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Giorgos Kostopoulos, Iosif Botetzagias

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THE “WAR ON THE GOAT”: FORESTRY, HUSBANDRY AND POLITICS
IN EARLY MODERN GREECE

Giorgos Kostopoulos and Iosif Botetzagias

ABSTRACT: This article examines the conflict over forest use in modern Greece. While the main protagonists were foresters, who prioritised the importance of forests in providing timber, and those involved in animal husbandry, who needed the forests as grazing grounds, a number of other societal and political actors also engaged in this century-long struggle, which culminated in the 1937 decision to remove goats from Greek forests. It shows how the Greek foresters succeeded in framing the goat and goat rearing as the symbol of the country’s deforestation but also underdevelopment, both in economic and in cultural terms. Also, from the 1920s onwards, the large goat herds stood in the way of the development of the Greek agricultural sector: the extensive and free-roaming animal husbandry was viewed as an opponent of the state-sponsored and -endorsed settled farmer, who would help Greece in securing the desperately sought *σιτάρκεια* (grain sufficiency). Once Ioannis Metaxas seized power and established his authoritarian 4 August regime, which placed special emphasis on the agricultural development of the country, the fate of the goat was sealed: the “horned Satan” had to die, not just for the sake of the forests but, according to Metaxas himself, for the very survival of the Greek people.

In late 1935/early 1936, Greece was in political turmoil. On 10 October 1935, a coup d’état, aiming at the restoration of the royal family, which had been deposed in 1923, overthrew the elected government. A month later, following a rigged referendum, King George II returned from exile and appointed a caretaker government, led by a former liberal MP and university law professor, Konstantinos Demertzis, whose the sole aim was to organise fresh elections. Yet the elections of 26 January 1936 proved inconclusive. Demertzis was handed a mandate to form a government but when he died unexpectedly on 13 April, the king – contrary to parliamentary custom – appointed as prime minister-designate not one of the leaders of the major parties but a royalist ex-general turned parliamentarian, and leader of a minor, quasi-fascist party, Ioannis Metaxas.¹

On 24 April, following his dramatic yet overwhelming endorsement by the parliament the day before, Metaxas made his maiden appearance before the body as Greece’s new premier. The very first question he was called to answer came from Georgios Kafantaris, leader of the Progressive Party, who took issue with

¹ Kostas Kostis, *Τα κακομαθημένα παιδιά της ιστορίας* (Athens: Patakis, 2015), 638–40.

“a measure taken in an abnormal way, through [a government decree] signed just on the eve of the last elections ... And I refer to the banning of goat grazing in fir forests.”² Indeed, on 25 January 1936, “following the recommendation of the cabinet”, the king had signed a decree concerning “certain amendments of the laws concerning forests”, with Article 2 of which stipulating that “the grazing of goats in public or private fir forests is to be banned starting 6 months after the publication of the present law”.³ According to Panos Grispos, it was the head of the state’s Forestry Agency who had proposed this law to Agriculture Minister Antonios Benakis.⁴ Kafantaris claimed that the measure “amounts to deliberate extermination ... [the relevant line is missing from the parliamentary transcripts] under the pretext of protecting the forests”. As the announcement of the measure had led the mountain populations to the brink of an uprising, he asked the prime minister to commit to abolishing the law since “it is not goat rearing that is destroying our forests ... [but] forest fires, tree-felling and the clearing of forests”.⁵ Metaxas agreed to suspend the law, so that the issue could be reconsidered and debated through the normal parliamentary process. He nevertheless insisted that almost half of the county’s fir forests were already excluded from grazing under the existing legal framework, noting:

If goat grazing continues freely in fir forests, the latter are destined for destruction and thus the country’s forest wealth will be destroyed – to the injury of the national economy. There also more reasons for restricting goat grazing – to avoid the deforestation of the mountain regions, the rivers turning into torrents to destroy the plains, and more serious reasons. The fight between the goat and the fir is a fight to the death: one must die so the other may live.⁶

Thus the “War on the Goat” – in the words of Rigopoulos, president of the Patras’ branch of the Friends of the Forest Union (Φιλοδοασική Ένωση)⁷ – entered its final, and most dramatic phase. This war “is not something new, or novel”, maintained Rigopoulos. “The disgust and the hate for this horned animal originate in the distant past ... because the goat is a real Satan.”⁸ This was

² *Εφημερίς Συζητήσεων της Βουλής (ΕΣΒ)*, 24 April 1936, 84.

³ “Περί τροποποίησης διατάξεων τινων περί Δασών Νόμων,” *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως [ΦΕΚ]*, 59Α, 25 January 1936, 272.

⁴ Panos Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος: Από του ΙΕ΄ αιώνας μέχρι του 1971* (Athens: Forestry Agency, 1973), 295.

⁵ *ΕΣΒ*, 24 April 1936, 84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷ Angelos Rigopoulos, “Ο πόλεμος κατά της γίδας,” *Δασική Ζωή*, February 1936, 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*

not just the elite's view. The goat shepherds themselves, in their oral traditions, maintained that the goat was created by the Devil and cursed by none other than Jesus Christ.⁹ This article examines how the “war” against this hoofed menace had developed – and concluded – over the first hundred years of Greek statehood.

Greeks, Forests and the Goat

Upon the successful conclusion of the war of independence, the nascent Greek state found itself as the largest land proprietor in the country – acquiring by “right of conquest” all the Ottoman-held property of pre-revolutionary Greece.¹⁰ In the case of the country's forests, it is estimated that over 80 percent of their area came to belong to the state.¹¹ Yet, in the eyes of the ruling elite, this wooded national fortune was threatened by many factors, including animal grazing. In 1830, Greece's first governor, Ioannis Kapodistrias, tried – unsuccessfully – to ban all animals from the national forests but just six years later, a number of royal decrees introduced strict rules, accompanied by heavy penalties for trespassers. Thus the Royal Decree of 7 August 1836 “On animal tax”¹² allowed shepherds to graze their animals only in designated forested areas or in areas where “forest growth” was unlikely to occur, while the Royal Decree of 9 September 1836 “On the regulation of grazing in forests”¹³ prohibited grazing in regenerating forests “until the [saplings] grow to the point that they no longer fear the animal's mouth”.¹⁴

The animal that the saplings most “feared” – in the mind of contemporaries – was the goat. The goat, and its effect on vegetation, had been known to Greeks since antiquity. Grazing is a complex biological, financial and social process, as it combines many factors of a society and reflects their views on the land.¹⁵ Based

⁹ Dimitris Loukopoulos, *Ποιμενικά της Ρούμελης* (Athens: Sidiris, 1930), 217–18.

¹⁰ Iosif A. Botetzagias and Giorgos A. Kostopoulos, “For the Thorough Conservation of the Forests: A History of Forest Management and Protection in ‘Old Greece’, 1830–1880,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 39, no. 1 (2021): 93–116.

¹¹ William W. McGrew, *Land and Revolution in Modern Greece, 1800–1881: The Transition in the Tenure and Exploitation of Land from Ottoman Rule to Independence* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1985), 85.

¹² “Διάταγμα περί του επί των Ζώων φόρου,” *ΦΕΚ*, no. 40, 7 August 1836, 181.

¹³ “Διάταγμα περί του κανονισμού της βοσκής των δασών,” *ΦΕΚ*, no. 45, 9 September 1836, 215.

¹⁴ Botetzagias and Kostopoulos, “For the Thorough Conservation of the Forests,” 100.

¹⁵ Avi Perevolotsky and No'am G. Seligman, “Role of Grazing in Mediterranean Rangeland Ecosystems: Inversion of a Paradigm,” *BioScience* 48, no. 12 (1998): 1008.

on researchers such as Boyazoglu and Morand-Fehr,¹⁶ Rook et al.,¹⁷ Clergue et al.,¹⁸ and Dover et al.,¹⁹ Hadjigeorgiou mentions that grazing provided the Greek countryside with quality food and contributed to the conservation of biodiversity²⁰ while people exploited sheep and goats for the dairy, meat, leather, and wool they produced, which was necessary for the textile industry.²¹ Animals had grazed anywhere abundant vegetation was available – including forests. And if properly supervised, grazing may prove beneficial to the forest since it preserves biodiversity, reduces the likelihood of fires, and allows the exploitation of “unusable” less nutritious plants (see Papanastasis;²² Evans et al.;²³ Carmel and Kadmon;²⁴ Papanastasis;²⁵ Davies et al.;²⁶ Lovreglio et al.;²⁷ Kapotas²⁸). Yet, if unrestricted, the effects are detrimental since goats are capable of devouring

¹⁶ J. Boyazoglu and P. Morand-Fehr, “Mediterranean Dairy Sheep and Goat Products and their Quality. A Critical Review,” *Small Ruminant Research*, 40, no. 1 (2001): 1–11.

¹⁷ A.J. Rook, M. Petit, J. Isselstein, K. Osoro, M.F. Wallis de Vries, G. Parente and J. Mills, “Effects of Livestock Breed and Stocking Rate on Sustainable Grazing Systems: 1. Project Description and Synthesis of Results,” *Grassland Science in Europe* 9 (2004): 572–74.

