

The Honey Bee and Apian Imagery in Classical Literature

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Abstract

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This work is a cultural and literary history of the bee and apian imagery in ancient Greece and Rome, and seeks to offer a better understanding of how apian imagery is used throughout antiquity. In three chapters, I explore such diverse topics as the nature of women, the erotic, politics, prophesy, poetry, and the divine, using natural historical, scientific, and agricultural texts, as well as fables and proverbs, to shed light on the conceptualization of the hive in ancient literature. Building on the more narrowly focused scholarship already written on apian imagery, this project offers a comprehensive and unified study, which brings together mythology, science, and literature to look at the ways in which authors as diverse as Hesiod, Xenophon, Virgil, and Varro use the bee to explore human nature and the relationship between humans and the divine, and how these authors draw on a shared core understanding and set of assumptions, when using the image of the bee.

The first chapter examines Greek and Roman mythology involving the bee. It builds on the influential work of Cook,¹ which argued that myths involving bees created a conception of the insect in the mind of an average Greek as being a chthonic creature, particularly associated with the soul. My examination looks at both Greek and Roman mythology, as well as some cultic practices and literary associations, and reveals that the nature of the bee in mythology is not only associated with the underworld, but that it is also tied strongly to the earth and fertility, as well as the heavenly sphere. It suggests that the bee was conceived of as a creature that could cross the boundaries between different realms and mediate between the world of the divine and the world of humans, serving as a liminal creature with strong associations with ancient earth goddesses and the will of Zeus.

The second chapter looks at political imagery involving the bee and the ways in which hierarchical organization of the hive influences the popular conception of the bee, as it is manifested in the literature of Greece and Rome. An examination of natural historical texts reveals that the organization of the hive was conceived of as political in nature. This conception led to the use of bees, broadly, and apiculture, specifically, as a means of discussing and exploring politics. Apicultural texts such as Aristotle, Pliny, and Columella were influenced by what they conceive of as political activity within the hive, while literary authors such as Varro and Virgil used literary tropes associating the bee with politics to develop complex allegories for the Roman political system, employing the language and methods of apicultural and natural historical texts.

The final chapter examines the connections between woman and bees in Greek literature, as well as the erotic implications of bees, which are often connected to women. In it, I note that

¹ Cook (1895).

a proverb (found in Sappho) and a fable (recorded by Phaedrus) both depict the bee as a species made up of good and evil. The workers and the honey are the good, which the hive provides, while the lazy drone and the bee's sting are the evils that exist alongside the good. This makes the bee an apt image for women and *eros*, as conceptualized by Hesiod, Semonides, Sappho, Pseudo-Theocritus, and an Anacreontic poem. This chapter also examines how the lore surrounding bees helps to enhance depictions of the female ideal, such as chastity and diligence, though the works of Hesiod and Semonides use the bee to cast doubt on the existence of this ideal. It ends with an examination of the *Oeconomicus*, in which Xenophon builds on these previous bee images and reworks them to recast economic prosperity as the highest good a woman can achieve, to the exclusion of more traditional virtues, which the bee images was used to enhance.

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Introduction

Honey is what first drew the attention of early humans to the bee. As early as the Mesolithic period, there is evidence of humans' pursuit of honey and its importance to us.² A number of cave paintings in Spain show people ascending rickety ladders up to hives swarming with bees, and are roughly dated to sometime between 8,000 and 2,000 B.C.E.³ Similar Stone Age depictions appear in South Africa, as well.⁴ Apart from the obvious benefit of honey— that is the nutritional value— the substance must have seemed strangely magical, which it is, in certain ways. Before the discovery of sugar cane, its sweetness was comparable only to that of the date. But unlike the date, honey does not decay or rot and has antiseptic properties. It was used in recipes, as medicine, in religious practices, and as an offering throughout the Mediterranean world, and given the countless uses of the substance, it is not surprising the lengths to which early humans would go to obtain small amounts of honey, even before the development of apiculture.

With this early evidence for the burgeoning relationship between humans and bee, it is only natural that apiculture would soon follow after the theft of wild hives. The earliest evidence of beekeeping is an Egyptian relief from the sun temple of Neuserre, Abu Ghorab, from 2,400 B.C.E.⁵ The relief depicts bees, hives, and several men handling and packaging honey in an organized manner which suggests that beekeeping⁶ might have been an established practice in

² It has been argued by Pager (1976) that paintings from the Paleolithic period suggest honey-hunting, but I have defaulted to the later example, as its depiction is not disputed.

³ Crane (1983) 21. For discussion of the dating of these images, see Dams (1978).

⁴ Crane (1983) 23.

⁵ Crane and Graham (1985a) 24, Crane (1983) 36.

⁶ I use "beekeeping" here and throughout to refer to apicultural practices that is the actual keeping of and care for bees by humans, what might be called "domestication" (though bees are never tamed, in the way taht the term generally implies), rather than the

Egypt for some time already.⁷ However, the first archaeological evidence of an apiary is significantly later, in the mid-10th or early 9th Century B.C.E.⁸ In Tel Rehov, Israel, an extensive apiary was discovered, which may have contained as many as a hundred straw and clay cylindrical hives.⁹ Those that were excavated were found stacked in horizontal rows, about three tiers high, with small holes in the lids for the coming and going of bees, and evidence of wax, honey, and sometimes even bees within.¹⁰ Cultic items found nearby, including an altar depicting a fertility goddess, has led to speculation about Israelite cultic practices relating to bees, honey, and beeswax.¹¹ The existence of these practices would not be surprising, given the prevalence of honey in ancient cultic practices throughout the Mediterranean world and the strong tie, particularly in the Near East, between bees and fertility goddesses.¹²

Bees and Beekeeping in Ancient Greece and Rome

By the time we have mention of beekeeping in ancient Greece and Rome, apiculture seems to be both widespread and a highly developed industry. Hesiod is generally accepted as the earliest literary evidence for beekeeping in Greece. In his *Theogony*, his comparison between women and lazy men and the drones reveals an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the hive, a knowledge that suggests an awareness of beekeeping.¹³ In addition, Crane and Graham note that the words Hesiod uses for "hive" (σμῆνος, σίμβλος) are consistent with later terms denoting

harvesting of honey from wild bees. By "apiology", I mean the study of bees and bee behavior.

⁷ For a detailed overview of the pictorial evidence for beekeeping in the ancient world, see Crane and Graham (1985a), (1985b).

⁸ See Webography: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁹ See Webography: Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

¹⁰ See Webography: Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

¹¹ See Webography: Hebrew University of Jerusalem

¹² For a discussion of bees, honey, and religion, see Chapter One.

¹³ Ransome (1939) 76.

human-made hives (versus nests) and that the description is congruous with beekeeping practices.¹⁴ In addition to casual literary evidence, a number of beekeeping guides, many of which are now lost, existed throughout the Mediterranean world. In Greek, there was Philiscus of Thasos, Aristomachus of Soli, who wrote a *Melissourgica*, and Nicander, whose work on the subject bore the same title.¹⁵ Columella mentions Mago the Carthaginian, who wrote a treatise on farming that included a section on beekeeping, as well as Celsus and Hyginus, and Columella himself spent a book of his farming treatise on beekeeping. A number of authors offer natural historical discussions of bees, also, most notably Aristotle and Pliny the Elder, and a large number of authors, including Varro, and Virgil, describe beekeeping practices in detail, as part of a wider discussion, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.¹⁶

While these sources only attest to the popularity of the subject of beekeeping, the widespread nature of the practice itself can be seen both in the archaeological record, and in the references to laws and legal discussions regarding beekeeping. Hives were made out of a variety of substances, many of which were perishable, such as bark, wood and wicker,¹⁷ but both intact and fragmentary remains of terra cotta and other ceramic hives have been found all over the Mediterranean world.¹⁸ Existing hives are generally cylindrical in shape, often resembling amphorae, and were either placed on their sides, which allowed for stacking many in a small space, such as at Tel Rehov, or upright, which required space between each hive. Horizontal

¹⁴ Crane and Graham (1985a) 34-5.

¹⁵ For more on Philiscus and Aristomachus, see Crane and Graham (1985a) 35. Both authors are mentioned by Pliny, *NH*, 11.8.

¹⁶ For more on the literary and pictorial sources for beekeeping in Greece and Rome, see Crane and Graham (1985a), Crane and Graham (1985b).

¹⁷ See Crane (1983) 52, for a summary of the types of hives mentioned in Roman texts and their sources. Jones, Graham, Sackett, and Geroulanos (1973) 404-408, also contains a discussion of beekeeping in ancient sources with a focus on hives.

¹⁸ Crane and Graham (1985b) 148-154.

hives had lids over their mouths, with small holes to allow for the bees' passage, whereas upright hives had openings at the top or bottom of the side of the hive and were presumably more mobile than their stacking counterparts.¹⁹ Horizontal hives are more copious in the archaeological record than upright ones, though Columella indicates that mobility was a desirable quality in a hive, in case of barrenness arising in the place where the hives were currently placed (Col. 9.6).

In regard to laws, Plutarch tells us that Solon included a passage on beekeeping in his laws, declaring that one had to place his hive at least 300 feet away from those set down by another (Plut. *Sol.* 23). For the Romans, legal references to the bee occur in terms of ownership. According to Pliny, all animals exist in two forms: wild and domesticated, but he admits that some animals, like the bee, are neither wholly tamed, nor wild (*NH* 8.213). Herein lies the difficulty with the bee: how does one determine the ownership of an animal that is neither entirely tamed nor wild and cannot and should not be fully enclosed?²⁰ Though the exact means of defining the bee in terms of wildness and determining its ownership were hotly debated, Roman law seemed to come down on the side of protecting a beekeeper against damages.²¹ The Roman investment in securing the beekeeper against loss suggests that importance was attached to protecting the lucrative honey-production industry in the Roman world.

The importance of and interest in beekeeping in both Greek and Roman cultures was due, in part, to the number of products that one could derive from hives and the potential profitability of those products. Apicius, who wrote in the 4th Century C.E. and provides one of the oldest sources for ancient recipes, includes honey as an ingredient in more than 150 of his recipes (his

¹⁹ For further discussions of the appearance of hives in Greece and Rome and images, see Anderson-Stojanović and Jones (2002), Crane and Graham (1985b) 149.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this problem and how it is discussed in various Roman texts, see Frier (1983).

²¹ E.g. Ulp. 9 Disp., D. 9.2.49; 19 ad. Ed., D. 10.2.8.1

work includes 467 recipes total), which amounts to about 33% of his total recipes.²² His text includes several references to honey as an important preservative, as well.²³ Likewise, honey was hugely significant for its medicinal properties, both true and believed. Apicius recommends a honey mixture as a laxative (Apicius 3.2.5), whereas Pliny suggests its use to treat eye diseases, ulcers, and intestinal ailments (Pliny, *NH*, 11.14).²⁴ Hippocrates uses honey in his salves to care for and clean ulcers, as well as to treat sores on the glans penis (Hp. *Ulc.* 5). He also describes its use for fevers accompanied by hiccups (Hp. *Acut. Sp.* 10), empyema (an accumulation of pus in a body cavity, Hp. *Acut. Sp.* 30), dropsy (Hp. *Acut. Sp.* 39), and hemorrhoids (Hp. *Haem.* 2, 8), among other ailments.

Other bee-made substances, like propolis and wax, were popular and widely used in Ancient Greece and Rome, as well. Propolis, also known as "bee-glue" and used by bees to seal their honeycombs, was employed by physicians in a number of medicaments, according to Varro and Pliny (Plin. *NH* 11.6), and thus was rather expensive (Varro *DRR* 3.16.23). Pliny describes several uses for propolis, including for extracting bee stingers or other foreign bodies, dispersing tumors, softening hard spots, mitigating pain in the tendons, and healing ulcers (Plin. *NH* 22.50). Celsus recommends the employment of propolis in treatments for abscesses (Cels. 3.1), to promote suppuration (Cels. 3.1), to cause discharge (Cels. 12.1), as an extractive (Cels. 19.15), and to treat lesions (Cels. 28.11). Pliny mentions medical applications for certain types of

²² This figure does not include recipes in which Apicius says one can add honey, if one likes, and it does not include the addition to a recipe of items that already include honey. For example, broths often include honey, however, I have not counted references to adding broth in this figure.

²³ Apicius recommends using honey to preserve meat, quinces, and various fruits (recipes 1.8, 1.19, and 1.20).

²⁴ According to Pliny, the substance has not yet become honey, at the stage at which it is best as a medicament (11.14).

beeswax (Plin. *NH* 21.47), as well, though its applications were much broader than those of propolis, and included everyday uses such as in wax tablets, candles, figurines, and sealants.

Yet, despite the prevalence of beekeeping and the great number of bee products on the market in the ancient world, a Greek or Roman individual's scope of knowledge on the honeybee and the hive was quite different from what someone today might consider common knowledge. Modern science has illuminated and changed our perspective on the nature of these creatures to a huge extent. We take for granted that the queen bee is a female and that bees produce offspring through intercourse, but in the ancient world, such facts as these were the source of mystery, legend, theory, and debate. Yet, still, their knowledge was vast and their contact with the bee generally more intimate and common than that of the every day modern individual. This significant distance between our common knowledge and assumptions and theirs requires any conversation about the ancient bee to begin with an attempt to recapture at least part of the ancient standpoint. A basic familiarity with their science and lore begins to reveal just how differently bees were viewed by the Greeks and Romans, and it is only through a familiarity with their conception and understanding of the bee and the hive that one can begin to understand how and why bees were such a prevalent and important source of imagery in many of the canonical works from antiquity.

Aristotle provides the foundation of the ancient Greeks and Romans' understanding of bees and bee behavior and his studies were highly influential, particularly on later natural historians, like Pliny the Elder, who dedicated a large section of his *Natural History* to his discussion of bees. These authors' detailed works reveal the scope of knowledge on the bee in the ancient world, but also indicate some of the confusions and misconceptions that seeped into the body of ancient apiological knowledge. The most significant examples occur with regard to

bee reproduction and the role and nature of the queen bee in the hive. It was not until the 17th Century C.E. that the queen bee was definitively declared a female, when the Dutch anatomist, Jan Swammerdam, determined her sex through dissection, but even after this discovery, the exact means of fertilization was still unclear.²⁵ In the late 18th Century C.E., the Swiss naturalist, François Huber and his assistant, François Burnens, first observed and recorded information about the queen's mating flight and only then was the mystery laid to rest.²⁶ Up to the point of these discoveries, there was a great deal of speculation regarding apian gender and reproduction, much of which was discussed by Aristotle, who was considered the authority on the subject many centuries into the common era.

Aristotle delivers a number of theories regarding the queen and reproduction in his discussions of the bee. Though he refers to the queen with the masculine term king or leader (βασιλεύς, ἡγεμών), he is careful to note that some call it the mother,²⁷ and affirms that the king does, in fact, play a role in reproduction (*HA* 553b). Ancient authors, by and large, employed the same or equivalent terms (βασιλεύς, ἡγεμών, *rex*, *dux*),²⁸ including authors prior to Aristotle's time, suggesting that the name of "king" had become standardized by the time he wrote and influenced his own selection of the term. However, his acknowledgement that there are those who call the king a mother indicates that there were some who believed the king to be female, and thus it is worth cautioning against the assumption that the masculine terms "king" and "leader" indicated a universal belief that the queen bee is a male. Rather, it seems to be the case

²⁵ Grout (1946) 73. For a discussion of Swammerdam's life and observations on the bee, see Wilson (2007) 95-100.

²⁶ Grout (1946) 103, Wilson (2007), 102. For a discussion of Huber's life and Huber and Burnens' study of the bee, see Wilson (2007) 100-103.

²⁷ It is worth noting that, according to Aristotle, the queen of the wasps is referred to commonly as the mother (*HA*, 9.41). For a discussion of the scholarship regarding gender and ideology in Aristotle, see Mayhew (1999).

²⁸ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the terms for the queen bee.

that there were those who suspected the queen's true gender, and those who simply assumed the largest bee to be male. Both views were likely based on assumptions, rather than observations, though it is possible that a rather diligent observer might have seen the queen's mating flight or return to the hive, laden with sperm. If such observations were made, definitive knowledge was the exception, not the rule, and the common beliefs were speculative.

In regard to apian generation, Aristotle says that bees either bring their young from elsewhere, where they are spontaneously generated or born from another animal, or reproduce themselves, or fetch some young and generate the others (*GA* 759a). According to Aristotle, each theory has its supporters: some say the bees fetch their young from various plants or flowers (*HA* 553a), while others claim the drones are male and the workers female, or vice versa (*HA* 553a), and still others believe their reproduction is a combination of the two; thus in the later case the drones are fetched, the workers are born from the king (*HA* 553a), and the king generates other kings (*GA* 759a). Evidence of the theory that bees fetch their young from flowers is found elsewhere, often in poetry, but it seems likely that theories involving copulation were more accepted, at least amongst the more educated who were familiar with works like Aristotle's and those who kept bees and had observed their behavior.

In his *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle tries to determine the most likely means of generation for the bees, using various observations of the animal kingdom and his own logic to narrow the possibilities down to his conclusion. He dismisses the notion that bees are produced spontaneously, based on the fact that other animals only trouble themselves over offspring that they have produced themselves, and young bees do not appear without other bees to fetch them (*GA* 759a). Based on his beliefs regarding gender, he discards the theory that the drones and workers reproduce with one another, since a female is not likely to bear a weapon, as a worker

bears a stinger, and the male is not likely to serve his offspring, as the workers serve the drones and kings (*GA* 759b). Further complicating such a theory is the fact that bees have never been observed copulating (*GA* 759b). He also notes that the brood does not exist in a hive without the king, thus he determines that the king must be central to the generation of the hive (*GA* 759b). His conclusion is that the kings generate both other kings and workers, whereas the workers generate drones and the drones produce no offspring (*GA* 760a).

Later natural histories were influenced by Aristotle's careful study of the bees, and Pliny offers the best study of reproductive theory regarding the bees, after that of Aristotle. He notes that some believe the king to be the only male and all the others females, which explains why no young are produced without the king, but he dismisses this, since he cannot understand how the drone would be produced from the king (*NH* 11.16). Pliny also mentions the possibility of bees arising from flowers and he notes that this seems closer to the truth than any previously mentioned theory, but sees problems with this theory as well (*NH* 11.16). Unlike Aristotle, he does not attempt to settle the dispute, and moves on without supporting any particular hypothesis.

The function of the drones within the hive was also a source of confusion for both Greeks and Romans. As Aristotle's discussion of the theories of bee reproduction indicates, most did not believe the drone had anything to do with reproduction, and as early as the time of Hesiod, it had been observed that the drones seem to lack a clear function or duty in the hive (*Hes. WD*, 304, *Th.* 594-6). Pliny refers to them as "imperfect bees" (*NH* 11.11), and their seeming purposelessness led to their use as a proverbial emblem of laziness, waste, and selfish consumption.²⁹ The drones were often juxtaposed with their diligent hive-mates, the workers,

²⁹ Arist. *Vesp.* 1114-6; *Aesopica*, 504 Perry; Plat. *Laws* 901a, *Rep.* 552c; Xen. *Oec.* 17.14-15.

who served as the hard-working counterpart in many of these images, with whose unending work the drone is able to sustain itself.

An Overview of Bee-Focused Scholarship

The significance of the bee in classical literature has long been recognized and served as a popular subject of scholarly inquiry, though there has been no thorough and cohesive study.³⁰ In the late 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, there was a surge of interest in the role and symbolism of the bee in Greek and Roman literature, but this early scholarship was largely cataloguing, and contained little more than detailed and exhaustive records of the references to bees in a given context. Weniger compiled and discussed references to bees in mythology, while Ransome took his exploration a step farther and offered a bit of analysis, as well.³¹ Elderkin's work discussed the connection between bees and Artemis, providing a thorough outline of the references in literature,³² and Fraser compiled the discussions of beekeeping in classical texts in an attempt to reconstruct and understand Greek and Roman apicultural practices and beliefs.³³ Similarly, Hudson-Williams compiled the references to the king bee's gender to determine who believed what on the topic.³⁴ Like Roscher, whose dictionary of mythology includes an extensive entry on references to various Melissai in mythology,³⁵ most authors were primarily concerned with detailing the information that exists and relating it to a given subject, most often

³⁰ Some chapters contain overviews and discussions of relevant author-specific scholarship. Here, I provide an overview only of the scholarship primarily focused on bees.

³¹ Weniger (1871), Ransome (1939).

³² Elderkin (1939).

³³ Fraser (1951).

³⁴ Hudson-Williams (1935).

³⁵ Roscher (1897).

mythology.³⁶ However, others, like Cook, not only compiled information but also began to pave the way for how we understand the role of the bee in literature. Cook pointed out trends in the appearances of bees in mythology and began to piece together how an ancient Greek would have conceived of the bee.³⁷

These early works provide the foundation for modern scholarship on bees and have had a lasting impact on our current views of the creature's role in literature, an impact that has been both positive and negative. There is no denying that a great amount of work went into sifting through the canon (and sometimes beyond) of classical literature and compiling an exhaustive list of the references to bees in mythology, beekeeping, or bee gender. These sources provide an easy and comprehensive overview of what exists, though by and large their discussions of each source are brief and not particularly analytical. Works like those of Cook, Elderkin, and Ransome are still cited today because of the thorough nature of their studies and the scope of their information which has made these studies authoritative on their given topics. However, in some regards, this approach of culling information on a specific topic from various texts has created misconceptions about these texts that are prevalent today. For example, Fraser's inclusion of literary texts like Virgil's *Fourth Georgic* and Varro's *De Re Rustica* beside instructive manuals like Columella's *De Re Rustica* has contributed to misreadings of both Virgil and Varro.³⁸ While Virgil and Varro both discuss beekeeping in their texts, it is superficial to

³⁶ Authors on bees and mythology include Weniger (1871), Robert-Turnow (1893), Cook (1895), Roscher (1897), Ransome (1939). More on Cook and Roscher below.

³⁷ Cook (1895).

³⁸ Fraser's work is part of a larger contemporary trend, in regard to Virgil, that attempts to understand what Virgil knew about apiculture and apiology from his works. E.g. Royds and Fowler (1914), Jermyn (1949), Whitfield (1956), Haarford (1960). This approach is flawed due to the assumption that Virgil is interested in representing apiculture accurately, rather than poetically, in his depiction of the bees. For a discussion on how Columella's work

suggest that these texts are simply about beekeeping or serve as apicultural manuals. The impact of this kind of treatment of Varro and Virgil has been different for each author. Where Varro is concerned, it has contributed to his text being dismissed as an instructional manual with little or no literary value.³⁹ For Virgil, the impact of this abstracting of apicultural information has contributed to the tendency in *Georgics'* scholarship to focus on the second half of the Fourth Georgic often to the exclusion, of the first half, to varying degrees.⁴⁰ This neglect may be due to an uncertainty as to how to handle its apicultural content and/or the assumption that this section was included as a nod to the purported subject of the text, beekeeping, and contributes little else. One of the aims of my study is to take a closer look at texts like Varro and Virgil and consider their use of apicultural imagery in the context of the work as a whole, and in doing so gain a more nuanced understanding their use of this imagery and language.

These early works of modern scholarship, along with more modern catalogues and dictionaries, like those of Davies and Kathirithamby,⁴¹ Kitchell,⁴² and Beavis⁴³ have also given the impression that the topic of bees in classical literature has satisfactorily been studied and explored. Kitchell, in particular, provides a thorough summary of pertinent sources and offers his reader an idea of the breadth of usages of bees and apian imagery. However, despite broad titles, like Davies and Kathirithamby's *Greek Insects*, such works of scholarship provide much in

compares to Varro's and the ways in which this suggests a different aim for Varro's text, see Chapter Two.

³⁹ It should be noted that this misconception regarding the function of Varro's work is not limited to the bee section, but prevails for the text as whole, which is widely viewed as no more than an agricultural guide. E.g. Rayment (1945), Skydsgaard (1968) 8, Tilly (1973) 26-27, Nicolaye (2008).

⁴⁰ E.g. Perret (1965), Commager (1966), Bradley (1969), Griffin (1977), Nadeau (1984), Hardie (1971).

⁴¹ Davies and Kathirithamby (1986).

⁴² Kitchell (2014).

⁴³ Beavis (1988).

the way of direction, but little in the way of depth and analysis. Though the nature and aim of these studies is only to provide a general guide, the impression given to one perusing titles is that these are the definitive works, particularly in the case of Beavis and Davies and Kathirithamby.

Much of the recent scholarship has swung in the opposite direction of these broadly focused works and does not explore larger patterns or look widely at a vast number of texts. Rather many scholars have explored individual instances that mention bees, in a specific work, or a small number of works with a clear relationship to one another. The subjects of these sorts of studies include topics like bee imagery in Plutarch,⁴⁴ issues of gender ideology in discussions of the king bee,⁴⁵ and the relationship between Virgil's bee imagery and other given texts, usually just a single text.⁴⁶ These works have led to some thorough and insightful examinations of particular texts, and have influenced my own studies of those texts. But extracting a moment or single reference from a large number of similar and often related examples has its limitations. For example, Dahlmann overemphasizes the connection between Virgil's and Seneca's bee societies in an attempt to show that the two authors had the same aim, in part, because his study is limited to just these two works.⁴⁷ In a different vein, Sussman's study of Hesiod uses his bee image primarily to indicate a shift in Greek perceptions about female work and their economic contribution.⁴⁸ More recently, Xenophontos has offered a study of Plutarch's bee imagery, acknowledging the author's debt to prior bee images and arguing for his innovation on those models.⁴⁹ However, she spends little time discussing the models and her knowledge of bee

⁴⁴ E.g. Xenophontos (2013), Borthwich (1991).

⁴⁵ E.g. Pomeroy (1984), Mayhew (1999).

⁴⁶ E.g. Verrall (1910), Dahlmann (1953), Polleichtner (2005).

⁴⁷ Dahlmann (1953).

⁴⁸ Sussman (1979). It is worth noting that her intention is not to explore the image itself, rather the image's implications.

⁴⁹ Xenophontos (2013).

imagery and scholarship seems cursory, at best.⁵⁰ Her reader therefore is left with a detailed discussion of how Plutarch employs bee imagery in a handful of cases, but confusion as to the degree of his innovation and his employment of what Xenophontos calls "conventional uses" of bee imagery, as well.⁵¹ It is not the case that all studies with a more limited scope are flawed. However, I hope to use a broader view in my own approach in the hope that this will illuminate these images in a new way.

Works that take a broader, comparative stance in their analysis of bee imagery and attempt to understand the relationship between a number of different depictions of the bee have influenced my work considerably. Cook was the first to examine and synthesize a broad array of sources when drawing his conclusions about the role of the bee in mythology.⁵² His articles combined the cataloguing tendency of the 1800s and early 1900s with an attempt to understand the patterns that emerged in his sweeping overview. In doing so, he argued for a cohesive conception of the bee in Greek mythology as a chthonic creature with associations with the human soul.⁵³ His article is one of the most broad and comprehensive looks at bees with regard to a specific topic, but several other authors have consulted a wider variety of sources involving the bee in their analyses of a given image, as well. Though McLachlan's aim is to identify a particular creature referred to in Sappho's fragment 31, she looks beyond the scope of Sappho's

⁵⁰ For example, Xenophontos (2013) 126, mentions the trope of "the female bee who is indignant with the male because of his various erotic liaisons", citing Theoc. *Id.* 1.105, which only mentions bees in passing and the scenario she describes does not appear here, nor does it appear elsewhere, to my knowledge. I believe what she is misinterpreting is the belief that bees will attack the impure beekeeper that approaches their hive and lovers who are unfaithful, as this phenomenon is most akin to the Plutarch passage she cites in reference to this "motif" (Plut. *Conjug.* 144d). For a discussion of these traditions, see Chapter Three.

⁵¹ Xenophontos (2013) 127.

⁵² Cook (1895)

⁵³ Cook (1895) 19, 23. Cook's relationship to my own work will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

corpus and delves into a variety of sources in order to establish a connection between bees and the erotic and thus tie the bee back to Sappho's fragment.⁵⁴ Similarly, Larson sifts through a variety of references, including works of art and mythology, in an attempt to understand the bee maidens in the Homeric Hymn better.⁵⁵ Acknowledging their obvious apian attributes, she looks to the associations between bees and nymphs and the Corcyrian nymphs, in particular, to argue for their identification as the maidens in the poem. Though her scope is more limited and she focuses on only three texts, Kronenberg's work on farming texts as allegories has also proven useful, due to the way it looks at the use of bee imagery in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Varro's *De Re Rustica*, and Virgil's *Georgics*.⁵⁶ While not as focused on bees as the introduction suggests, the work does examine apian images with an eye towards how these texts function as wholes, and how these works have built on one another. Her questions in regard to the purpose of these three works and how this imagery fits into those goals are very much in line with my own.

The topic of bees as a source of political imagery has led to some of the most detailed and insightful studies that look at the broader patterns of the bee's political associations and examine the use of the image over a long span of time and by a great number of authors. Morley focuses on Roman uses of the image of the hive and discusses how bees and the hive serve as a means of discussing Rome and the Romans.⁵⁷ Morley argues that contemporary concerns are reflected in these discussions of beekeeping, not only in philosophical texts, but also apicultural texts, and that these concerns, in fact, affected apicultural practices and conceptions. Van Ovenmeire goes even further, looking at both Greek and Roman discussions of the king as king bee and

⁵⁴ McLachlan (1989).

⁵⁵ Larson (1995).

⁵⁶ Kronenberg (2009)

⁵⁷ Morley (2007)

concluding from his examination that each author's political experiences had an influence on how he treats and conceives of the hive.⁵⁸

Most akin to my work is the book *Ille operum custos: kulturgeschichtliche Beiträge zur antiken Bienensymbolik und ihrer Rezeption*, which contains a series of articles on the symbolism of the bee in antiquity and beyond.⁵⁹ Each chapter, written by a different author, examines a different aspect of bee symbolism, including subjects similar to some of those I approach. This book is expansive in its scope, looking beyond the Greek and Roman world and beyond antiquity, but suffers from the fact that each chapter is a separate article and serves more as an introduction to its topic, rather than a detailed examination. For example, Herren's article on bee symbolism in mythology provides an overview of myths containing bees, but does not look closely at any of these examples and she often simply states her conclusions rather than showing how she draws them from the texts.⁶⁰ Bounas' treatment of bee imagery in Greek poetry is also useful for its overview of sources, but his discussion of the themes that he sees among these images would be enhanced by a look at prose sources, as well, since there is considerable overlap in the kinds of imagery prose and poetry authors use.⁶¹ The benefit of this approach is the fact that each author brings his or her own expertise to his or her article, but because of this, each article is independent and does not look to the others for insight into its own topic. While my work does not look at so vast a span of time and is limited in scope to primarily Greece and Rome, it is my hope that a study of all of these topics together will lead to new insights.

⁵⁸ Van Ovenmeire (2011).

⁵⁹ Engels and Nicolaye (2008).

⁶⁰ Herren (2008).

⁶¹ Bounas (2008).

The Aims of This Project

In my work, I attempt to negotiate a balance between breadth of subjects and authors and careful consideration of individual instances of bee imagery. In doing so, it is my aim both to carefully analyze these references and to reconstruct the nexus of ideas that colored Greek and Roman views of the bee. Some ancient authors engage more with the scope of bee imagery that existed and the cultural ideas and assumptions about the bee, and some less, but it is only through a view of the whole picture of bee ideas and imagery that one can understand how the bee was conceived of and how authors used this image, within the context of that conceptualization. The bee was not a symbol in a vacuum and each author's usage of that image was often informed somewhat by previous images or ideas. It is my hope that a broad and exhaustive analysis of the most significant examples of bee imagery together in a single work will help construct a framework through which other apian images may be better understood.

My dissertation begins in the mythological world, taking the broadest standpoint first, and works its way gradually towards more specific topics, moving from the gods and the realm of myth, to the political and social, and finally to a category of human beings, women. My work looks at both Greek and Roman sources, to get the most complete view possible, and examines not only literary works, but a variety of other sources, as well, to varying degrees, including art, fables, proverbs, mythology, agricultural manuals, and natural history. Though I attempt to be comprehensive, it is not the case that my work is always entirely cohesive, because a nexus of idea on a given subject is not always cohesive and our ability to reconstruct that nexus is limited, due to temporal distance and an incomplete record. It would be dangerous, limiting, and disingenuous to attempt to string a large number of works together and claim a single, unified conclusion. However, it is my hope that compiling so many examples into a single work will

lead to a better understanding of how the bee was conceived of, how its image was used, and why it was such a prominent and important symbol in Greek and Roman literature.

Chapter One: Bees and the Divine

'Apes enim ego divinas bestias puto.'
-Petronius, *Satyricon* 56

" 'Truly, I think bees are divine creatures.' "

Before the gods received offerings of wine, and even before they received offerings of oil, the gods were given honey, at least according to Porphyrius, who quotes Theophrastus on the matter (*De Abst.*, 2.20). While it is impossible to tell if this is accurate, it speaks to the role that honey played in the Greek and Roman imagination. It was an old and sacred substance, dating back to before the vine was cultivated (Plut. *Ques. Conv.* 4.5), and according to Plutarch, even the societies which had not yet discovered the cultivation of wine had figured out how to make a drink from honey (*Ques. Conv.*, 4.5). Honey drinks were the first step towards civilization and were used in literature as a means of indicating the antiquity of an event. Plato tells of how Porus became drunk on nectar⁶² in the garden of Zeus, before wine was known (Plat. *Sym.* 203b), and the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyrius claims that Zeus got Cronos drunk on honey in the days before wine, as well (*De Ant. Nym.* 7). In the minds of the ancient Greeks, honey and honey drinks dominated in the earliest of times, before Cronos was overthrown, and before the gods had withdrawn from direct interactions with mortals.

