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Special Issue
Bees and Honey in Religions

Guest Edited by
Carrie B. Dohe

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Special Issue Introduction: Bees and Honey in Religions

Guest Editor: Carrie B. Dohe

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Behold the bee—an image of selfless industriousness, and of the exploited working class; a member of a well-tuned patriarchal state, and a peaceful eco-matriarchy; a model of collective harmony and faithfulness, and a picture of a frenzied, violent mob. The bee—that is, the honeybee, genus *Apis*—is the bearer of multiple and often mutually contradictory cultural meanings for humans.

In ancient Greek culture, for example, bees symbolized both the sweet sensuality of sexual love and the searing sting of love lost (Rigby 2019). The love bees symbolized was stripped by early Christians of its carnality and used to represent *agape*, love spiritualized (Preston 2019).

Similarly, the collective harmony and cooperation imputed to bees have long been admired, yet differently nuanced from antiquity to today (Preston 2019). For example, the Chinese historian and author Guo Pu (276–324 CE) imagined bees as a well-ordered imperial court ruled by a bee-king (Pattinson 2018). In contrast, the contemporary Wiccan author Starhawk described the hive as an ecofeminist matriarchy, run peacefully by women to whom men willingly renounced their aggression-based power (Starhawk 1994). The image of apian harmony appeared in 1912 in children’s literature as ‘Maya the Bee’ (Die Biene Maja), subsequently a world-renowned TV cartoon (Dutli 2018). Such peaceful images overlook honeybees’ poisonous stinger and striped body, which signal danger to other creatures.

These images of harmony have been inverted as well. Bernard de Mandeville claimed in his *Fable of the Bees* (1714) that human vices, not Christian virtues, led to social progress (Dutli 2018). Since the Romantic era, the supposed selflessness of bees has symbolized the oppression of

industrial workers, stripped of agency. In the United States after World War II, bees symbolized equally agentless and oppressed socialist hordes (Preston 2019).

Meanings ascribed to bees have often diverged sharply in the world's religious traditions, both across and within cultures. They have also reflected what cultures consider(ed) good on individual, societal, and divine levels. For example, both Buddhists and Christians considered bees a model for human diligence and restraint. While Buddhists saw bees as representing family unity, cleanliness, and modesty (Oldroyd and Nanork 2006), medieval Christians followed the classical belief that bees were asexual and imagined bees as chaste creatures; beeswax candles were therefore used on church altars to reflect the Immaculate Conception (Preston 2019).

Honey, too, has been important in religious thought and practice. Hindus believe their gods Krishna, Vishnu, and Indra were born of nectar; they portray Vishnu as a blue bee perched on a lotus flower (Oldroyd and Nanork 2006). Ancient Greeks said their gods safeguarded their immortality by ingesting nectar and ambrosia. Their god Apollo instructed his son Aristaeus in beekeeping, cheesemaking, and olive oil production; Aristaeus in turn bequeathed his knowledge to humans. Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, and practitioners of traditional African religions have all offered honey to their gods (Socha 2016; Mbiti 1971). Hindu ritual participants share a honey-based drink (Oldroyd and Nanork 2006), and Jewish celebrants eat apple slices dipped in honey during Rosh Hashanah, hoping to have a sweet new year (Nayik et al. 2014). Buddhist monks, allowed only two meals per day, may have honey any time as a tonic and aid to meditation (Oldroyd and Nanork 2006). The Qu'ran recommends honey as 'healing' (surah 16:69), which motivated medieval Muslim scholars to develop a Greco-Arabic ('Unani') medicine that incorporated beeswax and honey (Kappl 2015).

Bees and honey have strong connections with divine wisdom and discourse. Hindu sacred texts refer to divine wisdom as 'honey knowledge': it blends, or unifies, everything, just as honey blends together many nectars (Oldroyd and Nanork 2006). Divine discourse or other forms of marked language issued from bee-blessed mouths, such as those of Plato (428/427–348/347 BCE), Pindar (d. 438 BCE), Sophocles (c. 497/6–406/5 BCE), St. Basil of Caesarea (b. 330 CE), and St. Ambrose of Milan (340–397 CE) (Preston 2019). Ancient Slavic priests drank honey wine on Kupala Night, the summer solstice, before prophesying about the coming harvest (Socha 2016). The name of the Hebrew prophetess Deborah ('bee') suggests a strong apian connection, as does the designation Melisa ('bee') given to several Greek nymphs and priestesses (Rigby 2019).

This brief sketch demonstrates that humans have long been occupied with bees and honey, imbuing both with profound significance. Around the globe and throughout time, bees have been carriers of human culture—of humans' hopes and fears, dreams and desires, and longings for health, wealth, happiness and connection, both corporeal and divine.

Behold the bee—a marvel of nature, bees first appeared on the evolutionary timeline about 100 million years ago. Bees evolved away from their carnivorous cousin, the wasp, to feed on nectar and pollen, sparking an evolutionary explosion of flowers, all designed to entice foraging bees.

Although female worker bees do not reproduce, they and flowers share a polyamorous and multi-species sexuality. Worker honeybees are the liaison between flowers, carrying plant sperm found in pollen from one bloom to another in their avid quest for nectar. Composed primarily of sugar and laced with the habit-forming nicotine and caffeine, nectar may be seen as the original 'energy drink'. As with humans, it is a potent mixture that keeps bees coming back for more.

The erotic play between bees and flowers pales in comparison to the sex life of the queen honeybee. When a colony becomes overcrowded, worker bees gorge themselves on honey before forcing the queen to swarm and establish a new home. New queens mature, then fight each other to the death to rule the hive. Afterward, the victor embarks on her 'nuptial flight', giving off sex pheromones to attract nearby drones. This is the moment they have literally been living for—to copulate with the queen, filling her body with the sperm she will use throughout her life to produce new eggs. This gymnastic midair sex act causes a drone's genitals to explode; after his moment of glory, he falls dead to the ground (Chadwick et al. 2016). These facts about apian sexuality are a far cry from ancient and medieval Christian portrayals of bees' purported chastity.

Other bee-related religious traditions may be more inspired by bee biology. For instance, prophets are said to perceive what ordinary humans cannot; bees, too, have extraordinary senses of perception. Each large eye contains over 5,000 lens units. Bees cannot see red but do perceive ultraviolet light, spying patterns on flowers invisible to humans. They also detect polarized light, thereby navigating using the sun, even when it is cloud-covered. Bees can also possibly detect the lines of Earth's magnetic field, as well as a flower's electrical field, thereby confidently navigating to its source of nectar (Chadwick et al. 2016).

Bees and honey as symbolizing exemplary human communication is also not amiss. When bees find a food source, they communicate its location, distance, and quality through a 'waggle dance'. Dancing in

figure-eight loops on a honeycomb, a bee waggles her abdomen in the pitch-black hive to her sisters, who sense her waggles, the speed of her dance and the angle of her loops through their antennae and the vibrations she makes on the honeycomb (Chadwick et al. 2016; Socha 2016).

Finally, the image of the hive as a highly organized society with selfless, well-disciplined workers has its merits, because the roles and functions of the queen, drones, and workers are clearly defined: a queen lays eggs, over 2,000 per day; drones do nothing except copulate once with the queen; and worker bees do everything else: they begin life as cleaners, move on to tending the larvae, then graduate to being collectors of pollen and nectar (Chadwick et al. 2016).

The discussion of bees in religions and bee biology has mainly concerned the honeybee. However, most bees—over 90%—are solitary. They have no queen, do not live in colonies, and most produce no honey (Chadwick et al. 2016). One might assume that humans' love of honey has led them to disregard a most efficient pollinator. But solitary bees are simply much harder to detect.

Bees are essential members of many ecosystems. According to the United Nations, 'nearly 90% of the world's wild flowering plant species depend, entirely, or at least in part, on animal pollination, along with more than 75% of the world's food crops and 35% of global agricultural land' (United Nations 2020). While bees' pollinating activities produce food for numerous species, bees themselves are nourishment for many animals (Chadwick et al. 2016). Bees thus help maintain Earth's rich diversity of plant and animal life. Genetic diversity across and within species increases their resilience and chances of survival, which is increasingly necessary in this time of rapid climate change. Because bees are fundamental to the world's ecosystems and food supply, the United Nations designated May 20 as International World Bee Day.

Behold the bee—if you can still find one. Bee populations have declined significantly over the past ten years. The UN estimates that 40% of 'invertebrate pollinators', which includes bees, face extinction (FAO n.d.). A quarter of Japanese honeybee colonies have collapsed, and the US and European numbers are even worse. One suspected cause of Colony Collapse Disorder is migratory beekeeping, especially in the US (Chadwick et al. 2016). The summer-long trucking of bee colonies from Florida's orange groves and California's almond tree acres to more northern climates (Socha 2016) again evokes the image of the oppressed working class, but with bees themselves as the exploited workers.

Other causes of bee decline include megafarming, habitat loss, monoculture, pesticides, mites, and climate change. Huge swathes of single-crop farmland deny bees the diversity of food sources they need to

survive. The fields are often too large to fly across for wild bees seeking food sources to which they are adapted. Furthermore, the indiscriminate spraying of pesticides causes widespread damage to ecosystems (Chadwick et al. 2016; FAO n.d.). Neonicotinoid pesticides, especially deadly because they are absorbed into every part of a plant, have been detected not just on crops, but also on wildflowers. They thus undermine the nervous system and motor function of bees living even far away from farms (Friends of the Earth n.d.).

Faced with apian extinction, *Homo sapiens* are being forced to acknowledge our dependence on bees. The anthropocentric perspective of humans as the ‘crown of creation’, when coupled with the unquenchable capitalist thirst for profit, denies the reality of the interdependence of life on Earth—to the peril of millions of species, including our own. The various forms of life on which our own species depends are dependent on forms of life upon which we do not directly depend. Given these chains of interdependence, only a view of all of nature as valuable in its own right, apart from its use value to humans, makes sense—with action that embodies that view.

Bee decline is sparking a new religious occupation with bees. In Canada, Anglicans practice beekeeping both to fulfill what they see as their Christian duty to care for Creation and to strengthen their communities (Kidd 2019). Islamic Help in the UK instructs Tanzanians in beekeeping, empowering them to break out of poverty (Islamic Aid n.d.). In 2018, the ecumenical Consortium of Christian Churches in Germany chose insect protection as the theme for Creation Day, grounding their choice in their belief in a Creator God and a scientific study detailing an 80% decrease in insect populations in Germany over the past thirty years (ACK 2017). A year later, the interfaith Abrahamic Forum in Germany announced the Noah’s Ark Festival, to be celebrated on May 20 or May 22, the dates of the UN’s World Bee Day and International Day for the Conservation of Biodiversity respectively (Abrahamisches Forum in Deutschland 2020). In Israel, Bees for Peace (no relation to the project of the same name summarized below) imagines bees as living in harmony with each other and the environment to build bridges via bio-dynamic beekeeping between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Palestine, Israel, and Jordan (Aud n.d.). These examples show some continuity with past understandings of bees, in that bees serve as models for well-functioning human societies. Yet they also reveal novel interests, based on scientific ecological knowledge, worries about the global environmental crisis and loss of biodiversity, and concern with social cohesion in multireligious societies.

The contributions in this issue are a rich selection of research articles that reflect on the myriad, often mutually contradictory meanings ascribed to bees and honey. Though based on cultures far apart in time and space, the articles at times share surprising themes with each other and demonstrate how the meaning of bees or honey may change to reflect a given culture's own transformations. In 'Bears as Benefactors? Bear Veneration as Apicultural Risk Management in Roman Spain', David Wallace-Hare discusses possible transformations in bear worship among Celtiberians, reflecting the transition from honey-hunting to settled apiculture in the Roman era. Using primarily linguistic and archeological evidence, Wallace-Hare argues that worship of the bear-god Arco was originally based on Celtiberians seeing bears as (dangerous) guides to sources of honey. As Celtiberians moved to beekeeping, their relationship to bears would have likewise changed, as honey-seeking bears now posed threats less to one's life than to one's livelihood.

In 'Samson and the Bees as a Myth: An Anthropological Reading', Mattat Adar Bunis seeks to uncover a pagan myth behind the biblical story of Samson. Using structural analysis and the concept of sympathetic magic, Bunis draws on textual and archaeological sources from cultures surrounding the ancient Hebrews to unpack the segment of the biblical story in which Samson slays a lion, the carcass of which becomes a kind of bee colony producing honey. Bunis argues that the pre-biblical Samson was a magician performing a rite for his own resurrection and was the mediating element between the lion, symbolizing death, and the bees, symbolizing eternal life.

In 'A Taste of Honey: Metaphorizing Nature in Traditional Jewish Art', Ilia Rodov uses textual and visual analysis to explore images of bees, honey, and bears in European Jewish manuscripts and synagogue art from the medieval through the early modern era. Jewish thinkers metaphorized honey as sweet divine wisdom that nourished avid students of the Torah, the student at times imagined as a honey-seeking bear. These metaphors, grounded in the Hebrew Bible, also became performed as initiation ceremonies of young pupils learning the Hebrew alphabet. Several contemporaneous Christian thinkers created a moralizing allegory out of the image of the honey-seeking bear to caution against indulging in carnal pleasures. These divergent views may be derived from different understandings of the human body in Judaism and Christianity.

In 'The Bees of Rome: Representing Social and Spiritual Transition in Victorian Poetry', Jane Wright examines the poetic legacy of the *Aeneid* by the ancient Roman poet Virgil. His murmuring bees, spirits in the

underworld to be reborn as the future citizens of Rome, were poetically reincarnated in the poetry of Dante, Milton, and Tennyson, among others. Through exploring these and other poems in which Virgil's bees were reborn and reinterpreted, Wright demonstrates the incredible plasticity of the image of murmuring bees, which has been used to express multiple and often contrasting views of renewal—individual, social, national, and spiritual.

My own article, 'Mobilizing Faith Communities for Bee Preservation: An Analysis of Bees for Peace', broaches the topic of bees from within the new field of religious environmentalism. Bees for Peace seeks to mobilize faith communities by extracting from their teachings the shared traditional religious value of peace and extending it to the non-human world. I used action research, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews to explore whether this process of extracting and extending the value of peace might motivate members of faith communities in Cologne to engage in an interfaith project for bee protection. The participants understood the importance of preserving bees yet lacked technical know-how. This was to be supplied by trained nature conservationists, many of whom expressed deep resistance toward working with faith communities.

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Bears as Benefactors? Bear Veneration as Apicultural Risk Management in Roman Spain

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Abstract

Worship of bear deities in pre-Roman and Roman Spain seems to have occurred for rather pragmatic reasons having more to do with the activities of bears rather than bears themselves. I show that this reverence originated in an important mode of subsistence in Iron Age and Roman central Spain, beekeeping, upon which the predatory habits of the bear, common in the Peninsula until recent centuries, came increasingly to encroach. I demonstrate that Latin votive dedications made to a Celtiberian deity named Arco in the region of Segovia during the early Principate should ultimately be considered as a reflection of the importance of indigenous honey production. By conceptualizing Arco, whose name in Celtiberian meant 'bear', as a rationalization of apicultural risk, we gain a powerful new tool in understanding both the importance of beekeeping in the Iberian Peninsula and how intimately connected in some areas it was with bears.

Keywords

Bear worship, beekeeping, Roman Spain, Celtic deities, onomastics, votive dedications

Introduction

In the first century CE, Pompeius Placidus, a Roman citizen of the province of Hispania Tarraconensis and member of a local Celtiberian community, the Arevaci, erected the following votive dedication at Saldaña de Ayllón in the region of Segovia, marking the termination of his vow (*votum* in Latin), a sort of verbal contract, with a god named

Arco, after receiving help: 'To the god Arco, Pompeius Placidus of the Medugeni fulfilled his vow gladly and rightly'.¹ Perhaps shortly thereafter a possible relative of Pompeius Placidus, Lucius Pompeius Paternus, erected another votive dedication to Arco.² Arco's name, based on a Hispano-Celtic root, *arc-*, means 'bear' (Albertos 1952: 50; 1966: 32; Palomar 1957: 38; Vallejo 2005a: 178-80).³ Pompeius Placidus belonged to a suprafamilial kinship group common to the Central Meseta, the interior plateau of the Peninsula, called a *gentilitas* or 'clan', more commonly named the Medugeni.⁴ The Celtiberian clan name, Medugenicum, broken down, is composed of two parts: *medu-* meaning 'honey' and *gen-* 'born of' (Delamarre 2003: 221-22). While the root *medu-* can mean 'honey' (Albertos 1966: 153), it can also mean 'mead', that is, fermented honey used as an alcoholic beverage. Thus, José María Vallejo renders the personal name *Medugenus* as 'mead begotten' or 'born from mead' (2005b: 103, 105, 108, 118, 121). Either option, honey or mead, could ultimately arise from an apicultural context, and it is not easy to make a clear determination as to which meaning applies in all but the rarest cases.⁵ Additional apicultural context might be helpful for isolating

1. *L'Année Epigraphique* (hereafter *AE*) 1955, 232: *Arconi / Pompeius / Placidus / Medugeni/cum v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. On both texts, see Gómez-Pantoja 2004.

2. *Epigrafía romana de Segovia y su provincia* (hereafter *ERSegovia*) 59: *Arconi / L(ucius) Pompeius / Paternu[s] / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*.

3. Prósper (2016: 153) disagreed with this reading and did not connect Arco or another Hispano-Celtic god of Central Spain, Aricona, found in a single inscription from Talavera de la Reina (ancient Caesarobriga) to the south of Segovia (*AE* 1946, 14). Prósper associates the Peninsular root *arc-* (though not Gaulish *art-* ['bear']) with a PIE root **phariko*, apparently meaning 'the highest' or 'foremost'. Prósper's reading does not take into account the evidence explored in this article concerning archaeological evidence for apiculture and bear populations near the sites of dedications to Arco.

4. There is some dispute about the provenance of *AE* 1955, 232, featuring the clan name *Medugenicum*. Gimeno (2008: 281 n. 82) argued against Gómez-Pantoja and for a findspot at Riba de Saelices (a town east of Segovia) and not Saldaña de Ayllón, the site of the other dedication to Arco (*ERSegovia* 59). According to Gimeno, two other inscriptions from Riba de Saelices featuring names with the root *medu-* argue for choosing that location as the findspot of the votive dedication, whose provenance has been debated (*AE* 1916, 73 *Medutica*; *Hispania Epigraphica* (hereafter *HEp*) 2008, 78 *Meducenus*). Ultimately, as Santos and Hoces (2016) demonstrated, the issue could be argued both ways concerning the findspot of *AE* 1955, 232. For the purpose of this article, a much larger surrounding region, encompassing Saldaña de Ayllón and Riba de Saelices, is considered, as it seems to have practiced beekeeping in the late Roman Republic and early Principate.

5. For such a case, see McCone (2001: 484) discussing the Celtiberian name *Mezuku* 'a wolf for mead'.

which meaning is more preferred in a given area. That two members of the 'Honey-Born' clan made votive dedications to a bear god (Arco) is significant and offers us a rare glimpse into a unique method adopted by beekeeping populations in Roman central Spain for managing bear populations.

Understandings of Arco

Although Pompeius Placidus' votive dedication to Arco had first been published in 1924, it was not until 1952 that the theonym, or divine name, of the god was deciphered. In 1952 the onomastician María Albertos was the first to make a successful analysis of Arco's name using historical linguistics, connecting the theonym to the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) precedent, **h₂rt̥kōs*, the origin of the word for 'bear' in many European languages (Albertos 1952: 50). Albertos connected the name to other Indo-European parallels, such as the Greek *arktos* as well as the Gaulish root *art-*. Her etymological analysis was sound, but the function she attributed to Arco was by necessity categorical rather than functional. According to Albertos, Arco was 'una divinidad relacionada el oso', a divinity related to bears. What role a god related to bears would play was still to be explained.

Ten years later, in 1962, José María Blázquez published a large-scale study on the 'primitive' religions of Hispania which, at the time, represented a great step forward in synthetic studies on ancient Paleohispanic religion in the Peninsula (Blázquez 1962). Blázquez' classification of indigenous deities was mostly etymological and derived from the Peninsula's epigraphic record of theonyms. Blázquez re-allocated Arco to the very category created by Albertos, 'dioses relacionados con el oso', 'deities related to bears' (Blázquez 1962: 103-104; 1972: 138). Blázquez also began to speculate about what role Arco might play in the pre-Roman pantheon by overlaying whatever contemporary Latin sources referring to bears in Roman Hispania (unsurprisingly few) had to say about Arco. Thus, Blázquez relied on the unique, but ambiguous, comment of the Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) concerning the behaviour of some local individuals in Hispania Tarraconensis regarding the bodies of bears killed in the spectacles (staged animal hunts) of the province. Pliny (*NH* 8.56) said that 'in Hispania, they believe that there is a drug (*veneficium*) found in the heads of bears, and it is well known that they burn the heads of those bears killed in the spectacles believing that their brain, when consumed as a

draught, leads to bear madness'.⁶ From this, Blázquez extrapolated that worship of Arco revolved around the eating of bear brains so as to gain certain magical powers (Blázquez 1962: 104; 1972: 138). Despite the background of staged combat behind the deaths of these bears, Blázquez did not appear to link this to the obvious analogue of the *Berserker* of Germanic mythology (with some analogues in Celtic mythology, such as the warp-spasm [*ríastrad*] of the Irish Cú Chulainn), but leaves the 'ciertas prácticas mágicas' unexplained.⁷ The term Pliny used to describe the substance found within the bears' heads, which I have translated as 'drug', is *veneficium*. This word can also mean 'sorcery', depending on the context (Gaughan 2010: 77-84). Here, however, the former seems to be the meaning, but Blázquez clearly assumed the second, magical, meaning. Pliny's comment says nothing of magical practice *per se* and his language is much more in line with current Roman popular medicine than magic. Indeed, Pliny noted that the Hispani, rather than consuming what they found within the deceased bears' skulls, actively burned the heads to prevent the spread of what he termed *ursina rabies*, or 'bear rage/rabies'. Yet, if the local individuals of this area utilized the brains of these bears, Pliny would have found nothing suspect in such behaviour, as bear body parts were commonly used ingredients in Graeco-Roman pharmacology. In fact, Pliny recorded dozens of recipes utilizing bear ingredients, including the brains, for a variety of ailments.⁸ In reality, it seems that Pliny was somewhat startled by this unproductive behaviour of the Hispani in *not* using this clearly efficacious substance at their disposal. Pliny was not making a religious distinction here, however. At the very least he might have been commenting on the *superstitio* of these Hispani, that is, on their alleged irrational belief that consumption of bear products, *viz.* bear brain matter, would lead to *ursina rabies*, rather than the range of healthful properties Pliny believed such ingredients contained. Blázquez' comment, therefore, seems to inject something into Pliny's anecdote that was not there before, a hierarchy of religion setting legitimate veneration against magic.

6. NH 8.56: *cerebro veneficium inesse Hispaniae credunt occisorumque in spectaculis capita cremant testato, quoniam potum in ursinam rabiem agat.*

7. For the meaning of *Berserker* in Scandinavian mythology and mythohistorical accounts, see Liberman 2005. On a similar frenzied battle state in Irish mythology called the *ríastrad*, see Larsen 2003.

8. Bear ingredients (fat, blood, and bile in particular) seem to have been extremely popular in Roman pharmacology as key ingredients in medicinal preparations for at least twenty different ailments, ranging from hair loss to epilepsy, e.g. Pliny, NH (21.72; 22.15; 24.8; 28.42-44, 48-51, 56-58, 63, 66; and 32.40).



Figure 1. The goddess Artio shown in the Muri statuette group. Historisches Museum Bern. *CIL* XIII 5160. Photograph courtesy of Flora Tarelli at the Historisches Museum Bern.

In any case, the geographic imprecision of ‘Hispani’ could represent a vast swathe of people in the Peninsula. However, Pliny, who held a procuratorship in Hispania Tarraconensis, a province comprising the northeastern half of the Iberian Peninsula, seemed to be recording something witnessed rather than something merely reported (Syme 1969). The comment is, in fact, unique to Pliny. A lot of information cited by Pliny about Hispania we encounter nowhere else in ancient sources, adding greater weight to his testimony, or at least, slightly greater verisimilitude.⁹

Incidentally, Blázquez also attempted to link Arco more closely with a seemingly similar Gaulish goddess, Artio, who appeared in a small statuette group from Bern, Switzerland (Fig. 1). The name of this goddess, something confirmed by the character of the statuette, is based on the Gaulish *artos* meaning ‘bear’, a word easily connected etymologically to parallels in Old Irish and Middle Welsh (Delamarre 2003: 55-56). At the time of Blázquez’ writing, little was known about Artio except what scholars could glean from the statuette itself. According to Blázquez, Artio (and Arco by analogy) epitomized a ‘primitive theriomorphic stage’ and ‘represented a very concrete example of bear cult’ (Blázquez 1972: 138). His analysis revealed an effort to position Artio and by extension Arco within an evolutionary framework. That is, Artio and by extension Arco represented an animal stage in the evolution of these deities into fully anthropomorphic beings.

9. For example, the technical details about mining practices in Hispania, vignettes of mining activities cited nowhere else, and some local terminology suggested to Healy (1999: 8-9) that Pliny had been an eyewitness to them.

Little attention was paid to Arco in the decades that followed. In fact, it was only recently that scholars began to revisit Arco's dedications thanks to an important review by the epigrapher Joaquín Gómez-Pantoja (2004). In an aptly titled chapter, 'Cuando se pierden los papeles: A propósito de algunas inscripciones latinas del Museo Arqueológico Nacional de Madrid', Gómez-Pantoja traced the provenance and tortuous journey of Arco's two votive dedications around various museum collections, before their ultimate arrival at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (Gómez-Pantoja 2004). Gómez-Pantoja's investigation served as a call for further study of Arco's votives, one which was taken up intermittently in the first two decades of the new millennium by several scholars (Santos et al. 2005: 127-30; Martínez 2014: 273-82; Santos et al. 2015). The conclusions reached in these later treatments culminated in a temporary exhibition of Arco's votive altars at the Museo de Segovia (Santos et al. 2015). These later studies focused on Arco's place in the wider epigraphic and archaeological landscape of Segovia to better understand this deity's *utilitas publica* or 'public relevance'. According to Juan Santos and his colleagues, Arco is better interpreted as a tutelary deity who protected travelers, shepherds, cattle, and merchants, and was thus an equivalent to the Italic Hercules (Santos et al. 2015). This new reading was largely based on the presence of several votive dedications to Hercules found at San Esteban de Gormaz, a ford of the river Duero and a town close to Saldaña de Ayllón.¹⁰ These scholars also suggested that we should imagine a shrine to Arco at the modern town of Saldaña de Ayllón, a juncture of the Termes-Confloenta highway and the *via Salaria Segontia-Confloenta*. Because of its place on a busy highway, these scholars hypothesized that Arco might be linked to well-known commercial gods such as Hercules, connected with cattle-raising in many parts of the Empire (Santos et al. 2015). A *forum pecuarium*, a square enclosure acting as a livestock market, at Confloenta (mod. Duratón) and other archaeological evidence of extensive animal husbandry in the area could support this reading (Martínez 2015). The primary stimulus for commercial activity at Segovia, however, was the copper mining operations in the southern part of the *territorium* of Segovia, at Cerro de los Almadenes (Otrero de Herreros), during the first and second centuries CE.¹¹ What seems clear is that the importance of mining operations at Cerro de los Almadenes, critical for the rise of Segovia during the High Empire, may explain the presence of associated

10. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (hereafter *CIL*) II 2814; II 2815; and II 2816.

11. On mineral exploitation in the region of Segovia during the Roman period, see Salas, San Clemente, and Sebastián 2012; Salas et al. 2014; and Sebastián et al. 2014.

agrarian economic gods, such as gods connected with beekeeping, reflective of the wealth that grew out of these extractive operations.¹²

These later readings represented steps forward methodologically because they attempted to consider what role Arco would have played in his chronological and geographic context. Refreshingly these scholars rejected a simplistic interpretation of Arco as a 'forest' god and looked at why such a god would be present in this heavily trafficked area. The absence of discussion of Arco's theonym in these later studies seems to have represented a rejection of the anecdotal nature of previous explanations of Arco's role based on etymology alone. Incorporation of both methodologies, one exploring the etymological possibilities of Arco's theonym and the other rooting the dedications in a lived context is the best way forward. Arco's theonym and some of the onomastic information in the names of his dedicants help explain why Arco appeared in such a commercial zone. Yet this only becomes clear when contextualized in associated archaeological evidence connected with beekeeping in central Spain.

