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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Adam Smith and Whig Constitutionalism in the Mediterranean

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Abstract

This essay deals with the influence of Adam Smith—at the end of the eighteenth century and during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars—on the constitutional projects and public debates through which reformers of southern Europe tried to import and translate British society. I focus on the intellectual filters that affected the reception of Smithian thought, particularly the political and ideological aim to realize a Whig social order, that induced the Mediterranean elite to link the Wealth of Nations *with the thought of Edmund Burke and Arthur Young. The result is a moderate and conservative profile of Smithian liberalism that was is in tune with the ideological trend of the nineteenth century.*

Keywords: Adam Smith; Paolo Balsamo; Gaspar de Jovellanos; Sicily; Spain; Whiggism; Constitutionalism; Mediterranean

Introduction

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, several attempts occurred in the Mediterranean to found constitutional frameworks inspired by the British constitution: the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom, the Cadiz Constitution, the Sicilian Constitution of 1812, and the United States of the Ionian Islands. These specific national cases are linked by the political international context of the period, determined by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. In this scenario of military, political, and ideological contraposition, the Whig party conceives a plan to contrast the Jacobin-Napoleonic model of society with British constitutionalism, particularly in the Mediterranean. This process of exportation is not limited to the constitution, but it also affects civil and criminal legislation, court systems, economic institutions, trade, education and language, and public life.

For the countries involved, this does not mean a passive reception of a foreign doctrinal and institutional paradigm. In the Mediterranean, the national elites share Whig ideals and are protagonists of the political and cultural initiatives to

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translate the British model of constitution and society. Significantly, Mediterranean reformers are inspired by Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.* This Scottish scholar is considered the master of "good political economy" and a key interpreter of a model of Whig society ruled by free markets and liberal institutions. Southern policymakers identify British society with the idealization of "commercial society" read about in the pages of the *Wealth of Nations.* Yet, other sources contribute to define a Whig model of society. The ideas of Edmund Burke—directly or mediated by Whig exponents—supply a set of political theories and ethical values that mold the concepts of nation, citizenship, political representation, national interests, and mixed government. At the same time, Arthur Young's agronomy, which was considered the best explanation of British agricultural revolution, completes the model of economic development that Mediterranean leadership imagined for their countries.

This essay goes beyond exegesis of the *Wealth of Nations* and focuses on the opinion that societies of the time had of it. This is an invitation to wonder what understanding, meanings, benefits, ideological orientation, and political collocation readers ascribed to the text. It is also a way to study how Smith's work contributed to shaping late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe.

This essay also deals with the influence of Adam Smith on the constitutional projects and public debates through which reformers of southern Europe tried to import and translate British society. Furthermore, I focus on the intellectual filters that affected the reception of Smithian thought, particularly the political and ideological aim to realize a Whig social order, that induced the Mediterranean elite to link the *Wealth of Nations* with the thought of Burke and Young. The result is a moderate and conservative profile of Smithian liberalism that was in tune with the ideological trend of the nineteenth century.

In this essay, I aim to concur with recent studies inquiring into the international dissemination of Smith's thought and its acceptance in various national contexts.[1] The methodology adopted begins with Sophus Reinert's thesis that the ruling classes import and emulate foreign models spurred by the necessity to survive in conflictual international frameworks.[2] This approach is then combined with Institutional Historiography of Economic Thought, which focuses on "institutional packages" through which economic ideas cross borders and are introduced in distant regions.[3]

[1] This work follows on a conference held in Palermo, Italy, in 2017 on the international circulation of Smith's thought, the proceedings of which are collected in *Adam Smith Across the World: The Spread of His Thought and the Intellectual Filters*, ed. Fabrizio Simon, a special issue of *History of Economic Ideas* 28, no. 2 (2021). A useful contribution to current research comes from Jesus Astigarraga and Juan Zabalza, eds., *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain* (Routledge, 2022).

[2] Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

[3] Regarding the method and targets of the Institutional Historiography of Economic Thought, see Massimo M. Augello and Marco E. L. Guidi, *Economisti e Scienza Economica nell'Italia Liberale (1848–1922)*, two vols. (FrancoAngeli, 2019); Marco E. L. Guidi, "Packages Istituzionale e Circolazione Internazionale dell'Economia Politica: Alcune Note su Francesco Ferrara," *Storia e Politica* 3, no. 2 (2011): 212–37.

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In the next section, I first describe the spread of Whig ideals in southern Europe and the attempts to translate them into a concrete constitutional regime. The following section dwells on initiatives undertaken in the Mediterranean to realize a social order able to promote free and competitive markets as well as a capitalistic transformation of agriculture. I then sum up the epilogue of this first, brief season of liberalism in southern Europe and its cultural, moral, and political inheritance for successive national liberal movements. This essay concludes with reflections on how political emergencies influence the reception, interpretation, and above all the use of political and economic literature by intellectuals and policymakers.

The Whig season of constitutionalism in the Mediterranean (1794–1818)

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, the Atlantic revolutionary spirit breaks through to the Mediterranean, overwhelming states and centuries-old social order, forcing southern European nations into rapid and, in some cases, violent modernization processes. For the Italian peninsula and most of the Iberian one, change means accepting first Jacobin republicanism and then the institution of Napoleonic monarchy. Other Mediterranean regions adopt the British institutional order and social organization as a reference model. The English Glorious Revolution, with its myth of a society founded on civil liberty and a parliament that represents the interests of the nation, inspired the rebels in Corsica, the Cortes of Cadiz, and the Royal Parliament in Sicily. In distant Mediterranean countries, the national elite—such as the Asturian Gaspar de Jovellanos[4] or the Sicilian Paolo Balsamo[5]—collaborate with a varied crowd of British agents to build constitutional orders that reproduce, as effectively as possible, not only the system of government in force in Great Britain, but more ambitiously a model of society composed of social relations, languages, institutions, lifestyles, and economic activity.

Liberalism, which spread in the Mediterranean, in its essential recurring features consists in the idealization of a society of independent individuals, carriers of legitimate interest, put in the position to act freely in business and in public life, and who are able to participate through representative institutions in deciding the political choices of the nation. This is a society in which people and property are safeguarded by laws. The key element of this social optimum

[4] Gaspar de Jovellanos (1744–1811), scholar, jurist, economist, and statesman, is one of the main exponents of Spanish Enlightenment. He held various roles in the judiciary and the administration of the realm and was a member of the principal Iberian scientific societies. He was minister of Gracia y Justicia in 1797 and, during the years of the war of independence, he was the Asturian representative in the Junta Central and one of the leaders of the Cortes of Cadiz. See, e.g., José Miguel Caso Gonzalez, *Jovellanos* (Ariel, 1998); Manuel Alarez-Valdés, *Jovellanos: Enigmas y certezas* (Fundación Foro Jovellanos, 2002); Manuel Alvarez-Valdés, *Jovellanos: Vida y pensamiento* (Ediciones Nobel, 2012).

