

Underfunded Modernization: Tobacco Producers and Agricultural Policy in Interwar Greece

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze the state-led project of optimizing tobacco production in interwar Greece, as well as its effects on the peasant population. I look at one specific stage within the productive chain, known as primary processing. The history of primary processing allows us to appreciate the interplay of four factors that, I argue, most decisively determined the trajectory of Greece's agricultural policy in the interwar period. Such factors are a) the undercapitalization of the Greek rural economy, b) the ever increasing dependence of the Greek tobacco sector on the German sales market; c) the nonexistence of strong, autonomous agrarian organizations, and d) the pro-merchant stance of successive Greek governments. The scale of analysis proposed in this article can enrich the existing historiography on Greek agriculture by overcoming some of the limitations of the approaches that emphasize quantitative data on productivity, output and land use.

I. Introduction

Rural modernization and the solution to varying versions of the agrarian question featured quite high on a wide range of political agendas in interwar Europe.ⁱ In this regard, the case of Greece is no exception. In the small, largely rural Mediterranean country, reformers of all political stripes, probably with the sole exception of the communists, thought of the optimization of the countryside's productive capabilities as key for the country's economic development and social peace.ⁱⁱ Compared with other European states, interwar Greece presented the particularity of having undergone one of the most radical processes of land reform in the continent's history in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Throughout the interwar period, the goal of Greece's agricultural policy was to modernize agricultural production while maintaining the social order that the population exchange with Turkey and the land reform had ushered in (Petmezas 2012). Economic historians have discussed important shortcomings in the implementation of this political program, and identified the scarcity of capital as a root cause of underdevelopment. They have substantiated their claim that Greece's rural economy made little progress in the interwar period by pointing at the generally low productivity per unit of cultivated land, as well as the modest increase in land use. They do grant that these indicators showed some improvement in the last years of the interwar period, but their assessment is by and large less than celebratory (Petmezas 2013; Kōstēs 2019, 194). In this article, I propose that yields and cultivated area are not always what we should be looking at when analyzing the modernization of Greece's rural economy. This is certainly the case when it comes to the country's most important export-oriented crop, source of foreign currency, and industrial raw material: tobacco leaves. Instead, I take an approach that focuses on the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at improving the crop's quality, not expanding or intensifying its production.

In this article, I analyze primary processing, a stage within the tobacco value chain that would normally take place at the peasant's home after the harvest, and factor decisively in the quality of the product. Primary processing consisted of drying the leaves in the sun and packing them in order to prevent their deterioration during storage and transportation. The history of this value-adding procedure and the regulations aimed at optimizing it will allow us to appreciate the interplay of four factors that shaped the content of state-led modernization on the Greek countryside, as well as the impact of such modernizing drive on the peasant population. Such factors are a) the undercapitalization of the Greek rural economy, b) the ever increasing dependence of the Greek tobacco sector on the German sales market; c) the nonexistence of strong, autonomous agrarian organizations, and d) the pro-merchant stance of successive Greek governments.

In contrast to the literature that emphasizes macro-economic indicators such as aggregate productivity per hectare or agricultural output, this approach can shed light into the question of how the rural population experienced the agricultural policies targeting them. Simply put, policymakers intended to change the way that peasants worked and lived their daily lives for the sake of national economic development. We can observe such changes (or lack thereof) by looking at the materiality of the tasks that the peasants performed, and the instruments that they used, however technically obscure they might seem to us.

The characterization of interwar Europe as a place where “the countryside became the subject of governance techniques like never before” (Patel 2017) is accurate in a general sense. However, we should keep in mind that the concrete manifestations of such techniques presented a high degree of variation not only from country to country, but even within one country. In the case of Greece, state agencies pursued an increase in wheat production nationwide while

discouraging the overproduction of tobacco in certain regions. This means that the total amount of cultivated land or the average yield per hectare can be useful metrics when it comes to cereals, but not tobacco. Unlike in the case of grains, quality was the goal rather than quantity.ⁱⁱⁱ Tobacco producers, as I show in this article, often experienced the arm of the state as ineffective at best, and outright invasive at worst.

The sources informing the research presented here include, but are not limited to, published and unpublished documents produced by the Agricultural Bank of Greece (ABG), the Tobacco Research Institute of Greece, the Offices for the Protection of Greek Tobacco, and the Ministry of Agriculture. They also include articles from the newspaper *Makedonia*. The examination of these sources allow for an analysis that goes beyond simply enunciating the expectations that policymakers inscribed in the legislation, or the pointing out that policies were often difficult to implement.^{iv}

I have organized the article as follows: Part II provides background information that is necessary for understanding the particularities of tobacco production, and outlines the historical context for the ensuing discussion. Part III analyzes the initiatives that the Greek government undertook to have peasants process their tobacco according to methods that would increase the shelf life and quality of the product. Part III also explains why these efforts did not come to fruition. Part IV discusses the renewed push for the upgrading of primary processing during Metaxas' dictatorship, highlighting a) the importance of German demand for Greek tobacco as a factor shaping these policies, and b) the burden that peasants would have to bear in order for the new regulations to become effective. Finally, part V summarizes the conclusions of this study.

II. A Lucrative Crop in a Nation of Small Landholders

In interwar Greece, tobacco production was the main source of income for hundreds of thousands of peasant families. Leaf packing was also the most important urban industry in the country, providing employment to tens of thousands of workers. Tobacco was particularly important in the local economies of the country's northern regions commonly known as the New Lands. At the macro-economic level, tobacco leaves were the most important export commodity in Greece in terms of value. From the 1920s onward, but even more so during the international economic crisis of the 1930s that left large tobacco stocks unsold, this sector of the Greek economy became a site of intense social conflict and state interventionism. Tobacco production and trade were the object of countless regulations. The 'tobacco question' ('καπνικό ζήτημα') was the subject of heated debates in the press, as well as in scholarly and labor circles. Understanding the context in which tobacco became such an important component of the Greek economy is necessary before I turn to a discussion of the policies that targeted it in the interwar period.

