually transformed, in particular after 1789, into a “fundamentally political movement focused on the highest of stakes: the basic values and institutions of society; the shape of the body politic; the definition of an acceptable collective destiny; and the legitimate direction of the affairs of the society.”

Covering two centuries of a bitter intellectual struggle between secular and religious thought, the analysis offered in this book reveals the major influence of late seventeenth- and eighteen-century European thinkers, such as John Locke or Voltaire, on the development of the Enlightenment within the narrow but prominent elite of secular-oriented Greek intellectuals. Prof. Kitromilides shows the extent to which the Newtonian scientific revolution sparked the dispute between liberal-minded intellectuals and conservative church-oriented groups, between modernity and traditionalist religious approach to life and education. Early, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century protagonists of the Enlightenment, educators and philosophers such as Methodius Anthrakitis, Vikentios Damodos or Antonis Katiphoros from northern Greece and the Ionian islands, heralded a change in the overall intellectual climate by introducing new ideas, such as natural law and Aristotelianism, into the Neohellenic world. The main figures of the Greek Enlightenment, such as A. Korais and E. Voulgaris, and their followers remained ever open to enlightened ideas coming from western Europe. Their main hope was that the gradual introduction of these ideas into the education process, and possibly politics, would give an impetus to the modernization and Europeanization of the Ottoman-dominated Greek world.

Evgenios Voulgaris (1716–1806), also a native of the Venice-held Ionian Islands and early translator of Locke and Voltaire into Greek, came to be synonymous with the Greek Enlightenment, epitomizing Greek re-education through “the affirmation of reason as the only standard of truth”. Over the twenty years of teaching in the Greek world, from the Balkans to Asia Minor, Voulgaris and his disciples “made the Enlightenment and its social and political implications appear as a credible option, relevant to the changing needs of Greek society under Ottoman rule in the eighteenth century”.

The rediscovery of ancient Greek traditions through the translation of western historical narratives (sixteen volumes of *Histoire ancienne* by Charles Rollin, a devoted disciple of Bossuet) was instrumental for the self-perception of modern Greeks as direct and natural descendants of ancient Greece and its spectacular classical civilization. “These elements of the Neohellenic self-conception were put forward at varying levels of articulation in a wide range of sources over a long period of time and culminated in nineteenth-century historicism. The modern Greek Enlightenment spelled out the initial version of a historical doctrine that eventually provided the basis of national self-conception.” The rediscovered ancient Greek past became a basis for new interpretations of the genuine Greek heritage such as the art of government, democracy, “civility and civil virtue, the equitable administration of justice, ingenuity of mind in the exact sciences, dexterity in the arts, and virtuosity in all things. Thus, out of the pages of a textbook on ancient history,” Kitromilides stresses, “emerged the moral and intellectual priorities of the Enlightenment, timid and circumscribed, to be sure, but nonetheless irresistible.”

In what followed in the process, apart from passing from a sacred to modern, culturally-based geography (*Novel Geog-*

raphy by D. Philippides and G. Constantas in 1791), an innovation that contributed largely to the self-awareness of the Greeks, two important Greek intellectuals (I. Moisioudax and D. Katartzis) offered, in the 1770s and 1780s, a new theory of enlightened absolutism as an instrument of social change, combining the Hellenistic and Byzantine legacies with the modern need for cultural transformation and political renewal.

Adamantios Korais, the eyewitness of the 1789 French Revolution, was the most prominent among the enlightened Greek intellectuals. His political activity gave substantial weight to the whole movement, spreading an entire set of revolutionary and national ideas among freshly-awakened layers of Greek society. Korais was inspired by Condorcet and his ideological successors, and profoundly impressed by the intellectual impact of Condorcet's treatise on the progress of the human spirit. In a similar way Korais, a liberal republican, sought to bolster the Greek Enlightenment through his *Mémoire sur l'état actuel de la civilisation dans la Grèce* (1803). The French Revolution which "seemed to give concrete political form to the philosophical and cultural aspirations of the Enlightenment" was discredited to a large extent by the bloody events of 1793, which had a negative impact on the Greek learned society, giving rise to the publication of anti-revolutionary pamphlets. The richest layer of Greek society, the Phanariotes, aligning their interests with those of the Sublime Porte at Constantinople, saw the Enlightenment ideas and their proponents as the main threat to their dominant role in Greek education and traditional culture. Some dogmatists of the Patriarchate of Constantinople articulated their opposition in the counterrevolutionary text titled *Paternal Instruction*, exhorting their Orthodox flock to acknowledge the legitimacy of Ottoman rule and "submit loyally and