[5] Paolo Balsamo (1764–1816), a professor of Agriculture and Economics at the Regia Università degli Studi di Palermo, was abbot and member of the Sicilian parliament and compiler of the 1812 constitutional charter. See Fabrizio Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo: Paolo Balsamo e l'Utopia Liberale in Sicilia (1787–1816)* (Palermo University Press, 2023).

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can be found in the particular British constitutional order that, in the opinion of European observers at the time, by means of the parliamentary institution is able to balance and combine the interest of the subjects, particularly the most economically active of them, with the public role of the aristocracy and the rights of the Crown. The independence of judicial authority and the guarantee of habeas corpus contribute to the perfection of this model of freedom and balance of power. It is a model that announces the possibility of pursuing progress free from conflict or drastic upheaval of social balance, a kind of moderate and gradual way toward change that beguiles many conservative circles of Mediterranean aristocracy.

If acceptance of the English paradigm is gradual in the late eighteenth century, its achievement in the Mediterranean is a consequence of revolutionary events in France. The success of the British model in the Mediterranean is a consequence of the ideological war that the supporters of English liberalism undertook for about twenty years against Jacobinism and then against the Napoleonic regime.

Burke is the first to denounce the French Revolution irremediably as an enemy of the British model of society,[6] and he engaged in a political struggle to drive the Whig party to oppose the revolutionary ideals.[7] Faced with the drama of splitting the Whigs, this Irish philosopher indicates the Glorious Revolution as the unique true point of reference and guide for Whiggism.[8] What the Whig ideologue proposes is a "War of Principle," which deletes the revolutionary order but also defeats the doctrines that generated it.[9] From the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom in 1794 and even after the death of Burke in 1797, the main Whig exponents—the Duke of Portland, George Grenwill, and William Fitzwilliam—interpret this as a struggle for a Europe inflamed by revolution and overrun by armies.[10]

The constitutional projects present recurring characteristics, starting with an attempt at codification, as an indispensable and inevitable step to reproduce a constitution whose mechanisms are instead the spontaneous and ultimate outcome of rules, practices, and tradition consolidated over centuries in Britain. Furthermore, constitutional charters are the result of the will of nations as

[6] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (J. Dodsley, 1790).

[7] Edmund Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (J. Dodsley, 1791).

[8] On May 6, 1791, the political break between Burke and Fox caused the division of the Whig party. Regarding the crisis of the Whig party because of the French Revolution, see Max Skjönsberg, "Edmund Burke, the French Revolution, and the Battle for the Soul of the Whig Party," *Parliamentary History* 40, no. 3 (2021): 543–62.

[9] Burke exposes clearly the idea of "War of Principle" in his correspondence to the Duke of Portland. See Letter of Burke to Portland, August 1, 1793, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland et al., 10 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1958–1978), vol 7, 380–81. Regarding Burke's ideological war, see Philip Scholfield, "British Politicians and French Arms: The Ideological War of 1793–1795," *History* 77, no. 250 (1992): 183–201.

[10] Regarding British constitutionalism in the Mediterranean, see Andrea Romano, ed., *Il Modello Costituzionale Inglese e la Sua Recezione nell'Area Mediterranea tra la Fine del 700 e la Prima metà dell'800* (Giuffrè editore, 1998); Carlo R. Ricotti, *Il Costituzionalismo Britannico nel Mediterraneo (1794–1818)* (Giuffré-Luiss University Press, 2005).

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expressed through parliamentary representation, made up of the part of the social body that bears the nation's real interests. Coherently with Burke's idea of a nation and the classes that legally represent it and take the lead, Mediterranean reformers inspired by the Whigs reproduced ideally those "landed interests" who guarantee both the stability and progress of the state. It follows that the reform process transcends the design of a mere constitutional system and that the constitution itself becomes an instrument to promote and consolidate social order in the Whig matrix, the pillars of which are modern and capitalistic agriculture like the English one, a competitive market system, an impartial and trustworthy judicial system, a strong and reliable public finance, and a state whose prime function is defense of its citizens.

The operation of exporting the British model in the Mediterranean is a process that unfolds with alternating fates for about twenty years, from the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom[11] in 1794 to Spain and in Sicily in 1812. The great protagonists of this page of British politics are Gilbert Elliot, William Bentinck, Lord Holland, Henry Fox, and John Moore,[12] whose personal and political history are closely linked to Burke as political companions and followers. Yet, the spread of British constitutionalism in the Mediterranean is not the result of a unilateral process. In Europe, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, a kind of "international Whig" exists that, although with naturally different roles, unites the exponents of British culture and politics and the Mediterranean political elite.[13]

The process of welcoming, elaborating, and translating this social order, above all for the Mediterranean ruling classes, comes about through the reception of some key authors, who are identified as interpreters of that ideal of society. It is natural that, also in the Mediterranean, the Whig ideal is molded by Burkean ideas, directly through the reading of his writings and speeches or mediated later by his more enthusiastic followers, such as Lord Holland in Spain or Lord Bentinck in Sicily. At the end of the eighteenth century, Burke is a well-known author in southern Europe.[14] In particular, his work *A Philosophical Enquiry*

[11] Regarding the Corsican nation during the revolutionary period, see Fabrizio Dal Passo, *Il Mediterraneo dei Lumi: Corsica e Democrazia nella Stagione delle Revoluzioni* (Bibliopolis, 2006), 111–250; Marco Cini, "Una Nazione senza Stato: l'Identità Corsa tra Sette e Ottocento," in *Nazioni d'Italia: Identità Politiche e Appartenenze Regionali fra Settecento e Ottocento*, ed. Angela De Benedictis et al. (Viella, 2012), 267–85.

[12] More precisely, these are Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, First Earl of Minto (1751–1814); Lord William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck (1774–1839), son of the Duke of Portland; Lord Henry Richard Vassall-Fox, Third Baron Holland (1773–1840), nephew of Charles James Fox; General Henry Edward Fox (1755–1811), brother of Charles James Fox; Lieutenant General John Moore (1761–1809).

