

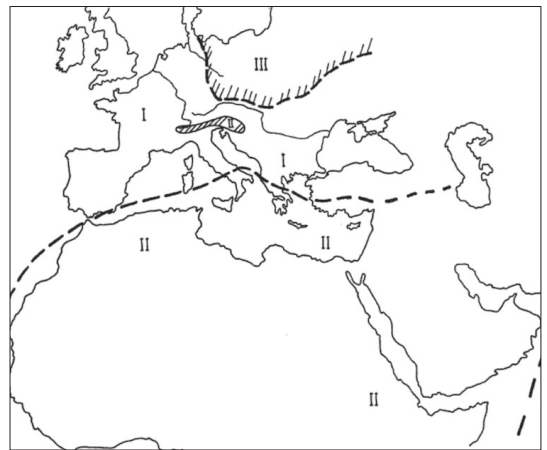
# WILD AND DOMESTIC HONEY IN MIDDLE BYZANTINE HAGIOGRAPHY: SOME ISSUES RELATING TO ITS PRODUCTION, COLLECTION, AND CONSUMPTION

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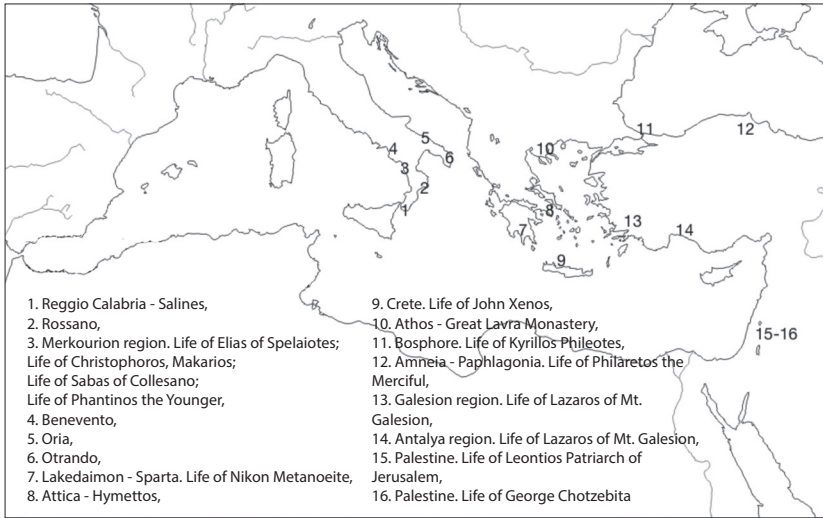
Information provided to us by Byzantine Hagiography relating to the production, collection and consumption of honey is not particularly copious but very specific and possibly unique. In this paper which focuses on information mainly from the 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, we chose those Hagiographies best representing the subject and in fact those concerning Byzantine Southern Italy, Calabria, the Southern Peloponnese, Crete and south-west Asia Minor, specifically the mountainous area of Antalya. The imaginary arc formed by these regions corresponds to the maximum area covered by the Middle Byzantine state and characterized largely as dry arid and semiarid climates, with temperate coastal or island honey-producing regions, as well as large mountain ranges, forests, gorges and plateaus with a continental climate (**Fig. 1**). Ever since ancient and of course Byzantine times up to the present day these regions have been famous for their honey. In the hagiographies we chose to study we shall focus mainly on views on the production and consumption of honey by monks and which to a certain extent reflect the opinions of the Middle Byzantine man. Indeed in some cases details are given about wild and domestic honey, their co-existence in production and consumption, as well as the gradual replacement of the former by the latter. We must point out from the start that we shall only deal briefly with the abundant information provided by the monasteries' *Typika* on the amounts and kinds of honey in the monastic diet.

We start from Calabria. A host of Middle Byzantine hagiographical texts provide us with information



**Fig. 1** Map of arid regions indicated by II according to an older diagram by F. Ruttner (1979) regarding the distribution of various types of hives in Europe (From Naso 1989, 216).

about bee-keeping in Southern Italy. Despite the climate changes over time, Byzantine bee-keeping in the region developed, as today, in a stable Mediterranean environment, with long, dry summers from mid-May to mid-September, when temperatures could exceed 40°C, and with mild winters with rainfall in the coastal regions and on the plains, but cold and snow on the mountains. And so as not to repeat ourselves later on, the other regions in the arc to which we shall refer (Crete, the Peloponnese, and Southern Asia Minor) have roughly the same climate (**Fig.1, 2**). As regards the area of Calabria, Greek sources make