Yet not only honey, but also the bee played an important role in Greek and Roman myth and the Greeks and Romans conceived of the bee as a creature that was able to walk a line between the world of humans and the world of the gods, mediating between realms in a unique way. The honeybee is an animal that appears frequently in Greek and Roman mythology and its unusual nature led to a unique conceptualization of the animal in terms of its divine associations

⁶² On the conflation of nectar and honey, see Roscher (1883).

and role in myth and religion. As a winged animal, the bee is celestial, flying, swarming, and sometimes nesting aloft, but more often it dwells in hollowed trees, rock crevices, or caves, chthonic homes, hidden away in the earth. Yet, honeybees are much more visible than the creatures typically considered chthonic,⁶³ like snakes, who slither unseen on and into the ground. Rather bees spend their days out in meadows and gardens, and eventually when they are somewhat domesticated, they live side by side with humans, in organized societies much like our own. These habits lend them a threefold association with the divine, allowing them to have connections with the celestial, chthonic, and the earthly, but more importantly, they are a creature capable of crossing realms and blurring lines. Their appearances in religion and myth often indicate a bridging between two realms, either the spheres of the living and the dead, or those of the human and the divine.

Life, Death and Fertility: The Chthonic and Earthly Bee

The chthonic associations of the bee and honey are many and have been well attested to for some time by Arthur Bernard Cook. Through his examination of Greek myth and, to a lesser degree, religious practices, Cook argued that "the general impression produced on the mind of the average Greek must have been that the bee was a chthonian creature intimately connected with, if not actually embodying, the soul,"⁶⁴ noting that they are also "closely associated with the birth and death of soul."⁶⁵ Though Cook's observations are insightful and accurate, he does not spend much time with any single example and instead provides an overview, rather than an intensive

⁶³ Here and throughout this chapter, I use the word "chthonic" with its English meaning in mind, to describe something that pertains to or is associated with the underworld, rather than its broader Greek meaning, which could describe both something associated with the underworld, but also something simply pertaining to the earth.

⁶⁴ Cook (1895) 19.

⁶⁵ Cook (1895) 23.

examination, and because of this, he seems to miss the complexity of many of his references. In looking more closely at many of the myths that Cook references, as well as other related sources, the significance of the bee becomes more complex and this complexity can be seen not only in Greek sources, but in Roman ones, as well. Though some of the earliest religious associations are with the dead, and the chthonic aspects of the insect are many and important, the bee also serves as a liminal creature that is just as much associated with human life on earth as it is with the underworld and the death (or birth) of the soul. The chthonic associations remain an important part of the core conceptualization of the honeybee, however, and thus serve as a suitable starting point for the topic of bees and divinity.

Honey has borne a connection with the dead from a very early point in history and appears in association with death and the dead in many societies that flourished prior to any Greek evidence, including ancient Egypt.⁶⁶ The earliest literary evidence of honey's significance in Greek rituals to the dead appears in the *Iliad*, at the funeral of Patroclus, where Achilles leans a jar filled with honey on his friend's bier (*Il.* 23.170). Similarly, in the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon describes the funeral of Achilles to the hero's shade, telling him how his body was burned "with much unguent and sweet honey" (ἀλείφατι πολλῷ καὶ μέλιτι γλυκερῷ, *Od.* 24.68). Offerings of honey or honey mixtures to the dead and the gods of the underworld, including Hecate and the Eumenides, occur throughout classical literature in Aeschylus (*Pers.* 204), Sophocles (*Oed. Col.* 468), Euripides (*Orest.* 114), Apollonius of Rhodes (3.1036), Silius Italicus (13.415), and Ovid (*Fasti*, 4.458), to name only a handful.⁶⁷ Both Ransome and Cook note that the use of honey

⁶⁶ For more on honey's association with death and the dead in pre-Greek societies, see Ransome (1939) and Wilson (2004) 190-5.

⁶⁷ However, it is also worth noting that offerings of honey were made to a variety of other gods without infernal connections, including Helios, Mnemosyne, Pan, Priapus, Eos, Selene, Aphrodite, Fortuna, and Janus. See Ransome (1939) 129-132.

implies the antiquity of this practice of making offerings to the dead, suggesting that the practice is a relic dating back to a time before the invention of wine.⁶⁸ The continuous references to honey in funerary rites and as an offering to the dead and the underworld gods suggest that this tradition continued from the time of Homer (or perhaps before) on through antiquity, relatively unchanged.⁶⁹

The perceived immortal quality of honey may be one reason it seemed like a suitable offering to the gods of the underworld, being somewhat divine itself in its lack of perishability. Ransome offers honey's sweetness as another possible reason, noting that one would be offering the deceased something that brought them pleasure in life, to accompany him or her down into death.⁷⁰ Thus, this theory ties honey's significance for the dead to the pleasure enjoyed during life. Yet, the lore surrounding the bee may provide another reason. At some point (it is impossible to determine when), as Cook noted, the bee became associated with the human soul,⁷¹ suggesting that honey, the product of the bee, is the appropriate offering for the soul as represented by the bee.

The association between bee and soul appears most explicitly in a few passages in Greek and Roman literature, passages which indicate the bee's connection to life on earth, as well as to death. In a fragment of Sophocles, the poet describes the dead as a buzzing swarm (βομβεῖ δὲ νεκρῶν σμήνος, fr. 879), using both the term for a swarm of bees (σμήνος)⁷² and the same verb

⁶⁸ Cook (1895) 2, Ransome (1939) 119, 123.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the many literary references to honey libations to the dead and the gods of the underworlds, see Cook (1895) 21-22, Ransome (1939) 106, 120-124. It is worth noting that honey is used in some cultures to preserve the dead. See Ransome (1939) 81.

⁷⁰ Ransome (1939) 120.

⁷¹ Cook (1895) 19.

⁷² LSJ s.v. σμήνος A. II.

that is used to indicate the buzzing of bees (βομβεῖν).⁷³ Virgil also evokes the bee's connection with the soul and its birth in the *Aeneid's* underworld, where he compares the souls gathering along the Lethe to bees buzzing about the fields:

*ac veluti in pratis ubi apes aestate serena
floribus insidunt variis et candida circum
lilia funduntur, strepit omnis murmure campus.*
-Virgil, *Aen.* 6.707-709

And as when in the meadows during the calm summer the bees
land upon various flowers and are poured forth around the white
lilies, the whole field hums with buzzing.⁷⁴

Virgil sets up the bees as a counterpart to the human soul, mirroring the actions of the dead who seek life with the bees' behavior in the land of the living. The two are equated through their shared nature, namely the bustling of their activity and their lively swarming, but Virgil exploits their contrasting settings. The underworld context and the idea of souls scrambling for forgetfulness in the land of the dead present a dire and dark picture. However, this idea is tempered by the simile's imagery, which stands in contrast to Aeneas' Stygian surroundings. Instead of mournful darkness, the bees inhabit a serene summer (*aestate serena*, 6.707), filled with bright flowers (*floribus...variis*, 6.708), which give the impression of life, fertility and liveliness. So productive and active are the bees that the whole of the meadow is alive with their buzzing (*strepit omnis murmure campus*, 6.709). This image not only connects the bees with the human soul through the comparison of the two's activity, but stresses life and fecundity even amidst the land of the dead and creates a tension between the chthonic associations of the bee and its ties to earthly fertility and the life on earth that humans enjoy. Furthermore, as Anchises tells Aeneas, these souls are readying to be reborn, thus the liveliness of the bees looks to the

⁷³ LSJ s.v. βομβέω A.

⁷⁴ All translations are my own.

future of the souls, who have died and now must forget their former lives in order to again inhabit the world of the living.

The duality of the bees, as an emblem of the souls of the dead, yet a reminder of life and plenty, is furthered by the way this simile subtly echoes a prior bee simile in the *Aeneid*. In Book One, the poet uses similar language to begin his comparison between the production and liveliness of Carthage and the diligent industry of the bees in a meadow.

*Qualis apes aestate nova per florea rura
exercet sub sole labor, cum gentis adultos
educunt fetus, aut cum liquentia mella
stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas,
aut onera accipiunt venientum, aut agmine facto
ignavum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent:
fervet opus redolentque thymo fragrantia mella.*
-Virgil, *Aen.* 1.427-436

Just as in the early summer work keeps the bees busy throughout the flowery countryside beneath the sun, when they lead forth the youth of their race, who have grown up, or when they pack the liquid honey and swell the cells with sweet nectar, or receive the burdens of those coming, or with the line drawn up they shut off the lazy flock, the drones, from the folds; work rages on and the fragrant honey is redolent of thyme.

The repetition of *apes* and *aestate* in the first line links the two passages, as well as the similar descriptions of the floridity (*floribus, florea*) of the countryside (*pratis, campus, rura*). Whereas the bees in the simile in Book Six are only busy harvesting among the flowers, from the image in Book One, the reader gets the whole spectrum of apian activity, as compared to the activity of the Carthaginians building their new city. In addition, this image evokes shepherding through its discussion of the drones, calling them a flock (*pecus*, 1.435) shut off from the folds (*a praesepibus*, 1.435), which both adds a new activity to the spectrum of human actions referenced, as well as further tying the scene to the everyday world of the living. Virgil's description of the bees brings youths to this picture also, and introduces the idea of reproduction

to the scene of productivity. Though these offspring are specified as *adultos* (1.431) and Austin notes that this is a scene of the young bees being escorted from the hive,⁷⁵ the reproductive aspect is emphasized in the use of *educunt fetus* (1.429), a common metaphor for giving birth.⁷⁶ This combination of images is enhanced by the context of the meadow, which itself is bursting with life, *florea*, despite the *aestus* (1.430), creating an atmosphere of productivity, life, and fecundity. In light of the passage in Book Six, the birth metaphor and the floridity and fertility of the scene look forward to the rebirth that Aeneas witnesses in the underworld, with the souls along the Lethe waiting to return to the world above and to move from death back to life. However, the comparison in Book One also looks forward to the referents in Book Six, as the reader know that Carthage and its people are doomed.

Thus, the bees' chthonic associations add a new element to the image in Book One, as well, by suggesting the ultimate fate of the Carthaginians after the Punic Wars and the impending death of their Queen, whom Aeneas is about to encounter and who will take her own life in Book Four. By creating interplay between these two similes, Virgil contrasts the dire underworld and the sadness of death with the productive and reproductive world of the living. He uses the bee as a stand in for the human soul on earth and a means of illustrating the activities in the life of soul. He contrasts the death of the underworld and the chthonic associations of the bee with the liveliness and fertility of the upper world, suggesting the soul's inevitable reemergence on earth, in its next life,⁷⁷ but also the fated fall of Carthage and the death of Dido in Book Four. Thus the images in Book One and Book Six are a juxtaposition of life and death, the earth and the underworld, brought into relief by the bee that represents both concepts and both worlds.

⁷⁵ Austin (1971) 149.

⁷⁶ OLD s.v. *educō* 6.a

⁷⁷ See also Verrall (1910) 45, who stresses the importance of rebirth and reincarnation in this image.

Porphyrus, who preserved the aforementioned Sophocles quote, also examines the relationship between the bee and soul. He mentions the aptness of Sophocles' words amidst his discussion of the bee as an emblem for the souls of those who will live justly (μελίσσης ἔλεγον...τὰς μελλούσας μετὰ δικαιοσύνης βιοτεύειν, *De Ant. Nym.* 19). Porphyrus' discussion draws a distinct connection between the bee and the birth of the soul, and claims that honey is a symbol of death (θανάτου σύμβολον, *De Ant. Nym.* 18), but also connected with generation (*De Ant. Nym.* 19), purification (καθαράς, καθαίρουσι, *De Ant. Nym.* 16), and the pleasures of copulation (τῆ ἐκ συνουσίας ἡδονῆ, *De Ant. Nym.* 16). Thus, the image of the bee for Porphyrus not only evokes the dead, but also purity, and generation.

The myth of the king of Crete, Minos' son, Glaucus, also illustrates a connection between bees (and honey) and the dead, the soul, and rebirth, while hinting at associations beyond the realm of the chthonic. The story appears in both Apollodorus (3.3.1) and Hyginus (*Fab.* 136), and was once the subject of the now lost plays *Kressai* by Aeschylus, Sophocles' *Manteis*, and *Polyidus* by Euripides.⁷⁸ Of the remaining literary versions, Hyginus' is the most detailed and extensive:

Glaucus Minois et Pasiphae filius dum ludit pila, cecidit in dolium melle plenus. Quem cum parentes quaerent Apollinem sciscitati sunt de puero. Quibus Apollo respondit: 'monstrum vobis natum est; quod si quis solverit, puerum vobis resituet'. Minos sorte audita coepit monstrum a suis quaerere, cui dixerunt natum esse vitulum, qui ter in die colorem mutaret per quaternas horas, primum album secundo rubeum deinde nigrum. Minos autem ad monstrum solvendum augeres convocavit. Qui cum non invenirent, Polyidus Coerani filius †Bizanti monstrum demonstravit, eum † arbori moro similem esse; nam primum album est, deinde rubrum, cum permatur[a]vit nigrum. Tunc Minos ait ei: 'ex Apollinis responso filium mihi oportet resituas'. Quod Polyidus dum auguratur, vidit noctuam super cellam vinariam desentem atque apes fugantem: augurio accepto puerum exanimem de dolio eduxit. Cui Minos ait: 'corpore invento nunc spiritum resitue'. Quod Polyidus cum negaret fosse fieri, Minos iubet eum cum puero in monumento

⁷⁸ This tale also appears in Palaephatus (26), and on a cup from about 440 B.C.E. See Gantz (1993) 270-1.

includi et gladium poni. Qui cum inclusi essent, draco repente ad corpus pueri processit, quod Polyidus existimans eum velle consumere gladio repente percussit et occidit. altera serpens parem quaerens vidit eam interfectam et progressa herbam attulit atque eius tactu sepenti spiritum restituit; idemque Polyidus fecit. Qui cum intus vociferarentur, quidam praeteriens Minoi nuntiavit; qui monumentum iussit aperiri et filium incolumem recuperavit, Polyidus cum multis muneribus in patriam remisit.

-Hyginus, *Fab.* 136

While Glaucus, the son of Minos and Pasiphae, was playing ball, he fell into a jar full of honey. When his parents were looking for him, they asked Apollo about the boy. Apollo responded to them: 'A monstrosity was born to you; if anyone should interpret this, he will return the boy to you. When he had heard this prophesy, Minos began to seek out a monstrosity from his people. They told him that a calf was born, which changed color three times a day every fourth hour, first white, then red, and finally black. So, Minos called together the augers to interpret the monstrosity. When they could not find an answer, Polyidus, the son of Coeranus, †pointed out that the monstrosity of Bizantus†, that it was similar to the mulberry tree; for first it is white, then red, when it has ripened black. Then Minos said to him: 'according to the response of Apollo, it is fitting that you restore my son to me.' While Polyidus was consulting the auguries, he saw an owl sitting on the wine storeroom and driving off bees: after the augury was received, he took the dead boy from the jar, and Minos said to him: "Since the body has been found, now restore his spirit'. When Polyidus denied that it was possible to happen, Minos ordered him to be closed off into a tomb with the boy and a sword was put in. When they were shut up, suddenly a serpent approached the body of the boy, Polyidus, thinking that it wished to eat him, immediately struck and killed it with the sword. Another serpent, searching for its mate, saw it dead and going, it took an herb and by the touch of the herb, it restored the soul of the snake: Polyidus did the same. When they cried out from within, a person passing by announced it to Minos; he ordered the tomb to be opened and he recovered his unharmed son, he sent Polyidus back to his homeland with many gifts.

Here, both the honey and the bees carry symbolic significance regarding the child's death, preservation, and eventual reanimation. It is honey, that common offering to the dead and to underworld spirits, which both kills Glaucus and preserves his corpse, while his father seeks divine answers. The honey provides Glaucus with a sort of liminal state, in which he can linger either until he is discovered and buried, receiving the proper passage to the underworld and thus being fully incorporated with the world of the dead, or until he is returned to the realm of the

living. His corporeal form gets to enjoy the sweetness of the honey, as the boy himself did in life, though it is the very thing that killed him and now serves as a somewhat premature funeral offering. In this way, the honey creates a sphere for Glaucus that is neither entirely dead nor entirely living.

Furthermore, it is the bee that serves as the portent that reveals the location of Glaucus, who has been hidden away in his suspended state for an unclear period of time. Portents and omens involving bees are common in both the Greek and Roman worlds and have a range of interpretations, indicating everything from the death of an emperor (Dio Cass. 42), to an individual's ascension to power (Cic. *Div.* 1.33, 73).⁷⁹ Their prevalence in such a capacity in tales both mythical and historical suggests that they are linked with prophecy and the expression of divine will on earth, associations that become more evident elsewhere in mythology.⁸⁰ In the Glaucus story, the bees' prophetic associations are outshone by their significance as a symbolic representation of the child's soul attempting to return to his body in the storeroom.⁸¹ In opposition to the bees' role as an indication of life and potential rebirth for the child, via the return of his soul, the owl serves as a symbol of death, and actively prevents the approach of the boy's soul, as represented by the bees returning to the storeroom. An engraved gem that seems to depict this tale shows the child emerging from a jar, with a bee hovering over his head to symbolize the return of the boy's soul.⁸² Cook and Elderkin have taken a slightly different

⁷⁹ See below for a more complete discussion of bee omens.

⁸⁰ This subject will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁸¹ Ransome (1939) 108.

⁸² Furtwängler, Pl. 22, 16. Furtwängler (1900) 253 also suggests that the bee is the boy's soul.

approach, however, and suggest that it is the moment of death, with the male figure beside the jar being Hermes, summoning the soul away.⁸³

The bees' failed attempt to return to the child and reanimate his body is then contrasted with the ultimate success of the snake's herb. The snake, another creature associated with the chthonic, as well as rebirth, due to the shedding of its skin, provides Polyidos with the ability to bring about the reanimation of the child. However, it is only once the child is removed from the honey, or taken out of his liminal state, that he can be brought back. In both Palaephatus' (26) and Hyginus' versions (*Fab.* 136), Polyidos and Glaucus are locked in a tomb before the snake's approach. By entombing the child, Minos essentially acknowledges Glaucus as deceased, giving him the most basic of burial rites, that is entombment, thus implying Glaucus' departure from the living realm and integration with the dead. It is after he is acknowledged as dead that he is then able to be reborn, or drawn back from death.

These examples begin to paint a picture of the bee as a creature associated with the interplay between life and death, being just as much engaged with the earthly world as with the chthonic one. While the associations with the human soul are often made explicit, as in the examples of Sophocles and Porphyrius, the bee is also closely tied to the life force of creatures, in general; that is to say, whatever force it is that animates a living thing, be it the soul or otherwise. This is the case particularly with the bull. Through the notion of the *bugonia*, bees become a strange emblem of rebirth, or more accurately, life issuing from death. The concept of the *bugonia*, the birth of a swarm of bees from the carcass of a young bullock, originated in Egypt, according to Antigonus of Carystus, a 3rd Century B.C.E Greek writer.⁸⁴ In his account, he explains that, if one buries a bull so that only his horns are above ground and later saws off

⁸³ Cook (1895) 469, Elderkin (1939) 207.

⁸⁴ Virgil also implies that the *bugonia* was first practiced in Egypt (*G.* 4.280-314).

the horns, bees will fly out (*Mir.* 19). Though one might expect to find the earliest mention of this belief in Aristotle, who offers a quite detailed account of the bee, the *bugonia* is conspicuously absent from his works. However, in his *Generation of Animals*, he explicitly dismisses the notion that bees can be spawned from other animals (*GA*, 759a), which suggests that he may have known about some tradition of the *bugonia*, yet chose not to give it voice and implicitly to deny its existence.⁸⁵ It is not until about a century later that Nicander of Colophon wrote what would be the oldest account to survive.⁸⁶ In his *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca* (and possibly in his lost *Melissourgica* and *Georgica*, as well), Nicander describes the *bugonia*, but a different sort than what seems to have been the Egyptian variation, as it was described by Antigonus. In Nicander's version, a version more similar to what is found in the other extant accounts, bees can be born from the corpse of a young bull that has been torn by wolves (*λυκοσπάδες*, *Ther.* 742).

In most versions of the *bugonia*, the close confinement of the animal at death or the keeping of the corpse intact is central to the success of the practice. In Antigonus' version, the bull is buried in sand up to his head, both preserving and confining his body, much in the same way as Glaucus. Ovid's accounts also mention burying the bull (*Fast.* 1.377; *Met.* 15.364), while Virgil says the bull must be beaten so that his skin remains intact. Virgil also says that the method used in Egypt is to build a small room to contain the body, a room which should remained closed up from the time of the bull's death, until the collection of the bees later, and that the mouth and nostrils of the corpse should be plugged up. Florentinus in the *Geoponica*

⁸⁵ There are a number of similar processes involving animals springing from the dead of other creatures that may have caused Aristotle to dismiss the general concept of animals spawning from corpses.

⁸⁶ Callimachus mentions the "ox-born bee" (fr. 383) and Archelaus call bees "the children of the dead ox" (fr. 128) somewhat prior to Nicander's description.

also recommends confining the corpse and instructs his reader to seal up the windows and doors with mud to keep it airtight (*Geoponica*, 15.2). The idea behind this stress on confinement and preservation seems to be that the bull's life force must be contained during death, either within the creature's body or within a confined space, until the transformation into a swarm is complete. It is not clear how the Greeks and Romans believed this would occur, but somehow the life of the bull was transformed into the lives of the bees, or, as Ovid describes it, "one soul having been killed gives forth a thousand souls" (*mille animas una necata dedit*, *Fast.* 1.380). However, the continual reference to confinement suggests that this act could only occur if the life force was made stationary for a time.⁸⁷

A similar concept involving the transference of life from one to many occurs in the story of the priestess Melissa, as well, and, again, the bees are the recipients of that life.⁸⁸ The tale of Melissa appears in Servius, who briefly retells it in his comment on the first bee simile in Book One of the *Aeneid*.

Sane fabula de apibus talis est. Apud Isthmon anus quaedam nomine Melissa fuit. Hanc Ceres sacrorum suorum cum secreta docuisset, interminata est, ne cui ea quae didicisset aperiret; sed cum ad eam mulieres accessissent, ut ab ea primo blandimentis post precibus et praemiis elicerent, ut sibi a Cerere commissa patefaceret atque in silentio perduraret, ab eisdem iratis mulieribus discerpta est. Quam rem Ceres inmissa tam supra dictis feminis quam populo eius regionis pestilentia ulta est; de corpore vero Melissaes apes nasci fecit. Latine autem μέλισσα apis dicitur.

- Servius, *A.* 1.430

Indeed such is the tale of the bees. At Isthmus, there was a certain old woman named Melissa. When Ceres had taught her the rites of her worship, she forbade that she reveal the things which she had learned; but when the women approached her so that they might entice her first with flattery then with coaxing and bribery, so that she might reveal the things entrusted to her by Ceres, and when she abided in silence, she was torn apart by the same women, having been enraged. Ceres,

⁸⁷ See also Cook (1895) 9-10.

⁸⁸ Roscher (1897) 2640, vaguely links Melissa's story to the *bugonia*, though without elaboration.

having learned of this, took vengeance on the women who had been mentioned formerly, just as much as on the people of that region, with a plague; and in truth, she made it that bees were born from the body of Melissa. But in Latin a *melissa* ("bee") is called an *apis*.

As with the *bugonia*, this transformation from woman to bee focuses on the conversion of death into new lives. Though there is no emphasis on containing the corpse or preserving her body intact, the mode of the old woman's death bears resemblance to that of the bull in Nicander's rendition of the *bugonia*. Instead of being torn by wolves, she is torn by women, and while the end result does not seem to require the soul to be contained, it does have the external aid of a divinity to bring it about. As with Glaucus and the *bugonia*, the bee is not simply standing in for death or the soul, but rather taking on a liminal role and helping to create a connection between life and death, or in this case death and life. In the same way Virgil uses the bees to draw death and life into a single, conflicting image, the bees are a reminder of life and generation amidst death, as is emphasized with Servius' phrase *de corpore vero Melissae apes nasci fecit*, in which Melissa's body, despite its old age (she is an *anus*) and lifeless state is still able to give birth (*nasci*).

The role of Melissa herself is also interesting, in the context of the associations she lends to the bee, as their mother, of sorts. As Servius points out, her name is linked to her outcome and it seems to be implied in the story that Melissa does not produce just any swarm, but the first swarm, thus their adopting of her name. Furthermore, Melissa has a special role in regard to divinity. She is privy to secret knowledge that is tied specifically to Ceres and this suggests that there is a special relationship between Ceres and the bees that the goddess helps to create from the body of her favorite.

In the case of Melissa, it is not a surprise that life and death are emphasized together, given that Ceres is the agent driving this transformation. Ceres, or rather her Greek counterpart, Demeter, in many respects parallels the bee with regards to her cultic associations. Primarily a fertility goddess, Demeter's rituals often demonstrate a conflation between female fertility and crop fertility, as various aspects of the Thesmophoria demonstrate, including the role of the piglets, as symbolic of female genitalia, and the handling of phallic implements.⁸⁹ Similarly, the bees' proximity to plant life and flowers, in particular, has linked them with the earth's fertility, as in the similes of Virgil. But they also have prominent erotic connections, as shown, for example, by their role as conveyers of love notes between a nymph and her potential paramour (Schol. Theocr. 3.13, Charon in Schol. Apoll 2.47, Etym. M. 75.31), and by parallels with Eros's sweetness and danger (*Anacreont.* 35, Ps.-Theoc. 19).⁹⁰ However, Demeter also has chthonic aspects, as she and her daughter have close ties to the afterlife and the underworld. Such aspects are central to their worship in the Eleusinian Mysteries,⁹¹ the cult of Chthonian Demeter in Hermione,⁹² and likely her cults in Arcadia, as well.⁹³ As Burkert points out, the chthonic associations are central to Demeter (and Kore) as divinities associated with earthly fertility and grain,⁹⁴ for grain (like Kore, who allegorically represents the grain in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Burkert argues) "must descend into the earth so that from seeming death new fruit may germinate."⁹⁵ The fruit of the earth was conceived of as rising from the depths of the earth, thus

⁸⁹ Larson (2007) 71.

⁹⁰ For a more extensive discussion of the erotic connotations of the bee, see the following chapter.

⁹¹ Burkert (1985) 161, Larson (2007) 73-76.

⁹² Larson (2007) 78-79.

⁹³ Burkert (1985) 161, Larson (2007) 79-80.

⁹⁴ Burkert (1985) 160-1.

⁹⁵ Burkert (1985) 160.

the fertility of the earth was associated with the world of the dead,⁹⁶ making the union between the daughter of the harvest goddess and the king of the dead a sensible one. This also contributes to the sense that life springs from death and that the two are interrelated, one being an unavoidable part of the other, a concept central to both the *bugonia* and Servius' tale of the birth of the bees.

This parallel between Demeter and Kore, as chthonic earth and fertility goddesses, and the bees' associations with the chthonic, as well as earthly fertility, is not the only connection between these divinities and the insect. As with many divinities, honey was a common offering to Demeter (Paus. 8.42, Virg. *G.*1.343-4). In addition, her daughter was called "honeyed" (μελιτώδη, Theocr. 15.94, Porphy. *De Antr.* 18), and the initiates into their Mysteries were referred to as "bees" (μελίσσας, Porphy. *De Antr.* 18). There is evidence linking the name Melissa with the priestesses of Demeter, beyond the scope of Servius' tale, as well. Callimachus' reference to "the bees" (Μέλισσαι) that "bring water to Deo" (Δηοῖ...ὔδωρ φερέουσι, Call. H. 2.110), which can be interpreted as a reference to the priestesses or initiates of Demeter (Hesch. μ 719 Schmidt). Apollodorus of Athens calls the women in the Thesmophoria "bees" (Apollod. *FGrH* 244 F 89), while others link the priestess of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis with the name "bee" (Pind. fr. incert. 188 Schroeder, Schol. Pind. Pyth. 60).⁹⁷ All of these references illustrate a close connection between the bee and the cult practices and mythology surrounding Demeter and her daughter.

⁹⁶ Burkert (1985) 200.

⁹⁷ See also Pomeroy (1994) 279.

Fertility Goddesses, Melissai, and the Birth of Zeus

The title "bee", as well as the insect, in general, is closely associated with the women affiliated with cults of a number of Greek and Roman goddesses with similarly complex natural world associations, all of whom fall into the category of "mother goddess types".⁹⁸ The worship of fertility goddesses, such as Cybele, Ma, Rhea, Ishtar, and Artemis was prominent among the early religions of the Mediterranean, Near East, and Western Asia, and through cultural contact, syncretism, some common divine predecessor, or perhaps a combination of these factors, goddesses from a number of civilizations share several features in regard to their associations and iconography. These goddesses are associated with fertility and the natural world, sometimes being depicted as a Mistress of Animals (πότνια θερῶν). They also have ties to female fertility, and that being the case, they are often given the role of mother to other major divinities in the pantheon, bridging the gap between earthly and female fertility, as was the case with Demeter, as well.⁹⁹ In visual images, these goddesses are often shown enthroned or, as the Mistress of Animals, standing flanked by a pair of beasts, often lions or deer, though as we will see in the case of the Greek and Roman mother goddess types, bees are also part of their common iconography.

⁹⁸ Talalay (2012) 7. Talalay uses this phrase to describe the goddesses that "are thought to represent vestiges of these early female divinities", or the prehistorical Mother Goddess of the Mother Goddess Theory. See Goodison and Morris (1998), Eller (2000), Talalay (2012) for a summary of the theory and the debate surrounding it. My use of the term is not meant to imply the existence of prehistorical matrilineal societies, whose dominant religious feature is the worship of female goddesses; rather I argue that these types of goddesses, for which we have evidence and accounts, share common features that suggest some sort of link. The bee being an element of the iconography among these historical mother goddess types links the insect both with early religious practices and with earthly elements, suggesting it is not solely chthonic, as Cook suggested.

⁹⁹ For connection between Demeter and the mother goddesses, particularly Cybele, see Gantz (1993) 43-44.

Ransome and Larson speculate that it was a Hittite mother goddess that the Greeks found in Anatolia and identified with their Artemis (and thus the Romans identified her with Diana), who was then called Ephesian Artemis.¹⁰⁰ However, others have suggested that she has Minoan origins.¹⁰¹ Ephesian Artemis, like many of her counterparts, is a Mistress of Animals, but also has associations with fertility.¹⁰² From the earliest statues that remain of Ephesian Artemis, which are likely Hellenistic copies of much earlier versions of the same or a similar image, the goddess is shown with bees around her legs, and the earliest coins of her sacred city, Ephesus, also depict the bee.¹⁰³ Various other representations of the bee have been found in the ruins of her temple there, including a bee-shaped pinhead and small plaques adorned with the image of the bees.¹⁰⁴ Pausanias says that at Ephesus, officials associated with her cult were called *Essenes*, "King Bees" (Paus. 8.13.1),¹⁰⁵ while her priestesses, like those of Demeter, were called *Melissai*.¹⁰⁶ In a fragment of a lost play, Aeschylus, too, mentions bee terminology as being associated with the worship of Artemis, calling her chief priestesses "Bee-Keepers" (μελισσονόμοι, Aesch. fr. 87).

There are many possible reasons for the connection between bee terminology and those affiliated with the cults and worship of Artemis and Demeter. The Ephesian division between the "Bees" and the "King Bees", or perhaps more broadly the "Bee-Keepers," could be related to the hierarchical nature of these religious institution, for, as the next chapter demonstrates, the bees and their hive served as the paradigm for a seamless, natural hierarchy. It may also allude

¹⁰⁰ Ransome (1939) 57, Larson (2007) 109.

¹⁰¹ Mouratidis (2005), Persson (1942) 165.

¹⁰² Larson (2007) 101-2, 106, 110, 108-112.

¹⁰³ Elderkin (1939) 203.

¹⁰⁴ Ransome (1939) 58, Hogarth (1908) 98, 102, 111-12.

¹⁰⁵ For more on *Essenes*, see Cook (1895) 12-13.

¹⁰⁶ The evidence for the connection between Artemis and the bee is too numerous to be described in full here. For more on this association, see Elderkin (1939), Ransome (1939).

to the celibacy that certain cults required of their initiates or priestesses, as many believed bees to reproduce without sex (Arist. *HA* 553a), making them an apt comparison for chaste followers. Bees were also believed to be pure, drinking only the cleanest water, shunning extravagance (Varro, *DRR* 3.16.6), and avoiding those that are impure or unfaithful to their lovers (Pindar, fr. 252 Snell-Maehler; Theoc. 1.105). This belief may also have lent itself to the association between bees and these priesthods, though it is unclear if these folk beliefs predate the cults; I suspect they do not.¹⁰⁷ In addition, it may have been simply the bee's connection with earthly fertility and vegetation that linked them with these divinities that govern fecundity and the natural world.

While each of these explanations has merit and any one or combination of these factors may have led to the prominence of this term, it is striking, nonetheless, that most of these explanations could make the term "bee" a suitable one for a vast array of deities' affiliates, if not any cult affiliate. However, *Melissai* is not universally applied to priestesses (or related terms to priests), nor is it applied to every cult with associated with fertility. In addition to Demeter and Artemis, this term *Melissai* is used for priestesses of Rhea and Cybele, who became syncretized to some degree at an early point.¹⁰⁸ Thus, *Melissai* is used predominately in association with those goddesses that fall into the category of the mother goddess type.

Various myths associate Rhea and Cybele with the bee, particularly those tales concerned with the rearing of Zeus.¹⁰⁹ When Zeus was an infant, being hidden away in the Idaean cave, he

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Bounas (2008) 70, who suggests that the link between the various goddesses and their priestesses and the bee was their shared purity.