¹⁸ Boris Clergue, Bernard Amiaud, Frank Pervanchon, Françoise Lasserre-Joulin and Sylvain Plantureux, “Biodiversity: Function and Assessment in Agricultural Areas: A Review,” *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* 25, no. 1 (2005): 1–15.

¹⁹ J.W. Dover, S. Spencer, S. Collins, I. Hadjigeorgiou and A. Rescia, “Grassland Butterflies and Low Intensity Farming in Europe,” *Journal of Insect Conservation* 15 (2011): 129–37.

²⁰ Ioannis Hadjigeorgiou, “Past, Present and Future of Pastoralism in Greece,” *Pastoralism* 1 (2011), 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² Vasilis Papanastasis, “Land Abandonment and Old Field Dynamics in Greece,” in *Old Fields: Dynamics and Restoration of Abandoned Farmland*, ed. Viki A. Cramer and R.J. Hobbs (Washington: Island Press, 2007), 225–46.

²³ Darren M. Evans, Stephen M. Redpath, David A. Elston, Sharon A. Evans, Ruth J. Mitchell and Peter Dennis, “To Graze or not to Graze? Sheep, Voles, Forestry and Nature Conservation in the British Uplands,” *Journal of Applied Ecology* 43, no. 3 (2006): 499–505.

²⁴ Yohay Carmel and Ronen Kadmon, “Effects of Grazing and Topography on Long-term Vegetation Changes in a Mediterranean Ecosystem in Israel,” *Plant Ecology* 145 (1999): 243–54.

²⁵ Vasilis Papanastasis, “Traditional vs Contemporary Management of Mediterranean Vegetation: The Case of the Island of Crete,” *Journal of Biological Research* 1 (2004): 39–46.

²⁶ Kirk W. Davies, Chad S. Boyd, Jon D. Bates and April Hulet, “Winter Grazing can Reduce Wildfire Size, Intensity and Behaviour in a Shrub-Grassland,” *International Journal of Wildland Fire* 25, no. 2 (2015): 129–36.

²⁷ Raffella Lovreglio, Ouahiba Meddour-Sahar and Vittorio Leone, “Goat Grazing as a Wildfire Prevention Tool: A Basic Review,” *iForest* 7, no. 4 (2014): 260–68.

²⁸ Panagiotis Kapotas and Efpraxia-Aithra Maria, “Livestock Grazing, Forest Protection and Law in Greece,” *Management of Environmental Quality* 28, no. 1 (2017): 57–69.

almost any growing plant or tree they can reach – while even the bark of older trees is not immune to their teeth.

The Debate about Forest Protection and Goat Grazing

The position that goats had a detrimental effect on Greece's forests was strongly supported in nineteenth-century upper-class discourse. In this perspective, the country's forests were being "destroyed" – and the main culprits were the (transhumant) shepherds who let their herds graze unrestricted inside the forests and/or set the latter on fire to create new pasturelands and spur the growth of grass.²⁹ Thus, Sir Thomas Wyse, the British minister to Greece, blames the "constantly thwarted" tree growth on the island of Euboea on "the goats [that] come down like wild armies, and destroy all before them low enough for their teeth. Should any escape, the shepherds – wild nomads, belonging to no one but their sheep – burn *ad libitum* for grass, through laziness and wickedness: thus large tracts frequently perish."³⁰ In similar vein, in 1874 Theodoros Afentoulis, a university professor of medicine, blamed the goat shepherds (*αίπολοι*) – alongside the farmers practicing "swidden [slash-and-burn] agriculture" – who "burn the forests ... in order for new sprouts to come out of the unscathed roots, and thus the next year the goats will have plentiful and tender fodder".³¹ Thus Afentoulis was suggesting that Greece should follow the example of Germany in banning goats from forests, starting with the Greek regions where most (and most often) forest fires occurred, "in Attica, Megarida, Boeotia and Euboea".³²

Not everyone was convinced a total ban should or could be implemented. Writing in 1876, Alexandros Tobazis, a forest proprietor from Euboea, exclaimed that "by truth, the goat is not to be blamed [for forest destruction] and we consider it our duty to protect her [the goat]". The goat was simply *more* destructive compared to other grazing animals, so if grazing is regulated "then even the goat, this relentless spoiler of the forests, would graze in them without causing harm". Thus, banning goats was not only unnecessary but it would run counter to Greece's natural conditions and national interest. "Before Mr Afentoulis ostracises the goats of our country," quipped Tobazis, "he must first change Greek nature. Since this and only this causes our great goat husbandry since the goat is perfectly made for the mountains." If the goats were removed, their grazing grounds would be left

²⁹ See Botetzagias and Kostopoulos, "For the Thorough Conservation of the Forests," 109–10.

³⁰ Thomas Wyse, *Impressions of Greece* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1871), 231.

³¹ Theodoros Afentoulis, "Τα δάση καίονται, τις πταίει;" *Το Μέλλον*, 13 August 1874.

³² *Ibid.*

unused (the sheep having totally different dietary requirements) and, in effect, the national wealth would receive a severe blow since “next to apiculture, no other husbandry activity is as profitable in our country as goat herding”.³³

Some also seriously doubted that the parliament would ever vote to restrict goats. An editorial in *To Μέλλον* newspaper a few weeks after Afentoulis’ drastic call to action commented that a law banning forest grazing would prove as unenforceable as the existing one forbidding swidden agriculture, thanks to the endemic corruption of the Forestry Agency and the local authorities,³⁴ while patronage and political clientelism by “members of parliament, ministers, journalists” would ensure that such a draft law would be neutralised as “barbarous and unsparing of the poor goats”.³⁵ Instead, suggested the lead, by introducing (high) taxes for grazing goats in the forest – and even renting out the collection of these taxes – these animals would be “gradually driven out of the forests, being unable to pay the high prices for grazing in these areas” while

the goat herders ... will find other grazing lands, elsewhere in the country, or they will take on sheep herding, or they [will] abandon the mountainous [*ορεινήν*] goat herding and engage in lowland goat herding, that is, in the towns and villages, the latter being less harmful and more useful both to the goat shepherds and to society.³⁶

The above extract suggests that, in the contemporary mind, the “mountainous” (mobile/transhumant/nomadic) pastoralists were as much to blame for forest destruction as the goat itself. The most populous group of these mountainous “goat herders” were the

Greek-speaking Sarakatsans and the bilingual Koutsovlachs and Arvanitovlachs, who spoke Vlach and, respectively, Greek and Albanian [despite their different mobility status] more often than not, these peoples were collectively referred to by Greek officials in the nineteenth century as *Vlachopoimenes* [Vlach-shepherds], “Vlach” in this case meaning nomadic”. [They were organised in tselingata, that is], large, patriarchal associations of [pastoralist] men and their horses, sheep and goats, [which] ascended in May to the higher slopes of the mountain and descended in November to the lowlands.³⁷

³³ Alexandros Tobazis, *Σπουδαιότης των δασών και συντήρησις αυτών εν Ελλάδι* (Athens: Typ. ton Adelfon Perri, 1876), 40–41.

³⁴ See Botetzagias and Kostopoulos, “For the Thorough Conservation of the Forests,” 105–7.

³⁵ “Αποκέντρωσις των δασών,” *Το Μέλλον*, 7 September 1874.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ John S. Koliopoulos, “Shepherds, Brigands, and Irregulars in Nineteenth Century Greece,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 8, no. 4 (1981): 41.

For most commentators, these mountainous, transhumant herders were a rough and lawless group of people. As Afentoulis lamented in his analysis of forest destruction:

The goat shepherds are wild men and mountain people. You may vote and pass and set as many laws as you wish [for protecting forests]. They will never respect these laws since it is much more difficult to catch them in the act. Why should you expect the goat shepherds to respect your public (αδέσποτα) forests when they show no respect for your life and your fortune, being the very people who commit robberies and harbour bandits?³⁸

As Koliopoulos states, it is a fact that in nineteenth-century Greece “the brigand band and the nomadic group of shepherds and animals, the *tselingato*,³⁹ were in many ways complementary associations: the latter provided shelter, food, dress, and intelligence in exchange for protection” and the vast majority of brigands were (recruited from the) shepherds.⁴⁰ This close relation, he explains, “resulted mainly from the transhumant shepherd’s need for protection against the sedentary peasant” but it was further reinforced by the Greek state’s open hostility which considered their nomadic lifestyle “a disgrace to civilised Greece” and a thing to be done away with.⁴¹ Thus, turning transhumant (mountainous) animal husbandry into the “less harmful and more useful, both to the goat shepherds and to the society” lowland one (to use *To Μέλλον*’s evaluation) had been a common *topos* for Greek elite discourse and official state policy.⁴² Already by 1836, a royal decree⁴³ ordered that transhumant shepherds had to register with one of the kingdom’s communes, or establish their own [permanent] ones, in order to have access to pasturelands, otherwise “they will not be tolerated within the kingdom save for this coming winter”. Similar provisions were reiterated in 1857.⁴⁴ Harshes of all, Law ΤΟΔ’ (304) of 1871⁴⁵ “For the suppression of brigandage” had a special section on “the responsibility of Vlach-shepherds”. Clearly demarcating them from the shepherds who “settle in a village and reside therein with their family, permanently and perpetually”, the law provisioned that nomadic shepherds were to be put under police surveillance from six months

³⁸ Theodoros Afentoulis, “Τα δάση καίονται, τις πταίει;,” *Το Μέλλον*, 13 August 1874.