The tobacco variety that grows in Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey is commonly known as Oriental. The feature that makes this variety especially valuable is its mild flavor, which makes it an important component in the tobacco mixes used in the production of cigarettes worldwide. The Ottoman Empire was the only significant exporter of Oriental tobacco until the early twentieth century. The Kingdom of Greece annexed the Empire's most important tobacco-producing regions, Macedonia and western Thrace, in the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. As a result, Greece became the new leader in Oriental tobacco exports, a position that it would keep until World War II. In the 1920s, the production of Oriental tobacco in what had become Greece's New Lands skyrocketed.

The quick expansion of tobacco production was a direct result of the settlement of hundreds of thousands of Asia Minor refugees in what had become Greece's northernmost

provinces, especially in Macedonia, after the population exchange with Turkey (Dankas 2003, 213). Significant tracts of land were claimed for agricultural purposes, and large estates were partitioned and distributed among the newly increased peasant population. The redistribution of land and the creation of a nation of small landholders had been part of the liberal political program since the early twentieth century. The need to integrate 1.2 million newcomers in a country of roughly 3.5 million inhabitants turned the costly project of land redistribution into an urgent humanitarian priority (Kontogiorgi 2006). The small size of many of the lots allocated in the land reform incentivized the production of tobacco, since there was no other crop with profit margins nearly as high. In fact, in some cases tobacco was the only financially viable crop for a peasant family.

The limitations of the land tenure system that of the land reform had created in northern Greece became evident as soon as the international demand for Oriental tobacco slowed down.^v Oriental tobacco was an export-oriented crop, used to add flavor to the tobacco mixes that went in cigarettes produced worldwide, but especially in Central Europe. Already in the mid-1920s, the weakness of a variety of European currencies caused some alarm in Greece, as inflation made it costly for cigarette manufacturers to import raw material.^{vi} That was nothing compared to the calamities of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. Large amounts of tobacco remained unsold in the hands of the peasants, while prices plunged. Greek peasants and policymakers had to grapple with the higher production costs of Greek tobacco compared with its Bulgarian and Turkish counterparts. The challenges facing the tobacco sector turned it into the object of particularly intensive policymaking since the mid-1920s, in the broader context of the bourgeois-led project of modernizing the Greek countryside.

Primer Minister Eleftherios Venizelos' modernizing agenda for the rural economy truly took off during his second four-year term (1928-1932).^{vii} To the extent that the political instability of the 1930s allowed, until World War II successive governments maintained the spirit of these reforms. Greek elites envisioned rural modernization along the following lines: reduction of Greece's dependence on imported foodstuffs; increase in output, quality and productivity through technical assistance, and rationalization of the rural credit market by bringing it under the control of the ABG. As far as tobacco was concerned, the main goal was not an overall increase in production, but the opposite: limiting overproduction following years of high prices, while encouraging peasants who owned land that was suboptimal for tobacco production to turn towards other crops.^{viii} Even those peasants who did produce good tobacco received incentives to diversify the use of their land.^x The overarching logic of these measures was to reduce the exposure of Greece's economy to the vagaries of the international tobacco market.

Given that overproduction, not underproduction, was the main threat hanging over the heads of tobacco producers, we cannot answer the question of whether the modernization of the sector succeeded by looking for increases in overall output. Data on the use of chemical fertilizers are also of little help (Cf. Kōstēs 2019, 191-194; Petmezas 2013). Agronomists advised against their use because overly fertilized tobacco leaves would contain thick veins, which would negatively affect their quality.^x With regard to quality as a measure of success, our problem is the absence of data sets that might allow us to observe any kind of trend. To assess the extent of the modernization of Greece's tobacco sector, it is therefore useful to assess the existing evidence of the adoption of new quality-enhancing techniques related to primary processing.

III. Underfunded Liberal Modernization (1925-1936)

The historiography on interwar Greece has highlighted the incapacity of its large class of small landholders to invest in the improvement of their farms, as well as the insufficiency of the available public funds to compensate for the lack of private capital (Petmezas 2013; Vergopoulos 1975). On the other hand, some authors have pointed at the improvement of very specific metrics (e.g. availability of trained agronomists, or the amount of wheat bought up by state agencies) to support more optimistic views on the trajectory of Greek agricultural policy (Panagiōtopoulos 2004; Gasias 2019). The case of tobacco, in particular with regard to the improvement of the infrastructure available for its primary processing, supports the pessimistic assessment of the actual impact of agricultural policy in the interwar years. It does so, however, in an interesting way. It reveals the extent to which policies could fail even when support for them cut across class divisions. Furthermore, it is telling of the constraining political-economic framework within which policies had to be implemented.

The primary processing of Oriental tobacco consisted of drying the leaves in the sun, and possibly packaging them to prevent deterioration during storage and transportation. In the absence of industry-wide standards or state regulations, primary processing followed a series of local customs, and could vary according to individual preferences. In its most simple form, producers would just string the leaves to form garlands, which they would then hang in the sun for several days. Once sufficiently dry, the peasants would store the tobacco strings away from the sunlight until the time of the sale. The peasants could either sell the garlands, or pile them to form a package called *armathodema*. After buying the tobacco, the merchant would transport it to an urban center for the next stage of processing. This second round of processing, which I will discuss later on, was known as *commercial processing* (εμπορική επεξεργασία).

