

Tütün Kitabı

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KİTABEVİ

History and Historiography on Greek Tobacco

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As my contribution to this colloquium, which is, as far as I know, the first devoted to the history of tobacco in the Balkans, I have decided to present an outline of the historiography on tobacco in Greece. By way of a preface, let me just say that in my opinion tobacco had two basic consequences in Greece: it contributed actively to the incorporation of the farmer as a crop-grower in the national economy and it contributed to the formation of working-class and union consciousness in the labourer.

The Greek bibliography on tobacco is enormous, as is the mass of sources, but historical studies are few. Those that exist focus on the late nineteenth century and after. This is quite understandable, as will emerge from what I say later on, since after the expansion of its borders Greece became essentially a tobacco-producing country, playing a leading role in the export trade of Oriental tobaccos.

It is not fortuitous that when I asked the Documentation Centre of the National Hellenic Research Foundation for titles of Greek dissertations on the subject of tobacco all were of medical content, concerning the harmful effects of tobacco-smoking on health. I located one DEA, submitted to the Sorbonne in 1986, by Aglaia Gretsikou, entitled *Cavalla: centre de preparation et de commerce de tabac. L'economie agricole de Thassos et l'emigration temporaire des Thassiens comme ouvriers de tabac à Cavalla*. And another one maîtrise, defended at the University of Thessaloniki in 1994, by Nikos Kantas entitled *Working problems and Mobilisations of Tobacco-workers of Kavala in inter-war years*.

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I shall begin my paper following a chronological order:

Our knowledge of tobacco-growing and trading in the area of northern Greece during the Ottoman period is gleaned from travellers — mainly Holland and Cousinery— and consular reports. Constantine Mertzios cites information from the archive of the Venetian consulate in Thessaloniki on the transport of tobacco through the port in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Felix Beaujour mentions the varieties and the prices of Macedonian tobacco in the decade 1787-1797. M. Laskaris, N. Svoronos and Dimokratia Iliadou inventory information from the reports of the French consuls and the *Chambre de Commerce de Marseille* concerning the tobacco trade in the eighteenth century through the ports of Thessaloniki and Kavala. In studying the tobacco trade, both N. Svoronos, for the eighteenth century, and Emilia Themopoulou for the nineteenth, draw on information in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry. Themopoulou extends her research to the archives of the British Foreign Office and the Greek Foreign Ministry. Si-orokas also follows the tobacco trade in the region of Arta from French consular archives.

It is apparent from what I have said so far that the rich source of information in the Ottoman archive of Thessaloniki has not been tapped, nor has the material in the Ottoman archives in Turkey. There is information on tobacco in the sicills of Thessaloniki. Indeed, Vasdravellis has published documents for the years 1808 and 1813 from these codices, on prices fixed for the different varieties of Macedonian tobaccos. However, in general no studies have been made of tobacco in the wider area of Macedonia in the Ottoman period; as far as I know the only work is by A. Matkovski; T. Mateescu has written about tobacco-growing in Dobrudja in the eighteenth century.

The Ottoman sources are not the only ones that await investigation for the period of the Ottoman Occupation. There is abundant information in Greek documents of the period. By way of example, I mention the chronicle of Papasynadinos from Serres, in which is recorded "7132 (1632) in the month of September Sultan Murad became the new king ... and he spoilt the coffee shops all over the realm, as well as tobacco; and no one smokes it'. It is recorded in a manuscript in the library at Zagora that in 1760 Patriarch Kallinikos expressly forbade smoking by the clergy. The reason for this is clear: There was an immediate danger of fire. Once again from the chronicle of Papasynadinos I quote the testimony on a great fire in the market-place at Serres: 'in the cobb-

ler's shop some were smoking tobacco and afterwards they passed there where they had shaken the pipe, the fire had not gone out and the workshop was full of litres of cotton and everything was burning'. As early as the late seventeenth century tobacco had acquired its opponents and its supporters. Nikolaos Mavrokordatos, Voevod of Wallachia and son of Alexander, wrote a 'Rebuke against nicotine', while Mitrophanis Grigoras defended it.

Judging from the references to tobacco pouches, pipes etc. in the texts of wills or from the mounds of pipe bowls discovered in excavations around the castles, there was widespread use of tobacco in the area of Greece during the Ottoman period.