¹⁰⁸ Ransome (1939) 93.

¹⁰⁹ For a more complete listing of the mentions of a Melissa in connection with the birth of Zeus, see Roscher (1897) 2638.

was nursed by a she-goat (either named Amalthea or owned by Amalthea¹¹⁰) and fed honey by bees. The she-goat and bees served as surrogate mothers for the young god, playing the role of Rhea for the boy, and thus the insect was tied both to the mother, and to her son, Zeus, as well, who sometimes bore the cult title Melissaios (Heschy. μ 718 Schmidt). The baby was watched over by the Curetes,¹¹¹ Cretan soldiers and attendants of his mother, whom Diodorus Siculus credits with the discovery of honey (5.65). Another tale, recorded by Antoninus Liberalis, tells of what became of the sacred cave and the bees that went on to inhabit it.

Ἐν Κρήτῃ λέγεται εἶναι ἱερὸν ἄντρον μελισσῶν ἐν ᾧ μυθολογοῦσι τεκεῖν Ῥέαν τὸν Δία καὶ <οὐκ> ἔστιν ὅσιον οὐδένα παρελθεῖν οὔτε θεὸν οὔτε θνητόν. ἐν δὲ χρόνῳ ἀφωρισμένῳ ὁράται καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος πλεῖστον ἐκλάμπων ἐκ τοῦ σπηλαίου πῦρ. τοῦτο δὲ γίνεσθαι μυθολογοῦσιν, ὅταν ἐκζέῃ τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἐκ τῆς γενέσεως αἷμα. κατέχουσι δὲ τὸ ἄντρον ἱεραὶ μέλιτται, τροφοὶ τοῦ Διὸς. εἰς τοῦτο παρελθεῖν ἐθάρρησαν Λάιος καὶ Κελεὸς καὶ Κέρβερος καὶ Αἰγωλιός, ὅπως πλεῖστον ἀρύσωνται μέλι· καὶ περιθέμονοι περὶ τὸ σῶμα πάντῃ χαλκὸν, ἠρύσαντο τοῦ μέλιτος τῶν μελισσῶν καὶ τὰ τοῦ Διὸς εἶδον σπάργανα καὶ αὐτῶν ὁ χαλκὸς ἐρράγη περὶ τὸ σῶμα. Ζεὺς δὲ βροντήσας ἀνέτεινε τὸν κεραυνόν. Μοῖραι δὲ καὶ Θέμις ἐκόλυσαν· οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὅσιον αὐτόθι θανεῖν οὐδένα· καὶ ὁ Ζεὺς πάντας αὐτοὺς ἐποίησεν ὄρνιθας· καὶ ἔστιν ἐξ αὐτῶν τὸ γένος τῶν οἰωνῶν, λάιοι καὶ κολιοῖοι καὶ κέρβεροι καὶ αἰγωλιοῖοι· καὶ εἰσὶν ἀγαθοὶ φανέντες καὶ ἐπιτελεῖς παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ὄρνιθας, ὅτι τοῦ Διὸς εἶδον τὸ αἷμα.

-Antoninus Liberalis, Met. Syn. 19.

In Crete, it is said that there is a sacred cave of bees in which they say Rhea bore Zeus and it was forbidden that anyone enter it, either god or man. At a designated time in each year, a very great fire appears to shine from the cave. The story says that this occurs whenever the blood from the birth of Zeus boils out. The holy bees possess the cave, the nurses of Zeus. Laios and Keleos and Kerberos and Aigolos emboldened themselves to enter it, so that they might collect the great amount of honey. Putting bronze everywhere around their bodies, they collected the bees' honey and they saw the swaddling clothes of Zeus and the bronze was knocked from their bodies. Zeus, thundering, lifted up his thunderbolt, but the Moirai and Themis held him back. For it is not at all lawful to kill anyone in there. And so Zeus made them all birds. And the race of birds of omen comes from them, the blue thrush, and the jackdaw, and the kerberoi¹¹², and the barn

¹¹⁰ Gantz (1993) 41-2.

¹¹¹ The Curetes are often linked with the Corybantes and their mythology is rather confused. See Gantz (1993) 147-148.

¹¹² Exact type of bird with this name is unknown.

owl. And appearing they are good and auspicious beyond other birds, because they saw the blood of Zeus.

In Antoninus Liberalis' rendition of the tale, originally the cave is associated with Rhea, as the location of her labor and then as the site of a miraculous annual manifestation of her labor blood. There are many examples of caves being associated with childbirth in Greek religion, including a number of shrines to Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, found within caves.¹¹³ This is perhaps because the hollow cavity in the earth mirrors the womb. Bees also have associations with caves, due to their frequent habitation of caves and rock crevices in nature, making this an appropriate setting for their dwelling in the myth. Furthermore, their connection with fertility and life make them suitable residents of a cave linked with childbirth and apt attendants to the infant Zeus.¹¹⁴

As the myth continues, the bee is associated increasingly with the King of the Gods, and less with his mother. The insects are describes as "the nurses of Zeus" (τροφοὶ τοῦ Διός) and it is Zeus himself, not Rhea, that comes to defend their honey, when this sacred place is disturbed. However it is a sister of Rhea, Themis, who protects the cave's sanctity from the taint of death. Yet, the animals' ability to be linked to both divinities in this myth is suggestive. They are not only tied to the earth mother, who gives birth amidst nature and hides her son in a cave, but also to her sky god son, who ultimately inhabits the heavens. This duality shows the liminal nature of

¹¹³ See Burkert (1985) 24, 48, Larson (2007) 164, for a discussion of the birthing goddess, Eileithyia's associations with caves.

¹¹⁴ Caves also have associations with power and kingship, as Burkert (1985) 25 explains. This may also play into the location of Zeus' birth, or may be a result of it.

the creature which comes to represent both mother and son and also bridges the gap between the human realm and the divine living both amongst humans and in a sacred home.¹¹⁵

Another rendition of the myth of Zeus' birth and upbringing, found in a 4th Century CE text by Lactantius, seems to try to rationalize the role of the bee in the early life of Zeus and to explain the title Melissa for the priestesses of Cybele. Lactantius' version is the same one given by the 1st Century BCE Greek scholar Didymus, in his commentary on Pindar. This account tells of how the Cretan King Melissos had two daughters, Melissa and Amalthea. It was these two girls that cared for the infant god, feeding him milk and honey. From the names of these girls comes the "poetic tale" (*poetica illa fabula*, Div. Inst. 1. 22) that Jove was nursed by bees and a she-goat. Lactantius explains that because of this service, Melisseus made his daughter, Melissa, into the first priestess of the Great Mother, thus the subsequent priestesses bore the name Melissa after their predecessor.¹¹⁶ While this rendition is stripped of the more fantastical elements that are common in other versions of the myth, Lactantius and Didymus seem to work to maintain the elements that show the significance of Melissa, whether she is human or insect. This tale preserves her involvement in Zeus' birth, her connection to Rhea, and her role as a figure that establishes and maintains a connection between the world of the divine and the human realm. By preserving these elements, the tale still maintains her liminality, both between the mortal and immortal, and between the earthly realm of Rhea and the heavenly realm of Zeus.

In addition to playing the role of surrogate parents to Zeus, the bees also serve as surrogate parent to a few offspring of Zeus, as well. One such tale, which was preserved in a

¹¹⁵ The role of the bees in this tale is emphasized in two Attic red-figure renditions, which depict the men, having entered the sacred cave, now naked and surrounded by bees. British Museum, 4330; Antkenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, 340559.

¹¹⁶ Herren (2008) 44, believe this account is a later rationalization of the original version that contained the bees. I am inclined to agree.

fragment of Nicander's *Heteroeumena*, begins, like many other stories about Zeus, with the seduction of a nymph. As is always the case, the nymph becomes pregnant and, fearing the inevitable wrath of Hera, exposes the baby. However, "according to the will of Zeus," as Nicander describes it, the baby is fed by bees, and he is eventually found by Apollo's shepherding son, Phagros, still accompanied by his guardian swarm. Phagros adopted the boy and named him Meliteus, due to his apian companions, and Meliteus went on to become a king. A similar tale exists regarding another son of Zeus, as well, namely Dionysus. Apollonius of Rhodes says that this infant was fed on honey, also, while separated from his parents, though not by the bees themselves, but by a daughter of Aristaeus, the founding father of apiculture (*Arg.* 4.1129-34). Though the bees do not play the same explicit role as a pseudo-parent, caring for Zeus' child on earth, their honey does provide a link to the nursing tales of both Meliteus and Zeus himself, roughly following the nursing trope that associates Zeus and the bees, through the presence of their honey as a pseudo-mother's milk.

Columella makes reference to another story involving Zeus and the bee, showing a different sort of link between the two, and the casualness of his reference likely indicates that the tale was a well-known one. He notes that it is not the job of the husbandman to engage with the same questions and tales as the fabulist, one such tale being that of a woman of great beauty named Melissa, whom Jupiter turned into a bee (*Col.* 9.2.3). This reference comes shortly after his mention of Hyginus detailing the fabulous origins of bees, so it is probable that this Melissa tale, like the one regarding Demeter, is another story of how bees originally came into being, but in this version Jupiter— or Zeus— seems to be the responsible party.¹¹⁷ Based on the

¹¹⁷ Herren (2008) 45, posits that the story of Jupiter creating the bees is just a variation on the tale that Demeter creates them. To me, these stories seem distinct, but based on the

mythology surrounding Jupiter and beautiful women, it is not a rash inference that Melissa was another of his lovers, or a potential lover of the god, which calls to mind the erotic associations of the bee (see above). However, this story also echoes the tale of Demeter's Melissa and reminds us that female Melissai are often tied to priestesses and the beginning of priesthods. This story fits nicely into the perimeter of stories regarding the King of the Gods, in regard to its starting point with a lovely woman, and, while these myths usually end with the birth of a hero, here we have the birth of a species that features in a number of myths involving Zeus. Given that so many stories tie bees and Zeus together, it is a natural progression to credit him with their birth and to link their name with a woman who shares the same name.

Columella's story, along with the other tales regarding Zeus' bees, makes an important contribution to the symbolic conceptualization of the insects in myth. These stories show another side of apian associations, different from the aspects stressed by Cook, though still drawing upon some of the aspects previously identified as central to the bee. In these stories, they are presented as nurturers, linked closely to reproduction and birth, though in the case of Zeus and Dionysus, clearly not the birth of the human soul. They exhibit ties to Rhea and Cybele, both through their role as a surrogate parent to Zeus, and in the fact that their followers have ties to bees, namely the Curetes and the Melissai. With regards to Dionysus, Meliteus, and Melissa, we see the role of humans come into play, and the bees serve as a way to bridge the human and divine, providing semi-divine care of the sons of the King of the Gods, and the end result of Zeus' affection for the beautiful Melissa. A pair of minor tales strengthens the association between the god and the insect, reinforcing the sort of relationship that is depicted in the Melissa tale, that is, the role of Zeus as creator or patron of the bee. One such story credits

brief rendition offered by Columella, it is impossible to assess how closely they resemble one another.

Zeus with their bronze color and their hardy constitution, as thanks for their role in his youth (Diod. 5.70), and a fable tells of how the bee offered Zeus a taste of his honeycomb and he was so impressed that he offered it a reward, bestowing upon the insect, at its request, the ability to sting (*Aesopica*, 163 Perry).¹¹⁸ Thus, these tales emphasize a close relationship between Zeus and the bees, one in which the bees function somewhat like enactors of Zeus' will on earth, fulfilling his wishes in the mortal world by nourishing his sons.

Apian Prophecy and Poetry

As a revelation of Zeus' divine will and a manifestation of otherworldly knowledge on earth—that is, a link between the divine and human—the association between poetry, prophesy, and bees is unsurprising and functions on a multitude of levels. Like Zeus and the sons of Zeus, a number of celebrated ancient poets were said to have been fed by bees on honey. Theocritus tells the tale of a goatherd-poet, Comatas, who was locked up in a box, during which time he was kept alive by the bees, who brought him honey (*Theoc. Id. 7*). In addition, stories about historical poets, including Hesiod, Pindar, and Virgil, told of how bees fed them honey in their youth.¹¹⁹ Tale such as these link the divinely-inspired nature of their words and the sweetness of their poetry to the divine messengers, the bees, and their immortal product, honey. The equation of the sweetness of song with the sweetness of honey was common in both Greece and Rome, and honeyed terms are abundant in even the oldest Greek discussions of poetry. The stem for honey (μελι-) appears throughout early Greek poetry, in words used to describe the poetic craft

¹¹⁸ Bounas (2008), 68 views this fable in a negative light, as a representation of the aggressiveness of the bee, an emphasis that I do not perceive in the tale.

¹¹⁹ For a complete listing of references, see Cook (1895) 8 n.53-60.

and successful and pleasing poets and poetry, terms such as μελιγάρυς ("sweet-voiced"),¹²⁰ and μελίγλωστος ("honey-tongued"),¹²¹ to name but two.

The Pythia, too, was called the "Delphic bee" (Pin. *Pyth.* 4.60), being a singer of sorts, who murmured the divine will of Zeus in hexameters, illustrating the strong conflation between poetry and prophesy, which likely occurred quite early on.¹²² Hesiod's Muses offer the earliest suggestion of this conflation. In the *Theogony*, the poet asks the Muses to inspire his song, since when they sing, they offer knowledge of the past, present, and future (Hes. *Th.* 38). Futuristic pronouncements were often referred to in terms which remind the audience that what is revealed of the future is the will of Zeus himself, as in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, where Apollo gives the young god dominion over the lesser means of divination, which he practiced prior to becoming the revealer of the will of Zeus by means of his oracle (*HHH* 535-566). The Muses, too, as potential singers of the past, present, and future are relegated primarily to singing the glory of Zeus, which suggests that their ability to foretell events is, in fact, a revealing of and

¹²⁰ Alc. 26.1; *Od.* 12.187; Pin. *O.* 11.4, *Pyth.* 3.64, *Is.* 2.3, *Pae.* 5.7, *Nem.* 3.4

¹²¹ Aesch. *PB.* 173; Bacchyl. *Fr.* 3.2, Ep. 3.97; Aristoph. *Birds*, 908.

¹²² The Pythia is the only priestess who does not fit the pattern of mother goddess-type priestesses bearing the name Melissa. It is difficult to say why she bears the name Melissa. On the one hand, her nature is not like that of other priestess, due to the prophetic aspect, and thus may have to do more with the associations between poetry, prophesy and the bee. On the other hand, the mythology concerning the early history of Delphi may offer another explanation. One set of tales ties worship at that site back to the earth goddess, Gaia, and indicates that this was once the site of her daughter, Themis' oracle (Aesch. *Eu.* 1-8, Eur. *IT* 1239-83, Pind. fr. 55 SM, Plut. *Mor.* 293c, 421c). See Gantz (1993) 88. The accounts differ on how Apollo came to displace Gaia and Themis, but this conflict seems to be manifested in the story of Apollo and the Python, whom he defeats before establishing himself in Delphi, where it dwelt. The death of the Python, as a child of Gaia, serves as a sort of symbolic slaying of Gaia's claim to the site, and represents the site's change of hands. Gaia, as a goddess associated with the earth and fertility, is a good candidate for priestess bearing the name Melissa, and, if such was the case, the title may have been a relic harking back to the original oracular uses of the site, despite the change in dominant divinity.

celebration of the will of Zeus.¹²³ In terms of the bees' association with prophesy, in particular, it is a logical continuation.

Bees are often depicted in conjunction with the prophetic explicitly (not just indirectly) through the Pythia or through song. Pindar tells the tale of the seer Iamus who was fed on honey by snakes and thus Apollo, his father, made him gifted beyond all others in the prophetic arts (Pin. *O.* 6).¹²⁴ In addition, bees themselves are frequent sources of omens and oracles in myth and history, conveying a variety of meanings and signs awaiting the correct interpretation of those to whom they are sent. Pausanias tells how the oracle of Trophonius was discovered by following bees to the site (Paus. 9.40.1) and Aristotle, Varro, Vergil, and Pliny all credit the insect with foretelling the weather (Arist. *HA* 625b, Varro, 3.16.37, Verg. *G.* 4.191, Pliny *NH*, 11.20). Livy tells of several bee omens, including one in the Forum (24.46), and one in the camp of Scipio (21.46). Tacitus mentions the settling of a swarm on the Capitoline as a progeny in 64 CE (*Ann.* 12.64), while Pliny and Julius Obsequens both mention another swarm omen in the camp of Drusus (Pliny, 11.55; Obs. 72).¹²⁵ The insect is also connected to a mysterious means of divination in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (HHH 552-566).

Given the bees' ties to poetry and prophesy, it is perhaps no surprise that they are also associated with Parnassus and Delphi, the region of the god of poetry and prophesy's oracle, which purports to reveal to humans the will of the gods. It is often considered a given that the creatures that are connected with poetry and prophesy are associated with Apollo, as well, but it is hasty to think that, because his realm has connections with the bee, he must also be connected

¹²³ The Muses are associated with bees, for the same reason as are poets. For a discussion of the connection between the Muses and bees, see Herren (2008) 50-2.

¹²⁴ It is worth noting that Germanic mythology links mead with poetry and prophesy. See Ransome (1939) 155-175.

¹²⁵ For a more extensive list of bee omens, see Ransome (1939) 109-110, MacInnes (2000).

with them for the same reasons. Rather the link between Apollo and bees is a somewhat tenuous one, mysterious due to a distinct lack of information and a mythological tradition that only hints at an indirect connection between the two. In regard to an association between the bee and Delphi, the evidence is strong. Bees feature on the city's coins¹²⁶ and a myth about the early history of the site, found in Pindar and Pausanias, gives the bees an explicit role in the sanctuary there, all of which suggests a strong connection between the god and the insect, but it is a connection that must be sought out.

Pausanias offers an extensive discussion regarding the succession of Apollo's temples at the site, a tale that was also told by Pindar in a paean several hundred years prior, but which exists now only in fragments. According to Pausanias, the original temple of Apollo at Delphi was a laurel leaf hut, while the second was made by the bees and the birds, out of beeswax and feathers, and was sent by Apollo to the land of the Hyperboreans (Paus. 10.5.9). However, he finds this tale unlikely and explains that another story says that it was actually made by a man named Pteras, for whom the temple was named (Paus. 10.5.10). The third temple was made of bronze, which he finds unsurprising, and he offers examples of other bronze structures (Paus. 10.5.11), but dismisses a version of the tale that suggests the temple was made by Hephaestus and had bewitching, singing ornaments, claiming that these ornaments were modeled on Homer's sirens (Paus. 10.5.12). Pausanias tells us that various accounts say this temple either fell into a chasm or melted (Paus. 10.5.12), which the heroes Trophonius and Agamedes replaced with the fourth and final temple, made from stone (Paus. 10.5.13). From what remains of Pindar's version, it is clear that he told a more fantastic account, with the second temple ending up with the Hyperboreans (Pind. *P.* 8.100), and Hephaestus and Athena crafting the third, with golden

¹²⁶ Ransome (1939) 98.

singers enchanting those who come near and causing them to waste away at the site, due to the beauty of their song (Pind. *Pyth.* 8.103-124). His discussion of the bees and the birds is mostly lost, and we lack any record of what the narrative surrounding the laurel temple was, but it is probable that this version predated the version preferred by Pausanias, which seems to be a rationalized reworking of Pindar's strange account.

In Pindar's account, it seems to be the case that the bees are part of a stage in Delphi's mythic history, contributing to the site in a nebulous way, one of a series of materials and builders with increasingly confusing links to the god and to his domain. The laurel associations are easily explained, as the plant was Apollo's official emblem, often adorning his head in visual images. Birds, like the god himself, are songsters and connected to prophesy through their role in augury or ornithomancy, and Apollo himself is associated with a number of bird species, particularly the crow or raven. Strabo tells the story of how a pair of eagles, or perhaps crows, determined the site of Delphi (Strabo, 9.3.6), giving the sanctuary a specific tie to both birds and ornithomancy. The link between birds and Apollo is not quite as evident as his connection with the laurels, but is still easily discernable. However, there is no body of mythology that directly associates Apollo with the bees of Delphi, aside from this poem. As we have seen, honey terms and bee myths are often linked to the poets, and thus can be indirectly connected to their patron god, Apollo, and we have seen them as a means of demonstrating Zeus' divine will, and, as the mouthpiece for that will, Apollo and Delphi share something in common with them. Yet this link is more tenuous than the others, and this is increasingly the case with the other successive versions of the temple, to the extent that it has left the few scholars who have taken an interest in this myth grasping for an explanation as to why these elements are associated with the early stages of Delphi.

Sourvinou-Inwood's examination of the myth tries to connect the elements associated with the temple with actual structures or cultic practices in Delphi's history, suggesting that the evolution of the temples correlates with the development of the site.¹²⁷ Rutherford's commentary does much of the same thing, trying to explain the myth in terms of real world connections,¹²⁸ while Papalexandrou looks for ties to elements of worship and cult practices at Delphi.¹²⁹ As is often the case with interpretations of mythology, these scholars are looking for what the Delphic succession myth says (or, in the case of Papalexandrou, is riddling) about the history of the site, and what it is reflecting about the practices that took place there, and seek to offer a singular and unified real world explanation. This approach is problematic, however, as it assumes that myth always reflects a real world element, that modern interpreter can successfully reconstruct those elements, and that the significance of the complex imagery and symbolism found in myth can best be understood through a historical lens, rather than as a reflection of another sort of anxiety or conceptualization that is not necessarily historical in nature or unified. The shortcomings of this approach are evident in each of these examples, as none of these three discussions comes to a satisfying conclusion as to what these elements are doing here and why they are important and, for the most part, they are forced into speculation. Quite tellingly, the Trophonios and Agamedes part of the myth is often forgotten entirely in these attempts to understand the history behind the myth.

Part of the problem of interpreting this myth is, as always, that a modern audience is lacking some of the pertinent information, a fact that is particularly evident in the apian element of the myth. Apollo does have a bee-related history in myth, but our evidence for it is grounded

¹²⁷ Sourvinou-Inwood (1979).

¹²⁸ Rutherford (2001) 210-232.

¹²⁹ Papalexandrou (2004)

in a single source, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. In the *Hymn*, Apollo tells the young Hermes that he can have dominion over a lesser form of divination

σεμναί¹³⁰ γάρ τινές εἰσι, κασίγνηται γεγαυῖαι,
 παρθένοι, ὠκείησιν ἀγαλλόμεναι περυγέσσι,
 τρεῖς· κατὰ δὲ κρατὸς πεπαλαγμέναι ἄλφιστα λευκὰ
 οἰκία ναιετάουσιν ὑπὸ πτυχί Παρνησοῖο,
 μαντεῖης ἀπάνευθε διδάσκαλοι ἦν ἐπὶ βουσί
 παῖς ἔτ' ἐὼν μελέτησα· πατὴρ δ' ἐμὸς οὐκ ἀλέγιζεν.
 ἐντεῦθεν δῆπειτα ποτώμεναι ἄλλοτε ἄλλη
 κηρία βόσκονται καὶ τε κραίνουσιν ἕκαστα.
 αἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν θυίωσιν ἐδηδυῖαι μέλι χλωρὸν
 προφρονέως ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθείην ἀγορεύειν·
 ἦν δ' ἀπονοσφισθῶσι θεῶν ἠδεῖαν ἐδωδὴν
 ψεύδονται δῆπειτα δι' ἀλλήλων δονέουσαι.
 τάς τοι ἔπειτα δίδωμι, σὺ δ' ἀτρεκέως ἐρεείνων
 σὴν αὐτοῦ φρένα τέρπε, καὶ εἰ βροτὸν ἄνδρα δαείης
 πολλάκι σῆς ὀμφῆς ἐπακούσεται αἶ κε τύχησι.
 -*Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, 552-566

For there are certain holy ones, who are sisters,
 maidens, exulting in their swift wings,
 three of them: their heads besprinkled with white barley,
 they make their home on a glen of Parnassus,
 teachers of the prophetic art, which among the cattle
 I practiced, while still a boy, but my father did not heed it.
 Then hence they fly about, here and there,
 and feed upon the honeycomb and bring to pass each thing.
 When they have eaten fresh honey, they are inspired,
 they are readily willing to speak the truth.
 But if they are robbed of the sweet food of the gods,
 then buzzing around one another, they lie.
*Hereafter, I give these to you. Enquiring of them strictly
 Rejoice in your mind, and if you teach mortal man,
 many times he will hear your voice, if he is fortunate.*

This tale has also caused its fair share of interpretive disputes. The impulse among scholars is to identify these maidens with someone or something we have more information on and much ink

¹³⁰ I have chosen to provide σεμναί here rather than the alternatives, discussed below, because it is the version that appears in the majority of the manuscripts.

has been spilt arguing that they are linked to the Corcyrian nymphs,¹³¹ the Thriai,¹³² and various divining practices at Delphi. The text itself only increases this difficulty, as the first word of the text quoted above is disputed, appearing in most manuscripts as "holy" (σεμναί), but in one version as "Fates" (μοῖραι). Yet, Hermann proposed emending the text to Θριαί,¹³³ a reading that gains its credibility mostly from a passage in Apollodorus inspired by the *Hymn* and a scholiast who mentions that the Thriai were prophetic nymphs on Parnassus and that they were nurses of Apollo. Though Hermann's emendation has been more or less dismissed at this point, his identification still holds among a number of scholars, despite a number of difficulties. The primary objection is that the Thriai are associated with divination by means of pebbles, which Philochorus says are named for the goddesses (*FGrHist* 328 F195), and yet, the *Hymn* contains nothing that could be conceived of as a reference to this method of divination and no mention of the pebbles with which they are so closely linked.¹³⁴ Despite this disjunction, Jacoby has attempted to salvage the identification, by claiming a shift in the means of prophesizing associated with the Thriai, between the time of the *Hymn* and the information supplied by Philochorus.¹³⁵

Instead of seeking illumination from outside the text, I would like to start with what the passage itself tells the reader about these strange divinities. Firstly, it is clear that there are three of them (τρεις, 554), who are sisters (κασίγνηται, 552) and maidens (παρθένοι, 553). Though the language of these first lines seems to be straightforward enough, it has been argued that these maidens are, in fact, elderly, due to the reference to their heads being sprinkled with barley (κατὰ

¹³¹ Larson (1995).

¹³² Hermann (1806) 83-4.

¹³³ For a discussion of history of these suggestions and the merits of each reading, see Feyel (1946), Vergados (2013) 567-8.

¹³⁴ Scheinberg (1979) 11-12, Larson (1995) 342.

¹³⁵ Jacoby (1969) on Philochorus, *FGrH* 328 F 195.

δὲ κρατὸς πεπαλαγμένοι ἄλφιστα λευκά, 554). Matthiae interpreted this as a reference to their white hair,¹³⁶ however there is nothing in the language itself that suggests this passage is metaphorical and the usage of παρθένοι in the previous line suggests that the women are young, at the appropriate age for marriage, like nymphs. Though this term is sometimes used to indicate chastity,¹³⁷ it is far more common for it to be a marker of general age, as is indicated by the fact that the term is also used of unmarried women who are not virgins.¹³⁸ Thus, the chastity notion seems secondary to the implication of marriageable youth.¹³⁹

The *Hymn* also informs its reader that these maidens have wings (ὠκεΐησιν ἀγαλλόμεναι περὺγεςσι, 553; ποτώμεναι, 558), live on the slopes of Parnassus (οἰκία ναιετάουσιν ὑπὸ πτυχὶ Παρνησοῖο, 555),¹⁴⁰ and both practice and teach prophesy, though exactly what kind of prophesy is unclear and another source of speculation and debate. Grottonelli suggested cleromancy,¹⁴¹ Amandry picks up on the barley reference and links it to a gloss in Hesychius that suggests Apollo was associated with alphetomancy (also known as aleuromancy), divination via barley meal or cakes, though he does not definitively identify the act in the *Hymn* as alphetomancy,¹⁴² and others have proposed various methods of divining by bee.¹⁴³ But in the poem itself, the divination seems to be rendered through the maidens themselves, though, again, the exact

¹³⁶ Matthiae (1800) 311. Ilgen (1796), Cook (1895), and Radermacher (1933) suggested the barley meal is actually pollen, though, again, there is nothing in the text itself that suggests this reading and the elements that associate the maidens with bees have not yet occurred, which would make this reference a confusing one.

¹³⁷ LSJ s.v. παρθένος II.

¹³⁸ LSJ s.v. παρθένος I.2.

¹³⁹ LSJ s.v. παρθένος I.1-2.

¹⁴⁰ This is usually read as a cave on the slopes of Parnassus. E.g. Scheinberg (1979), Larson (1995) 347, Vergados (2013) 273.

¹⁴¹ Grottonelli (2001).

¹⁴² Amandry (1950) 60-61. Amandry (1950) 61, also suggest that the poem allegorically references an ancient agrarian practice of making offerings of barley mixed with honey.

¹⁴³ Larson (1995), Latte (1939) 832.

method of revealing their prophesy is unclear. However, the text does indicate that these maidens have a sort of kinship with bees, a connection that is central to their mantic process. Like bees, these sisters inhabit the countryside, fly (ποτόμεναι, 558), eat honey (μέλι, 560) and honeycombs (κηρία, 559), and buzz (δονέουσαι, 563), a word that can convey both movement (as in "to shake" and sometimes "to agitate")¹⁴⁴ and sound, though with regard to bees it is more likely to apply to their sound.¹⁴⁵ As with the poets mentioned earlier, honey is linked to their inspiration and it is only after they have consumed honey that they will deliver true prophesies. They may or may not "buzz around one another" while they deliver true prophesies, but they certainly do when delivering false ones. This suggests, though not with full certainty, that flight and buzzing may play a role in how they divine. Vergados rightly notes that the process is reminiscent of ornithomancy.¹⁴⁶

Of the many theories offered regarding who these maidens are, Larson provides one of the most thorough and thoughtful arguments. While admitting that her identification is not perfect, she posits that the Corycian nymphs are the best candidates for the mysterious Bee Maidens. They inhabit Parnassus, were likely associated with both Hermes and Apollo,¹⁴⁷ and their shrine is a cave, in which astragali were found, likely for the casting of lots, possibly for prophetic purposes (*i.e.* cleromancy).¹⁴⁸ She points out some connections between bees and nymphs, such as their mutual connection to nature, the fact that several nymphs bear the name Melissa, and their appearance together in various myths,¹⁴⁹ and suggests that their cave might

¹⁴⁴ LSJ *s.v.* δονέω I

¹⁴⁵ LSJ *s.v.* δονέω II

¹⁴⁶ Vergados (2013) 570.

¹⁴⁷ Larson (1995) 349.

¹⁴⁸ Larson (1995) 347.

¹⁴⁹ Larson (1995) 352.

have housed bees at one time,¹⁵⁰ to which offerings of honey may have been made prior to divination.¹⁵¹

While her examination of the evidence is careful and illuminating in some regards, several problems remain with the identification. Though nymphs, in general, are often associated with Hermes,¹⁵² there is little evidence linking the Corycian nymphs, in particular, to Hermes,¹⁵³ a fact which is particularly problematic given that this is one of the significant features of the Bee Maidens in the *Hymn* (that they are now representatives of Hermes' domain of prophesy). She notes that honey is a common offering to nymphs and Hermes,¹⁵⁴ but fails to note that it was a common offering to numerous gods and therefore cannot be used as evidence to connect Hermes, the Corycian nymphs, and the maidens of the poem. But most significant is the problem of how to deal with the text itself, particularly in regard to what the reader is supposed to take as a literal description of these maidens and what is more figurative. She takes the bee qualities ascribed to the maidens in the *Hymn* as metaphorical and the result of an intentional conflation between bees and nymphs, noting that nymphs are often equated with bees¹⁵⁵ and suggesting that the nymphs and real bees may have inhabited the same cave in the

¹⁵⁰ Larson (1995) 355.

¹⁵¹ Larson (1995) 356.

¹⁵² Larson (1995) 349.

¹⁵³ Hermes appears on a relief with Apollo and a triad of nymphs, who are unidentified. Larson (1995) 349-50, speculates that the Corycian nymphs' cave may have been sacred to Hermes, as a god associated with nymphs early on, and later passed into the domain of Pan, but the cave itself bears no evidence of cult activity directed toward Hermes. She does, however, point out that astragali are associated with Hermes, though that does not prove that this cave related to him.

¹⁵⁴ Larson (1995) 355.

¹⁵⁵ Larson (1995) 352-3. I think this claim is overstated. As nature divinities, the nymphs are associated with the whole realm of the natural world including trees, springs, meadows, bees, wild life, and so forth. A handful of stories in which certain nymphs interact with bees does not necessarily create a general association between all nymphs and the creatures, particularly when the bees may be representing other themes or aspects

tradition that the poem is referencing, which is perhaps why their actions are conflated within the poem.¹⁵⁶ However, while bees and nymphs are linked, an equation like this is unparalleled.

Nymphs are never made to have bee-like characteristics, are never said to "fly" or "rejoice in their wings", and the text offers nothing to suggest that this description is not literal.¹⁵⁷

Secondly, she hypothesizes that the divination practices of the nymphs may have occurred in the cave, while it was occupied by bees, and this may have contributed to the conflation between the activities of the bees and the nymphs.¹⁵⁸ But this arrangement is not a realistic one, at least not for a prolonged period of time. Bees swarm and change locations regularly and even modern beekeepers lose hives irretrievably. The idea is an appealing one that ties together her argument cleanly, but the reality is that neither wild nor domesticated bees could be relied upon to remain in the cave. If this union was a significant part of the activities going on there, as the poem suggests, the practice would quickly fall apart when the swarm fled or fell ill, particularly if the shrine lacked regular attendants seeing to the health of the bees and plenty of available food, something that would be hard to come by in such a dry, rocky locale.¹⁵⁹

Scheinberg and Feyel also offer attractive options for the Bee Maidens. However, the appeal of their arguments is in their openness to ambiguity. Scheinberg concludes that the Bee

of a given tale rather than representing the nymph herself, as is the case with the nymph who sends a bee as a messenger to her lover, Rhoecus (Charon of Lampsacus, FGrHist 262 F 12). Here, the bee's associations with fertility and the erotic setting of the meadow are more likely at play than an equating of the nymph and her bee.