The time between the harvesting of the tobacco and its collection by a buyer was usually unknown to the peasant *a priori*. Whether in the form of garlands or packaged as an *armathodema*, the leaves could easily deteriorate while stored or transported. Imbalances in humidity or temperature, and friction with the floor or other objects could damage them. The peasant could prevent damage of this sort by breaking up the garlands, separating the leaves into different categories based on size and quality, and packaging them in a more elaborate fashion. This is exactly what, at least on paper, successive governments required northern Greek peasants to do from 1925 onward, based on a series of regulations. A decree from July of that year prohibited the transportation of tobacco that had not undergone primary processing according to methods that were more labor and capital-intensive than the ^{xi}. The law allowed the *seira-pastal* method, more elaborate than the *armathodema* but not requiring distinctions based on quality, only in southern Greece, which produced lower-quality tobacco more oriented towards the domestic market. In contrast, the local economies of the New Lands in the north depended more heavily on tobacco exports. Starting in 1929, northern Greek peasants would not be allowed to even sign sale contracts unless they had processed their tobacco correctly beforehand.^{xii}

The purpose of the new regulations was to improve the quality of the Greek tobacco while increasing peasant incomes. The processing methods that the law required for northern Greece allowed the peasant to do two things: First, he could potentially ask for a higher price, since his product was of better quality. Second, increased durability gave the peasant more time to negotiate with potential buyers. Since the peasant did not need to worry about his product deteriorating while in storage, he would be able to wait for the next interested merchant.^{xiii} There were advantages for the buyer as well. He would be able to buy a better product, and assess its quality more easily. The content of the tobacco bale would be more homogeneous, while the

arrangement of the leaves within it would make a quick visual examination easier.^{xiv} To put it in the economist's terms, these measures reduced the transaction costs for the tobacco merchant. From the point of view of Greek policymakers, the prospect of peasants asking for more money for their crop was not necessarily a bad one, at least if the additional income were to contribute to a more self-sustainable rural economy. On the way of a policy intended to favor all parties involved (i.e. peasants, merchants and policymakers) stood, however, a series of important obstacles.

One major factor that played against the implementation of the state-mandated improvement of primary processing was the inability of most peasants to pay for the necessary infrastructural upgrades and labor inputs. They would need to build drying racks and additional storage space, and sometimes even hire hands outside the family in order to process their tobacco more carefully. Furthermore, forcing peasants to upgrade primary processing through additional debt entailed the risk of defeating the very purpose of these measures. More debt meant more interests that would add to the per-unit production cost. Such cost increase would force the peasant to either pass the burden on to the buyer (thereby making Greek tobacco less competitive), or see his own profit shrink. In the long run, higher production costs could perpetuate the vicious cycle of high prices leading to unsold tobacco, and unsold tobacco leading in turn to even more debt the next season.

The peasant family could only finance the most basic levels of consumption through debt until the sale of the crop. The newly settled peasants that had benefited from the land reform were particularly vulnerable in this regard. They remained in debt for decades until they paid off the land that they had been granted. As long as they had limited property rights over their land, they could not use it as collateral. In this context, mid and long-term investments were beyond

the reach of most peasant families. The Salonika Tobacco Office for the Protection of Greek Tobacco made this clear in 1926, when it explained to the government that tobacco producers could not invest in drying barns, fertilizers, or storage room despite being well aware of the benefit that they would obtain from such investment. There was simply not enough credit available to them.^{xv}

Up until the 1930s, the Greek government's most important tool for the capitalization of the Greek countryside was the successive agreements that it signed with the National Bank of Greece. In exchange for a series of privileges, which included the right to issue the country's currency, the bank was expected to allocate a minimum of credit to agricultural production. This policy, which dated back to the 1870s, was an insufficient remedy to the problem of rural undercapitalization (Brégianni 2013, 51-52). Its shortcomings became more and more apparent as the expectations set on agricultural policy increased.

Most stakeholders within the tobacco sector agreed on the need for a generalized modernization of primary processing. Some of them, however, did at times add a few caveats to such support. A number of representatives of the agricultural co-operatives, as well as some tobacco merchants and agronomists provide a case in point. At venues such as the Tobacco Producers' Congress of 1930 or the Agrarian Congress of 1931, they agreed that more financial support for the peasants was still necessary if the regulations were to be enforced.^{xvi} In addition to material resources, there was a need for effective supervision for the regulations to be successful.^{xvii}

An incomplete enforcement of the new regulations from the state's side, i.e. allowing some to not perform the primary processing as established by law, would create problems for those who did follow the rules. If a peasant risked being undersold by someone else who had not

packaged his tobacco, he would be at a clear disadvantage. By the time that the law-abiding peasant finished the primary processing, it might be too late to sell it, since the other peasants might have sold their less-processed tobacco already, and the tobacco merchants might have left the village. The same applied to the intermediary tobacco merchants who bought the tobacco with the purpose of reselling it to a larger company. If one merchant could get away with supplying the larger company with unprocessed tobacco, the others would be missing on business opportunities. In such circumstances, a generalized turn towards more sophisticated tobacco processing would be unfeasible.

Labor costs also prevented most peasants from adopting more elaborate forms of primary processing. Carrying out the additional processing correctly often required hiring wage workers from outside the family unit. In the case of the unexperienced producers who had recently arrived as refugees, there was also a lack of know-how. Before World War I, it had been common for tobacco merchants to send skilled urban workers to assist peasants in the packaging of their product (Δημητριάδου 1904, 61-62). The demographic shifts that took place in northern Greece after the population exchange disrupted past practices, while many peasant families could hardly afford hiring skilled workers themselves. The more elaborate the method of primary processing, the more workdays were necessary.