[13] Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 84–92; John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck and the British Occupation of Sicily 1811–1814* (Cambridge University Press, 1956); Manuel Moreno Alonso, "Lord Holland y los Orígenes del Liberalismo Español," *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 36 (1983): 181–218; Manuel Moreno Alonso, *La Forja del Liberalismo en España: Los Amigos Españoles de Lord Holland 1793–1840* (Congreso de los Diputados, 1997); Sally-Ann Kitts, "The Role of Holland House in the Diffusion, Exchange, and Transformation of Spanish Enlightened Ideas, 1793–1845," in *The Routledge Companion to the Hispanic Enlightenment*, ed. Elizabeth F. Lewis et al. (Routledge, 2019), 243–57.

[14] Regarding the international circulation of Burke's ideas, see Martin Fitzpatrick and Peter Jones, eds., *The Reception of Edmund Burke in Europe* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

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into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful is spread and read, and collections of *The Annual Register* are kept in private and public libraries from Spain to Sicily.[15] In the last decades of the eighteenth century, the influence of Burke on Mediterranean scholars can be traced to the idea of a nation, which is a concept that several authors start identifying with the body of traditional institutions and laws set throughout history that make up the constitution of the country. We see it in Jovellanos's writings[16] on the old Spanish constitution, and it is at the core of Rosario Gregorio's work, who was one of the main Sicilian historian and law theorists of the age.[17] Consequently, the idea of the constitutional process also reproduces the Burkean Whig interpretation of the Glorious Revolution. The political narration of Mediterranean scholars argues that despotism corrupted the old laws of the reign, which the reforms aim to restore.[18] So, constitutional reforms are considered mainly as a restoration of lost freedom, but at the same time they are open to the same improvements that Great Britain already made thanks to the Glorious Revolution.

For the southern scholars, Smith is also easily assimilated to Whiggism. The idea of spontaneous progress in institutions and laws—in contrast to the legislative rationalism of the "man of system" (TMS VI.iii.2.17)—and the vision of the state as defender of the interests, property, and freedom of the citizen, make Smithian thought an effective weapon against the radicalism of the French Revolution.[19] Moreover, the idea of a natural course of economic development was also seen as a decisive argument to disprove the legitimacy of the Jacobins' redistributive policy. Smith's recognition of the role of agriculture in economic progress inspires the program of the Mediterranean reformers even before the outbreak of the French Revolution, which explains the success of Smithianism among the local ruling classes.[20] In the context of the struggle between Whigs

[15] The eighteenth-century editions of *A Philosophical Enquiry*, in English or translated, are present in Iberian, Sicilian, and Mediterranean libraries. Jovellanos owned an English translation sent him in 1790 by the Spanish ambassador in London together with a copy of Adam Smith's the *Wealth of Nations.* See John H. R. Polt, *Jovellanos and His English Sources: Economic, Philosophical, and Political Writings* (American Philosophical Society, 1964), 11; Clara Alvarez Alonso, "La Influencia Britannica y la Idea de Constitución en Jovellanos," in *Il Modello Costituzionale Inglese*, ed. Romano, 508.

[16] The works of Jovellanos on Spanish legal history and the Constitution of Spain are collected in *Obras Publicadas e Ineditas de Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellano*, ed. Candido Nocedal (Atlas Ediciones, 1963); *Obras Publicadas e Ineditas de Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellano*, ed. Miguel Artola (Atlas Ediciones, 1956).

[17] The work of Rosario Gregorio (1753–1809) that most clearly reveals the influence of Burke is his *Introduzione al Diritto Pubblico Siciliano* (Reale Stamperia, 1794). The link between Gregorio and Burke is highlighted by Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *Illuministi Italiani*, vol. 7 (Ricciardi, 1965), 1147–48.

[18] G. M. de Jovellanos, *Consulta Sobre la Convocación de las Cortes por Estamentos*, in *Obras Publicadas*, ed. Nocedal, 597–600; Paolo Balsamo, *Memorie Segrete sulla Istoria Moderna del Regno di Sicilia* (1816; repr., Edizioni della Regione Siciliana, 1969), 95–96; Niccolò Palmeri, *Saggio Storico Politico sulla Costituzione del Regno di Sicilia* (1847; repr., Edizioni della Regione Siciliana, 1972), 101–2, 155–57.

[19] This is true, despite that at the time there was an opposite reading of Smith as inspiring French revolutionaries that is still credited in Europe. See Emma Rothschild, "Adam Smith and Conservative Economics," *The Economic History Review* 45, no. 1 (1992): 74–96.

[20] Regarding the success of Smith in Spain and Sicily, see Astigarraga and Zabalza, eds., *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*; Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo.*

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and Jacobins, a selective and agriculturist interpretation of the *Wealth of Nations* contributes to asserting a key social role for the "landed interest," legitimizing aristocracy as the best interpreter and guide of a nation's well-being. This thesis is not exactly faithful to Smith's original thought, but it is perfectly consistent with Burkean Whiggism.

Yet, the Whigs' path for moderate reforms requires that agriculture is no longer feudal but, on the contrary, reformed and open to markets and capitalistic management. This is the reason for Young's success with the supporters of Whig reformism. The editor of the *Annals of Agriculture*, already in the late eighteenth century, is considered in the Mediterranean as the main source from which to learn the English agricultural revolution, with its farms, enclosures, crop rotation, artificial lawns, agricultural machines, fertilizers, and integration of cultivation and animal husbandry. Young's model of agronomy completes and makes possible the economic development process described by Smith. Reading and linking both authors, Mediterranean scholars conceive a larger-scale economic model as an alternative to the small farms proposed by Jacobins.