Arco and Beekeeping in the Iberian Peninsula

Considering the meaning of Arco's theonym and that of the clan of two of his dedicants, I suggest that we see in Arco a response to local apicultural concerns. The association of beekeeping with pre-Roman and Roman central Spain can be demonstrated through several ancient Greek and Latin sources and a wide array of archaeological and epigraphic evidence.

Along with mining, honey-production was one of the few industries in our sources associated with the pre-Roman kingdom of Tartessus, an ancient southern Spanish kingdom said to have traded extensively with early Phoenician colonies along the southern coast centuries before the arrival of the Romans. According to the Latin historian Justin (third century CE), who compiled an epitome of the history of the first century BCE Gallo-Roman historian Pompeius Trogus, 'the Curetes, whose very ancient king, Gargoris, was the first to discover the practice of collecting honey, inhabited the mountain passes of the Tartessians, where tradition tells us the Titans fought a war against the gods'.¹³ The Latin here does

12. The pollination benefits of bees in agriculturally less productive areas of the empire, such as the Central Meseta, may have helped preserve a range of beekeeping deities, including Arco. On the connection between mining and beekeeping, see Wallace-Hare (forthcoming 2021).

13. Justin 44.4: *Saltus vero Tartessiorum, in quibus Titanas bellum adversus deos gessisse proditur, incoluere Curetes, quorum rex vetustissimus Gargoris mellis colligendi*

not refer to *apicultura*, that is, the care and cultivation (-*cultura* from *colere* 'to farm; tend to') of bees by humans in artificially created structures, but rather to the much older practice of *mellis collectio*, the 'gathering' (*con-*'with', *lectio* 'act of gathering') or 'hunting' of honey from wild beehives.

Honey hunting is the oldest method of honey acquisition and has been practiced since prehistoric times (Crane 1999: 43). In fact, the earliest representation of honey hunting in all of Europe, a rock painting dating to the Mesolithic, 9000–6000 BCE, is found at Bicorp, in the region of Valencia. In this scene a honey-hunter scales a rock face to obtain wild honey from a lofty nest swarming with bees (Crane 1999: 43).¹⁴ The montane location of the rock painting and its content lend credence to Justin's comment cited above (*Epitome* 44.4) that wild beekeeping occurred in the mountain passes of southern Spain. Similarly, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE) recorded that the Celtiberians, a large conglomeration of Celtic-speaking peoples to the northeast of the earlier Tartessi, also practiced intensive apiculture even before the arrival of the Romans. According to Diodorus, the 'Celtiberians consume all manner of meats and in great quantities, as well as a drink made of honey and wine (*oinomeli*), since their land abounds in a vast amount of honey, whereas they purchase wine from the traders who sail to them' (5.34). While the language is very similar to Diodorus' anecdote about the high prices which the Gauls (5.26) were willing to pay for wine because of its absence there, the presence of honey in the Celtiberian anecdote suggests that both accounts were based on reports received from traders who had visited these areas. The name 'Celtiberians' was used by Graeco-Roman writers to describe several peoples living around the middle Ebro valley and the eastern Meseta region.¹⁵ The association of central Spain with beekeeping is significant as few other references to apiculture during the Roman period in the western provinces of the Empire exist. Pliny the Elder (*NH* 21.42) did note that beekeeping in Hispania (the province in which he had been procurator) resembled that practiced in Northern Italy near the river Po (his birthplace). He also noted that the honey of the province of Hispania

usum primus invenit. While the historicity of Tartessus is debated, see Aubet (1989) and more recently Aguilar (2005). Regardless, the attribution of honey hunting to such an obscure figure and area of the ancient Mediterranean helps argue in favour of the historicity of Tartessus.

14. Crane also mentioned another honey-collecting rock painting from the same area at Barranc Fondo, Valencia (Crane 1999: 44).

15. 'Celtiberians' was the Graeco-Roman exonym for a large Celtic ethnolinguistic people inhabiting the central and NE Iberian Peninsula. On the Celtiberians in Greek and Latin sources, see Curchin 2004: 24–26.

Tarraconensis had a bitter taste due to the esparto grass that grew there (*NH* 11.8).¹⁶ According to Pliny, the region of Carthago Nova (mod. Cartagena) in Hispania Tarraconensis was the main producer of esparto and the zone of its heaviest use (*NH* 19.7). Pliny's work helps us isolate central and eastern Spain as the likeliest area where this esparto honey would have been found.

Although literary sources on pre-Roman and Roman Spain record local populations as practicing apiculture, making these testimonies into material realities was largely impossible before the 1990s. It is unsurprising that scholars had not connected the little-attested god Arco to this activity before then. In the 1990s, archaeologists Helena Bonet and Consuelo Mata from the Universitat de València uncovered an almost industrial level of beekeeping, consisting of hundreds of hive fragments, in the hinterland of cities belonging to ancient Edetania, an Iberian-speaking zone near modern Valencia. These remains spanned the sixth century BCE to the first century CE and took the form of horizontal ceramic tubes open on both ends with interior striations to aid in comb attachment (Fig. 2). These ceramic hives, however, were not in widespread use even during their period of greatest utilization. The Roman agricultural author Columella (first century CE), notably from Gades (modern Cádiz) in the Roman province below Hispania Tarraconensis, Baetica, expressly disapproved of such hives and recommended that beekeepers use hives made of lighter materials, such as cork. According to Columella, unlike cork hives, clay hives had a tendency to overheat in summer temperatures and crack in cooler ones (Columella, *RR* 9.6.1-2). The archaeological record may reflect such preferences, with clay hives appearing only sporadically in Peninsular contexts. Bonet and Mata found that such hives in Valencia disappeared in the first century CE when there seems to have been a move to hives made of organic materials, which have since perished (1997: 42-43). Subsequent ceramic

16. Pilar Fernández Uriel (1998: 68) suggested, based on the use of esparto grass in later traditional beekeeping, that esparto grass would have been used as a filter to strain honey and remove impurities during the Roman period too. This process may hypothetically have imparted a flavour or the perception of a flavour of esparto grass to the honey. Esparto grass is wind- and not bee-pollinated and is not sought out by bees for its pollen either, meaning that the only way honey would have been so flavoured would have been through later processing. On the cultivation of esparto grass in Roman Spain, see Alfaro 1975. Esparto grass is still common in eastern and southern Spain and historically has comprised extensive grasslands. On traditional uses of esparto grass, see Fajardo et al. 2015.

finds followed in several areas of Spain and Portugal.¹⁷ Most notably, Jorge Morín and Rui de Almeida discovered the largest number of non-Iberian hives in central Spain during extensive excavations between 2009 and 2011 in the territory of Segobriga (near modern Cuenca). Segobriga was home to a Celtiberian population and located shortly beyond the southeast corner of the territory of the Arevaci (Fig. 3) (Morín and de Almeida 2014: 290-301).



Figure 2. Beehives from Puntal dels Llops, Tossal de Sant Miquel, and La Monravana (IV–III century BCE).

Photo courtesy of the Museo de Prehistoria de Valencia.

This revealing beekeeping data was unavailable to those who first treated Arco and circulated slowly in the few years that followed Bonet and Mata's publication. Earlier treatments investigated this deity largely from a linguistic standpoint focused on theonymic analysis or comparison to other early imperial deities in Arco's immediate environment. Arco lacks both an extant mythology and has no easily identifiable iconographic representations in Spain. Iconographic depictions of bears do appear in the form of inscribed tokens called *tesserae hospitales* or 'hospitality tokens' in use between the late second to early first century BCE in northern and central Spain in historically Hispano-Celtic-speaking zones.¹⁸

17. Ceramic hives (mostly from the Roman period), have been found at Braga, Martinhal (Sagres), Saelices, Las Pedroñeras, and Santa Cruz de La Zarza (Morais 2006; de Almeida and Morín 2012; Morín and de Almeida 2014; Bernardes et al. 2014), while honey pots (*vasa mellaria*, Port. *meleiros*) have been found at Monte Castelo (Matosinhos), Chaves, and Conímbriga (Morais 2006).

18. Rojo 1996–97; Sanchez 2002; and Curchin 2004: 140-43.



Figure 3. Map of ceramic beehives in the pre-Roman and Roman Iberian Peninsula.
 (Map: D. Wallace-Hare and R. Morais ©.)

These tokens represented symbols of friendly relations between individuals and communities. According to Sánchez (2002), the establishment of friendship (*hospitium*) between towns was not only a diplomatic action but may also have had economic implications in terms of commerce, transhumance, or access to mineral deposits. These hospitality tokens often took the form of different animals (such as dolphins, for example, *HEp* 1, 1989, 653) or occasionally more symbolic associations (such as clasped hands, *CIL* I 3465). The meaning behind the choices of these shapes is difficult to recover. Indeed, the appearance of animals like dolphins in central Spain also precludes linking them to geographic realities. For example, a first-century BCE dolphin hospitality token written in Celtiberian is known from Monreal de Ariza (ancient Arcobriga, or 'Bear-Fort'), a town to the northeast of Saldaña de Ayllón. This token documents the establishment of friendship (*kar*) between the town of Arcobriga and an individual whose name is difficult to recover.¹⁹ While the toponym has a clear ursine component, the animal chosen for the token, a dolphin, undermines the usage of such tokens for investigating regional animal population dynamics or modes of animal husbandry.²⁰

Onomastic Evidence of Beekeeping in Roman and Pre-Roman Spain

Though Arco's mythology may no longer be accessible, the meaning of his name is, as are those of his dedicants. In fact, the link between the root of Arco's theonym, *arco-* 'bear' and the clan name of that of his two extant dedicants, *Medugenicum* 'those born of honey', provides a clear indication of a relationship that has surprisingly long gone unnoticed despite the common and almost universal observation that bears love honey. In many Celtic-speaking parts of the Iberian Peninsula, bears seem to have been synonymous with beekeeping during the pre-Roman Iron Age and apparently after Roman occupation. This relationship is visible in the close geographic association of the roots *arc-* 'bear', *mat-* 'bear', and *medu-* 'honey' in Celtic-speaking parts of the Peninsula. Arco's dedication represents the only ursine deity known so far from the Peninsula, but the root on which his theonym is based, *arco-*, was also used extensively in the anthroponymy of Roman Spain.

19. *HEp* 1995, 923: *IKAR Arcobriga / Gof[-]ci Ando[1]O Gidosq(um)*. On this text, see Curchin 1994. The token is currently held in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional (2007/55/6).

20. For a depiction of a bear on a hospitality token from II-I century BCE Cantabria, see Fernández and Bolado 2011: 47-48.

A lack of attention to Arco's dedicants has often marked past treatments. Occasionally, votive dedicants included additional information besides personal names, such as professional designations or schematic reasons for an initial vow to a god.²¹ Such information is welcomed as it allows scholars to deduce, among other things, what role provincial deities played locally, be they Roman deities in new contexts or indigenous gods, especially in the absence of local mythologies for much of the Roman West. In the case of Arco, we are fortunate to have a dedicant with additional name elements, in the form of the clan name, Medugenicum. Such clan names were borne by many Celtic-speaking individuals in the Central Meseta and were technically known as *gentilitates*.²²

These clan names are found in both the Latin epigraphic record and inscribed documents in Celtiberian, such as tablet III of the Botorrita tablets found at Botorrita (ancient Contrebia Belaisca) near Zaragoza, which records dozens of clan names in much the same format as Pompeius Placidus' dedication.²³ According to Leonard Curchin, an authority on the development of central Roman Spain, 'the clan is a suprafamilial, often supralocal, kin group claiming descent from a common ancestor' (Curchin 2004: 117). What roles clans played besides their genealogical and demographic functions are also unclear. Curchin believed that there are reasonable grounds for supposing that clans engaged in communal activities such as 'guest-friendships with other groups, and periodic banquets with one another' (Curchin 2004: 119). Yet we might also wish to extend these activities to other realms, including collective religious or economic activities, something suggested also by *tesserae hospitales*.

González alerted scholars to the possibility that certain clans might be connected to specific gods and that communal acts of veneration might thus be highly significant (1986: 33-34). Therefore, we should pay close attention when two people, Pompeius Placidus and Lucius Pompeius Paternus, both likely members of the Medugeni clan, perhaps even relatives, given the shared god, offer votive dedications successively to Arco.

21. For a large-scale study of Latin votive dedications and recorded motivations for vow-making in the Roman Empire, see Ehmig 2013a, 2013b.

22. A recent treatment of the clan structure of Celtiberian Spain can be found in Curchin 2004: 117-21. The classic treatment is that of González 1986. See more recently Gómez-Pantoja 1996 for a larger discussion concerning issues of the terminology describing these kinship groups in both antiquity and modern scholarship.

23. For a detailed study of the third tablet, see especially Beltrán, De Hoz, and Untermann 1986.

The root forming the first part of the clan name, *medu-*, is significant for possibly connecting Arco to a clan focused on beekeeping, suggestive perhaps of other acts of communal veneration. Although the dedications to Arco are unique, we find many other honey- and bear-named clans in Arco's immediate proximity and throughout the larger Central Meseta (Fig. 4). Here, the Hispano-Celtic roots *arc-*, *mat-*, and *medu-* feature in thirteen different instances, representing ten distinct clans. Still, the clans provide a useful structuring principle, emphasizing an association of bears and honey on a community-wide scale, an association reified in Arco's two dedications. Although clans are more reflective of Celtic-speaking peoples inhabiting the Central Meseta, the association of the roots *arc-*, *med-*, and *mat-* also extends beyond the Central Meseta.

Beyond the area where clans are found and beyond known dedications to Arco in the Peninsula, names featuring the roots *arc-*, *mat-*, and especially *medu-*, are frequently found in close proximity in personal names used in Celtic-speaking areas (Fig. 5).²⁴ These names also correlate with the currently known archaeological remains of Roman beekeeping in the Peninsula (namely ceramic beehives seen in Fig. 3 above, but also contemporary ceramic honey pots for honey storage). The connection of bear- and honey-names to areas where we find physical vestiges of beekeeping is notable, and suggests that this constellation of roots meaning 'bear' and 'honey' points to a slightly different stance toward bears than the purely antagonistic one we begin to see develop in central and southern Europe during the Roman period and increase thereafter. That bears might be emblematic of beekeeping in Celtic-speaking parts of the Iberian Peninsula, especially central Spain, needs to be unpacked.

24. This map was created using inscriptions with findspots recorded in *HEp* and *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby*. For the ceramic hive and honeypot findspots, see Morais 2006; Morín and de Almeida 2014; García 1995; Pérez and Rodríguez 2004; Bonet and Mata 1997. The data on apiary walls (stone circumvallations built around many late antique, medieval, and early modern Portuguese and Spanish apiaries in mountainous areas of the Peninsula), often correlating with the onomastic and archaeological evidence, are based on the studies collected in Caninas et al. 2010. For the Zaragoza region, <http://cesbor.blogspot.com/search/label/Abejares> was very useful for mapping the apiary walls in the region of Arco's dedications for later periods.

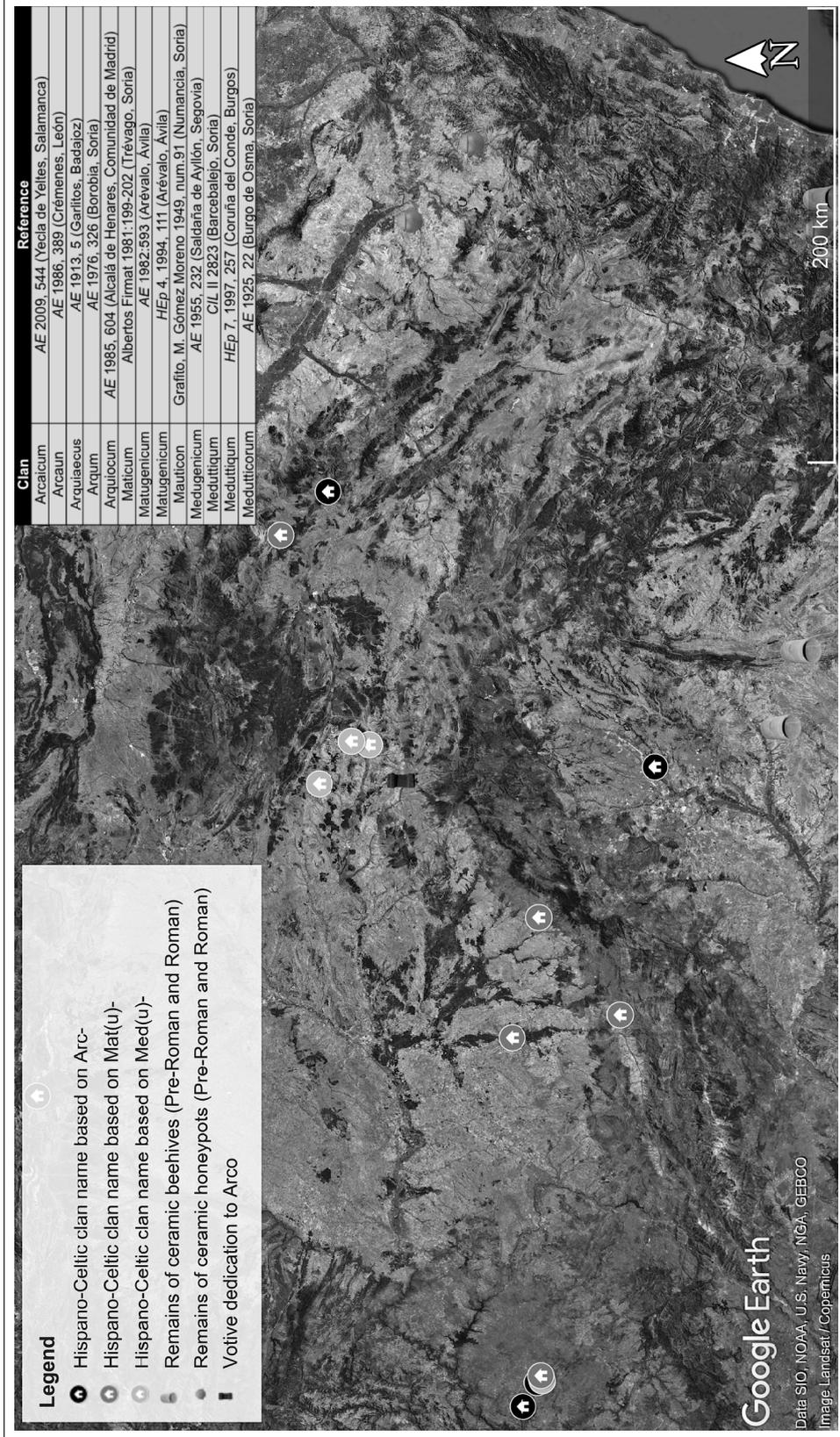


Figure 4. Map of bear and honey clan names in central Roman Spain.

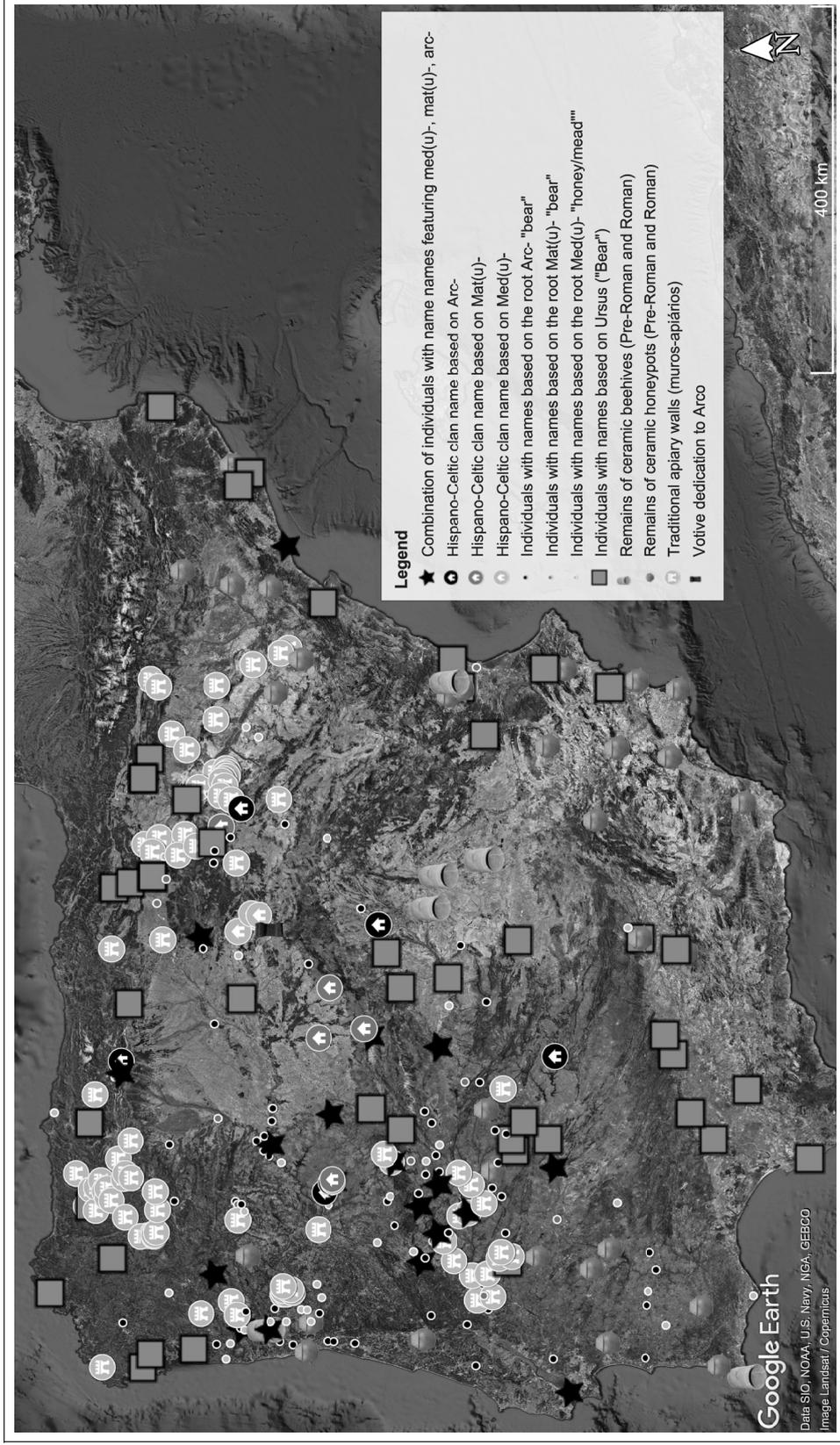


Figure 5. Map comparing the onomastic evidence of beekeeping in the Latin epigraphic record with the archaeological remains of pre-modern Beekeeping in the Iberian Peninsula.

*Bears as Guides? The Greater Honey-Guide (Indicator indicator)
as a Vehicle for Understanding Arco's Theogenesis*

Particularly in the mountainous parts of pre-Roman and Roman Spain, bears came to represent a risk to beekeeping interests over time. While this risk ultimately ended in the near extinction of the bear in the Peninsula by the nineteenth century, earlier populations may have rationalized the bear's honey predation rather uniquely: through worship.²⁵ However, in the transition from the migrational honey hunting described by Justin to the settled beekeeping evident in Columella's agricultural treatise, the bear's role likely shifted from a 'guiding' figure beneficial to finding new honey sources to one unfavourable to settled honey production, an enemy of established economic order.

As mentioned above, honey hunting was said to have been 'invented' by King Gargoris of the Curetes. Mesolithic rock paintings seem to confirm that collecting wild honey from wild hives can be traced far back in the Peninsula's history. Yet our first encounter with Arco comes in a period in which settled beekeeping predominated, as evidenced in the remains of ceramic hives notable in central and eastern Spain.

Morín and de Almeida's investigation into beekeeping in the *ager Segobricensis* or hinterland of Segobriga was important because of the connections they drew between the Roman-period ceramic hive remains found in abundance at five rural villa sites around the *ager Segobricensis* and the Iberian hives studied by Bonet and Mata (1997).²⁶ The large number of hive fragments discovered in the territory of Segobriga allowed Morín and de Almeida to create new typologies for the Iberian hives examined by Bonet and Mata. They established the existence of a ceramic hive type different from the common 'tubular' Iberian hive type. This new type, which the excavators dubbed 'troncocónico' ('cone-trunked') was an innovation on the Iberian model, which seems to have allowed for extension rings to be attached to the hive (Morín and de Almeida 2014: 302).²⁷ The excavators believed that the hive assemblages

25. The historical distribution of bears in Spain has been the subject of several studies: Clevenger and Purroy 1991; Nores and Naves 1993; Naves and Palomero 1993; Casanova 1997; Torrente 1999; Piñeiro Maceiras 2000; Grande, Piñeiro, and Hernando 2002.

26. See also Morín and de Almeida 2014: 302.

27. On such extension rings, see Harissis 2018. According to Harissis (2018: 20-21), a 'traditional practice, also known in antiquity, was to elongate horizontal hives by adding a bottomless cylindrical terra-cotta stem ("extension ring"), which was fastened between the lid and the end of the hive, which had projecting rims. With this technique, the beekeeper could easily separate the extension ring from the main hive and harvest part of its crop without disturbing the inner parts; this entailed using less

and their distribution in the rural hinterland around Segobriga unequivocally showed ‘an intensive production that has no relation to the traditional transhumant practice’ (Morín and de Almeida 2014: 284). That is, the ceramic hives to the south of Arco’s dedication reflected settled apiculture.

A bear deity in first-century CE central Spain thus seems rather at odds with the state of apiculture at the time and place. Yet how do we explain the dedications made to Arco then? In origin, Arco’s role may have been quite different than the Arco of the first-century CE dedications by the Medugeni. A bird from east Africa, known as the Greater Honey-Guide (*Indicator indicator*), may provide one answer for how a god such as this arose in the Iberian Peninsula in the dimly remembered past. For millennia the Boran people of East Africa have engaged in a synergistic relationship with the Greater Honey-Guide. This bird has helped the Boran people track down wild hives, and is one of the only birds to have adapted its diet to consume wax. John Marzluff, an expert in avian cognition and cultural co-evolution among corvids (crows and ravens) and humans, highlighted the highly unusual quasi-contractual arrangement that the Boran people have established with this bird:

The Boran people of East Africa and a drab bird called the Greater Honey-Guide (*Indicator indicator*) have closely intertwined their behaviors. The Honey-Guide is a specialized forager on the wax and larvae of wild honeybees, but despite its appetite, it cannot efficiently raid the hive of the honeybee. Hives are usually deep in tree crevices and vigorously defended by stinging swarms. The Boran people love honey, but they cannot efficiently locate the widely spaced and inconspicuous hives. So they work together, Honey-Guide and human... Birds reduce the search time of people for honey by roughly two-thirds. Because of this benefit, the Boran culture includes a specific and loud whistle, known as the ‘Fuulido’, sounded by blowing into shells, nuts, or a closed fist, when the search for honey is to begin. The ‘Fuulido’ doubles the encounter rate with honey-guides. Clearly the culture of following honey-guides by the Boran people has evolved by social learning—passing traditions along family lines.... (Marzluff 2005: 123-24)²⁸

A similar cultural co-evolution may have led to veneration of the bear among early honey hunters in the mountains of the Sistema Central, the likeliest location of local bear populations in Arco’s geographic and

smoke, which was known to harm the taste of honey. Additionally, the extra space provided in the hive prevented swarming.’

