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978-1-108-07332-5 - Greece Under the Romans: A Historical View of the Condition of the Greek Nation, from the Time of Its Conquest by the Romans Until the Extinction of the Roman Empire in the East

George Finlay

Excerpt

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GREECE UNDER THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE CONQUEST OF GREECE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSTANTINOPLE AS CAPITAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. B. C. 146, to A. D. 330.

INTRODUCTION — CHANGES PRODUCED BY THE CONQUESTS OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT ON THE CONDITION OF THE GREEK NATION — CAUSES OF THE CONQUEST OF GREECE BY THE ROMANS — TREATMENT OF GREECE AFTER ITS CONQUEST — EFFECTS OF THE MITHRIDATIC WAR ON THE STATE OF GREECE — RUIN OF THE COUNTRY BY THE PIRATES OF CILICIA — NATURE OF THE ROMAN PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN GREECE — FISCAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE ROMANS — DEPOPULATION OF GREECE CAUSED BY THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT — ROMAN COLONIES ESTABLISHED IN GREECE — POLITICAL CONDITION OF GREECE FROM THE TIME OF AUGUSTUS TO THAT OF CARACALLA — THE GREEKS AND ROMANS NEVER SHEWED ANY DISPOSITION TO UNITE — STATE OF SOCIETY AMONG THE GREEKS — INFLUENCE OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY — SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE GREEKS AFFECTED BY THE WANT OF COLONIES OF EMIGRATION — EFFECTS PRODUCED IN GREECE BY THE INROADS OF THE GOTHs — CHANGES WHICH PRECEDED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSTANTINOPLE AS THE CAPITAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

THE conquests of Alexander the Great effected a permanent change in the political condition of the Greek nation, and this change powerfully influenced its moral and social state during the whole period of its subjection to the Roman empire. The international system of policy by which Alexander connected Greece with Western Asia and Egypt, was

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only effaced by the religion of Mohammed, and the conquests of the Arabs. Though Alexander was himself a Greek, both from education, and the prejudices cherished by the pride of ancestry, still, neither the people of Macedonia, nor the chief part of the army, whose discipline and valour had secured his victories, was Greek, either in language or feelings.* Had Alexander, therefore, determined on organizing his empire with the view of uniting the Macedonians and Persians in common feelings of opposition to the Greek nation, there can be no doubt, that he could easily have accomplished the design. The Greeks might then have found themselves enabled to adopt a very different course in their national career from that which they were compelled to follow by the powerful influence exercised over them by Alexander's conduct. Alexander himself, undoubtedly, perceived, that the greater numbers of the Persians, and their equality, if not superiority, in civilization to the Macedonians, rendered it necessary for him to seek some powerful ally to prevent the absorption of the Macedonians in the Persian population, the loss of their language, manners, and nationality, and the speedy change of his empire into the sovereignty of a mere Græco-Persian dynasty. It did not escape his discernment, that the political institutions of the Greeks created a principle of nationality capable of combating the unalterable laws of the Medes and Persians.

* Q. CURTIUS, vi. 9. 35. K. O. MÜLLER ueber die Makedoner, p. 34. MÜLLER'S Dorians, i. 499, Eng. trans. PLUTARCH (*Aratus*, 33) shews us the light in which the Greeks viewed the noblest Macedonians when compared with the Spartans.

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Alexander was the noblest model of a conqueror; his ambition aspired at eclipsing the glory of his unparalleled victories by the universal prosperity which was to flow from his civil government. New cities and extended commerce were to found an era in the world's history. Even the strength of his empire was to be based on a political principle which he has the merit of discovering, and of which he proved the efficacy; this principle was the amalgamation of his subjects into one people by permanent institutions. All other conquerors have endeavoured to augment their power by the subjection of one race to another.* The merit of Alexander is very much increased by the nature of his position with regard to the Greek nation. The Greeks were not favourably disposed either towards his empire or his person; they would willingly have destroyed both as the surest way of securing their own liberty. But the moral energy of the Greek national character did not escape the observation of Alexander, and he resolved to render this quality available for the preservation of his empire, by introducing into the East those municipal institutions which gave it vigour, and thus facilitating the infusion of some portion of the Hellenic character into the hearts of his conquered subjects.

The moderation of Alexander in the execution of his plans of reform and change is as remarkable as

* History and poetry seem to have taken Alexander as the type of an ambitious warrior. The phrase, "Macedonia's madman," and the circumstance of his weeping for worlds to conquer, hardly convey a correct idea of one whose views of glory were so intimately connected with the effects his conquests were to produce. From Alexandria to Candahar the unlettered do him more justice.