In the field of civil freedom, habeas corpus, and freedom of speech, Mediterranean regimes—despite some uncertainties and facing obstacles—implement the liberal ideals that inspire them, whereas arranging the constitutional framework turns out to be more difficult than foreseen. The changes that need to be introduced are several and deep, making it impossible to remain steadfast in the following principle of spontaneous progress of the constitution. Contradicting Burkean and Smithian anti-rationalism, the reformers adopt rationalism and a codification that, in the end, replaces ancient national constitutions.[21]

Rarely did the resulting institutional architecture confirm Whig expectations; ironically, in some cases, it was more in tune with the French regime's alternative model. Despite the efforts of Jovellanos and the Whig current of Spanish politics (linked to Holland House) to guide the process of convening Cortez (1809–1810) toward the parliamentary regime of Great Britain, their solution is overturned by adoption of a unicameral assembly model, which is much closer to the French one. Indeed, contemporary observers perceived the Constitution of Cadiz not as an example of Whiggism, but as a democratic charter that breaks with the tradition of the Iberian constitution. The Sicilian Constitution of 1812 is

[21] A decisive role is played by the envoys of London in the Mediterranean, such as Lord Henry Holland in Spain and Lord William Bentinck in Sicily. It is beyond the task of this essay to deal with this debate, which has been addressed elsewhere. See, e.g., Enzo Sciacca, *Riflessi del Costituzionalismo Europeo in Sicilia: 1812–1815* (Bonanno, 1966); Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck*; Francisco Tomás y Valiente, "Las Cortes de España en 1809, Según un Folleto Bilingü e Cuya Autoría hay que Atribuir a un Triángulo Compuesto por un Lord Inglés, un Ilustrado Español y un Joven Médico Llamado John Allen," *Initium: Revista Catalana d'Història del Dret* 1 (1996): 753–815; Alvarez Alonso, "La Influencia Britannica"; Santos M. Coronas González, "La recepción del Modelo Constitucional Inglés como Defensa de la Constitución Histórica Propria (1761–1810)," in *Il Modello Costituzionale Inglese*, ed. Romano, 615–43; José M. Portillo Valdés, "Existia una Antigua Constitución Española? El Debate Sobra el Modelo Inglés en España, 1808–1812," in *Il Modello Costituzionale Inglese*, ed. Romano, 545–85; Ricotti, *Il Costituzionalismo Britannico*; Ignacio F. Sarasola, "'So, You Want Us to Be Englishmen …': Jovellanos and British Influence on Spain's First Modern Parliament (1808–1810)," *Comparative Legal History* 4, no. 1 (2016): 51–81.

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more in tune with the British system. Unlike the Spanish case, the Sicilian medieval constitution—due to a common Norman origin—is closer, at least outwardly, to that existing on the other side of the Channel. In spite of this, the alignment of the Sicilian Constitution to the British one is not easy. Codification, pressured by political events, does not allow only a few adjustments.[22] The final result imitates British institutions in some ways, even while disregarding fundamentals of the British model.[23]

Natural liberty, market system, and agricultural development

The economic order that the Mediterranean reformers prepare to introduce is much more faithful to the Whig ideal and Smith's teaching than is the constitutional order. Already at the end of 1793, shortly before the birth of the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom, war minister Henry Dundas's instructions to British envoys describe the adoption of an economic model founded on full and inviolable entitlement to private property, a free market system, and a fundamental economic and political role for great landholders to play.[24] These are, in short, the cardinal points that sum up Burke's opposition to the Jacobins' economic program. Examining different national cases and lingering on two main ones—Spain and Sicily—we can observe very little deviation from the initial Whig principles. There is also a kind of doctrinaire uniformity in the debate, which is political in the conclusion, between various national parliaments on the topics of property, market, and taxes.

In Mediterranean countries, not all projects to emulate the British economy are due to the revolutionary situation; rather, they were initiated decades before in an enlightened reformation context. Even more evident is the familiarity that intellectuals and the Mediterranean political elite have with British literature, especially with Smith, in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century.[25] In Spain, the Scottish economist's influence was already recognizable in the work of Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes regarding corporations and trade. The contribution of the *Wealth of Nations* is also detectable in the late eighteenth-century debate on fiscal reform and the role of the state.[26] On the topic of agriculture,

[22] Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck*, 26–39; Francesco Renda, *La Sicilia nel 1812* (Salvatore Sciascia editore, 1963), 202–11; Ricotti, *Il Costituzionalismo Britannico*, 219–25.

[23] Ricotti, *Il Costituzionalismo Britannico*, 235–66. Regarding Balsamo's position in favor of a moderate reform of the Sicilian Constitution and against a new codification, see Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 143.

[24] The document is kept at the National Library of Scotland, in Minto Papers n. 1140, 1–36, and it is analyzed by Ricotti, *Il Costituzionalismo Britannico*, 31–38.

[25] It is not the task of this essay to deal with the reception of Smithian thought in the Mediterranean. This essay develops results already reached in other work. See, e.g., Fabrizio Simon, "Paolo Balsamo, Smithianism, and the Birth of Liberalism in Sicily," *History of Economic Ideas* 28, no. 2 (2021): 183–203; Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*; Astigarraga and Zabalza, eds., *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*.

[26] Jesus Astigarraga, "Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*: The First Spanish Readings in Spain, 1777–1800," in *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*, ed. Astigarraga and Zabalza, 103–20.

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particularly in Jovellanos's renowned 1795 *Informe de Ley Agraria*, we can find even more explicit inspiration from Smith's work.[27] The reform program of his work promotes an agricultural development led by individual interest and consisting in a series of measures that outline an English style of agriculture: enclosures and intensive cultivation; the spread of agronomical culture; abolition of the *mortmain*, *fee tail*, and privileges for nomad breeders; privatization of common lands; and free grain markets and free circulation of merchandise.

Balsamo's conclusions in Sicily are almost specular. During his twenty years of teaching at the university and in his written work, he systematically resorts to Smith's theories to solve the economic problems of the island.[28] Balsamo, finding labor as the only original source of wealth,[29] contests the physiocratic theory. As a consequence, he also contests the correctness of fiscal reform founded mainly on direct taxation on income of the great landholders, which he believes contrasts with Smith's four taxation principles (WN V.ii).[30] The vision of the state explained by Balsamo to his students and readers is inspired by the *Wealth of Nations*[31] and reflects the difference between justice and benevolence he learned from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

> [T]he power or public force of the government being that of all the citizens, united together into one body for their happiness' sake, cannot be lawfully exercised against any of them, but for defending and securing to individuals of the society those rights which man could in the state of nature exercise; and as man in that state could not lawfully, by his force, oblige another to assist him in the improvement of his natural condition, so the government cannot lawfully oblige any citizen to help another in the improvement of his social condition.[32]

The limits imposed by Balsamo on the legislator entail that they also be refused the authority to indicate the course of growth of the nation. The Sicilian economy and society must therefore indulge the natural course of history concerning land investment, the development of agriculture, the accumulation of capital, and the birth of manufacturing. Balsamo's preference for agriculture emerges from the bias of an aristocratic class interest and gets transformed into adherence to Smith's vision of progress.[33] This results in an agricultural reform

[27] Astigarraga, "Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*," 116.

[28] Regarding the use of Smith's thought in the teaching and works of Balsamo, see Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 93–131.