28. For the classic study of the Honey-Guide, see Friedmann 1955. Nancy Jacobs (2016) took the Honey-Guide as a thematic motif in her recent monograph on birders in Africa to demonstrate human–bird interaction over time.

historical context.²⁹ Of course, it must be said that the bear is a very different animal than a bird, where the power balance was/is clearly not in favour of humans. Further, the ability of bears to access hives, unlike the Greater Honey-Guide, was not at all impaired or in need of assistance; quite the contrary. If anything, earlier honey hunters would have been better cast in the role of the Honey-Guide, waiting for the bear to leave and then smoking the bees out. The sort of cooperation seen between the Boran and the Honey-Guide, where both parties receive what they want, is not the type of relationship we should expect to see closely modelled between bears and honey hunters. The appearance and movement of bears in areas not known to have bees may, however, have been a warning sign for honey hunters, who, at all events, might have driven bears off and consumed the honey, leaving a portion for the bear as compensation. The injunction against eating parts of the bear's body (which might also have extended to local injunctions against killing bears) might be compared to injunctions against harming or killing Honey-Guides among the Boran (Friedmann 1955: 32).

Yet by the Roman period we have few descriptions of honey hunting still practiced in the Empire (and none for Spain). What we do possess are archaeological and literary testimonies of apiculture. In such a world, Arco's possible original positive function as a honey-guide would have been problematic. The taboo concerning consumption (and likely murder) of bears among the populations of Hispania Tarraconensis mentioned by Pliny implies at the very least a reverential attitude toward this animal, one possibly suggestive of an altered role. For those who practiced settled beekeeping in Hispania, the presence of the bear and its theft and destruction of hives must have been a source of unease but not perhaps animosity when juxtaposed with earlier honey hunting traditions.

Arco's role for the Medugeni, then, might be as a deity of protection of bee stocks *from* bears. We certainly know from ancient sources that the roaming of bears was not welcome in settled communities of the Roman world. While Greek and Latin sources never explicitly mention bear predation as detrimental to apiculture, there are indications that, in areas where bears were abundant, this was a concern. We can make such a determination in part from references to bear hunting in Roman legal sources and epigraphic attestations. For instance, in the Late Antique law code known as the *Digest*, a compilation of legal material collected under the emperor Justinian, the creation of bear traps on public highways is expressly forbidden, but in places less frequented it was

29. Bears could still be found in the Madrid/Toledo region, in fact, until the seventeenth century and were first mentioned there as early as the eighth; see Gómez 2015.

endorsed, likely as a public benefit.³⁰ Furthermore, the capture of bears seems to have been taken very seriously, as we find several attestations of bear hunters, called *ursarii*, in the western provinces, mostly in mountain zones.³¹ These *ursarii* are often encountered in the context of inscribed votive dedications, and are especially connected to the deities Diana and Silvanus. This might suggest a religious connection to bears stemming from their cultural role in these communities, that is, the destruction of this sacred animal may have required further expiation.³² One bear hunter from Andematunum in the province of Gallia Belgica, named Augurius Catullinus, commissioned an inscription in which he referred to himself as an *ursarius*. A possible translation of the town's toponym in Gaulish, a language related to Celtiberian, is 'village of the great (*ande-*) bear (*mat-*)' (Delamarre 2003: 45, 220).³³ The root *mat-*, another word for 'bear', is much more common outside the Peninsula, especially in personal names, where the root *art-*, the equivalent of *arc-*, is primarily used in divine and place names. The usage of this root is open to debate, however, as it can also be rendered as 'good, noble'. Thus, names like *Matugenus* might mean either 'Bear-Born' or 'Noble-born'. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, given the relatively wide array of archaeological evidence of beekeeping in the pre-Roman, Roman, and Late Antique period, it becomes easier to associate the root *matu-* with bears (Wallace-Hare 2019b). This is especially the case when this root is found in the proximity of other roots plausibly connected to beekeeping, such as *medu-* and *arc-*. As archaeological evidence of beekeeping is minimal for Celtic-speaking areas of the Roman Empire outside the Iberian

30. *Digesta* 9.2.28: 'Whoever constructs pits for trapping bears and deer, if they have made them on the public highways and on that account, anything falls down into them and is impaired, according to the Aquilian Law they are liable; but they will not be held so if they construct them in other places, where they are usually constructed'.

31. CIL XIII 5703 (Langres / Andematunum, Gallia Belgica): *Opus quadratarium / Augurius Catullinus / ursar(ius) d(e) s(ua) p(ecunia) d(edit)*, CIL XIII 8639 (Xanten / Colonia Ulpia Traiana, Germania Inferior): *Deo Silvano / Cessorinius / Ammausius / ursarius leg(ionis) / XXX U(lpiae) V(ictricis) S(everianae) A(lexandrianae) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*, CIL XIII 5243 (Zurich / Turicum, Germania Superior): *Deae Dianae / et Silvano / ursari(i) / posueru/nt ex voto*, CIL II 2660e (León / Legio, Hispania Tarraconensis): *Donat hac pelli D[iana] / Tullius te Maxim[us] / rector Aeneadum [gemella] / legio quis est se[ptima] / ipse quam detrax[it] urso / laude opima p[raeditus]*.

32. Importantly, one of these *ursarius* inscriptions comes from León near the Cantabrian mountains, home even today to brown bear populations. On animal hunters in the Roman Empire, see Mackinnon (2006) and King (1999).

33. Delamarre did discuss when *matu-* means 'bear' or 'good' due to the extreme difficulty of making such a distinction in most cases. For another approach to tackling these two homonymous roots, see Uhlich 1999: 276-77.

Peninsula, such as Gaul, generating definitive translations for names like *Matugenus/a* is always a matter of likelihoods rather than certainties. There are some clues that point to similar apicultural realities in Gaul and Germania, however, even without such archaeological evidence.

Bear hunting in Italy and many places besides would have been considered widely beneficial, as it led to the removal of a possible danger to humans, to the decrease in predation of cattle and other farmed animals, and to the decrease in destruction of apicultural property by bears searching for honey. Lastly, bear hunting facilitated the creation of a source of entertainment in the arena. After a bear's death in combat, its body could also be harvested for a plethora of medicinal ingredients. Such views are clearly evident in Pliny the Elder's surprise at the care with which the Hispani handled deceased bears (*NH* 8.56). Yet, in Hispania Tarraconensis, and perhaps in other Celtic-speaking parts of the Empire, this hostile attitude toward bears, even in spite of a negative impact on apiculture, may have been complex.

*Worshipping Risk: The Bee-Eater as a Vehicle for
Understanding Arco's Shifting Roles*

An anti-Honey-Guide of sorts, a bird called the bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) represents another vehicle for understanding Arco's role in the settled apicultural communities we encounter in Roman Spain. In the town of Cucuron, ancient Aquae Sextiae, in the adjacent province of Gallia Narbonensis, to the northeast of Hispania Tarraconensis, a very unique votive inscription was found which allows a fascinating glimpse at the type of role Arco might have played for the Medugeni. This votive dedication seems to have been set up by a beekeeper named Abascantus: 'Abascantus fulfilled his vow gladly and rightly to Avianius on behalf of his bees (*pro apes*)'.³⁴ The dedication marks the fulfillment of a vow made by Abascantus to a deity named Avianius who apparently protected his bees (*apes*) at some point in the past. Avianius' theonym is possibly a Latinization of a native Gaulish theonym, which has been translated from Gaulish to a word based on the Latin *avis*, meaning 'bird'. Such *interpretatio* or 'translation' of the names of local gods into Latinized forms was not at all uncommon in the area. For example, in nearby Aquitania, the province directly above Hispania Tarraconensis, we find a number of tree-gods receiving votive dedications with names in both Aquitanian (a Basque-related language) and Latin, mostly connected to trees of the oak family (Wallace-Hare 2019a).

34. *AE* 2001, 1319: *Abasc[a]/ntus / s(olvit) v(otum) l(ibens) m(erito) / Avianio / pro apes*.

Avianus is mentioned four other times in the area of Nîmes (ancient Nemausus) but nowhere else.³⁵ If we consider Avianus as a restraint god, then the unusual vow made by Abascantus begins to make more sense. The eating habits of the bee-eater in this area, a bird quite common in southern Europe, may be the reason behind these dedications.³⁶ The bee-eater was likely eating this, and apparently four other beekeepers' bees, necessitating greater action. This worked or was perceived to have worked, even if temporarily, given the fact that we have the votive dedications marking the fulfilment of the vows. Evidently, given the number of attestations of this deity, bee-eaters may have been a serious problem. This deity's origin might have been similar to Arco's and served as a compass for honey hunters, because of the ability of bee-eaters to locate concentrations of bees. Its trajectory toward becoming an economic nuisance might also have run parallel to Arco's.

Arco's connection to apiculture in Spain is supported by onomastic, archaeological, and literary evidence. Yet a similar pattern of linking the Celtic roots meaning 'bear' and 'honey' characterizes several other Celtic-speaking areas of the Empire.³⁷ While we rarely find *medu-* in personal names outside the Peninsula, we do find this root many times in divine names in Celtic-speaking communities of the western provinces of the Empire, like the provinces of Gaul and Germania.³⁸ We also find in these

35. *Inscriptions latines de Gaule (Narbonnaise)* 666 (Castelnau-le-Lex, Nîmes); *CIL* XII 6034 (Gordes); *AE* 1937, 143 (Saint-Rémy-de-Provence); and *AE* 2001, 1368 (Saussan).

36. See the impact study on bee stocks by Galeotti and Inglisa 2001. For attestations of the bee-eater in antiquity, see Arnott 2007: 126.

37. Deities: Aquitania: Comedovae Augustae (*CIL* XII 2445, Aix-les-Bains), Meduio (*Carte Archéologique de la Gaule* [hereafter *CAG*] 13, 2, p. 227, Noves), Maglomatoniun (*CIL* XIII 915, Agin), Apollo Matuix (*Inscriptions Latines des Trois Gaules* [hereafter *ILTG*] 156, Poitiers), Dea Damona Matuberginis (*Inscriptions Latines d'Aquitaine: Santons* 108, Saintes), Dea Augusta Andarta (*CIL* XII 1555-1560 and *ILTG* 230, Aurel, Die, Luc-en-Diois), Mercurius Augustus Artaius (*CIL* XII 2199, Beaucaumont), Mattus (*CAG* 13.2: 309, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence). Gallia Belgica: Artio (*CIL* XIII 420 and 4113, Daun and Erzen), Arterancus (*CIL* XIII 4137, Fließem). Germania Superior: (Dea) Meduna (*CIL* XIII 7667, Bad Bertrich), Deus Medrus (*CIL* XIII 6017, Brumath), Dea Artio (*CIL* XIII 5160, *CIL* XIII 7375, and *CIL* XIII 11789, Muri, Hedderheim, and Stockstadt am Main). Venetia et Histria: Medilavinus (*AE* 1946, 219, Lago di Ledro). Britannia: Dei Fauni Medugeni (*AE* 1982, 670e, Thetford), Deus Matunus (*CIL* VII 995, Rochester), Mars Medocius (*AE* 1892, 89, Colchester).

38. The root *medu-* might also be represented outside the peninsula by the Gaulish root *suad-* 'sweet' in personal names. *Suad-* names are relatively common in the epigraphic record of Celtic areas outside Hispania. Among these names, *Suadugenus/a* recurs often, just as *Medugenus/a* in Hispania. These attestations have a similar dispersion in relation to the honey and bear deities as well as bear names outside Hispania. Whether we should consider this as a marker of apicultural activity is not

regions many votive dedications to bear deities, dedications often in close proximity to Gaulish honey deities. Furthermore, the roots *art-* (the Gaulish equivalent of *arc-*) and *mat-* are present in abundance in personal names, and similarly cluster near one another and near the votive dedication findspots of Gaulish honey and bear deities.

Archaeologically, however, ceramic hive remains such as those frequently found in the Iberian Peninsula are rare in the west. Furthermore, literary attestations of apiculture are also infrequent in sources on the western provinces, where Spain stands out. Nonetheless the strong correlation between honey and bears in the Celtic-speaking provinces outside the peninsula indicates a similar role played by bear and honey deities in these locations. Hypothetically the bear may have played a different role for beekeeping populations depending on whether they hunted or cultivated honey.

Conclusion

While we cannot chart the minutiae of a shift in function of Arco or these other bear deities from guidance to restraint, the positive associations of bears in the Peninsula and in wider Gaul and Germania onomastically suggests a much more complex, nuanced relationship. This relationship is further complicated because veneration of bears seems not to have been directed at bears *per se* but at what they represented: access to food or its destruction. In Hispania, bears may have dually represented access to honey and the consolidation of its production. Moreover, Arco's role seems to have shifted from guide to predator in relation to economic shifts from foraging to settled apiculture, though such a teleological model is surely too simplified. Notwithstanding, in both cases, veneration seems linked to a desire to manage risk. With Arco as guide, the worship of bears would have entailed close monitoring of bears' feeding habits and perhaps resulted in a higher rate of success in finding honey and wax. With Arco as predator, veneration seems to have entailed entreaties to bear deities to protect hives from bear populations.

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yet clear. On the root *suad-*, see the examples and bibliography of Delamarre (2003: 283).

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Samson and the Bees as a Myth: An Anthropological Reading

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Abstract

In this article I suggest that the biblical Samson story (Judges 13–16, 18) is a late reconstruction of a pagan myth recounting the life, deeds, and death of Samson the magician. When Samson senses that his death is imminent, he performs a private resurrection ritual for himself, in which bees, accompanied by a lion, play a central role. As in myths from some neighboring cultures, in the Samson myth bees are blessed with the supernatural power to return to life in the spring after dying in the winter and to resurrect the whole of nature. The bees swarming in the cadaver of the lion Samson kills bring the lion back to life in their own form. Samson, who in many ways resembles both a bee and a lion, performs magic based on resemblance to ensure his future return to life.

Keywords

Samson, bees, lion, myth, life, death, ritual, resurrection, sympathetic magic, structural analysis

Introduction

This article offers a new interpretation of the story of Samson as it appears in Judges 13–16, 18. It also analyses the role of bees and honey in ancient Israelite culture as depicted in the Bible in general. Following a critical review of the existing literature attempting to explain the somewhat confusing biblical story of Samson, I argue that the story conceals an ancient resurrection myth. My interpretation is supported by

what is known about the role of bees and oxen or lions in resurrection rituals of the ancient Mediterranean peoples with whom the ancient Israelites were in contact.

By using the anthropological technique of structural analysis and the concept of sympathetic magic, I seek to unearth this myth. Whereas in the biblical story the details of bees and honey are dispensable or unclear, the underlying myth is built around the opposition between the bees and honey, symbolizing eternal life, and the lion, symbolizing death. The third vertex in the structure of this myth, its mediator, is Samson. Due to his resemblance to both the lion and the bees, Samson symbolically transforms the lion's death into its eternal life in the form of bees. Through his use of sympathetic magic, based on his resemblance to the lion and the bees, Samson actually ensures his own future resurrection.

The biblical story of Samson, summarized, tells of a baby born to a barren woman of the tribe of Dan in the town of Tsorah. An angel of God visited the woman, telling her that she would give birth to a son who would grow up to be a Nazirite who must never trim his hair or drink wine or eat impure foods. She named him Samson and he was blessed by God.

The tribe of Dan was located between the tribe of Judah, in the east, and the Philistines, in the west. In spite of the religious and territorial conflict between the Dan and the Philistines, Samson wished to marry a Philistine woman from Timnah. As he was passing through a vineyard to her home, a young lion (*kēfir arayot*) approached him, roaring. Samson tore it to pieces with his bare hands as if it were a lamb. Sometime later he passed the lion's carcass and found within it a swarm of bees and honey, and he ate some of the honey. At his wedding celebration, Samson posed a riddle, and promised a prize to anyone who could solve it: 'Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet' (Judg. 14:14). The guests, unable to answer the riddle, pressured the bride to seduce Samson and get the answer from him. She obeyed and learned the answer was lion and honey. The guests won the prize, but when Samson realized he had been cheated, he left the ceremony and the bride was married to another man. In revenge, Samson caught 300 foxes and tied their tails in pairs. In between the tails he stuck a burning torch, and he chased the foxes in the direction of the wheat fields of the Philistines.

Following numerous violent encounters with the Philistines, Samson visited a whore in the Philistine town of Gaza. The news spread and a few men planned to kill him in the morning, waiting the whole night near the town's gate. At midnight he approached the gate, uprooted it with its doorposts and bolts, and carried it up the hill toward Hebron.

The third Philistine woman Samson loved was Delilah. Under the pressure of her compatriots she interrogated him about the source of his physical power. Succumbing to her constant nagging, Samson admitted that his power stemmed from his never-trimmed hair. While he was sleeping, Delilah cut his hair. With Samson powerless, his enemies bound him, gouged out his eyes, and took him to the jail of Gaza, where he was forced to pull the millstone. The Philistine ministers decided to celebrate Samson's defeat and the victory of their gods over his God, and they brought him from the jail to entertain them. As they were laughing at him, he asked God to endow him with power one more time and, crying, begged 'Let me die with the Philistines'. He seized the two pillars of the house, pushed them forward, and the house collapsed on him and on the three thousand men and women present. Samson was buried near his father between Zorah and Eshtaol (Judg. 16:31). After Samson's death, members of his tribe traveled north in search of a permanent territory. They settled in the town of Laish ('lion' in Hebrew) (Judg. 18).

The story of Samson has fascinated and bewildered many readers, due in part to the enigmatic nature of the story as a whole, and to the complex nature of Samson's character: A wild man with supernatural powers but also an eloquent speaker, a loner but also a judge who played a public role, Samson's character is rife with contradiction. Many interpretations have been given to the story. Incongruities, anomalies, and seemingly unnecessary details in the Samson story have led some scholars to assume that under the biblical story lies a myth (Zakovitch 1982; Shinan and Zakovitch 2012), possibly a pagan one (Carus 1907; Ransome 2004 [1937]; Margalith 1986a, 1986b). Scholars speculate that such a myth would have traveled by word of mouth before it was eventually edited and committed to writing. Ransome (2004 [1937]: 66) gave an example of an incongruity in the biblical story: although Samson was a Nazirite (Judg. 13:5) and as such was prohibited from touching a corpse and eating impure foods (Num. 6:6-7), he willingly handled the carcass of a lion and ate honey that he found inside of it (Judg. 14:9). Ransome concluded from such details that the Nazirite status of Samson was a later addition to an originally pagan myth, predating the biblical story.

Following this assumption, my purpose is to shed light on one possible interpretation of the ancient myth underlying the Samson story. I argue that other scholars have neglected to seriously consider the role of the bees in Judg. 14:8-9. In doing so, I offer a novel interpretation of the roots of the ancient myth believed to predate the biblical Samson story.

Unearthing and re-constituting the myth hiding behind a biblical story is a challenge: in the original myth the parts must have been better integrated within the narrative and their role clearer. The present analysis of the Samson story utilizes a mixed approach deriving from the anthropological study of magic as elaborated by James George Frazer (1998 [1890]) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1954 [1925]), as well as structuralism. From the study of magic, I have borrowed the term 'sympathetic magic' based on similarity, as suggested by Frazer (1998 [1890]: 27-28). Sympathetic magic, in this sense, may be defined as a performance of conjuring by a magician having the power to affect a person or god through a supernatural act directed at an object that is similar to them and represents them. I will suggest that the use of sympathetic magic in the Samson story was aimed at controlling that which is uncontrollable by natural means: death, as proposed by Malinowski (1954 [1925]). A structuralist analysis of a myth or ritual is an attempt to disclose a triangular system of symbols, usually consisting of two opposites and a mediator. The mediator contains the characteristics of both opposites; its purpose is to unite them or to transform them into one another, as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1963). This system of symbols is the outline of the uncovered myth.

A proposal to analyze biblical myths using a structuralist approach was previously made by Edmund Leach and Alan Aycok (1983), and it was applied to the study of individual biblical myths by Leach (1969), David Jobling (1978), Jan Fokkelman (2004 [1991]), Philippe Wajdenbaum (2014), and others. In their analyses, structural anthropologists mainly discussed a few specific structures, one of them consisting of life and death as opposites, and a mediator that unites life and death or transforms them into one another. Lévi-Strauss (2013 [1960]), for example, revealed such a structure in a myth entitled 'two friends who died and came back to life', which was told by a Native American of the Winnebago tribe of Nebraska to anthropologist Paul Radin. At the center of the myth are two young tribesmen who were grateful to their tribe for being kind to them. During a war declared by an enemy tribe in revenge for a previous defeat, the two young tribesmen exposed themselves to the enemy and were killed in an ambush. The people of the tribe, whose enemy was satisfied with the death of the two and ceased to fight, got to live a long life, at the end of which they would die an absolute death, in the way of all mortals. As opposed to them, the two young heroes who had sacrificed their lives returned to life and enjoyed a long line of half-lives and half-deaths. The message of this myth, according to Lévi-Strauss, is this: 'If one desires a full life—one shall die an absolute death at the end of it. But if one gives his own life to save his tribe, he shall

grant his tribe's people longer lives, full but with a final end, and to himself he grants an endless cycle of half-lives and half-deaths' (Lévi-Strauss 2013 [1960]: 501).

A similar structure may be identified in the story of Samson. His fate, as I shall demonstrate, is similar to that of the two Winnebago heroes: as a hero Samson chose to die with his enemies, who were also his tribe's enemies, and thus he deserved to return to life. In order to achieve this goal he performed a private resurrection ritual with the help of a lion and bees.

The interpretations suggested by earlier researchers of the Samson story were influenced by the cultural context they had chosen as reflected in the ancient literature. Some of them took into account the ancient Israelite context as reflected in the Bible or the Jewish post-biblical literary sources only; others took into consideration a broader cultural context additionally or solely reflected in literary works of neighboring cultures in the Mediterranean basin and in the ancient Near East. Most of the latter group of researchers pointed to similarities and connections between the story of Samson and Greek mythology or Greek customs (e.g., Zakovitch 1982; Margalith 1986a, 1986b; Yadin 2002). Almost all of the preceding researchers overlooked similarities with Near Eastern mythology (Mobley 1997 is one exception), though quite a few scholars have shown that Mesopotamian literature too left numerous traces in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh was known in the region in which the story of Samson is set (Kempinski 1989; Stuckenbruck 1997) and it influenced some parts of the Bible (e.g. Shepher 1967; Fenton 1978; Jones 1990; Azize 2000; Mark 2011). In my interpretation of the story of Samson, I draw on written sources and some archeological evidence from the cultures of all these regions.

*Mediterranean Basin and Near East Peoples' Craving for
Eternal Life and Their Attempts to Achieve It*

The biblical story of Samson hardly appears to be concerned with eternal life, but what follows shows that the passion for eternal life was central to the myth underlying the biblical tale. The motif of the quest for eternal life was common in the literature of ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, and Israel. This concept took manifold forms, such as life with no death; the passage of the dead to their own realm in which they continue to live in diverse ways; and death followed by resurrection. For example, the Mesopotamian song 'Descent of Ishtar into the Netherworld' (in Akkadian) incorporates the concept of resurrection. Ishtar threatens the gatekeeper of the netherworld, who refuses to let her in, with the words:

'I shall resurrect the dead to eat the living and thus the dead shall outnumber the living' (Speiser 1969 [1950]: 107, lines 19-20). The song ends with: 'May the dead be resurrected and smell the incense' (1969 [1950]: 109, line 62). The ancient Egyptians, too, believed in resurrection. Deities responsible for resurrection held an ankh—the symbol of life—in their hands, demonstrating their power to preserve life and bring the dead back to life in the afterworld (Tobin 1989).

According to Joseph Campbell (1981), tall trees, mountains, ladders, stairs, and pillars, prevalent in different religions, symbolically function as the axis of the world, which allows humans to climb from their place on earth up to the heavens or down to the netherworld, and to pass from transience to eternity (and vice versa). Quite a few representations of the axis of the world, allowing mortals to pass on to the place of eternal life, are portrayed in the Bible and show how crucial the quest for eternal life was for the Israelites. Among such representations are the ladder in Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:12-19); the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:22) and the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:16; 3), which had grown in the biblical Garden of Eden and were possibly one split tree (Campbell 1981: 190, 194); the palm tree (*timorot*, apparently referring to palm trees that appear in the description of the First Temple [1 Kgs 7:36], and the palm tree that grew between 'the high place and the house of God' [*haramah* and *Beit El*], under which the prophetess Deborah judged the people [Judg. 4:5]); and the Pillar of Fire and Pillar of Cloud, which accompanied the Israelite people in the desert (Exod. 13:21; 14:19; 40:38; Num. 9:15). In the story of Samson, the only two obvious clues to the hero's passion for eternal life and his attempt to achieve it are the motif of the mountain (he carried the gate of Gaza up the mountain toward Hebron), and the high frequency of verbs formed from the Hebrew root '*a.l.eh* (ascend). However, other less apparent clues also inform the narrative.

The use of variegated practices for resurrecting the dead, as an expression of the attempt to secure eternal life, is described in various other literary sources as well. One such practice was recreating humans from stones, a symbol of eternity (Frazer 1913), as recalled in the Greek Flood myth recounted by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, in the sections on the Flood and Deucalion and Pyrrha (Book 1, lines 262-453; see Ovid 2010: 12-18). The prophet Elisha resurrected the dead son of the 'woman from Shunem' differently, by use of physical contact and respiration (2 Kgs 4:33-35). Though considered illegitimate in ancient Israel, magicians and necromancers too engaged in such practices (Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:10-11; 1 Sam. 28). So too, as I shall show, did Samson.

In the majority of cases the attempts to achieve immortality portrayed in the ancient sources ended in failure. Thus, for example, the attempt of

Gilgamesh to bring his beloved friend Enkidu back to life and to ensure his own eternity did not succeed. In the face of his obstinate quest, the goddess Siduri told him: 'The life you are searching for, you shall not find. Eternal life have the gods given to themselves, not to humans' (Friedman 1992: 98-99, lines 198-200, my translation from Hebrew). Gilgamesh did not relent, however, and with the help of Utnapishtim he was able to find the thorny plant of Eshkhar, which had the power to return a man's youth; but eventually the magical plant was stolen from him by a snake. Another example is the Mesopotamian myth 'Adapa and the South Wind' (translated by Izre'el 2005). According to this myth Adapa refrained from eating the food or drinking the water of [Eternal] Life that were served to him by the sky gods. Insulted, the gods expelled him back to earth and he missed the opportunity for eternal life. In the Bible too, the fruit of the Tree of Life had not been forbidden to Adam and Eve, but before they ate it they were exiled from paradise and lost the chance to become immortal (Gen. 2:17; 3:22-24).

Nonetheless, ancient literature describes a number of humans who were granted immortality: some of them had died and were brought back to life; others had never died at all. Examples of such humans include the Greek mythological hero Heracles, Tithonus, the prince of Troy, Sisyphos, the king of Ephyra, the Greek poet Aristeas of Proconnesus (Herodotus, book IV, 13-16), Utnapishtim and his wife (the two Flood survivors from the tale of Gilgamesh), Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha (the two Greek survivors of the Flood), Adapa in a later version of the Mesopotamian myth 'Adapa and the South Wind' (Izre'el 2005), and the biblical Enoch, Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, as suggested by Yair Zakovitch and Avigdor Shinan (2004).

Use of Magic Birds for the Purpose of Achieving Eternal Life

In the ancient cultures of the Near East and the Mediterranean Basin, magical birds were used by humans to achieve eternal life. It was believed that the birds' wings enabled them to carry the deceased to the heavens or to the netherworld and sometimes back to earth. In the story of Gilgamesh, for example, the dying Enkidu had a dream in which a creature with the legs of a lion and the claws of a vulture took hold of him and then 'of my hands grew feathers and into wings they turned...' (Friedman 1992: 185, line 330). This creature, the reincarnation of Enkidu, flew 'to the dwelling of the goddess of the netherworld', where according to the song 'Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld', the deceased were 'dressed as birds in feathered garments' (Speiser 1969 [1950]: 107, lines 9-10). In particular, magical power was attributed to the eagle and

the vulture. In some mythologies, birds function specifically as symbols of resurrection (Becker 1994: 24, 41, 91). In the Bible, for example, we read: 'your youth is renewed like the vulture's' (Ps. 103:5) seemingly due to its ability to shed the old feathers from its neck, grow new feathers, and have its youth restored (Pagis 1962). Two more examples of birds that symbolize resurrection are the Greek Phoenix (Van den Broek 1972) and Bennu, representing the Egyptian sun god Ra, who was swallowed at night by the sky goddess Nut and reborn in the morning (Hart 2005). Magic power was also ascribed to another winged creature, the bee, which is featured in the story of Samson.

