

# **New Approaches to the Archaeology of Beekeeping**

Edited by  
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## Preface

Current interest in beekeeping, or apiculture, is growing because of the precipitous decline of bees worldwide and the disastrous effect it portends for global agriculture. As a result, all aspects of beekeeping in all historical periods are coming under closer scrutiny. The current volume takes a holistic view of beekeeping archaeology (including honey and associated products, hive construction, and participants in this trade) in one large interconnected geographic region, the Mediterranean, central Europe, and the Atlantic Façade.

Increasingly inventive archaeological work focusing on ancient material remains of apiculture in the Mediterranean, for example, has expanded our knowledge of several areas of seemingly great production intensity, as in the pre-Roman and Roman Iberian Peninsula, and pre-Roman and Roman Crete and mainland Greece. Further work needs to be done now to bridge our growing body of ancient archaeological evidence from the Mediterranean with other areas of ancient Europe in addition to connecting this material to different sorts of evidence from later periods in these same areas, to say nothing of making similar diachronic connections outside Europe. Other research is forging entirely new lines of inquiry hitherto inaccessible in the past through the application of exciting new tools such as organic and pollen residue analysis of surviving hives and apicultural equipment and products from premodern periods (Louveaux, Maurizio, and Vorwohl 1978; Furness 1994; Garnier et al. 2002; Evershed 2008; Garnier 2015; Oliveira et al. 2019).

*New Approaches to the Archaeology of Beekeeping* focuses on novel approaches to historical beekeeping but also highlights new applications of more established ways of treating apicultural material from the past. The volume is keenly interested in helping readers navigate the challenges inherent in studying beekeeping historically. For example, while numerous ceramic beehives from pre-Roman and Roman Spain and ancient Greece speak to the importance of this industry in the ancient west, such hives tend to disappear in late antiquity, when hives of biodegradable materials like cork, wicker, or logs seem to have more widely replaced them. In fact, these organic hives appear to have been the norm for much of antiquity, with ceramic hives appearing only haphazardly, mostly in cities on the Mediterranean littoral. In temperate and Atlantic Europe, ceramic hives rarely seem to have been used at all. Extant material evidence for apiculture is disproportionately distributed in the ancient world with far fewer material remains, surprisingly, found for the medieval or early modern period. Textually, this situation is the reverse, in that we have an abundance of documentary evidence concerning beekeeping from the medieval and early modern periods and much less for antiquity. One way the volume has attempted to meet this asymmetric array of evidence is through its interdisciplinary and diachronic outlook, allowing current researchers and new voices a chance to see where they can add to the growing conversation on historical beekeeping.

The volume brings together scholars working not only on ancient archaeological evidence of beekeeping but also medieval, early modern, and ethnographic evidence of it. In this sense, *New Approaches to the Archaeology of Beekeeping* is meant to serve as a handbook for current researchers in this field and those who wish to undertake research into the history and archaeology of beekeeping. The array of case studies within are written in such a way as to balance publication of specialist material with inclusive explanation of the methodologies employed in each case.

The arrival of Langstroth's movable frame hive (1852) simultaneously heralded the arrival of modern industrial beekeeping but also the death knell of traditional beekeeping practices over much of the world. Before that time, change in hive technology and associated beekeeping equipment moved, as Suzanne Rotroff has put it, at a 'glacial pace' (Rotroff 2006:126). Studying beekeeping diachronically for much of its history is essential for filling in gaps in any given period. While no standardized beekeeping existed in the premodern world, variation in hive technology and, for instance, smokers, was not extreme in central or southern Europe, North Africa, or the Near East. Those who research the field of historical beekeeping, therefore, in some ways must be versatile and open to looking in other areas and time periods. This specific globalizing approach to historical beekeeping owes itself to the work of a sorely missed scholar to whom the present volume is dedicated, Dr. Eva Crane (1917-2007).

Dr. Crane was a giant in the study of historical beekeeping. Two among her many works on beekeeping have definitively shaped the modern field of apicultural history and archaeology: *The Archaeology of Beekeeping* (1983) and the magisterial *The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting* (1999). With the first volume, Crane established the field of beekeeping archaeology as an international pursuit the holistic study of which could help scholars understand beekeeping developments on a global scale. If that were not ambitious enough, Crane later followed up that volume with a tome representing the capstone of her endeavours in the study of apicultural history. Her

1999 volume surveyed textual and archaeological evidence of beekeeping around the world while also paying close and important attention to a category of evidence long ignored but now quite at home in the historical study of beekeeping, ethnographic evidence of traditional beekeeping.

To date there have been few direct follow-up volumes to Crane's 1983 and 1999 works besides Bortolin's (2008) *Archeologia del miele* and Giuman's (2008) *Melissa: archeologia delle api e del miele nella Grecia antica*. Both focusing, as the titles imply, on archaeological material, and in the one case, on Greece alone. In 2018, in collaboration with the Eva Crane Trust, an edited volume, *Beekeeping in the Mediterranean: From Antiquity to the Present* (eds. Hatjina, Mavrofridis, and Jones, hereafter HMJ) followed in Crane's footsteps more directly. This work was the publication of the proceedings of a conference held at Syros in 2014. That volume continued Crane's work in several ways 1) it brought together contributions of a geographically varied nature within the Mediterranean, 2) considered beekeeping diachronically across time within this macroregion, and 3) considered archaeological, historical, and ethnographic studies of this subject in this zone equally. These were all the hallmarks of Crane's method.

Like Crane's focus, the current volume too takes a combined historical-archaeological approach to the study of the history of beekeeping. The volume's name, *New Approaches to the Archaeology of Beekeeping*, pays homage to Crane's 1983 volume by sharing its disciplinarily holistic perspective. Taken in conjunction with HMJ, the present volume is intended to provide a conspectus view of historical beekeeping in the western Mediterranean and Europe. It is hoped that the conversations engendered by the research within the volume will foster further collaboration and discourse about historical trends in global beekeeping.

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