[29] Paolo Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite di Pubblica Economia e Agricoltura*, vol. 1 (1845; repr., Salvatore Sciascia editore, 1983), 31.

[30] Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 2, 80–84; Roberto Salvo, "Di Agricoltura: Un Inedito di Paolo Balsamo," *Il Pensiero Economico Italiano* 2, no. 1 (1994): 190–97.

[31] Smith, WN V; see Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 1, 88–89.

[32] Paolo Balsamo, "On the Price of Labour: In Answer to Mr. Ruggle's Paper on the Police and Situation of Poor," *Annals of Agriculture* 13 (1790): 47.

[33] Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 1, 60.

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program, in broad terms, similar to the one in Jovellanos's *Informe de Ley Agraria.*[34]

For Mediterranean liberals, Smith is much more than just an economist. The Scottish author is recognized as the discoverer of the real laws of political economy[35] and is viewed, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, as the undisputed authority and reference point of a "good economy": "[M]y opinion is irrelevant in this regard, but that of the best economist we know is not, I mean the great Smith."[36] As a consequence, Smith's teachings are applied to the main economic debates that, not surprisingly given common tendencies and characteristics in the entire Mediterranean area, focus more or less uniformly on the same subjects in each nation.

To begin, we see acceptance of the idea of "natural liberty," which enters under different forms and expressions in constitutional charters as a fundamental value. This is unsurprising for Sicily, where Balsamo, prior to 1812 and through his chair, introduces and promotes the utopia of the "invisible hand."[37] In the Spanish context, Smith's ideal of natural freedom reaches its affirmation in the debates of Cortez,[38] when a second liberal generation completes the process of receiving the message of the *Wealth of Nations*, grasping its most profound meaning and overcoming previous eclectic and selective reception.[39] In Articles 4 and 31 of the Constitution of Cadiz, we thus find announcement of a commitment to defend individual freedom and the principle that the well-being of society can come about only through individuals.[40]

The first great reform of the Mediterranean constitutional parliaments was taxation, as the new liberal regimes needed to introduce a tax system that was coherent with public ethics and the idea of national representation. At the same time, reform need not hinder the economic development, founded on great agricultural landholding, that it intended to promote. Smith's four principles on taxation appeared in the Court of Cadiz, abrogating the *ancien regime*'s fiscal plan to adopt a system of mixed direct and indirect taxation. In the ensuing

[34] Paolo Balsamo, *Giornale del Viaggio Fatto in Sicilia e Particolarmente nella Contea di Modica dall'AB: Paolo Balsamo* (1809; repr., Edigraf, 1969), 238–39. Regarding the convergence of the agrarian proposals of Balsamo and Jovellanos, see Fabrizio Simon, "Paolo Balsamo, Gaspar de Jovellanos, and the Agrarian Whiggism in the Mediterranean," *History of Economic Ideas* 32, no. 3 (2024): 85–109.

[35] Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 1, 138.

[36] Quotation of Pedro Silves, member of the Court of Cadiz, during a debate on taxation, Session 30, 1813, cited in and translated by Javier Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz (1810–1813): More Than Enlightened Liberalism," in *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*, ed. Astigarraga and Zabalza, 188.

[37] Balsamo, "On the Price of Labour," 50–54; Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 1, 88–89; Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 2, 99.

[38] Astigarraga, "Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*," 117–18; Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 188, 200.

[39] Jesus Astigarraga, José M. Menudo, and Javier Usoz, "Nuancing Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations*' Reception and Influences in Spain, 1800–1820," in *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*, ed. Astigarraga and Zabalza, 121–37; Javier San Julián Arrupe, "Adam Smith in the Chairs on Political Economy in Spain, 1780–1823," in *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*, ed. Astigarraga and Zabalza, 172–85.

[40] See Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 187, 192.

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parliamentary debate,[41] the Conde de Toreno discredited legislative theories inspired by principles of physiocracy, contrasting them with the *Wealth of Nations*:

> The Committee has not forgotten ... the principles of good economists, in particular Smith; and how could it have departed from the doctrine of this sainted father of political economy? ... [T]he Committee has not departed from the doctrine set out by Smith, who neither approves nor disapproves of direct or indirect contributions, but discusses the evils of them all, offers suitable improvements, and lays down certain canons or rules to which they must conform.[42]

Not only does political and doctrinaire confrontation happen in Cortez, but that also leads to outlining a fiscal system that contemplates both direct and indirect taxation, without exclusively burdening income from land. This carefully avoids damaging capital, so that investment in agriculture is not compromised.[43]

In the Sicilian parliament in 1810, the general reform of taxation elaborated by Balsamo causes extraordinary events that lead to a parliamentary revolution and the Constitution of 1812. The constitutional party, led by the Principe di Castelnuovo and the Principe di Belmonte, intended to use Balsamo's plan to abolish the feudal mechanism of tax distribution with a rational system of mixed direct and indirect taxation.[44] The reform foresaw that only a third of the revenues would come from taxation on landholdings, while two-thirds would consist in indirect taxation on goods and usage. In this model of fiscal policy, Balsamo claims to apply Smith's four principles of taxation contrary to the erroneous "doctrine of the French economists"[45] that would have unfairly targeted only landholding income and impede the island's agricultural development. From the Corsican legislature in 1795[46] to the Cadiz and Palermo parliaments, the system of mixed direct and indirect taxation believed to be inspired by the *Wealth of Nations* constantly appears in debates on taxation, and it is the solution preferred by Whig reformers.[47]

[41] Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 187, 192; Astigarraga, Menudo, and Usoz, "Nuancing Adam Smith," 131–34.

[42] Intervention of Conde de Toreno, member of the Court of Cadiz, during a debate on taxation, Session 19, 1813, cited in and translated by Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 189.

[43] Astigarraga, Menudo, and Usoz, "Nuancing Adam Smith," 131–34.

[44] Giuseppe Giarrizzo, "La Sicilia dal Cinquecento all'Unità d'Italia," in *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'Unità d'Italia*, ed. Vincenzo D'Allessandro and Giuseppe Giarrizzo (UTET, 1989), 642–45; Antonino Giuffrida, "La Deputazione del Regno e la Riforma della Finanza Pubblica Siciliana del 1810," in *Sicilia 1812: Laboratorio Costituzionale, la Società, la Cultura, le Arti*, ed. Maria Andaloro and Giovanni Tomasello (Edizioni ARS, 2012), 54–61.

[45] Balsamo, *Memorie Segrete*, 52.