*Use of Bees and Honey to Obtain Eternal Life
in the Mediterranean Basin*

Bees were central to the religion of the Hittites, who were neighbors of the ancient Israelites. A piece of archeological evidence suggesting the importance of bees in the religion of the Hittites is a figurine from the fifteenth century BCE. This figurine is associated with rites related to the Hittite Mother-Goddess and depicts her as a woman with the head of a bee with ox horns protruding from it. According to Marija Gimbutas's interpretation, the bee symbolized the Mother-Goddess;¹ its role, like that of the Mother Goddess herself, was to bring nature back to life (Gimbutas 1989). This role is described in the Hittite myth of Telepinus, the god of agriculture and fertility. When Telepinus grew angry he vanished, for reasons unknown, and brought death upon all living things. The Mother-Goddess sent her bee after him, instructing it to sting his hands and feet in order to wake him from his sleep and to bring him back to the company of the gods. Once Telepinus returned, life was restored to all (Fontenrose 1980 [1959]). The Hittite kingdom descended from the stage of history in the twelfth century BCE, yet small enclaves of Hittites remained throughout the entire region, including the Land of Israel, as indicated in the biblical text. It is probable that through the contact between the Hittites and the Israelites, the latter were exposed to the culture of the former and thus to the meanings and roles of bees in Hittite culture.

Other neighbors of the Israelites, the Greeks, also kept bees and sanctified them. According to Aesop, in his bees' fable as translated into Hebrew by Shlomo Shpan (1960), bees were originally immortal, but Zeus punished them for their miserliness, and they became mortal.

1. Ucko (1968), Fleming (1969) and a few other archeologists disagreed with the theory of the Mother Goddess, later popularized by Gimbutas.

However, among the peoples of ancient Greece, Crete, Asia Minor, and Egypt, it was widely believed that bees themselves returned to life after death and had the power to resurrect the dead (Cook 1895: 19, 23; Carlson 2015). Figures of bees, symbolizing resurrection, were engraved on tombs in some regions, for example, in Egypt (Barlow 2017), probably to ensure the resurrection of the deceased. Honey, too, was a symbol of death and life. Gifts of honey were buried with the deceased in order to nourish them (Carlson 2015: 21), and in some areas, such as Egypt, human corpses were immersed in honey for the purpose of preservation (Brenner 2014).

The religious significance of bees was also attested in the name *Melisa*, 'honey bee', given to deities, nymphs, priestesses, and prophetesses. Porphyry [233–304 CE] (in Gimbutas 1974: 181-82), a Greek philosopher, wrote: 'The ancients gave the name *melisa* to the priestesses of Demeter, Kora (Persephone), Artemis who was in charge of birth...' Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, was in his infancy fed with honey by a nymph and was associated with bees (Kerenyi 1962). Zeus, too, was raised by bees, was fed with honey and was called bee-man or *melis-saios* (Cilliers and Retief 2008). Priestesses and female shamans were called *melisa* probably because, like the worker bees, many of them remained virgins.

The Greeks also considered honey and bees to have a powerful influence on speech and poetic talent. Hesiod wrote that the sweet talk of leaders and speakers was a result of the bee nectar that was dripped on their lips at infancy by the muses (Hesiod 2017: lines 83-84, 94-97); and Pliny the Elder wrote that bees fed Plato honey during his childhood, thus ensuring his future eloquence (Pliny 1947: 467). Consuming honey or mead, which helped magicians, oracles, and prophets in some places to experience a change in consciousness, was also aimed at developing their rhetorical power, without which they could not practice.

Meanings of Bees and Honey and their Uses in Ancient Israelite Culture

Some of the aforementioned meanings and roles attributed to bees and honey by other peoples of the region were also ascribed to them in ancient Israelite culture. Ransome (2004 [1937]: 66) argued that there is no evidence in the Bible that suggests the sanctity of bees among the ancient Israelites; but her argument is inaccurate. Firstly, the name 'Deborah' ('bee' in Hebrew) which was borne by the biblical prophetess, is parallel to the name 'Melisa' given to oracles, priestesses, prophetesses, and goddesses by the Greeks. Another biblical Deborah—Rebecca's nursemaid (Gen. 35:8)—paralleled the bees that nursed the

young Zeus or young Dionysus; she was buried in a holy location 'beneath the house of God' (*mitahat le'Beit El*). These are all clear allusions to the sanctity of the bee in Israelite culture.

Honey was offered by some Israelites to God, as hinted at by the very prohibition of this practice in the Bible: 'You must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as an offering by fire to God' (Lev. 2:11). Honey and mead also assisted Israelite religious functionaries to change their state of consciousness in order to fulfill their roles. Jonathan, son of Saul, disobeying Saul's orders, ate from the flow of honey in the forest 'and his eyes saw' (1 Sam. 14:27). I believe this should be understood to mean that he prophesied ('for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer', 1 Sam. 9:9). Honey was also sent by King Jeroboam to the prophet Ahijah, apparently to activate his special powers and heal his son (1 Kgs 14:3).

Archeology provides evidence for the existence of a fertility ritual connected to bees and honey in the north of Israel during the Iron Age. In archeological excavations made by Amichai Mazar and Nava Panitz-Cohen in Tel Rehov, an altar, ornamented by two figures of fertility goddesses and cups, was found near beehives (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2007; Mazar 2013). The aim of the rituals performed in this location was probably to ensure either strong swarms and high yields of honey or the resurrection of nature as a whole with the help of the magical bees.

As in Greece, in the Bible the bee and honey symbolized poetic and rhetorical abilities. The affiliation of the bee with rhetorical ability and poetic talent is demonstrated by the prophetess Deborah (derived from *d.b.r*—talk in Hebrew), who was summoned to chant: 'Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!' (Judg. 5:12). According to the author of the book of Proverbs, honey symbolized rhetorical talent and wisdom, and consuming it assisted one to develop such qualities: 'Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body' (16:24); 'My child, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul' (24:13-14).

The Emergence of Bees from the Carcasses of Animals: Sympathetic Magic and Resurrection

The narrative of the emergence of bees from the carcass of the lion in the Israelite Samson story has a clear parallel in the belief system of the ancient Greeks and other Mediterranean peoples. In this region it was commonly believed that bees were born from the carcasses of oxen,

which were central to the life and livelihood of the Greeks, and sometimes from other animals, such as lions. The creation of bees from the cadaver of oxen was described in the myth of Aristaeus, the first beekeeper. According to this myth as told by Virgil (first century BCE) in his *Georgics*, part 4 (Virgil 1934: line 295 and following), Aristaeus chased after the nymph Eurydice with the intention of raping her. While fleeing she stepped on a snake; being barefoot she was bitten and died. For his misdeed Aristaeus was punished by the queen of nymphs with the death of his bees. Aristaeus asked Proteus (one of the gods of the sea), who was also called 'the magician', to help bring his bees back to life; under Proteus' instruction Aristaeus sacrificed four oxen and four female calves to the queen of nymphs. Each one of the carcasses produced a thousand living bees. The slaughter performed by Aristaeus was actually a resurrection ritual. Yair Zakovitch (1982) and Othniel Margalith (1986b) have already pointed to the similarity between the birth of bees from the carcass of the lion in the Samson story, and the birth of bees from within the carcasses of oxen and calves in the myth of Aristaeus. However, they offered no discussion of the meaning and role of bees in the Greek myth, or in Greek culture in general, nor did they attempt to derive the essence of the myth of Samson and the bees from the Greek myth.

Among the ancient Greeks, resurrection rituals were held in the spring for the purpose of bringing back to life the gods of fertility, who died in the winter, and with them the whole of nature. In these rituals, an ox was usually put to death and from its carcass came forth bees. Antigonos of Karystos (250 BCE) described such a ritual held in Canopus, Egypt: priests led a two-year-old calf into a small cell, beat it to death, and covered the carcass with leaves. Shortly thereafter, bees arose from its body (Gimbutas 1974: 181-82). Virgil mentioned this ritual and expressed his belief that it was held in order to ensure the resurrection of Eurydice and bring about the transition of nature from winter to spring (Sax 2001: 36). If one accepts Virgil's interpretation, then the goal of Aristaeus's sacrifice—the resurrection of his bees—was in fact the means for the resurrection of Euridice, symbolized by bees, in a seasonal resurrection ritual. A similar ritual was held in honor of the Greek goddess of fertility, Artemis. Gimbutas (1974: 181-82) suggested that Artemis was 'linked to the bees and the ox...like the bee she was in charge of the return of souls to the world. The concept of resurrection is reflected in the belief that the life of the ox is passed on to the bees'.

But how did the ritual slaughter of the ox, by which his life was passed on to the bees, bring about the rebirth of the souls? The ox and the bees were mere symbols of Artemis and other fertility gods; the resurrection of the dead was not their responsibility but that of the gods themselves. I

would suggest that the ritual slaughter of the ox was a practice of sympathetic magic (Frazer 1998 [1890]). Putting an ox to death was meant to cause the rebirth of the bees, which in turn would bring the ox back to life in the bees' form. The oxen and the bees were representations of Artemis, and she was supposed to imitate them—by coming back to life and resurrecting the dead souls and winter-struck nature.

Lions Instead of oxen

In ancient thought lions and oxen often formed magical pairs, combating or cooperating with each other. For example, the biblical Cherubim were accompanied by lions and oxen (1 Kgs 7:29), and a lion and a bull appear together with a vulture and a human in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 1:1). Occasionally, pairs of lions and bees—that is, artifacts representing them, and not live ones—were used in resurrection rituals instead of oxen and bees. For example, gold pinheads or plates from the seventh–eighth centuries BCE engraved with the figures of a lion, as well as a bee, were found in Asia Minor, Rhodes, the northwestern Peloponnese, and Etruria. These artifacts were used in rituals in honor of Artemis, and expressed the belief that bees were born from a lion's carcass (Ransome 2004 [1937]: 60-67). Similarly to the ritual killing of live animals, the engraved objects were meant to evoke changes in nature by inducing imitation by a fertility god or goddess. The objects mentioned were found mostly in areas where collective rituals were performed. In Greece, however, identical pinheads were found in tombs as well (Ransome 2004 [1937]: 61). The use of artifacts of this kind in tombs was aimed at ensuring the resurrection of the individuals buried in them. Scholars agree that artifacts and ideas were transmitted between the ancient Greeks and Israelites through the 'peoples of the sea' (probably inhabitants of the islands of the Aegean Sea), among them the Philistines (Dothan and Dothan 1992), and there is evidence from the Bible to support this assumption (Margalith 1988). I therefore assume that both the belief in the ability of bees to bring a dead human or animal back to life and the collective and individual resurrection rituals just described were also transmitted between the two peoples.

The Structure of the Samson Myth: Death, Life, and Transformation

On the basis of a structural analysis of the biblical story and its restructuring into a myth, I suggest that, like the ancient Israelites and other peoples in the Mediterranean basin and the Near East, Samson, who was destined to a premature death, believed in the possibility of

returning to life, and sought to transform his destiny. As practiced by priests and magicians all over the Mediterranean basin, Samson ritually slaughtered an animal—in this case a lion, although others usually slaughtered a bull—in order to assure his own resurrection. Later, in the animal's cadaver, he found the supernatural creatures, the bees, that he needed for the kind of magic he was about to perform. He ate the honey from the bees he found in the cadaver in order to gain ritual and rhetorical power as well as eternal life.

The oppositions in the myth underlying the Samson story are death and life. A central expression of the death motif in the biblical story is Samson's death, recounted in the biblical text (Zakovitch 1982; Levine 2007). Samson's mother conveyed to her husband, Manoah, the words of the Angel of God who visited her (Judg. 13:5), but added mention of the fact of Samson's eventual death ('for the boy is to be a Nazirite consecrated to God from his birth to the day of his death', Judg. 13:7). In speaking in this manner his mother 'prophesied his premature death without knowing that which she had prophesied', suggested Zakovitch (1982: 42). Samson himself was aware of his impending death and often spoke of it. He had the people of Judah swear not to harm him, and they promised '...we will not kill you' (Judg. 15:12-13). Delilah pressured Samson to reveal to her the source of his power to the point of 'wearying him to death' (Judg. 16:16). After the Philistines pulled out his eyes and imprisoned him, Samson cried out, 'Let me [literally, let my soul] die with the Philistines' (Judg. 16:30). To these occurrences of the words 'death' and 'die' in the text the narrator added: 'So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life' (Judg. 16:30). In the myth the death motif is also expressed by the killing of the lion. The death of both the lion and Samson is also expressed by words deriving from the Hebrew root *n.ph.l* ('to fall'), among them 'the carcass or *mappelet* of the lion' (Judg. 14:8), 'and I fell' (Judg. 15:18), 'and he caused them to fall' (Judg. 16:30) (Levine 2007: 64).

Samson's death was unique. If throughout the biblical story it appears that he was led to his death by his own mistakes, toward the end of the story a dramatic change took place in his approach to death: he himself chose death, saying, 'let me die with the Philistines'. While in the biblical story Samson's death was final and he was not rewarded for his heroism, in the hidden myth Samson was destined to be resurrected. His choice of his own death, intended to cause the death of his and his tribe's enemies as well, elevated him to the level of the two Winnebago heroes, who were granted immortality, as described by Lévi-Strauss.

If death is a central motif in the myth, the motif of life is bound to be present in it as well. In the biblical story the life motif is expressed by the

birth of Samson. In the myth it is expressed also by the rebirth of the bees from the lion's carcass, symbolizing the lion's resurrection in the form of the bees.

As was pointed out, the third required component in the structure of a myth is the mediator, who resembles each of the opposites. In the Samson myth the role of the mediator was fulfilled by Samson, who shared both an identity with the bees and with the lion. The shared identity with the lion is based on Samson's belonging to the tribe of Dan, which in the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:22) was referred to as 'a lion's whelp' (Levine 2007: 64).² Furthermore, the name of the northern town of the tribe of Dan was Laish, a lion in Hebrew (Levine 2007: 63). Both Samson and the lion had manes of hair; and both Samson and the lion died young. Samson was also a *melis-saios*, a bee-man. The name of his birth place was Tsorah (cf. Hebrew *tsirah*, 'wasp') (Levine 2007: 63), probably referring to bees; like them he ate honey and his Hebrew name, Shimshon, demonstrated a connection to the color of the sun (Hebrew *shemesh*), yellow, which is also the color of honey.

Of the two possible symbolic roles of the mediator, the role of Samson was to transform one opposite into the other. Whereas the direction of the transformation in the biblical story was from birth (life) to absolute death, in the underlying myth it was from death to life-after-death. Samson himself unwittingly prophesied this when he posed the riddle at his wedding celebration: The eater, the lion, which symbolized death, was to be transformed into sweet food (honey), which symbolized eternal life. Samson's mother too, after prophesying her son's premature death (Zakovitch 1982: 42), also prophesied his resurrection, naming him 'Shimshon' (Judg. 13:24), which derives from the word *shemesh* (sun). The sun, believed to die every evening and to be reborn every morning, was the symbol of resurrection in cultures of the region such as that of ancient Greece (MacUrduy 1917) and ancient Egypt (Frazer 1998 [1890]).

Samson as a Magician Performing Sympathetic Magic

Samson not only symbolized transformation, he also performed it. He shared many characteristics with magicians and was probably a magician himself. Magicians are often described as liminal members of society (Ricks 1990; Luhrmann 1991) and Samson was a liminal type. Like the heroes of the neighboring peoples—for example Gilgamesh, born to the

2. Nachman Levine (2007) pointed to this shared identity of Samson with the lion and the bees in the biblical story, but the role he attributed to this identity is different than that proposed herein.

goddess Ninsun and a human father (Mandell 1997), or Heracles, son of Zeus and Alcmene—Samson was half god and half human, born to a barren woman who was visited by an angel (or messenger of God). From the words spoken by Samson's mother to her husband, Manoah, 'A man of God came to me...' (Judg. 13:6), a suspicion arises that the angel, and not Manoah, was Samson's actual father (Zakovitch and Shinan 2004: 173-79). Samson existed between life and death. He belonged to 'us' and to 'them' at the same time: in his everyday life, he traveled back and forth between his Israelite surroundings and that of the Philistines and did not seem to belong completely to one or the other. Even within the boundaries of his tribe he was caught in the middle: his spirit surged 'between Zorah and Eshtaol' (Judg. 13:25) and he was buried between these two places (16:31). He also passed between different states of consciousness, with the help of the grape wine, implied by his encounter with the lion at the vineyards of Timnah, and by the honey or mead he consumed.

The changes in Samson's state of consciousness, which were meant to transport him from the natural to the supernatural, are also implied in the biblical narrative by the gate motif. Mircea Eliade (1959: 25) noted that in the religions of the world, doors, gates, doorsteps, and openings symbolize the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the natural to the supernatural. In ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Israel, the gate, due to its holy nature, was also the place where judges took up residence, altars were constructed, and sacrifices offered. In the Bible, Jacob called the place in which he slept and dreamt of the ladder that led to heaven 'the gate of heaven' (Gen. 28:17), and in this place he set up an altar and poured oil on it. In the epic of Gilgamesh, which may have influenced the story of Samson, the motif of the gate to the dwelling place of the gods appears four times. The Philistines, too, sanctified the gate: in the excavations of the Philistine city of Gath made in 2007 by Aharon Meir, a gate was revealed, and near it, a temple. I suggest that in the hidden myth underlying the story of Samson, the gate of the city of Gaza symbolized the passage of Samson, as a magician, from a natural to a supernatural state. Additional support for this assumption is supplied by the sentence 'and he ascended with them [the gate with the door posts and the bolt] to the top of the mountain' (16:3).

Ransome (2004 [1937]: 66) assumed that Samson was participating, apparently as a priest, in a collective rite in honor of the god of the Sun, which took place in his temple or house—*Beit Shemesh* (House of Sun). In light of Samson's individualistic conduct, I would argue instead that, sensing his impending death, Samson the magician performed a private ritual of resurrection—his own. Killing the lion, he brought about the

emergence of the immortal bees that resurrected the dead animal in their own form. Due to his identity with both the lion and the bees, Samson used sympathetic magic based on imitation, expecting the resurrection of the dead lion, in the form of the bees, to ultimately effect his own resurrection after his death. Samson's future ascent to the heavens, followed by his descent back to life on earth, are hinted at by the high number of verbs in the biblical text that stem from the Hebrew roots *'a.l.eh* (ascend, appearing 12 times in the text) and *y.r.d* (descend, appearing 8 times). It should be noted that, although according to the Bible most humans died, were buried, and descended to the underworld (*sheol*), Samson's ascent was considered a possibility by the ancient Israelites. The prophet Elijah 'ascended to the heavens in a storm' (2 Kgs 2:11); and before him, Enoch 'wasn't any more, for God took him' (Gen. 5:24), probably to his abode in the heavens.

Conclusion

In the biblical story the role of the bees arising from the lion's carcass seems insignificant or at least unclear. The present article proposes that underlying the edited and written biblical story of Samson is an orally transmitted ancient pagan myth in which the bees played a crucial role as magical creatures that helped Samson achieve resurrection.

Using the tool of the structural analysis of myth, an opposition was extrapolated between the slain lion and the bees and honey, respectively symbolizing the opposition between death and eternal life. Due to Samson's identity with the lion and the bees, he functioned as the mediator, thereby symbolizing the transformation of death into eternal life. His identity with both the bees and the lion also enabled him to perform a ritual using sympathetic magic. The ritual slaughter of the lion and his resurrection in the form of bees were expected to effect the resurrection of Samson himself upon his death. The myth of Samson proposed here, as it must have been recounted orally by the ancient Israelites, is one expression of their passion for resurrection, and a proof they gave to themselves of its possibility.

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A Taste of Honey: Metaphorizing Nature in Traditional Jewish Art*

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Abstract

The production and consumption of honey have inspired linguistic and visual metaphors in letters, folk customs, and the plastic arts. The images conveying the honey metaphor in medieval and modern Jewish art emphasized the operations with and about honey: the human or animal appetite for it and enjoyment in its consumption, as well as its mysterious production and courageous protection by the bees. The natural phenomenon of bee honey and bodily reactions to it was symbolically projected to represent human intellectual learning. Visual implementations of the honey metaphor in Hebrew books and synagogues and on Jewish ritual objects moralized nature in order to propagate aspiration for divine wisdom.

Keywords

Honey metaphor, bees, visual arts, Judaism, aspiration for wisdom, religious art.

Introduction

Since the prehistoric development of apiculture, the sophisticated behavior of bee swarms producing and storing honey in combs, as well as the prominent qualities of this product, has caused various reflections in human cultures. The natural phenomenon of honey production was

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widely perceived as a metaphor of human values in literature, folk customs, and the plastic arts. Honey and bees have had significant symbolic meaning in Jewish visual culture, including the area of 'traditional' artistic craftsmanship. Reaffirming the common values of both creator and audience, traditional artistic craftsmanship has been important in consolidating a cohesive Jewish community (Shiner 2001; Rodov 2016). The earliest surviving visual evidence of Jewish honey metaphors is found in medieval and early modern Jewish communities in Europe. These communities boasted distinct traditions, enjoyed communal autonomy, and inhabited isolated residential areas (Guggenheim 2004; Cluse 2004, 2009). Nevertheless, they had routine contact with Christians, which created a culture that historians have defined as 'hybrid' (Rosman 2014: 82-110, 154-67). The pre-emancipated Jewish communities in Europe not only nurtured knowledge of Jewish religious literature, language, customs, and folklore, but also encountered religious, ideological, and artistic paradigms of the surrounding Christian culture.¹ This article investigates the emergence and visualization of the Jewish honey metaphor in its manifold contexts.

Metaphor in Context

Culture is a product of and a reflection on physical reality that includes both nature and human corporeality.² Cognitive linguistics has described metaphors that map semantic correspondences between two different conceptual domains as powerful instruments for the interpretation of culture in terms of nature (Lakoff and Johnson 1984; Kövecses 2017). Distinct from the Aristotelian understanding of the metaphor as a matter of language, 'the transference of names from things similar' (Aristotle 1987: 50), the conceptual metaphor may be expressed through various media (Kövecses 2010: 57-66; Danesi 2013). The recipient perceives a metaphor in given historical, cultural, religious, and personal contexts, which connotes diverse mental correspondences that may be traced between conceptual domains (Stern 2000; Kövecses 2017). Peter Burke interpreted moralizing metaphors as projections of social arrangements onto the universe that, if viewed in the context of early modern

1. Since the late eighteenth century, the process of emancipation caused gradually increasing dissolution of cohesive religious communities and the integration of Jews into the surrounding national societies (Sorkin 2019). Jewish traditionalist religious communities endured during the age of Jewish emancipation and survive into the twenty-first century.

2. On the role of embodied experience in human models of reality, see Johnson 2013.

European civilization, were believed to be objective ‘correspondences’ (Burke 1997: 112). My interest is the opposite cultural process: the projection of nature onto human and social behaviors.

Metaphorical elaborations on the consumption of honey expand upon its sweet taste and healing abilities. The sweetness of honey is associated with the food of the gods and supernatural human beings, divine grace, friendliness, love, erotic allure, and apotropaic powers, among others. For ancient Greek philosophers and their followers through the ages, the origin of honey was believed to be celestial (Quiviger 2003). Production of honey inspired reflections on the bees’ diligence in collecting pollen, their ferocity in protecting their honey, on the mysteriously perfect architecture of honeycombs,³ and on the organization of the beehive as an exemplum of ideal social order or a model of well-structured knowledge like that preserved in human memory or in libraries.⁴ The circulation of literary topoi relating to bees and honey is demonstrated by the numerous examples collected by Ralph Dutli (2012) from the ancient writings of Egypt, the Middle East, Greece, and Rome, and include the Indian Rigveda; Hebrew Bible; medieval Christian literature and theology; and modern fiction, poetry, and folklore. Contesting Jewish and Christian theological discourses were formative in the forging of visual metaphors of bees, honey, and its production and consumption in European Jewish art.

Medieval Theology: From Biblical Metaphor to Ritual Performance

Numerous Jewish religious *halakhic* (legislative) references testify to the enduring use of honey as a sweetener in Jewish communities (*‘Devash’* [Honey] 1999). The Hebrew Bible is imbued with accounts of both the use of honey in the legendary past and symbolic perceptions of bee honey.⁵ Tova Forti divided metaphors for honey in biblical wisdom

3. Theories about divine providence or nature’s wisdom associated with bees as ‘intelligent architects’ include Hugh of Saint-Victor (1096–1141), who compared the mental construction of ‘a fortress of faith’ in one’s mind to a honeycomb, from which an allegory is extracted as honey (Taylor 1961: 138).

4. Woolfson (2010) investigated Ancient and Renaissance views of bees, their social organization, and industriousness. Carruthers (2008: 42, 44-47) discussed the honeycomb and beehive as ancient and medieval metaphors for well-structured collections of mental and material records of information. For a historical survey and modern implications of the beehive metaphor on social thought and architecture, see Ramírez 2000.

5. Biblical Hebrew uses the term *DeVaSH* for bee honey as well as for fruit syrup made of dates or grapes. On the biblical nomenclature for honey, see *‘Devash’* [Honey] 1999; Forti 2006: 327; Frymer and Rabinowitz 2007; and James 2016.

literature⁶ into four categories, one of which is of particular interest here: the comparison of the intake of honey to the internalization of wisdom (Forti 2006: 333-36).⁷ The reception of divine revelation is compared with the eating of honey in the Prophecy of Ezekiel (3:3): ‘And He said unto me: “Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee”. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness’.⁸ The prophet was commanded to swallow the words of divine guidance written on the scroll rather than merely read them. The divine commandment permutated the natural bodily process of perceiving information: instead of hearing with his ears or scanning with his eyes, Ezekiel absorbed the narration via his mouth, an organ of speech. The contents are not merely committed to the prophet’s memory; rather, absorbed by his organism they become a component of his body. The book of Proverbs (24:13-14) paralleled the consumption of honey and the learning of divine wisdom: ‘My son, eat thou honey, for it is good, and *nofet* [virgin honey] is sweet to *hikekha* [thy palate]. So know thou wisdom to be unto thy soul [...].’⁹ The gustatory delight is not only a promised reward for those who pursue heavenly wisdom but is also a sensual concomitant of their spiritual enlightenment. According to this tradition, the human body acts as a sign and vehicle for the performance of the commandments, and as an instrument for the acquirement and distribution of knowledge.¹⁰ Jewish believers were expected to govern their carnality rather than suppress it: in the words of Eilberg-Schwartz,

6. The ‘wisdom literature’ defines a genre of ancient texts preoccupied with attaining wisdom, relationships with divinity, personal virtues, and proper social behaviours. The genre includes the biblical books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; see Crenshaw 1998.

7. The other categories Forti (2006) delineated are: Eating honey in measure or beyond any measure as a symbol of restraint and moderation as against overindulgence (336-38); ‘Lips dripping Honey’: a metaphor for temptation and ensnarement (338-39); ‘Honey under the tongue’ and ‘venom under the tongue’ as expressing the ideational antithesis between the pleasant words of the Wise and the evil stratagems of the Wicked (339-41).

8. The Bible is quoted according to the Jewish Publication Society of America English translation (*The Holy Scriptures, according to the Masoretic Text* 1917; hereafter JPS), if not noted otherwise.

9. The term *nofet*, translated in the JPS as ‘honeycomb’, is defined as ‘virgin honey’ in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Online* 2017: s.v. *NoFeT*, and ‘honey that drops’ in Easton (1893: 334). In the JPS, the word *hikekha* (derivative of *hekh*: palate) is translated more generally as ‘thy taste’.

10. For a wide range of scholarly inferences regarding the treatment of the human body in Jewish tradition and experience, see the collections of articles in *People of the Body* (Eilberg-Schwartz 1992) and *The Jewish Body* (Diemling and Veltri 2009).

the 'ideas about knowledge are shaped by ideas about bodies and vice-versa' (1992: 2).