³⁹ Koliopoulos, “Shepherds, Brigands, and Irregulars,” 47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46–47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 48–49.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “Διάταγμα περί του επί των Ζώων φόρου,” 181.

⁴⁴ “Νόμος ΤΖΘ’ [399] περί φόρου επί των ζώων διά το 1857,” *ΦΕΚ*, no. 4, 6 March 1857, 17.

⁴⁵ “Νόμος ΤΟΔ’ [304] περί καταδιώξεως της ληστείας,” *ΦΕΚ*, no. 5, 1 March 1871, 33.

up to one year if there existed “strong suspicions” that they were harbouring brigands. In the cases of brigandage, if those who assisted the perpetrators could not be identified then *all* transhumant shepherds present in the area at the time of the crime were liable to pay an indemnity (up to 3,000 drachmas, proportional to their flock’s size) to the victims: and if the shepherds were unable or unwilling to do so, they would be prevented from migrating between their winter/summer grazing grounds. It is quite telling of the official Greek establishment opinion on these shepherds “that the harsh stipulations of this law concerning the nomads, unlike the rest of the provisions, caused not a single dissenting voice or vote”.⁴⁶

While the Greek state was quite successful in restricting the nomadic (goat) herders, dealing with the goats themselves was a far more difficult political challenge. In 1882, the parliament debated a bill regarding the increase in the domestic animal head tax. Yet this was more than a fiscal issue as far as goats were concerned. While up to that point sheep and goats were similarly taxed at 25 drachmas per head, the bill proposed doubling the tax on goats compared to a 20-percent increase on that of the sheep. One MP denounced Finance Minister Pavlos Kalligas, who had tabled the bill, claiming that “the Minister asks us to double the tax on goats in order to destroy them, because they are misdoing animals”,⁴⁷ a charge Kalligas did not refute:

Animal husbandry in Greece is [today] in the deplorable condition of the times of Abraham and Isaac ... Until it becomes sedentary it will be detrimental to agriculture ... It even wears down the national property through the destruction of the forests ... Between the two species, sheep and goats, which is the most devastating [for the forest]? I tell you it is the goat ... A certain Englishman brilliantly mentioned some years ago that Greek forests were being destroyed by the Greeks and by goats. And we may deal with the Greeks through the law on forest [protection]. [Yet] for the goats, what else may the legislator do if he wishes to offer useful direction and advice, other than making the possession of goats less profitable? Then sheep will increase, and they are beneficial not only to the shepherd but also to society ... since sheep are susceptible to improvement – thus [they help in] increasing revenue, while goats are unsusceptible [to improvement].⁴⁸

A storm of objections developed while the bill was under debate. One MP argued that goats grazed on poor lands where no other animal could be sustained, and another that eliminating goats would be a major blow to the rural economy of the

⁴⁶ Koliopoulos, “Shepherds, Brigands, and Irregulars,” 49–50.

⁴⁷ *ΕΣΒ*, 15 April 1882, 417.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 422–23.

mountainous communities while the amount of meat for sale in urban centres would sharply decrease. Another MP claimed that such a tax increase would be the ruin of shepherds, who would be forced to become bandits in order to secure their livelihoods. Some MPs mentioned that goats are not the only (or even the major) perpetrator of the damage to forests while a certain one went as far as to claim that goats caused no harm whatsoever to forests.⁴⁹ More sober objectors suggested that tougher penalties for illegal grazing was the way to protect forests from the goats – following the French example – and not “exterminating” the hapless beasts. The MPs’ reactions were coupled by petitions against the bill from most of the country’s goat-rearing provinces, as reflected in this exchange involving Prime Minister Harilaos Trikoupis himself:

[Prime Minister]: Mr Kalligas wished to provoke a discussion on this issue [of restricting goat grazing]. He is aware that banning goats from certain areas of the country – because indeed this provision [the tax increase] will amount to a ban in some instances – is not something which may be easily achieved...

[Opposition MP]: And it should not [be achieved]!

[Prime Minister]: It must be achieved when the country is ready to accept it. In all the countries where agriculture and forestry are advanced, there exist bans on goats ... The other tax increases proposed in this bill are simply fiscal measures. And the government cannot but insist on these. Regarding the goats, the [tax] increase is a fiscal measure, yet it is also a restricting measure. Thus the government does not wish to insist on fully implementing this measure as long as the country is not ready to accept it.⁵⁰

Thus, after much debate, it was agreed that the tax on goats would be increased equally with the one on sheep, that is, by 20 percent. The opposition MPs were highly critical of the government’s idea that enhancing Greek animal husbandry (and protecting forests) could come about through penalising, fiscal measures. Rather, a more structural change was needed. As one opposition MP noted in the concluding discussion,

animal husbandry is the way it is in Greece, and it will inevitably continue to exist [in this condition] as long as there are uncultivated lands, excess lands. Look at our provinces where the lands are cultivated and planted. There [free-roaming/transhumant] animal

⁴⁹ *EΣB*, 15, 17, 27 and 28 April 1882.

⁵⁰ *EΣB*, 17 April 1882, 453.

husbandry was restricted and it will end up as sedentary animal husbandry when the surrounding fields, the uncultivated, the excess and the ones used for feeding the animals, cease to exist. This is the reason for the state of Greek animal husbandry, and it cannot be fixed by destroying the goats.⁵¹

The opponents of goats also agreed that open-air/nomadic (goat) herding was a relic of the past which would fade away as the country developed; yet they also stressed the importance of interim measures. “The condition of our forests is deplorable due to goat grazing,” lamented Giorgos Kofinas, a middle-ranking bureaucrat in the Finance Ministry who would rise to the position of minister 20 years later: “Thus is the animal husbandry in our country: rowdy, wild, destructive.”⁵² Nevertheless, he was convinced that banning forest grazing would prove unenforceable – especially when “a great number of the country’s municipalities” was financially sustained by the goats.⁵³ Yet, “where civilisation more and more has penetrated, there the goat has gradually disappeared,” noted Kofinas, who suggested taking a middle ground regarding the goat: establishing no-grazing zones around forests and increasing the tax on the particular beast.⁵⁴ Epameinondas Empeirikos, a scion of a powerful shipowner family just beginning his political career, was of a similar mind, hoping that the increased taxes would prompt shepherds to “replace, gradually and incrementally, their goat flocks and thus the Greek soil – and above all the forests – will be redeemed by one of their greatest destroyers”.⁵⁵

Greek Foresters and the Goat

The need for targeted interventions to speed the goats’ exodus from the country’s forests was also the view of the first generation of Greek foresters, who were all trained in Germany.⁵⁶ Writing in 1900 about his impressions of Greece’s forests, Konstantinos Samios, head of the state Forestry Agency and professor of forestry courses in the Technical University of Athens, dedicated a whole chapter to “The goat and our forests”. According to Samios, “the mild Greek climate, the mountainous terrain and the underdevelopment of farming brought about the

⁵¹ ΕΣΒ, 27 April 1882, 563.

⁵² Giorgos Kofinas, *Μελέται περί δασών* (Athens: Τυπ. Anesti Konstantinidou, 1895), 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Epameinondas Empeirikos, *Περί διασώσεως και εκμεταλλεύσεως του δασικού ημών πλούτου* (Athens: Τυπ. Leoni, 1891), 31.

⁵⁶ See Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, 223, 228, 237, 256

formidable proliferation of goats, destroying our forests and maintaining our peasants in their blessed idleness – which follows from the small requirements of this type [goat] of husbandry”.⁵⁷ Samios acknowledged the many benefits the frugal goat bestowed on the peasantry – especially in the mountainous regions – thus he considered it implausible (and impractical) to totally ban the animal from the country’s forests. In another book, after listing the damage to forests from both sedentary (yet free-roaming) as well as transhumant animal husbandry,⁵⁸ he concluded:

Least one thinks, based on what I wrote, that I recommend the total annihilation of the goat in order to achieve the amelioration of forest vegetation. That would be indeed absurd if one considers our prevailing conditions and habits, the morphology of the terrain and the climate of the country, as well as the economic importance the goat has for the peasant population.⁵⁹

Instead, he advocated limiting the grazing of goats in selected forested areas and for the animals to be supervised.⁶⁰ In similar vein, Petros Kontos, the young chief forester for the Attica region – fresh from his state-sponsored studies in Germany – was also against the total ban on grazing in forests, even by goats, not least because it could benefit forests if properly conducted but also because it was of significant economic value to rural communities.⁶¹ Thus he also advocated a middle ground: allowing goats to graze in those areas where forestry could not develop (for example, rocky areas) or in mature forests, replacing goats with sheep or cows, cultivating fodder plants in order to supply indoor animal husbandry, as well as limiting grazing rights and the number of animals allowed to graze.⁶²

It is important to note that the Greek foresters constantly emphasised that the destruction brought upon the land’s forests was not caused *only* by the “unruly” and nomadic shepherds but *also* by settled peasants, and both were manifestations of the same structural root cause, the “primitive” condition of the Greek (rural) economy. As Samios wrote in 1906, “since the main breadwinning activities of our peasants are the cultivation of cereals and

⁵⁷ Konstantinos Samios, *Εικόνες εκ των ελληνικών δασών* (Athens: Typ. I. Angelopoulou, 1900), 158.