In addition to the scarcity of know-how among the newcomers, there was the problem of deficient housing and equipment. In 1930, i.e. five years after the legislature passed the first piece laws on primary processing, a parliamentary committee reported that the rules remained unenforced. According to the committee's report, the homes of many tobacco producers were still unsuitable for tobacco processing. They lacked the racks needed to correctly dry the leaves (Μπακάμπασης 1930, 6-9). The peasants often had to hang them on the walls and roofs of their

homes, which gave sub-optimal results (Σπυρόπουλος 1928, 25-26). Packaging incorrectly dried leaves could cause serious deterioration at later stages of the value chain..Most peasant houses lacked enough space to store the tobacco properly. This was especially important, since the spatial arrangement of the tobacco bales allowed the peasant to regulate their humidity levels. Increasing or reducing the separation between bales allowed for the circulation of more or less air between them. The more air circulated, the more humidity the package could release (Δημητριάδου 1904, 61). Maintaining the temperature within suitable levels was also difficult if the storage area failed to meet certain standards. To make things worse, peasants without enough storage room would keep their tobacco in the same space where they cooked their food, slept, or kept their animals. In such spaces, tobacco could absorb unwanted smells. The practice also involved health risks for the peasants.^{xviii}

The 1930 parliamentary report called for the strict enforcement of the rules on primary processing without further delay, as well as for an increase in the financial support given to peasants for the upgrading of their homes. The report made reference to the pre-fabricated housing units that the German firm DEHATEGE had provided to the refugees from Asia Minor under the aegis of the Refugee Settlement Commission in the previous decade. These small huts were particularly unsuited for the necessary upgrades (Μπακάλμπασης 1930, 6-9). The contrast between the inadequate DEHATEGE huts and the houses of the Muslim tobacco producers that had been excluded from the population exchange is quite striking. In Thrace, where these producers lived, one encountered much more suitable facilities. The typical home of a Muslim family in one of the *tobacco villages* (*καπνοχώρια*) in the district of Xanthi had an upper floor with room to store tobacco in the humid winter days. On the lower floor, the walls of the main storage room had two rows of shelves. The lower shelf was placed at a height of 10 cm above the

floor, to avoid the contact of the tobacco packages with humidity and dirt. Outside the house there was a roofed structure for the drying of tobacco leaves before their further classification and packaging. There would also be a room for tobacco processing, which could be separated from, or the same as, the space where wage workers would sleep during the periods of intense work. Such period corresponded to the transplanting of seedlings, the harvest, and the primary processing of the leaves (Αλτσιτζογλου 1941, 59-60). Most resettled peasants could not afford facilities of this sort without substantial financial assistance. At multiple times throughout the interwar period, the regulations on primary processing were suspended because of the generalized infrastructural insufficiency. In 1930, for instance, the Kavala Office for the Protection of Greek Tobacco received so many requests from peasants to have the requirement waved, that it asked the government to defer the enforcement of the regulations.^{xix}

In the early 1930s, there were signs that the new decade would be more conducive to a generalized upgrading of primary processing. On paper, the Greek state had put all necessary mechanisms in place already by 1930. It established the ABG in 1929 with the sole purpose of capitalizing the countryside. The construction of infrastructure for tobacco processing qualified as an activity that the bank could finance.^{xx} In addition, the Greek executive approved a credit line for the Tobacco Offices to hire skilled workers, who would help the peasants perform the primary processing correctly.^{xxi} Despite these apparently conducive factors, there is no evidence of more elaborate forms of primary processing becoming common practice to any significant extent before the establishment of Metaxas' dictatorship in 1936. Change would come only towards the end of the interwar period as a result of the outright coercion of peasants, and once the interests of the German cigarette industry and its suppliers had been accommodated into the body of regulations. But before turning to that particular form of implementation in section IV,

let us quantify the extent of the failure of this policy before 1936 based on the available data. This is a necessary step if we want to avoid being misguided by the celebratory tone that one often encounters in the contemporary annual reports published by the ABG. The report on the activities carried out in 1935, for instance, tells us the following:

“... loans for the construction of facilities were made in the amount of 3,833,476 drachmas, an increase from the 2,225,700 drachmas of 1934. [...] Loans were granted mainly for the construction of tobacco drying barns in eastern Macedonia ... The support for drying barns improved significantly the financial footing of the producers, as well as the quality of the tobacco.” (Τράπεζα της Ελλάδος 1936, 40).

The ABG granted three types of loans: short, mid, and long term. The purpose of the short-term loans was to finance agriculture on a season-by-season basis. In the case of tobacco, the peasant would borrow before planting his land, and then again after the harvest, using his crop as collateral until the time of the sale. Mid and long-term loans were supposed to finance investment in equipment upgrades such as tobacco drying barns, storage space, work animals, or wells (Αγροτική Τράπεζα της Ελλάδος 1936, 39). The borrower had to pay back the mid-term loan within five years, whereas long-term loans were those of any duration above five years.^{xxii} Based on the available data, we cannot quantify with accuracy how much money the ABG allocated to the construction of facilities for the primary processing of tobacco, or how many of such facilities were actually erected. What we can do is extrapolate on the basis of the quantitative data that we do have.