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the wisdom of his extensive projects. In order to mould the Asiatics to his wishes, he did not attempt to enforce laws and constitutions similar to those of Greece. He had profited too well by the lessons of Aristotle to think of treating man as a machine. But he introduced Greek civilization as an important element in his civil government, and established Greek colonies with political rights throughout his conquests. It is true, that he seized all the unlimited power of the Persian monarchs, but, at the same time, he strove to secure administrative responsibility, and to establish free institutions in municipal government. Any laws or constitution which Alexander could have promulgated to enforce his system of consolidating the population of his empire into one body, would most probably have been immediately repealed by his successors, in consequence of the hostile feelings of the Macedonian army. But it was more difficult to escape from the tendency imprinted on the administration by the systematic arrangements which Alexander had introduced. He seems to have been fully aware of this fact, though it is impossible to trace the whole series of measures he adopted to accelerate the completion of his great project of creating a new state of society, and a new nation, as well as a new empire, in the imperfect records of his civil administration which have survived. His death left his own scheme incomplete, yet his success was wonderful; for though his empire was immediately dismembered, its numerous portions long retained a deep imprint of that Greek civilization which he had introduced. The influence of his philanthropic policy survived the kingdoms which his arms had founded,

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and tempered the despotic sway of the Romans by its superior power over society ; nor was the influence of Alexander's government utterly effaced in Asia until Mahommed changed the government, the religion, and the frame of society in the East.

The monarchs of Egypt, Syria, Pergamus, and Bactriana, who were either Macedonians or Greeks, respected the civil institutions, the language, and the religion of their native subjects, however adverse they might be to Greek usages ; and the sovereigns of Bithynia, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Parthia, though native princes, retained a deep tincture of Greek civilization after they had thrown off the Macedonian yoke. They not only encouraged the arts, sciences, and literature of Greece, but they even protected the peculiar political constitutions of the Greek colonies settled in their dominions, though at variance with the Asiatic views of monarchical government.

The Greeks and Macedonians long continued separate nations, though a number of the causes which ultimately produced their fusion began to exert some influence shortly after the death of Alexander. The moral and social causes which enabled the Greeks to acquire a complete superiority over the Macedonian race, and ultimately to absorb it as a component element of their own nation, were the same which afterwards enabled them to destroy the Roman influence in the East. For several generations, the Greeks appeared the feebler party in their struggle with the Macedonians. The new kingdoms, into which Alexander's empire was divided, were placed in very different circumstances from the older Greek states. Two separate divisions were

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created in the Hellenic world, and the Macedonian monarchies on the one hand, and the free Greeks on the other, formed two distinct international systems of policy. The Macedonian sovereigns had a balance of power to maintain, in which the free states of Europe could only be directly interested when the overwhelming influence of a conqueror placed their independence in jeopardy. The multifarious diplomatic relations of the free states among themselves required constant attention, not only to maintain their political independence, but even to protect their property and civil rights. The two great divisions of Hellenic civic society were often governed by opposite views and feelings in morals and politics, though they were continually placed in collision or alliance with one another in their struggles to preserve the balance of their respective systems.

The immense power and wealth of the Seleucidæ and Ptolemies rendered vain all the efforts of the small European states to maintain the high military, civil, and literary rank they had previously occupied. Their best soldiers, their wisest statesmen, and their ablest authors, were induced to emigrate to a more profitable and extensive scene of action. Alexandria became the capital of the Hellenic world. Yet the history of the European states still continued to maintain its predominant interest, and as a political lesson, the struggles of the Achæan League to defend the independence of Greece against Macedonia and Rome, are as instructive as the annals of Athens and Sparta. The European Greeks at this period perceived all the danger to which their liberties were exposed from the wealth and power of the Asiatic

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monarchies, and they vainly endeavoured to effect a combination of all the free states into one federal body. Whatever might have been the success of such a combination, it certainly offered the only hope of preserving the liberty of Greece against the powerful states with which the altered condition of the civilized world had brought her into contact.

At the very time when the Macedonian kings were attacking the independence of Greece, and the Asiatic courts undermining the morals of the Greek nation, the Greek colonies, whose independence, from their remote situation, was secured against the attacks of the Eastern monarchs, were conquered by the Romans. Many circumstances tending to weaken the Greeks, and over which they had no control, followed one another with fatal celerity. The invasion of the Gauls, though bravely repulsed, inflicted great losses on Greece.* Shortly after, the Romans completed the conquest of the Greek states in Italy.† From that time the Sicilian Greeks were too feeble to be any thing but spectators of the fierce struggle of the Romans and Carthaginians for the sovereignty of their island, and though the city of Syracuse courageously defended its independence, the struggle was a hopeless tribute to national glory.‡ The cities of Cyrenaica had been long subject to the Ptolemies, and the republics on the shores of the Black Sea had been unable to maintain their liberties against the repeated attacks of the sovereigns of Pontus and Bithynia.§

Though the Macedonians and Greeks were sepa-

* B. C. 279.