⁵⁸ Konstantinos Samios, *Το μέλλον των ελληνικών δασών* (Athens: Typ. S. Kousoulinou, 1906), 30–34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁰ Samios, *Εικόνες εκ των ελληνικών δασών*, 161–62.

⁶¹ Petros Kontos, *Δάση και πολιτισμός ιδία εν Ελλάδι* (Athens: Typ. Leoni, 1906).

⁶² Samios, *Εικόνες εκ των ελληνικών δασών*, 160–69.

nomadic animal husbandry ... they are ignorant of the usefulness of the forests' products"⁶³ and

since the majority of the peasants, especially in mountainous areas, engage in animal husbandry without any relation to agriculture, that is, without any production of fodder, there is no other way to conduct animal husbandry but through the constant free-roaming grazing on all grounds ... since animal husbandry is practiced in a way unconnected to agriculture, and to the latter's injury, it is exercised *a fortiori* in a way unconnected to forestry, and to the latter's even greater injury.⁶⁴

Similarly Kontos maintained that Greece was currently

in the first stages of agricultural life, whereas part of the forests is cleared and turned into fields, the cultivated lands are loosely exploited and often left fallow ... while herds of domesticated animals roam and graze in the extended forest expanses, while the little wood needed for fuel and construction is harvested easily and wastefully.⁶⁵

But as the population grows, the economy expands and the needs multiply, "[a] country's agriculture and animal husbandry become more intensive, [and] then forestry production is facilitated and may become also more intensive".⁶⁶ Yet,

in contrast to the observed progress in our agricultural production since 1830, our animal husbandry – although the number of animals has increased considerably – retains overall its nomadic character, to the injury of agriculture ... since the nomadic herds destroy every agricultural amelioration, and also to the injury of forestry.⁶⁷

Similar to the opinion of the nineteenth-century parliamentarians – who argued that one could not enforce the protection of the forests through prohibitions but a more profound and structural change had to occur beforehand – Kontos also stressed that a ban on grazing might be a useful measure for protecting the forests on occasions, but in order for it to bear fruit, "beforehand, the necessary preconditions, capable of bringing about a more intensive arrangement of the country's economic and land production, must arise on their own – through the development of the country's economic production and culture".⁶⁸

⁶³ Samios, *Το μέλλον των ελληνικών δασών*, 27.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁶⁵ Kontos, *Δάση και πολιτισμός ιδία εν Ελλάδι*, 122.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 132–33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

In the first decades of the twentieth century there was evidence that the country was indeed changing, both culturally and economically, in a way conducive to forest protection. Concerning the former, a number of books appeared with the expressed aim to “educate” or “elucidate” the general public concerning the condition of the Greek forests and the threats they were facing, and they were not just written by the Greek foresters mentioned above. For example, Adolf Stengel, head of the Austrian Forestry Mission to Greece, considering that “changing the common perception [about forests] is as important as the direct protection of forests through relevant laws and institutions”, published a booklet (1914) aiming to “instruct and elucidate, even by little, the general public” about the importance of Greece’s forests.⁶⁹ And in his book, Stengel did not fail to stress the detrimental effects of goats – and nomadic grazing – on forests.⁷⁰ Similarly, the Greek Friends of the Forest Union – established in 1899 by Samios and presided over by Crown Princess Sophia of Greece – alongside its public lectures and reforestation events had also been publishing informative booklets, therein presenting the necessary measures to reach a

compromise between grazing and the existence and wellbeing of the forest ... this compromise would be easier when our animal husbandry is systematically improved. Then the goats, this formidable enemy of the forests, will be limited mainly to shrubland ... and goat grazing in the forests will also be substantially restricted.⁷¹

Yet the most important change was the one occurring in the “arrangement of the country’s economic and land production”, which Kontos was seeking in 1906. Between 1912 and 1922, following a series of military triumphs and disasters, Greece had changed completely. In 1907 the country’s surface was 63,211 square kilometres, with a population of 2,631,952 people; by 1928 these figures were 129,281 and 6,204,684, respectively.⁷² This was due to the annexation of the regions of Epirus, Macedonia, Thrace, the Aegean islands and Crete to the Greek Kingdom as well as to the influx of over 1.2 million refugees following the ill-fated Asia Minor Campaign.⁷³ The Greek state responded to this population challenge with a radical land reform programme and by protecting and intensifying/modernising agricultural production. Thus, the large estates

⁶⁹ Adolf Stengel, *Η σημασία του δάσους: Ιδία εν Ελλάδι*, trans. Iraklis Diamantopoulos (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1914), 6–7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 28–31.

⁷¹ Fillodasiki Enosis, *Δια τα δάση μας* (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1914), 8.

⁷² Kostis, *Τα κακομαθημένα παιδιά της ιστορίας*, 604.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 610.

(chifliks) were dissolved and their land distributed to small owners, refugees included, while a number of state interventions (such as irrigation and drainage projects, the creation of agricultural cooperatives and the establishment of the Agriculture Ministry (1917) and Agricultural Bank (1929), the introduction of cash crops, fertilisers, new machinery as well as the state-protectionism of agricultural production – with the aim of achieving “grain-sufficiency”⁷⁴ – gave a major boost to Greek agriculture, which had been suffering from the effects of the global agricultural crisis of the interwar period.⁷⁵ Between 1923 and 1938 the cultivated area increased by 90 percent, representing 18 percent of the country’s total area in 1939, tree plantations not included; the number of farmers increased (from 38.7 percent of the economically active population in 1907 to 52 percent in 1928); while in over just 5 years (1923–1928) the country’s agricultural production increased by 67 percent – with agriculture representing 34.8 percent of the Greek national income in 1929.⁷⁶

The gains of Greece’s agriculture had occurred at the injury of the open-air animal husbandry. As shown in Figure 1, the number of sheep and goats stagnated, as the area under cultivation expanded.⁷⁷ Dimitris Syrakis, an agronomist and general inspector for agriculture, having toured “the animal-grazing regions of the country (Thessaly, Macedonia, Epirus, Central Greece)” in 1923, reported a bleak picture of the condition of transhumant shepherds. He noted that the wars and the establishment of national borders effectively ended the Greek nomadic herds’ freedom of movement to pasturelands in the neighbouring countries, intensifying even further the pressure transhumant husbandry was facing due to the lack of summer (that is, mountain) grazing grounds in Greek Macedonia and Thrace.⁷⁸ The nomadic herds has thus become even more dependent on the lowland areas for grazing at the very time that these areas were fast reducing. The old chiflik lands in Thessaly and Macedonia were distributed to hundreds and thousands of individual farmers, while the previously fallow/uncultivated lands – traditionally used as grazing grounds –

⁷⁴ Cf. Vasilis Patronis, *Ελληνική οικονομική ιστορία* (Athens: Kallipos, Open Academic Publications, 2015), available through: <https://hdl.handle.net/11419/1700>.

⁷⁵ See Spyridon Ploumidis, “Η ελληνική αγροτική κρίση του Μεσοπολέμου (Δεκ. 1920): Κοινωνικές διαστάσεις της οικονομολογικής σκέψης επί της κρίσης,” *Δωδώνη* 38–42 (2008–2013): 303–39.

⁷⁶ Patronis, *Ελληνική οικονομική ιστορία*, 172–73.

⁷⁷ Konstantinos Kinnas and Nikolaos Mousmoutis, *Το κτηνοτροφικόν πρόβλημα της Ελλάδος* (Athens: Stampa, 1940), 42.