Although it might appear to be of an exaggeration, it is nevertheless true that the period of the Ottoman rule to the mid-nineteenth century is *terra incognita* in the history of tobacco in the Greek regions. By saying this I do not of course mean that we know nothing about the extent of its cultivation or the volume of yields, the prices at which it was traded, the level of taxation and so on. I mean for example that the attitude of the Orthodox Church to tobacco in these years has not been studied, just as the folk tradition of tobacco has not been investigated systematically. With this ascertainment, not particularly flattering for the discipline I serve, I now pass to the history of tobacco from the late nineteenth century to the inter-war years.

As a general observation on the themes of this historiography, I should say that it analyses the terms of articulation of the farming family with the monoculture of tobacco as a cash-crop in the regions unified in the Modern Greek state between 1881 and 1919. It studies aspects of government policy that contributed to the formation of powerful social groups directly dependent on the product yet not incorporated in the rural community, that is the tobacco merchants and manufacturers. Other studies have attempted either to present the social profile of the tobacco-workers, to explain the reasons for their participation as activists in the labour and political struggles in the inter-war years, and to sketch the social consciousness of the tobacco-workers' community.

I shall continue by attempting to describe briefly, through the existing bibliography, the phases in the history of Greek tobacco. Three can be broadly distinguished.

During the period just after the founding of the Modern Greek State until 1882 the small farms in Old Greece (Naplion, Argos, Agrinio)

prevailed, their production covering the small demand for domestic consumption and the even smaller demand for export. There were no restrictions on cultivation, while tobacco was taxed according to the same system as other agricultural products: a tithe was levied. Two significant events transformed the state's relationship to tobacco, and their consequences became manifest in the next period.

First, in 1876 the new law introducing 'the tax on consumable tobacco' was passed, which imposed the transport of uncut tobacco to state warehouses that were set up in the provincial capitals and the payment of duties to the state when the cut tobacco was despatched from the warehouses to the tobacco retailers.

Second, in 1881 the provinces of Epirus and Thessaly were incorporated in the Greek state, considerably reinforcing the production and export of Greek tobacco.

The 1883 legislation imposing the consumption tax on tobacco ushered in the second period, during which there were no restrictions on the cultivation or the export of tobacco. However in the consumption of tobacco the state reserved the privilege of cutting it and of providing the cigarette paper. Debate at this time led to a proposal that the state's privileges in this field should be replaced by a tobacco monopoly modelled on the Turkish Limited Tobacco Company, Régie. The period 1883-1919 was marked by serious upheavals in the countries producing Oriental tobacco and Greece rose to first place among the exporters. The first impetus had been given at the beginning of the decade when Greek production was boosted by 25% after the incorporation of Thessaly. The second impetus was given after the end of the Balkan Wars (1912-13), when the rich regions of western and eastern Macedonia, specialising in excellent quality Oriental tobaccos, were incorporated in the Modern Greek state. Last, in 1919 Greece acquired another important tobacco-growing region, western Thrace. The changes in the national boundaries increased the volume of production and improved the quality of the product, and also emphasised regional differences in the growing conditions, trade and industrial processing of tobacco.

In the late eighteenth century 1/8 of the arable land of Macedonia was devoted to tobacco growing. The area increased significantly in the nineteenth century, and by the early twentieth century tobacco accounted for a quarter to a fifth of the crops cultivated, while its percentage of the value of total agricultural production was much greater. In contrast to the organisation of the tobacco trade in Greece of the 1881

boundaries, this trade in Macedonia was conducted by foreign firms with offices in the traditional commercial centres of the region, while foreign state monopolies were the steady suppliers of Oriental tobaccos to these centres. The principal characteristic of these markets was the stability of supplies, namely every second year by the merchant houses (more rarely every three years) and annually by the state monopolies. In parallel, more than 30,000 workers, with fixed working hours, specialist skills and union organisation were added to the labour force of Old Greece.

The third period is defined by the supermacy of exports: tobacco accounted for about half the value of Greece's total exports. However the problems of the Greek economy in the 1920s, the monetary instability and the exchange problem, together with the uncontrolled stockpiling of tobacco, obliged the state to take three important steps:

– The first, which was political, involved the inter-Balkan collaboration of the three main tobacco-producing countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey).