In contrast to the preoccupation of Jewish exegesis with the flavour of honey,¹¹ medieval Christian theologians accentuated the spatial aspect of Ezekiel's metaphor, relating to Scripture and the honeycomb as vessels housing their precious contents—wisdom and honey, respectively. Rhabanus Maurus of Mainz (780–856) expressed this concept in his *De universo* 22.1 (Migne 1864: 594C): '*Item favus Scriptura est divina melle spiritualis sapientiae repleta*' ('Divine Scripture is a honeycomb filled with the honey of spiritual wisdom').¹² Hugh of Saint-Victor likened honey in a honeycomb to sweetness encapsulated in the dry language of the sacred Scriptures (Taylor 1961: 102, 121), implying thereby that unnurtured or profane eyes cannot discern the pleasant spiritual treasure.

The biblical usage of honey as a metaphor for temptation and ensnarement¹³ did not considerably affect post-ancient Jewish thought. In contrast, for many medieval Christian thinkers the sensual pleasure of sweetness was fraught with the danger of sinful carnality. Christian praise for abstinence from gustatory delights is traced back to the late fourth- to mid-fifth-century *apophthegma* (didactic sayings) attributed to hermits in Egypt. One of the stories described an old monk who ate a cake in which his young disciple mistakenly put evil-smelling grease instead of honey. Then 'the old man tortured himself and ate it' as he believed that the disciple's fault was God's will; the tale implies that ascetic self-control of the sense of taste is a godly virtue (Chadwick 1958: 57-58).

Another turn of this aspect of the honey metaphor is evident in the legend about Barlaam and Josaphat that spread widely in many languages (see a survey and bibliography in Levine 2019). The legend describes a man who, being chased by a raging unicorn, clung to a tree to prevent himself falling into the mouth of a fiery dragon, which represented the evils of this world and the horrors of hell. Honey dropping down the branches enticed the protagonist to neglect the mortal dangers to his eternal soul for the sake of carnal pleasure, but his death was inevitable as the tree trunk was being fretted by mice (Jacobs 1896: cxi). In his representation of this story in the carved tympanum of

11. Christian theologians embraced the parallel of the digestion of honey and the learning of wisdom as well; see Carruthers 2008: 209.

12. On honey production by bees and the honeycomb as metaphors for human memory and learning, see Carruthers 2008: 41-42, 44-45, 209.

13. See above, n. 7.

the southern portal of the Baptistry in Parma,¹⁴ Benedetto Antelami (1150–ca. 1230) designed the man's grasp of the tree to be a gesture toward honey, and replaced the honey drops with a clearly visible beehive. Departing from the story that told about the hero clinging to a tree in the pit, the image of a figure standing within the crown of an upright tree in Parma and several more similar medieval illustrations evoked their association with the concept of the heavenly ladder:

To fall victim to imagining that the sweetness of honey (earthly rewards, sensual enjoyment) represents security, which it is not, even for those who have chosen a religious life but without the commitment, is to fail. It is possible to be ejected from the allegorical ladder that one must climb in order to reach bliss. (Davidson 2017: 91)¹⁵

The beehive in Antelami's relief warned visitors of temptations with the power to revoke one's Christian status, thereby exposing the viewer to the perils of mundane life (Glass 2015: 276-80).¹⁶ The image extended the honey metaphor over a tropology, a moralizing allegorical narrative characteristic of medieval Christian biblical exegesis (Reventlow 2010: 307 s.v. 'tropology, tropological').

Commonly interpreted as an admonition against sins, the Christian honey metaphor was never monosemantic. For example, the medieval French theologian Alan de Lille (ca. 1128–ca. 1202), who associated honey with a tropological reading of the Bible, followed the biblical archetype representing acquisition of knowledge as bodily digestion, but restricted the pleasure to the middle level of biblical learning. He defined the basic level—'history' (literary plot)—with easily assimilable 'milk', whereas the sweetness of honey alluded to the pleasure of advanced students who learn moralizing tropologies. In contrast, the highest level—'solid bread of allegory'—is nourishing but not dulcet: true wisdom is presented as a sufficient reward in itself that does not require a delightful relish.¹⁷ De Lille's hierarchy of food implies a spiritual aspect of Christian

14. As the number of illustrations in the current publication is limited, please refer to a photograph published at Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, no. fmlac1002533, www.bildindex.de/document/obj20343485?medium=fmlac1002533&part=1.

15. For John Klimakos' *Heavenly Ladder* (ca. 600) as a framework for understanding the illuminations of Barlaam and Josaphat in Byzantine art, see Hilsdale 2017: 82-84.

16. For more medieval depictions of this apologue, see Porter 1915: 150; Sminé 1993; Pitman and Scattergood 1977; and Hilsdale 2017.

17. He wrote, 'Hoc pane reficiuntur tres viri, sc. majores, mediocres et minores. Minoribus proponuntur lac historiae, mediocribus mel tropologiae, majoribus solidus panis allegoriae' (Three types of men are refreshed by this bread [—the metaphor of a theological reading of the Bible], the big, the middle-sized, and the little. The milk of

corporeality celebrated by the consumption of the sacramental bread during the Eucharist.

A figure climbing a tree (with or without fruit) reappeared in Christian art, from Quattrocento book illustrations in Italy and Germany to Baroque *Emblemata* books in many European languages, to allegorize the Neoplatonic concept of human ascent toward the heavenly source of wisdom.¹⁸

Other expressions of the alluring aspect of honey delegated the role of sinful protagonist to a bear, a beast commonly associated with enjoyably tasting honey and sweet fruit. Medieval Christian theologians endowed bears with the traits of gluttony, greed, and sexual lust (Stauch 1937; Ziolkowski 2011: 634; cf. Emison 1992). In the decoration of entrance portals to churches, a bear's endeavor to reach tree fruit allegorizes sins. Around 1065, an anthropomorphic figure of a bear extending its paw to a tree branch was sculpted on the bronze door of the Cathedral in Augsburg (Stauch 1937: 1442-43; see also Diemer et al. 2013). Decades later, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) traced a parallel between the origins of human and ursine profane desire; she believed that after Adam ate the fruit in Paradise (Gen. 3:17-19), his pristine nature became mundane, and the bear's primordial love similarly changed to lust (Migne 1855: 1316C; see also Kiersnowski 1990: 241-54; Ziolkowski 2011: 634). Elsewhere in Catholic Europe, the image of a lustful bear survived for centuries.¹⁹ Around 1500, Hieronymus Bosch depicted a bear climbing a tree in the Paradise section of his moralizing *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Museo del Prado, Madrid; see Glum 1976: 52),²⁰ and about five years later, a bear ascending a tree laden with fruit was carved above the entrance to the Tarnów Cathedral (Trajdos 1960; Białostocki 1976: 114).²¹

Medieval Jewish interpretations of the honey metaphor focused on the process of attaining wisdom are exemplified by eleventh- and twelfth-century rabbinical comments on Prov. 24:13-14. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (also known as Rashi) reread the verses as an appeal for eagerness in the

history is set before the little; the honey of tropology, before the middle-sized; the solid bread of allegory, for those who are bigger). The Latin text and its translation into English are quoted from de Lubac 2000: 30-31, 250 n. 36).

18. This iconography extends beyond the limited scope of the current article and is a subject of my study in progress.

19. Exceptional is the image of a rampant bear resting on a strawberry tree, on the coat-of-arms of Madrid reportedly since 1222. For the story of the emblem, see Gea Ortigas 1999.

20. Madrid, Museo del Prado, inventory number P002053.

21. See Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, no. fmd461076, www.bildindex.de/document/obj20412942?medium=fmd461076.

study of divine wisdom: ‘*Ke-shem she-atah rodef le’ekhol devash ken teh’e rodef lada’at hokhmah*’ (‘As you pursue eating honey, so be pursuing to know wisdom’) (RP Rashi: Prov. 24:13-14).²² Abraham ibn Ezra endorsed the similarity of spiritual and gastronomic delights: the wisdom is sweet to one’s soul as honey is sweet to one’s palate (RP Abraham ibn Ezra: Prov. 24:13-14). Maimonides (1921: 42-43) scrutinized the affinity of bodily and spiritual nutrition:

[...] the verb ‘to eat’ [‘A-KH-L] is figuratively used in the sense of ‘acquiring wisdom’, ‘learning’; in short, for all intellectual perceptions. These preserve the human form (intellect) constantly in the most perfect manner, in the same way as food preserves the body in its best condition. Comp[are] ‘Come ye, buy and eat’ [Isa. 35:1]; ‘Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good’ [Isa. 35:2]; ‘It is not good to eat much honey’ [Prov. 25:27]; ‘My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul’ [Prov. 24:13-14]. This figurative use of the verb ‘to eat’ in the sense of ‘acquiring wisdom’ is frequently met with in the Talmud, e.g., ‘Come, eat fat meat at Raba’s’ [*Baba Batra 22a*]; comp[are]: ‘All expressions of “eating” and “drinking” found in this book (of Proverbs) refer to wisdom’, or, according to another reading, ‘to the Law’. (RP *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*: on Eccl. 3:13; English translation: Maimonides 1904: 40)

Even earlier, Midrash *Tankhuma* (a collection of Jewish exegetical legends edited around the ninth century) associated the nectar flavour of the purest honey with the experience of the Israelites who witnessed the mystery of revelation of the divine law at Mount Sinai:

‘When they stood in front of Mount Sinai and said “All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey”’ [Exod. 24:7]. At the same time, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said to them, ‘honey and milk under your tongue’ [Song of Songs 4:11]; You have loved the Torah and your life is given to you as a gift, and given to Moses. (RP *Tankhuma: Ki Tisa 9:9*)²³

The eleventh-century *Mahzor* (prayer book) *Vitry* indicated a twofold evolution of the concept of a sweet reward for wisdom. First, honey is a delicacy of the righteous in Paradise (Simḥah of Vitry 1963: 735 sign 532), echoing Greek myths of nectar as sustenance of the immortals (see Roscher 1883; Wright 1917; Clay 1981). Secondly, the *Mahzor* testifies to the symbolic use of honey in Jewish ritual (Simḥah of Vitry 1963: 628

22. The rabbinical sources are taken from *The Bar-Ilan Responsa Project* (version 26) 2018, hereafter RP.

23. This Midrashic discourse also identified the *devash* (honey) of the Torah with *nofet zufim* (Ps. 16:24), being virgin honey in a *zuf* (Hebrew, singular of *zufim*: store of honey, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Online* 2017: c.v. זUF I), and praised by *nofet* as ‘the best honey in the world’ (RP *Tankhuma: Ki Tisa 9:9*).

sign 508). At the Festival of Shavuot,²⁴ initiation ceremonies for children of five, who had begun learning the Hebrew alphabet as the basis for Torah studies, featured honey spread over letters written on a board, and the boys were lavished with honey cakes and sweets.²⁵ A wider application of the honey simile was proposed by Rabbi Jacob ben Abba Mari Anatoli, a thirteenth-century Jewish scholar.²⁶ He reported that the ceremony of initiation of pupils included drinking milk and licking honey, and explained that honey implies the pleasure of the faithful who not only study the Law but also observe all its commandments (Jacob ben Abba Mari Anatoli 1866: 121v).

The initiation ritual is not the first case of an education metaphor that connects honey with perplexing contents being internalized by students. Lucretius' (99–55 BCE) Epicurean teaching to 'cure the disease of ignorance' employed a parable of a cup ringed with honey to disguise the bitter taste of a salutary remedy given to children (*De Rerum Natura* 1.936-50).²⁷ For Hugh of Saint-Victor honey symbolized a reward for exhausting spiritual work (Taylor 1961: 102, 121). Distinct from them, the Jewish metaphor downgraded the contraposition between the process and contents of education: both were presented as enjoyable. This emphasis echoes the concept of 'Torah study for its own sake', postulated in the Mishnaic tractate *Ethics of the Fathers* as the most exalted level of intimacy between the scholar and divine wisdom (RP *Avot*. 6:1).

Just as the Jewish pupil's initiation coincided with the feast celebrating the theophany at Mount Sinai, so too the biblical verses quoted during the rituals represented personal initiation into Torah studies as a recurrence of the biblical mystery of the Torah's revelation and of Ezekiel's learning of wisdom as consuming honey (Marcus 1996: 54-55;

24. In Jewish rabbinic tradition, *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks; Pentecost) commemorates the Sinaitic theophany, which occurred on the fiftieth day after the Exodus.

25. The Jewish rituals of pupils' initiation, including the tasting of honey, honey cakes, and sweets which has been examined in depth by Marcus (1996, 2001) and Kogman-Appel (2012: 98-104), and discussed in various contexts by Cohen 1989; Kanarfogel 1992: 116-17; Swartz 1996: 47; Goldberg 1998; and Arazi 2006: 95-99.

26. Jacob ben Abba Mari Anatoli was a translator and biblical exegete well educated in classical philosophy, Arabic scientific thought, and Christian theology, and who enjoyed the royal patronage of Frederick II Hohenstaufen; see Roth 1977: 67-80.

27. For the Latin original and English translation by Hugh Andrew Johnstone Munro, see Lucretius 2010: 42. I am grateful to Kirke M. Otto, who kindly pointed me to the semblance of this parable and medieval Jewish alphabet-learning practices. On the didactic meaning of the story, see Berns 1976: 491-92; Thury 1987: 294; and Holm 2013.

Kogman-Appel 2012: 98-104).²⁸ The literary metaphor thereby became a performance scenario, in which the pupils embodied the mystery of ingesting letters and experiencing their honey taste.

Book Illustrations: From Performance to the Visual Allegory

Visual evidence of honey and its symbolism in medieval Jewish art is meager. The only surviving portrayal of the initiation ceremony that reportedly involved tasting honey or eating honey cakes decorates folio 131r in the so-called Leipzig Mahzor, a monumental Hebrew prayer book produced in Worms around 1310 (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Voller 1102/I; Narkiss 1964: 29). This painting and the image of the Sinaitic revelation on the opposite folio 130v (Narkiss 1964: 28) illuminate a *piyyut* 'The Lord who Taught Me', a liturgical hymn recited on the day of the Shavuot Festival, which celebrates the reception of the Torah. Marcus (1996) and Kogman-Appel (2012: 104) have pointed out multiple formal and symbolic correspondences between Moses transmitting the Tablets of the Law to the Israelites and the teacher introducing the pupils to the studies of Mosaic Law. The initiation ceremony is depicted in detail, but the licking of honey-coated letters is absent. The composition of the hymn may allude to the alphabet that the children learn in the ceremony; the initial letter of each row, enlarged by the scribe, is a consequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The image of cakes in the pupils' hands conveys the concept of reunion with divine wisdom through the process of digestion. In the painting, the yellow roundels prominently displayed by the Jewish children emulate the elevation of the Host in the church, claiming thereby an antithesis to the Eucharistic reunion with Divinity. Only the beholders initiated in Jewish customs of regaling young pupils with honey could identify the depicted round pastry with the honey cakes.²⁹ Nevertheless, although the ritual and its symbolism preoccupied the mind of the illuminator, he made no clear reference to the sensual delight of honey.

28. For more aspects of mythologization of the ceremonial introduction to education in medieval Ashkenazi communities as a reenactment of the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, see Goldin 1996: 173-74.

29. On the earlier traditions of eating cakes as a ritual symbolizing spiritual nourishment, and the representation of cakes in the Leipzig Mahzor in the light of Jewish polemics with the Christian dogmata relating to the Eucharistic consecrated bread, see Cohen 1989; Marcus 1996: 83-101; and Kogman-Appel 2012: 102.

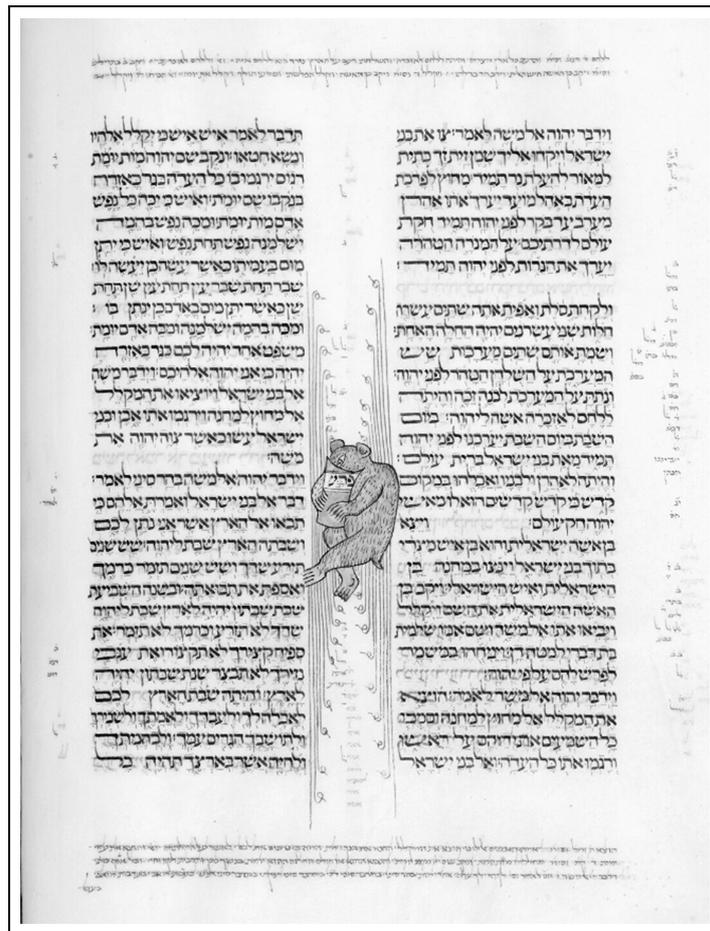


Figure 1. *Bear with Beehive*, sign marking the beginning of pericope *Be-har* (Lev. 25:1-26:2). Kennicott Bible, La Coruña, 1476. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Kennicott 1, fol. 73v. © Oxford, Bodleian Library.

Jewish visual manifestations of honey symbolism emerged in late-fifteenth-century Hebrew books illuminated in the Iberian Peninsula. They originate in the image of a bear in engravings attributed to the Master of Playing Cards, active in southwestern Germany from the 1430s to the 1450s.³⁰ The Master's playing cards became a popular model for zoomorphic marginalia in German manuscripts and incunabula. In contrast to the Master's other animal figures that either stand, sit, or rest on the ground, the bear appears suspended in air, with its limbs rendered in a climbing motion. The copyists usually motivated the bear's fluctuating posture by attaching a stem which the bear climbs (Lehmann-Haupt 1966: 6-7, 9), but none depicted honey or a beehive. The bear from the German playing cards was also replicated in a Hebrew manuscript in Spain. This image marks the beginning of two pericopes in the so-called

30. See a reproduction at Geiserberg 1905: plate 5. Online at Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, no. fd 148 873, www.bildindex.de/document/obj30108413.

Kennicott Bible produced in La Coruña in 1476 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Kennicott 1; see Narkiss, Cohen-Mushlin, and Tcherikover 1982: 1:155-59). In the mark on fol. 58r, the illuminator reversed the bear and added vertical strokes resembling a plant in the background (Narkiss, Cohen-Mushlin, and Tcherikover 1982: 2:160 fig. 479). There is no intelligible relation of this image to the adjacent pericope, *Pekudei* (Hebrew: The Accounts [of the Tabernacle]; Exod. 38:21–40:38), which detailed the construction of the Tabernacle without mentioning either bears or honey. The turn to honey symbolism occurred in a further modification of the model, the pericope mark on fol. 73v (Fig. 1) that depicts a bear sinking its snout into a cylindrical vessel, likely a beehive. The honey-eater flags the pericope *Be-har* ('In the Mount'; Lev. 25:1–26:2) that begins with the words: 'And the Lord spoke unto Moses in mount Sinai' (Lev. 25:1). The choice and pictorial amendment of the ursine image might have been inspired by the symbolic link between the taste of honey and the experience of the Sinaitic revelation of divine wisdom.



Figure 2. Abraham d'Ortas, Decorative frame, woodcut. Jacob ben Asher, *Arba'ah Turim: Orah Hayyim*, Leiria: Samuel d'Ortas, 1495.

In Hebrew printed books, a bear licking honey from a beehive debuted in the ornamental frame that enclosed the initial page of the *Orah Hayyim* (Path of Life), a chapter relating to prayer and the synagogue, in the

Arba'ah Turim (Four Columns) printed by Samuel d'Ortas in Leiria, Portugal, in 1495 (Fig. 2). This popular code of Jewish Law composed by Jacob ben Asher (Germany and Spain, 1270–ca. 1340), was disseminated in numerous manuscripts and printed copies (Galinsky 2004, 2008). The woodcut frame of the *Orah Hayyim* attributed to Samuel d'Ortas' son, Abraham, pioneered Hebrew printed book decoration produced by Jewish designers in the Iberian Peninsula. In his frame, Abraham illustrated the didactic allegory of four animals (leopard, eagle, deer, and lion) from the Ethics of the Fathers (RP *Avot* 5:20) quoted in the beginning of the chapter. He placed three of them in three corners of the frame, but moved the fourth one, the leopard, to the upper center. By depicting the bear in a corner, Abraham ascribed to it the role of a fifth allegory that visually complements rather than merely illustrates the text.

The case of the Leiria *Orah Hayyim* testifies to the process of invention of a visual allegory via reinterpretation of an alien formal model in the light of Jewish symbolism. Nowhere in the book do we find any mention of a bear, but the beast was commonly associated with appetite for sweets. In the spirit of zoomorphic allegories parading in the introduction to the *Orah Hayyim*, the bear's desire was considered an allusion to the pious Jew's zeal for Torah scholarship. In order to accentuate this symbolism, Abraham d'Ortas emphasized the bear's tongue licking honey.

The history of the Jewish honey metaphor in the Iberian Peninsula ended with the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal in 1497. Biblical and patristic metaphors of the Holy Scriptures as honey reemerged in Spanish illustrated books much later. This occurred after the arrival in Spain of some copies of *Biblia del oso* (Bible of the Bear) named so for the image of a bear on its title page,³¹ a Spanish translation of the Bible directly from the Hebrew and Greek by the Protestant Casiodoro de Reina, published in Basel in 1569 (Díaz de Bustamante 2004; Mediano 2016: 92-93). For his edition, Reina reused a woodcut printer's mark produced by Hans Widitz in 1543 for Matthias Apiarius (alias Biener; 1500–1554). The bees, a pun on the printer's name, attack the bear as it reaches out to retrieve honey from a beehive on a tree.³² In Widitz' woodcut, the bees feeding on honey from a book with the Hebrew

31. The title page of the *Biblia del oso* (*La Biblia: que es, los Sacros Libros del Vieio y Nueuo Testamento*) (trans. Casiodoro de Reina; Basel: Thomas Guarinus, 1569); Universidade de Coimbra digital collection, no. b17724223: digitalis-dsp.uc.pt/bg1/UCBG-2-9-4-8/UCBG-2-9-4-8_item1/P9.html.

32. The confrontation between a raging bear and bees defending their hive is the plot of a fable ascribed to Aesop, 'De urso et apibus', first published in Venice in 1495 (Valla 1495: Biii[r], fable 38).

Tetragrammaton symbolized the faithful who learned Scripture from a text translated truthfully from its divinely revealed source (Muller 1994: 333-35; Wilkinson 2015: 374-75). This allegorical meaning of the emblem likely served as the main attraction for the publisher of the Spanish Bible. Unlike the Jewish topos of a bear's virtuous aspiration for the sweetness of wisdom, the Protestant image inherited the medieval moralizing vision of the bear as a vicious sinner.

Sacred Spaces and Ritual Objects: Expansion of the Allegory

A revival of ursine honey hunters occurred in wall and ceiling paintings in east-European synagogues from the eighteenth century on.³³ The earliest known adoption of this pattern in synagogue art is bear cubs climbing a tree, barely discernible in an old photograph of the ceiling of the synagogue in Khodoriv (then Chodorów; decorated in 1714 and destroyed in World War I; Fig. 3). Synagogue painters transposed the allegory of bears enjoying honey as Jews studying the Torah onto the symbolic image of ursine figures climbing a tree to attain wisdom or redemption (Wischnitzer 1964: 131). Ida Huberman noted the distinction between the bears climbing trees, which she associated with the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, and the bear peacefully sitting within a flourishing bush, interpreted as a sign of messianic times (Huberman 1988: 30, 83-84, plates. 67-70).



Figure 3. Israel ben Mordecai Lissnitsky, *Bears Seeking Honey*, ceiling painting (detail), 1713/14. Synagogue, Khodoriv. Photograph: Alois Breier, ca. 1913. © Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

33. On this art, see Wischnitzer 1964: 125-54; Huberman 1988; Hubka 2003; Piechotka and Piechotka 2015: 127-236.



Figure 4. Anonymous student of the Vitebsk Art School, *Bears Seeking Honey*, drawing, 1926. Copy of a fragment of Hayim ben Isaac Segal's ceiling painting (1740) in the synagogue in Mogilev on the Dnieper. The National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus.

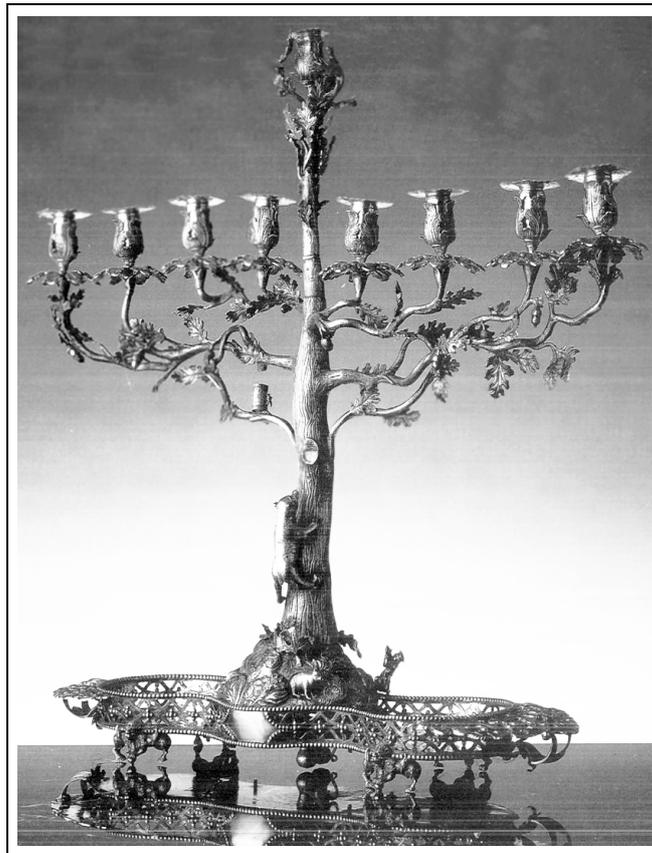


Figure 5. *Bear Seeking Honey*, Hanukkah Lamp, silver. Lviv, ca. 1800, © Los Angeles, Skirball Cultural Center, Skirball Museum, SCC 27.100. Photograph: Susan Einstein.

Both climbing- and sitting-bear images were reiterated in synagogue paintings and other media. The anthropomorphism of bear bodies facilitated allegories of human virtues in zoomorphic images. This also enabled artists to avoid depicting human figures, which were rarely tolerated in medieval and early modern synagogue decoration. To ensure that the beholder understood that the bear climbed for honey, Israel ben Mordecai Lissnitsky in the Khodoriv synagogue (Fig. 3) and Hayim Segal in the synagogue in Mogilev on the Dnieper (Fig. 4) (Wischnitzer 1959; 1964: 141-44) similarly depicted beehives on trees. A Hanukkah lamp produced in Lviv (then Lemberg) around 1800 demonstrates an unusual implementation of this motif (Fig. 5). Here, the bear that climbs toward a barrel or beehive on a branch of an oak-shaped lamp's trunk may be considered part of a sylvan scene. In all cases, those aware of biblical parables, Jewish scriptural exegesis, and synagogue art could perceive these images as metaphors for religious virtue.