[46] Fabrizio Dal Passo, *"Amici e Non di Ventura": Francia ed Inghilterra nei Documenti della Corsica Rivoluzionaria (1718–1815)*, vol. 1 (EAI, 2016), 47.

[47] At the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the debate on the reform of taxation is wider and also involves Great Britain. See Patrick K. O'Brien, "The Political Economy of British Taxation, 1660–1815," *Economic History Review* 41, no. 1 (1988): 1–32.

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The liberalization of grain commerce, a sensitive theme in southern economies, is one of the main objects of reflection and a primary objective of political reform. In the last two decades of the 1700s, Smith's vision of a free, competitive market gains approval among Mediterranean economists and policymakers. This faith in the natural forces of the economy and the "invisible hand"[48] induces distrust of legal authority in the economic sphere and Whigs to restrict as much as possible law's power over the market, economic activities, and business.[49] In 1812, Francisco Garces says: "[H]ow detrimental the urge to make regulations has been to us, ... the government's hand in the operating of private interests only serves to hinder or prevent them ... . [F]armers and stockbreeders know more about their business than the most skillful ministers and the most experienced councils."[50]

The attention reserved by Mediterranean legislators for the right to property depended on the protection reserved for individual interests, because the former constitutes both incentive and reward for the latter. The "indisputable right to private property" is proclaimed several times in 1811 in Cadiz during the work of parliament,[51] and we find it enshrined with the same words in Chapter VI of the section on "Libertà, Diritti e Doveri del Cittadino" in Title 1 of the 1812 Sicilian Constitution.

The leading theme in Mediterranean public debates at the end of the 1700s is how to get beyond feudalism not only in the economic sphere, but also by transforming old feudal monarchies into constitutionally liberal regimes. The path taken to suppress the feudal system will also define future social organization of the regimes and who will have control over choosing the ruling class. This extremely important issue is central to every reform plan that newly formed Mediterranean Whig states are asked to solve by proposing an economic model coherent with the political and social ideals that inspired them. The new liberal nations need an alternative economic solution to the initiatives that had favored small farmlands both during the preceding era of enlightened absolutism and under the current French regime.

Legislative commitment to this is seen immediately in Corsica in 1794–1795.[52] Consistent with the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom's constitutional design and its strong census-based form of suffrage in political representation, Corsican civil legislation—in contrast with traditional civic use of fields—encourages through enclosures reinforcement of great landholdings, assigning communal uncultivated lands to the island's aristocracy in large undivided plots. This is largely the economic orientation of Whig politics found, after a few years, articulated and developed in the Sicilian and Iberian contexts.

The main target of the Whig economic program in the Mediterranean was legal transformation of *fiefdom in allod* and into a modern and productive

[48] Balsamo, *Memorie Inedite*, vol. 2, 99; Balsamo, "On the Price of Labour," 50.

[49] The Sicilian Constitution foresees complete economic freedom, in chapters 1 and 3 of the section on "Consigli Civici e Magistrature Municipali" of Title 2.

[50] Intervention of Francisco Garces, member of the Court of Cadiz, in the work of the Agricultural Committee in 1812, cited in and translated by Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 190.

[51] See Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 191, 193.

[52] Dal Passo, *"Amici e Non di Ventura,"* 44–47.

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capitalist agricultural business. That program encountered the obstacle of a proposal, according to public law doctrine, of a return of feudal lands to royal *demesne.* In the Sicilian context, where the quarrel was already resolved in favor of privatization, the Sicilian parliament proceeded—in Article XI and successive sections of "Delle Feudalità, diritti e pesi Feudali," Title 1 of the 1812 Constitution—to suppress feudalism without hesitation regarding the legal and economic future of large landholdings. In contrast, in the summer of 1811, the Courts of Cadiz still had the task of settling the question of the fate of Iberian feudal assets. The result was not dissimilar, given that they appealed to "the liberal principles of the English economy," so that feudalism was abolished without a return to state property.[53]

The transformation of the feudal countryside into modern capitalist agriculture, such as that depicted by Young's agronomy, needs further provision to make such property fully exploitable and suitable to attract investments. In Spain, as in Sicily, abolishing every civic use of land, woods, and pasture becomes of primary importance to completely assert the principle of full use and inviolability of private property. Both constitutions, when they have to mediate between collective or private interest, appear decidedly unbalanced in favor of the latter. This is shown particularly by Sicilian legislators who, after conferring to the owner exclusive use of lands habitually used by local populations, puts the "industrial interest" above the public by deciding "to the advantage of free economy" in the conflict over promiscuous use of fields between private individuals and the community.[54]

The economic strategy of Mediterranean liberals did not consist in unburdening barons of their feudal obligations through granting them enormous properties free from any commitment. The ultimate objective was that the feuds, by succession among the heirs, would gradually be divided into medium- to large-sized properties, larger than small farm holdings but not so excessively vast as to allow parasitic income without the owner needing to invest. Consequently, in both Spain and Sicily, abolition of *fideicommissum* is problematic. This old institution, which also exists in common law systems and is known as *fee tail*, binds the heir to preserve the integrity of the property and, after death, to transfer it to a third, specific, predetermined subject. By this legal means, the aristocracy could avoid the principle of hereditary succession by quotas and, in disguise, recover the abolished primogeniture. In Sicily the government, to the point of risking dissolution of its own parliamentary majority, achieved suppression of *fideicommissum.*[55] In the Courts of Cadiz, although the Conde de Toreno, appealing to the authority of Smith, opposed *fideicommissum* with the intent of favoring major circulation of land, liberal forces failed to enact laws on the subject.[56]

[53] Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 193.

[54] Art. 3, chap. 3, "Delle Feudalità, Diritti e Pesi Feudali," Title 1, Sicilian Constitution of 1812.

[55] Arts. 1–15, "Dell'Abolizione de' Fedecommessi," Title 1, Sicilian Constitution of 1812. See Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 145–46.

[56] Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 194–95.