– The second, which had to do with credit, was the founding of the Agricultural Bank in the late 1920s.

– The third step concerned social policy, with regard to the tobacco workers for example 'Tobacco-workers' Insurance and Rehabilitation Fund' and to state interventionist institutions such as "Greek Tobacco Organisation", "Bureau for the Joint Distribution of Tobacco".

The spread of tobacco-growing in Greece from the late nineteenth century onwards was due to the following parameters:

1. It required small land holdings and not particularly fertile soil
2. It brought high yields and income
3. There were favourable circumstances in the international demand for Oriental tobacco
4. Production soared with the acquisition of Thessaly and Epirus, and the transfer of most of their lands in the early years to Greek capitalists who linked the economic efficiency of their holdings with the developments in international trade.
5. Last, the annexation of Macedonia and western Thrace established Greece internationally as a tobacco-exporting country, in conjunction with the influx of Asia Minor refugees from tobacco-producing regions of the Ottoman Empire (e.g. Samsun, Bafra), who settled in cor-

responding tobacco-growing regions of Macedonia and Thrace after the Exchange of Populations.

The special features of tobacco cultivation, and specifically its large intensive growing stage, acted as a constraint on amassing land holdings, or to put it another way, contributed to the maintenance of small holdings farmed by members of a family. Moreover, the obligations that tobacco cultivation imposed further weakened the family's involvement with other farming activities such as stock-raising, and favoured the expansion of the cash crop.

This meant that specialised rural settlements were created with small plots growing fine tobaccos. The villages created after the settlement of the refugees from Asia Minor were also assimilated in these. It also meant that equilibrium was achieved in the system of small and large agricultural land holdings, and it speeded up the modernisation of the rural economy.

The specialisation of the local economy and the incorporation of the farmer as crop-grower in the national economy also proceeded apace. On the other hand these same factors contributed to the modernisation of the fiscal institutions, and the implementation of a state policy of strong social intervention: which included changes in cultivation systems, adoption of innovations in agricultural credit facilities, application of state supervision of crop size, and intervention in the domestic and international markets. The development of the sector was linked with controlling competitiveness and eliminating smuggling.

When the art of cigarette-rolling by hand gave way to the cigarette-making machine the cigarette industry was born. This enhanced a powerful group in the class of businessmen, the tobacco manufacturers. Greek tobacco manufacturers dominated the Greek market as a result of the increase in domestic consumption and the consumer addiction to the machine-made cigarette. They soon became involved in supplementary branches of the industry such as box-making and printing (lithography). The presence of Greek tobacco merchants/tobacco manufacturers was not limited to Greece but extended also to Europe, America and Australia. Greeks were the leading producers of 'Egyptian cigarettes' and systematic importers of Oriental tobaccos to America. The lobby of Greek tobacco merchants in Smyrna and Istanbul was a powerful one. For example, the Muratti Ambassador company, recently bought out, was founded by Mouratoglou, a Greek tobacco merchant from Istanbul who had factories in London and Manchester.

Allow me, if I have not tired you, to proceed to the second leg of my summary history of Greek tobacco: the tobacco labourer's movement, on which there is a considerable Greek bibliography.

Tobacco-workers were the mainstay of the Greek labour movement in the inter-war years. They were its most numerous, most solid sector, with strong concentration in certain towns (Kavala, Drama, Serres, Thessaloniki, Volos, Agrinio and elsewhere). They were also the most militant. The tobacco-workers' struggles, known generically as the 'tobacco question', characterised the 1920s and 30s.

The tobacco question can be distinguished into three periods. In the first, from the late nineteenth century till 1922, the professional group of tobacco-workers was formed and the terms of the trade and processing of tobacco were formulated. Two towns functioned as organisational centres of tobacco-production, Kavala and Thessaloniki. In the early twentieth century the big international tobacco-trading companies began to appear (Allatini, American Company, Hertzog and others), which bought the tobacco leaves from the farmers and then processed them. They cleaned them, separated them according to quality and size, and then tied them in bundles to preserve their quality and aroma. The high cost of processing led the tobacco merchants to make their first attempt at exporting raw (unprocessed) tobacco from the port of Kavala in 1909. There was another wave of raw tobacco exports in 1914 and again in the two years 1919-1920. The dramatic strikes declared by the workers in protest were tantamount to an uprising, as workers clashed with strike-breakers and police. The great strike in 1914, that shook the whole of Macedonia, was organised and led by the "Federation", the most important socialist movement in the province. The action was successful, since the tobacco merchants accepted the tobacco-workers' demands for better working conditions.