¹⁵⁶ Larson (1995) 355-6.

¹⁵⁷ Vergados (2013) 573, claims that the passage is intentionally ambiguous, but instead he sees this ambiguity as making it unclear whether the Bee Maidens are anthropomorphized figures or actual bees.

¹⁵⁸ She also mentions the possibility of divination by bee, a theory that has been posited by several scholars. E.g. Amandry (1950) 63 n.1, Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) 241-2. However the problem with this is much the same as the problems associated with retaining a hive or hives of bees in a cave (discussed above).

¹⁵⁹ This same objection can apply to a number of other scholars' arguments that posit bee divination at various sites.

Maidens cannot be identified due to their similarities with countless other divine and semi-divine triads of sister.¹⁶⁰ Feyel suggests that the passage concerns some currently unknown, ancient bee goddesses, whom he calls *σμῆναι*,¹⁶¹ a term that he suggests is connected etymologically with *σμῆνος* ("swarm") and to which he would like to emend the text.¹⁶² Emending the text to a proposed *hapax legomenon* is problematic and unwise, regardless of the etymological grounds offered, but his theory that the text refers to a triad of unknown bee-goddesses is promising. In fact, this is the easiest explanation, given the difficulty of matching the characteristics offered with any triad of goddesses, particularly in their apian features. As Scheinberg points out, the identification with the Thriai requires that the reader ignore the references to honey and bees, which are essential to themes of the text,¹⁶³ and the fact that the Thriai's main attribute, mantic stones, are nowhere to be seen.¹⁶⁴ She likens ignoring the bee-like features of the maidens to describing a centaur without the word 'horse'.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, Larson's theory requires that the reader assume these apian attributes are metaphorical, though the text itself does not suggest that.¹⁶⁶ Thus, I believe that Scheinberg is correct to argue against any identification of these maidens. However, the reason that they cannot be identified is probably because the divinities in question have slipped from the existing record, or for the most part, anyway.

Vergados, among others, has noted the appeal of connecting the Bee Maidens of the *Hymn* with the hybrid figures that appear on some small, archaic plaques in the Boston Museum

¹⁶⁰ Scheinberg (1979). and Richardson (2010) similarly claims that the description is intentionally riddling, which prevents certain identification, but lends the figures "an awesome dignity."

¹⁶¹ Feyel (1946) 15.

¹⁶² Feyel (1946) 12-15.

¹⁶³ Scheinberg (1979) 14.

¹⁶⁴ Scheinberg (1979) 14.

¹⁶⁵ Scheinberg (1979) 14.

¹⁶⁶ Larson (1995) 352. Vergados (2013) 569, offers a similar argument against Larson's identification.

and British Museum, dated to around the 7th Century BCE.¹⁶⁷ These figures have a human head, arms and chest, probably that of a woman, large, outstretched wings, and a body that looks like the thorax of an insect. The upper body looks much like depictions of Potnia Theron, though her grasping hands hold nothing, instead of holding animals like typical depiction of the goddess, and their bee-half strongly resembles depictions of bees on coins. Another image, from Thera dated to the 7th Century BCE,¹⁶⁸ shows similar bee-hybrid figures on charms, depicted in a similar style and manner as the plaques. A third image, engraved on gem shows an insect body, complete with thorax and wings with a female head attached to it, in profile, and what has been identified as a lyre behind her.¹⁶⁹ Though initially identified as a depiction of a Muse, this sort of image for a Muse is unheard of and without further evidence to unite such a depiction with the Muses, it seems wise to avoid any firm identification of this unique figure. It would be hasty to declare that these images should be associated with the Bee Maidens in the *Hymn*, but it serves as an interesting comparison. It shows that the notion of combining woman and bee is not an isolated one and that there is some nexus between divinity, bee, and maiden, which may be linked to Apollo, though drawing any conclusions about these figures beyond that is difficult.

It is also worth noting the similarities that Pindar's *Keledones* (Κηληδόνες, Pind. Pae. 6.108) bear to the Bee Maidens and other such maiden groups. They, too, are linked to maidens, in that the word *παρθενία* is used, possibly in regard to their song. Furthermore, they may have prophetic abilities. Pindar says that "Memory told to them everything that is and that was before" (πρόσθεν γεγενημένα [...]ται Μναμοσύνα [...] παντα σφιν ἔφρα[σ]), at which point the text breaks off. Rutherford speculates that what follows may be "and that will be", as the

¹⁶⁷ Vergados (2013) 569. Boston Museum, 99.396, 397 and 398; British Museum, 1860, 0404.123 and 124.

¹⁶⁸ Mittelilung *ods Kais Deut. Arch. Institut. Athenische Abteilung* Vol. 28 (1901), 225.

¹⁶⁹ Southesh. Coll. Pl. IX H9.

passage itself is rather formulaic. If this is the case, their songs would be like that of the Muses, daughters of Memory, and they would be another prophetic group of maidens, or maiden-like singers, inhabiting Parnassus, like the Bee Maidens and possibly the Corycian nymphs. Significantly, the *Keledones* and the Bee Maidens are both tied to old and discarded means of prophesy or song at or near Delphi, once associated with Apollo and now somewhat separate from him. In the case of the *Keledones*, they are said to be hidden underground by the gods, but it is unclear whether that puts an end to their song. Rutherford notes that it is possible that the *Keledones* are simply buried with the temple, but continue to sing, becoming a source of prophetic knowledge.¹⁷⁰ Whatever the case, these figures seem to be the precursors of the Pythia at Delphi, singing prior to the establishment of the priestess, in the same way that the Bee Maidens are Apollo's means of divination, prior to becoming the voice of Zeus' will in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. Both groups of figures seem to represent a moment in the past of the site and in Apollo's development as a god, and a part of Delphi's imagined evolution into becoming what it eventually became.

While the *Keledones* and the Bee Maidens raise more questions than provide answers about the murky past of Delphi and the bee's association to Apollo, the Bee Maidens, in particular, fit into the parameter of mythical trends regarding the bee established in this chapter. Like the Bee Maidens, bees are composed of contrasting elements. The Bee Maidens live on earth, but are themselves divinities, offering otherworldly knowledge to those who can decipher their message. Likewise, the bee crosses realms, living amongst men, but serving Zeus and the mother goddesses, and bearing a close association with the human soul and rebirth. Given the bee's constant connection with maidens called Melissa, including a variety of

¹⁷⁰ Rutherford (2001) 228.

priestesses and nymphs (see above), there is a certain sense to the melding of apian and maidenly features.

Conclusion

Throughout mythology, the bee is continuously blurring lines and preventing an easy definition of its role in the mythological world. They are at once chthonic and earthly, an emblem of the dead and of the living, and their *bugonia* represents the potential to formulate life from death. These more chthonic associations have long been teased out, but their connection to the earthly both contrasts those associations and works alongside them to give a greater unity to the idea of rebirth. Furthermore, these earthly elements and their connection to fecundity make them an important symbol for a variety of mother goddesses, and help make sense of the name given to a large number of seemingly unrelated priestesses across the Greek world.

Rhea then lends her association with the bee to Zeus, and now we can see the bee not only as a creature that crosses the boundaries between earth and the underworld, but also as one that bridges the gap between the heavens and the earth, as an enactor of Zeus' will. In this sense, they fit well into the realm of prophesy, which provides mortal humans a window into the divine scheme for the world, and allows a glimpse at Zeus' plan. As the voice of that plan, Apollo has a place in association with the bees, but the exact nature of that place is still unclear. The bee's tie to early Delphi is undoubtedly due, in part, to the role Gaia once played at the sanctuary, but how, in what way, and to what degree they come to be connected with Apollo, is still and will likely remain somewhat uncertain. Only through looking at the vast variety of myth associated with the bee, can one begin to see the scope of the bee's importance and the diversity of its roles.

However, in sorting through the complexity, what is clear is the flexibility of the insect and its special significance as a creature that embodies fertility, rebirth, divine will, and liminality.

Chapter Two: The Society and Politics of the Hive

More than any other social animal, there is something about the bee that suggests that its species has formed not just a flock or a herd, but rather a society. While wolves and sheep live together in greater numbers, whether it be for the sake of hunting or protection, bees live together not only to cooperate, but also to create a communal home, a hive, to delegate work, and to mass produce. Their organization, production, specialization, and division of labor are so sophisticated that it has been difficult to see it as a mere natural phenomenon. Instead, for thousands of years, humans have seen the hive as a sort of civilization and, as Aristotle makes clear, such social organization suggests politics.

διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῶν πάσης μελίττης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζώου μᾶλλον, δῆλον.

-Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a

For that reason, the human is clearly a political creature more than every kind of bee and every herd animal.

This line reveals much about how Aristotle conceives of the bee and its place among other animals and humans. The sentence's structure emphasizes the close correlation between ἄνθρωπος and πολιτικὸν through their placement next to one another. However, what comes next is the mention of the bee and only after a καὶ does Aristotle note "every herd animal" (καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζώου). The separation between the bee and the herd animal with the word καὶ and the usage of παντὸς with ἀγελαίου ζώου, suggests that a distinction is being made between the bee and the herd animals. This distinction may seem arbitrary at first glance, but it serves to establish how Aristotle sees the relationship between these three categories of "political animal" (πολιτικὸν...ζῶον), and, most significantly for this discussion, how he conceives of the bee.

These distinctions and the positioning of the words, first humans, then the bee, then the gregarious animals, suggests a spectrum of political possibilities, from most to least political, with the bee falling somewhere between merely gregarious and politically organized to the extent that human beings are. There is something distinct about the choice of this word (πολιτικός) and Aristotle's decision to mention the bee, in particular, as an example of a more political animal. This choice suggests that there is something about the bee that makes it more akin to humans than most animals, because they are more πολιτικός than other animals.

The term πολιτικός is worth a closer look, as well, in order to determine what Aristotle is suggesting about the bee. It is etymologically derived from πόλις ("city" or "city-state"), and linked to the term πολίτης, which indicates a member of the city or city-state, a citizen.¹⁷¹ The word πολιτικός does not merely describe something affiliated with a city, but something that participates in the city.¹⁷² Definitions of πολιτικός include simply "of or relating to citizens",¹⁷³ but also "befitting a citizen"¹⁷⁴, "consisting of citizens"¹⁷⁵, and "living in a community".¹⁷⁶ When used substantively, τὰ πολιτικά indicates the "affairs of the state".¹⁷⁷ Thus, the use of a word like πολιτικός to describe animals implies not only a cooperative living situation, but an organized one, in which the individuals are working towards some common end, as in a state.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷¹ Cooper (1990) 221-22, also emphasizes the importance of the connection between πολιτικός and πόλις in regards to humans' nature in his work.

¹⁷² On the specifics regarding Aristotle's use of the term πολιτικός and its three senses, in his works, see Mulgan (1974). It is not my aim to argue for the bee being πολιτικός in any particular one of Mulgan's senses.

¹⁷³ LSJ s.v. πολιτικός I. 1.

¹⁷⁴ LSJ s.v. πολιτικός I. 2.

¹⁷⁵ LSJ s.v. πολιτικός I. 3.

¹⁷⁶ LSJ s.v. πολιτικός I. 4.

¹⁷⁷ LSJ s.v. πολιτικός III. 1.

¹⁷⁸ As in Cooper's (1990) 226 discussion of political animals, where he says the political animal is one whose members engage in some common work together, with a differentiation of function (see HA 488a). Depew (1995) 170-1, adds to this that they must

This passage suggests three tiers of social organization, in relation to the degree to which they are πολιτικός.¹⁷⁹ The least πολιτικός of the social animals are those which are "living in a herd".¹⁸⁰ The most πολιτικός is, of course, humans, who are the only species to have created cities and government, but nestled somewhere between the flock animals and humans is the bee.

The degree to which apian society is more organized than the herd is the main reason the bees seem distinct from other animals and more human. Aristotle spends considerable time discussing the organization and division of labor within the hive, noting that some bees work with the combs, others collect pollen, others make wax, and so forth (*HA* 625b, 627a). His extensive discussion indicates that this is a feature he thinks distinguishes honeybees from other creatures. However, in addition to their human-like specialization, the hive centers around a single bee, larger than the others, who, the Greeks thought, governs the rest of the bees as a leader. As is the case in English and many other languages,¹⁸¹ the association between this larger

be intelligent enough and able to communicate well enough to realize this goal. For further discussion on communication and intelligence of animals in Aristotle, see Depew (1995) 170 n. 32. This sense of political is not meant to imply that bees literally have a state, but rather that they are more like to humans, who are capable of being πολιτικός in the sense of having cities and government, than the gregarious creatures. As Depew (1995) 167, points out, "humans, at least in the *HA*, are not *politikos* because they latently desire to live in cities, but because (exceptions notwithstanding) they typically cooperate in making a living and in other matters of common concern, and most often and most successfully do so in *poleis*".

¹⁷⁹ There is a large and ongoing debate about how exactly to define the classes of animal-types laid out by Aristotle in the *History of Animals*, a debate into which this is not the place to enter. Suffice it to say, many scholars agree that Aristotle presents somewhat of a dichotomy between solitary and gregarious animals, with political animals being a subclass of the gregarious. Depew (1995) 161, argues instead for a continuum on which four traits fall, with the solitary and the very political at opposite ends of the spectrum. Whatever the case, my claim can be maintained in either circumstance. For more on the classifications of species and the defining of categories in Aristotle, see Kullman (1980), Cooper (1990), Depew (1995).

¹⁸⁰ LSJ s.v. ἀγελαῖος II.

¹⁸¹ For more on political metaphor involving the bee, beyond the scope of classical texts, see Wilson (2004) 106-139.

bee and a human monarch is reflected in the term for this central bee, which the Greeks called βασιλεύς ("king") or ἡγεμών ("leader"),¹⁸² imposing the terminology of government on the organization of the hive.

This phenomenon of calling the queen bee a "king" was neither unique to the Greeks nor did it begin with them.¹⁸³ In ancient Egypt, the hieroglyph and the word for bee (*bit*) meant both "king" and "Egypt", as well.¹⁸⁴ Lower Egypt was associated with the bee, in particular, and its king was "The One of the Bee", thus when Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt (symbolized by the sedge) were united under a single Pharaoh, the "Sedge and the Bee" became a symbol of the Pharaoh's rule over all of Egypt.¹⁸⁵ In hieroglyphic inscriptions, the image of the bee can almost always be seen just before the royal cartouche, cementing the association between the bee and Egypt's monarch and leading to the linguistic conflation.¹⁸⁶

The Romans used the terminology of monarchy for their bees, as well, calling the largest a *rex* ("king"), or, less frequently, a *dux* ("leader") or *imperator* ("general"). Given the prevalence of this image throughout the Mediterranean world, it is hardly a surprise that this conception of the largest bee as a monarch or leader colored the Greek and Roman conception of the hive. In even the most clear-cut and observant of the natural historical or scientific texts of the ancient world, the idea that bees have a political leader has had an impact on the observations of the hive. Aristotle's *History of Animals* offers the first extensive discussion of bees and their

¹⁸² For more on the gendering of the queen bee in Greek and Roman literature, see Introduction.

¹⁸³ From here on, I will distinguish between our modern, biological knowledge of the queen bee and the Greeks' and Romans' conception of this bee. When referring to the actual, fully-developed, female bee (workers are also female, but not fully-developed and thus incapable of breeding), I will use the term "queen bee", whereas I will call this bee the "bee-king", when referring to it exclusively in terms of its conception by the Greeks and Romans.

¹⁸⁴ Ransome (1939) 24, Stephens (2003) 1, Wilson (2004) 110.

¹⁸⁵ Wilson (2004) 111.

¹⁸⁶ Stephens (2003) 1.

habits in the Greek world and though much of the information he collected is accurate and insightful, a careful reading of his work reveals the degree to which he interpreted the actions of the bee as human, and specifically political in nature. His bias regarding the bee can be seen most clearly where he strays most from careful observation, but more subtle evidence can be seen throughout his discussion.

Due to the importance and influence of Aristotle, I have included the following detailed summary of his two sections dedicated to the bee, which appear in book five of the *History of Animals*. Though he mentions bees briefly in a few other sections, these two are the most significant both for an understanding of Aristotle's theories on bees, and for observing his relationship with later authors on the same subject, who draw heavily on Aristotle's research, sometimes in significant and telling ways.

Section	Topics:	Summary:
HA 553a	Reproduction theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not copulate, but fetch their young • Fetch the drones, workers born by kings • Drones are male, workers female
	Types of kings & description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two kinds of kings • Superior- fire-colored • The other- black and mottled • Double the size of worker
	Location of generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker- cells of comb • Kings- special cells suspended from the comb • King cells number 6-7 • Kings grow differently than the rest
HA 553b	Sting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers have sting • Drones have no sting • Kings have sting • Kings never use sting, people say they do not have it.
	Types of bees & description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best- round and mottled • Another- long, looks like wasp • "Robber"- black and fat-bellied • Drone- largest, stingless, inactive
	Organization of the hive & behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too few kings- disaster, as they contributed to generation • Too many kings- tears hive apart • Spring comes late, drought and mildew- less progeny • Dry weather- attend to honey

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wet weather- attend to brood ● Summer/Autumn- place young in honeycomb w/ honey
HA 554a	Honeycomb & honey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Honeycomb from flowers ● Wax from resin of trees ● Honey from dew ● No honey before Pleiades rise ● Honey gathered, not made ● Honey ripens and matures- 20 days ● Thyme honey- best ● Gather from every flower w/ a cup ● Takes up juice w/ a tongue-like organ ● Best progeny produced at the time of honey-making ● Carries wax, bee-bread on legs, vomits honey
	Young and their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sits on young, like a bird ● Young clings to comb to sit up for food ● Young workers & drones- white "grubs" ● King bee's egg- reddish ● King is born fully-formed (no grub stage) ● Eggs laid w/ honey beside ● Larvae develop fully before breaking out
HA 554b	Young and their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remove larvae heads before wings appear- bees will eat larvae ● Take wings off drone, bees will remove other drones' wings
	Lifespan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workers live 6-7 years ● Swarm lives 9-10 years, w/ good management
	The bees of Pontus and other varieties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pontus bees- white, produce honey twice a month ● Themiscyra bees have ground hives, little wax, great honey ● Pontus bees derive honey from ivy ● In Amisus- bees make white honey, deposited on trees ● Some bees make triple honeycombs in ground, w/ honey, no grubs

One of the first topics Aristotle approaches and one that he addresses repeatedly and in the greatest detail is the bee-king. He takes particular interest in the bee-kings' physical appearance, and makes an effort to mark out this bee as something different and distinct from the rest of the hive, much in the way one would expect a human monarch to be visually distinguishable from the people.¹⁸⁷ He points out that there are two varieties, one of which is "superior" (βελτιων, 553a), though curiously, he makes no reference to what makes it superior to

¹⁸⁷ Van Overmeire (2011) 34-38, offers a brief discussion of the way in which kings are marked out as physically distinct and how that compares to various biographical traditions, mostly from the Roman period.

the other. However, both can be distinguished by their larger size, which is double that of the worker (μέγεθος διπλάσιος τῆς χρηστῆς, 553a), and their particularly long abdomen (τὸ κάτω τοῦ διαζώματος ἔχουσιν ἡμιόλιον μάλιστα τῷ μήκει, 553a).

While it is true that queen bees are larger in size than workers, it is worth noting that Aristotle has exaggerated this feature. Generally, the queen bee is not double the size of the worker bee¹⁸⁸ and, in fact, cannot easily be spotted when among her hive. Modern beekeepers often mark the back of the queen with brightly colored paint, so that she can be spotted with ease and not lost among her workers of roughly comparable size.¹⁸⁹ However, this exaggeration is a telling one, as it seeks to make the bee-king more distinguished than he appears. Aristotle links the bee-king's superior size to his perceived greater importance in the hive, and accentuates this marker of his status, in the same way that a ruler or leader might be marked out by their clothes, countenance, or attractiveness, or in artwork, by his superior size.

Aristotle also emphasizes the bee-king's distinctiveness with regard to a number of his other features. According to the *History of Animals*, the king is born in a special cell, of which there are only six or seven, and his generation is unique from the other bees. He does not have a larval stage, but rather is hatched in his cell and emerges, fully formed, rather than emerging as a "grub" or "worm" (σκώληξ, HA 554a), as do the drones and workers. Whereas the "seed" of the other bees is white (ὁ δὲ γόνος ἐστὶ...λευκός, HA 554a), the "seed" that hatches a king is fire-colored (ὁ τῶν βασιλέων γόνον τὴν χροάν γίγνεται ὑπόπυρρος, HA 554a). In his descriptions of the young bee-kings, Aristotle muddles truth with fiction in his desire to separate the bee-king from the rest of the hive. He is correct in noting the different nature of the bee-king's cell (now

¹⁸⁸ The queen bee is about 18mm in length, whereas the workers are about 13 mm. See Webography: Mayer and Burgett.

¹⁸⁹ This also allows the beekeeper to keep track of when the queen is introduced into the hive, by using a different color for the queens that are introduced each year.

called a "queen cup" or a "queen cell") and that these are fewer than the cells that contain the developing workers and drones. They also have a unique appearance, being more brown than the rest of the hive and hanging from the honeycombs. However, it is not clear why Aristotle marks the bee-king's eggs as unique in so many respects, since all the eggs are rather small (about half the size of a grain of rice), tucked out-of-sight each within its own cell, and universally white in color. In addition, all bees undergo a larval stage.

While this stress on uniqueness can be dismissed as misinformation or minor confusion, Aristotle's discussion of the social organization of the hive exhibits unmistakable markers of his anthropomorphizing and politicizing of the bee's so-called monarch. He notes that in each hive, there is not just one bee-king, but several (πλείους... ἡγεμόνες, καὶ οὐχ εἷς μόνος, *HA* 553b). According to Aristotle's account, the success of the hive depends on there being the right number of bee-kings, since too few or too many will lead to disaster. His only explanation as to why too few is dangerous is that they "contribute to generation in some way" (*HA* 553b), whereas too many will "tear the hive apart" (διασπῶσι, *HA* 553b). However, despite the possible presence of multiple virgin queens in an actual hive or a virgin queen and a mature queen,¹⁹⁰ it does not contain more than one mature queen at a time, thus, Aristotle's comments can not come from observation. Yet the social discord he envisions as being caused by too few or too many rulers certainly reveals the degree to which human politics have colored his perception of the bee-king. As Davies and Kathirithamby note, in regard to this passage, Aristotle's "excessive anthropomorphic conception of the bee" is "tinged with a characteristic leaning to oligarchy",¹⁹¹ which explains an ignorance of the facts and invention of roles that would be difficult to make

¹⁹⁰ This never lasts for long, as it resulting in the hive dividing or the killing of any rivals.

¹⁹¹ Davies and Kathirithamby (1986) 63.

sense of in any other manner. This false observation of multiple leaders vying for control makes more sense as a picture of human politics than it does as a statement on apian organization.

It is also worth noting that, while Aristotle spends a significant amount of time discussing the bee-king, his appearance, and what happens if there are too many or too few in the hive, he never specifies what their role in the swarm is. For the worker bees, he details their responsibilities tending to the young and fetching pollen, but no such passages exist regarding the bee-king. However, he does note that some believe the bee-kings have a role in the species' generation, thus are sometimes called the "mothers" (μητέρες, *HA* 553a)¹⁹² and that anarchy does not occur when there is an absence of kings (οὐχ οὕτω διὰ τὸ ἄναρχα, *HA* 553b), but apart from these vague asides, Aristotle gives no indication of his role. It seems as though, for Aristotle and his readers, the names "king" and "leader" (both of which are applied to the bee-king in the *History of Animals*) speak for themselves.

Likewise, Pliny the Elder's natural historical account is colored by his own perception of how people interact socially and politically, however, it is his choice of vocabulary that shows the extent to which he has politicized the bee. Pliny's admiration for the bee and the kinship he perceives between bees and humans serves as his introduction to the topic, and offers a glimpse, from the start, of the sorts of idealized notions which will appear throughout his work. He declares that this creature deserves the admiration (*admiratio*, 11.4) of humans because only the bee was created for the sake of humans (*solis ex eo genere hominum causa genitis*, 11.4), before listing the qualities that are most remarkable about the bee, including the benefits they offer man. Among these, he includes both their production of wax and honey, and a number of features that

¹⁹² Tellingly, this is what he calls the "king" of the wasps. Despite their similar organizational system, their treatment by Aristotle is markedly different. See Mayhew (1999) for a discussion of gender, the mother wasp, and the king bee in Aristotle's *History of Animals*.

anthropomorphize bees, making the hive a sort of model for an ideal human society. Pliny's bees are diligent workers, tolerant of their labors (*laborem tolerant, opera conficiunt*, 11.4), and have a "state" (*rem publicam habent*, 11.4), "hold counsel" (*consilia*, 11.4), and have "generals" (*duces*, 11.4), as well as "social customs" (*mores*, 11.4). His use of terms like *rem publicam* and *consilia* reveals the political way in which Pliny views apian society, through his application of human, specifically Roman, socio-political terminology to describe their habits. As his description of the admirable qualities of the bee continues, Pliny's discussion makes it clear that it is not merely a coincidence that the bees seem social, but rather that these political features are a result of their human-like capacity for virtue. He includes among their qualities that of efficiency (*efficaciae*, 11.4), a term which appears in Pliny only of the bees, and diligence (*industriarum*, 11.4), as well as a degree of "reason" (*ratio*, 11.4) comparable to human reason. These terms serve as a means of showing the humanness of the bee, and creating a relationship between humans and bees that is not only beneficial to humans, but also so ideal and alike to them politically and socially that it can serve as a model for human society.

In the more detailed description of the hive that follows this introductory passage, Pliny's description of the bee as a human society continues, becoming more explicit as the bees not only have human-like socio-political qualities, but also institutions and organizations more appropriate for humans than bees.¹⁹³ When the bees are sent out to search for good areas to harvest pollen, Pliny envisions these creatures as "scouts" (*spectaculores*, 11.8) sent out on "expeditions" (*expeditione*, 11.8), evoking military imagery. Shortly after, Pliny tells of the "watch" (*statio*, 11.10) of the bees at the "gates of the camp" (*portas...castrorum*, 11.10), which

¹⁹³ It is also worth noting that Pliny gives the hive itself characteristics of a human dwelling, calling the structure the bees' "house" (*domos*, 11.5, 8) and its entrances become "doors" (*fores*, 11.5). These descriptions enhance the anthropomorphizing of the bee, but do not contribute to the political depiction of the bee, per se.

makes the connection between hive and camp explicit. This image of the watch is then followed by others that enhance this depiction of hive as camp, or depict the bee as enactors of practices similar to those of humans. Twice, Pliny compares the buzzing of bees to communicate the beginning or end of the day, to a trumpet in a camp (*bombo ut bucino aliquo*, 11.10; *quo exitavit bombo ceu quietem capere imperans, et hoc castorum more*, 11.10). He notes that bees also exact punishments, such as death imposed upon the idle (*cessantium inertiam notant, castigant, mox et puniunt morte*, 11.10) and he asserts that the drones are punished "without clemency" (*sine clementia*, 11.11).

In his discussion of the construction and organization of the interior of the hive, Pliny notes that homes are made first for the plebeians and then for the kings (*domos primum plebei exaedificant, deinde regibus*, 11.11). The use of the term *plebeius* to refer to the worker bees is particularly remarkable. This term's association with the Roman class system imposes the Roman world directly onto the world of the bee world, and contrasts these "common" bees with their "kings" (*regibus*), implying a distinction between the two kinds of bees that is more than simply a difference in function, but relates to their birth and place in society itself.

After a passage describing the drone, calling them the "late-ripe young, like slaves of the true bees" (*serotinus fetus et quasi servitia verarum apium*, 11.11), Pliny goes on to detail the residence of the bee-kings, in terms that accentuate their importance and uniqueness, much in the way Aristotle did. The houses (presumably their cells) are described as regal (*regias*, 11.10), spacious (*amplas*, 11.10), noble (*magnificas*, 11.10), and separated (*separatas*, 11.10). The descriptor "regal" begins the sentence, laying out the general tone of what will follow by stressing that the accommodations of the future leaders (*imperatoribus futuris*, 11.10) are worthy of that role, specifically, that they are "fit for a king", *rex* being the other word used for these

imperatores, elsewhere in Pliny. The other descriptors all follow suit, and seem to fit better as adjectives modifying a palace, than any aspect of or place in a hive. No cell would normally be described as "roomy", or "noble", and it is unclear what exactly Pliny finds "noble" about the bees' residence, but it fits well with the expectations one would have for the home of a king. Similarly, the bee-king has little reason to be "separate" and in fact moves around the hive considerably while she lays her eggs. Again, the notion of separation is more appropriate for one's conception of a human monarch, and by applying these words to the home of the bee-king, Pliny imposes the expectation of a human monarchy and all its elegance and pomp on the queen bee.

Though both Pliny and Aristotle show great insight and intelligence in their observations regarding the hive and, in many respects, demonstrate that they were ahead of their time with regard to their studies on bees—Aristotle in particular—still it is important to be able to pinpoint where their insights end and their biases begin. Pliny approaches and deals with bees in a manner distinct from that of Aristotle, but the impulse to understand the bee in human terms is the same. The hive's organization and seemingly hierarchical nature make it too easy to understand the apian world through the lens of the human one and, in doing so, the hive and its bee-king come to tell us just as much, if not more, about how humans view politics and social organization than about the world of the bee itself. In fact, the impulse to politicize the bee, from the time that its hierarchy was first discovered, leads to the use of apian imagery for the explicit purpose of exploring human government. The subjects of apiology and apiculture become a means of discussing and examining politics and human nature, due to the perceived political quality inherent to the bee, which authors like Aristotle and Pliny make apparent.

This perceived political nature leads to the development of the "good bee-king" trope, in which the natural organization of the hive and the innate leadership of the king are used as a point of comparison to illustrate the perfection or alternatively the defects of human politics and kingship. As mentioned in the Introduction, there is a tendency in scholarship to assume that any text that employs apiological or apicultural language is about apiology or apiculture. In this discussion, I draw a distinction between texts aimed at imparting knowledge on the bee, and texts that employ apiological or apicultural language and imagery in their discussion of other matters. Varro and Virgil are the best examples of this, both of whom offer discussions of apiculture that reflect more on the state of human affairs than serve as a useful guide to beekeeping. However, authors like Varro and Virgil use this trope and the parallels offered between apiculture and human government to discuss the nature of human government and the flaws and problems intrinsic to human society and Rome's changing government, in particular.

The Good Bee-King

The influence that the human experience of political and social organization has had on depictions of the hive is profound, as description, language, and theories presented in Aristotle and Pliny's works indicate. Given the human inclination to understand and explain the animal world in familiar terms, and in the case of the bee, to explain the apian world in socio-political terms, it is not surprising that the bee became and remains a popular and powerful way of exploring and understanding human politics. The use of apian imagery to depict human political and social interactions can be traced as far back as Homer, where the assembly of the Greek leaders is compared to the swarming of bees (*Il.* 2.87-93) and the steadfastness of the Greek troops on the shores of Troy is compared to bees or wasps defending their nest (*Il.* 12.167-72).

However, one of the most common uses of the bee-image is to depict a virtuous or idealized society. Most of these images focus on the bee-king as the ruler of a perfectly organized and diligent hive, to whom a human monarch or leader is compared, usually favorably. In doing so, the author associates the human leader with the effectiveness and organization of the hive and ascribes to him any number of features that are connected to good rule, innate leadership, or general virtue. This trope of the good bee-king often serves as a means both of idealizing a leader and describing his virtues, and of praising his society and people for their diligence and loyalty to him as their leader.¹⁹⁴

Plato employs the image of the idealized bee-king twice in his dialogues. In the *Republic*, it appears amidst a discussion of the philosopher kings, charged with ruling the πόλις. Socrates mimics what would be said to these philosophers, to compel them to take charge of and guard the πόλις, and in this speech, he explains their role in the city and the reasoning behind it:

"ὁμᾶς δ' ἡμεῖς ὑμῖν τε αὐτοῖς τῇ τε ἄλλῃ πόλει ὥσπερ ἐν σμήνεσιν ἡγεμόνας τε καὶ βασιλέας ἐγεννήσαμεν, ἄμεινόν τε καὶ τελεώτερον ἐκείνων πεπαιδευμένους καὶ μᾶλλον δυνατοὺς ἀμφοτέρων μετέχειν."

-Plato, *Rep.* 520b

" 'But we bore you like leaders and kings of the swarm, for yourselves and the others in the city, educated better and more completely than the others and more able to share in both (types of life).' "¹⁹⁵

Here, Socrates draws on the natural organization of the hive to emphasize the philosopher king's unique superiority for a position of rule. Socrates focuses on how this state bore the philosopher kings (ὁμᾶς... ἐγεννήσαμεν) and educates them so that they are more able to deal with ruling (ἄμεινόν τε καὶ τελεώτερον ἐκείνων πεπαιδευμένους καὶ μᾶλλον δυνατοὺς ἀμφοτέρων μετέχειν). This comparison between philosopher king and the bee-king serves as a means of enhancing the

¹⁹⁴ For a discussion of the links between Zeus and bees and the significance of that connection, see Chapter One.