The yearly reports published of the ABG contain some data about the mid and long-term loans that the bank granted. They show how much money the ABG lent as loans in these

categories, as well as how much of that money was allocated for the construction of tobacco drying barns and for the cloth that covered the tobacco during the drying process (Table 1). For the sake of simplicity, I refer to this equipment as TPPE (Tobacco Primary Processing Equipment). The total amounts approved for loans was usually larger than the amounts eventually granted in a given year. Some approved loans never came to fruition for a variety of reasons, usually of bureaucratic nature. Only in 1939 do we see more money granted than had been approved, which can be explained by the remnant of money approved in previous years, but not granted.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

In 1937, the Xanthi branch of the ABG lent 982,000 drachmas for the construction of TPPE, divided among 109 loan recipients (Αλτσίτζογλου 1941, 154). This means that, on average, each one of those loans was for an amount of 9,009 drachmas. In combination with the data on mid and long term loans, this average amount allows us to estimate how many loans the ABG granted nation-wide in the 1930s for the construction of TPPE (Table 2). I have taken the average of 9,009 drachmas, adjusted to inflation based on the CPI published yearly by the Greek authorities, as a plausible value for the whole series. I then use that value to divide the amount granted in a year for TPPE construction nation-wide, and estimate how many loans of that type were granted. Since I do not have complete data for some years, I also have to estimate the overall amounts granted for TPPE. I do so by assuming that the percentage of all the money approved for mid and long term loans in 1936 that was allocated for TPPE construction was the same in all the previous years. The result of these estimates is that the ABG granted approximately 5,565 loans for TPPE construction in the interwar period, of which approximately

4,504 (around 80%) were granted between 1937 and 1939, i.e towards the end of the interwar period, during the Metaxas dictatorship.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

The estimate of 5,565 loans is probably too optimistic. In the first years of the ABG's existence, the incomplete enforcement of the regulations on tobacco processing received less attention, at least if one is to judge from the scarcity of references to this issue in the sources. In fact, as late as 1936 the Office for the Protection of Greek Tobacco that had the optimization of production in eastern Macedonia and Thrace as one of its main goals, had to ask the specialists at the Tobacco Research Institute which types of TPPE were suitable for its jurisdiction.^{xxiii} Circular letters sent in 1939 by the Ministry of Agriculture also suggest that, before the 1938 harvest, there had not been much zeal in the enforcement of regulations on primary processing.^{xxiv} It is therefore reasonable to think that my estimates for the number of loans in the first years of the series (Table 1) are too high. Be that as it may, even if we consider the figure of 5,565 loans somewhat realistic, the conclusion that we should draw is that the large majority of Greece's approximately 150,000 tobacco producers did not receive support from the ABG for the construction of tobacco processing facilities (Dankas 2003, table 75).

The generalized insufficiency of TPPE did not come to an end until after World War II. Soon after the war, a committee of experts charged with the study of the tobacco question repeated the recommendations that multiple stakeholders and their representatives had already voiced in the 1930s in this regard: the peasants needed financial assistance to build tobacco processing facilities. As late as 1959, there were important tobacco-producing areas, such as the village of Sappes in the Thracian department of Rhodope, where the ABG was only starting to finance storage space for tobacco.^{xxv} That the ABG was not lending enough money for upgrades

in the form of mid and long-term loans was a complaint voiced even by high-level state officials such as N. Kanasēs, head of the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Service in Drama (1937, 65-84). The insufficiency of the facilities of many peasants for the correct processing of their tobacco is historically relevant for at least two reasons. First, because it constitutes an example of how policy makers made demands on the rural population that were unrealistic considering the means that were available. Second, it also exemplifies, in very concrete terms, the failure of the ABG to supply enough agricultural credit.

IV. Authoritarian Implementation (1936-1941)

Escalating social unrest and parliamentary gridlock in the context of the interwar economic crisis created the conditions for Greece's slide towards authoritarianism in 1936. On the agricultural policy front, Ioannis Metaxas' Fourth of August Regime did not pursue goals substantially different from those of previous democratically elected governments, although it centralized decision-making and suppressed dissent to an unprecedented extent.^{xxvi} With regard to the upgrading of tobacco processing methods, the dictatorial regime proved more effective than its predecessors. It did so in spite of the continued existence of material constraints, and at the expense of the rural population's well-being and autonomy. In contrast, the Fourth of August Regime proved willing to accommodate the demands of Greece's tobacco merchants as well as the German cigarette industry.

Internal correspondence of the ABG reveals the new regimes's willingness to instrumentalise credit as a mechanism to force peasants to fulfill their legal obligation with regard to primary processing. Every year, a tobacco producer would borrow twice from the ABG. He used the first loan to finance the cost of planting tobacco on the field, as well as his family's

living expenses until the time of the harvest. At that point, the peasant would borrow for a second time, using his crop as collateral. He then used the new loan to finance the processing of his product, and the family's consumption until the date of the sale. The ABG would release the funds from this second loan in two separate payments.^{xxvii} In September of 1936, i.e. short after the establishment of the dictatorship, the central headquarters of the ABG instructed the local branches to make the beginning of the processing of tobacco a condition for the release of the second payment.^{xxviii} After another circular letter from October 1939, the policy became even tougher: the bank was to release only a third of the total sum upfront. It would release the remaining two thirds not upon the beginning of primary processing, but after its completion.^{xxix}

The ABG's lending policies with regard to tobacco were not the only ones that became tougher under Metaxas. Since 1927, the existing regulations had been neither fully implemented, nor reformed by subsequent legislation. In 1938, law 1193 tightened the requirements regarding primary processing. The law regulated, in considerable detail, how, and by which date, each variety of tobacco from each region had to be processed. The law also specified the maximum size of each type of package, and the date after which peasants would not be allowed to sell their tobacco to a merchant. Most importantly, the law required that peasants divide tobacco leaves into three different categories, depending on their quality. The first two qualities, known ^{xxx}