**Fig. 2** Places and Lives of Saints concerning bee-keeping referred to in this study (I. Anagnostakis).

no mention of wild bees and wild honey, without this meaning that there weren't any. On the other hand we have accounts of domestic honey from the coastal area, eg. from Rossano, as well as from the mountains where Byzantine monasteries were located in which the monks were engaged in bee-keeping. This could include two to three kinds of honey, thyme and flower honeys from the coastal region and honey from the coniferous trees on the verdant mountain slopes<sup>1</sup>. In fact according to information from physicians in the region, excellent honey was produced in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Otrando and Oria, and above all the honey from Rossano was considered on a par with that from dry Attica, namely the thyme honey from Hymettus, with which constantly throughout the years since Antiquity all honeys have been compared<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2). Mention should also be made of the widespread dissemination in Southern Italy and the Longobard Benevento of beekeeping depictions, rich in detail and expression, on parchment rolls with

clear Byzantine reference, known as *exultet* (with the Christian hymn to the bee), and which reveal the important role played by beekeeping in monasteries and generally in the economy of the region from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>3</sup>.

So *Saints' Lives* mention then that the Byzantine monasteries of Calabria had bee-hives and took particular care of protecting the bees from attack by wild animals. In complete contrast to modern times, we have evidence during the Middle Byzantine years of the existence of bears, wild boars and deer in the region. *Lives of Byzantine Saints of Southern Italy* note the destructive nature of wild boars and bears, animals that trample gardens and destroy legumes, fruit and bee-hives. They even describe the sheltered places in the hewn-out rocks and the threshing fields where cereals and wine were stored, and hives protected, providing in other words valuable information about crops and agricultural practices in the region<sup>4</sup>.

1 For many of those mentioned above, see the papers which include previous relevant bibliography, Naso 1989, 203-240; Montanari et alii 2002; Caruso 2004, 55-96; Luzzi 2006, 137-154; Ditchfield 2007, 155-158; Anagnostakis 2014, 179-196. See also for the Italo-Greek Saints, Efthymiadis 2012, 347-372; Re 2011, 227-258.

2 Donnolo, *Sefer ha-Mirqahot*, §4; Sharf 1976, 95; von Falkenhausen 1989, 283-284; Anagnostakis 2014, 189-190. See also the papers in Lacerenza 2004. On apiculture and honey in place names and the Greek dialects of Calabria, see Naso 1989, 205-207 and notes 9-12.

The *Life of Elias of Spelaiotes* (864-960) mentions that Elias, a saint who roamed from Sicily to the Peloponnese but founded a monastery in Calabria, comes face to face with a bear that has come down from the mountain opposite the monastery and eats the honey from the hives. The bear is described as a savage beast that often stole from the clay hives (συλοῦσα ἀπὸ τῶν ἀγγείων τῶν μελισσῶν), namely

3 Avery 1936; for the *exultet* with bibliography Germanidou 2012, 257-264 and Germanidou 2017, 66 ff.  
4 Luzzi 2006; Ditchfield 2007, 155-158; Anagnostakis 2011, 219-223; Anagnostakis 2014, 189 and note 40.



**Fig. 3** Dilapidated, circular bee-garden (melissokepos) built with walls of loose stones and holes. Unpublished bee-garden (circa 17th - 18th c.) in the place named Melissokepos from Gouves Pediados, Irakleion Crete (Photo Ilias Anagnostakis).

breaking them, eating the honey and leaving undisturbed<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that to protect them from thieves and destructive animals the hives were usually surrounded by a fence or a stone-built circular wall and this enclosed area in modern times was called “μελισσομάντρι” or “μελισσόκηπος”, in other words “bee-garden”. The *Geoponica* in fact reveal how to construct a θριγγίον, an enclosure with loosely laid stones (ἐξ ἀραιῶν λίθων), in other words with many openings for bees to go in and out: “the beekeeper (ἐσμοφύλαξ) should build a wall (θριγγίον) with loose stones around them so that bees can fly into the holes and escape the dew and any predatory birds”<sup>6</sup> (**Fig. 3**). In a later 13<sup>th</sup>-century Saint’s Life the honey is called κηπευτόν, meaning produced in a “bee-garden”, a domestic honey, as this adjective is widely used by physicians in Late Antiquity, and not only then, to describe domesticated, cultivated plants and other products and as the opposite of the corresponding wild ones<sup>7</sup>.

5 Life of Elias of Spelaiotes, 867A; Naso 1989, 214; Anagnostakis 2011, 219-221.

6 *Geoponica*, Book 15, 2, 9 and English translation Dalby, 300. See also Koukoules 1952, 297-302; Crane 1999, 188.