¹⁹⁵ This refers to the life of ruling the city and that of studying the good.

notion of the philosopher king's ability to govern. Just as there is something unique about the bee-king that makes him always the bee-king (there is never some lone worker holding the role), so is it natural that the philosopher king should be made king. The way members of the hive finds perfect order and contentment with their allotted roles is the very social image Socrates wishes to convey in his πόλις, for as the philosopher kings are the best suited for their positions, each member of his swarm has also been given the role that most suits him, with the aim of a society that creates the same selfless contentment and productivity as the hive.

The bee-king in Plato's *Politicus* is used in a similar manner as in the *Republic*, and due to the political nature of this dialogue and its exploration of ideas about rule and government, it is hardly surprising that Plato chose to employ the image of the bee-king. However, here the bee-king is upheld as an ideal that cannot be so easily obtained. As Machelini notes in regards to the *Politicus*, "the relationship between conventional and ideal regimes is the essential crux of the dialogue's political discussion,"¹⁹⁶ and the gap between human society and the perfectly organized and mutually beneficial nature of the hive serve as a means of highlighting the distinction between real and ideal. After the Stranger has explained that other kinds of rule have come into existence because people do not trust that a single monarch can be worthy (τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρχῆς ἄξιον, 301c), just (τὰ δίκαια...διανέμειν, 301d), and capable of ruling knowledgeably and well (δυνατὸν εἶναι μετ' ἀρετῆς καὶ ἐπιστήμης ἄρχοντα, 301d), but rather think he will be a tyrant (301d), he goes on to say:

"νῦν δέ γε ὅποτε οὐκ ἔστι γιγνόμενος, ὡς δὴ φαμεν, ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι βασιλεὺς οἷος ἐν σμήνεσιν ἐμφύεται, τό τε σῶμα εὐθὺς καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν διαφέρων εἷς, δεῖ δὴ συνελθόντας συγγράμματα γράφειν, ὡς ἔοικεν, μεταθέοντας τὰ τῆς ἀληθεστάτης πολιτείας ἔχνη."
-Plato, *Pol.* 301d

¹⁹⁶ Michelini (2002) 184.

" 'Now, as we claim, since such a king is not born in cities, as the king is born into the hive, being distinguished at once with regard to body and nature, it is necessary, as it seems, to band together to write the laws, and trace the tracks of the most true government.' "

This reference plays off the innate and automatically-accepted authority of the king-bee ("such a king is not born in cities..being distinguished..."), as did the reference in the *Republic*, but adds a number of other idealized features to the apian monarch. The Stranger's catalogue of the features of the ideal monarch and his dismissal of this figure's automatic acceptance by the people are set in contrast to the hive, where the king-bee is distinguished and, it is implied, unquestioningly embraced by the bees. In doing this, the Stranger also highlights the fact that an apian monarch has these features that people refuse to believe can exist in a monarch, enhancing the contrast between the skeptical and imperfect human world and the flawlessly just and organized world of nature and of the bee.¹⁹⁷ Thus the hive serves not only as evidence that such a system is possible, but also a model of what is unattainable to humans, demonstrating the tension between real and ideal which runs through the dialogue.¹⁹⁸

As this image of the good bee-king is continually reused and reworked, new and different characteristics are emphasized and employed to exhibit the ideal features for a leader. Xenophon uses the image in his *Cyropaedia* to discuss Cyrus' merits as a king, again drawing on the same notion of someone who is innately destined to rule, but modifying the image, as well. In the passage, one of Cyrus' followers says to him:

"ὁ βασιλεῦ: βασιλεὺς γὰρ ἔμοιγε δοκεῖς σὺ φύσει πεφυκέναι οὐδὲν ἦττον ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ σμήνῃ φυόμενος τῶν μελιτῶν ἡγεμών: ἐκείνῳ τε γὰρ αἱ μέλιται ἔκοῦσαι μὲν πείθονται, ὅπου δ' ἂν μένη, οὐδεμία ἐντεῦθεν ἀπέρχεται: ἐὰν δὲ ποι ἐξίτη, οὐδεμία αὐτοῦ

¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Rowe (1995) 233, notes that this passage shows that the comparison between human and bee king fails in three ways. Firstly, when kings do exist, they are not immediately recognizable, like a king bee. Secondly, they do not exist one in every city, and lastly, they are not born as kings, in the same way that the king bee is.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Ovenmeire (2011) 38, who stresses human society's inferiority to the natural world.

ἀπολείπεται: οὕτω δεινός τις ἔρωσ ἀνταῖς τοῦ ἄρχεσθαι ὑπ' ἐκείνου ἐγγίγνεται. καὶ πρὸς σὲ δέ μοι δοκοῦσι παραπλησίων πως οἱ ἄνθρωποι οὕτω διακεῖσθαι."

-Xenophon, *Cyrop.* 5.124-5

" 'O King: you seem to me to be born a king in nature no less than the leader of the bees in the hive: for the bees willingly obey him and anywhere he remains, no one goes from there: and if he goes somewhere, no one leaves him: there arises in them such a wondrous desire to be ruled by him. Humans also seem to me to be affected similarly by you.' "

Again, similar tropes come up in the bee-king image when Xenophon uses it. Cyrus is depicted as a natural choice for king, just as the bees' king is born into and for his role in the hive.¹⁹⁹

However, here an emphasis is placed on the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The unquestionable choice of the bee-king as king is not only a matter of nature, but the result of a desire by the bees to be ruled by this particular king. This devotion and loyalty are ascribed to Cyrus, as well, who is not only a king by nature, but also inspires such loyalty and dedication from his followers that they willingly obey him and are guided by him, as the bee will obey and follow the bee-king.²⁰⁰

All of these images of the bee-king play off similar qualities perceived in the bees' "monarchy", and due to the prevalence of bee-king imagery in Greek (and Roman) texts, an author can ascribe a number of qualities to a leader in few words, simply by making the comparison. The characteristics most commonly conveyed are the naturalness of the rule, the distinct and remarkable nature of the king, and the loyalty he inspires. However, this traditional and well-established image can also be employed in more unusual and detailed ways, as is the case in Seneca the Younger's use of the bee-king in his *De Clementia*, a treatise written to the young Emperor Nero early in his reign. In it, the philosopher discusses the difference between

¹⁹⁹ Rowe (1995) 233, contrasts the portrayal of Cyrus as the natural ruler with the skepticism of the existence of natural rulers, as expressed in the *Politicus* (see the above passage).

²⁰⁰ Ovenmeire (2011) 39, also notes the emphasis on loyalty in this image.

the tyrant and the good ruler, drawing on various examples to show the virtue of clemency for a ruler. Among his examples is that of the bee-king:

Excogitare nemo quicquam poterit, quod magis decorum regenti sit quam clementia, quocumque modo is et quocumque iure praepositus ceteris erit. Eo scilicet formosium id esse magnificentiusque fatebimur, quo in maiore praestabitur potestate, quam non oportet noxiam esse, si ad naturae legem componitur. Natura enim commenta est regem, quod et ex aliis animalibus licet cognoscere et ex apibus; quarum regi amplissimum cubile est medioque ac tutissimo loco; praeterea opere vacat exactor alienorum operum, et amisso rege totum dilabitur, nec umquam plus unum patiuntur melioremque pugna quaerunt; praeterea insignis regi forma est dissimilisque ceteris cum magnitudine tum nitore. Hoc tamen maxime distinguitur; iracundissimae ac pro corporis captu pugnacissimae sunt apes et aculeos in volnere relinquunt, rex ipse sine aculeo est; noluit illum natura nec saevum esse nec ultionem magno constaturam petere telumque detraxit et iram eius inermem reliquit. Exemplar hoc magnis regibus ingens; est enim illi mos exercere se in parvis et ingentium rerum documenta minima largiri. pudeat ab exiguis animalibus non trahere mores, cum tanto hominum moderatior esse animus debeat, quanto vehementius nocet.

-Seneca, *Clem.* 1.19.1-4

No one is able to think of anything which is more fitting for one ruling than clemency, whatever the manner and whatever the authority by which he was set over others. Although we will admit that it is more beautiful and more magnificent, the greater the power by which it is maintained, it is not fitting for it to be harmful, if it is adjusted to the law of nature. In fact, nature invented the king, a thing which is possible to see from other animals and from the bees, the bedchamber of whose king is the most spacious and in the central and safest position. In addition, he is free from work, but the overseer of the work of the others, and all disperse, when the king has left. They do not endure more than one and they seek out a better one through fighting. Furthermore, the form of the king is distinguished and dissimilar from the others with regard to its size and splendor. However, he is distinguished by this most of all: bees are very irascible and in proportion to their bodies, very warlike, and they abandon their stingers in the wound; but the king himself is without a stinger. Nature forbade that he either be savage or seek a vengeance that would be fixed at a great price, and [nature] removed the spear and left behind an unarmed anger. This model is a remarkable one for great kings. For it is nature's custom to employ herself in small ways and to make the smallest examples of the greatest things. It would be shameful not to adopt these customs from the tiny animals since the mind of humans ought to be more moderate by as much as it harms more violently.

Seneca frames his comparison in the terms of a natural philosopher or historian, and approaches the topic as though examining the nature of the hive, side by side with an exploration of the natural state of human government. Accordingly, his work seems to draw on Aristotle and

has noticeable similarities to Pliny's work, which, though written later, looked to the texts of prior writers for much of its information. However, he begins by branching off from the use of the good bee-king as evidence of a monarch's innate role as ruler, and instead offers the claim that the bee is evidence that monarchy, in general, is a natural state, as nature invented the role of king.²⁰¹ Given the Romans' hostility towards monarchy and the fact that Seneca will soon after compare Nero to a king, this argument is an important foundation for what will follow. Since Seneca will go on to claim that, despite the link between monarchy and tyranny in the Roman mind, a king's natural state is clemency, it is an important step in reframing the conception of monarchy for the Roman people, who had seen fewer good Emperors than corrupt ones.

Once the bee is introduced, Seneca focuses on the distinctness of the bee-king and his uniqueness within the hive, as a means of linking human and apian monarchy and showing that bees offer a model for the human world, as he will soon claim. He begins his discussion by looking at the bee-king's residence, which he describes as being a "most spacious" (*amplissimum*, 1.19.2) "bedchamber" (*cubile*, 1.19.2), which is "central" (*medioque*, 1.19.2) and in the "safest position" (*tutissimo loco*, 1.19.2).²⁰² Seneca's description of the bee-king's special residence sounds much like that of Pliny, as both describe a spacious, safe locale, despite the fact that the queen bee, in fact, has no special quarters, save for the cell in which she is hatched and then departs from. Yet this inaccurate description offers the implication that, just as a human king inhabits a palace, as evidence of his important status, so does the king produced by nature. Thus, a superior residence is not something worthy of remark for a king per se, whether Roman

²⁰¹ Morley (2007) 463, Braund (2009) 342.

²⁰² Braund (2009) 342, notes that the concern with the king bee's safety here mirrors the people's effort to protect their king, as described in *Clem.* 1.3.3.

or apian, but rather a mark of their natural status in the community and something which shows the likeness between human and natural monarchy.

As evidence of the special status of the bee-king that earns him this unique abode in the hive, Seneca describes his duties and his physical appearance, two features that make him unlike the rest of the hive. Firstly, unlike the workers, the bee-king is "free from work" (*opere vacat*, 1.19.2), but rather supervises the rest of the hive, and Seneca uses the word *exactor* to describe this function. The lack of precision in this term,²⁰³ which can be used for a tax collector, executioner, and any sort of superintendent or supervisor, perhaps suggests the diversity of responsibilities that a bee-king must attend to. His role as supervisor of the hive is vast and entails many duties, just as the Emperor is an overseer of countless jobs he does not do himself. The natural historical texts also emphasize the bee-king's role as a ruler, one who oversees the work of the others in the hive. However, while it is the case that the queen bee communicates with the hive by means of pheromones, there is little in her actions that would imply her authority over the rest of the hive. However, this perception is both prevalent in various accounts and important in this account as a means of stressing the likeness of the bee to a human monarch.

Yet, it is not only this perceived authority that marks out the bee-king as different, but his very appearance, as well. Seneca describes him as "distinguished and dissimilar" from the hive, and both larger and more "splendid" (*nitore*, 1.19.2). Much like Aristotle's exaggeration of the bee-king's superior size, which implied his general superiority, and his either fire-colored or black appearance, both of which made him physically distinct from the rest of the hive, this size and splendor fulfill the same function for Seneca's bee-king.

²⁰³ Braund (2009) 342-3.

However, for Seneca, there is more to the bee-king that makes him important and unique than merely his appearance and his authority in the hive. As was the case in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Seneca emphasizes the relationship between ruler and ruled. When the bee-king leaves, the other bees disperse, and they do not tolerate more than one leader. This shows the loyalty of the hive to their king, and reemphasizes the degree to which having just one ruler is natural for the bees, and, by extension, for people, as well. However, this loyalty is not so innate as it seems in Xenophon or Plato; rather it is something the bee-king has earned, as he has proven himself to be the best through battle (1.19.2).²⁰⁴ This departure from the emphasis on innate ability is significant, as it suggests that a monarch is not merely born into privilege, but that his holding of that privilege proves that he has done something to deserve it.²⁰⁵ The suggestion is a troubling one, with regard to Nero, whose lack of experience and youth made him an unseasoned and questionable choice for the role of Emperor. However, it is that very challenge which Seneca wishes to address in his essay. In order to become the good bee-king, Nero needs to do something to prove himself worthy of his position and that is precisely where Seneca and the example of the good bee-king come into play.

According to Seneca, bees are naturally hot-tempered and prone to sting, just as the Romans have proven themselves to be, as evidenced by years of civil war and, more recently, the assassination of the Emperor Gaius. However, the bee-king is born a different sort. Whereas bees can lose their tempers and sting, Seneca notes that the bee-kings are born without

²⁰⁴ Braund (2009) 343, also reads this as a reference to a battle between potential kings and compares it to Virgil's bee civil war passage, discussed below.

²⁰⁵ The cautionary nature of this passage should also be noted, as it suggests that the hive will reject a bad bee king.

stingers.²⁰⁶ Nature herself forbids the king from having the same hot-headed nature as his subjects and it is that quality which makes him the good bee-king.²⁰⁷ It is this example that Nature wishes man to follow, and the example that Seneca offers the young Emperor, as a way to prove himself. While a bee-king is "obliged to be more moderate" by his stingless nature, a human king must make the active choice whether or not to be so. Thus, if Nero wishes to follow the natural order of things and fulfill the potential which the good bee-king offers, he can prove himself by adopting the policy of *clementia*, which Seneca hopes to promote here, the implication being that, if Nero does so, all of the positive features that the bee-king has come to represent through centuries of use will be applicable to him, as well.

Apiculture Meets Politics in Varro's *De Re Rustica*

As Seneca's elaborate development of the bee-king trope suggests, Roman authors found the political associations of the bee a fruitful source for more extensive discussions and examinations of politics. Varro, who wrote about a century prior to Seneca during the turbulent years at the end of the republic, takes this trope of the good king bee and expands it to look at the idealistic nature of the whole bee society. In his *De Re Rustica*, Varro uses what is ostensibly a practical discussion of apiculture and the vocabulary and topic of beekeeping to reflect on Rome's changing political climate. The *De Re Rustica* is composed of three books, each of which functions more or less independently of the others; each dialogue has its own context (all of which is political in nature), setting (each in a different period of time), and subject (though all

²⁰⁶ The question of whether or not a king bee had a stinger was a point of debate among ancient scholars. Aristotle claimed that they did (*HA* 553b), whereas Dio Chrysostom offers the opposite opinion (4.63). Pliny notes that the subject is a contentious one among experts (*NH* 11.52). The queen does, in fact, have a stinger.

²⁰⁷ Dahlmann (1970) 181-2, Morley (2007) 464.

relate to a different aspect of farming), with little repetition of characters. In the first book, Varro provides an introduction, saying that he wrote these books as a manual for his too aptly named wife, Fundania, who has just purchased an estate; however we know nothing of his wife from any other source, so it is impossible to determine whether this is factual. He does nothing to explain the dialogue form, but he does serve as a character in each of the books, though most of the other characters cannot be identified with actual Romans with any certainty.²⁰⁸

Given the uniqueness of this text, it is not immediately clear what to make of it, however Varro offers the first clue as to how he wishes his reader to think about his *De Re Rustica* in the introduction. There, he declares that he will not allow the Sibyl to be the only one whose books are consulted when one needs to know what to do in the case of portents (1.1.3). Thus, he too will compose his three books so that one can look back at them whenever one wishes (1.1.4). At first glance, this passage seems straightforward, though perhaps a bit bizarre: Varro wants to write a farming manual that can be consulted in the future, just like the Sibylline Books were consulted, even after the Sibyl herself was dead. However, the image of the Sibyl adds complexity to this comparison. Her books were consulted by the city (*publice*, 1.1.3), not only for the interpretation of portents, as Varro indicates (*quid faciendum sit nobis ex aliquo portento*, 1.1.3), but in times of state crisis, as well. This comparison to the Sibylline books subtly suggests the political nature of Varro's books, a feature which is further highlighted by the political setting of each of the books.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, one of the most notable things about a Sibyl is that her advice is not straightforward; she speaks in riddles. If Varro is truly writing like the Sibyl, the reader can expect his books to contain important and useful information that is in

²⁰⁸ Linderski (1989), 16-17, notes that all the interlocutors have names independently attested to in literature and ascription, but only Scrofa (in Book One and Two), Appius (in Book Three), and Varro are readily identifiable.

²⁰⁹ Green (1997) 430-432.

need of correct interpretation in order to be applicable. In short, the reader must scratch beneath the agricultural surface to solve the riddles that Varro offers.

This is certainly true of the section in book three that contains a discussion of beekeeping and apiculture. Varro draws his readers' attention to the bees, in particular, by having the interlocutors almost forge the bees entirely.²¹⁰ When one of the speakers, Appius, suggests that the discussion move on to its "third act", namely the discussion of fishponds, his companion Axius remarks:

Quid tertius?...An quia tu solitus es in adolescentia tua domi mulsum non bibere propter parsimoniam, nos mel neclegemus?

-Varro, *DRR*, 3.16.1

" 'Why third? Or because you were accustomed not to drink honey-wine at home in your youth, due to frugality, shall we disregard honey?' "

This then inspires Appius (whose name is a pun on *apis*)²¹¹ to take up the subject, launching into a natural history-inspired description of these creatures and their habits.

Appius' description falls in line with the precedent laid out by previous bee discussions, such as those by Xenophon and Aristotle, and is laden with human terminology, most often pertaining to human social and political activity. However, Varro carefully hints that he is doing more than following suit and borrowing terms. Appius begins his description of the bees by noting the particularly social and unique nature of the bees, much as Aristotle drew attention to their unique political nature, in the *Politics*.

Apes non sunt solitaria natura, ut aquilae, sed ut homines. Quod si in hoc faciunt etiam graculi, at non idem, quod hic societas operis et aedificiorum, quod illic non est, hic ratio atque ars, ab his opus facere discunt, ab his aedificare, ab his cibaria condere.

-Varro, *DRR*, 3.16.4

²¹⁰ This is an old technique for highlighting an important theme, found in several other texts, e.g. Book Five of Plato's *Republic*

²¹¹ Hooper and Ash (1935) 498 n.3, Green (1997) 439 n.25.

Bees do not have a solitary nature, as eagles, but are like human beings. Even if jackdaws act in this way, still it is not the same case; because in this one there is a collaboration of toil and building which is not in that other; in this one there is reason and skill, from these humans learn to do work, to build, to store up food.

By setting up the bee in such a way, Varro, through Appius, emphasizes the humanity of the bees by comparing them to humans, while distancing them from the rest of the animal world, as represented by the only comparable animal (the jackdaw), whose social organization is different from that of the bee. He continues on to say that bees have a "collaboration of toil and building" (*societas operis et aedificiorum*, 3.16.4), using the term *aedificium* which is particularly associated with human-made structures.²¹² He also ascribes reason (*ratio*) and skill (*ars*) to his bees (3.16.4), and most surprising of all, Appius says that from the bees, humans learn to do work, to build and to store up food (*ab his opus facere discunt, ab his aedificare, ab his cibaria condere*, 3.16.4).

Because of the seeming ambiguity of the Latin and the alternative reading of the above passage offered by Kroenenberg,²¹³ a brief discussion of the likelihood and merits of this interpretation is necessary.²¹⁴ Firstly, it is not immediately clear to what *ab his* refers. Kroenenberg posits *ratio* and *ars* (which Varro has just discussed) as its antecedents, but based on the usage of *hic* and its various forms throughout Appius' speech, it is unlikely that this is the case. *Hic* appear a total of fourteen times in Appius' discussion of the bee: thirteen times as a demonstrative pronoun,²¹⁵ and once as an adjective.²¹⁶ Nine of the examples of *hic* as a pronoun (that is, all its appearances except the three examples in question and one other) clearly refer to

²¹² OLD s.v. *aedificium*.

²¹³ Kroenenberg (2009) 125.

²¹⁴ Flach (2002), 268 does little to illuminate this passage in his commentary.

²¹⁵ Number of references by section: 3.16.4: 6, 3.16.5: 1, *DRR* 3.16.6: 4, 3.16.7: 1, 3.16.9: 1.

²¹⁶ *Hic* appears adjectively only in *DRR* 3.16.7: *et ut his dis Helicona atque Olympon adtribuerunt homines...*

the bees. It is only used once to refer to a different noun and it is worth noting that, on that occasion, there is no question about the reference of *hic* ("in this manner", *quod si in hoc faciunt etiam graculi...* 3.16.4). In this case under discussion, *his* is preceded by two examples of *hic* referring to the bees, within the same sentence. Given the prevalence of *hic* referring to bees and the use of this word immediately preceding this example, it is unlikely that this example's antecedent would be any different from the previous two and the eleven that follow.

Given that *his* is likely the bees, this leaves either *graculi* or *homines* as the subject of *discunt*, as these are the only other topics of discussion in this passage. Unfortunately, grammar offers little help here, but the sense of the passage makes it apparent that *homines* must be the subject. Appius' point, in this passage, is to indicate that the bees are similar to people and not jackdaws. Indicating that jackdaws learned their social behavior from the bees would make them seem more akin to the insect, rather than less. Whereas, suggesting that humans learned their social behavior from the bees follows with the sense of the passage, in that it shows the similitude between bees and humans, and lessens the connection between bees and jackdaws.

Though this interpretation makes the greatest amount of sense, both topically and grammatically, still the meaning is surprising and the claim, a bold and original one. It takes the connection between humans and bees beyond the level of mere similarity and ostensible kinship, and beyond Aristotle's sliding scale of degrees of πολιτικός, and forges a link between them that Varro suggests is ancient, as it presumably dates back to the emergence of human society. It casts humans in the role of the descendants and inheritors of apian society. But, most importantly, this passage serves as a red flag, right at the beginning of the discussion of the bees, that signals to Varro's reader that he or she should keep humans in mind when reading about the bees, because human society is a reflection of bee society. Given this, and Greene's compelling

argument for the dialogue offering hints as to how it should be read,²¹⁷ what follows serves as an allegorical discussion of human society and politics.

As Kroenenberg points out, Appius' description of the bees paints a rather idyllic and idealistic image of society.²¹⁸ Though inspired by natural history, his details are the more poetic, whimsical ones, such as his account of the ox-born bees, and his language is reminiscent of an idealized Roman society and politics. He assigns the bees a king (*rex*, 3.16.6, 8), generals (*duces*, 3.16.9), an allegiance (*societas*, 3.16.6) and rule (*imperium*, 3.16.6), and notes that they construct (*aedificare*, 3.16.4), live like those in an army (*omnes ut in exercitu vivunt atque alternis dormiunt et opus faciunt pariter*, 3.16.), and send out colonies (*colonias mittunt*, 3.16.9). But in Appius' eyes, they are not just a Roman-like society, but one which is dedicated to virtue. They produce honey for the pleasure of the gods, as well as humans (*et deis et hominibus est acceptum, quod favus venit in altaria*, 3.16.5); Appius thus connects them in an indirect way to the gods and piety. He also describes how they pursue only what is pure (*secuntur omnia pura*, 3.16.6), and shun all odors, including perfumes (*Itaque nulla harum adsidit in loco inquinato aut eo qui male oleat, neque etiam in eo qui bona olet unguenta*, 3.16.6), a mark of luxury in Roman society. They are dedicated to production and construction (3.16.7), which suggests that they are an advanced society with great ingenuity and an interest in peace. The bees are brave enough to defend their own work, but self-aware enough to know their own weakness (*neque ignava, ut non, qui eius conetur disturbare, resistat; neque tamen nescia suae imbecillitatis*, 3.16.7), ascribing to the insects a degree of self-reflection, as well as a military sort of *virtus*, through their valiant defending. In addition, they are friends of the Muses (*Musarum esse dicuntur volucres*, 3.16.7), detest laziness (*neque ipsae sunt inficientes nec non oderunt inertes*, 3.16.8)

²¹⁷ Green (1997) 428-9.

²¹⁸ Kroenenberg (2009) 126.

and shun those who are lazy (*itaque insectantes ab se eiciunt fucos, quod hi neque adiuvant et mel consumunt*, 3.16.8).²¹⁹ All in all, Appius' description depicts them as creatures that seem to have perfected society and governance in a way that humans have not.

When Appius has concluded, another speaker, Merula, takes the helm of the conversation and directs it towards the care and capitalization of bees. He begins by explaining to his friends how profitable beekeeping can be, citing a certain Seius "who has his own hives leased for the annual price of 5,000 pounds of honey" (*qui alvaria sua locata habet quatannis quinque milibus pondo mellis*, 3.16.10), as well as the Veianii brothers, who "never get less than 10,000 sesterces from their honey" (*numquam minus...dena milia sestertia ex melle recipere esse solitos*, 3.16.11). Kroenenberg notes the emphasis on profitability here and throughout Merula's discussion and suggests that his profit-based account of beekeeping is in stark opposition to Appius' natural historical, idealized musing.²²⁰ However, the relationship is more complex. Merula's speech is perhaps not as profit-based as he suggests and does not "break the illusion of Appius' ideal society", as Kroenenberg claims,²²¹ but rather offers a different sort of idealism towards the bee. It is true that the focus in this section changes significantly: there is less natural history discourse at play and more of a diagnostic/prognostic guide for the bee-keeper, describing what to expect, behavior-wise, from one's bees, and how to deal with these behaviors and best foster a productive bee society. In content, Merula's discussion seems to be a conglomeration of the close observational work of Aristotle and apicultural guides, of which there were many in the ancient world, offering the biological alongside the practical information needed for tending hives.

²¹⁹ Cf. Kroenenberg (2009) 125.

²²⁰ Kroenenberg (2009) 126.

²²¹ Kroenenberg (2009) 126.

However, the fact that most ancient beekeeping guides have not survived makes it difficult to pinpoint where Varro obtained his information, since he cites no sources here, or how he may have altered it for his purposes. The best extant source on the subject is Columella, who wrote some time during the 1st Century C.E., after the death of Augustus, and was particularly diligent about indicating his sources. Columella makes a reference to Varro in the preface of his work (Col. 1.1.12), and mentions that he wrote on animal husbandry and "refined" the topic (*expolivit*, Col. 1.1.12). Columella makes a few other passing references to Varro, but neither the content of the text nor does the author indicate that Varro was a source for Columella's work. Columella's significantly later date is also a compelling reason to take any comparison made between him and Varro with caution. Still, as his work is thorough, straightforward, and does that which Merula's account claims to do, i.e. offer a guide to bee care and profiting from beekeeping, he provides a relatively sound point of reference for helping a modern reader to determine what might be unique, bizarre, or incongruous in Merula's account. Thus the comparison, if used carefully, can help to interpret what Varro is doing with his discussion of bees.

Given the shared subject matter, it is only to be expected that Merula's guide in Varro has much in common with Columella's work. Both look to Aristotle in their discussion of the different sorts of kings that can arise in a hive (*DRR* 3.16.18, *HA* 553b), the varieties of bees within the hive (*DRR* 3.16.19, *HA* 553a), and the timing of ripe honey (*DRR* 3.16.32-35, *HA* 554a), among other subjects, and their information particular to bee-keeping covers the same general topics of discussion, such as feeding grounds, situation of apiaries, kinds of hives, and the health of bees. However, Merula's account offers several surprises that suggest that his

account is not in fact practical or effective as a beekeeping guide, and that have startling implications when applied allegorically.

The most notable problem with Merula's account is that he offers little information regarding the harvesting of honey or wax, the useful and profitable aims of keeping bees. He broaches the subject, declaring to his companions:

Quod ad pastiones pertinere sum ratus quoniam dixi, nunc iam, quoniam causa adhibetur ea cura, de fructu dicam.

-Varro, *DRR* 3.16.32

" 'Since I have said what I think relates to feeding, now I will speak of the thing for the sake of which this care is applied, profit.' "

This leads into a brief discussion of how to tell when the honey is ripe and ready to be harvested and how much to leave behind for the hive, but Merula never actually tells his audience how to extract the combs, how to separate the combs from the honey, or how to filter the honey, that is, the information necessary to actually make a profit. Furthermore, he never touches the subject of the wax, nor that of the propolis, though he earlier notes that propolis sells for a higher price than honey, since physicians use it to make poultices (3.16.23). As a point of comparison, Columella details all the aspects of extracting honey and wax, and spends almost a seventh (about 14%) of his entire examination of bees on this aspect of beekeeping. Varro, by contrast dedicates about one eleventh (about 9%) of his bee-related section (i.e. both Appius and Merula's speeches together) to this topic. Merula spends only about a ninth of his total time (about 11%) on what he claims is his focus. This difference is even more marked when one considers how much longer Columella's discussion of the bees is than Varro's. Given that bees were not a glamorous addition to one's estate, the way eel ponds or aviaries might be, profit is the only real purpose for a gentleman farmer to keep hives, and thus, without the essential information regarding

harvesting and readying bee products for sale, Merula's discussion (and thus Varro's) can hardly be intended to be practical or useful as a guide.²²²

Merula also omits any discussion of the outside threats to bees, save for a brief mention of wasps. Though any successful apiary is endangered by the threat of robbers, lizards, birds, spiders, and a number of insects that act as pests to the hive, Merula makes no mention of their existence or potential for harm or how one might help to protect one's hive from the danger they pose. The topic of guarding against such perils is a frequent and recurring subject for Columella, and a necessary one for any beekeeper, yet the conspicuous absence of this topic further indicates the inadequacies of this text as a guidebook.

The subjects that Merula does cover are addressed in an odd manner, as well. Like Aristotle and Columella, he spends a significant amount of time on the food sources for bees; however, his degree of detail is both astounding and suspicious. While Columella's discussion gives a great many plants, noting that certain ones are among the best, second best, worst, etc. for honey making and that a few are good for wax making and some others deemed hurtful, Merula's analysis goes into details that could not possibly be known or observed, regardless of the diligence of the beekeeper.²²³ After naming a handful of plants that are reputed to be the favorites of bees, he draws attention to snail-clover, as being "the most beneficial for their health" (*valentibus utilissimum est*, 3.16.13). As is standard among beekeeping texts, he notes that thyme is the best for honey (*ad mellificum thymum*, 3.16.13). He later returns to the subject

²²² Skydsgaard (1968) 11-18, notes similar incongruities in book one, such as the difference in what Scrofa lays out as his themes for his discussion and what he ultimately says, and the expected discussions of where to grow particular plants that never occurs.

²²³ There were some preexisting traditions regarding how certain plants affect the bees' products, but Varro goes beyond the scope of any of our other texts.

of food, but this time with increased precision, noting from what plants the bees make each of their products.

Neque quae afferunt ad quattuor res faciendas, propolim erithacen, favum, mel, ex iisdem omnibus rebus carpere dicunt. Simplex, quod e malo punico et asparago cibum carpant solum, ex olea arbore ceram, e fico mel, sed non bonum. Duplex ministerium praeberi, ut e faba, apiastro, cucurbita, brassica ceram et cibum; nec non aliter duplex quod fit e malo et piris silvestribus, cibum et mel; item aliter duplex quod e papaverem ceram et mel. Triplex ministerium quoque fieri, ut ex nuce Graeca et e lapsano cibum, mel, ceram.
-Varro, *DRR* 3.16.24-25

They say that [the bees] do not take from all the same sources the things, which they collect for making the four substances: propolis, erithace, comb, and honey. [Sometimes] there is a singular use, for example what they take from the punice apple and asparagus is only food, from the olive tree is only comb, from the fig, only honey, but not good honey. [Sometimes] there is a double use, for example what they take from the bean, the balm, the gourd, and the cabbage is comb and food; and similarly from the apple and wild pear, is food and honey, and again from the poppy, is wax and honey. [Sometimes] there is triple use also, as from the Grecian nut and wild mustard.

In addition to this exact knowledge of what each plant offers,²²⁴ Merula also claims to know the impact of certain plants on the quality and features of the honey it yields. As his discussion continues, he declares:

ut in melle, quod ex alia re faciant liquidum mel, ut e siserae flore, ex alia contra spissum, ut e rore ramino; si ex alia re, ut e fico mel insuave, e cytiso bonum, e thymo optimum.

-Varro, *DRR* 3.16.26

As in honey, since they make watery honey from one thing, for example from the sisera flower, and from another thick honey, for example from rosemary, thus from another source, for example from the fig, they make unpleasant honey, and good honey from snail-clover, and the best from thyme.

Merula's exhaustive discussion seems to suggest that a beekeeper can have so intimate a knowledge of his bees' habits that he can trace the features of the hive and honey back to nature.

²²⁴ In Pliny's discussion on the same topic, he says that propolis is made of sweet gum from the poplar or vine, erithace is made from spring dew and the gummy juices of trees, and wax is made from the flowers of all plants and trees (*NH* 11.6-8). Note the more general nature of Pliny's discussion.