⁷⁸ Dimitris Syrakis, “Η νομαδική κτηνοτροφία εν Ελλάδι,” *Δελτίον γεωργικών της Ελληνικής Γεωργικής Εταιρείας* 12, no. 169 (1925): 743–53.

were employed for settling refugees from Asia Minor.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the revenue earned from cultivating the lowlands was fast catching up with that created through grazing: in 1914 chiflik owners could anticipate a revenue of around 2 golden drachmas per stremma a year for renting their lands for grazing, compared to 1-1.5 drachmas through shared-farming (*επίμορτος γεωργία*);⁸⁰ by 1923 the two were almost at par, and Syrakis projected that, with agriculture becoming “more intensive, cultivating not only cereals but also other plants as well as industrial plants such as tobacco etc.”, the income through farming would soon surpass the earnings from letting fields for grazing.⁸¹

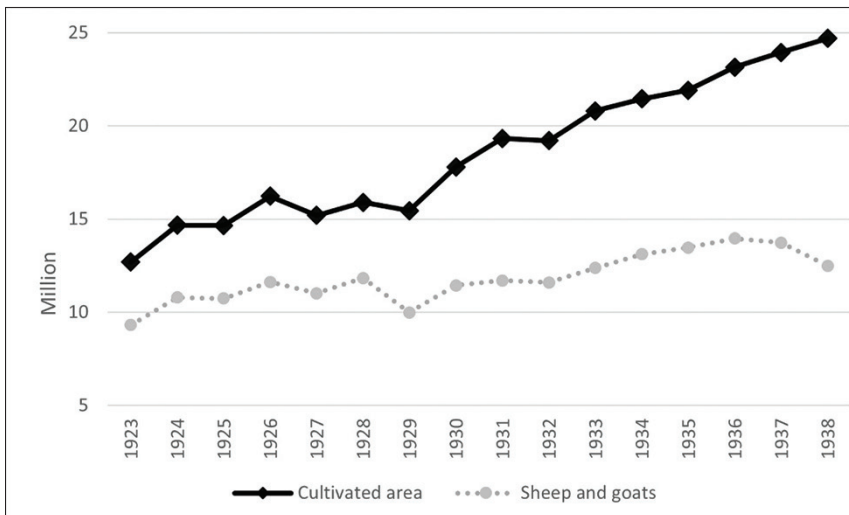


Figure 1. Number of sheep and goats and cultivated area in Greece, in stremmata (1 stremma equals 0.1 hectare). The data on animals for 1923–1928 is from General Statistics Service of Greece, *Στατιστική Επετηρίς της Ελλάδος* (1930) and for 1929–1938 from General Statistics Service of Greece, *Ετήσια Γεωργική Στατιστική της Ελλάδος* (1929; 1930) and *Ετήσια Γεωργική και Κτηνοτροφική Στατιστική της Ελλάδος* (1931–1938). The date on the cultivated area is from Konstantinos Kinnas and Nikolaos Mousmoutis, *Το κτηνοτροφικόν πρόβλημα της Ελλάδος* (Athens: Stampa, 1940), 42.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 754–55.

⁸⁰ Petros Kontos, *Δάση και κτηνοτροφία εις τήν Ελλάδα: Από οικονομικής και πολιτικής απόψεως* (Thessaloniki: Typ. M. Triantafyllou, 1932), 29; Syrakis, “Η νομαδική κτηνοτροφία εν Ελλάδι,” 746.

⁸¹ Syrakis, “Η νομαδική κτηνοτροφία εν Ελλάδι,” 745–46.

As available, and necessary, pastureland was becoming scarcer, the age-old confrontation between farmers and herders intensified. Clashes, even deadly ones, between farmers and herders – when the latter’s animals drifted into the former’s plantations – as well as between herders themselves, for contested pastures, had always occurred,⁸² but the cataclysmic developments of the 1920s made things worse. “The goat is not animal husbandry,” one newspaper wrote in 1919, “but a curse on the vegetation ... now that the expanse of [the country’s] plantations has reached 13,548 hectares, the goats must be further removed from the cultivated fields.”⁸³ A year later, the same newspaper complained that no measures had ever been taken for protecting fields from the free-roaming goats, which, quipped the writer, “have introduced bolshevism [to Greece] by abolishing all property rights! Or at least agricultural rights!”⁸⁴ Furthermore, in 1925 Syrakis reported that the newly established farmers were strategically trying to push the transhumant shepherds out of the contested lands, either by not letting for grazing their excess/fallow fields – although they could thus secure extra revenue⁸⁵ – or by cultivating areas close and around the nomadic shepherds’ temporary camps in order to block the latter’s movement.⁸⁶

While agriculture was pushing the goats out of lowland pastures, the foresters were trying to fend them off the mountainous forested ones – with mixed results. “Regarding the goats,” remarked Anastasios Stefanou, chief forester for Thrace, in 1928, “an issue which is a disgrace for today’s civilisation and still remains unresolved ... particularly in our country, I shamefully admit – since I am also a forester – that our [state] Forestry Agency has failed to remove the goats even from the good, so-called, fir forests.”⁸⁷ Yet this did not mean that the goats were grazing unrestricted in all the country’s forests. In 1932, Kontos, who had twice served as the head of the Forestry Agency and was now a professor at the newly established School of Forestry at the University of Thessaloniki, wrote that grazing was prohibited in 23 percent of all forested areas (or 38 percent of the precious fir as well as beech and oak deciduous forests) of Greece – excluding the island of Euboea – for a variety of reasons (for example, natural regrowth, reforestation, following forest fires, etc.).⁸⁸ More particularly, in 31 percent of the

⁸² *Εμπρός*, 18 March 1901 and 18 July 1913.

⁸³ *Εμπρός*, 17 December 1919.

⁸⁴ *Εμπρός*, 5 September 1920.

⁸⁵ Syrakis, “Η νομαδική κτηνοτροφία εν Ελλάδι,” 757–58.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 759.

⁸⁷ Anastasios Stefanou, *Το δάσος που λαχτάριζες* (Athens: self-pub, 1928 [1974]), 135.

⁸⁸ Kontos, *Δάση και κτηνοτροφία εις τήν Ελλάδα*, 10–11.

total prohibited area, the ban applied *only* to goats.⁸⁹ As Kontos explicitly states, around half of the grazing restrictions were imposed for the forests' "natural regrowth – that is for directly economic reasons".⁹⁰ He then offered a long and detailed comparison of what a forested hectare may contribute to national income if used as pasture compared to being exploited for its forest products, reaching the conclusion that, in certain circumstances, the latter could be more profitable even for individual, profit-minded, forest proprietors.⁹¹ Thus, according to Kontos, the "natural" development, based on hard economic figures, would be for the nomadic goat grazing in forests to be drastically curtailed:

Neither fires nor rapacious tree felling harms the Greek forests as much as goat grazing since natural reforestation would fix this damage if this was not prevented by the grazing goatherds.

This should not imply that it is necessary to immediately remove all goats from all Greek forests ... there exist great areas with evergreen broadleaf [trees] ... which may chiefly be exploited only through goat grazing ...

The goat is the cow of the poor farmer of the [era of the] natural economy. At an advanced stage of the cash economy, when the issue is about [producing] high volumes of milk, the rearing of cows in stables is recommended. At this stage the goat is expelled from the more fertile lands of the meadows – which are cultivated through plantations of olives, chestnuts, locust trees – as well as from the most fertile forests of fir, black pine and deciduous oak, chestnut and beech.

Thus with the progress of the national economy the goat is restricted to the status of either a domestic, milk-producing animal, the cow of the poor farmer, fed by the plants of its master's fields and gardens or grazing in the communal meadows, or to a herder's animal [living] in the barren and rocky tree-covered meadows or in poor forests with little wood production, [that is] in places where goat herding is necessary for exploiting the productive potential of the forest.⁹²

As for the nomadic shepherds, at least the smaller ones, they "should settle down in villages and acquire a house and land to plant crops and trees, and ... graze their animals in the nearby communal or public lands, by paying a reasonable rent".⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁹¹ Ibid., 17–34.

⁹² Ibid., 36–37.

⁹³ Ibid., 75.

Accordingly, for the Greek foresters of the first half of the twentieth century, the problem of goat grazing in the forests was an indication of Greece's developmental lag vis-à-vis other "civilised countries". The Greek forested area was far smaller than in other European countries, amounting to just 14 percent of its total area, when "due to [Greece's] mountainous and rocky terrain, this percentage should have been at least 50 percent", as lamented Stefanou, now reforestation inspector at the Agriculture Ministry, in 1933.⁹⁴ This was one of the reasons why domestic production could not meet the country's needs in wood, resulting in millions of drachmas spent on imports.⁹⁵ The other reason was that the Greek forests were not "high forests", thus their production was less than half that of the European ones or much worse.⁹⁶ This economically suboptimal situation was due to the fact that Greek agriculture and animal husbandry, because of their primitive character, had used the forests as an easy target. As one observer noted, "the forest expanses are squatted to be cultivated or grazed".⁹⁷ Of all the threats facing forests, the most formidable one was the goat – since it would devour almost every piece of greenery it could reach. Another alarming fact was that the number of goats was steadily rising (fig. 2) and Greece had the highest density in Europe: in 1865, the country had 1.2 goats per person and 0.48 goats per hectare;⁹⁸ in 1936 it was still top of the list, with 0.79 goats per person and 0.42 goats per hectare (next in line were Turkey and Bulgaria, with 0.59 and 0.13 goats per hectare, respectively).⁹⁹ Thus "it is impossible for the goat and the precious forests – such as the wood-producing forests of fir, [black] pine, oak and beech – to co-exist".¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, the goat had to be removed from these (highly profitable) forests, either through increased taxation, which would make other animals more appealing, or through further restrictions. The state had to take the necessary measures

⁹⁴ Anastasios Stefanou, *Αι δρυάδες των αρχαίων ελλήνων και τα δάση των νεοτέρων* (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1933), 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12–13; Ioannis Kokkinis, *Η σημερινή κατάσταση των δασών και η δασική πολιτική του μέλλοντος* (Athens, Ethniko Typografeio, 1934), 5–6, 80.