By the time that the Metaxas government started to push forcefully for the upgrading of primary processing in 1936, a new obstacle had appeared on the way. In the interwar period, the German cigarette industry had emerged as the largest buyer of Greek tobacco.^{xxxi} By 1936, Hamburg-based firm Reemtsma had become the industry leader in Germany, as well as the most important market actor in the Oriental tobacco trade. Reemtsma alone bought up 31.06% of all the tobacco exported from eastern Macedonia and Thrace to all countries in 1936. All other

German cigarette manufacturers combined bought 12.38% percent. Independent Greek merchants bought a quarter of the tobacco exported that year. In 1938, Reemtsma bought 68% of all the Greek tobacco that entered the German market (Πιτζαλέος 2006, 136-137). Reemtsma had no interest in paying more for more elaborate forms of primary processing. The firm's status as undisputed largest buyer made it impossible for Greek policymakers to disregard its interests.

When buying directly from peasants, Reemtsma's agents would usually buy tobacco packed according to the^{xxxii} Reemtsma's size and control over the supply chain allowed it to foresee how much tobacco it would need, of which types, and by when. Therefore, less durable forms of packaging were not a problem.^{xxxiii} The representatives of the tobacco growers brought up the issue at a state-endorsed tobacco congress held in Kavala in 1937. As long as the Germans (i.e. mainly Reemtsma) preferred the *seira-pastal*, the peasants would not want any other type of packaging imposed upon them. Such imposition would put them at a disadvantage with respect to Bulgarian and Turkish producers (Γραφείο Προστασίας Καπνού Καβάλας 1937, 158-170).

The Metaxas administration eventually chose an intermediate solution. A clause in law 1193 allowed peasants to sell tobacco in the *seira-pastal* format early in the season, i.e. by November 25. By allowing the *seira-pastal* method under certain circumstances, the Greek government intended to strike a balance between two conflicting priorities. On the one hand, there was the need to cater to the German preference for cheaply processed tobacco. On the other, it was necessary to safeguard the quality of the product in the long run, and give peasants a stronger footing to negotiate sale prices at times of low international demand. In other words, the Greek dependency on tobacco exports to Germany limited the extent to which policymakers could favor quality and peasant incomes if doing so entailed the risk of making Greek tobacco less attractive to Reemtsma.

To fully understand the socio-political forces that gave shape to tobacco policies in this period, it is not enough to simply look at the legislation passed under Metaxas. After all, similar legislation had been in place for 13 years by 1938. One also needs to examine the unequal distribution of the costs involved in the enforcement of these policies. Widespread enforcement started in 1938, supported by closer surveillance and punishment of peasants. A dossier of legal and administrative documentation related to the requirement on primary processing kept at the archive of the Tobacco Research Institute is quite revealing in this regard.^{xxxiv} The dossier was put together by the Ministry of Economy as a guide for all state offices involved in the enforcement of regulations on tobacco. It contained the relevant legislation, the introductory reports to the bills that resulted in such legislation, as well as circular letters with instructions for implementation. The documentation does not make any references to the insufficient equipment available to peasants. Instead, non-compliance is explained on the grounds of the peasants' purported ignorance, or unwillingness, to carry out the primary processing as required by law. A circular letter from 6 November 1939 used the following language to explain how the government would ensure compliance:

Since, as it became apparent during the first application of the law, a considerable number of peasants did not sufficiently understand their duty in regard to this new requirement, there is the need to inform them over and over, and in all sorts of ways, that the fate of a measure of such importance cannot be left to the mercy of their caprice. Instead, the State, with its understanding of the real general interest of the tobacco producing class and of the sector, will enforce compliance upon violators through legal means.^{xxxv}

In contrast with the repeated calls for heavy-handedness when dealing with non-complying sellers (i.e. peasants), high-level government officials ordered the regulatory agencies to not enforce the penalties that the law mandated for buyers. They did so at least twice in 1939. For the merchants who would break the law, there would be neither fines, nor requisition of the goods. Only peasants were to get punished. Merchants were to be reported only if there was proof that they had promised a peasant to pay his fine for non-compliance. Even in such cases, however, the available evidence was to be sent to the Ministry of Economy for further review. No office should undertake punitive action against the merchant without express instructions from above.^{xxxvi} At the same time, the government doubled down on the surveillance of the peasant population by allocating more funds to the inspectors in charge of supervising the enforcement of these regulations by visiting the peasants' homes.^{xxxvii} In short, the regulations on primary processing would be enforced, but only as long as they would not become too much of an obstacle for merchants.

A measure that had been on the agenda for over a decade and had enjoyed the support of the representatives of all stakeholders in the tobacco industry was finally in effect. In theory, peasants stood to gain from the new state of affairs. However, in the absence of sufficient material support, the peasants were the ones who had to carry all the cost of its implementation, at the risk of being punished.

In the illiberal context of Metaxas' dictatorial regime, the weakness of peasant organizations precluded the possibility of an organized response that might question the authority of the state to impose these regulations upon the tobacco producers. Metaxas combined the carrot of debt relief for the rural population with the stick of fines and incarceration for those who would not comply with the regulations.^{xxxviii} He did so while tightening state control over all

agrarian institutions, including the peasant cooperatives (Panagiotopoulos & Carmona-Zabala 2019). The absence of an open conflict between tobacco producers on the one hand, and the state and the tobacco merchants on the other, stands in stark contrast with the case of urban tobacco workers, who were much more combative in the 1920s and 1930s.^{xxxix} The enforcement of the regulations on primary processing under Metaxas shows that, despite the apparent peacefulness of the Greek countryside, the trajectory of rural communities under the self-declared pro-peasant dictator was far from uneventful or invariably favorable to them.