With these facts, he implies that one can produce whatever sort of honey one desires, if one can successfully control what a bee consumes, a notion which is so specific as to be naively idealistic or absurd.²²⁵ It would be nice to be certain that one's bees are eating only thyme and producing the best honey, but it is impossible to prevent one's bees from flying outside of one's pasturage and eating something else.²²⁶ By that same token, it is impossible to know the food source of your bees.

Merula's guide suggests an unattainable degree of control. This tendency is found elsewhere in his work, as well. He offers solutions to a number of problems that may threaten the hive, in a similarly omniscient manner. Among the troubles beekeepers may face, he includes sedition (*seditiones*, 3.16.18), "runaway" bees (*fugitivae*, 3.16.21), and the need to change hives (3.16.22). In each case, he presents only one solution, without discussion of alternatives or alternate sources. This is in stark contrast to other works on bees, including Aristotle and Columella, who emphasizes their authority on the subject is emphasized by their knowledge of sources and presentation of alternatives, even if one single source or solution is privileged over the others. Merula allows for no variability or variety and his voice is singular and authoritative, giving the impression that for every problem there is just one, true solution. By minimizing alternatives and erasing any reference to sources, Varro has Merula present a

²²⁵ As a point of comparison, Pliny only notes that thyme makes the best honey, rosemary makes thick honey, and wild honey is the worst (*HN* 11.15), whereas Columella states that thyme makes the best honey and that woodland honey is the worst, though he also mentions a variety of other plants that fall into three different groups somewhere in between thyme and woodland honey (*Col.* 9.3-7). He does not mention specific qualities that come along with any specific type of honey.

²²⁶ The difficulty of controlling a hive's foodsource is evidenced by the recent bizarre diet choices of bees in France and New York that resulted in brightly colored honey, due to dyes in their foodsources. See Webography: Genthon, Dominus.

guide to beekeeping that stresses control and authority in a single way, and emphasizes the control that a beekeeper can exert, if he is knowledgeable and observant.

This method, which is far from functional, furthers the idealized notion presented by Appius, rather than undercutting it. Merula suggests that, while problems can and will occur, nothing is beyond repair for a knowledgeable beekeeper and that it is possible for an idealistic society to grow and thrive without collapse. In short, Merula suggests that humans can obtain, institute and maintain order, peace and productivity successfully. The impracticality of Merula's approach and the information offered is evidenced in the fact that neither Columella nor Pliny cites Varro as a source for their bee sections.

Neither Merula nor Appius offer a method of bee-keeping which a burgeoning beekeeper could hope to abide by, just as no ruler, regardless of how well-intentioned, intelligent and/or skilled, can hope to predict and rightly treat any social or political situation that arises. This desire to exercise control over a society successfully is further problematized in what remains of the dialogue, which emphasizes the shortcomings of human society when compared to the agriculturally-minded apian civilization and, in doing so, further highlights the absurdity of aiming at such a high degree of control.

After the bee conversation is concluded, the speakers move on to the topic of fishponds. The first thing that Axius (who takes over the dialogue now) notes about fishponds is their lack of profitability and the expense of the ponds of the nobility, which "more capably empty the purse of their master" (*et potius marsippium domini exinaniunt*, 3.17.2). He goes on to detail the expense of their upkeep and construction (3.17.2-3) and the extravagance of the practice and of

the stock of fish itself, which often include different varieties of fish (3.17.4) that are treated as though they were sacred (*ut sacri sint ac sanctiores*, 3.17.4).²²⁷

This passage contrasts sharply with that about the bees. While the bees are associated with activity and productivity, the fishponds are associated with decadence and luxury, the very things the bees themselves shun (3.16.6). It is also notable that Axius associates fishponds explicitly with the nobility, even providing examples of a few of Rome's most prominent men, including Caesar and Hortensius, and how lavish and expensive their fishponds are (3.16.3, 6-9). In doing so, Varro effectively highlights the Roman aristocracy, pointing out their lack of virtue and taste for extravagance, in a way which is similar to the depiction of the birds in his pleasure aviary (a discussion which occurs prior to the bee section in Book Three, 3.5.9-16), which are given all kinds of empty luxuries.²²⁸

In contrast, the bees' love of work and productivity, along with their virtue portray them in a different light. Their depiction as an idealized society profiting off of what the land freely offers makes them reminiscent of the myths of humans during the golden age, while their productivity and natural virtue bring to mind the Roman ideal of the citizen farmer, pursuing good governance but maintaining a close kinship with the land and in doing so, maintaining nobility and virtue. While the luxurious birds and the expensive fishponds allow one easy control over the animals that live within, the bees need their freedom in order to be productive, and their virtue in order to produce honey of a good quality. It is these very qualities that prevent the bees from being controlled and make the advice of Merula absurd and useless.

²²⁷ For more on the associations between fishponds and luxury in this passage, see Kroenberg (2009) 127-8.

²²⁸ Green (1997) 443.

After the fishponds, the dialogue closes with the conclusion of Rome's last free election (the book is set in 50 BCE),²²⁹ a dire and gloomy reminder of the instability, chaos and destruction that has plagued Rome in the past and will continue to do so, as well as the threat of monarchy which increased with each passing year. While the aviaries and fishponds seem to threaten the idea of governance and stability offered by the bees, all these images work together to elucidate the complexities of power, society and human nature. It is contemporary Rome's decadence and deficiencies that make it possible for a figure such as Caesar to exert himself over the people, and this has its social costs. Without freedom, there is little hope of a society thriving the way the bee society does.

The bees' society is at once an unattainable ideal and a paradox. They need freedom and virtue in order to thrive. Yet the perfect beekeeper is also necessary to harness their production and keep the hive in optimal condition. But the perfect beekeeper would be one with Merula's knowledge of apiaries, a knowledge so extensive and precise that it illustrates the absurdity and impossibility of having that kind of control. While the bees are captive and subject to the beekeeper, who assures their safety and prosperity, they must be at the same time free and untamed, in a way that other domesticated animals are not, in order to be productive. Thus, Appius and Merula's idealistic description of the hive serves to leave the reader with a cautionary reminder of the absurdity and the impossibility of ever attaining a happy, well-ordered society.

Life, Death, and Beekeeping in Virgil's *Fourth Georgic*

Virgil also makes use of the frequency with which apiculture and apiology draws on the vocabulary of human society to describe the bees in his *Georgics*, another text claiming to be

²²⁹ Linderski (1985), Green (1997) 432, Diederich (2007), 183. However, Dahlmann (1935) 1192, and Richardson (1983) argue in favor of 54 BCE.

about farming but with a deeper, more complex significance. Like Varro before him, Virgil exploits the use of socio-political terminology in apiology to tease out the idealistic features of the hive and contrast them with the shortcomings of the human world. His description of apian society tempts the reader to think of the hive as a Roman society, but he shatters the comparison that he invites, by highlighting the idealized and somewhat fantastical nature of the hive, just when it seems most human.²³⁰ His beekeeping narrative is then set beside the tale of Aristaeus, which contrasts his idealized look at apiculture²³¹ with the harsh realities of human suffering and loss, and reminds the reader that human actions have dire consequences, whereas bees are free from the difficult choices of the human world. Modern scholarship has struggled to find a strong sense of unity between these two sections of the Fourth *Georgis* and has mainly been concerned with the allegorical significance of the text, looking at particular moments in a degree of isolation from the larger apicultural context.²³² Instead of looking for a strict allegory, I propose a search for a sense of unity and a reason for the seemingly incongruous sections. In doing so, I piece together the broader political message that Virgil is offering in his Fourth *Georgic*.

The beekeeping information offered in the first half of the poem is fairly standard and influenced by prior apicultural texts. Virgil covers subjects such as selecting a suitable location for a hive and when to harvest the honey, and his narrative is full of productive imagery, blooming flowers, and the lively activity of bees, but the genre allows for a more elegant, poetic depiction of the hive and beekeeping. Columella calls Virgil's account the most splendid of the

²³⁰ Similarly, Nappa (2005) 182, also notes that Virgil is both "reinforcing and challenging the equivalency between the bees and Romans," though this is not the focus of his study.

²³¹ Dahlmann (1954), Olbertz (2008), 99-103.

²³² Nappa (2005) offers a thorough and well-balanced look at Virgil's bees, examining both the apiculture section and the mythological section, however his reading is thoroughly political and his focus on finding politics amidst the bees causes him to overlook the very apian features that are emphasized throughout and that complicate a purely political reading. See below for a summary of some other scholars' arguments regarding the bee.

beekeeping guides (Col. 9.2.1). However, there are several moments that stand out amidst the discussion of predators and supplying ample food, the first of which is a battle between rival leaders of a hive.

*Sin autem ad pugnam exierint, nam saepe duobus
regibus incessit magno discordia motu,
continuoque animos vulgi et trepidantia bello
corda licet longe praesciscere; namque morantes
Martius ille a aeris racui canor increpat et vox
auditur fractos sonitus imitata tuburam;
tum trepidae inter se coeunt pennisque coruscant
spiculaque exacuunt rostris aptantque lacertos
et circa regem atque ipsa ad praetoria densae
miscentur magnisque vocant clamoribus hostem.
Ergo ubi ver nactae sudum camposque patentes,
erumpunt portis; concurritur, aethere in alto
fit sonitus, magnum mixtae glomerantur in orbem
praecipitesque cadunt; non densior aere grando,
nec de concussa tantum pluit ilice glandis.
ipsi per medias acies insignibus alis
ingentes animos angusto in pectore versant,
usque adeo obnixa non cedere, dum gravis ut hos
aut hos versa fuga victor dare terga subegit.
Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta
pulveris exigui iactu compressa quiescent.
Verum ubi ductores acie revocaveris ambo,
deterior qui visus, eum, ne prodigus obsit,
dede neci; melior vacua sine regnet in aula.*

-Virgil, G. 4.67-90

"However, if they march out to battle, for often dissension, with a great tumult, falls upon two leaders, and immediately, it is possible to foresee the will of the people and their agitated hearts from far off, for that martial sound of a shrill brass rings out to those delaying and a voice imitating the broken sound of trumpets is heard; then restless, they go among themselves and shake their wings and sharpen their stingers with their beaks and ready their strength and mingle dense around the king and near the officers, and they call out to the enemy with great shouts. Thus, when they have found a cloudless spring day and open fields, they break through the gates; there is a commotion, and in the lofty sky a clamor arises, and, intermingled, they crowd into a great orb and fall headlong; hail from the sky is not denser,

nor in such a way does it rain acorns from a shaken oak.
 The distinguished ones themselves turn their spirits in their narrow
 breasts, in the middle of the ranks, with their wings conspicuous,
 determined not to yield, until the victor with his authority
 has driven either these or these to turn their back in flight.
 These stirrings of the spirits and such contests as these
 grow quiet, checked by the throwing of a little dust.
 But when you have called back both leaders from their battle lines
 the one who seems worse, so as to hinder waste,
 kill him; allow the better one to rule the empty halls."

This battle has received much attention, even from scholars who view the *Georgics* primarily as a source of information on ancient apicultural practices. In his book on Roman and Greek beekeeping, Fraser notes that Virgil must be confusing several phenomena, or blending them together for dramatic effect, since there is no quarrel for leadership of the hive that looks or behaves as Virgil describes.²³³ But this discrepancy can either be taken as some confusion or mistake (or both) on the author's part, as is often the case with the more outlandish moments in texts on beekeeping, or the divergence from fact can be seen as something significant, an artistic departure from the truth to serve a purpose.

Virgil is the first author among our surviving accounts to dwell upon the actions of the bees while in conflict, spending more than thirty lines on what is summarized by other authors as "robbery" or "swarming" or "dissension". Furthermore, this scene is put in a prominent position in the text, being the first moment of extended narrative on a single subject and dominating the early lines of the book. In regard to impact, the battle eclipses the narrative of the developed bee society, a trope that usually serves as the focal point for apiological texts. It draws the reader's attention not only because of its unusual subject matter, but also because it comes before any sort of productive social description.

²³³ Fraser (1951) 35-6. Thomas (1988) 158, claims that the activity described in this passage is swarming.

The most popular interpretation, first made by Herrmann, is that the bees' miniature epic battle serves as an allegory for the Battle of Actium.²³⁴ As the bees are later called "*parvos...Quirites*" (4.201), and the struggle between Antony and Octavian was fresh in the Roman consciousness, this comparison is certainly tempting. However, the description of the bee battle is vague, which problematizes a strict allegorical reading. The two warring sides are not differentiated until the end, when the leaders are marked out as inferior or superior, depending only upon the beekeeper's perception. After the passage quoted above, Virgil does tell his reader that there are two kinds of king, distinguishable by their appearance, following in the vein of Aristotle, Varro, and many others, but the appearances are not made to sound like the men or political factions involved in Actium, or any other specific conflict. Rather, with their gold spots or shaggy fur, they seem distinctly apian rather than human.²³⁵

This sudden outbreak of war contrasts sharply with the orderly, idyllic depiction of the bees in the first sixty-seven lines, in which the beekeeper selects a safe location for the hive, free from external threats, which do not seem to attack the hive itself, but only individuals bees, scattered about the surrounding meadow.²³⁶ In the face of swallows and lizards, the hive's biggest threat to its internal stability and its survival, in general, seems to be within the hive itself. In the first sixty-seven lines, the beekeeper manages all, and Virgil guides his decisions,

²³⁴ Herrmann (1931).

²³⁵ Wilkinson (1969) 181, Nappa (2005) 170, and Bunni (2010) 155, suggests a link between these descriptions and the Octavian propaganda against Antony, but as Nappa and Thomas (1988) 165 note, Virgil's instructions to pull off the king's wings problematize this reading. Thomas (1988) 162, points out that "V's treatment of the bee, while symbolic, does not suit such a strict equation."

²³⁶ Nappa (2005) 162-3, notes that the mention of swallows, through the name of their mythological progenitor Procne adds a "sinister undertone" and provides "another link to the human world" in the bee description, which is an appealing addition to my argument, given the brutality of the tale in contrast with the bees' passing and trivial struggle with predators.

but amidst the battle, the beekeeper fades away and the bees take center stage. Virgil puts the battle in human terms, following the examples of Aristotle, Xenophon, and Varro, to create an atmosphere of human strife. However, amidst the descriptions of trumpets blaring and the shouts of soldiers as they enter the fray, the poet simultaneously does not let his reader forget that these are bees to which he refers. While their sounds imitate horns and they draw up their battle lines, swarming around their king and leaders, still the text is peppered with terms that remind the reader of how any clear-cut allegory fails. These soldiers have wings, beaks,²³⁷ and stingers; any adjective referring to the bees is in the feminine, not the masculine, and there seems only to be the din of battle, without the death and gore which permeates human conflict. In the end, the beekeeper reemerges and the war is settled by the throwing of dust, a reminder of how trifling this strife is in comparison with our own.²³⁸ While calling to mind Rome's long period of civil war, not just Actium, Virgil contrasts that series of disasters to this low-stakes, anticlimactic bee conflict, free from casualties and oppression, something which arises suddenly and disappears swiftly and easily. Unlike Rome's civil wars, the inferior side can be determined by appearance alone and the death of the worse king leads to instantaneous stability. The conflict is at once forgotten, as though it never occurred, along with the failed king, as though he never existed.

Virgil then returns to more bucolic themes, offering another interlude of fragrant plants and blossoming flowers, in which he shows off his pastoral skill in describing the garden that should surround the hive. This return to natural beauty and departure from a linear, scene-focused narrative of the battle reduces the conflict within the hive to something passing and manageable, tempering it with the same light style that preceded it. It is only after this that

²³⁷ The term *rostrum* is also used in Pliny to describe the mouth of the bee (*NH*, 11.9).

²³⁸ Griffin (1979) 63, notes the "grave humor" of this line, given that "human battles, too, end with a handful of dust", referencing the burial of the dead. This irony heightens the contrast between the severity of human war and the insignificance of apian war.

Virgil offers a description of apian work inside and outside of the hive, engaging with the tradition of humanizing the labor of the bee. Virgil spends significantly more time developing the parallels between bee society and human society than previous authors had, anthropomorphizing all aspects of their work and production. Virgil transforms their hive into a city, referring to their houses (*tecta*, 4.153, 79, 187), city (*urbis*, 4.154, 4.193), towns (*oppida*, 4.178), gates (*portis*, 4.185), thresholds (*limina*, 4.188), and city walls (*sub moenibus urbis*, 4.193) and emphasizes the political organization, with the references to their king (*regem*, 4.201), his palace (*regna*, 4.202), and his courtyard (*aulas*, 4.202), and even to their laws (*legibus*, 4.154), as well as their practice of hoisting their leader onto their shoulders (*attollunt umeris*, 4.217), and their striving to earn glorious deaths in war (*pulchramque petunt per vulnera mortem*, 4.218). Their other activities include fashioning (*fingerere*, 4.179), work (*operum*, 4.184), labor (*labor*, 4.184), caring (*curant*, 4.187) muttering (*mussant*, 4.188), gathering (*composuere*, 4.189), and fetching water (*aquantur*, 4.193), and the poet describes their flight through wind like sailors sailing through storms, relating how they often carry rocks as ballasts (*saburram*, 4.195).

However, in the middle of his detailed depiction of a Roman town in miniature, he dissolves the aptness of the comparison with a discussion of apian reproduction, which is an explicitly non-human theory of generation:

*Illum adeo placuisse apibus mirabere morem,
quod neque concubitu indulgent, nec corpora segnes
in Venerem soluunt aut fetus nixibus edunt;
verum ipsae e foliis natos, e suavibus herbis
ore legunt...*

-Virgil, G. 4.197-201

"You will marvel that this habit is pleasing to the bees,
that they do not indulge in copulation, nor lazily
relax their bodies in Venus or birth their young with pain;

but they gather their young from flowers, from the sweet herbs
with their mouths..."

Much as was the case with the bee battle, Virgil seems to meld his bees into human form, only to remind his reader of his or her error in making this comparison. The description of the activities of bee society and the sheer number of human-like terms allows the reader to get lost in their similarities to human society and organization, but a more idealized and peaceful one that functions perfectly.²³⁹ This peace contrasts with the battle the reader witnesses about one hundred lines prior, and the bees' humanness is undermined by their lack of interest in sex and their floral origins.²⁴⁰ On the one hand, this gives the bee a surprising purity and a generation tale like gods or mythical creatures, who spring forth from the earth, water, heads, and thighs.²⁴¹ This fantastical generation and golden age-like features make their civilization all the more ideal, but these aspects of the narrative also remind the reader how un-human they are and how unachievable any example they offer is.²⁴²

Yet, Virgil continues to weave together the divine, almost magical qualities of the bees with their most human aspects. This depiction of their miraculous generation is followed by a

²³⁹ Dahlmann (1954) and Olbertz (2008) 99-103, also stress the idealized features of the hive, claiming that Virgil intends to offer it as a model for human society and for good rule.

²⁴⁰ Nappa (2005) 182 also notes that this contrasts with the humanness in the description of the bees. Segal (1966) 310, draws attention to the bees' lack of passion and contrasts that with humans, while Olbertz (2008) 102, suggest that Virgil makes his ideal society free from the sexual "*furor*" that the poet disapproved of in his third book.

²⁴¹ The mythic is brought to the forefront in the section that compares bees to the Cyclopes, which is discussed insightfully by Betensky (1979), who focuses on the complexity of contrasting and complementary images that comprise the comparison. I would argue that this interplay is similar to what Virgil does in his comparison of bees and humans throughout the poem.

²⁴² Cf. Batstone (1997). Nappa (2005) 198, also notes that Virgil's description of how the bees dissolve their society after the death of their king (G. 4.213-14) highlights just how unlike humans the bees are.

continuation of the discussion of their human-like behavior and production, which then moves on to discuss the diseases that afflict the species. Virgil tells his reader:

*Si vero, quoniam casus apibus quoque nostros
vita tulit, tristi languerunt corpora morbo--
quod iam non dubiis poteris cognoscere signis*
- Virgil, G. 4.251-53

Since life offers our misfortunes to the bees, also,
if then their bodies grow weak with mournful disease
you will be able to recognize it by clear signs.

In this passage, the poet draws specific attention to the bees' likeness to us in their susceptibility to disease and claims that this similarity can aid us in the recognition of illness when it strikes the hive. However, this discussion follows Virgil noting the "immortality" of the species, which remains alive and continuous, despite the death of individuals within the hive.

It is followed by another passage, notable in that it speaks to a problem that no previous text has addressed, the failure of the hive as a whole. After an extensive discussion of the treatment of disease, the transition seems sharp and shocking.

*Sed si quem proles subito defecerit omnis
nec genus unde novae stirpis revocetur habebit,
tempus et Arcadii memoranda inventa magistri
pandere...*
-Virgil, G. 4.281-84

"But if the whole line suddenly fails someone,
nor does he have a stock from which to call back a new line,
then it is time to reveal that memorable discovery of the Arcadian
teacher..."

This introduces the reader to the first of two *bugoniae* in what remains of the poem, and moves the narrative away from an idealized, bucolic depiction of beekeeping at its finest toward a mythological scene, laced with heavy loss and suffering, and flanked by two brutal *bugoniae*.

By using the *bugonia* as a transition, Virgil blends the idealized triviality of the bee world

with the more dire human world, to which the *bugonia* introduces us. For the bees, even the destruction of the entire swarm lacks consequences. The swarm can be restored, if one has the right knowledge. But for the farmer who must perform the *bugonia*, the loss is not so trivial.²⁴³ Virgil emphasizes the violence of the act and the gore required to complete the ritual, as well as the precision required of the one who performs the act. The bull is not simply to be killed, but "once it is killed by blows, its entrails being struck are disintegrated through its intact skin" (*plagisque perempto tunsae per integram soluuntur viscera pellem*, 4.301-2). The detailed and graphic nature of this description seem to be Virgil's own innovation, as prior extant examples simply mentioned the bull's death or summarized the method in a word (as in Nicander's *λυκοσπάδες* bulls, *Ther.* 742), without dwelling on the brutality of it.²⁴⁴ This sudden, violent twist contrasts sharply with the idyllic setting of the bees and their idealized narrative, but is consistent with the mythical nature of the overall bee society description. Furthermore, it guides the reader into the broader narrative of the Aristaetus story, which, though a myth, is more concerned with the reality of human existence than the deceptively human narrative of the bees.

The myth of Aristaetus, the discoverer of the *bugonia*, whose pursuit of Eurydice caused her death, has been the focus of much of the modern scholarship on the Fourth *Georgic*. Like the bee war section, this section of narrative encourages readers to look at it allegorically, and scholars have read into Aristaetus and Orpheus roles including that of Octavian,²⁴⁵ Octavian and Antony,²⁴⁶ "work culture" and "an alternative view of culture",²⁴⁷ and different and opposing

²⁴³ It is worth noting that, as Thomas (1988), 237 emphasizes, the killing of bulls would not be an economical way of replacing the hive. Ross (1987), 214-16 esp. n.8, also notes that the *bugonia* is not an attainable means of creation

²⁴⁴ See Chapter One for a discussion of the *bugonia* prior to Virgil.

²⁴⁵ Perret (1965), Commager (1966), Bunni (2010) 164-166.

²⁴⁶ Griffin (1977), Nadeau (1984).

²⁴⁷ Bradley (1969).

aspects of Virgil himself,²⁴⁸ among a number of other possible readings. The depiction of the bee war as a civil war, the humanness and the Roman-ness of the bees' duties and hive, and giving them the name *Quirites*, have thus far encouraged the reader to look for Rome and to look for contemporary meanings in the poem, and the many contrasting aspects of Aristaeus and Orpheus have a similar function. The sheer number of possible readings for the pair demonstrates how easy it is for readers to see the issues of contemporary Rome in their story and how difficult it is to pinpoint one specific message in Virgil's text. As Morley says of the bee war, "the readers are simply left... to draw their own conclusions."²⁴⁹ When closely examining the patterns of the text for the whole of the Fourth *Georgic*, the focus on contrasting elements comes to the forefront, as the previous discussion on the first section of the text indicates. Now, with the Aristaeus narrative, Virgil emphasizes human suffering and loss, with an eye towards the devastating consequences that human actions can have and draws attention to the way that this contrasts with the world of the bees from the first half of the poem. This emphasis on contrasting human suffering with the fantastical and idealized world of the bee shows that the bees' perfect society can not be actualized by humans and reminds the reader that any hope of attaining any sort of socio-political stability will come with serious and unpleasant consequences.

When the reader first encounters Aristaeus, he is grieving over the failure of his swarm, which he, like the farmer of the first half, has lost. He turns to his divine mother for answers, who in turn sends him to Proteus. After physically subduing Proteus, the god explains to Aristaeus the reason for his loss, launching into a story that is the focus of much of the remaining narrative. He tells Aristaeus of the nymphs' anger at the loss of their sister, Eurydice, who was

²⁴⁸ Hardie (1971).

²⁴⁹ Morley (2007) 464.

poisoned by a snake as she ran from Aristaeus' attempt to rape her. Her husband Orpheus' grief at her loss is the central focus of this tale and the driving force behind his venturing into the underworld, while still alive, to fetch Eurydice back. However, due to his inability to follow directions, Orpheus' attempt to retrieve Eurydice only causes him to lose her once more and he returns to the world of the living, again bereft and full of misery and grief, until he is dismembered by Bacchants, a horrific end to a sorrowful tale. Aristaeus learns that only through the appeasement of Orpheus can he regain a hive and thus he learns of the *bugonia*.²⁵⁰

This tale stands in stark opposition to the apian narrative that led to it. The bee society that Virgil presents seems to be the perfect model for human society. Its problems are fixable, the bees are dedicated to their king and their work, and war is fleeting and inconsequential. Disease can be recognized and cured and even the loss of the entire swarm is not devastating, but rather it can be replaced through the performance of a *bugonia*. However, throughout this description, Virgil reminds his reader that this is an *apian* society and not a human one, and in order to do so, he shows the reader the fantastical elements of the bees' world that make using their society as a model for human politics and life impossible. Thereafter, we are ostensibly told the origin of the *bugonia*, but Virgil is also showing just how little the human world resembles the bee world, when the realities of human life are considered. Aristaeus' pursuit of Eurydice had the unforeseen consequence of her death and was, in and of itself, an attempt at violence. Her death, in turn, led to the misery of Orpheus, his endeavor to bring her back, and ultimately his own death. Eurydice's dual deaths mirror the two *bugoniae* that flank this story, juxtaposing the almost magical way in which a new swarm can be born with the permanence and

²⁵⁰ The first *bugonia* and the second are relatively different in regards to the manner of their performance. For a discussion of the possible significance of these differing methods, see Bunni (2010) 195-200.

irreversibility of human death. The beekeeper has no need to grieve the loss of a swarm, since a new one can be obtained,²⁵¹ but in the human world, grief is sharp and devastating and lives cannot simply be brought back or replaced.

As Segal points out, Virgil's description of the second *bugonia*, using *liquafacta* and *ruptis*, highlights the fact that the bees' rebirth springs "out of violence, putrefaction, death" (*liquafacta boum per viscera toto/ stridere apes utero et ruptis effervere costis*, 4.555-6).²⁵² The restoration of loss that the *bugonia* represents is taught to Aristaeus only after the deaths of his bees, Orpheus, and Eurydice, and can occur only through more death, and a particularly horrible and violent death, at that. While the *bugonia* offers a restoration of life, which Virgil describes as "a wonder, marvelous to speak of" (*dictu mirabile monstrum*, 4.554), Ross is right to note that "rebirth" is perhaps not the best term to describe this occurrence.²⁵³ It is not the case that the bull from which the bees spring is reborn, or that Aristaeus' lost bees regain their lives, and neither Orpheus nor Eurydice can be brought back, but rather a *new* life comes from this death.²⁵⁴

In the end, the bees fail as a model for human life and cannot provide answers to the difficult questions that plague Rome, though the city is remarkable in its resemblance to the bees's hive.²⁵⁵ But in juxtaposing these two worlds, Virgil highlights the fact that there is no easy fix and no perfect political model for humans, reminding his reader of the dire consequences of human actions and the permanence of death.²⁵⁶ The hope of the *bugonia* is not

²⁵¹ While the cost of the *bugonia* is significant, as noted above, it is not a cost for the bees, but rather it comes at a price for the farmer.

²⁵² Segal (1966) 321.

²⁵³ Ross (1987) 214.

²⁵⁴ Ross (1987) 214.

²⁵⁵ Similarly, Morley (2007) 464, say "Virgil's account is thus less a realisable model and more an image of unattainable peace and simplicity".

²⁵⁶ Ross (1987) 214.

enough to outweigh the tragic losses and deaths present in the rest of the poem,²⁵⁷ however, the bees help to remind the reader that it is not necessarily a matter of mere death and destruction *or* life and renewal. These conflicting images go hand in hand.²⁵⁸

Virgil's closing lines, noting Caesar's victories abroad while he composes his songs, once again bring the reader's mind back to contemporary Rome and raise the question of what these conflicting images and the tension of the poem and the *bugonia*, in particular, mean for Rome. Virgil's careful blending of optimism and dire pessimism, the very thing that makes his bee images so unique and powerful, highlights the poet's anxiety and doubts about Rome and its future, while still preserving a sense of hope and continuity. In terms of Octavian's recently solidified control and the beginning of the principate, the fact that Rome may have found stability, peace, and a chance to rebuild, does not negate the suffering, which was lasting and severe, or the fact that countless lives were lost. The images in the *Georgics* help to display the hope and uncertainty, optimism and doubt, which must have been felt throughout Rome during this period. Ross is not wrong to stress that the poet had seen years of civil war and endless violence throughout his youth and adulthood, and that peace to him must have seemed foreign and uncertain, something that could not be trusted,²⁵⁹ but at the same time, Octavian provided the

²⁵⁷ Ross (1987) 232-233.

²⁵⁸ Morgan's (1999) 106, observation of Stoic elements in Virgil's representation of the *bugonia* support this idea. The stoic notion of a universe comprised of periodic destruction and creation is a worldview that is reflected in Virgil's depiction of the *bugonia*, an image of death and rebirth. Morgan argues that this same cycle of destruction and creation which makes up both the universe according to Stoic philosophy and the *bugonia* serves as a sort of Augustan propaganda, wherein the violence of the civil wars, like the sacrifice of the bullock, are necessary for the creation of peace and stability, which the principate offers.

²⁵⁹ Ross (1987) 4-5. In his introduction, Ross (1987) 2-10, offers a comprehensive time line of the major historical events during Virgil's lifetime and how they corresponded to the works on which he was working. Morgan (1999) 1-5, also provides a summary of the historical events around the time of the *Georgics*.

most promising hope for Rome and he gave the city reason to feel optimistic about the stability he offered.

This conflict between skepticism and hope is perceivable throughout the book, particularly in the imagery of bees that suggests political prosperity and success, while casting the shadow of doubt through violent imagery and loss. To over-emphasize the loss or the gain presented in the poem is to lessen the very tension that intrigues readers and scholars alike, and to deny the complexity of existence, which Virgil instilled into his poem. The bees' society does not present a simple worldview or an attainable model, because no simple worldview or perfect model exists. The bees and Aristaeus together are an image of war and peace, prosperity and devastation that mirrors those very real elements of life that are inescapable, inevitable and intrinsically tied to existence, within a city that is in constant flux.

Conclusion

In exploring the political implications of the bee image, this chapter has shown the degree to which the bee was thought of as a political creature, in even the most scientific of ancient texts. This view of the hierarchical, political nature of the bee was so much a part of ancient apiculture and apiology that human socio-political vocabulary became commonplace in describing it and, in turn, discussions of apiculture and apiology could be used politically. This is seen most often in the image of the good king bee, that appeared so commonly that it became a trope in Greek and Roman literature. However, each author who employed this trope tweaked the image to highlight the qualities that he wished to emphasize in his own use of the image, catering his depiction of the hive to what was most important to him in the human world. This image was then expanded into discussions of the hive as a whole, as a reflection of human society. In the

cases of Varro and Virgil in particular, the bee image exploited the seemingly perfect nature of the hive and the idea of control that apiculture offered, and in doing so showed how impossible it is to have full control and manage a human society. For them, the bees do not show how a ruler can be at his best or what is most important for a society, but rather they show the impossibility of perfect human control and stability. The bee society is an unattainable ideal that shows us the shortcomings of our society and the difficulties of the real world.

Chapter Three: The Honey and The Sting

μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα
-Sappho fr. 146 Voigt

"Neither the honey nor the bee for me."

This fragment of Sappho was preserved in the pages of the Augustan grammarian Trypho.

While its exact context eludes us, Trypho tells us that here Sappho offers the words of a proverb (*Trop.* 25). Diogenianus, a lexicographer and compiler of proverbs from the 2nd Century C.E., elucidates a little more, explaining that this saying was applied to those who were not willing to take the good with the bad, or, as Gregorius Cyprius (3.4) said, those who "refuse to experience something good because of the danger residing in it."²⁶⁰

While it is not possible to date this proverb with confidence to a time prior to Sappho's lifetime at the end of the 7th Century B.C.E., it seems unlikely that it originated with her. If it is the case that this proverb precedes Sappho, it offers an interesting glance into the early Greek conceptualization of the hive. As the saying indicates, the hive was thought to contain a hidden good inside, namely the honey, but this good is offered alongside a risk, namely, the potential sting of the bees.²⁶¹ Presumably, this risk was one worth taking, but there was a risk nonetheless. In an age before elaborate beekeeping gear, when smoking was the best option for placating an angry hive enough to extract their honey, and the practice of keeping bees was not limited to a few, faraway mass-producers, the risk likely felt more acute and tangible. And with honey's importance spanning from preservations to medicine to daily cooking, the rewards, also, must have seemed great.