⁹⁶ Panagiotis Zervas, *Τα ελληνικά δάση: Η σύστασις των, η σημασία των, η διοίκησις των, τα προϊόντα των, η θήρα, η ιχθυοκομία μας* (Athens: Typ. N. Apatsidi, 1932), 29.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁸ Alexandros Mansolas, *Πολιτειακαί πληροφορίαί περί Ελλάδος* (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1867), 89.

⁹⁹ Panagiotis Dekazos, *Το κτηνοτροφικόν ζήτημα της Ελλάδος* (Athens: Typ. N. Apatsidi, 1940), 185.

¹⁰⁰ Stefanou, *Αι δρυάδες των αρχαίων ελλήνων*, 22.

to assist the two social groups mostly affected, the shepherds of the large transhumant herds and the peasants, to deal with the new situation. The former, who “as God’s creatures have a right to live and as Greek citizens have the same claims and rights, the same way the state requires of them the same obligations as the rest of Greeks”. Instead, they were “daily reduced to misery” by “the agricultural law and the settlement of the refugees”, according to the sympathetic Syrakis.¹⁰¹ They should be helped in their transition to a settled agro-pastoralist life – for the Greek-speaking Sarakatsans, in the newly established northern frontier of Macedonia for obvious national security reasons, according to one general inspector of forests,¹⁰² otherwise “the worst and most likely scenario, since they are mostly a crude mass [of people] not knowing and incapable of something else, is that they will turn to robbery and banditry at the expense of the rest of society”.¹⁰³ Concerning the peasants, whose flocks most foresters viewed as the real danger to forests,¹⁰⁴ Kontos in 1932 proposed compensating them, for a period of up to 10 years, for losing the privilege to freely graze their animals in the “precious, state forests of Greece”.¹⁰⁵ It is worth keeping in mind that Greece did not lack a legal framework regulating grazing in forests. Indeed, as Kontos demonstrated by listing the existing legal provisions, grazing was restricted/banned, for a number of reasons, in a substantial percentage of Greek forests.¹⁰⁶ Yet what was new was the idea that the state should completely ban a specific animal

¹⁰¹ Syrakis, “Η νομαδική κτηνοτροφία εν Ελλάδι,” 765.

¹⁰² Antonis Andrianopoulos, *Πως θα αναδασωθεί η Ελλάς* (Athens: Typ. Deli kai Tsipi, 1929), 10–11.

¹⁰³ Syrakis, “Η νομαδική κτηνοτροφία εν Ελλάδι,” 762.

¹⁰⁴ Kontos rightly notes the number of nomadic animals is much smaller than that of sedentary ones, and they may more easily be driven away from the forests which would come under protection (*Δάση και κτηνοτροφία εις τήν Ελλάδα*, 73). To that extent see, for example, the telegram sent to the crown prince by the inhabitants of one village in Achaia: “Your Highness’ stewards’ decision to destroy 100,000-tree forest [in the prince’s estates] ... has driven the peasants to despair, since felling this forest will result to the banning of grazing for their 20,000 animals. We beg your highness to order accordingly so that the peasants may be saved, since they have no other place where to graze their animals” (*Σκριπ*, 17 September 1898). Needless to add that the settled peasants had also the political networks to block any protective measures: “Only God can imagine, the complaints that the Forestry Agency and the Agriculture Ministry had received from shepherds, other magnates, various party cadres and politicians, when they issued a ban on grazing the barren Ymittos mountain in Athens,” Stefanou recounted, in *Το δάσος που λαχτάριζες*, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Kontos, *Δάση και κτηνοτροφία εις τήν Ελλάδα*, 91.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 85–90.

from the country's forests. "We should enforce this on [the goat shepherds]," noted Kokkinis, a former head of the Forestry Agency.

By law we should require the removal or replacement of goats from all the regions and villages where the aforementioned precious forests are found ... within five years. The goat should go and be permanently settled on the bushy pastures of the lowlands. There, and only there, is its place.

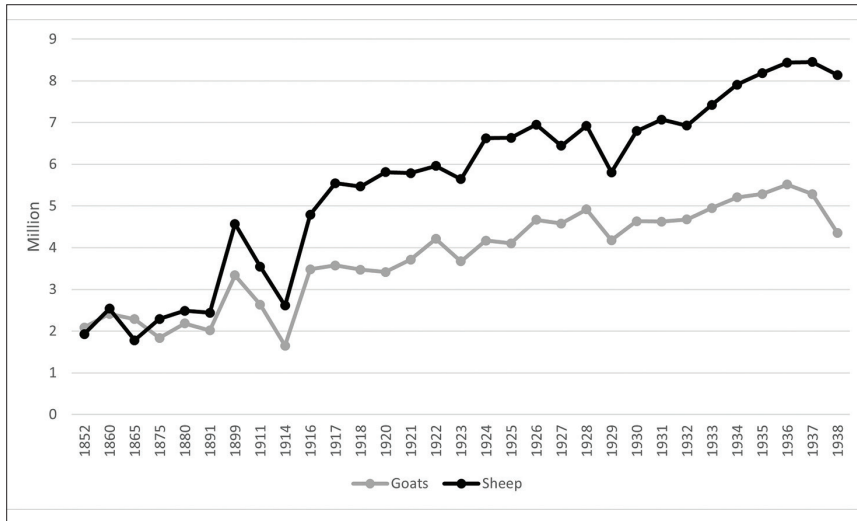


Figure 2. Goats and sheep in Greece. Data sources: 1852–1865 (Alexandros Mansolas, *Πολιτειακαί πληροφοριαί περί Ελλάδος* [Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1867]); 1875 (Alexandros Mansolas, *La Grèce à l'exposition universelle de Paris en 1878: Notions statistiques, catalogue des exposants* [Athens: Philocalie, 1878], 89); 1880 (*Εφημερίς Συζητήσεων της Βουλής*, 15 April 1882, 423); 1891 (Ioannis Vlassis, *Στατιστική της εν Ελλάδι κτηνοτροφίας* [Athens: Typ. S. Vlastou, 1905], 34); 1911–1928 (General Statistics Service of Greece, *Ετήσια Γεωργική Στατιστική της Ελλάδος* [1930]); 1929–1938 (General Statistics Service of Greece, *Ετήσια Γεωργική Στατιστική της Ελλάδος* [1929; 1930] and *Ετήσια Γεωργική και Κτηνοτροφική Στατιστική της Ελλάδος* [annual reports for 1931–1938]).

Goats and the Metaxas Regime

As mentioned in the introduction, the law the foresters had sought – instituting a total ban on goat grazing – came into force in early 1936, through a decree. And while the new prime minister, Metaxas, gave an assurance that the law would be reconsidered and debated through the normal parliamentary process, this was not going to happen as parliament was suspended a week later until the autumn.

It would never reconvene. On 4 August 1936, Metaxas – in collaboration with the king – staged his own coup d'état, establishing an authoritarian, semi-fascist regime.

Yet Metaxas did not forget about the goats. In late 1936, the new agriculture minister, Georgios Kyriakos, an agronomist and member of the Academy of Athens, invited Kontos to take over – for the third time – at the helm of the Forestry Agency.¹⁰⁷ Almost immediately, Kontos issued instructions to the country's Forestry Offices (*Δασαρχεία*) to implement the decree – which Metaxas had said would be reconsidered – on prohibiting goat grazing in forests – and with a vengeance. Now goats were to be gradually banned from any forest comprising at least 50 percent fir. The application of the ban would come into effect on 23 April 1937 and was to be fully implemented by 23 April 1941, the pace depending both on the region as well as on the ratio of fir forests to total grazing grounds in each area.¹⁰⁸ In September 1937, these instructions and other provisions were enshrined in Obligatory Law 875/1937.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the Agriculture Ministry was to authorise special grazing areas for the domestic animals of local communities while the cutting of branches from forest trees to be used as fodder (*κλάρισμα*) was banned. Local government, police and forestry authorities were allowed to issue a number of restrictions or bans concerning the grazing of any animal in “state and private forests, partially forested meadows, and mountainous grass meadows” for a variety of reasons, while goat herders owing 80 to 200 animals and wealth of less than 50,000 drachmas, were to be given – if they slaughtered their animals – up to 1.5 hectares of public lands for cultivation (or 3 hectares for planting fruit-bearing trees).¹¹⁰ As Grispos rightly notes, the result was that virtually all forested areas in the country were no longer available for free grazing.¹¹¹

Although they were the inspiration of Kontos, these measures were of course fully endorsed by his political supervisors. Metaxas publicly defended the restrictions on goat grazing in a number of public speeches. Speaking in December 1936 at the inauguration of an irrigation project in the Thessalian plain, he noted that “every family must ... produce the necessary fodder for the development of indoor (*οικόσιτος*) animal husbandry ... since you well realise

¹⁰⁷ Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, 296, 330.