*Gershom Ha-Cohen's Edition of the Exodus:
Apian Sweetness and Sting*

Although the bee metaphor appeared frequently in medieval Christian theology and iconography and became increasingly popular in Renaissance art and literature, it was only rarely depicted in Jewish literature and art. A unique Jewish iconographic representation of bees (Fig. 6) can be found on the title page of the book of Exodus published by Gershom Ha-Cohen in Prague in 1518. The frame enclosing the book's enlarged initial word *Ve'eleh* ('Now these are') and the beginning of the first chapter is an assemblage of woodcut panels that differ in style. Two narrow panels on the sides, a wider one in the upper center, and a broad bottom piece depict a portal containing architectural parts and plants inhabited with putti, mermaids, and animals. All of these are rendered as dense ornaments set against a black background in the transitional, Gothic-to-Renaissance style typical of early sixteenth-century Bohemian and German printed books (Wengrov 1967; Sixtová 2012). In contrast, simpler linear drawings on the white background style are the insertions, which may have been customized for this edition (Wengrov 1967: 16, 66, 92, 127; Metzger and Metzger 1985: 145-46; Putík 1993: 27-34). Among those are two small panels flanking the book's title that contain portrayals of a bear playing a horn and a monkey staring at its reflection in a mirror. The human behaviors of the bear and monkey and the anthropomorphic appearance of their figures testify to the allegorical character of these animal intrusions, in contrast to the heraldic animals in other sections.



Figure 6. Initial page of the *Book of Exodus*,
Prague: Gershom Ha-Cohen, 1518.

In both images, almost identical drawings of a bee flying downward appeared in the upper left corner of each panel. On the left, the bee hovers above a bear, meets its gaze and seems to be enchanted by the bear's music. On the right, the bee that touches the occiput of the monkey obviously stings the latter. The bee's anger with the monkey may be explained in the context of coeval and older Christian iconography, whereas monkeys gazing into mirrors symbolized vanity, folly, and lust (Janson 1952: 199-286). Mechthild of Magdeburg grouped a monkey and a bear as kindred allegories for sin challenging the soul.³⁴

34. 'Sie hat den äffen der weit von sich geworfen/ Si[e] hat den beren der unküschi überwunden' (Mechthild von Magdeburg 1869: 17 [XXXVIII]) ('She [the soul] has thrown the ape of wordiness away from her;/ She has overcome the bear of fornication' [author's translation]). The source is quoted and discussed by Janson (1952: 43, 66 n. 103, 263).

Yet, in the Prague Exodus, the bee's amicability toward the bear signals that the latter is an antithesis of the monkey. As in the case of the bear with the beehive in the Leiria *Oraḥ Ḥayyim* (Fig. 3), a bear playing for a bee may be a positive allegory representing the diligent student of biblical wisdom.

Furthermore, like the pair of climbing bears in the Kennicott Bible manuscript (folia 58r and 73v [Fig. 1]), the bear and monkey in the Prague printed Bible (Fig. 6) also decorate the book of Exodus, without having been mentioned in the text. The visual evidence is too sporadic to affirm that these animals refer to the Sinaitic revelation narrative. Neither can we assert that the juxtaposition of the bear, monkey, and bees with the other parts of the Prague Exodus' title page decoration connotes additional symbolic meanings. Nevertheless, the supposed moralizing ambiguity of the apian honey and sting has its roots in earlier Jewish discourse. Rabbi Joseph ben Moses of Bavaria (1423–ca. 1490) contended:

[...] and bee honey is a likeness of justice, for [the bees] sometimes take revenge, as proved by the verses, and what comes forth from them is sweetness. This is a sign of transition from the attribute of judgement to the attribute of mercy. (Author's translation of Joseph ben Moses 1903: 124)

The proof of the bee's abilities lies, for Joseph ben Moses, in the text: 'what comes forth from them is sweetness', which refers to Samson's bee riddle in Judg. 14:14: 'and out of the strong came forth sweetness'. Scripture was given priority over human experience in explaining the nature of bees, whose creation was interpreted as God's moralizing message to humankind. Joseph invoked the symbolism of bees in describing the eating of honey as an omen for a good new year. Meditations on divine judgment and pleas for divine mercy, dual attributes of God, are nodal in the liturgy of the Jewish New Year and subsequent Days of Repentance and the Day of Atonement (Goodman 1971).

The honey-vs.-sting topos recorded by Joseph ben Moses likely inspired the dualistic presentation of bees on the title page of Gershom Ha-Cohen's Exodus. The bees' divergent attitudes toward the bear and the monkey deliver a didactic introduction to Scripture: an amicable bee promises the sweetness of honey to a pious scholar, whereas the sting of a rigorous bee punishes a negligent pupil for his folly and vanity. The apian metaphor conveys a homiletic lesson on divine Providence: bees are agents of both God's mercy and God's justice.

Conclusions

The honey metaphor in the art of the Jewish minority in Christian Europe epitomizes the evolution of a trope through periods, cultures, and media. The metaphor projects the process of bodily digestion of substances onto the mental realm. The sweetness and digestibility of honey were linked to the delight of acquisition and comprehension of knowledge. The Bible associated the contents with divinely revealed wisdom, thereby consecrating the metaphor for the faithful readers.

Sharing a sense of the sanctity of the Bible and parallels between intellectual activities and bodily digestion, Jews and Christians of medieval Europe nonetheless expressed divergent attitudes to the symbolism of gustatory pleasure. Medieval Christian theologians detached the corporeal relish from religious piety and transmuted the honey metaphor into a moralizing allegory. Christian artists adopted honey and beehives as symbols of sinful lure and depicted a vicious honey hunter, either human or ursine. The latter, a wild beast thirsty for honey, was an even more illuminating personification of a carnal sin. Later historical evidence proves that the nature of the honey metaphor was conceptual, crossing the borders of verbal, visual, and performative media.

Jews engaged with the biblical metaphor in a ritual of passage. Pupils introduced to Torah studies were conceived of as the Israelites receiving the Torah at Sinai, whereas sweet honey represented the immediate and tangible reward of acquiring knowledge of the divine Law. The earliest known Jewish visual metaphors of honey come from late fifteenth-century Spain and Portugal and early-sixteenth-century Prague. The Jewish visualization of the honey metaphor utilized the Christian visual allegory of bears. Images of bears climbing trees for honey spread widely in eastern European synagogues in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Paradoxically, imagery conveying the honey metaphor in medieval and modern Jewish art portrayed honey containers, producers, guardians, and hunters—but no honey *per se*. Indeed, artists not well versed in the illusionistic realism may have felt unable to render a recognizable representation of honey's amorphous state.

Although neither Judaism nor Christianity are clearly delineated entities whose tenets may be summarized independently of their epoch, region, society, and personalities, the different implications of similar metaphors of nature reveal distinct principles propagated by each religion over space and time. The Jewish visual manifestations of the honey metaphor emanate from Catholic-dominated countries or countries with significant Catholic presence alongside other Christian movements. Despite theological differences, various Churches maintained that the

Passion of Christ served as an exemplum of carnal suffering and a model of faithful imitation, and they supposed that the human body 'exerts a malign influence over the believer and his religious devotions' (Weinstein 2009: 17). Most probably, this stance toward the body implies the blame placed on appetite for honey on carnal vice in the selected Christian images and texts. The Jewish interpretation of the honey metaphor accentuates the discrepancy between the approaches to corporeality of the two religions. The textual and honey metaphor entangle the images of Jews as both 'People of the Book' and 'People of the Body' (cf. Eilberg-Schwartz 1992: 1-46): the natural phenomenon of bee honey and bodily reactions to it was projected onto the process of human intellectual learning. Visual implementations of the honey metaphor in Hebrew books and synagogues and on Jewish ritual objects moralized nature to propagate the aspiration for divine wisdom.

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The Bees of Rome: Representing Social and Spiritual Transition in Victorian Poetry

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Abstract

In Book VI of the *Aeneid*, Virgil used bees to figure human spirits in the Underworld. This was not the earliest association of bees with death and the afterlife, but it was the first such link in European literature. Virgil's bees figured those spirits who would become Aeneas' descendants, future citizens of Rome. This moment in Pagan mythology had a remarkable literary afterlife in the work of (among others) Dante, Milton, Tennyson, Browning, C.G. Rossetti, and Michael Field, for each of whom (according to his or her religious faith) the bees were variously linked with Christ, Lucifer, France, Rome, the Saints, and both personal and national spiritual transition. Elucidating apian allusions in these poets' works, I explain how the bees became poetical figures for social and spiritual upheaval (at once dangerous and creative) and for the vital presence of the non-human (or angelic) in spiritual life.

Keywords

Bees, Virgil, Dante, Tennyson, Catholicism, Anglo-Catholicism, Browning, Christina Rossetti, Michael Field.

Introduction

The alterity of insects has long been registered in human art and culture.¹ One aspect of that association can be found in ancient connections

1. Christopher Hollingsworth (2001) offered readings of the insect metaphor from Homer onward. In Chapter 4, he examined the role insects have had in cultural and literary depictions of foreign 'Others'.

drawn between bees and the spirit world.² Bees were linked specifically to reincarnation and to the heavens—realms of what might now be called radically ‘other’ modes of being—in ancient Egypt, India, and in the early cultures of Greece and Rome (Ransome [1937] 2004: 32, 48, 106). Such connections also figure in European literature, where they form part of a broader history which links bees topically to ideal forms of human society, political conquest, and sexual love.³ Bees appear in ancient Greek literary fragments as figures of the lyric poet, and they have a yet longer association with the genre of epic and the work of the epic simile, starting with Homer’s *Iliad*. In two books of the *Iliad* (II and XII) bees provide the primary image in extended similes depicting the nature of human society and the value of human unity amid diversity (II, 84-93; XII, 167-70). The poet Virgil famously imitated and adapted Homer’s bee similes, and in doing so changed the bees’ association from Greek to Trojan, and from the homely or familiar to the unfamiliar and other-worldly. In *Aeneid* I Virgil used a bee simile to describe how those building the city of Carthage appeared to Aeneas. In *Aeneid* VI, Aeneas visited his father, Anchises, in the underworld and was shown a crowd of spirits, likened to bees, who were being readied for reincarnation to the human world (I quote the passage below). The spirits would one day become Aeneas’ descendants, citizens of the newly founded Rome. Where Homer linked the bees to Greek communities and households, Virgil used the harmonious social identity of the bees to represent not the Greek invaders of Troy, but, first, a society alien to Aeneas, whose order and control he admired, in Book I, and, secondly, the future citizens of Rome (as well as linking bees to the spirits awaiting reincarnation in *Aeneid* VI, they are again compared to Roman citizens in *Aeneid* XII). Together, the bees in Virgil’s *Georgics* and *Aeneid* depict well-organised human societies, the power of community, and, most importantly, the life and identity of the nation that would one day become

2. See, for example, Pliny, *Natural History* X.xi.30-31). Virgil began *Georgics* IV: ‘Next I will discourse on Heaven’s gift, the honey from the skies’ (1-2), and later remarked that, blessed with ‘divine intelligence’ (220), bees do not die but instead ‘fly unto the ranks of the stars’ (224-25).

3. Important examples of the symbolic function and associations of bees in European classical literature include: Homer, *Iliad* II.84-93, XII.167-70, mentioned above; Virgil, *Georgics* IV, and *Aeneid* I.430-36, VI.703-709, XII.583-92; fragments in the *Greek Anthology* (Paton 1916–18), 2.69, 2.108, 7.13, 7.34, and 16.305, and in Pindar (e.g. *Fragment* 152), connecting poets to bees; and Theocritus *Idylls* I, III, V, VII, VIII, IX, XIX (which makes a famous link between ‘Love’, or Cupid, and the bee), and XXII. Virgil’s *Eclogues*, which include several passing references to bees, also helped subsequent poets to connect their work with the politics of the pastoral literary tradition.

modern Italy. And they figure our encounters with the spirit world and with alterity. The legacy of all these associations can be found in nineteenth-century British poetry, as part of Victorian literature's own negotiation of its evolving national and spiritual identity and its constructive recognition of diverse social beliefs. The readings in this article address some Victorian poetic adaptations of the association between bees and the spirit world in particular: adaptations which connected bees with both ancient and modern Rome, and (directly or indirectly) with Catholicism.

The link Virgil made between bees and the spirit world is the first of its kind in European literature. This particular literary connection developed a remarkable afterlife in later poetry, making its way through the work of Dante Alighieri and John Milton, among others, and into the work of the nineteenth-century poets that are my primary subject, including Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Christina Rossetti, and 'Michael Field' (pseudonym of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper).⁴ The allusions and associations I elucidate in this article are, then, only part of a larger story that might be told; and what I have called here the 'bees of Rome' have sometimes only an indirect connection to the representation of Catholicism. But whether the links made between bees and Rome were direct or indirect, positive or negative, they appear to have provided poets with a way of thinking about not only personal spiritual questions but also the social and ethical troubles of their times—among those, the question of women's education, the spread of religious doubt, the rise of Anglo-Catholicism (following the Tractarian philosophy of members of the Oxford movement), and the social role of art, which itself developed a challenging new relation to the Church as a means of touching people's humanity amid religious division and social uncertainty.⁵ What follows is an outline of the creative diversity bees offered to poets through their early links with Rome and with, specifically, a moment in the *Aeneid* defined by national and spiritual upheaval. By revealing the intertextual richness that lies behind the representations of bees in nineteenth-century poetry, the article shows some of the ways

4. James Whaler (1932) traced the evolution of literary bee similes, from Homer to Milton.

5. Members of the Oxford movement argued that Anglicanism was one branch of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and that Anglican traditions should be reviewed accordingly. They wrote a series of 'Tracts for the Times' (between 1833 and 1841), from which their philosophy derived the name 'Tractarianism'. They were associated with the rise of Anglo-Catholicism, and many prominent Tractarians later converted to Roman Catholicism. For a good history of the Oxford Movement, see Chadwick 1960.

bees have enabled poets to think about human encounters with religious and cultural otherness. The article therefore serves as a case study in how the literary tradition, with its fundamental activity of alluding to and yet transforming earlier texts and myths, works out the relations between religious thinking and the natural world.

In 1847, Alfred Tennyson published a long poem called *The Princess* (Tennyson 1987: 2:185-296). Set in modern-day England on a gentleman's country estate, it presents us with seven young men, on vacation from university, who made up a story about higher education for women. In the story (embedded within the poem's frame narrative), a Princess called Ida refused to be contracted in marriage to the Prince of a neighbouring kingdom and instead founded a university exclusively for women: men enter on pain of death. The Prince, not to be put off, dressed up in women's clothes (along with two male friends) and infiltrated the university in the hope of winning Ida back. By the end of the story, war had broken out, the Princess's army had won, but the women's university had been turned into a hospital for the ailing male soldiers. The following poem (of which I give only the opening and closing lines) is read by Ida to the Prince, as he lay on his sick bed.⁶ The lyric is spoken by a shepherd, who is calling a maid to come down from the mountain and join him in the valley (the idea being that this echoes the Prince's wish for Ida to join him in marriage); the lyric ends with a line about bees which has become famous among literary scholars for its rich mimetic effect:

Come down, O maid, from yonder height:
 What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang)
 [...]
 So waste not thou; but come, for all the vales
 Await thee; azure pillars of the hearth
 Arise to thee; the children call, and I
 Thy shepherd pipe, and sweet is every sound,
 Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is sweet;
 Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
 The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
 And murmuring of innumerable bees.

(Tennyson 1987: 2:286-88, ll. 177-78, 200-207)

For many years, critics have discussed the sounds of Tennyson's poems as an important part of his aesthetic achievement. The last line mimics or copies the sound of bees by creating a murmuring, humming sound with its tumbling consonants, which is thought to be exemplary (Ricks 1989:

6. For a reading of the many allusive bees in this poem, see Wright 2015.

193; Leighton 2010: 327). This is a poem about seduction, and critics have suggested that the sounds of the last line constitute a kind of aesthetic seduction: a pleasing sound that might distract the reader from the moral implications of the scene. So why does Tennyson use the sound of the bees in this way? Why are these bees in the valley with the male speaker? And what might happen to the maid if she goes into the valley as the shepherd wishes? Tennyson never tells the reader. But if we can hear the allusion to Virgil in these lines, then we can speculate.

In nineteenth-century England, educated young men would have been familiar with Virgil's *Aeneid* in the original Latin. Here is a translation of the passage which likens the spirits to bees; they are Aeneas' future descendants, set to become the citizens of Rome:

Aeneas sees a sequestered grove and rustling forest thickets, and the river Lethe drifting past those peaceful homes. About it hovered peoples and tribes unnumbered; even as when, in the meadows, in cloudless summertime, bees light on many-hued blossoms and stream round lustrous lilies and all the fields murmur with the humming.

In Latin:

Interea videt Aenesa in valle reducta
Seclusum nemus et virulta sonantia silvae
Lethaeumque, domos placidas qui praenatat, amnem.
hunc circum innumerae gentes populique volabant;
ac veluti in pratis ubi apes aestate serena
floribus insidunt variis et candida circum
lilia fundatur, strepit omnis murmure campus.

(Virgil 1999: VI, 703-709)

Virgil likened the 'innumerable peoples' (*innumerae gentes*, or 'tribes unnumbered') to bees which made the fields of Hades murmur with their humming (*murmure*). This is where Tennyson first heard the murmuring of innumerable bees. The valley in 'Come down, O maid' is presented as a romantic idyll and is linked to the idea of marriage (the Prince's proposal to the Princess in the story which frames the lyric); this valley is a place, the poem implies, that a woman might like to live. But by alluding to Virgil in this way, Tennyson hid in this seemingly romantic lyric a literary reference to the underworld, to the dead, and to the future of the Roman Empire. More troubling still, it was an allusion that, by this point in European literary history, could also bear reference to Hell.

The poet John Milton adapted Virgil's image of the bees in 1667. And Milton, too, had put his bees in the underworld, though not in a Pagan underworld but a Christian one. Milton, adapting Virgil, compared

Lucifer and the recently fallen angels to innumerable bees in Book I of *Paradise Lost* (Milton 1998: ll. 338, 767-96). If Tennyson's educated readers could hear *this* allusive element of Tennyson's line, then Tennyson had successfully given his seemingly delightful valley a link not only to the Pagan underworld but also to Milton's Hell. If 'Come down, O maid' was meant to depict a romantic idyll and to imply a future marriage, it also hid within its literary texture a potentially sinister joke about marriage as a hellish condition and the foundation for patriarchal empire.⁷

But this was not the only appearance of bees in *The Princess*: Tennyson also linked Princess Ida to a bee and her university to a hive (Tennyson 1987: 2:201, l. 132; 223, ll. 97-98).⁸ And, at the end of the poem, in the frame narrative, he had one of his characters make a connection between Ida's university and the recent revolts and revolutions in France. The character in question (Walter, a 'Tory member's elder son'—the son of a conservative Member of Parliament) compared the idea of a university for women to the craziness (in his view) of revolution. He spoke with displeasure about what he called the 'Revolts, republics, [and] revolutions' of France, and he referred to the French as 'Like our wild Princess with as wise a dream' (Tennyson 1987: 2:295, ll. 65, 69). He compared, in other words, the idea of women's access to higher education with what, from his political perspective, was the wrongheadedness of revolution and republicanism.

The connection with France also suggested links between bees and Catholicism. During the early years of the nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte adopted the symbol of the bee as a strategic element of his own self-presentation. In paintings from this period by artists including François Gérard, Robert Lefèvre, and Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon was depicted wearing notably regal-looking coronation robes richly embroidered with golden bees.⁹ Combined with their literary legacy from Virgil onward, and their association with the founding of Rome, the bees were a convenient image for Napoleon: a sign of the Imperium (in the broad sense that poets too might use the term), a centre of power, literal or symbolic.¹⁰ Napoleon's golden bees could represent the idea of a

7. On the sexual politics of Tennyson's poetry, see Shaw 1988 and Wright 2015.

8. See further discussion in Wright 2015: 253.

9. The association of bees with France continued later into the century. Examples include reports of 'French Bees Swarming for London' on the occasion of Louis Napoleon's state visit to London in *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* (Lloyd 1855), and jokey reports of his marked support for the Catholic Church in *Punch* 1856 (see 'Bees and Black Beetles', 140).

10. Hollingsworth (2001) described the emergence of links between the figure of the hive and idea of the Imperium (52 and 85).

Republic, but they could also represent an ideal monarchy; and so Napoleon could have it both ways. To have Walter scorn both Princess Ida and the French together was a way for Tennyson to establish an implicit link in his poem between women's education, political revolution, and Catholicism (which was seen by some as a threat to the Church of England). Each of these forms of potential upheaval and transition—domestic, national, and spiritual—found a common link in the figure of the bee. Tennyson's use of the bees gave his poem a social and political complexity that is not often recognised.¹¹

One of the most direct links between bees and Catholicism in Victorian poetry appeared in a poem called 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day' (1850) by Robert Browning (see Browning 1991)—a poem also occupied with thinking about national and spiritual identity, and one which connects the bees at once to Rome, the Catholic Church, and to the community and diversity of humanity. In the first part, *Christmas Eve*, the narrator visited a dissenting chapel (a non-Anglican place of Protestant worship). While there he fell asleep and had a vision—first of St Peter's Basilica in Rome, and then of a lecture theatre in Göttingen, where a lecture on Christian myth was being delivered by a practitioner of the Higher Criticism¹²—and he woke to the realization that his own faith was only one among many faiths equally valid. Of his vision of St Peter's, the narrator states that:

I, the sinner that speak to you,
 Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
 Both this and more. For see, for see,
 The dark is rent, mine eye is free
 To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
 And I view inside, and all there, all,
 As the swarming hollow of a hive,
 The whole Basilica alive!
 Men in the chancel, body and nave,
 Men on the pillars' architrave,
 Men on the statues, men on the tombs
 With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,
 All famishing in expectation
 Of the main-altar's consummation.

(Browning 1991: ll. 555-68)

11. For an overview of the symbolic value of the bees to different global and historical political systems, see Wilson 2004: 106-39.

12. The Higher Criticism was the practice of historical analysis of the origins of ancient texts in the interests of accurate interpretation and historical reconstruction.

Here the Basilica becomes a hive. Rome had been linked with bees in the literary imagination through Virgil; it would gain further associations with bees through Dante's adaptation of Virgil (in the *Paradiso*, as I shall discuss below), and that association had also informed Milton's decision (as himself an anti-Catholic poet) to liken the fallen angels to bees in *Paradise Lost*: where Dante used bees to represent the heavenly host, Milton put his own angelic bees in hell. The ideas of Rome and of spiritual posterity could be well represented by bees in the nineteenth-century poetical imagination.

But there was also a more particular reason for the connection in Browning's poem. Browning was a poet deeply committed to the idea that art itself has humane and spiritual significance. He saw bees as signs of both the poet's art and of religious or spiritual art.¹³ The poet or artist, Browning believed, always had a divine purpose—to make people marvel at the world around them, to make them see the world anew.¹⁴ The bee, a good image of the poet-maker, had this divine connection too: both the bee and the poet take materials from diverse sources (flowers, in the case of the bee; books and human society, in the case of the poet) and turn them into something nourishing and preservative (honey and poetry). Such human acts of making are then available for interpretation; and the act of interpretation also has a kind of spiritual function: it requires discipline, focus, an openness to the creative process of others, and regular leaps of faith, as the interpreter endeavours to understand the mind of another with both accuracy and generosity. There is a passage well-known among Browning scholars, in the poem 'Fra Lippo Lippi' (1855), where the speaker (Fra Lippo himself, Browning's reimagining of the fifteenth-century Carmelite friar, artist, and priest) explained that artists help people to see the world differently, observing: 'Art was given for that; / God uses us to help each other so, / Lending our minds out' (Browning 1995: ll. 304-306).

Beneath the skep-like dome of the Basilica, as Browning well knew, there are many crafted bees. They were the heraldic symbol of the Barberini family, of whom Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini) was one, and they are abundant on the pillars of the 'baldacchino' (or canopy) that Urban VIII commissioned the sculptor Bernini to produce between 1623 and 1634. Indeed, as symbols of the powerful Barberini family, carved and heraldic bees can be found at a number of prominent sites across

13. For further discussion of the figure of the bee in Browning's work, see Wright 2013.

14. Studies of this aspect of Browning's work include Nestruck 1966 and Cheeke 2016.

Rome.¹⁵ But the crafted bees of Bernini's baldacchino are, in Browning's response to them, not confined to representing the Barberini alone. Browning deliberately repurposed Barberini's bees, to focus on the matter of artistry and human activity. The bees his speaker imagined seeing in the Basilica helped to figure the bustle of humanity within, and specifically the presence there of both the living and the dead ('Men in the chancel, body and nave [...] Men on the statues, men on the tombs'). In Browning's handling, the bees help to signal the fact that true community encompasses not only trans-national encounter but trans-historical recognition of both the present and the past. In the context of a poem about diverse perspectives on the Christian faith, Browning understood the bees to be aptly attuned to the literary image of Rome's past (in Virgil), as well as to his own attitudes toward artistry. For him, the bee combined associations with the ancient classical past, Rome, Catholicism, artistic production (in this case the example of Bernini's work), and what poets, too, might attempt: blending diverse sources as bees take nectar from many flowers.

The poem *Christmas Eve* is itself about religious diversity, if only of a relatively local and contemporary European kind, and included the perceived challenge to faith that came from the Higher Criticism. But the complexities facing nineteenth-century British religious communities were many, and among others were the fact of the increasing number of dissenting communities and the revival of Catholicism in England. During the 1840s, the young poet, Christina Rossetti, became interested in the Anglo-Catholic movement, which rested on the idea that Anglicanism was historically a branch of the Catholic Church.¹⁶ And for Rossetti, the presence of poetical bees indicated a literary and spiritual inheritance too.

An admirer of Tennyson, Rossetti echoed the sounds of his verses in her own work. Rossetti came from an Anglo-Italian family, and her father, Gabrielle Rossetti, was a scholar of Dante. In her poem 'All Saints' (1881) we can also hear an echo of Virgil's bee simile. This is the middle section of the poem:

Up the steeps of Zion
They are mounting,
Coming, coming,
Throngs beyond man's counting;

15. For further discussion of the Barberini bees, see Wilson 2004: 129-31.

16. See also n. 5. Mary Arseneau (2004) provided an influential discussion of Rossetti's Anglo-Catholic perspectives. Simon Humphries (2007), who also noted the influence of the Oxford Movement on Rossetti's thought, issued a caution against simplifying Anglican identities in this period, which he described as 'often fluid' (395).

With a sound
 Like innumerable bees
 Swarming, humming
 Where flowering trees
 Many tinted,
 Many scented,
 All alike abound
 With honey,—
 With a swell
 Like a blast upswaying unrestrainable
 From a shadowed dell
 To the hill-tops sunny,—
 With a thunder
 Like the ocean when in strength
 Breadth and length
 It sets to shore;
 More and more
 Waves on waves redoubled pour
 Leaping flashing to the shore

(Rossetti 2001: 16-38)

Like the bees in Virgil and Tennyson, these bees come from a valley, but they seek to rise to the heights above them: Rossetti's saints come 'From a shadowed dell' and are climbing 'Up the steeps of Zion'. To place a compound allusion as the subject of a simile concerning sound ('With a sound / Like innumerable bees'), signalling Virgil as well as, potentially, those later poets who had adapted his bee simile, was a clever way to alert readers to listen carefully, especially given that the sounds of the earlier poets' words were themselves striking for their mimetic aural effect. 'Listen', Rossetti, seemed to say, 'I'm about to mention "innumerable bees", which have a long literary and spiritual inheritance behind them'.

A key feature of this passage is the picture of natural abundance that the bee simile helps to elaborate: it is important that not only are the saints coming in 'Throongs beyond man's counting', seeming thus 'Like innumerable bees', but also that the figurative 'bees' are 'humming / Where flowering trees, / Many tinted, / Many scented, / All alike abound / With honey'. For the saints to make a sound 'Like innumerable bees' was a way for Rossetti to indicate not only their number and productivity, but also to observe implicitly that what the saints could offer to humankind was, by analogy with honey, both sweet and sustaining.