V. Conclusions

The history of the state-led project for the modernization of tobacco production reveals how a multiplicity of factors interacted in shaping agricultural policy in interwar Greece. The Agricultural Bank of Greece was unable to sufficiently fund the upgrading of tobacco processing facilities, despite the boastful tone of its yearly reports. To the extent that the initiative to have peasants produce and package better tobacco did come to fruition under Metaxas, it did so through punitive measures against the peasants, and only after the interests of the German cigarette industry and the merchants that wanted to purchase cheaply processed tobacco had been safeguarded. In contrast, the agrarian organizations that had actively called for the material and political support that would allow peasants to upgrade their facilities and increase their profits under democratic governments became powerless under Metaxas. The peasants had to bear most of the cost involved in improving the primary processing of tobacco leaves.

As regards the scale of analysis that I have chosen, I hope to have demonstrated the value of a methodology that inquires into one single activity along the value-adding chain, using it as a case study of the interplay of socio-political and economic forces that ultimately affect the material basis of production, work, and life on the countryside more generally. Peasants, after all,

often perform productive as well as reproductive labor in the same physical space. Statistical data about land usage and agricultural output provide a useful framework for the study of rural history, as do legislation and reports from economic institutions such as banks or ministries. There is also value, however, in looking at the enforcement of policies at the most concrete level allowed by the available sources. The reward of such analysis is, at least in this case, a better understanding of how peasants experienced the historical developments that transformed rural economies and communities in the interwar period.

Table 1: Total amounts approved and lent as mid and long-term loans by the ABG, and specifically for the purchase/construction of tobacco primary processing equipment (TPPE), 1930-1939

	Approved		Lent	
	Total	For TPPE	Total	For TPPE
1930	NDA	NDA	14814000	NDA
1931	NDA	NDA	36799013.75	NDA
1932	NDA	NDA	21499711	NDA
1933	NDA	NDA	30242474	NDA
1934	NDA	NDA	47778450.4	NDA
1935	NDA	NDA	80186489	NDA
1936	253789917	5625580	147753782.35	NDA
1937	331265315	11150412	315268929	11912822
1938	429281988	15871284	416381163.25	14743928
1939	382471373	13576863	417892567.55	13763075

Source: Αγροτική Τράπεζα της Ελλάδος, *Απολογισμός*, 1930-1939.

Table 2: Estimates of ABG loans for construction of tobacco processing facilities (TPPE), 1930-1939

	Average amount per loan for TPPE	Total amount lent for TPPE	No. of loans for TPPE
1930	6934.76	328371.37	47.35
1931	6887.76	815697.48	118.43
1932	7309.94	476568.75	65.19
1933	7847.98	670363.34	85.42
1934	7985.69	1059070.82	132.62
1935	8066.50	1777436.69	220.35

1936	8359.64	3275152.66	391.78
1937	9009.00	11912822	1322.32
1938	8958.70	14743928	1645.77
1939	8958.70	13763075	1536.28
1930-1936			1061.14
1937-1939			4504.37
TOTAL			5565.51

Note: Amounts adjusted to inflation (base year 1936). Life cost index taken from Στατιστική επιτηρίς της Ελλάδος, 1930-1939.

Note: No life cost index available for 1939. For the sake of simplicity, I am assuming that there was no inflation that year.

Sources: Αγροτική Τράπεζα της Ελλάδος, *Απολογισμός*, 1930-1939; Altsitzoglou 1941, 154.

- ⁱ For a discussion of how the rural world featured in fascist ideology in multiple European countries, but also of the similarities and differences in this regard between fascism and other political projects, see Fernández Prieto et al. (2014). On the state-led liberal modernization of the British countryside, see Berry (2015). For a discussion of how rural space featured in multiple modernizing programs in interwar Switzerland, see Burkhard (2015).
- ⁱⁱ The similarities between liberal and authoritarian agrarian policies in interwar Greece are discussed in Panagiotopoulos and Carmona-Zabala (2019).
- ⁱⁱⁱ For a discussion of the policies that supported the expansion of grain production in interwar Greece, see Gasias (2019).
- ^{iv} The upgrading of tobacco processing techniques has been discussed quite superficially in otherwise extremely informative works by Labrianidis (1982, 156) and Petmezas (2012, 229).
- ^v The shortcomings of the Greek reform more generally, not only with regard to the tobacco sector, are discussed in Kōstēs (2019, 130-136).
- ^{vi} German consulate in Salonika to Auswärtiges Amt, 1925, R Auswärtiges Amt des Deutschen Reiches, folder 242106, items 181-182, Political Archive of the German Foreign Service.
- ^{vii} For an overview of the stated goals of the liberal economic program, see Tzokas (2002).
- ^{viii} Law 4660/1930, *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως*, May 8, 1930; vol. 1.
- ^{ix} For instance, in 1932 the ABG only granted loans to tobacco producers who committed to plant tobacco on an amount of land for which the labor of their nuclear family would suffice, and use any remaining land for other purposes. Circular letter, 4/16/32, Αρχείο ΑΤΕ, Σειρά Εγκύκλιοι και Διαταγαι, Ιστορικά Αρχεία Πολιτιστικού Ιδρύματος Ομίλου Πειραιώς (ΙΑΠΙΟΠ).
- ^x “Η χρήσις χημικών λιπασμάτων εις την καλλιέργειαν του καπνού” in *Δελτίον καπνού*, March 1936.
- ^{xi} Decree “Περί επεξεργασίας του καπνού και ασφαλίσεως των καπνεργατών,” *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως*, July 15, 1925, vol. 1. *armathodema* described above
- ^{xii} Decree “Περί κυρώσεως του από 11 Ιουλίου 1925 Ν. Δ. «περί επεξεργασίας του καπνού και ασφαλίσεως καπνεργατών» ως ετροποποιήθη,” *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως*, October 31, 1927, vol. 1.
- ^{xiii} Memorandum regarding Law 1193/1938, 1938, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1216, General State Archives in Drama (GSA Drama).
- ^{xiv} “Η ρύθμισις των αγοραπωλησιών του καπνου,” *Δελτίον του Συνδέσμου Γραφείων Προστασίας Ελληνικού Καπνού*, December 1936.
- ^{xv} “Αι πιστώσαι της τραπέζης προς τους καπνοπαραγωγούς,” *Μακεδονία*, December 4, 1926.
- ^{xvi} “Οι εισιγήσεις επί όλων των καπνικών ζητημάτων,” *Μακεδονία*, January 28, 1930; “Η Β΄. ημέρα του αγροτικού συνεδρίου Λαγκαδά,” *Μακεδονία*, November 2, 1931.
- ^{xvii} “Ελιξαν αι εργασίαι του καπνοπαραγωγικού,” *Μακεδονία*, January 30, 1930.
- ^{xviii} Tobacco Office of Kavala to League of Offices for the Protection of Greek Tobacco, 1936, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1700, GSA Drama.