¹⁰⁸ *Ελεύθερον Βήμα*, 29 March 1937.

¹⁰⁹ “Αναγκαστικός Νόμος 875 περί βοσκής εντός δασών, μερικών δασοσκεπών εκτάσεων και μη πεδικών χορτολιβαδίων,” *ΦΕΚ*, no. 379A, 28 September 1937, 2465.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, 297.

that the time of nomadic animal husbandry is little by little passing away”.¹¹² In Arta in June 1937, commenting on plans to regulate the flow of the local river, he asked peasants “to conserve the forests around the rivers. Obey the measures we will take for preserving the forests, since without forested mountainous areas ... the rivers will bring down ... rocks and pebbles”.¹¹³ And more forcefully, little over a month after Obligatory Law 875/1937 came into force, Metaxas – speaking on the occasion of yet another river project and stressing the importance of forests in preserving the works – declared in October 1937 that this may only happen by controlling “the rearing of goats, which bring about a terrible disaster”:

I know that by thus saying I may not be pleasing to the majority, since the goat is an animal which costs nothing to its owner and gives him so much – milk, cheese, skin, hair and so on. Yet the disaster [the goat causes] is also great. Goat rearing and forests cannot possibly coexist. We must decide which one of the two we prefer. The forest or the goat? We must choose. I do not mean that the inhabitant of the mountainous areas should lose a mean of his sustenance. Share [your goats] among yourselves, swap or sell [them], keep a number which may be fed at your home, your hut, your village dwelling, not in the forests ... The forests, now that I’m speaking to you, I do consider the forests only in terms of the common good. I do not consider them as the natural decoration of our land, [I’m not] looking forward to the nice sight they offer, but I consider them in terms of their usefulness in meeting so many human needs ... [Once the forests return, among others] the rivers will stop destroying the plain, that most beautiful of places, which mainly provides the means of life.¹¹⁴

This strong position against goats was received with mixed feelings by the various stakeholders. *Δασική Ζωή* – a magazine published by the younger generation of foresters and pitched to the wider public interested in forests¹¹⁵ – republished an extract of Metaxas’ speech on its front page, noting that

the understanding, by the whole of the society, of that paramount truth [that is, that “goat rearing and forests cannot coexist”] is an important achievement of the Forestry Agency. They who have fought for this achievement, who know what sacrifices this victory entailed, they have every right to be merry and proud of this felicitous result.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις 1936–1941*, vol. 1, 1936–1938 (Athens: Govosti, 1969), 142. First published 1937.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 256–57.

¹¹⁵ Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, 321–22.

¹¹⁶ *Δασική Ζωή*, July–September 1937, 124.

For others, forest destruction had been blamed on the wrong culprit. In a humorous article written by “a prominent veterinarian”, the goat defended itself by claiming that

I am not the enemy of your forests. Someone else is – and you know him too well ... It is you, the people: the peasants, the charcoal burners, the lumberjacks, the [pine] resin collectors and so many other uneducated [people] and exploiters of your forest wealth.¹¹⁷

The author added the time-long argument that a great part of the barren Greek terrain could only be exploited through goats; abolishing them would reduce the national income. Kontos himself replied to these criticisms, pointing out that goats would continue to graze in those areas that could not be otherwise exploited, but not in the forests. Forested areas, reforested and scientifically managed, would provide an income “ten to twenty times higher than the one achieved from goat grazing”.¹¹⁸ In similar vein, Kyriakos, the agriculture minister, in his 1940 account of the country’s forest policy under the Metaxas regime, wrote:

Many protested against this law ... claiming that the well-thought reduction [of goats] amounts to their total extermination and the ruin of a great national revenue ... In the Land of Pan, the goats will not be exterminated. They enjoy, and will continue to enjoy, vast areas of bushes and shrubs, one third of the country’s total area ... in the provinces [goats] are already being profitably replaced, especially by sheep, cows and even pigs [grazing] in the oak forests. Freed from the goats, the forests are returning an equal, if not higher, revenue compared to goat grazing, even in their current condition; surely, as they improve over time, they will return five times greater, while the most precious among them, such as the sylvan reserves (*δρυμοί*), [will return] even ten times greater.¹¹⁹

Yet the reality on the ground seemed to have been quite gloomy for goats and their owners. The magazine for the Greek Society for the Protection of Animals reported in December 1937 that “we are informed that following the decision to totally exterminate the goats by 1941, pregnant and ready-to-give-birth goats are being slaughtered daily, having little kids – which in most cases are about to be born – removed from their wombs.”¹²⁰ In 1939, an agronomist, Christos Vasmatzidis, quoting reports from some regional prefects in support

¹¹⁷ *Ελεύθερον Βήμα*, 25 December 1937.

¹¹⁸ *Δασική Ζωή*, January 1938, 7.

¹¹⁹ Georgios Kyriakos, *Δασική πολιτική άλλωτε και τώρα* (Athens: Agriculture Ministry, 1940), 24.

¹²⁰ *Ο φίλος των ζώων*, no. 31, December 1937, 82. The name of the organisation was Εταιρεία Προστασίας των Ζώων.

of his claims,¹²¹ concluded that locally specific transition plans had not been developed – and thus the breaking up of the nomadic herds created

total anarchy [in the countryside], with every dissolved little local economic unit – being deprived of the framework necessary for its survival and development and feeling that it is choking [to death] – crying in despair and asking to be saved by the continuous assistance and protection of the Agricultural Bank or any other authority.¹²²

Thus the number of goats dropped drastically (fig. 2). Official statistics show a 20-percent reduction in the number of goats between 1936 and 1938 (compared to just a 3.5-percent drop in the number of sheep), and their numbers surely fell even further over the following years. Though some authors claim that goats were eventually completely eliminated (for example, Grispos claims that all of Greece’s “approximately 5 million goats were slaughtered between 1939 and 1940, with no benefit to the national economy”),¹²³ no official data supporting this extreme statement has come to light.

Conclusion

The proscription of goats in interwar Greece was the end result of the wish to “modernise” the Greek countryside, advocated by a professional body, the foresters, and espoused by an ideological camp, the authoritarian Metaxas regime. Greek foresters, desperate to save the country’s forests from decline, had for years campaigned against this particular animal. Surely, and the foresters never ceased to stress this, the forests were suffering from a number of other causes, including arson, slash-and-burn agriculture and unauthorized logging. Yet, all these were punishable under law, while (goat) grazing in forests was a *legitimate* activity and one which, due to the sheer number of the animals and the structure of the Greek peasant economy, had – in the foresters’ view – the most negative effect on the forest. In 1906, Samios, the head of the Forestry Agency, calculated that fires, clearing and encroachment resulted in the loss of approximately 9,000 hectares of state forests per year; grazing alone, which “totally deforests or degrades the forest vegetation”, was responsible for a loss of at least 10,000 hectares.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Christos Vasmatazidis, *Η τεχνική και οικονομική της αιγοτροφίας εν Ελλάδι* (Athens: Flamma, 1939), 6–8.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 51. See also Georgoulas Beikos, *Η λαϊκή εξουσία στην ελεύθερη Ελλάδα*, vol. 1 (Athens: Themelio, 1979) for a personal account on the impact of the goat ban.

¹²³ Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, 297.

¹²⁴ Samios, *Το μέλλον των ελληνικών δασών*, 230–31.

While acknowledging that the damage caused to forests was due to the primitive and underdeveloped character of Greek agriculture and animal husbandry, and that it would fade away as the country developed, the Greek foresters of the early twentieth century could not simply wait for the tide of time to change everything. Not least because this structural change could come too late for the Greek forests. Thus, Samios gloomily forecast in 1906 that, if nothing changed, within 25 years half of Greece's forests would be lost, resulting in disastrous river flooding and with detrimental effects on the country's forest revenue, cultivation, climate and public health.¹²⁵ Therefore, foresters embarked on a campaign to persuade the ruling elites to take the necessary measures to speed up the "modernisation" of the country, a development which would set Greece on higher cultural level and would also provide higher revenues. Regulating grazing in the forests – and, in effect, the animal husbandry of the country – was a pivotal aspect of this campaign. It is important to note that the foresters were very keen to demarcate forest grazing as *their* scientific turf, in a conscious attempt to legitimise their role in dealing with it. For example, the February 1936 editorial of *Δασική Ζωή*, titled "Animal husbandry and forestry", which appeared in the midst of the reactions following the recent ban on goat grazing in fir forests, argued that regulating "nomadic animal husbandry" was part of foresters' "mandate and specialisation" and was not to be left to agronomists and veterinarians.¹²⁶

Greek foresters were also aware that the political establishment was not receptive to their calls. Listing the reasons "why, to date, the state has not given the proper attention to the forests", Samios in 1906 included parliamentarism, which was operating in a society not yet "perfected" enough to produce voters and MPs capable of "comprehending and appreciating [and] putting [the common good] above their own interest".¹²⁷ Over 20 years later, Samios' successor as head of the Forestry Agency, Kontos, in the second edition of his 1929 book on forest policy, retained his original 1910 prologue that asked rhetorically: "Who would be that national political man and which would be that parliament ... that would seek to ... implement the policy necessary ... for forest production [to] be cleansed and rejuvenated?"¹²⁸ And the answer, obvious yet unuttered, was: no one. The electoral power of the country's agro-pastoralist communities was so great that no elected MP would dare to limit the herds'

¹²⁵ Ibid., 232–34.