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In line with the program to make land productive, there are attempts to proceed with the privatization of fallow lands belonging to the city or the Church. The Conde de Toreno, during the work of parliament in April 1812, quoted Smith and reactivated an old debate between Campomanes and Jovellanos in favor of the sale of lands to the great capitalists.[57] In contrast, in Sicily the auction of large plots of uncultivated or ecclesiastic land is anterior to 1812 and had been common practice for years.[58] For economists and Whig reformers in the Mediterranean who claimed inspiration from the *Wealth of Nations* and Young's agronomy, the main obstacle to economic development of their countries was the absence of capital in agriculture, a tendency which could be inverted by creating the conditions needed to attract investment in the land. Only large landholdings have the necessary requirements to carry out a radical transformation of cultivation techniques and to guarantee sufficient profit margins to reassure investors. From his chair at the University of Palermo, Balsamo taught for twenty years about the productive superiority of large capitalist farms that he claimed to be the consequence of Smith's division of labor.[59] Transformation of feuds in private property, suppression of estovers, and privatization of fallow lands are all instruments that, in Mediterranean liberals' vision, are necessary to allow capital to initiate the process of economic development described in the *Wealth of Nations.*

The reform of Mediterranean parliaments shows an agrarian interpretation of Smith's thought. In the late eighteenth century in southern Europe, the *Wealth of Nations* is read, contemplated, and used to update economic debates on how to reform and modernize agriculture, which was formerly dominated by physiocratic thought or the Neapolitan school of Antonio Genovesi. In the Iberian context, the reception of the *Wealth of Nations* was marked by an initially eclectic approach by authors like Campomanes. In time, though, through the work of academic chairs, scientific societies, and periodicals—reception of Smith's work appeared to converge on pursuing economic agricultural development as similar as possible to Britain's.[60] This process reached its completion in the debates of the Cortes de Cádiz and in Sicily a few years prior to the era of constitutionalism. The Chair of Agriculture was founded in Palermo in 1787 with the explicit political and ideological aims of severing the link between Sicilian economic culture and those of Italy and France and of importing an agrarian version of Anglo-Saxon liberalism.[61] Balsamo fulfilled this task by pursuing from the beginning his teaching on the *Wealth of Nations* and Young's agronomy. Balsamo drew on the former for the task of affirming the idea of natural liberty and indicating the

[57] Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 194.

[58] Francesco Renda, *Storia della Sicilia dalle Origini ai Nostri Giorni*, vol. 2 (Sellerio, 2003), 780.

[59] Paolo Balsamo, *Corso di Agricoltura Economico-Politico Teorico Pratico* (Natale Biondo Editore, 1855), 34.

[60] Jesus Astigarraga, "Adam Smith in the Spanish Press, 1780–1808," in *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations in Spain*, ed. Astigarraga and Zabalza, 157-71; Arrupe, "Adam Smith in the Chairs on Political Economy in Spain," 175–79.

[61] Regarding Balsamo's chair and the political struggle in Sicily of the time, see Fabrizio Simon, "Successo e Declino del Pensiero Genovesiano in Sicilia sul Finire del XVIII e il Principio del XIX Secolo," *Il Pensiero Economico Italiano* 19, no. 1 (2021): 129–57; Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 75–98.

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laws and conditions needed for economic development, and the latter for reforming capitalistic agriculture produce for a free competitive market.[62]

Increasing work productivity is a necessary condition for developing Mediterranean agriculture. The strategy for reaching this target is indicated in the writings of Young and in the articles in the *Annals of Agriculture*, which had been read and translated in southern Europe for at least twenty years. In Balsamo's works and his university lectures, the recipe to transform Sicilian agriculture consists in enclosures, model farms, efficient rotation, artificial fields, breeding stalls, fertilization of the fields, use of agricultural machines, reduction of intensive cereal farming, increase in woodlands, diversification of selected cultivations related to the demands of the market, and expected profit margins. These are key points of the agronomical program that Balsamo assimilated by associating with Young and visiting the English countryside under his guidance. Scholars, policymakers, and Mediterranean farmers also tried to transplant this program into their own countries. Such agricultural reform was expected to have not only a direct effect on land productivity, but also an indirect one by educating a social class of able and enterprising country gentlemen.

It is understandable that in Spain the reading of the *Wealth of Nations* is also accompanied by reading about Young's agronomy, with the latter often being an interpretive key for Smith's work.[63] Spanish newspapers and periodicals of the time show that the *Wealth of Nations* was one of the texts held to be representative of Whig economic and political culture, which also included Young and John Sinclair.[64] Research shows that references to Smith also occurred in the publications specializing in agronomy, above all in those which dedicated constant attention to Young's writings.[65]

British agronomy was not only a distant intellectual source, but also part of a reform process in Mediterranean countries. Already at the end of the 1700s, Young, Sinclair, and the circle of the English Board of Agriculture are at the center of a vast network of personal, intellectual, and political relationships, through which both British agronomical knowledge and Whig political ideals circulated and spread in southern Europe. During the constitutional period and the Napoleonic wars, Sinclair and Young were personally involved in various ways in the success of the new regimes, collaborating with both British agents and local policymakers. At the same time, the Board of Agriculture strove through an intensive cultural campaign to support the cause of Mediterranean liberalism.[66]

The epilogue of Whig constitutionalism in the Mediterranean

The Constitution of Cadiz and the Sicilian Constitution of 1812 both represent the culmination of this first season of liberalism in the Mediterranean. In 1818 the

[62] Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 114–31.
[63] Astigarraga, Menudo, and Usoz, "Nuancing Adam Smith," 126.
[64] Astigarraga, "Adam Smith in the Spanish Press," 166.
[65] Astigarraga, "Adam Smith in the Spanish Press," 167–68.
[66] Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 92, 99, 140, 143.

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Constitution of the United States of the Ionian Islands concludes the reform efforts of London in the area, but those are very far from the original Whig ideals of freedom and national independence, instead appearing to be self-government statutes of a colonial dominion.

All these Mediterranean constitutional regimes are destined to a short life. Wobbly is the experience of the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom, which in 1796 ceased to exist as a result of French occupation. The Constitution of Cadiz, enacted on March 19, 1812—whose final outcome can hardly be included in the Whig charter—was repealed in 1814 by Ferdinando VII after he is restored to the throne. The Sicilian Constitution lasted until December 1816, when King Ferdinando, after regaining the Kingdom of Naples through a coup, not only suspends the constitutional system in Sicily, but also suppresses the independence of the islands and merges the two regimes in the new Kingdom of Two Sicilies. Clearly, these southern Whig constitutions do not work in line with expectations, are more trouble than predicted, and in any case appear very different from the original British model.

Also, the liberal economic order faced obstacles that its enthusiastic supporters did not foresee. From Corsica to Sicily, the market, economic freedom, and the model of capitalist agriculture met strong resistance, protests, and in some cases episodes of open violence by common people. In the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom, several riots occurred in the summer of 1795 against agrarian policies that favored great property holdings and, in 1796, opposition to reform of taxation soon evolved into social revolts that helped the French invasion.[67] In Sicily, total and scrupulous enforcement of a free market system spurred violent reaction by the lower classes. In a country where free movement of goods, free enterprise, and competition were so young and still weak and where there was also high inflation, fast rising bread prices provoked in summer 1813 serious unrest in the cities, especially in Palermo.