- ^{xix} “Διάφορα ζητήματα,” *Δελτίον του Γραφείου Προστασίας Ελληνικού Καπνού Καβάλλας*, November 1930.
- ^{xx} Circular letter, 15 February 1930, Αρχείο ΑΤΕ, Σειρά Εγκύκλιοι και Διαταγαί, ΙΑΠΙΟΠ.
- ^{xxi} “Αι αποφάσεις του Υπουργ. Συμβουλίου δια τα φλέγοντα μακεδονικά ζητήματα,” *Μακεδονία* December 12, 1930.
- ^{xxii} Circular letter, 15 February 1930, Αρχείο ΑΤΕ, Σειρά Εγκύκλιοι και Διαταγαί, ΙΑΠΙΟΠ.
- ^{xxiii} Tobacco Office of Kavala to Tobacco Research Institute, 1936, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1700, GSA Drama.
- ^{xxiv} Circular letters from the Ministry of Agriculture, 1939, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1296, GSA Drama.
- ^{xxv} “Σάππαι,” *Δελτίον Αγροτικής Τραπέζης*, January/February 1959.
- ^{xxvi} On the continuities and discontinuities between Metaxas’ agricultural policy and previous administrations, see Panagiotopoulos & Carmona-Zabala (2019). For a discussion of the Fourth of August Regime in relation to the rise of fascism in interwar Europe, see Kallis (2010).
- ^{xxvii} Circular letter, 10 November 1933, Αρχείο ΑΤΕ, Σειρά Εγκύκλιοι και Διαταγαί, ΙΑΠΙΟΠ.
- ^{xxviii} Circular letter, 10 September 1936, Αρχείο ΑΤΕ, Σειρά Εγκύκλιοι και Διαταγαί, ΙΑΠΙΟΠ.
- ^{xxix} Circular letter, 21 October 1939, Αρχείο ΑΤΕ, Σειρά Εγκύκλιοι και Διαταγαί, ΙΑΠΙΟΠ.
- ^{xxx} Law 1193/1938, *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως*, April 21, 1938, vol. 1. *maxouli* and *refouzi*, were suitable for sale. The third one was considered unsuitable for trade, and was to be destroyed under the supervision of a state official. The law stipulated fines and prison sentences for noncomplying peasants and buyers, as well as for negligent state officials responsible for supervision. The law also gave multiple offices the authority to conduct inspections, and to report on peasants that would not meet the mandated deadlines.
- ^{xxxi} For a discussion of how Germany’s prominence as an importer of Greek tobacco factored in the diplomatic relations between both countries as well as Greece’s national politics, see Pelt (1997).
- ^{xxxii} Andreadēs to League of Offices for the Protection of Greek Tobacco, 1937, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1700, GSA Drama. *seira-pastal* method, which did not differentiate between the first and second qualities. The reason for such preference was simple: unlike the independent merchants, who would first buy the goods and then market them among cigarette manufacturers, Reemtsma knew in advance what it needed for its own manufacturing operations. Instead of buying different qualities separately and then mixing them at the cigarette factory, Reemtsma's staff would supervise the mixing of leaves at the stage of commercial processing. Therefore, there was no point in refining the classification of leaves at the stage of primary processing.
- ^{xxxiii} On how the backwards integration of cigarette manufacturing into leaf purchasing affected the packaging to tobacco, see Assaël (1972, 35-37).
- ^{xxxiv} Dossier kept in 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1296, GSA Drama.

^{xxxv} Circular Letter from the Ministry of Agriculture, 1939, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1296, GSA Drama.

^{xxxvi} Telegram and circular letter from Apostolidēs to Tobacco Tax Offices, 1939, 262 Διοικ. 18.01 Αρχείο του Καπνολογικού Ινστιτούτου Νομού Δράμας, folder 1296, GSA Drama.

^{xxxvii} Law 2122/1939, art. 3, *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως*, December 4, 1939, vol. 1.

^{xxxviii} The debt relief granted to peasants is discussed in Vergopoulos (1975, 161).

^{xxxix} The labor struggles around issues related to commercial processing are by now a well-known theme in the historiography of interwar Greece. See, for instance, Fountanopoulos 2005.

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