¹²⁶ *Δασική Ζωή*, February 1936, 21. Emphasis in the original.

¹²⁷ Samios, *Το μέλλον των ελληνικών δασών*, 64.

¹²⁸ Petros Kontos, *Δασική πολιτική ιδία εν Ελλάδι, μετά στοιχείων αγροτικής πολιτικής*, 2nd expanded ed. (Athens: Typ. P.D. Sakellariou, 1929)

sylvan domains. It is quite telling that on the day after the 1936 elections, the *Έθνος* newspaper, still unaware of the fact that such a legal measure had *indeed* been taken by the caretaker government two days earlier and on the eve of the elections, commented: “We are saddened that [the Agriculture Ministry] has left to pass so many opportunities for [enabling] obligatory laws, without taking any measure to get rid of the goats, these bad demons of our forests.”¹²⁹ A couple of weeks later, the minister responsible for introducing the aforementioned obligatory law, Benakis, stated in an interview that this extra-parliamentary move was necessary since MPs, who were under pressure from their constituents, would not dare to vote such a measure.¹³⁰

In Metaxas the foresters’ quest found not only someone who had no parliamentary or electoral worries but also a man who ardently wished to “modernise” Greece – or, to be more precise, to develop it. In the Metaxas regime’s discourse, outdoor and transhumant grazing (of goats) was a relic of the past that had to be swept away, both for economic as well as cultural reasons. Babis Alivizatos, secretary general of the Agriculture Ministry, opined in 1937 that “at the level of economic and industrial civilisation that [our] country has now reached, it is no longer possible to continue exploiting the forest in the current way [through grazing]”; the revenue from grazing was much lower than what could be earned “even through the smallest forest exploitation”, that of taking firewood, thus “change is necessary, both from a national and an economic perspective”.¹³¹ While Kyriakos, the agriculture minister, complained in 1940 that

the great increase of the number of goats especially over the last 30 years has not only been a public danger to the forests and to the tree plantations of the country, but it has also discredited Greece, since foreigners could see that [our country] held the record for goat grazing among all other European countries, etc., and thus found herself at the lowest level of civilisation.¹³²

Metaxas himself shared these views concerning the suboptimal economic returns from transhumant animal husbandry, but his interest in forest preservation was quite different from the foresters’ emphasis on the economic value of

¹²⁹ *Έθνος*, 27 January 1936.

¹³⁰ *ΕΣΒ*, 28 April 1936, 84. See also n. 104.

¹³¹ Babis Alivizatos, *Κράτος και γεωργική πολιτική* (Athens: Agriculture Ministry, 1937), 432–33. According to the Agriculture Ministry, the revenue from goat grazing amounted to 2 drachmas per hectare compared to 100 drachmas/hectare and 30 drachmas/hectare for oak and fir forests, respectively. Figures from *Αγροτική Ηχώ*, 1 January 1938.

¹³² Kyriakos, *Δασική πολιτική*, 23.

forests. In his public speeches, Metaxas explicitly related the protection of the forests to what he considered the basis of Greece's national wealth and survival: agriculture. Frequently mentioning that his parents and grandparents were farmers – and of being proud of that – Metaxas, who was declared the country's "First Farmer" in July 1937,¹³³ never failed to stress the importance of agriculture for the nation's wellbeing. At one speech in 1937 he argued that the nation could double its population in the years to come "and still live happily within its current frontiers as long as we cultivate the land in a scientific, and systematic, and intensive, persistent way".¹³⁴ In May 1938 he claimed that "there is no way of creating wealth in Greece other than agriculture".¹³⁵ Thus, in his public addresses he very often drew a causal line between banning goats, conserving forests, avoiding torrents and landslides, and, consequently, protecting cultivated lands.¹³⁶ Addressing a farmers conference in December 1937, he noted that "it is impossible for large-scale animal husbandry [that is, nomadic large herds] to continue forever while agriculture develops in the way it will develop in Greece". He went on to proclaim that "it is impossible for the goat to coexist with modern civilisation".¹³⁷ And for Metaxas, this "modern civilisation" encompassed both the modernising hydraulic/irrigation projects his government was planning but also the newly cultivated lowlands, the asset which would safeguard Greece's survival and future: both of them risked being destroyed by the torrents coming down from the goat-deforested mountains.¹³⁸ It is in this light that Metaxas' most famous saying regarding goats, from a speech he gave while turning the first sod for yet another dam-reservoir in August 1939, should be interpreted:

For the goat we have been doing what we can and we will restrict it. I am very sorry and saddened for the herders who have such animals, which have such a frugal diet, need so little and return so much. Yet [by doing thus] the destruction ceased. If we had let the goat free, there would be no trees, all these would not exist, [this] area would have been covered by pebbles and sand. And there would be no Greeks in Greece – just goats. This is something that you certainly do not want; it is better to reduce [the number of goats] so that people may live.¹³⁹

¹³³ Marina Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth: Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), 52.

¹³⁴ Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις*, 209.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.

¹³⁶ See his speeches on 16 June 1937 and 31 October 1937.

¹³⁷ Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις*, 302.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις 1936–1941*, vol. 2, 1939–1941 (Athens: Govosti, 1969), 129–30. First published 1939.

Once the Greek foresters' modernising agenda fitted with Metaxas' vision of the "new" Greece, the fate of goat grazing in forests was sealed. Yet the decision to drive out the millions of Greek goats within the span of just four years rests mainly with Kontos, the most prominent forester of his generation. Grispos, recalling his time under Kontos in the Forestry Agency, recounts how he told his supervisor that the phasing out of goats could have been extended over a longer period, in order to spare the waste of such a valuable animal capital: "Kontos answered: 'Yes, surely it could be done, yet we must hurry since we do not know how short-lived this government may be – and we will never again get an opportunity such as this one.'"¹⁴⁰ Grispos blames Kontos' ego for this hasty procedure: "Kontos was interested in connecting his name with such a cultural scheme. Because banning goat rearing in Greece was neither a forestry nor an agricultural issue, but a broader cultural one."¹⁴¹ But Grispos seems to underestimate the fact that, precisely because this was *indeed* a "broader cultural" issue, the ban could not come soon enough for those primarily involved: the foresters' community (and Kontos), who had been fighting for a generation to "educate" the Greeks on the importance of their forests, and the Metaxas regime, which was eager to create the "New State". Furthermore, the 1930s had been a period when "protecting the green" featured highly both in the social and political agendas. This is corroborated by the increase in the number of articles in the press and the holding of relevant conferences,¹⁴² the proliferation of branches of the Friends of the Forest Union around Greece (numbering 124 in 1930)¹⁴³ as well as by the promotion of reforestation by the Metaxas regime.¹⁴⁴ Next to them were other stakeholders for which the removal of the goats from the Greek forests was an economic priority. Thus, in May 1936, the board of the Greek Electricity Companies Union publicly defended Agriculture Minister Benakis' decree banning goat grazing, noting that:

Especially for the electrical economy of the country and the general development of the standard of living of the Greek people ... to maintain goat grazing is truly disastrous since, as long as it exists, [the development of] any hydraulic projects can be ruled out; and they are the national electrical economy's only future alternative [if] the country is to break free of its dependence on foreign [providers].¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, 297.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 294–95.

¹⁴³ Stefanos Maris, *Αι αναδασώσεις* (Athens: Agriculture Ministry, 1931), 63–67.

¹⁴⁴ Petrakis, *Metaxas Myth*, 111–14.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in *Δασική Ζωή*, August–September 1936, 154

In this context, dealing with what had been framed as the “scourge”, “destroyer”, “demon” and “Satan” of forests could not have been anything other than a matter of urgency.

Thus, starting in late 1936, the expulsion of goats from Greek forests progressed in what seemed an inexorable way. In 1939, a newspaper, commenting on the decision to ban live goat imports in Greece, wrote that “little by little the goat is convicted to extinction. One day it will exist no more, but only in our parlance, as a metaphor and a taunt against ugliness – *goats*.”¹⁴⁶ The milestone was set for 23 April 1941, by when the elimination of goats from Greek fir forests was to be completed. Yet, when the day arrived, Metaxas and Kontos were dead while Greece itself was breathing its last as a free state, following its invasion by Nazi Germany on 6 April. The goat survived them all, and by 2022 some 30 percent of the goats in the EU (about 3.1 million) could be found in Greece – but not in the country’s forests, where they had dwelt since antiquity.¹⁴⁷

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¹⁴⁶ Σκριπ, 23 May 1939, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁷ Goats population: Annual data, Eurostat, accessed 22 February 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/619ff223-695f-4ffa-a34e-72dbf7032c19>.