²⁶⁰ McLachlan (1989) 97.

²⁶¹ Bounas (2008) 77.

When Sappho quoted the bee-proverb in her lost lyric, it seems a fair guess that the topic of her discussion was love and erotic desire. This line expresses a similar sentiment to ones found elsewhere in her work, when she voices her desire to avoid the pains and sorrows of love such as in her invocation of Aphrodite in fragment 1 (1.3-4 Voigt) or when she calls Eros "bitter-sweet" (γλυκύπικρον, fr. 130.2 Voigt). For Sappho, we may surmise love provided the dangerous allure of honey, and the powerful threat of the bee's sting. In fragment 146, she declares that love is not worth the trouble, that she would rather abandon the sweetness of *eros* and avoid the bitter pangs of its sting than enjoy a honey-sweet taste and risk the evil with the good.²⁶² So well suited was the image of the honey and the sting for the struggles of love that it was adopted by other poets, as well, primarily in a lyric context.

A fine example of the bee as an image to convey the mixed nature of erotic passion can be found in the *Anacreontea*, a collection of sixty-two poems formerly thought to be the work of Anacreon, but now recognized as a collection by various unknown authors, each of whom attempted to replicate some aspect (or multiple aspects) of Anacreon's poetry, mimicking his meter, subject matter, and sometimes voice. The composition of these poems spanned a large period of time, the earliest ones probably dating from either the 1st Century BCE or the 1st Century CE, while the latest ones may have been written as late as the 6th Century CE.²⁶³ Anacreontic poem 35, which discusses Eros' encounter with a bee, probably dates to the Hellenistic period, or perhaps a bit later.²⁶⁴

Ἔρως ποτ' ἐν ῥόδοισι
κοιμωμένην μέλιτταν
οὐκ εἶδεν, ἀλλ' ἐτρώθη.

²⁶² This is also the interpretation McLachlan (1989) defends.

²⁶³ Budelmann (2009) 237-8.

²⁶⁴ For a discussion of dating and this poem's relationship to the Pseudo-Theocritean poem discussed below, see Rosenmeyer (2006) 174 n.50.

τὸν δάκτυλον παταχθείς
 τᾶς χειρὸς ὠλόλυξε,
 δραμῶν δὲ καὶ πετασθείς
 πρὸς τὴν καλὴν Κυθήρην
 “ὄλωλα, μήτηρ,” εἶπεν,
 “ὄλωλα κάποθνήσκω·
 ὄφις μ’ ἔτυψε μικρὸς
 πτερωτός, ὃν καλοῦσιν
 μέλιτταν οἱ γεωργοί.”
 ἃ δ’ εἶπεν· “εἰ τὸ κέντρον
 πονεῖς τὸ τᾶς μελίττας,
 πόσον δοκεῖς πονοῦσιν,
 Ἔρωσ, ὅσους σὺ βάλλεις;”
 - *Anacreontea* 35

Eros once did not see a bee
 sleeping amidst the roses
 But was stung.
 Having been struck on the finger
 Of his hand, he cried,
 Running off and flying
 To lovely Cytherea
 "I have perished, mother," he said,
 "I have perished and I am dying;
 A little serpent which stuck me,
 A flying one, the farmers
 Call a bee."
 And she said "if you suffer
 From the prick of the bee,
 How much do you think they suffer,
 Eros, those whom you strike?"

As Rosenmeyer points out, this poem reads like a fairy-tale with its "once upon a time" introduction, and its continuation into the charming story of the young Eros' first encounter with a bee. The first line begins with the name of the god and sets the scene "amidst the roses", laying out the focus of the poem, Eros, and reinforcing it with the appropriately erotic setting of a bed of blossoming flowers. Here, the unsuspecting god falls victim to the sting of a sleeping bee, and the poet emphasizes his suffering by ending the following pair of lines with words that refer to his wound (ἐτρώθη, 35.3; παταχθείς, 35.4). After he finds his mother, Eros offers a short but

dramatic lament that evokes tragedy with its language. The young god repeats "I have perished" (ὄλωλα, 35.8, 9), declares "I am dying" (κάποθνήσκω, 35.9) and refers to his attacker as a "serpent" (ὄφις, 35.10), who has "struck" him (ἔτυψε, 35.10). This exaggerated display is contrasted with the "Alexandrian touch of scholarly gloss"²⁶⁵ in lines 11-12, in which Eros defines the "serpent" as the flying creature farmers call bee and, with this glossing of the term, adds further humor to the scene.

Aphrodite's answer, while short, is to the point, driving home the comparison that the poem has led up to. Picking up on the previous emphasis on pain, Aphrodite's words focus on suffering, repeating the verb "to suffer" (πονεῖν, 35.14, 15) as she points out that though Eros suffers from the bee, how much greater is the suffering of humans because of him. While the god draws attention to the size of his attacker (μικρός, 35.10), his mother emphasizes the greatness of the wounds he inflicts, a remark that draws attention to the shared qualities of the young god and the bee, two small creatures who inflict great suffering.

A similar poem is attributed to Theocritus, one which is so alike as to raise the suspicion that one influenced the other. However, given that neither poem was composed by the author to whom it is attributed, dating is impossible and determining influence is equally hopeless. While the Pseudo-Theocritean work follows the same basic storyline, it contains its own twist on what may have been a familiar tale to the Greeks.

Τὸν κλέπταν ποτ' Ἔρωτα κακὰ κέντασε μέλισσα
 κηρίον ἐκ σίμβλων συλεύμενον, ἄκρα δὲ χειρῶν
 δάκτυλα πάνθ' ὑπένυξεν. ὃ δ' ἄλγεε καὶ χέρ' ἐφύση
 καὶ τὰν γὰν ἐπάταξε καὶ ἄλατο, τῷ δ' Ἀφροδίται
 δεῖξεν τὰν ὀδύναν, καὶ μέμφετο ὅττι γε τυτθὸν
 θηρίον ἐντὶ μέλισσα καὶ ἀλίκα τραύματα ποιεῖ.
 χά μᾶτηρ γελάσασα· "τὸ δ' οὐκ ἴσος ἐσσί μελίσσαις,
 ὃς τυτθὸς μὲν ἔεις τὰ δὲ τραύματα ἀλίκα ποιεῖς;"

²⁶⁵ Rosenmeyer (2006) 175.

- Pseudo-Theocritus 19

Once a foul bee stung Eros, the thief, who was stealing
 the honeycomb from the beehive, and it pricked
 each finger on his hand. And he suffered and blew on his hand
 and struck the earth and stomped about, and then he showed
 his pain to Aphrodite, and complained that
 a bee is a small beast and yet it makes bitter wounds.
 And his mother, laughing, said, "Are you not equal to the bees,
 you who are small and yet make bitter wounds?"

The first words that greet the reader are τὸν κλέπταν (the thief, 19.1), which serves to introduce a rather distinct Eros, what Rosenmeyer calls the "quintessential Alexandrian god of love",²⁶⁶ who is characterized as a childish mischief-maker, as in Apollonius (Apollon. 3.113-50). Pseudo-Theocritus focuses on the puerile and mischievous aspects of the god,²⁶⁷ casting him as the thief of the bees' honey, who sees himself as the victim of the "foul bee" (κακὰ...μέλισσα, 19.1) and flies into a dramatic fit, when the result of his theft is a sting. He complains that so small (τυτθός, 19.5) a creature can inflict so great a wound. The word used for "small" helps lead up to Aphrodite's closing quip, as it is also used in the sense of "young" and given Eros' particularly juvenile depiction, it helps to pave the way to the final connection between Eros and the bee. Aphrodite meets her son's complaints with a laugh, and points out, rather unsubtly, that he is "equal to the bees" (ἴσος ἐσσί μελίσσαις, 19.7). The goddess echoes her son's use of τυτθός, but now applying it to him, to emphasize his similarity to the insect, and likewise, reappropriates his terms for the bee's "bitter wounds" (τραύματα ἀλίκια, 19.8), using them instead for the wounds of love.

While both poems lack subtlety and depth, they contain a great deal of charm and humor in their comparisons and framework. Though similar in content, the characters of both Eros and

²⁶⁶ Rosenmeyer (2006) 175.

²⁶⁷ Rosenmeyer (2006) 175.

Aphrodite appear distinct and the feel of the two poems differs considerably. However, both tease out, in a rather whimsical manner, that which was a heartfelt sentiment for a poet like Sappho. The likeness to Sappho's proverb comes across more clearly in the Pseudo-Theocritus poem, where the comparison between Eros and the lover is more explicit. Like an optimistic lover, he thinks he can take the honey and escape the bee, but in the end, even the crafty god is subject to the suffering that goes along with pleasure. He is lured by the positive potential of the hive, but inevitably struck by the danger hidden within, reinforcing the notion that not only the erotic, but the hive, as well, is a mixed bag.

This type of tension between the positive and negative potential of the hive is also conceptualized through the apian labor system, which is the subject of a fable that comes down to us from Phaedrus. Because Phaedrus wrote in the 1st Century CE and he is our only source for this tale, it is impossible to say how early its origins are, but it is likely that Phaedrus' retelling reflects, at least to some degree, an early Greek tradition, perhaps even contemporary with Sappho's elegant proverb.²⁶⁸

In Phaedrus' tale, both the bees and the drones claim to have made a honeycomb. When they take their case to the wasp, the wasp declares that whoever made the honeycomb can make another and that both groups ought to prove they made the original honeycomb by creating a second, as evidence. The bees agree to this, whereas the drones refuse to take part, thus revealing the bees as the diligent, honest workers, and the drones as lazy parasites, trying to take credit for someone else's work (*Aesopica*, 504 Perry).²⁶⁹ Here, it is the race of bee itself that is

²⁶⁸ As Davies and Kathirithamby (1986) 1, note there is "no reason to doubt that many of them [i.e. fables] derive from an earlier, ultimately pre-literate, stage of Greek culture". For a summary of the discussions of dating fables, see Davies and Kathirithamby (1986) 1 n.1.

²⁶⁹ For a brief discussion of the "proverbial drone" and its appearances in other texts, see Introduction.

the double-sided coin. On the one hand, the species offers the diligent and hard-working bee, which comes to serve as a proverbial example of industriousness for the ancient Greeks, as it does now for us. Yet, on the other hand, there is the lazy drone, whose appearance is much like that of the bee, but whose character could not be farther from that of its assiduous kin, and worse still, Phaedrus' tale suggest a deceptive nature hidden beneath its benign exterior.

Pandora and the Lazy Drone: Hesiod's Bee

It is possible that this tale or a similar one influenced Hesiod's contrast between woman to man in the *Theogony*.

ὥς δ' ὅποτε ἐν σμήνεσσι κατηρέεσσι μέλισσαι
 κηφῆνας βόσκωσι, κακῶν ξυνήονας ἔργων·
 αἱ μὲν τε πρόπαν ἥμαρ ἐς ἡέλιον καταδύντα
 ἡμάτιαι σπεύδουσι τιθεῖσί τε κηρία λευκά,
 οἱ δ' ἔντοσθε μένοντες ἐπηρέεας κατὰ σίμβλους
 ἀλλότριον κάματον σφετέρην ἐς γαστέρ' ἀμῶνται·
 ὥς δ' αὐτως ἄνδρεςσι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γυναῖκας
 Ζεὺς ὑπιβρεμέτης θῆκε, ξυνήονας ἔργων
 ἀργαλέων.

- Hesiod *Th.* 594-602

"As when in their vaulted hives the bees
 Feed the drones, partners of evil work;
 The bees who by day hurry about all day
 until the sun sinks and pack the white wax
 while those ones, remaining within, in the covered hive
 gather the toil of others into their bellies;
 Thus in this manner high-thundering Zeus
 made women a evil for mortal men, partners in
 grievous work."

Here, Hesiod tells his reader that man and bee have the same lot, in that both work all day while the drone (or in the case of man, the woman) stays within the hive and consumes the work of others. Ostensibly, the meaning of this comparison is clear. Man is the diligent worker, the

maker of the honeycomb, as were the bees in Phaedrus' tale, whereas the woman, like the drone, fails to contribute. However, while Phaedrus' drone claimed the work of the bee as his own, in Hesiod's tale, the woman takes ownership of the work of men, not by claiming to have created it herself, but by consuming it as though it were hers to consume. Both tales represent the household or hive as the single home of two very different creatures, one being man or the worker, contributing and creating, the model of industry, and the other being the drone, or the woman, a paradigm of laziness and uselessness.²⁷⁰ Yet, despite this discrepancy between the two housemates, this image acknowledges the inevitability of this mismatched household. Just as Phaedrus' bees do not then drive off the drones, Hesiod tells his reader that a man who does not take a woman into his house is doomed to die without a son to support him and have his estate divided up (600-12). For Hesiod's reader, the lack of a woman is worse than her presence. She is a necessary evil, a *καλὸν κακὸν*, like her progenitor, Pandora (585), and to borrow from Sappho's proverb, a man must take the bee with the honey. The bee image helps to stress that this is the natural order of things, as natural as the drone and bee sharing a hive.

This simile is a favorite among scholars as a means of exploring gender-relations in Hesiod. Most notably, Sussman uses the workers and drones as a means of exploring the economy of early Greece and trying to discover both the perceived and actual role of women within the changing agricultural economy during Hesiod's lifetime or perhaps a bit earlier.²⁷¹ Continuing in this vein, Marquardt notes that Hesiod, in the *Theogony*, stresses the economic aspects of women and the way her primary evil is described in economic terms, as she, like the

²⁷⁰ This analogy saying that women are to men what the drone is to the bee is the general explanation given by most scholars for this simile and the extent to which the image is discussed, as in Vernant (1980) 171; Zeitlin (1995) 49. While not incorrect, I argue it is incomplete and simplistic.

²⁷¹ Sussman (1979).

drone, is a drain on resources.²⁷² Brown, too, focuses his discussion on the "socio-economic" impact of women and his concern with this image is more focused on how a male audience would have perceived their role in this image than how the image itself fits into its context.²⁷³

While these investigations are certainly fruitful in their own right, scholarly discussions of the comparison address a similar question²⁷⁴ and take a similar approach: what does the *Theogony* say about women by comparing them to the drone? By framing the question in such a way, these scholars have explored how men view women's place in the household, as compared to how humans view the drone's role in the hive. The question of Sussman and others is certainly an important one and their answers have been insightful and elucidating. However, it is equally important to examine Hesiod's *choice* of an apian simile to describe women and to look into how this image fits into the greater context of the passage and Hesiod's work. This alteration in the framework of the question opens up the discussion to looking at the traditions surrounding similarly tense bee images, like those of Sappho and Phaedrus, which may have influenced the poet's choice of this image. It also invites an exploration into how Hesiod's discussion of woman, as bee, becomes a commonplace means of discussing male ambivalence regarding women, as in the works of Semonides and Xenophon, and how these subsequent authors use and alter Hesiod's image for their own purposes.

In order to understand more fully how Hesiod is using this simile, it is first necessary to look back at the context leading up to it. The episode directly prior to the bee simile begins with

²⁷² Marquardt (1982) 288.

²⁷³ Brown (1997) 39.

²⁷⁴ I say "question" here and throughout, as I view these authors' inquiries as being largely in pursuit of the same thing and taken from similar angles, though their studies do vary in interesting and insightful ways.

what Vernant calls "a duel in cunning" between Zeus and Prometheus.²⁷⁵ When dividing up the sacrificial ox into two portions, one for mortal men and one of the gods, Prometheus offers Zeus the choice of two bundles, one covered in the desirable fat of the ox, which conceals the inedible pieces within, and the other comprised of the edible parts, hidden within the stomach of the ox. Zeus, letting himself be deceived, selects the thick layer of fat for himself, only to receive the unfavorable offering concealed within. In revenge against Prometheus' trick that favors mankind, Zeus withholds his celestial fire from mortals, but again, Prometheus deceives him, hiding fire in a hollow fennel stalk and gifting it to mortals. As his final retaliation, Zeus makes a deceptive gift for mankind, in return for fire. He and the other gods form "the likeness of a modest virgin" (παρθένω αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον, *Th.* 572) out of earth, whose appearance is god-like but whose mind is set upon evil; she is a καλὸν κακὸν ("beautiful evil") given to Epimetheus. It is after Hesiod's description of this "modest virgin", elsewhere called Pandora, and the race of women that she gives rise to, that the bee simile appears.

As Vernant's discussion of this passage stresses, these episodes are framed as a series of "reciprocal offers of deceptive gifts" which are "designed to 'hide', 'conceal from view'" (καλύπτειν, κρύπτειν).²⁷⁶ The first of these gifts is a choice between a sacrifice which appears good but contains the bad parts of the ox, and a sacrifice which appears bad, but actually contains the good part of the ox, thus, a good disguised as bad, and a bad disguised as good. The next, fire, is concealed in something that appears useless (the fennel stalk) but what is hidden is actually powerful, another good disguised as bad. The third, woman, appears divine and good, due to her beauty and the gifts she is given by the gods, but is actually a grief (πῆμα), a final bad disguised as good. This framework of good concealing evil and vice versa is key to this passage,

²⁷⁵ Vernant (1980) 169.

²⁷⁶ Vernant (1980) 170.

not only because it stresses the interrelated nature of these gifts which come to define human existence, as Vernant argues, but also because they build to this final gift, woman, the gift which results from the others and is ultimately both a good and an evil to men (unlike the other gifts, which offered good disguised as bad, or the reverse).²⁷⁷

It is only in this framework that the bee simile becomes significant. While on the one hand it plays off of the alleged imbalance of labor between the sexes, in the same way as Phaedrus' fable, on the other, it serves as a closing summary of this blending of good and evil and Hesiod's defining of both women and human nature. The bees, too, serve as a mix of good and evil. From the outside, what an observer sees is the diligent worker, the καλὸν of the species, or the lovely exterior appearance of the gift. However, hidden within, is the lazy drone bee, living side by side with the worker, but neither packing combs nor working. The drone then, is the κακὸν hidden within, something which Hesiod stresses in the vocabulary of the passage, through the use of ἔντοσθε ("within"). This term harkens back to the vocabulary of the previous gifts, all of which are describes as concealed or hidden (καλύπτειν, κρύπτειν) and many of which are accompanied by some indicator of the interior nature of that which is hidden (ἐν, 539, 566; ἐπὶ, 540).

When one recalls Sappho's proverb, another aspect of this mixed nature of the bee comes to light. As the proverb points out, the hive contains sweet honey, a benefit to man, but one that must be obtained through the risk of the bee's sting. This is the case with women, as well. Although she poses a danger to man, in order to obtain the benefit of sex and children, the sweetness that lies within a woman, a man must risk her evils.

²⁷⁷ As Zeitlin (1995) 51, has noted, Hesiod deemphasizes, almost to the point of omission, the good which women can offer.

Though the economic drawbacks of women are overtly stressed by Hesiod with the drone image, the preceding passage on Pandora reminds the reader of her erotic danger, suggesting that the erotic connections which play out in Sappho and the subsequent texts are not a misplaced association here. In her discussion of Hesiod's Pandora passage, Zeitlin draws attention not only to the gender dynamics of this section of text, but also to the erotic implications, which are naturally tied to gender roles and ideology. As she points out, the ambiguous role given to women by Hesiod is reflected in the discussions of sex and sexuality by various medical authors, who stress the imbalanced nature of the sexual act.²⁷⁸ As Zeitlin describes it: "sex is treated as an unequal transaction by which woman steals man's substance, both alimentary and sexual, and by her appetites even 'roasts man alive and brings him to a premature old age'".²⁷⁹ This ambiguity with regard to heterosexual sex is essentially the same ambiguity perceived in women. Sex is a necessity for survival and a means of pleasure, but these accounts underscore the inevitable negative results. Women, like the hive, are a blend of good and evil, offering both economic and sexual detriment to the man, along with sexual pleasure and the promise of sons. Hesiod's use of the bee image provides a means of expressing both the economic and erotic, which were likely already part of common conceptualizations of the hive.

Semonides on Women and the Ideal Bee Wife

The conflicted, but largely misogynistic view of women offered by the Pandora tale and enhanced by the bee image is drawn on and exploited by later authors' discussions of women. Semonides offers one of the most striking examples of misogynistic discourse and while

²⁷⁸ Zeitlin (1995) 51.

²⁷⁹ Zeitlin (1995) 51.

Hesiod's influence on his notorious poem 7 is subtle, nevertheless, it is clear.²⁸⁰ Semonides, like his predecessor, focuses on the creation of the "race" of women (ἐποίησεν, 7.1), particularly her mind and nature (νόον, 7.1) telling his reader that they were made separately (χωρίς, 7.1). However, it is not clear whether χωρίς is meant to indicate that the sorts of women are separate from one another, or that their nature is separate from that of men.²⁸¹ The latter is certainly true in Hesiod's version of events (though the former is not), where Pandora is created after man and her mind, in the *Works and Days*, at least, is unlike that of man, but rather described as the mind of a bitch (κύνεόν, *WD.* 67).²⁸² In addition to the subject matter of woman's creation and the misogynistic tone,²⁸³ Semonides' schema of comparing women to animals may have been inspired by Hesiod's description of Pandora's bitch-like mind (κύνεόν τε νόον, *WD.* 67) and comparison of woman to bee (*Th.* 594-602). The two examples of women in Semonides that stand apart, due to the fact that they do not use the "women are like animals" motif, are the woman who is born from the sea and the woman who is born from the earth. However, both of these women may also have their roots in Hesiod, whose Pandora is formed from earth and water.²⁸⁴

Yet, Semonides' treatment of woman as bee seems, on the surface, to be nothing like Hesiod's. While Hesiod's bee-woman is ripe with dangerous potential, it is the other women of Semonides' poem which offer every sort of danger to their husbands, whereas the bee-woman is a blessing to the husband that takes her (*Sem.* 7.83). The poet employs the image of the bee as a means of enhancing the traits associated with the feminine ideal that he attributes to her.

²⁸⁰ See Loraux (1993) 90-110.

²⁸¹ Lloyd-Jones (1975) 63 argues for the latter. *Cf.* Campbell (1982) 187.

²⁸² For more on the implications of κύων and related terms, see Gravers (1995).

²⁸³ Campbell (1982) 187.

²⁸⁴ Lloyd-Jones (1975) 69, Loraux (1993) 91.

τὴν δ' ἐκ μελίσσης· τὴν τις εὐτυχεῖ λαβῶν·
 κείνη γὰρ οἷη μῶμος οὐ προσιζάνει,
 θάλλει δ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς κάπαέζεται βίος.
 φίλη δὲ σὺμ φιλεῦντι γηράσκει πόσι
 τεκοῦσα καλὸν κούνομάκλυτος γένος.
 κάριπρεπῆς μὲν ἐν γυναιξὶ γίγνεται
 πάσησι, θεῆ δ' ἀμφιδέδρομεν χάρις.
 οὐδ' ἐν γυναιξὶν ἦδεται καθημένη,
 ὅκου λέγουσιν ἀφροδισίους λόγους.
 τοίας γυναικας ἀνδράσιν χαρίζεται
 Ζεὺς τὰς ἀρίστας καὶ πολυφραδεστάτος.

-Semonides 7.83-93

"[The god made]

This one from the bee. Whoever it is that takes this one is blessed.
 For blame does not settle on this one alone.
 And her husband's livelihood flourishes and prospers under her.
 And she beloved grows old with her husband loving her
 Bearing a noble and illustrious line.
 She is distinguished among all women,
 And god-like grace surrounds her.
 She does not take pleasure sitting among women,
 Where they have conversation about sex.
 Zeus gives these women as a favor to men,
 The best and most sagacious women."

The subtle imagery associated with the bee serves as a means of sharpening the general and brief terms of the narrative, giving Semonides' description of female virtue an additional, more vivid layer of detail. For example, the term Semonides selects for blame not "settling" on the bee-woman (προσιζάνει, 7.84) is a word that can be used of bees landing on a flower to collect pollen.²⁸⁵ This choice of words, though applied to blame (μῶμος) and not the bee woman, evokes the ceaseless work of the bee, collecting pollen in her unending flight in service of the hive. The image of the "busy bee", which perhaps seems strikingly modern and familiar to a reader today, was an applicable and resonant image for an ancient Greek, also, one which could

²⁸⁵ Campbell (1982) 190, Lloyd-Jones (1975) 84.

be traced back to Homer and Hesiod (Hom. *Il.* II.87-93; Hes. *Theog.* 597).²⁸⁶ However, in this passage, it plays off the lines that follow it, which describe the bee-woman's contribution to her husband's household. The worker bee returns to the hive with pollen, thus increasing the prosperity of the hive, as the woman's efforts are concentrated within the house on increasing her husband's prosperity.

Semonides continues the image of pollination²⁸⁷ and plenty, through the use of terms *θάλλει* and *ἐπαέξεται*, both of which are associated with flowers and plant life, and thus strengthen the image of fecundity in this passage.²⁸⁸ However, this flowery imagery also sets up a very different scene than the one of domestic diligence and prosperity. These "burgeoning"-type words would perhaps bring to mind a more bucolic scene, one akin to the sensual, flowering meadows found in Sappho, Mimnermus and Archilochus, all of whom use plant terms to evoke the erotic.²⁸⁹ While Semonides does not stress this association, these terms and their reminiscence of scenes of fecundity and *eros* subtly suggests the erotic appeal and fertility of the bee woman.

But the association made between the bee woman and the erotic sphere is potentially dangerous. A wife should not be overly eroticized and the suggestion of bees flitting from flower to flower hints at the potential trouble with an erotically charged wife. She is in danger of exploiting that eroticism and finding her way from man to man, as the bee goes from flower to flower. Yet, Semonides is careful to check the sexual charm of his bee woman. Though

²⁸⁶ As in Lloyd-Jones (1975) 84, Maclachlan (1989) 96.

²⁸⁷ It is worth noting that, in using the word "pollination", I do not mean the fertilizing of plants through the exchange of pollen, an act that was unknown to the Greeks, but rather the bee's act of collecting pollen.

²⁸⁸ Campbell (1998) 190, Lloyd-Jones (1975) 84.

²⁸⁹ E.g. Sappho, 2, 94; Mimnermus, 1,2; Archilochus, 196a. One of the best examples of the erotic connotations of the florid meadow is in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, which even makes mention of a bee (Eur. *Hipp.* 77).

προσιζάνει (7.84) brings to mind the bee, the bee woman herself is not the subject of verb, but rather blame (μῶμος, 7.84). Yet, here, blame, though acting like a bee, is unable to land on the bee wife, like it can other flowers. The bee-woman's goodness protects her from the dangers of her own desirability.

In the following lines, Semonides emphasizes the carefully controlled sexuality of the bee woman by revealing to the reader its appropriate application: bearing children (τεκοῦσα, 7.87). Nor can the paternity of these children be called into question, as might be the case with any children of the prior women in the poem, like the promiscuous ass (7.48-9) and weasel (7.53). Rather, the bee-woman's children are described as a "good and noble line" (καλὸν κούνομάκλυτον γένος, 7.87), suggesting the nobility of their mother, as well, and in turn, ridding her of the suspicion that might arise from her desirability.

The proper application of her erotic power is not only in regard to sex itself, but also to her exposure to material which may threaten to corrupt her pristine and appropriate behavior. The reader learns that the bee woman avoids other women and their chatter about sex (7.90-91), which shows her lack of interest in sex or things of a sexual nature outside the appropriate context of her husband's bed. Again, the reader is shown that she does not pose the promiscuous danger of the other kinds of women. Furthermore, the image of the bee itself enhances Semonides' careful balance of sexuality and chastity, due to the cultural associations and folk beliefs about bees and apian behavior. Though the bee was connected to fertility due to its general affiliation with plant life, flowers, fecundity, and growth, there was a deep sense of

confusion and mystery surrounding the insects' procreation that gave rise to a number of traditions that linked the bee with chastity and sexual control.²⁹⁰

Unfortunately, our evidence of these traditions come primarily from sources that are considerably later than Semonides, however it is likely that they reflect much older traditions, ones which the poet may have known and drawn on. For example, Aristotle notes that there are some who believed that bees did not engage in coitus at all, but rather gathered their young from flowers (*HA* 553a), a pure and chaste means of procreating. In a similar vein, Pliny mentions that it was believed that no one had ever seen bees copulate (*NH* 11.46), which sets them apart from other kinds of animals that have coitus in the open. A Pindar fragment mentions that bees sting adulterous lovers (fr. 252 Snell-Maehler), an example which depicts bees as reinforcing appropriate sexual behavior through their sting and suggests their support of non-transgressive sexual behavior.²⁹¹ These sorts of beliefs about apian behavior are also referenced by several sources, whose claims span from the belief that bees attack women who have had sex recently (*Geoponica* 15.2.19) to the advice that a beekeeper should be pure and chaste himself (*Pall.* 1.37.4).²⁹²

In the lines that follow the passage under discussion, the poet confirms outright that which the apian associations and imagery were hinting at throughout the passage, in his declaration that the bee-woman is the best possible wife and that whatever man marries her is truly blessed (τοίας γυναῖκας ἀνδράσιν χαρίζεται/Zεὺς τὰς ἀρίστας καὶ πολυφραδεστάτος (Sem.

²⁹⁰ Pomeroy (1994) 279. Lloyd-Jones (1975) 86, refers to this as the bee's "proverbial sophrosune" though this seems to be an anachronistic reference to Aelian, *NH* 5.11. Pomeroy (1994) 279, offers a list of references to this chastity throughout Greek and Latin literature, while I have chosen only to highlight those references that are chronologically appropriate or particularly illuminating.

²⁹¹ This bee behavior also appears in Theocritus, though he is significantly later (*Theoc.* 1.105). All the aforementioned instances are cited by Plutarch (*NP* 36).

²⁹² For other examples see Pomeroy (1994) 279-80, MacLachlan (1989) 96 n.3.

7.92-3). Yet, he draws this image into conflict, almost immediately by undercutting it with his assertion that women are a contrivance of Zeus against man and the greatest evil:

τὰ δ' ἄλλα φύλα ταῦτα μηχανῆ Διός
 ἔστιν τε πάντα καὶ παρ' ἀνδράσιν μένει.
 Ζεὺς γὰρ μέγιστον τοῦτ' ἐποίησεν κακόν,
 γυναῖκας.

-Semonides 7.94-7

"But all these other races exist by the contrivance
 of Zeus and remain beside men.
 For Zeus made this the greatest evil:
 women."

These contradictory statements have opened the door to a wealth of interpretations regarding what an ancient audience would conclude about the nature of the bee-woman and how to interpret this passage, in general. Lloyd-Jones, in particular, struggles to preserve the bee-woman's idealized depiction, in light of these dismissive words. He notes that "this must refer to the women of the first nine types", but admits that the use of *ταῦτα* (vs. *ἐκεῖνα*) suggests the bee-woman should be included in this condemnation. However, he latches on to *ἄλλα* as the poet's means of separating the bee-woman from this criticism.²⁹³ Yet, his interpretation is problematic. Firstly, *ἄλλα* need not indicate a difference between the bee woman and the previously mentioned women, but could be emphasizing the contrast between men and these other races that together comprise the female gender. More significantly, Lloyd-Jones' reading strives to ignore the sweeping generality of the poem's statement, which emphasizes the universality of its conclusion with the use of *πάντα*, a word which indicates that this is a condemnation of the *whole* race of women, and the frequent, subsequent reiterations of the evils of women in what remains of the poem (for example, 115-6).²⁹⁴ Lefkowitz rightly notes that following up the

²⁹³ Lloyd-Jones (1975) 87.

²⁹⁴ Sussman (1979) 30, reads this passages similarly.

description of the bee-woman with this "reflection on women's deceptiveness" suggests that a good woman is rare, and her subsequent "to say the least"²⁹⁵ seems to be a welcome invitation to push the point further, though she herself falls just short of saying that Semonides expresses skepticism that any such woman does exist, through his dismissal of the race of women.

This passage is similar to one of Hesiod's in the *Theogony*, where he, too, declares that Zeus made women as an evil for men (ὄς δ' αὐτῶς ἄνδρεςσι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γυναικάς Ζεὺς ὑπιβρεμέτης θῆκε, Hes. *Th.* 600-1). Both Hesiod's and Semonides' condemnations are preceded by bee imagery, and their similarities in content and context may serve as a means of calling to mind the myth of Pandora and the duality of the bee. If a reader were to perceive an association with Hesiod here, it would change how these lines reflect back onto the bee-woman of the previous lines, suggesting a similar duality in the bee-woman as Hesiod described in Pandora.

Furthermore, Semonides' makes no secret of the fact that there is often a discrepancy between how things look and how things are, as is the case with the beautiful mare-woman who is a detriment to her husband's household, despite her desirable appearance.²⁹⁶ A link to Hesiod would suggest that this same discrepancy is possible for the bee-woman, as well. One always wishes to acquire a wife like the diligent worker bee, but it is perhaps more likely, in the eyes of both Semonides and Hesiod, that one will end up with the slothful drone, since woman, bee, and Pandora are all fundamentally the same in nature, they are each a καλὸν κακὸν, hiding their natural inclination towards evil behind an alluring facade.

The bee's capability of producing abundant honey in a thriving hive, alluring men with this potential, and seducing with its promise of good, is an appealing image for Semonides' purposes. The hope of this good, whether it be honey or a good wife, makes one too able to

²⁹⁵ Lefkowitz (1986) 62.

²⁹⁶ Lefkowitz (1986) 115.

forget the danger of the sting. Semonides' bee-woman could be the sole good woman who will enhance her husband's household, but it is this very appearance of good that makes it easy to forget the hidden κακὸν that all women offer. The bee-woman's danger is not like that of the previous nine women, but one that is much greater because of her potential for goodness. For behind the facade of the diligent wife, she may end up being just like the other woman Semonides describes, though much better at hiding it and disarming her husband. As the poet says, the ones who seem to do the most good are the ones who offer the most harm (7.108-9).