gratefully to their God-ordained masters and forget all idle talk about a deceptive liberty on this earth." According to this concept, "the modern system of liberty was imported at the time from the West into Orthodox lands" and "stood in sharp contradiction to the Scriptures, and it involved nothing more than the pursuit of selfish interest and vile appetites". It presented the Ottoman Empire as a rampart against Western proselytism, "as a bridle on Latin heresy".

Korais responded with an anonymous pamphlet describing Ottoman rule as despotic and discriminatory, its system as corrupted, immoral and socially unjust, and the spiritual leadership of Greeks as enslaved in its centuries-long captivity. His *Fraternal Instruction*, as underscored by Kitromilides, "was the first proclamation of the political liberalism of the Enlightenment as a matrix for the Greek future." Unlike ecclesiastical circles, Korais's pamphlets praised Napoleon's advances in the Ionian Islands and Egypt, seeing them as the announcement of the inevitable demise of corrupt Ottoman rule. Korais was also responsible for the launching of the ambitious and very successful project of editing and republishing the Greek classics. The sixteen volumes of his Hellenic Library published between 1806 and 1827 reintroduced into modern Greek literature the great ancient authors such as Isocrates, Xenophon and Strabo, often considered as being compatible with the ideas of the Enlightenment, as well as the famous Greek authors from the period of the Roman Empire such as Plutarch.

Along with Korais, daring political action combined with intellectual activism was a trademark of Rhigas Velestinlis. In 1797, only a year before he was strangled in the fortress of Belgrade for fomenting revolutionary activity against the Ottomans and seeking to establish contact with Napoleon, Rhigas Velestinlis had published the influential pamphlet

New Political Constitution addressing the Greeks of the mainland, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean islands and the northeast Balkan regions of Wallachia and Moldavia. This important document, defining as Greeks all Balkan non-Greek ethnic groups bound to Greek language and culture, was inspired by Montesquieu and contained a charter of the rights of man and the popular battle hymn *Thourios*, linking the modern struggle for freedom to ancient Greek traditions.

The main challenge to the ideas of the Greek Enlightenment, however, was the Greek revolution itself. After the War of Independence started in 1821 and the National Assembly of insurgent Greece drafted a charter in January 1822, Korais scrutinized the new constitution in his *Notes on the Provisional Constitution of Greece*. It was in 1827 that the Third National Assembly of revolutionary Greece adopted Korais' suggestions and expressed its gratitude. "It was the Enlightenment's finest hour," Kitromilides accurately concludes: "A nation fighting for its freedom reached self-consciousness by making the aspirations of the Enlightenment the matrix of its fate."

The eventual collapse of many of the major Enlightenment ideas in nineteenth-century Greece was marked by the ascendancy of a nationalist ideology combined with conservative religious thought that

was hiding behind Romanticism and the nation-state concept. In spite of the revolutionary tradition which brought about the restoration of modern Greece in 1829, the lack of a liberal content in the national ideology pushed the enlightened trends in Greek society deep into the background: "The measure of liberalism's failure can be best appreciated in view of the fact that constitutional government and significant political change in Greece were achieved not as a consequence of liberal politics but by military interventions in 1843, 1862, and 1909 — a feature of the Greek political system that inaugurated an ominous tradition in the twentieth century." Thus, the rise of a nationalist and authoritarian model of society was responsible for the failure of liberalism, remaining the source of friction and instability until this day.

The Enlightenment, the author concludes, "remained a vision of possibilities and alternatives and a framework of social and cultural criticism rather than a workable blueprint of actual developments". Prof. Kitromilides's masterly written book offers a well-argued and captivating in-depth reconstruction of the whole cultural and political process of transmitting the European "new science" to the southern Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean, explaining the intellectual background of modern Greece.