In the period from the settlement of the Asia Minor refugees in Greece in 1922 until the onset of the economic crisis in 1929 the tobacco question was posed with particular social intensity. Tobacco merchants appeared adamant in implementing new methods of processing tobacco and new labour relations inside the tobacco warehouses in order to reduce production costs. The state was also involved in this conflict, siding with the tobacco merchants for two reasons.

First because the social conflict was associated with the fate of the country's main export product and consequently with the inflow of foreign exchange.

Second because it could not accept the radicalisation of the tobacco workers in whose ranks the Greek Communist Party (KKE) had a strong influence, particularly after the arrival of the Asia Minor refugees. It is characteristic that the largest percentage in the 1926 elections was gained by Greek Communist Party in Kavala (23.5%). The most aggressive strikes were those in 1927 and 1928, to which the tobacco merchants responded with lock-outs and the state with violent intervention by the police and the passing of anti-democratic legislation such as the "Idionymo = anti-democratic law". Nevertheless the tobacco-workers' unions, having the mass of tobacco-workers behind them, operated a closed shop until 1924 and obliged employers to pay relatively good daily wages.

In the third period, from 1929-1936, the tobacco-workers' profession was dealt another blow, when in 1933 the tobacco-merchants tried to replace the male workers with females, by changing the processing system, the famous 'tonga'. The opposition of the tobacco-workers essentially safeguarded their profession until 1953, when parliament voted to lift the protection of the profession of tobacco-worker and the exit of male workers. In 1936 the first conference of tobacco-workers was held in Thessaloniki, from which the Panhellenic Tobacco-workers' Federation emerged. This led the tobacco-workers to their most desperate and radical protest. The atmosphere of the bloody clashes in Thessaloniki in May 1936 verged on civil war, providing pretexts for the imposition of the Metaxas dictatorship.

If we try to interpret the presence and persistence of the tobacco-workers as a professional group, this should, I believe, be placed in the context of the peculiar development of Greek capitalism. The collapse of the country's traditional manufacturing centres, such as Hermoupolis in Syros, and the shrinking of centres of grape production in the Peloponnese were concurrent with the rise and reinforcement of economic sectors producing almost exclusively for export, such as the tobacco industry, which in 1924 accounted for 51.5% of the total value of Greece's exports. The increased demand for tobacco in the international markets strengthened the negotiating position of the tobacco-workers in the domestic labour market, to claim better wages, a natural consequence of the strength of the tobacco-workers' unions. According to Abraham Benaroya, about 90% of the tobacco-workers were unionised in 1921. The social status of the tobacco-workers acquired a completely different dimension with the introduction of the cigarette- ma-

king machine, each one of which made 100 workers redundant. Of course the main causative factors of the crisis in the sector were the tactics of the tobacco merchants in exporting unprocessed tobacco, as well as the difficulties in exporting tobacco because of the world economic crisis in 1929.

It is clear from what I have said that the tobacco-workers constituted a professional class that occupied an important place in the semi-industrial framework of merchant capitalism. And because no total shift of working methods to the advantage of capitalist industries was effected in Greece, various forms of production coexisted, resulting in a heterogeneous working class. Consequently the tobacco-workers owed their protracted presence not to a genuine capitalist development, which would have meant their social demise, but to a distorted capitalist development. So, if the place of the tobacco-workers in production and in the framework of merchant capitalism was self-evident, on the contrary, depending on the setbacks in the world market and the speculation of tobacco merchants, always in the same framework, it became counter-economic and more than problematical in a mechanised labour process. In my opinion this is where the reasons for the radicalisation of the Greek tobacco-workers in the inter-war years should be sought.

In conclusion, I feel the need to say that this paper is a token of homage to Kavala, my home town, the premier tobacco town in the Balkans until the 1960 s. I should also say that my involvement with the history of tobacco took me back to moments of my childhood and youth, strongly imbued with the aroma of tobacco that permeated from the tobacco sheds, which I passed every day on my way to school.

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