Poetically, and most importantly, this was also a way for Rossetti to indicate the endurance of the saints through time. That was so, in part, because in Virgil's original image the bees represented reincarnation—a

capacity to rise up from Hades and into the light—and so, in the tradition of Western European poetry, innumerable bees had continued to carry the trace (like pollen) of this idea of reincarnation. But these poetical bees were also a sign of temporal endurance for the simple reason that Virgil's simile had itself survived time and been reincarnated by subsequent poets through acts of translation, imitation, and allusion. To allude to these bees was a way for Rossetti to aver that the saints, too, would be heard through all posterity. Poetical bees were demonstrably the survivors of great imaginative, national, and historical transformations and upheavals. In sustaining, but leaving implicit, the imaginative connection to Virgil, Rossetti deftly secured her own place within an established poetical tradition and identified herself as a poet committed to the ongoing march of Christianity through time. Moreover, she subtly acknowledged her identity as an Anglican poet who could hear the call of Rome—a call that, because of its literary heritage, could sound like bees.

I want now to turn to two poets—Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper (known as 'Michael Field')—and the figure of the bee in a poem written a few years after their conversion to the Church of Rome (in 1907). Michael Field¹⁷ wrote around the turn of the twentieth century, publishing their collections of poems between 1889 and 1914. They were associated by acquaintance as well as poetic subject matter with the Aesthetic and Decadent movements of that period, and, like some other artists in those circles, they converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism (Hanson 1997). The bee was a significant poetical figure for Michael Field, a powerful symbol of both historical and spiritual transition. But critical attention to that fact has so far given only a partial and largely contemporary account of the literary significance of the bees. Once we recognize the poetical links between the bees and Rome, and the contemporary presence of those links in the allusions and adaptations of earlier Victorian poets, however, Field's particular choice of the bee figure, and use of it in the context of their poems of religious conversion, can be better understood.

Michael Field used the figure of the bee to help describe their interest in both classical and Christian texts, their complex negotiations with their own sexuality, and their conversion. Looking across the range of their work, the critic Marion Thain rightly identified 'the potential for the bee

17. It has become a convention among literary critics to speak of 'Michael Field', as the women wished to be known (and not as Bradley and Cooper), and to use the third-person plural pronoun, 'they', in modern recognition of the poets' collaboration. I maintain this convention here.

image to be pulled between significations of...Catholic beliefs and...[the] old pagan world' (Thain 2007: 131). Thain saw this, however, as primarily a personal trait in Michael Field's work, and not as a sign that they were consciously adapting their spiritual-literary heritage.¹⁸ Thain called the bee, for Michael Field, 'a marker of tension around transition', and she noted, in connection with their volume of poems, *Wild Honey from Various Thyme* (1908), that the 'bees are repeatedly shown to have the power to salve transition through their ability to preserve the past within the present' (Thain 2007: 139, 144). That power and ability, I think, came from the long history of bee similes in European poetry and drew in particular on the poetical association of the bees with Rome.

Dante was a part of that history, and the following poem by Michael Field drew on Dante perhaps most of all. This poem is called 'Imple Superna Gratia' and it was published in a collection called *Poems of Adoration* (1912):¹⁹

We may enter far into a rose,
Parting it, but the bee deeper still:
With our eyes we may even penetrate
To a ruby and our vision fill;
Though a beam of sunlight deeper knows
How the ruby's heart-rays congregate.

Give me finer potency of gift!
For Thy Holy Wounds I would attain,
As a bee the feeding loveliness
Of the sanguine roses. I would lift
Flashes of such faith that I may drain
From each Gem the wells of Blood that press! (Field 2009)

Thain interpreted this poem as a 'mixture of religious zeal and the Decadent erotic', and remarked that 'the taking in of the Holy Spirit is imagined very literally as a feeding from Christ's body' (Thain 2007: 177). Certainly, the bee was in part an erotic figure for Michael Field, as Thain further explained. But the figures of the rose and bee in 'Imple Superna Gratia' also set the poem within the tradition of bee similes

18. Thain observed the association of ancient classical poets with bees, and the biblical link between honey and the word of God, but not the bees' poetical heritage in Virgil, Dante, or Milton: precisely those poets who help to give the figure of the bee its connection to Rome and Catholicism.

19. The title, 'Imple Superna Gratia', is taken from the third line of the medieval Catholic hymn 'Veni Creator Spiritus', addressed to the Holy Spirit, and thought to have been written by the ninth-century Benedictine monk, Rabanus Maurus. A literal translation might be 'fill with heavenly grace'. For further discussion, see Thain 2007: 177.

outlined above. Seeming at once to find inspiration in nature and to adapt a personal image in their work, Michael Field in fact drew on a famous passage of Dante's *Paradiso*.

At the start of Canto XXXI of the *Paradiso*, Dante described the Empyrean: a heaven beyond time and space that is the home of the blessed. Picturing that heavenly realm, Dante adapted Virgil's bee simile and Christianized it. Where Virgil, a Pagan poet, had first represented spirits as bees in the underworld, Dante, by contrast, placed his bees in heaven. Dante's bees still represented the spirit world and a process of communication or transition. But for him they represented the angels communicating between heaven and the saints. The 'rose', in the passage below, figures the 'host' of saints; the 'bees' represent 'the other' or angelic 'host' that sings of God:

In fashion then as of a snow-white rose
 Displayed itself to me the saintly host,
 Whom Christ in his own blood had made his bride,
 But the other host, that flying sees and sings
 The glory of Him who doth enamour it,
 And the goodness that created it so noble,
 Even as a swarm of bees, that sinks in flowers
 One moment, and the next returns again
 To where its labour is to sweetness turned,
 Sank into the great flower, that is adorned
 With leaves so many, and thence reascended
 To where its love abideth evermore.

(Dante 2012: XXXI, 1-12)

In Canto XXXI, the 'saintly host' appeared to the poet as a 'white rose', and the angels—'the other host'—moved between the saintly host and God. In Michael Field's poem, comparably, there is a movement from the image of the rose and bee to the image of divine light (here as a figure for spiritual insight) which penetrates the world more effectively than human faith alone can attain. 'Imple Superna Gratia' might present an image of the bee-poet wishing to feed from Christ's wounds. But, read in the light of Dante's simile, it also describes the poets' wish to be themselves like angelic mediators, like members of the angelic host communicating between Christ and the saints—'As a bee the feeding loveliness / Of sanguine roses'. The 'sanguine roses' in 'Imple Superna Gratia' are likened to Christ's wounds (not, as in the *Paradiso*, the saintly host—although the link with Christ's wounds is there too: 'Whom Christ in his own blood had made his bride'). Michael Field did not presume to stand at the Empyrean with Dante; their bee and roses are more earthly, more clearly centred on Christ's human sacrifice. But their allusion to the

great Catholic poet and recognition of the potency of the image are evident.²⁰ This was a wish for higher spirituality which Michael Field recognised to be non-human: apian, angelic, divine.

In poems I do not have the space to discuss here, Michael Field continued to adapt traditional links between bees and angels, and between flowers and Christ, observing that where angels bring the light of God, bees 'Work us wax so fine, its flame / Be of God's the very name' ('Before Requiem', 11-12), and likening Christ to a white passion-flower which 'rayeth and extendeth white' in 'the firmament' ('White Passion-Flower', 2, 14), a flower from which 'Even as in the Host / The Precious blood is lost' (15-16). But even before their conversion, the tendency of what has been called their 'Pagan' poetry to harbour Christian thought can be found through the image of the bee. In 1893, they published a volume of poems called *Underneath the Bough*, which included the short poem 'An Apple-Flower'. This is the whole poem, which the reader is invited to hear as though spoken by the apple-flower itself:

I felt my leaves fall free,
I felt the wind and sun,
At my heart a honey-bee:
And life was done. (Field 2009)

The temporality of the voice of this poem is strange. The flower speaks in the past tense ('I felt', 'life was done'). But, if the flower's life is over, by whom or from where can the poem be spoken? The answer lies once again with the honey-bee, which, along with the tense of the poem's voice, works to imply a future. The leaves have fallen, the flower has been visited by a honey-bee, and so the life of the *flower* is ended. But, if the honey-bee has fertilized the flower, fruit will follow. In this seemingly simple poem, the reader is invited to hear an apple-flower speak its own 'consummatum est'—Christ's last words on the cross: 'it is finished'. If we notice the significance of the honey-bee, then we know too that fruit should follow. The figure of the bee in nineteenth-century British poetry, as we have also seen in the examples here by Tennyson, Browning, and Rossetti, often had this implicit relation with futurity—with endings that were also beginnings, with a life beyond, with rebirth and reincarnation.

Allusion has been nicely described by Lucy Newlyn as 'figurative language [used by authors] to expand meaning through suggestion' (Newlyn 1986: vii). An allusion calls to the reader's mind another work,

20. Discussing the possibilities of Christian poetry in a letter to the poet and priest, John Gray, during this period (spring 1907), Bradley observed the complex legacies of Milton and Dante. See Field 2009: 339.

image, or collection of ideas, without the author having to make a direct reference. It is a subtle form of communication with initiated readers who can recognise the earlier works, and it might also be described as a form of literary reincarnation, as the spirit of an earlier passage of text is revived in a subsequent one. Allusion, in this respect, is also a model of ideology, intimate with the powerful and sometimes unquantifiable ways that patterns of thought and practice are shared, adapted, and perpetuated.

For educated readers in nineteenth-century Britain, the association of literary bees with Virgil and with Dante, with government and with Napoleon, with France and with Rome, meant that bees often represented to the English mind not only the homely life of a cottage industry, but alternative cultures and other ways of being. In the context of the history of European poetry, this was an association with alterity which bees had carried ever since their appearance in Virgil's *Aeneid*. For these several reasons, the bees had become an ideal literary figure for helping the poets to represent national, intellectual, and religious diversity. In the field of literary studies, the full range of the figurative potentials of insect life has yet been relatively little discussed; bees in literature, however, have been recognised to indicate forms of alterity more or less radical.²¹ The examples in the nineteenth-century poems that I have examined here are part of a European cultural story in which bees helped writers to think creatively about other kinds of people, different needs, different perspectives—to think with wariness certainly, but also with generosity. In their contemplation of subjects as varied as women's education, Republicanism, Catholicism, spiritual diversity, saints and angels, the poetical history of bees helped poets to voice the creative presence of other ways of being. Recognising apian alterity, for them, had a humane spiritual purpose.

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21. See, for example, Hollingsworth 2001. In her article, Rachel Murray (2017) linked the fields of literary criticism and apiculture in examining the peripheral and specifically non-human 'hum' that literary texts invoke.

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Mobilizing Faith Communities for Bee Preservation: An Analysis of Bees for Peace*

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Abstract

Bees for Peace seeks to engage faith communities in applied projects for bee preservation by extracting from myriad faiths the shared traditional interest in promoting peace between human communities and extending this principle to the nonhuman world through imagining bees as peace ambassadors that unite disparate religious communities. Bees for Peace had an initial run during the 2018 Interreligious Week for Nature Conservation in Cologne, Germany. The Bees for Peace project contributed to the Cologne Week's twin goals of spreading nature conservation through religious communities and increasing social cohesion through interfaith cooperation. Yet it was confronted with a deep skepticism toward religion on the part of nature conservationists and failed to win the support of the central clique of Cologne.

Keywords

Religious environmentalism, religious values, nature conservation, interfaith cooperation, religious skepticism.

Introduction

On January 13, 2018, I found myself at a day-long BarCamp in Cologne, Germany, for the Edible City, an initiative seeking to mobilize city residents to grow their own food. I was there on a mission: to find collaborators for an Interreligious Week for Nature Conservation in

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Cologne and Region (hereafter Cologne Week), scheduled for September 2–9, 2018. In September 2017, as my new research project on religiously motivated environmentalism in Germany was starting, the very first Religious¹ Week for Nature Conservation took place in Darmstadt. This struck me as a golden opportunity to observe first-hand whether and to what degree interfaith cooperation for the environment influences both specific religions and the understanding of environmentalism. I therefore decided to bring the Week to Cologne, becoming its chief organizer in 2018 and 2019.

Among the BarCamp's many workshops, several focused on bee protection; I hopped into one. After the main presentation, a workshop participant asked how much living space bees need. The workshop leader explained that, since bees travel, even putting flowerpots on a balcony or windowsill can provide them with needed nourishment. Suddenly, I saw in my mind's eye a network of feeding sites for bees located on the grounds of faith communities. I further imagined the bees as peace ambassadors, whose sojourns from the mosque to the church to the synagogue to the Buddhist temple symbolize the unity and non-discrimination that all the world's major religions in theory promote. I raised my hand to speak, eager to share my 'eureka' moment with those gathered. I was greeted by a collective bemused chuckle.

Despite this skeptical reception, I was convinced that my vision of bees as peace ambassadors could become the right vehicle to achieve the aims of the Interreligious Week for Nature Conservation. These were to stimulate religious communities to embrace nature conservation while simultaneously promoting more social cohesion by using the preservation of nature as the 'common ground' between different communities. Two weeks after the BarCamp, a second planning meeting was held to attract interested parties to participate in the Cologne Week, and there I had more luck: participants voted to make Bees for Peace the *leitmotif* of the upcoming Week (planning meeting minutes, Jan. 29, 2018).

Background

The accelerating severity of anthropogenic climate change (IPCC 2018), the plundering of planetary resources (WWF International 2014), and massive species extinction (Diaz et al. 2019; Watts 2018) have sparked calls by scientists (e.g. Sagan et al. 1990) and global institutions (WCED 1987) to re-evaluate our collective values. Regulations and technology

1. The wording is correct: 'interreligious' in Cologne; 'religious' elsewhere.

are not enough; rather, an ecologically attuned worldview and emotional connection to nature are needed to ameliorate the grave ecological disease of our planet (Gardner 2003). These can supposedly be supplied by the world's religions, which are believed by some to share a set of values that can help mitigate the ecological crisis (Küng 1993; Tucker 2008; see also Taylor 2016), steering us away from global destruction to 'redemption and rejuvenation' (Bassett, Pedersen, and Brinkman 2000: 2).

The belief that religions transmit the necessary preservationist values and worldviews has stimulated organizations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Alliance for Religion and Conservation in the UK, and the United Nations Environment Programme to partner with religious communities. In Germany as well, the federal government has sponsored multiple interfaith conferences and initiatives on the environment throughout the 2000s (Micksch et al. 2015; Orth 2002; Saan-Klein and Wachowiak 2008; Singh and Steinau-Clark 2016). Furthermore, the 2007 *National Strategy on Biological Diversity*, Germany's guidebook to implementing the 1992 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, proposed that vast portions of civil society, including 'churches', should be engaged in preserving biodiversity (Küchler-Krischun and Walter 2007: 61). This has resulted in two initiatives funded by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN). The first took place in the mid-2000s in conjunction with the Evangelical Church in Germany² and the German Bishops' Conference to develop an ecological consciousness among churchgoers and transform church grounds into oases for local flora and fauna (Saan-Klein and Wachowiak 2008). The second is the interfaith 'Religions for Biological Diversity' initiative, administered by the interfaith Abrahamic Forum in Germany. It began with an initial dialog forum in 2015 (Micksch et al. 2015), which was followed by a three-year run beginning in 2017 (now with a two-year extension).

The 'Religions for Biological Diversity' initiative transforms the above-mentioned claim that religions share certain values that protect the planet to argue that '[r]especting and preserving the integrity of nature is one of the key messages of the world's religions' (Abrahamic Forum in Germany 2017). It does so in order to build networks 'at the grassroots level' between very diverse and often mutually antagonistic actors from different religions as well as with secular nature conservation organizations, 'to animate religious communities to take up the topic of nature conservation and biodiversity and to raise awareness and sensitization

2. This is the mainline Lutheran-Protestant Church in Germany, which chose to translate *evangelisch* not as 'Protestant' but as 'Evangelical'.

for nature conservation' (Abrahamisches Forum in Deutschland 2017).³ To achieve its aims, it has developed a booklet highlighting the aspects of nature in religious holidays (Glaeser 2019a); an interreligious network; the 'greening' of properties owned by religious communities; religion and nature conservation dialog teams; and interreligious days and weeks for nature conservation, which use the Christian ecumenical Day of Creation at the beginning of September as their point of departure (Abrahamic Forum in Germany 2017).

The 'Religions for Biological Diversity' initiative also claims that 'interfaith collaboration helps us get to know one another better and promotes peace among people and with nature' (Abrahamisches Forum in Deutschland n.d.). With this goal, the initiative shares a central concern regarding social cohesion with other interfaith dialog initiatives throughout Germany. Although some interfaith dialog participants are motivated by religious interest, more are concerned with improving social cohesion, reducing prejudice, integrating religious 'newcomers' (especially Muslims), and improving the status quo (Klinkhammer et al. 2011; Ohrt and Kalender 2018; Satilmis 2008). To achieve these aims, interreligious dialog groups have moved toward encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of different worldviews (Klinkhammer and Satilmis 2008). Dialog ideally happens at 'eye-level', cultivating the democratic principles of mutual respect, debate, and communication among equals (Malik 2008; Satilmis 2008).

Interfaith dialog often demands 'worldview translation' (Johnston 2013: 150), which becomes even more challenging when an interfaith initiative's subject is the environment. Not only may terminology favored by one group alienate another (Marshall 2018), but scientific concepts and jargon are often incomprehensible to non-scientists (Fonseca, Villela, and Vogas 2018). Attempts to overcome differences in worldviews have been made by the formulation of universal, abstract ethical codes (e.g. Küng 1993; Tucker 2008). While these may fail to move people at the grassroots level, who have cultural and emotional ties to specific religious traditions (Johnston 2013), they may enable joint action when different faith groups can express their diverging religious commitments (Ellingson, Woodley, and Vogas 2012). Moreover, removing rituals and narratives from religion-specific contexts and combining them in new forms in interreligious and religious-secular settings can invoke in all participants, both religious and non-religious, a collective feeling of

3. The quoted material is from the mission statement of the (Inter)religious Week for Nature Conservation printed in the events brochure for the Darmstadt Week in 2017 and reprinted in the 2018 and 2019 Cologne Week's events brochures.

belonging (Frisk 2015). Still, these attempts to find a common denominator may be hindered by underlying ethnic tensions (Tucker and Grim 2001), social inequalities (Baugh 2017), and a lack of clear leadership and financial resources (Lysack 2014). Given the multiple potential obstacles, interfaith initiatives of all kinds need time if they are to be durable (Johnston 2013; Micksch 2008).

Although the 'Religions for Biological Diversity' initiative's promotional materials claim that religions have always conveyed viewpoints and values that preserve nature, the initiative carries in its very name a scientific term first coined in 1916 (Harris 1916). This seems to support the assertion of several scholars who argue that contemporary religious environmentalism reflects modern ideas about nature, ecology, and the environment rather than ancient religious traditions (e.g. Baugh 2015, 2017; Harris 1991, 1997; Kalland 2005; Pedersen 1995; Taylor 2011; Tomalin 2009). Moreover, in seeming contradiction to the religious environmentalist claim, also espoused by 'Religions for Biological Diversity', that taking care of the planet is a central concern of faith traditions, the overall religious response to the environmental crisis can be described as ambivalent at best (for overviews, see Basedau, Gobien, and Prediger 2107; Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016; Vaidyanathan, Khalsa, and Ecklund 2018; Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay 2013).

Instead of debating the historical truth of religious environmentalist claims, scholars may understand these claims as strategies that people of faith use to *re-evaluate*, *reinterpret*, *reform*, and *reconstruct* their religious teachings and practices in accordance with environmentalist norms (Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien 2011; Gottlieb 1996; Tucker and Grim 2001).⁴ They may further *extract* a non-environmental principle and *extend* it to the preservation of the planet, or even *invent* teachings and practices to express their new understanding of their faith. For example, environmentally minded Christians and Muslims have *reinterpreted* the traditional religious human–nature relationship to advocate 'stewardship' of the Earth (Hiebert 2000; Kearns 1996; Saan-Klein and Wachowiak 2008) and the maintenance of a divinely ordained ecological balance (Doğanay 2013; Gilliat-Ray and Bryant 2011). Religious climate activists *extend* a non-environmental religious concept, such as love of the neighbor, to fight for climate justice for people around the world

4. *Recovery*, *reform*, and *replacement* are from Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien 2011; *retrieval*, *reevaluation*, and *reconstruction*, from Tucker and Grim 2001; *reinterpretation* and *extension*, from Gottlieb 1996. The terms *invention* and *extraction* come from my own observations. These strategies are of course nothing new, and they are also used by religious people to argue against the relevance of environmentalism as a faith issue.

(Gottlieb 1996; Biviano 2012; Johnston 2013). People of faith even *invent* completely new Earth-honoring beliefs, rituals, and holidays, such as the Zen master Ven. Thich Nhat Hahn's bowing to the Earth as Mother Earth Bodhisattva (Chan Duc 2019) as well as the Christian Creationtide, first proposed in 1989.⁵ Finally, religious actors and scholars interested in interfaith cooperation *extract* principles and values they claim are common to the world's major faith traditions (e.g. Küng 1993; Tucker 2008; Tucker and Grim 2001). A case in point is a German federal attempt to align religious traditions with the five dimensions of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (these being *planet, people, prosperity, peace, and partnership*, e.g. Singh and Steinau-Clark 2016).

Overview of Bees for Peace

To engage communities of faith for bee protection, Bees for Peace used two of the aforementioned strategies. It first *extracted* from myriad faiths the shared traditional interest in promoting peace between human communities. It then *extended* this principle to the nonhuman world through imagining bees as peace ambassadors that unite disparate religious communities. In February 2018, I drafted a mission statement for Bees for Peace, then sought input from those planning its first event in April. This included a Catholic adult educator, a biologist with a wild bee project employed by the city of Cologne, a member of Friends of the Earth, and the two project managers of HonigConnection (Honey-Connection), a public awareness project for bee protection of the Cologne Bee-Keeping Association. HonigConnection often used people's appetite for honey to first stir their interest in protecting honeybees, before also attempting to raise interest in little-known wild bees. The resulting mission statement reads as follows:

Bees travel far and wide in their search for food, pollinating the flowers in their path. Their endeavors guide them to traverse boundaries, including those set by humans. If bees didn't do this, we would have neither fruits nor vegetables, nor even flowers—much too little to eat and a significant decrease in beauty. Because the work of these insects is essential not only for us humans, but also for innumerable other creatures, we have to

5. Creationtide begins on September 1, the beginning of the Orthodox ecclesiastical calendar, and ends on the Day of St. Francis, known since 1979 as the patron saint of those who 'promote ecology' (John Paul II 1990). In 2009, the ecumenical Consortium of Christian Churches in Germany voted in the new holiday. Creation Day takes place on the first Friday of September; Creationtide concludes with the Harvest Thanksgiving in early October (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland, n.d.a and b).

protect them. Given that the bees are unperturbed by our borders, we can also think of them as messengers of peace. Our religions and humanistic traditions teach us to love one another, act in moderation and preserve nature. Yet, as humans, we have failed to create a world without discrimination, war and the exploitation of the Earth. We cling to our borders, forgetting that we are first and foremost humans dependent on this precious Earth and its diversity of living beings. The role model provided by bees could thus encourage us to act accordingly, overcoming (religious and other) boundaries in a united concern for the welfare of all. May the bees constantly remind us of peace and respect for life.⁶

By extending the religious interest in peace to bees, Bees for Peace initially sought to awaken enough concern for pollinators so that members of urban faith communities felt moved to protect them by planting flowers on their grounds and building nest aids. In terms of this desired result, Bees for Peace was similar to many other bee projects proposed at the BarCamp in January 2018. Bees for Peace differed from these other projects by extending pollinator protection beyond the preservation of nature to promoting the value of community, within and between faith organizations as well as between humans and other forms of life. After a slowdown in 2019, Bees for Peace received a boost when, on August 17, 2020, it was recognized as an 'Official Project of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity' in Germany, a title it will carry for two years.

Method

During the Cologne Week, I attended most events as a participant observer. Before and after, I analyzed meeting minutes, emails, flyers, and press announcements that relate to these events, recognizing that many of the 'implicit and explicit discourses' embedded in them (Davie and Wyatt 2014: 158) were created by me. This is because my chief method was that of action research, which combines theory, practice, and reflection about collaborating with others on projects for the betterment of society (Reason and Bradbury 2008). I did not wish to merely observe the processes of others, but actively co-create them, working together to collectively improve the world we share (Swantz 2008). This means that I initiated the Interreligious Week for Nature Conservation in Cologne, contributed actively to brainstorming about possible events, organized planning meetings, met or talked personally with possible collaborators, attended non-religious environmentalist events, wrote meeting minutes

6. The mission statement is online in English at <https://www.beesforpeace.org/about-bees-for-peace.html>. It was also published in German in the 2018 Cologne Week's events brochure.

and emails, and, after envisioning a network of feeding sites for bees, brought it to the planning table to see if the idea might awaken interest among those gathered. It did.

Moreover, I am interested in the nonreligious factors that enable or hinder the embrace of environmentalism as a faith issue. I therefore explored such issues during semi-structured interviews with eighteen of the 2018 Cologne Week's collaborators after the Week had ended, inviting them to propose solutions to problems raised (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008). I also conducted a few follow-up interviews specifically on Bees for Peace via email. All interviews have been anonymized and cited here by date. All interviews were conducted in German, then coded and analyzed thematically. Quoted material was translated by me. Of the interlocutors whose interviews are used here, all were born in Germany and raised Christian (mainly Lutheran Protestantism or Catholicism), except for a Sunni Muslim born in Turkey. The Baha'i and Buddhist members I interviewed left Christianity as adults. Except for two of the three nature conservationists included here, all of the interviewees were people of deep faith. In general, the collaborators were relatively well-educated, regularly employed, and engaged in voluntary activities. Most have spouses or partners and children. They are busy, engaged people.

Events

The 2018 Cologne Week ran September 2-9 and consisted of thirteen events in eight days at various locations throughout the city. Five of these events were explicitly concerned with bee protection; one, implicitly so. The Week was preceded by an interfaith action in the spring. These planned events spawned several others.

On April 21, 2018, several Cologne Week collaborators met in the workshop of a Catholic youth center for an interfaith action to build flower boxes and insect hotels. Faith representatives included a Catholic adult educator, the director of the Shambhala Center and her husband, and two members of the Baha'i Community. A social worker of the center, who is also a trained woodworker, and an independent nature conservationist supplied the technical know-how. A member of Friends of the Earth brought information on wild bee protection, and pictures and a video were taken by a member of HonigConnection.⁷

7. Identities of participants are disclosed with permission online at <https://www.beesforpeace.org/achievements.html>, but to varying degrees. I have chosen to anonymize them in this article for the sake of consistency.

This interfaith planter box action was preceded by a Bee Week in the youth center because the social workers recognized that the city children who visited the center needed more input to grasp why bees need protection. Hence, the youth made bees out of clay and wood and built insect hotels. They also planted bee-friendly flowers on the center's balcony and participated in a honey tasting. The social workers used social media to entice their clients to join in, posting messages such as 'flowers have successfully been planted and now there's [the cake] "Bee Sting"—come on by!' or 'We're gonna see a bee film soon' (interview, Oct. 11, 2018).

The April action was followed a few weeks later by the independent nature conservationist heeding the call made by a Catholic retirement home. The home wanted to participate in the action, but by having someone build a raised bed on-site. Hence, the nature conservationist brought all necessary materials by bike to the home, where he entertained the residents with his work and with lively conversation afterward (Drescher 2018).

These two events at Catholic locations were followed by a political church service held on May 6 at the Protestant Christ Church in the City Garden. This had been arranged by a representative of HonigConnection, who lives nearby and sometimes attends services. Because the church's pastor already gave regular sermons on animal ethics, he decided to dedicate a sermon to the topic of bee protection. HonigConnection presented on the decline and preservation of bees to about forty church visitors, while I, although religiously neutral, used eco-Christian discourse to talk to the Christian congregation about Creation as God's gift that we are to cherish and care for. After the service, we went outside to sow flower seeds in planter boxes. A church member expanded the action by planting flowers for bees elsewhere on the church's property throughout the summer.

