

George Finlay

*History of the Greek
Revolution*

The Hellenic Kingdom and the Greek Nation

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Foreword and Author's Biography

This ebook contains the *History of the Greek Revolution*, of 1861, as an appendix an earlier work of Finlay, *The Hellenic Kingdom and the Greek Nation*. The *British Dictionary of National Biography*, 1889 volume 19 pp. 36-37¹, contains the following biography of George Finlay, which is reproduced here as a foreword to the *History of the Greek Revolution*.

George Finlay (1799–1875), historian, was son of Captain John Finlay, R.E., F.R.S., and brother of Kirkman Finlay (d. 1828). His grandfather, James Finlay, was a Glasgow merchant. He was born 21 Dec. 1799, at Faversham, Kent, where his father was inspector of the government powder mills. The latter died in 1802, and George was for some time instructed by his mother, to whose training he attributed his love of history. His education was continued at an English boarding-school, and in the family of his uncle, Kirkman Finlay of Glasgow, under private tutors. He subsequently studied law in Glasgow, and proceeded about 1821 to the university of Göttingen to acquaint himself with Roman jurisprudence. While there he began to doubt his vocation for law, and, partly influenced by his acquaintance with a Greek fellow-student, “resolved to visit Greece and judge for myself concerning the condition of the people and the chances of the war.” In November 1823 he met Byron at Cephalonia. “You are young and enthusiastic,” said Byron, “and therefore sure to be disappointed when you know the Greeks as well as I do.” The number of Hellenes and Philhellenes about Byron gave umbrage to the Ionian government, which was bound to remain neutral. Finlay quitted the island on a hint from Sir Charles Napier, and, after narrowly escaping shipwreck, made his way successively to Athens and Missolonghi, where for two months he spent nearly every evening with Byron, who, Parry says, “wasted much of his time” in conversation with the future historian and other such frivolous persons. Quitting Missolonghi before Byron’s death, Finlay joined Odysseus on an expedition into the Morea, but, disgusted with the general venality and rapacity, returned to the headquarters of the government, where things were no better. A malarious fever compelled him to return to Scotland, where he passed his examination in civil law, but

¹ Available at

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Dictionary_of_National_Biography_volume_19.djvu/36

was soon again in Greece at the invitation of his intimate friend Frank Abney Hastings, who had built a steamer in which Finlay took his passage. He continued fighting for Greece, or engaged in missions on her behalf, until the termination of the war, when he purchased an estate in Attica, "hoping to aid in putting Greece into the road that leads to a rapid increase of production, population, and material improvement." "I lost my money and my labour, but I learned how the system of tenths has produced a state of society, and habits of cultivation, against which one man can do nothing. When I had wasted as much money as I possessed, I turned my attention to study." His unfortunate investment had at least the good results of compelling his continual residence in the country, with which he became most thoroughly acquainted, and of stimulating his perception of the evils which, in the past as in the present, have deteriorated the Greek character and injured the credit and prosperity of the nation. The publication of his great series of histories commenced in 1844, and was completed in 1861, when he wrote the autobiographical fragment which is almost the sole authority for his life. His correspondence is lost or inaccessible, and, notwithstanding his courteous hospitality, acknowledged by many travellers, little more seems to be known of his life in Greece than his constant endeavours to benefit the country by good advice, sometimes expressed in language of excessive if excusable acerbity, but which, if little followed, was never resented by the objects of it. His most important effort was the series of letters he addressed to the "Times" from 1864 to 1870, which, being translated by the Greek newspapers, produced more effect than his earlier admonitions. He also contributed to "Blackwood's Magazine," the "Athenæum," and the "Saturday Review," and occasionally visited England, not later, however, than 1854. He wrote in Greek on the stone age in 1869, and in the following year published the French narrative of Benjamin Brue, the interpreter who accompanied the Vizier Ali on his expedition into the Morea in 1715. Among his other writings are an essay on the site of the holy sepulchre (1847), and pamphlets on Greek politics (1836) and finance (1844). His essays on classical topography, never collected by himself, were published in 1842 in a German translation by S. F. W. Hoffmann. He died at Athens 26 Jan. 1875; the date 1876 given in the Oxford edition of his history is an unaccountable mistake.