† B. C. 272.

‡ B. C. 212.

§ B. C. 220. POLYBIUS, iv. 56. STRABO, l. 7. p. 93. Ed. Tauch. MEMNONIS HERACLEÆ, *Ponti Histor. excerpt.* Lipsiæ, 1816. Ed. J. C. Orellius.

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rated into two divisions by the opposite interests of the Asiatic monarchies and the European republics, still they were united by a powerful bond of national feelings. There was a strong similarity in the education, religion, and social position of the individual citizen in every state, whether Greek or Macedonian. Wherever Hellenic civilization was received, the free citizens formed only one part of the population, whether the other was composed of slaves or subjects; and this peculiarity placed their civil interests as Greeks in a more important light than their political differences as subjects of various states. The Macedonian Greeks of Asia and Egypt were a ruling class, governed, it is true, by an absolute sovereign, but having their interest so identified with his, in the vital question of retaining the administration of the country, that the Greeks, even in the absolute monarchies, formed a favoured and privileged class. In the Greek republics, the case was not very dissimilar; there, too, a small body of free citizens ruled a large slave or subject population, whose numbers required not only constant attention on the part of the rulers, but likewise a deep conviction of an ineffaceable separation in interests and character, to preserve the ascendancy. This peculiarity in the position of the Greeks, cherished their exclusive nationality, and created a feeling, that laws of honour and of nations forbade free men ever to make common cause with slaves. The influence of this feeling was visible for centuries on the laws and education of the free citizens of Greece, and it was equally powerful wherever Hellenic civilization spread.*

* PLUTARCH, *Sylla*, xviii. PLUTARCH, *in Hyperide*. *Cato*, 78. APPIAN *De Bell. Civ. I.* TACITUS *Ann.* xiv. 42. *Drig.* xxix. 5. 1. 32. 39.

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Alexander's conquests soon exercised a widely extended influence on the commerce, literature, morals, and religion of the Greeks. A direct communication was soon opened with India, the centre of Asia, and the southern coast of Africa. The immense extension of the commercial transactions of the Asiatic and Egyptian Greeks, soon diminished the relative wealth and importance of the European states, and at the same time, their stationary position assumed the aspect of decline from the rapidly increasing power and civilization of Western Europe. A considerable trade began to be carried on directly with the great commercial depots of the East which had formerly afforded large profits to the Greeks of Europe by its indirect channels. As soon as Rome rose to some degree of power, its inhabitants, if not its franchised citizens, traded with the East, as is proved by the existence of political relations between Rome and Rhodes, more than three centuries before the Christian era.* There can be no doubt, that the connection between the two states had its origin in the interests of trade. New channels were opened for mercantile enterprise as direct communications diminished the expense of transport. The increase of trade rendered piracy a profitable occupation, for sovereigns and merchants were compelled to navigate under the protection of powerful states, in

* POLYBIUS, xxx. 5. 6. CLINTON'S *Fasti Hellenici*, iii. 84. 2. The earliest connection of Rome with Carthage was also commercial, consequently, the trading portion of the Roman state was not unimportant, though it was not represented in the body politic. This explains the adverse assertions of Polybius in his first book, (c. 1.) with the fact of the existence of the Carthaginian treaties noticed in his third. The Romans had trade worth regulating by treaty five hundred years before the Christian era, though personally they despised commerce.

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order to secure their property from extortion and plunder.* These alterations in commercial affairs proved every way disadvantageous to the small republics of European Greece; and Alexandria and Rhodes soon occupied the position once held by Corinth and Athens.

The literature of a people is so intimately connected with the local circumstances which influence education, taste, and morals, that it can never be transplanted without undergoing a great alteration. It is not wonderful, therefore, that the literature of the Greeks, after the extension of their dominion in the East, should have undergone a great change; but it seems remarkable that this change should have proved invariably injurious to all its peculiar excellencies. It is singular, at the same time, to find how little the Greeks occupied themselves in the examination of the stores of knowledge possessed by the Eastern nations. The situation and interests of the Asiatic and Egyptian Greeks must have compelled many to learn the languages of the countries which they inhabited, and the literature of the East was laid open to their investigation. They appear to have availed themselves very sparingly of these advantages. Even in history and geography, they made but small additions to the information already collected by Herodotus, Ctesias, and Xenophon, and this supercilious neglect of foreign literature has been the cause of depriving modern times of all records of the powerful and civilized nations which flourished while Greece was in a state of barbarism. Had the Macedonians

* The Piracies of Scerdiliadas. POLYBIUS, v. 95.