The delicate balance between the alluring, erotic charm of this woman and her carefully checked sexuality flaunt the danger of the bee-woman going astray. Semonides also uses the term προσιζάνειν as a means of playing on the bee's ambiguity. On the one hand, he has used the bee as his emblem of virtue, by using it to describe his ideal woman. However, he applies this verb, one that calls to mind the bee, not to his perfect wife, but instead uses it to cast blame (μῶμος), a negative force, in the insect's role. Thus, by employing the bee images for both his perfect woman and for blame, the poet ties the two together, suggesting that the bee-woman has more in common with blame and the other, blameworthy women, than first appearance might suggest.

While it is easy to recognize the dangers of a woman whose physical appearance reflects her inner baseness, like the ape-woman or the weasel-woman, more problematic are the women whose outer appearance suggests goodness. Like the mare woman, whose beauty distracts from her lazy habits and her consumption, and Pandora, whose lovely form conceals her bitch-like mind, the bee-woman appears to be the greatest good, but her exact nature is concealed. As Lefkowitz points out, a woman's beauty hides her power to do evil,²⁹⁷ and, in the case of the bee-

²⁹⁷ Lefkowitz (1986) 115.

woman, her ostensible virtue hides well her inner nature, such that she disarms her man all the more by means of her seeming goodness. This concealment allows her to be all the more potent, should she act upon her inner nature.

Ischomachus' Bee Wife in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*

By the time Xenophon writes his *Oeconomicus*, the idea of a good wife as an industrious bee seems to have become something of a trope. Phocylides wrote a poem remarkably similar in imagery to Semonides' passage on the bee woman, employing the same comparison, but without the ambiguity present in the original (Phocylides, fr. 2 Diehl).²⁹⁸ Xenophon, also, offers a comparison that begins on a similar note. His interlocutor, Ischomachus, offers his new bride an apian model to govern her work ethic and in this comparison, he focuses on the role of woman as wife and her functions within her husband's household, with an eye towards female virtue and uxorial excellence, as in Semonides' poem. However, Xenophon draws on another model in his comparison, as well, that of the good king as king bee. By combining these two images, he is able to emphasize the wife's position of responsibility and authority within the household, but this combination also complicates the image by making it incongruous. An important subtext in the good bee wife image is that she is not in charge of the hive, but rather a servant of the hive's greater good, whereas the good king bee image plays on the natural authority and leadership qualities of the king.²⁹⁹ By blending these two notions to create a "good queen bee", Xenophon constructs an image that would seem strange and contradictory to a Greek audience, due to the

²⁹⁸ Phocylides does not include a condemnation of all women, as Semonides does, thus his poem does not conclude by casting doubt on the virtue of the bee wife. Because of the derivative nature of his poem, which presents an almost identical image of bee as wife, I have not included a discussion of it here. For the text of the poem and a translation, see the Appendix.

²⁹⁹ As discussed in Chapter Two.

mixing of gender associations and the suggestion of female authority and the positivity of a woman possessing masculine qualities.

The nature of Xenophon's text is less straightforward than that of Hesiod's and Semonides' (and Phocylides', too, for that matter). These previous authors incorporate the image of the wife as bee into a larger discourse that comments upon the nature of women, in general. However, Xenophon's interest in the *Oeconomicus* is not the nature or role of women, or even the role of women in the household. In fact, not even the section in which he discusses the woman as bee is about women in the household, but rather how the character Ischomachus envisions the role of *his* wife in *his* household.³⁰⁰ Thus, the way in which the image is read and

³⁰⁰Traditionally, scholarship has asserted that Ischomachus is a mouthpiece for the opinions of Xenophon and thus is the true "protagonist" of the *Oeconomicus*. E.g. Marchant (1923), Field (1930), Shero (1932), Oost (1977-8). Shero (1932) 17-18, argues that the additional voice of Ischomachus is needed, because estate management advice would be undermined coming from the lips of Socrates, who is presented as anti-materialistic, but this line of reasoning leads to more and not fewer questions. I find this to be in an inadequate explanation for the appearance of Socrates, and the dialogue format, and think that the layering of speakers must be significant to the text. Danzig (2003) 57, draws a similar conclusion. The dialogue format suggests that Ischomachus' speech should not and cannot be taken as Xenophon's own guide to estate management, but instead must be more complex. The layers of text (that is, Socrates' discussion with Kritoboulos, in which he quotes Ischomachus' recollection of his discussions with his own wife) coax the reader to interpret and not merely absorb the information offered. Therefore, the characterization of Ischomachus should impact how a reader views his words, rather than simply taking his role as "ideal gentleman" at face value and his instruction as a manual. Danzig notes that the dialogue form and the appearance of Socrates suggest that the purpose of the text was not simply that of an estate management guide (though perhaps some found it useful as such), but rather suggest a philosophic nature to the text. The utilization of the dialogue format should be considered intentional and at least somewhat significant to how the philosophical purpose of this text is determined and perceived. Higgins (1977) 1-20, in his discussion of Xenophon's style, emphasizes not the author's use of simplicity in language, but a pursuit of precise vocabulary and exactness of meaning. This stylistic dedication to clarity and care, even when getting at something more complex, seems to support the notion that Xenophon was a careful and thoughtful writer and did not select the dialogue format without consideration, and thus sees a purpose in this format. Scholarship has begun increasingly to acknowledge and explore the *Oeconomicus*' philosophical nature and dialogue format, when attempting to interpret the text, as well as the interactions between

interpreted does not necessary reflect back on the female gender, as a whole, or represent Xenophon's own opinion on a woman's role, but instead serves as a means of reflecting on Ischomachus' character.

The image of Ischomachus' wife as a bee appears shortly after Socrates comes across Ischomachus and the two men begin to discuss Ischomachus' household, which is run so as to allow him always to be out of the house. He credits this to his young wife, whom he has spent much time "training" to run his household affairs, a subject that Socrates asks him to expound upon. Ischomachus explains that when he married his young wife, she was not yet fifteen (7.5), knowing only how to take wool and make a cloak (7.6), and praying to the gods to become the sort of woman she ought (7.8). As she tries to learn to navigate what sort of woman she should be and her role in the house, she confesses to her husband that her mother explained that her job is "to be moderate", *σωφρονεῖν* (7.14). The term *σωφρονεῖν* is unsurprising here, as it is typically associated with good decision making, soundness of mind, and a capacity for restraint, particularly with regard to women. The related adjective *σόφρων* often means "prudent" or "chaste" when applied to women, indicating their control over their own sexual desires, and *σοφροσύνη* indicates "self-control" or "temperance", again, often in reference to sexual desire.³⁰¹ Both *σόφρων* and *σοφροσύνη* are linked specifically with women in the epigraphic tradition, often serving as the quintessential female virtue on the grave markers of wives.³⁰² In using the verb *σωφρονεῖν*, Xenophon indicates that this young bride has been sent along the normal path of virtue by her mother and carefully instructed that a good woman and a good wife needs to have the good sense to control herself and exercise chastity.

Socrates and Ischomachus, in particular. E.g. Danzig (2003), Diederich (2007) 181, Kroenenberg (2009). See also Strauss (1970), who offers an ironic reading of Xenophon.

³⁰¹ For more on *σοφροσύνη* North (1977) 35-48, Pomeroy (1994) 275.

³⁰² For a discussion of *σοφροσύνη* as a female virtue in epitaphs, see North (1977), 40-41.

Upon hearing this, Ischomachus agrees that this quality is important, but unpacks the meaning of "self restraint" as something very different from how it is usually understood. He admits that he heard this same piece of advice from his father and then explains how he sees the meaning of σωφρονεῖν:

ἀλλὰ σωφρόνων τοί εστι καὶ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς οὕτω ποιεῖν, ὅπως τά τε ὄντα ὡς βέλτιστα ἔξει καὶ ἄλλα ὅτι πλεῖστα ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ τε καὶ δικαίου προσγενήσεται.
-Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.15

But σωφρονεῖν both for a man and for a woman is to act so that their property, being as good as possible, increases and so that it becomes more plentiful through good and just actions.

As Pomeroy notes, Xenophon is first to connect σωφροσύνη with household management,³⁰³ and, in light of its typical usage, particularly in regard to women (and especially young brides), this redefinition of σωφρονεῖν as a fiscal term is surprising. Yet, it is important for what follows, in that this explanation of σωφρονεῖν is a significant indication of how Ischomachus sees the world and it has a great impact on both how he envisions the role of his wife, and on how he adapts Semonides' bee image and the good king bee image to explore this role. For Ischomachus, profitability is important and as he illustrates with the bee image, a virtuous wife will be one who helps the household profit.

Semonides' description of the bee woman is a good example of the traditional representation of the virtuous Greek matron. As his poem describes, a good wife is blameless, beneficial to her household, loved by and loving her husband, the mother of noble children, desirable, distinguished, chaste, uninterested in gossiping about erotic matters, and sagacious. According to this sort of model, a great portion of the qualities that are associated with feminine virtue pertain to a woman's careful control over her sexuality, what would generally be called

³⁰³ Pomeroy (1994) 275.

σοφροσύνη.³⁰⁴ However, following along with his redefining of σωφρονεῖν, Ischomachus reimagines the virtuous bee-woman as a queen bee,³⁰⁵ and shifts the emphasis from sexual restraint to household profitability.

The single line which Semonides' uses to discuss a woman's role as housekeeper ("and her husband's livelihood flourishes and prospers under her", Sem. 7.85) becomes the dominant theme of Ischomachus' version, who transforms the idea behind this succinct description into a vivid and complex, multi-line illustration:

Ὅτι, ἔφην ἐγὼ, ἐκείνη γε ἐν τῷ σμήνῃ μένουσα οὐκ ἔῃ ἀργούς τὰς μελίττας εἶναι, ἀλλ' ἄς μὲν δεῖ ἔξω ἐργάζεσθαι ἐκπέμπει ἐπὶ τὸ ἔργον, καὶ ἃ ἂν αὐτῶν ἐκάστη εἰσφέρει οἶδ' ἑ τε καὶ δέχεται, καὶ σῶζει ταῦτα ἕστ' ἂν δέη χρῆσθαι ἤκη, διανέμει τὸ δίκαιον ἐκάστη. καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔνδον δ' ἔξυφαινομένοις κηρίοις ἐφέστηκεν, ὡς καλῶς καὶ ταχέως ὑφαίνεται.
-Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.33-34

I said that she, remaining in the hive, does not allow the bees to be lazy, but those which are needed to work outside, she sends to work, and that which each of them brings in she receives and know, and she saves these things until it is necessary to use them She distributes that which is fair to each, and she attends to the honeycombs woven within, so that they are woven beautifully and quickly.

Here, Ischomachus focuses on the productive and profitable aspects of the hive that he wishes to replicate in his own house and goes into detail as to all the activities in which the bees engage, with a focus on how the queen bee is responsible for the organization of it all.

The use of the queen, rather than the worker, emphasizes that his wife's responsibilities are within the house (ἐν τῷ σμήνῃ, 7.33) rather than outside, like a worker's. While her isolation indoors eliminates the potential of her flitting about permiscuously, this also relates back to a point Ischomachus made earlier that men and women are yoked together for their mutual benefit,

³⁰⁴ Sussman (1979) 29, claims that the financial aspect is primary in Semonides, due to it being the first quality the poet mentions, however the scarcity of time spent on the subject of finances and the abundance of time spent discussing her other qualities suggests otherwise.

³⁰⁵ I use "queen" (instead of "king") in reference to Xenophon, because he refers to the king bee here as female.

in part, because men are better suited for outdoor activities and women for indoor pursuits (7.18-7.21). Ischomachus also stresses her importance as the person to receive the fruits of his work outside, for as he notes later, it would be foolish to bring in supplies if there was no one inside to receive and watch over them (7.40). This emphasizes the complementary economical role the woman has in relation to the man, for while he increases the wealth of the household outside, she maintains that wealth safely within. Furthermore, the language used to describe the bee's activity evokes matronly responsibilities. Ischomachus describes the "weaving" of honeycombs, beautifully and quickly, which, while not an appropriate term for the forming of combs in a literal sense, serves to evoke the woman's material contribution to the household, namely the weaving of textiles, thus suggesting her economic importance.³⁰⁶ Yet, in casting the woman as the queen organizing things indoors, and her husband as the one working outdoors, the text hints at a confusing of gender roles. If the woman is the queen, then the man has become the worker, thus the subordinate, as a worker is one of many, serving the king bee.

While the economic emphasis of Ischomachus' image is surprising compared to Semonides' more traditional use, as the comparison continues its divergence becomes even more striking. The lines that follow read:

καὶ τοῦ γιγνομένου τόκου ἐπιμελεῖται ὡς ἐκτρέφεται· ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἐκτραφῆ καὶ ἀξιοεργοὶ οἱ νεοττοὶ γένωνται, ἀποκίζει αὐτοὺς σὺν τῶν ἐπιγόνων τινὶ ἡγεμόνι.

-Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.34

And she takes care of the young being born, so that she rears them to maturity. And when she has brought them up and the brood become fit for work, she sends them out of the house/sends them to colonize with some leader of her descendants.

³⁰⁶ It is worth noting that the queen bee does not actually engage in any of the activities ascribed to her here. However, it is not clear to what extent Xenophon or his contemporaries were familiar with the specifics of the queens' activities in the hive.

At first read, it seems that Ischomachus has finally reached the topic of childrearing, a subject far more central to Semonides' image than housekeeping (the bee woman was, after all, the only one of the listed women who has children) and also more in line with typical, uxorial virtue. This passage is laden with reproductive imagery (γγνομένου, ἐκτρέφεται, ἐκτραφῆ, 7.34), which seems to stress the importance of reproduction and a woman's role as mother. Ischomachus even uses the term τόκος, which can indicate offspring, in general terms, but also a son or daughter, specifically.³⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that, compared to the profit-focused lines that preceded them, these lines are brief, which seems to reflect Ischomachus' lack of interest in sexual matters and his emphatic focus on profit.

However, as the description progresses, a few of the terms stand out awkwardly, drawing attention to themselves and disturbing the consistency and flow of the comparison. Firstly, the term ἀποικίζει is used for the queen sending the children from the house, but it also suggests colonization, as one of its primary meanings is "to colonize".³⁰⁸ This use of the term develops the comparison between a wife and a leader, which appears both in the use of the queen bee, rather than the traditional industrious worker, but also in subsequent images that Ischomachus employs, such as when he tells her that, just as Athens has guardians over its laws, she is to be the guardian over the laws of the house (9.14-9.15). Such a comparison stresses the need for the young bride to be capable of working and making judgements on her own and emphasizes her importance to the growth and stability of the household. As with a monarch, not only does organization depend on her, but she will play an important role in making the household profitable and assuring the stability and success of both its fiscal affairs and the affairs of those under her jurisdiction. In this way, the young wife is like the good king, and her industriousness,

³⁰⁷ LSJ s.v. τόκος II.1.

³⁰⁸ LSJ s.v. ἀποικίζω II.1.

care, and organization are all reflected in the profitability of her hive, and its smooth, continuous operations.

However, more notable is the term ἡγεμόνι, the last word spoken by Ischomachus during the comparison and one which reveals that there is something not quite right about this image of childrearing. Certainly, a mother needs to send her children out of the house at some point, once they are grown, either to start their own household or to their husbands, but sending all of the children, in general, under a "leader" does not quite make sense. Though it is perfectly appropriate for the colonization image, and perhaps it could refer to a husband leading away a daughter in marriage, there is no suitable equivalent for sending the male children out into the world. Furthermore, all of the children would certainly not be sent off under a single leader. Thus, this may suggest that there is something incongruous about Ischomachus' use of the image.

Ischomachus' young wife seems to notice a strange incoherency, as well, as she immediately asks, "will it be necessary that I do such things, also?" (Ἦ καὶ ἐμὲ οὖν, ἔφη ἡ γυνή, δεήσει ταῦτα ποιεῖν, 7.35). This moment reveals a breakdown in the comparison, in which the image no longer fits properly with that to which it is compared.³⁰⁹ The reader, like the wife, is left wondering exactly what one is supposed to take from the comparison. Equally jarring is Ischomachus' response that reveals that the most obvious interpretation of his former words and the subject that would most likely follow in a discussion of a young wife's duties, the birthing and care of children, is, in fact, not his topic at all. He explains:

Δεήσει μέντοι σε, ἔφην ἐγώ, ἔνδον τε μένειν καὶ οἷς μὲν ἂν ἔξω τὸ ἔργον ἢ τῶν οἰκετῶν, τούτους συνεκπέμπειν, οἷς δ' ἂν ἔνδον ἐργαστέον, τούτων σοι ἐπιστατητέον, καὶ τὰ τε εἰσφερόμενα ἀποδεκτέον καὶ ἃ μὲν ἂν αὐτῶν δέη δαπανᾶν σοὶ διανεμητέον, ἃ δ' ἂν

³⁰⁹ Gini (1993) 484-5, also looks at this passage in terms of the problem of reproduction in Ischomachus' vision of the household and similarly notes that Ischomachus' wife seems to pick up on a breakdown in her husband's analogy. However, he does not discuss the fact that Ischomachus clarifies that he is actually discussing slave children (see below).

περιττεύειν δέη, προνοητέον καὶ φθλακτέον ὅπως μὴ ἢ εἰς τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν κειμένη δαπάνη εἰς τὸν μῆνα δαπανᾶται. καὶ ὅταν ἔρια εἰσενεχθῇ σοι, ἐπιμελητέον ὅπως οἷς δεῖ ἰμάτια γίγνηται. καὶ ὁ γε ξηρὸς σίτος ὅπως καλῶς ἐδώδιμος γίγνηται ἐπιμελητέον.

-Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.35-36

"Indeed, it is necessary", I said, "for you to remain inside and to send out those of the household slaves for whom there is work outside, and those for whom there is work inside, you must supervise and you must receive the things brought in and that which is necessary to spend, you must distribute and that which is necessary to keep, you must take care of and guard so that that which is stored up for a year is not spent in a month. And whenever wool is brought in to you, you must see to it that cloaks are made for whom it is necessary, and see to the dried grain so that it be well prepared for cooking.

Ischomachus reiterates the responsibilities suggested in the bee comparison, but unpacks them so that they are not lost in the comparison, removing them from the context of the hive and placing them back in the household. However, in doing so, he reveals that his interest was not in his and his wife's future children, but rather in his wife's care for the children of slaves, whom she will be responsible for readying for their household responsibilities and sending out, under the care of a leader, to accept any tasks they are assigned outside of the house. This shift in the interpretation that he promotes, away from the reproductive responsibilities of the wife and back to her economic duties, reveals the extent of Ischomachus' marginalization of the traditional emphasis on a woman's sexual restraint and controlled reproduction.

Yet, the strong economic emphasis of the bee comparison would not be so remarkable, if it were not representative of Ischomachus' depiction of female virtue throughout his discussion of his young bride and her strengths as a wife. As was the case with his reimagining of the concept of σοφροσύνη, elsewhere he makes similar suggestions that profitability and economic efficiency are the highest good for which a woman can strive. Before Ischomachus compares his wife with the bee, in fact, he tells her to do what the gods have given her the natural ability to do and that which the law encourages (Ναὶ μὰ Δί, ἔφην ἐγώ, ἃ τε οἱ θεοὶ ἔφυσάν σε δύνασθαι καὶ ὁ νόμος συνεπαινεῖ, ταῦτα πειρῶ ὡς βέλτιστα ποιεῖν, 7.16). Here, Ischomachus unites the

concepts of φύσις and νόμος to emphasize the meeting of divine and human mandate for a woman behaving in such a way, suggesting that the actions which he will describe are both a human good and a divine one, stressing both their importance and significance. The natural assumption would be that Ischomachus will go on to stress the traditional feminine responsibilities such as sexual restraint and the rearing of legitimate children, but again Ischomachus subverts the expectation and puts his emphasis on profitability, by following this statement up with his bee comparison.

In fact, the reader's expectation of finding some discussion of reproduction amongst the description of the duties of a good wife is continuously disappointed in the *Oeconomicus*, as the subject scarcely features as a topic of conversation for Ischomachus. Reproduction is mentioned in only five passages³¹⁰ and then, mostly in terms of the natural purpose of marriage and never in terms of something his wife should aspire to and accept as her most important responsibility, or even an important responsibility. This unusual de-emphasis on any aspect of female sexuality, including the desirable result of properly directed sexual potential, is one of several things that is odd about Ischomachus' description of the role of women, or of his wife, at least.

Hand in hand with this is his almost masculine depiction of her as the queen bee, which (tellingly) is referred to commonly as the "king bee". Ischomachus' blending of these two images complicates both images. Semonides' description of woman as bee focused on the traditional lore regarding the bee and the actions of bees themselves. Both the virtues ascribed to the bee in lore and the laudable qualities noted in their behavior centered around the worker bee. Many of these characteristics were used to address the complex and almost contradictory notions and

³¹⁰ Four of these references are explicitly about reproduction (Xen. *Oec.* 7.11, 7.21, 7.24, 7.30), whereas one is in reference to intercourse, with no mention of resulting children or procreation (Xen. *Oec.* 10.4-12). I have not included the aforementioned passage, which seems to discuss reproduction, but actually refers to the care of slaves.

expectations regarding female sexuality. By altering the image to compare woman to a queen/king bee, Ischomachus replaces (or perhaps combines) the potency of many aspects of the original comparison with a comparison that is heavily masculine in its connotations. Instead of being the industrious subordinate, both hard-working and chaste, she becomes the monarch, ruling and organizing, in a position of dominance and control. As we have seen, the image of the king bee is often applied to leaders and politicians elsewhere in classical literature to highlight their effectiveness as a leader and stress the dedication of their subordinates and the perfection of their rule.³¹¹ While it is certainly Ischomachus' aim to suggest that those are the qualities his wife should aspire to, he ignores or fails to address the fact that, for a Greek reader, this is a *masculine* image, not a feminine one, and that his wife, while controlling many of the inner workings of the household needs not to be a monarch, but to be loyal and subordinate to him.

This contradiction in his expectations and his confusion with regards to his use of the image of the bee and how it best applies to his wife is emphasized and teased out by the terminology he uses elsewhere. Though he purports the desire for her to be organized, independent, and commanding, like the queen, he muddles this image with his repeated references to his wife with animal language. A number of scholars have noted Ischomachus' prevalent use of terms associated with the taming and training of animals throughout his discussion of estate management and his governing of slaves and his wife, in particular.³¹² Most notably are his references to yoking (7.18-19) and to her "taming and domestication" (χειροθήης ἦν καὶ ἐτετιθάσεντο, 7.10). While Kronenberg notes that Ischomachus' tendency to talk about humans as if they are animals is problematic,³¹³ it is particularly confusing when it comes to his

³¹¹ See Chapter Two.

³¹² E.g. Kronenberg (2009) 57; Pomeroy (1994) 272.

³¹³ Kronenberg (2009) 57.

wife. The stress on her domestication and training complicates the queen bee image he applies to his bride.

Fundamentally, Xenophon's image is doing the same thing that Semonides' and Hesiod's did before him. Xenophon employs the bee to highlight the conflict that is somehow linked to the female species, what is for Hesiod the *καλὸν κακὸν*, and for Sappho *μέλι* and *μέλισσα*. However, with Xenophon, his image does not show the conflict that is inherent in the very nature of women, but rather the conflict in how Ischomachus' *views* his wife. While Ischomachus may use this image as an attempt to bolster his wife's sense of importance within the household, at the same time he minimizes her natural role of mother and her sexuality in favor of a sterile, productive role that makes her the surrogate ruler of the house for him, enabling him to maximize his profits, while deemphasizing what he refers to as the divine purpose of marriage, procreation (7.11, 7.18-19). But while Semonides and Hesiod used this conflict to illustrate the peril of women and the struggle between truth and appearances, Ischomachus' terms are harder to reconcile and instead of reflecting back onto the female sex, they illustrate the shortcomings of *his* ideals, which, in turn, highlight the difference between Ischomachus' own appearance as the ideal gentleman farmer, and the reality of his world view.

In his emphasis on profitability and personal benefit, Ischomachus has lost sight of the most important need of the household, children to perpetuate it, and has privileged the economic value of his wife over her reproductive value. In doing so, he has rewritten female virtue as a sort of goodness based on her ability to help his estate prosper, rather than taking into consideration her other qualities, deemed more important by Semonides and the sole good of the female species by Hesiod. However, his redefinition of goodness is flawed, for as the figure of Socrates points out in this dialogue, goodness has nothing to do with commodities and

personal wealth and everything to do with nature (11.4-6). But it is not a typical σοφροσύνη which Ischomachus demands, but rather a σοφροσύνη which results in profit, making clear that it is not the nature of his wife that makes her good to him, but solely her benefit to the household.

Conclusion

The common thread in these three images of woman as bee is that all three serve as a means of showing how some imagined the concept of what woman is and should be, while holding the key to the incoherence of that image. In the case of Hesiod, the imagined concept is of women as some foreign other, one that brings only misery and consumption to men, however she is simultaneously necessary to his existence. While she is hateful for her sloth and inferior nature, she is irresistible, a καλὸν κακὸν that no man can live without. For Semonides, the bee brings to light the perfect female ideal, diligent, chaste, and noble, but though she offers what seems like a perfect balance of allure and virtue, Semonides himself dismisses this possibility, acknowledging only that all women are dangers and the most dangerous are those who seem the least. In the end, she is built on Hesiod's bee woman, an evil disguised in the shell of a perfect woman.

It is this image of the perfect woman as bee that serves as a foundation for Xenophon's discussion of his bee-woman, who is at once a queen and a subjugated work-horse. She is good because she is profitable and she possesses σοφροσύνη because she benefits her husband, but this benefit is not a reproductive one, and as children are forgotten, this profitability is doomed to be lost, since no stress is given to perpetuating the estate. It is the contradictions in her perceived nature and the focus on her financial profitability that shows the flaws of Ischomachus' world view, one in which benefit and profit are everything, and true virtue and the continuation of the line are forgotten. As for her place in terms of reproduction, where Semonides' found the

greatest potential for womanly virtue and what Hesiod found as her only use, reproduction, she has none.

Final Conclusion

In my dissertation, I have demonstrated the prevalence of the bee as a symbol and source of comparison throughout antiquity. I have looked at a diversity of genres and authors in order to offer a better understanding of the ideas that informed the uses of bee imagery in classical literature. By exploring a broad array of themes, works and authors over a large span of time, I have been able to provide a more comprehensive study of this insect's appearances in literature and to make connections across genres, and across cultures. Previous bee-related scholarship offered either a detailed look at a small number of texts, or a broad look at a wide number of texts, and my study has attempted to join the two, providing a thorough analysis of a wide number of texts. This approach has shown that the image of the bee has a consistent core conceptualization throughout classical literature and that this core conceptualization is then adopted, adapted, and/or subverted by authors to serve the purposes of their work. It is only through an understanding of how these images typically function that one can understand how an author is using the bee when he or she begins to alter it and innovate.

The first chapter offered an exploration of the uses of the bee as a symbol in Greek and Roman mythology and showed that the bee was thought of as a liminal creature, capable of crossing boundaries and possessing associations with the realms of the living, the dead, the earth, and the heavens, as well as particular connections with Zeus, prophesy, and Delphi. References to honey in early texts revealed the substance's significance as an offering to the dead, and the link between honey, bees, and the dead appears throughout mythology. The myth of Glaucus demonstrates how the bee was perceived as an emblem of the human soul and examples like Porphyrius' discussion of bees and references to the *bugonia* indicate the connection between death, rebirth and the bee, a link that is played out throughout antiquity. However, this symbol is

perhaps most notable in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the poet uses bee similes not only to link the souls of the dead to the lives of those on earth and suggest their reincarnation, but also to hint at Carthage's ultimate demise, amidst its burgeoning prosperity.

In addition to these ties to death and rebirth, the bee was used as a symbol of fertility and production, which was connected to the underworld and ideas of death and rebirth. Several fertility goddesses, like Ephesian Artemis and Cybele, were associated with the bee, and their priestesses attested to this connection by bearing the name *Melissa*. Furthermore, Zeus was tied with the bee as well, in part because of the link between this creature and mother goddesses, such as Rhea and Cybele, who served as the god's mother. The cave of Zeus' birth was inhabited by bees and several myths attest to their role as nurses, not only of the king of the gods, but also to his sons, and some tales tell of Zeus bestowing special favors on the creature, like their sting or their color. Lastly, this chapter looked at the connection between Apollo, Delphi, and bees, noting how the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and Pindar's fragmentary *Paean 6* suggest a connection between the early history of Delphi, prophesy, and the bee, perhaps attesting to goddesses that had been forgotten over time.

The second chapter provided an overview of the bee as a political and social symbol and demonstrated how the bee was seen as naturally political, due to the hive's seemingly hierarchical system. This assumption of the bee's political nature influenced the way bees were treated in apiological and natural historical texts, and also allowed it to be a rich source of imagery for authors discussing social organization, politics, and kingship. Beginning with Aristotle and Pliny, this chapter looked at the prevalence of human terminology when discussing apian habits and showed that human assumptions influenced these authors' exploration of the bee and its behavior. From these, I turned to texts that exploited this connection between the bee and

politics to compare human ruler to the innately ordained bee monarch. Authors like Plato, Xenophon, and Seneca, meld their perception of human politics with the ideal organization of the hive and particularly the perfect rule of the queen bee, as a way of idealizing or casting doubt on the abilities of monarchs and rulers in the real world. Using this type of comparison as a starting point, Varro branches out to examine the bee society as a whole and uses it as an allegory for rule in the Roman world. Through his detailed discussion of apiculture, he casts doubt on any human's ability to exert control over a society successfully and that society's ability to flourish under that rule. Similarly, Virgil uses bee society as an unattainable ideal for human society. He uses human terms for the bee to lure his readers into thinking of his idealized bee society as a human civilization, but simultaneously incorporates images and vocabulary that remind the reader of just how little the bees resemble humans after all. Finally, he contrasts his bee society to the myth of Aristaeus, where human suffering takes the forefront and actions have irreversible and often devastating consequences.

The final chapter of this dissertation examines the hive as an emblem of good and evil and how this conception is used in Greek literature to discuss the erotic and women. It begins by looking at how fables and a proverb construct the hive as a source for both good and bad. It contains honey and nature's most diligent worker, as well as painful stingers and lazy drones. This mixture becomes a way of discussing the erotic in poems, because, like the bee, it offers either something sweet or something painful. However, for a Greek audience, it was also an appropriate source of comparison for women, who were attributed with a mixed nature, much like the hive. Hesiod uses the drone to suggest a woman's laziness and that she is a burden for men in the same way that the drone burdens the hard-working worker bee. However, the hive, as a mixture of good and bad, fits into his discussion of the exchange of tricks between Prometheus

and Zeus, ending in Pandora, a beautiful woman with evil hidden within. Semonides also adopts this image, but seems to subvert it, by suggesting that a good wife is like a diligent bee.

However, the hive's dual nature is also at play here, as Semonides reminds his readers that all women are evil and nods to some of the negative aspects of women even during his discussion of this ideal woman, suggesting that this woman, too, is more than meets the eye. Lastly, Xenophon takes on the image of the wife as bee, but complicates it by adding elements of the king bee comparison discussed in the second chapter. By combining these two images, he creates a "masculine" wife, more concerned with economics, not reproduction.

This project has been both an attempt to understand a vast number of images on their own terms, and an effort to draw this multitude of discussions into focus as a nexus of images that share something at their core. The hive, as a complex society comprised of contrasting parts, offered the Greeks and Romans a way of thinking about and discussing the human world, through the lens of nature. The bee was simultaneously an ideal for human organization and behavior, as offered through nature, and an unattainable model of perfection. It provided a view of the good and evil that were intrinsically linked throughout not only the human world, but the divine one as well. The hive was a union of contrasting forces: man and woman, reproduction and chastity, living and dead, divine and human, heaven, earth, and underworld, diligence and sloth. It served as a microcosm for many aspect of existence and by examining the hive and its conflicting forces, humans are able to look at themselves and study their own condition. It is this contrasting nature that is central to how Greeks and Romans conceived of the bee. It is at once the animal like humans, but utterly different, so very mortal in the fragile lives of each worker, and yet somehow immortal in the continuity of a happy hive and the perpetuity of its product, honey. It is the familiarity and yet foreignness of the hive that makes it such an irresistible

source for study, and that allows it to be a symbol of how we live our lives and how we want to live our lives.

Appendix

Phocylides fr. 2 Diehl

καὶ τότε Φωκυλίδεω: τετόρων ἀπὸ τῶνδε γέγοντο
 φύλα γυναικείων: ἡ μὲν κυνός, ἡ δὲ μελίσσης,
 ἡ δὲ συὸς βλοσυρῆς, ἡ δ' ἵππου χαιτηέσσης:
 εὐφορος ἦδε, ταχεῖα, περιδρομος, εἶδος ἀρίστη:
 ἡ δὲ συὸς βλοσυρῆς οὐτ' ἄρ' ἀκακὴ οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλή:
 ἡ δὲ κυνὸς χαλεπὴ τε καὶ ἄγριος: ἡ δὲ μελίσσης
 οἰκονόμος τ' ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἐπίσταται ἐργάζεσθαι:
 ἦς εὐχευ, φίλ' ἑταῖρε, λαχεῖν γάμον ἡμερόεντα.

Thus also spoke Phocylides: the tribes of women
 are born from these four: the tribe of the dog, and of the bee,
 and of the bristling sow, and of the long-haired horse:
 this one is vigorous, swift, pleasure-seeking, the best in form:
 and that of the dog is difficult, and wild: and that of the bee
 is a good housekeeper and she knows how to work:
 pray, dear comrade, to obtain the desirable marriage of her.

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