Finlay's great work appeared in sections, as follows: "Greece under the

Romans," 1844; "Greece to its Conquest by the Turks," 1851; "Greece under Ottoman and Venetian Domination," 1856; "Greek Revolution," 1861. After the author's death the copyright of these several works was offered to the delegates of the Clarendon Press by his representatives, and in 1877 all were brought together under the title of "A History of Greece from its Conquest by the Romans to the present time, B.C. 146 to A.D. 1864," and published in seven volumes under the able editorship of the Rev. H. F. Tozer. The whole had been thoroughly revised by Finlay himself, who, besides aiming throughout at a greater condensation of style, had added several new chapters, chiefly on economical subjects, entirely recast the section on Mediæval Greece and Trebizond, and appended a continuation from 1843 to the enactment of the constitution of 1864. The period covered by the history, therefore, is no less than two thousand and ten years.

Finlay is a great historian of the type of Polybius, Procopius, and Machiavelli, a man of affairs, who has qualified himself for treating of public transactions by sharing in them, a soldier, a statesman, and an economist. He is not picturesque or eloquent, or a master of the delineation of character, but a singular charm attaches to his pages from the perpetual consciousness of contact with a vigorous intelligence. In the latter portion of his work he speaks with the authority of an acute, though not entirely dispassionate, eye-witness; in the earlier and more extensive portion it is his great glory to have shown how interesting the history of an age of slavery may be made, and how much Gibbon had left undone. Gibbon, as his plan requires, exhibits the superficial aspects of the period in a grand panorama; Finlay plunges beneath the surface, and brings to light a wealth of social particulars of which the mere reader of Gibbon could have no notion. This being Finlay's special department, it is the more to his praise that he has not smothered his story beneath his erudition. He may, indeed, even appear at a disadvantage beside the Germans as regards extent and profundity of research, but this inferiority is more than compensated by the advantages incidental to his prolonged residence in the country. His personal disappointments had indeed caused a censoriousness which somewhat defaces the latter part of his history, and is the more to be regretted as it affected his estimate of the value of his own work, and of its reception by the world. In character he was a frank, high-minded, public-spirited gentleman.

Note to the 2020 electronic edition

This e-book has been composed on the basis of the 1861 printed edition of *History of the Greek Revolution* and on the basis of the English (1836) and American (1837) editions of *The Hellenic Kingdom and the Greek Nation*, which differ slightly.

The scanned text was carefully controlled, in order to make available to the readers a good quality electronic version of this works. The page numbers of the original edition have been preserved in [square brackets].

To facilitate the reading of this electronic edition, the footnotes containing remarks that add some contents to the main discourse have been included in the text, and marked with letters within square brackets, e.g. [a]. The other footnotes contain references to the author's sources. Where the footnotes contain some discussion about the sources, they have been marked with an asterisk '*'. Therefore the remaining notes should be consulted only by those who have an interest in identifying the author's sources.

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Καὶ παρῶν ἐρῶ
Κουδὲν παρήσω τῆς ἀληθείας ἔπος
Τι γάρ σε μαλθάσσοιμ' ἄν ὧν ἐς ὕστερον
ψεῦσται φαγούμεθ'; ὀρθὸν ἀλήθει' ἀεὶ².

HISTORY OF THE GREEK REVOLUTION

BY GEORGE FINLAY, LL. D.

Hon. Member of the Royal Society of Literature, Member of the American Antiquarian Society, Corresponding Member of the Archaeological Institute at Rome.

Knight Gold Cross of the Greek Order of the Redeemer.
Author of the "History of Greece under Foreign Domination", etc.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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MDCCCLXI

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² Sophocle, Antigones, 1179-1182 [Editor's note].

BOOK FIRST. EVENTS PRECEDING THE REVOLUTION.

CHAPTER I. THE CONDITION OF THE MODERN GREEKS.

“Countless generation of mankind
Depart, and leave no vestige where they trode”
—Wordsworth

[1] This History records the events which established the independence of Greece.

Numbers of the Greek and Turkish races in Europe

As long as the literature and the taste of the ancient Greeks continue to nurture scholars and inspire artists, modern Greece must be an object of interest to cultivated minds. Nor is the history of the modern Greeks [2] unworthy of attention. The importance of the Greek race to the progress of European civilisation is not to be measured by its numerical strength, but by its social and religious influence in the East. Yet, even geographically, the Greeks occupy a wide extent of seacoast, and the countries in which they dwell are so thinly peopled that they have ample room to multiply and form a populous nation. At present their influence extends far beyond the territories occupied by their race; for Greek priests and Greek teachers have transfused their language and their ideas into the greater part of the Christian population of European Turkey. They have thus constituted themselves the representatives of Eastern Christianity, and placed themselves in prominent opposition to their conquerors, the Othoman Turks, who invaded Europe as apostles of the religion of Mohammed. The Greeks, during their subjection to the yoke of a foreign nation and a hostile religion, never forgot that the land which they inhabited was the land of their fathers; and their antagonism to their alien and infidel masters, in the hour of their most abject servitude, presaged that their opposition must end in their destruction or deliverance.