One Baha'i participant, a schoolteacher, decided to follow up on her participation by bringing the topic of bees into her classroom. She showed a film to her young pupils about bee decline from pesticides and discussed glyphosate with them. This generated a lot of questions from the students, some of whom were quite shaken: "'Bees?! No more bees?'" They were horrified, you know?' she said. Afterwards, she had them paint pictures related to bees (interview, Oct. 24, 2018).

The Shambhala Center director had informed me that, astrologically speaking, 2018 was the year of the Earth Dog in her Tibetan-based Buddhist school.⁸ The calendrical focus on the Earth prompted her to

8. Tibetan astrology is based in part on an originally Chinese twelve-year cycle of animal signs plus a sequence of five elements (wood, fire, earth, iron, and water).

inject a focus on environmentalism into her community. Her community created four special practice days, one per season for each of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. The members meditated on these elements as aspects of their own corporeality. Afterward, the community built a second raised bed and insect hotels together in the inner courtyard of the center.

The 2018 Cologne Week opened in the ethnological museum with a Market of Diversity, visited by about fifty people, including participants. It featured information tables for religiously motivated environmentalist projects in the Sikh, Baha'i, Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant faiths; the Earth Charter; and non-religious environmentalist groups that partnered with the Cologne Week, including Friends of the Earth and Honig-Connection. The two latter groups supplied visitors with information about bee biology, decline, and preservation, which was collected by the director of a Protestant kindergarten. This kindergarten participated in the Market as well to present its numerous projects on bee protection and sustainability for children.

The kindergarten director subsequently invited HonigConnection to participate in her kindergarten's Thanksgiving church service in October, where they did bee role-playing with the children. That autumn, the Earth Charter representative also participated in an annual regional harvest market in his village in Lower Saxony, where he helped harvest apples, pears, and walnuts. He used his participation in these events to promote both the Earth Charter and Bees for Peace.

On September 5, about ten people attended a workshop on wild bee habitats, hosted by Friends of the Earth. More than five hundred species of endangered wild bees live in Germany. Participants discussed how individuals and religious communities can preserve them within an urban environment.

The following day, about twenty people attended a one-day conference on 'Bees and Honey in Religions and in the Contemporary World' at a Protestant institute for adult education. The dual-language interdisciplinary conference featured talks by scholars in the humanities and social sciences as well as by HonigConnection representatives, to achieve a 'cross-pollination' of ideas.⁹ Lunch was provided by a Brahma Kumaris member, using produce supplied by Foodsharing, which seeks to reduce food waste by redistributing for free still-edible food deemed unsalable by supermarkets and bakeries.

On Friday, September 7, a bee event was held at the Central Mosque of DITIB, a Turkish-cultural Muslim organization and Germany's largest

9. This special issue of the *JSRNC* is the result of that conference.

Muslim association. DITIB invited Friends of the Earth to inform mosque visitors about bees and insect protection through its mobile environment bus, which offers binoculars to examine insects up close. Visitors could also build insect hotels and tour an exhibit of children's art on environmentalism that was made during Qur'an lessons.

The DITIB event was visited by participants in a bicycle 'pilgrimage' arranged by the Cologne Archbishopric's environmental officer and Friends of the Earth. Besides the mosque, other stops included the flowerbeds of the Christ Church, a nearby rooftop garden and apiary by HonigConnection, and the Shambhala Center's courtyard, with its raised beds and insect hotel. At the mosque, the bicycle pilgrims attended a short press talk about the Cologne Week, then continued to the Friends of the Earth office before cycling to the Saint Agnes Church, the grounds of which were being renovated as an oasis for local plants and animals by a trained nature conservationist. The final stop was the Baha'i Community Center, where pilgrims attended a presentation on sustainability projects in the worldwide Baha'i community.

The Catholic youth center, where the first Bees for Peace action took place, followed this on September 8 with an event to build hotels for bees. Finally, the kindergarten hosted a picnic open to all participants of the Cologne Week. Picnic participants, mostly members of the kindergarten's own community, gathered together at tables, getting acquainted and chatting amiably while chopping vegetables for the grill that had been supplied by Foodsharing. The kindergarten director encouraged picnickers to bring flowerpots to exchange with others, but mostly these were supplied by the kindergarten. They also gave visitors 'seed bombs', balls of dirt packed with seeds, to toss into the kindergarten's flowerbeds.

The 2019 Cologne Week, which ran September 8–15, had only one bee-related event. The DITIB Central Mosque had previously decided to 'greenify' its front plaza on September 13. During that Friday's prayer service, the imams in most of the 960 DITIB mosque communities in Germany preached on Islam and nature conservation, reaching possibly over 200,000 of the estimated 800,000 members. The mosque had purchased professionally made raised beds, to which Qu'ranic verses were affixed, including one from the Qu'ran's sixteenth chapter, known as 'the bee' (Arabic: النحل, *an-nahl*). Inspired by Bees for Peace, the event's organizers purchased bee-friendly flowers to be planted after the service by mosque visitors. A photo opportunity and follow-up roundtable discussion were arranged, which featured the leaders of the 'Religions for Biological Diversity' initiative, the director of a local nature conservation association, and me.

Finally, the Baha'i representative of the Round Table of Religions in Marburg (RTRM) in Hesse introduced Bees for Peace to this group. The other members discussed including it in the annual, award-winning 'Path of Peace', during which the participants visit the five different faith communities that comprise RTRM. As of this writing, the Baha'i member is still negotiating with the other RTRM members about lending their support to bee preservation.

Results

Motivation

What motivated individuals to collaborate with Bees for Peace or with the Cologne Week to which it belonged? Their reasons were many, and included religious teachings, concern about the state of the environment, interest in interfaith cooperation, and traditional religious values (Biviano 2012). For example, several interviewees mentioned directly or indirectly particular teachings in their given religions, whether stories about the Prophet Mohammed, sayings of Bahá'u'lláh, Pope Francis' environmental encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015), the conciliar process 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' of the World Council of Churches (Niles 2003), and the Christian Day of Creation. The Shambhala Center director spoke of an interfaith source, which was an interreligious event at COP23 in Bonn the year before, organized by GreenFaith. Strikingly, no one mentioned specific religious teachings about bees or their products, not even the Muslim representative, whose event description in the brochure for the Cologne Week mentioned the sixteenth chapter of the Qu'ran called 'the bees'.

Participation was further motivated by news of bee decline and general scientific knowledge about bees' roles in maintaining ecosystems. Bee protection was a topic on the minds of many people in Cologne in 2018 in large part due to the media blitz created by HonigConnection. In fact, two collaborators specifically mentioned hearing about bee decline in the news. As one Catholic social worker said, 'Bee mortality: that's quite relevant, isn't it?' (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). Likewise, the Muslim representative said, 'I heard a report the day before yesterday: insects are dying out. With the insects, many plant species then also die. The balance in the world goes, and when the balance is lost, then we are also ultimately lost' (interview, Oct. 16, 2018).¹⁰

10. His concern about the loss of balance may implicitly refer to the eco-Islamic view of a divinely ordained balance in the cosmic order (Doğanay 2013).

One Baha'i member participated because bees are 'fundamental to our fruit sustenance and the preservation of biologically natural cycles'. She noticed the decline in bees and other insects from year to year where she lives outside of Cologne (email, Oct. 3, 2019). Along with her faith, she also drew inspiration from a German insect conservationist named Markus Gastl and his Garden of the Insects (Gastl 2003). Moreover, the Catholic adult educator spoke of 'the immeasurable value of bees for so many connections in nature'. He then related what he called 'setting up picnic places for bees' on the grounds of various religious communities to the issue of social cohesion, when he stated that the project is 'a beautiful sign and impulse for interreligious dialogue and intercultural coexistence in our and other societies' (email, Oct. 31, 2019). Finally, the independent nature conservationist described his long-standing interest in the Christian ecumenical process. Still, he said, religion played no role in his decision to participate; rather, his motivation for building planter boxes for religious communities was simply to make more people aware of the need to preserve bees (interview, Nov. 1, 2018).

As collaborators described their participation in Bees for Peace, their words revealed several traditional religious values that also stirred them to participate. These included gratitude, empathy, self-reflection, interconnectedness, and community. For instance, one Catholic social worker explained that, while educating the children and teens who visit her youth center about protecting bees, she 'made it clear [to them] that we can be grateful for the Creation and that it is very important, just like for example, the bees...[to] preserve nature and treat it well' (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). Moreover, she and her colleague tried to evoke a sense of empathy for bees in their young charges when they made desserts out of honey. While the kids were eating, the social workers talked about how bees produce honey by feeding on flowers. Like the kids, bees also need nourishment; hence, it was necessary to plant flowers on the youth center's terrace to feed the bees (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). Likewise, the kindergarten director described what happened at the Thanksgiving church service with HonigConnection. The children crowded under a large blanket, huddling together to stay warm, just as bees do in their hives in the winter. The role-play was intended to awaken a sense of empathy in the children for bees (interview, Sept. 20, 2018).

The example of the social workers who stressed to their young clients the need to plant flowers for bees also suggests the value collaborators placed on taking responsibility for the state of the world. This was explicitly addressed by a Baha'i member. Raised Catholic, she said she 'always felt closely connected with nature and Creation in [her] religiosity'. For thirty years, she has been practicing the Baha'i religion,

which has led her worldview to be more 'universal, more open/global'. She asserted that she has 'an ethical responsibility in this day and age to protect and preserve nature' and believes that 'the Baha'i writings support and inspire me in this view' (email, Oct. 3, 2019).

As she continued, she also mentioned a sense of interconnectedness and community: 'As a Baha'i', she wrote, 'I know that, especially to the extent that people are willing to see themselves as a human family, to that extent they are also willing to protect the planet and nature' (email, Oct. 3, 2019). The Shambhala Center director expressed these same values as she described an Element Day that her community had invented to celebrate Earth-Dog Year. To create a sense of connection with the Earth, the practitioners were asked during meditation to contemplate where in their own bodies a given element may be found. This self-reflection led to the realization of the interconnectedness of all things. Afterward, community members built bee hotels and created a second raised bed in which they planted tomatoes. Several adults participated with their children in what the center director described as a 'very successful action day' (interview, Oct. 30, 2018).

Bees for Peace promotes the value of peace, both between human collectivities and between humans and the Earth. This idea apparently spoke to several collaborators, who mentioned it in their comments. The Catholic adult educator wrote, 'I find the idea of bees as ambassadors of peace, who overcome all the walls and do great benefit to all with their tireless work, an important thought' (email, Oct. 31, 2019). In a video interview with HonigConnection, the Shambhala Center director concurred. She said that bees 'don't recognize borders. They don't discriminate—it doesn't matter what religion you are or what country you're from. Everybody needs bees!' (Tomorrow e.V. 2020). Children, too, were able to understand the fundamental concept of Bees for Peace, as attested in the words of one of the Catholic social workers. She had told the center's young clients that, for the April action, people from different religions would be in the building to plant flowers for bees, and that this connects the different humans with each other. 'The kids understood this well', she said. They also found good the idea that 'the bees might visit different beds and thus create a connection' between them (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). Finally, when I asked the kindergarten director how she might interest parents in participating in the Cologne 2019 Week, she replied, 'I find peace in the world very important. And that the bees... keep no borders and swirl peacefully around from garden to garden', as well as 'across national borders'. She therefore thought bees can be role models 'for humanity' (interview, Sept. 20, 2018).

What these examples show is that faith played an important role in motivating collaborators to participate in Bees for Peace. More specifically, it was often traditional religious values shared by many faith traditions that convinced individuals to support the project. These values included peace and interconnectedness, those values explicitly stated in the text for Bees for Peace, but also went beyond them, to include gratitude, self-reflection, empathy, responsibility and community. Moreover, these traditional religious values were extended beyond human society to include bees and other nonhuman beings. However, religious texts and traditions that specifically refer to bees or honey appear to have played no overt role in motivating people to participate. Rather, it was news about bee decline and the dangers this poses to the health of the planet—that is, sources more secular and scientific than religious—that stimulated participation in the Week's bee-related events.

Nature Conservation and Interfaith Cooperation

How do you get people interested in bee protection? Often through roundabout means. This is what some collaborators reported who wanted to interest others, not yet concerned, in bee preservation. For example, the Catholic social workers reported that their young clients were at times confused about why bees were the focus of a whole week of activities. They decided to use circuitous methods to get the youth engaged. The city children that visit the youth center enjoy working with power tools to make objects. Hence, they could be convinced to use drills to bore holes in pieces of wood that were then used to build insect hotels. Moreover, the social workers got the kids talking about the different flavors of honey during a honey tasting. These taste differences are often derived from different flowers. This allowed the social workers to explain how bees make honey, using flowers as their nourishment. In this way, the social workers were able to convince the youth to engage in the dirty work of planting flowers on the balcony (interviews, Oct. 11, 2018).

Roundabout ways were used by nature conservationists as well to awaken an interest in conservation in the general public. For example, HonigConnection used people's love of honey and the creatures that make it as a way to get them interested in the topic of bee preservation. Honeybees become a door opener to a broader discussion about the decline of wild bees. In similar fashion, the nature conservationist renovating the grounds of St. Agnes Church built a sandbox next to a busy sidewalk. In the middle of the sandbox is a very tall and narrow insect hotel, filled with holes of different sizes. He explained that this insect hotel is good for more common wild bees, but those wild bees that

are rarer tend to lay their eggs in sandy areas in the ground. Hence, the purpose of the eye-catching insect hotel was to convince passersby to take a closer look at the sandbox.

Despite the collaborators' deep concerns about bee decline, they realized they needed external guidance from trained nature conservationists to realize their wish to contribute to bee preservation. In the words of the Shambhala Center director, 'As you know, we don't have experience with environmentalist activities, right?... Our actions are to sit on a cushion' (interview, Oct. 30, 2018). The lack of knowledge about practical nature conservation was faced by other faith communities as well. For example, the Catholic social workers educated themselves while planning their Bee Week, but also hoped for more support from the participating representative of Friends of the Earth in the form of honeycombs and other materials from bees that the children could touch and smell (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). Likewise, the kindergarten director also tried to educate herself, pointing out the necessity to understand bees in their biological makeup and corresponding needs. For example, she learned from a brochure from the Market of Diversity that crocuses provide bees their first food in early spring. Therefore, she planned to plant crocus bulbs with the children when the ground was still wet and cold. She also learned that many nesting aids one can buy in stores are incorrectly built (see Biba 2019), including one that she previously had on the grounds of the kindergarten (interview, Sept. 20, 2018).

The need for input from trained nature conservationists was made explicit by the report of the Baha'i representative of the Round Table of Religions in Marburg (RTRM). The other members of RTRM initially misunderstood the concept of Bees for Peace when she first presented it to the group. The pastor of a participating church supported the initiative, thinking that she would gain the labor needed to restore the grounds of the church that had been destroyed by workers during recent renovations. Yet when the Baha'i representative tried to clarify that the flowers planted at each community should nourish local bees, she was laughed at. The general response was that the religious communities would plant whatever they found pretty, without regard for the local ecosystem and its needs. The Baha'i representative was unable to clarify that plants for bees are also pretty, because she had no experience in gardening. Her next step in the negotiations with RTRM was to enlist the help of a local nature conservation group (ongoing personal communications, 2019–2020).

Obstacles

The Cologne Week as a whole was repeatedly confronted with the difficulty of attracting nature conservationists to participate. One example pertains directly to Bees for Peace. On February 24, 2018, I attended the Wild Bee Day at the central branch of the Cologne School of Continuing Education. Several environmentalist groups had information stands to raise public awareness about bee protection. I approached several of them to see if I might find collaborators for the Week. At one table, after I explained to a nature conservationist of a regional group (*Querwald Verein*) that I was organizing an Interfaith Week for Nature Conservation, she literally pulled back, as if in fright. 'But I'm not religious', she asserted. 'You don't have to be', I explained. 'You have the professional knowledge that religious communities need to implement practical projects for nature conservation'. Her response, however, already made clear that she was not willing to listen further. I moved to the Greenpeace table, where I was dismissed with the statement, 'We are transconfessional (*überkonfessionell*)'. I was confused by these immediate rejections. After all, an interfaith week for nature conservation is also by definition transconfessional and the leading agency of the initiative to which the Week belonged is the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation.

Although the leaders of Friends of the Earth (German: BUND), the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), and the German Nature Conservation Ring (DNR) all support the 'Religions for Biological Diversity' initiative, networking with nature conservationists on the grassroots level has proven difficult for all of the organizers of the (Inter)religious Days and Weeks of Nature Conservation (Glaeser 2019b).¹¹ To try to better understand the skepticism expressed towards religion by these nature conservationists (and others, see Dohe forthcoming), I asked some of my interlocutors in nature conservation about this issue. The independent nature conservationist told me that he often volunteers for Greenpeace. At meetings, he mentioned the Cologne Week, but said that 'as soon as [the other environmentalists] heard the word "religion", they were put off by it and they thought that it wouldn't suit their organization'. He tried convincing them to reconsider, because 'regardless of what someone believes in, you should support the thing

11. I took part in the discussion at the November 28, 2019 Working Group on 'Religions and Nature Conservation' meeting as a member. I also participated in the 'Celebrating Nature: Religious Holidays and Nature Conservation' Dialog Forum on October 17, 2019, as the organizer of the Cologne Week. During a podium discussion with other chief organizers, I mentioned the resistance of nature conservationists in Cologne to working with religious communities. The nodding heads of the other organizers made clear that they had experienced similar difficulties.

behind it'. 'We had as a theme Bees for Peace, and that we are for the bees', he explained, and wanted 'to create through these raised beds with the wildflowers in them' a 'greater food supply', especially for wild bees. But his colleagues remained unmoved (interview, Nov. 1, 2018). The member of Friends of the Earth who had participated in the first action also had many colleagues who were skeptical about religion; she reported that they saw religion as 'age-old tradition' that 'basically prevented progress' and something they had 'overcome' (interview, Oct. 10, 2018).

The Cologne Week received resistance not only from nature conservationists, but from the central organization for interfaith dialog in Cologne, the Council of Religions, over which Mayor Henriette Reker presides. One of the collaborators for the Cologne Week, a Cologne native, describes himself as an 'engaged Buddhist' and a longstanding member of this Council. During its spring meeting, he presented the upcoming Cologne Week, to which the mayor reportedly asked, 'What does religion have to do with nature conservation?'. As I was not invited to the meeting to present the Week myself, I do not know exactly what the Buddhist member said. However, he had made clear to me several times that he himself was not convinced by Bees for Peace. His personal interest in ecology was more theoretical, centered around Buddhist teachings on the subject, but 'to build boxes for bees or something—that's not my thing' (interview, Oct. 9, 2018). From another collaborator it was reported to me that the Protestant organizer of the Council was also unhappy about an 'outsider' bringing an interfaith project on environmentalism to the city (interview, Sept. 20, 2018). In the end, the Council of Religions decided not to support the Week.

On August 18, I attended the Honey Feast organized by HonigConnection to celebrate the International Honeybee Day. Again, numerous projects for bee protection had information tables. HonigConnection was praised for bringing 'the protection of wild and honey bees into the city as an important topic' and Mayor Reker asserted that 'Cologne is well on its way to becoming a bee-friendly city' (Stiftung Umwelt und Entwicklung Nordrhein-Westfalen, n.d.). HonigConnection was then awarded recognition as a 'Official Project of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity'.

After the ceremony, I spotted Mayor Reker mingling with the crowd. Determined to finally meet her, I walked over with the Cologne Week events brochure in my hand, which I then pressed into hers. After quickly introducing myself, I pointed out the many events for bee protection the Week was sponsoring. She smiled, noted how many interesting events there were in her city, and mentioned that she had heard about the upcoming Week. She then quickly turned her attention

toward a little girl in a bee outfit standing in front of her for a photo with the 'cute little bee'.

The lack of interest shown by Reker, the Council of Religions, and nature conservationists reveals the deep skepticism concerning the connection between religion and nature conservation that prevails in German culture. Despite the 2018 Week, with its focus on bee protection, directly following a summer when all of Cologne was buzzing with news about bees, the Week was unable to gain the endorsement of the city administration or to secure press attention. Yet it also reveals a particular mindset prevalent in Cologne. Despite Cologne's reputation as a vibrant, multicultural city, it is also run by a powerful clique of movers and shakers, known as the Cologne Cartel (*Kölsche Klüngel*), which is organized largely through Carnival associations.

I did not belong to that powerful¹² inner circle; nor, apparently, did HonigConnection. Several sources conveyed to me a grisly tale of envy towards HonigConnection's media success, which led to miscommunication about this project being passed through the channels of the Cartel. Ultimately, the project's funding was unexpectedly canceled, leading to a legal proceeding and the ruin of a very worthwhile project.

Contributions

Despite significant obstacles, Bees for Peace contributed significantly toward fulfilling the aims of the Cologne Week. These were to increase the awareness of nature and the need to protect it; create more social cohesion through interfaith cooperation; and help religious communities and nature conservationists network with each other. Regarding the first point, the Muslim representative said he learned a lot about environmentalism during the Week, in particular about bees. The Catholic adult educator, who had already taken several steps with his wife to create a more sustainable lifestyle, was further influenced by the Week in this direction. He had begun to notice more frequently the bees hovering around a large planter bed on his balcony. 'It was also nice to see how the bees were swirling in there and obviously felt comfortable there', he reported. He also hoped to convince his wife to include a wildflower meadow in their upcoming garden renovations (interview, Oct. 9, 2018). Moreover, one Catholic social worker found his knowledge about insect and bee decline taking on new meaning as he also found himself watching the apian activity on his home balcony: 'Ah, there's another

12. To indicate the strength and reach of this Cologne Cartel, note that both the DITIB Central Mosque and the Roon Street Synagogue belong to associations for Carnival, originally a Catholic tradition.

bee...there's another bee...', he said (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). His colleague had invested a lot of time educating herself about bees in preparation for the Bee Week. This self-learning increased her sense of the importance of bee protection. She worried about whether the topic of bee preservation would soon be forgotten by the youth center's visitors, so she was gratified to learn that at least one young person still had bees in mind. She reported that she had been looking at information about 'upcycling' on the computer when she came across the idea of making bees out of cans. One of the children, apparently looking with her, pointed out how well the idea would have fit into the previous Bee Week (interview, Oct. 11, 2018).

Several collaborators also mentioned how the initial Bees for Peace action had contributed to interfaith understanding. The Catholic adult educator expressed how 'very pleased' he was with the project, in particular as it 'brought together people who would otherwise rarely meet, let alone do something with each other'. He hoped that the project would continue, also with the Archbishopric on board (interview, Oct. 9, 2018). One Catholic social worker wished for a Muslim presence during the first action (interview, Oct. 11, 2018). But as the Shambhala Center director implied, interfaith cooperation is not always easy. 'We are slowly coming closer to each other and getting acquainted', she said. 'You have to understand that friendships need time. But at least this is a first step to get to know each other through a collective action... Taking the long view, I think this is a suitable way for the religious communities here to better network with each other' (Tomorrow e.V. 2020).

Her view seemed to be shared by one of the Catholic social workers, who pointed out that nature is 'trans-religious (*religionsübergreifend*)'. The bee protection project therefore created a 'common ground between mixed religions'. The initial interfaith action focused on the individuals engaging in it, not on their faith. 'Of course, the conversation [did turn toward the topic of religion]', he said, as those gathered discussed the various events for which they were responsible during the upcoming Week. Hence, despite the intense focus on the work, he said, 'I think the interreligious element still came to light' (interview, Oct. 11, 2018).

For one Protestant-raised nature conservationist, the events created an opportunity to network and create new contacts that had not existed previously. She was able to meet people that she otherwise would not have met, including people from other religious communities. This was true not only at the initial Bees for Peace action, but also at the Market of Diversity, which featured information tables from Baha'i, Buddhist, Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, and Sikh communities (interview, Oct. 10, 2018).

Finally, individuals' understanding and appreciation of other cultures was increased through the scholarly conference on 'Bees and Honey in Religions and in the Contemporary World'. The independent nature conservationist was among the approximately twenty people who attended the conference, and although he felt more background knowledge would have helped him follow the lectures, he still found it worthwhile to 'think outside of the box' of his own perspective and consider how other people and religions understand nature and nature conservation (interview, Nov. 1, 2018). The director of the Protestant institute where the conference was held also felt the conference was worthwhile. The turnout was lower than he wished, as he had hoped to attract more people with general knowledge about bees. Still, he said, 'I would say the expectations have been outperformed in terms of quality'. He was pleased by what he called the 'intellectual component' of the Week, which distinguished it from the Council of Religion's focus on conflict resolution. He further praised the involvement of the Archdiocese and the competence of HonigConnection (interview, Sept. 20, 2018).

Conclusion

Although Bees for Peace has so far been implemented only on a small scale in Cologne, findings suggest that the imagery of bees as peace ambassadors that unite myriad groups is able to engage members of disparate faith communities in collective actions for bee preservation, thereby contributing both to more social cohesion and to the conservation of nature. Rather than depending on the contested claim that religions are inherently nature conservationist when rightly understood (e.g. Baugh 2015, 2017; Harris 1991, 1997; Kalland 2005; Pedersen 1995; Taylor 2011; Tomalin 2009), the Bees for Peace project focused on the principle of peace, uncontestedly a traditional religious value (Biviano 2012). Its mission statement envisions neither a more peaceful nor more ecological past (Tomalin 2009), but rather admits that religions regularly fail to meet their own standards. Yet it inspired the collaborators by extracting the principle of peace shared by many faiths and extending it (Gottlieb 1996) across human groups to bees and all life dependent on them.

As with other interfaith dialogue initiatives in Germany, concerns about social cohesion (Klinkhammer et al. 2011; Ohrt and Kalender 2018; Satilmis 2008) motivated certain collaborators to participate in this project for bee preservation. The ideal of dialogue among equals (Malik 2008; Satilmis 2008) was realized in some of the events by focusing participants on the common ground they quite literally share. Moreover,

the universal, ethical vision formulated in the mission statement could be filled by faith communities and non-confessional nature conservation organizations in ways that allowed them to express their particular commitments (Ellingson, Woodley, and Paik 2012), both religious and ecological, by hosting their own events during the Cologne Week.

The difficulties described in other studies on translating worldviews (Johnston 2013) and developing a mutually comprehensible and appropriate terminology (Fonseca, Villela, and Vogas 2018; Marshall 2018) were hardly present in this pilot project. After all, the relatively educated collaborators of the Bees for Peace project already understand basic scientific principles about bees' role in pollination. Rather, what religious actors needed was technical know-how and specific information on local bees, their habitats, and their food preferences. Yet the unexpected stumbling blocks in the path toward realizing Bees for Peace were the very nature conservationists that could supply that technical know-how and scientific information. Not interreligious or ethnic prejudice (Baugh 2017; Tucker and Grim 2001) but nature conservationists' skepticism towards religion made it difficult for members of faith communities to get the knowledge they needed to do their part in preserving the planet.

The durability of the project (Johnston 2013; Micksch 2008) has yet to be tested. Although the Cologne Week continued in 2019, it did so without many of the original collaborators, who for their own reasons were no longer able to participate. The number of events in the 2019 Cologne Week was almost double the number in 2018. Yet, as previously mentioned, only one event had any relation to the topic of bees.

During the interviews with the Catholic social workers, the subject of the theme for the 2019 Cologne Week came up. One social worker believed repeating the topic from year to year seemed advisable, especially in the spring, because children forget quickly. Her colleague agreed but seemed to think adults needed reminders of the importance of the topic just as much as children. 'We used to talk about seals dying, but no one talks about that anymore. Then we had whales dying, you know?', he said. 'And it isn't only the bees, but also the insects that have become fewer, you know?'. Indeed, with the silencing of HonigConnection, news in Cologne about bee decline has decreased, although the phenomenon itself has not. The social worker continued, 'And that's how it is with people—as long as nothing serious happens, then it will quickly be forgotten... In Cologne, you're like, "You still got it good here," ya know?' (interview, Oct. 11, 2018).

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Notes for Contributors

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