Similar phenomena also occurred during that time in Great Britain, where politics faced them with pragmatic concerns. However, exponents of Mediterranean liberalism showed dogmatic faith in the principle of the "invisible hand" and assumed an intransigence in applying economic freedom to legislation and economic policy. Unlike Smith and Burke, they lacked a disenchanted skepticism that allows approaching reality with the sense of what's possible. In a difficult economic and social context that would require caution and gradualness, Balsamo, despite popular protests over the excessive cost of living, insisted that the market be left free to work without interference of city authorities or public measures to keep prices down.[68] He sought to

> [a]llow full liberty in every town of the kingdom to every body to make and sell bread at any price he likes. Allow and protect the free circulation of corn all over the kingdom and don't permit to be violated for any reason, or pretext whatever. For Palermo show the greatest firmness, and vigour against the insolent and extravagant idea of the common people, and make

[67] Dal Passo, *"Amici e Non di Ventura,"* 48–52.
[68] Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 150.

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> them steadily understand, that they must eat bread at the current price of corn—without this, there will never be an end to the evil. The mob will always pretend some thing, and will always be dissatisfied with every thing. Without this there never will be security of property, and trade, and consequently it will be impossible to have a regular supply of corn.[69]

Nevertheless, in spite of all the critical issues and faults of these regimes, it is undeniable that for countries abandoning an *ancien regime*, Whig constitutionalism represented a moment of significant progress. Indeed, after the restoration of absolutism, the spirit of constitutionalism remained in the consciousness of Mediterranean nations and inspired a wish for freedom and independence. Furthermore, the crisis of these southern liberal states cannot be entirely attributed to inherent defects of their constitutions or political weaknesses in the ruling classes. The end of the Napoleonic wars and the rise of conservative order introduced by the Congress of Vienna made constitutions, born in the context of Burke's ideological war, suddenly anachronistic and without political feasibility.

However, Whig charters survived in some way in the Mediterranean despite their fate. After their abolition, they marginally remained sources of law, for example, in the suppression of feudal institutions. What is more, constitutions live as myth and inspiration for generations of liberals who hand down their memory and build ideological processes of political and national identity on them.[70] From the second decade of the nineteenth century until at least the revolutions of 1848, these first liberal charters in the Mediterranean are constant reference points for the education of leadership, the elaboration of a national political tradition, and the planning of reforms.

Final remarks

Upon reflection, this early season of liberalism in the Mediterranean represents a remarkable example of how an idealized model of society is exported or imported in geographically and culturally distant contexts. National elites chose to adopt the British political and economic system as a strategy to survive in a historical era characterized by the spread of revolution, the tearing down of age-old regimes, and wars upsetting the political landscape of Europe.

Political economy is the protagonist of this process because southern reformers considered knowledge of it as a path to achieve a well-arranged society. The cultural initiatives undertaken in the last years of the eighteenth century by Iberian and Sicilian scholars to diffuse Smithianism institutionalized a precise kind of political economy that economists and policymakers then tried to enforce through constitutional reforms.

[69] Letter to Lord Bentinck, archived at University of Nottingham, England, Portland Collection Pw Jd 421.

[70] Usoz, "Adam Smith and the Cortes of Cádiz," 186; Simon, *L'Economista Anglofilo*, 156–60.

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What stands out in the Mediterranean case is that, in reforming and building a liberal state, the involved scholars selected foreign authors and ideas inspired not merely by intellectual factors, but also influenced and guided by political emergencies of national and international contexts. The ideological and political choice to adopt a precise model of social order and the necessity or convenience to take one side in the struggles inflaming Europe determine what works and theories to read, study, and import. Mediterranean economists arranged an intellectual package of British authors and ideas considered representative of the kind of society existing across the Channel and whose core is the work of Smith. With their sight set on this doctrinal framework, they try to mold through reforms the economic, political, and social reality of their nations.

The political factors influencing selection of some authors and works affect also their reading and interpretation, determining the intellectual filters through which ideas and theories have to pass in the process of reception and adaptation. Southern economists studied the *Wealth of Nations* and saw in it the best model of a Whig society as well as a kind of handbook for reproducing it. Consequently, they sought within its pages only what seemed to match their expectations and corroborate their beliefs. The result is often a simplistic interpretation of Smith's thought, which is wider, deeper, and more complex than these selective readings. Through the lens of Mediterranean scholars, the *Wealth of Nations* appears a text mainly oriented toward an agrarian model of economy whose protagonist is the social group of great landowners. This result was in tune with the aim of entrusting the guidance of a nation to the Burkean landed interest, but it does not perfectly coincide with Smith's political position. The Scottish scholar agrees that the aristocracy potentially could play a leadership role, but at the same time he expresses a strict and irreverent judgment on this class and its reliability. Furthermore, opposition to legislative reforms of private property and fear of the lower classes determine in the Mediterranean a more intransigent and ideological face of liberalism than the disenchanted and skeptical one typical of Smith. Adopting this approach, southern economists and reformers neglect in the *Wealth of Nation* all those passages which welcome legal interventions in defense of the freedom of workers. The final outcome of these readings and interpretations is that a conservative connotation of Smithian thought spreads in southern Europe during the last decade of the eighteenth century, while in Great Britain and other regions of the continent the figure of the Scottish scholar is still poised between supporters and antagonists of the French Revolution. This is a political collocation for Smith that, in some respects, forecasts trends not only of the nineteenth century, but also of the conservatism of the next one.

Taken as a whole package, the literature drawn on influences understanding the scholars and theories because each author and book supplies interpretative keys to reading the others. The reformers wrote the rules of the new social order with their eyes fixed on the *Wealth of Nations.* Yet, in the Mediterranean context, Smith is studied by linking his work, on the one hand, with the agronomy of Young and, on the other, setting his ideas within the political framework of Burkean Whiggism. This circumstance influenced dissemination of the original message of the *Wealth of Nations*, but at the same time determined its success

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among southern reformers and policymakers. This may be a recurring theme for Smith, who in successive seasons of liberalism is popularized and studied through the contribution of other authors, such as Jean-Baptiste Say during the nineteenth century, and whose interpretation is often conditioned by the political aims of his readers.

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