The Greek Revolution came at last. It delivered a Christian nation from subjection to Mohammedanism, founded a new state in Europe, and extended the advantages of civil liberty to regions where despotism had for ages been indigenious. In order to unfold its causes, it is necessary to describe the condition of the Greek people and of the Othoman government during the early part of this century.

When the Greeks took up arms, the numbers of the Greek and Turkish races in Europe were in all probability nearly equal, and neither is

supposed to have greatly exceeded, two millions. The population of continental Greece, from Cape Taenaron to the northernmost [3] limit of the Greek language, was supposed to be not much greater than a million.^{3*} Another million may be added for the population of Crete, the Cyclades, the Ionian Islands, Constantinople, and the Greek maritime towns. If we add to this the Greek population of Asia Minor, the islands on the Asiatic coast, Cyprus, the trans-Danubian provinces, Russia, and other countries, the whole number of the Greek race cannot be estimated at more than three millions and a half.

Two Christian races in the sultan's European dominions were more numerous: the Vallachian or Roman race was not less than four millions; the Slavonian, including the Bulgarian, which speaks the Slavonic language, exceeded five millions [a].

[a] Little dependence can be placed on the statistical accounts of the Othoman empire. Ubicini, one of the best authorities, in *Lettres sur la Turquie* (1853, p. 49), gives 60,000 as the population of Bassora. In the same year, the official registers at Constantinople were said to give only 5,000; and English officers who visited it shortly after, during the Persian war, did not suppose that it could contain a greater number. In 1820 the population was estimated at 12,000, and it has been declining ever since.

Pashaliks into which the country inhabited by the Greeks was divided

The provinces in which the Greeks formed a majority of the inhabitants were divided into six pashaliks of high rank, and many smaller districts, governed immediately by inferior pashas.

(... *End of Preview* ...)

³ This is the estimate of Colonel Leake, the most accurate and observant traveller in Greece. – *An Historical Outline of the Greek Revolution* (London, 1826), p. 20.

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GEORGE FINLAY

Back Cover

The Greek War of Independence gathered the European youth who languished in the torpid atmosphere of the Restoration in their own countries. George Finlay, sent to Göttingen to improve his knowledge of Roman law, conversed much with everybody he met who had visited Greece, read all the works of modern travellers, and became a good acquaintance of the only Greek who was then studying at Göttingen.

He did not resist this pervasive call which mobilized the idealism of his generation, and he embarked for Greece in 1823. By participating in the War he became friend with Byron and with the renowned Captain Hasting, commander of the first steam frigate which fought effectively against the Turkish fleet, and accumulated a vast first-hand knowledge of the events of the revolution. After the birth of independent Greece, Finlay did not return to his homeland, but attempted to set up an innovative farm, losing all his money in the enterprise. Then he began studying the history of medieval and modern Greece, and wrote, among other essays, this *History of the Greek Revolution*, in which the mass of first-hand testimonies and documentary data in his possession was reworked in a masterpiece of historiography attentive to the facts and their context.

The essay begins with a description of the Greek society at the dawn of the Independence War and extends up to the Constitutional Revolution of 1843. Each chapter proceeds first by qualifying the more general context, and then going into detail of the events: in this way today's readers who have not specialist interest in minute details and the chronicles of war can read this book as a collection of monographs, of extreme interest for the image full of life that they return, of a society on the one hand pervaded by a powerful desire to shape its own political system, on the other hindered to realize its potential from inexperience and inability to organize itself.

George Finlay

George Finlay (1799-1875), English born, was educated at Glasgow and Göttingen, where he studied Roman law. Becoming an enthusiast in the cause of Greece, he joined Byron in the War of Independence, and thereafter bought a property near Athens, where he settled and busied himself with schemes for the improvement of the country, which had little success, and writing a *History of Greece*, in several volumes, extending from the Roman Conquest to Finlay's present (146 B.C. to 1864).