7 Life of Leontios Patriarch of Jerusalem, 58 § 23 12 and commentary 175 where the editor understands that “κηπευτόν means something grown in a home garden, so maybe this was honey from bee-hives which were placed in or around a home orchard... it can also mean honey made from various plants such as carob or sesame”! However, on the use of κηπευτόν meaning cultivated and as the opposite of wild, see Dioskorides,

Regardless of the miraculous or ecological way in which the saints dealt with the bear, what can be deduced from the *Life of Spelaiotes* is the ongoing concern about guarding and protecting the bee-hives and the crops. Besides, in the *Life* the very monastery the saint was to found is described as a hive and the monks as bees (this is of course a common hagiographical topos) in accordance with the dream vision seen by the saint. He saw a swarm of bees (ἔσμος μελισσῶν) flying around his head, not intent on stinging him, but on the contrary their buzzing was melodious. And the saint took a large empty vessel (μέγα σκεῦος κενόν), put his head in with the bees flying around it and thus the bees remained in the vessel and a hive was created which he put in the garden with the plants and the flowers. When he took his head out of the vessel, some bees that had got tangled in his beard flew away. And the saint interpreted his dream to mean that on that spot he was to build a monastery with many monks<sup>8</sup>. The various elements of this dream reveal a) the way to create a domestic apiary from a free or wild swarm (by placing the swarm in a clay vessel/hive and putting it in a garden with different plants and flowers) and b) it reminds us of the images of Eros stealing honeycomb, showing him putting his head inside a hive<sup>9</sup> (**fig. 4**). Probably a similar wild swarm or some swarm (συστροφὴ μελισσῶν) that had escaped from its hives had settled in a vessel at the monastery of Chotzeba in Palestine, according to the *Life of Saint George Chotzebita*, a 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century saint. The swarm had begun producing honey in the old clay vessel (παλαιῶς κέραμος) that lay in the courtyard of the monastery<sup>10</sup>.

What interests us here is the taming of wild nature, the transition from the escaped, or wild bee swarm to domestic honey keeping and Elias’ creation of an apiary (be it as a vision) in the cave where he lived as a hermit. Indeed according to the *Life*, the new monastery would acquire an apiary which though would always be coveted by wild animals and

Book 2, 119, 1; *Geoponica*, Book 12, 30, 7.

8 *Life of Elias of Spelaiotes*, 864. Gerstel 2007, 151. See something similar in the very early apocryphal story (2<sup>th</sup> c.) when dozens of white bees leave honeycombs and hives and envelop Aseneth’s entire body and head, Joseph and Aseneth, § 8-17x: And bees came up from the cells of the comb, and they were white as snow ... And all the bees flew in circles round Aseneth, from her feet right up to her head; and yet more bees, settled on Aseneth’s lips. See also on Aseneth’s gastronomic vision and mystical theophagy, Putthoff 2014, 96-117.

9 On the subject of the putei, see illustrations and presentation with all the relevant bibliography, Geramidou 2017, 54-59.

10 *Life of George of Chotzeba*, § 13.

particularly bears. So one day when Spelaiotes saw a bear coming to steal honey from the monastery's beegardens, he yelled to drive it away, without harming the animal in any way. He severely scolded it, rebuking it for shamelessly stealing the product of the monks' labours, and ordered it to leave and never return. And the beast lowered its head and went away in shame<sup>11</sup>. Human feelings and logical behaviour are projected onto the bear that tries to steal the honey. This is made easier by the fact that the bear is considered a wise animal that resembles in every way a man; it walks upright and has the same limbs as he does<sup>12</sup>. Spelaiotes' treatment of the bear is characterized by precisely the same anthropocentrism that we see in its extreme form in 6<sup>th</sup>-century Italy in Gregory the Dialogist's tale of the bear-shepherd in a flock in Norcia in Umbria<sup>13</sup>.

A similar story to that of Spelaiotes and the bear appears again in Middle Byzantine Calabria, according to the *Life of St. Christopher* and his sons, Makarios and Sabas of Sicily (10<sup>th</sup> c.), most likely written by an Italo-Greek, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Orestes (- 1005/6). The saints, already renowned ascetics, escaped to Calabria after the Saracen invasion of Sicily and lived as monks initially in Reggio and Salines, ending up in the Merkourion region, in the valley of the Lao river, an area famed for its forests, waters, caves, hermitages and monasteries and, according to the *Lives* of the saints, also for bees and bears. Although the monastery's crops were guarded even at night, a bear managed to destroy the gardens that the monks had grown in specially deforested, cleared areas<sup>14</sup>. Southern Italian *Lives of Saints* frequently refer to the extensive clearing and crop-planting of entire areas during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tree-felling means the disappearance of wild flora and fauna and obviously of wild bees<sup>15</sup>. So when

11 *Life of Elias of Spelaiotes*, 867A; Naso 1989, 214; Anagnostakis 2011, 219-221.

12 Kyranides, 2.1: Ἄρκτος θηρίον ἐστί, ζῷον δασὺ καὶ κωθρόν, κατὰ πάντα εἰκόσ δ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, συνετόν καὶ ὀρθὰ βαδίζειν θέλων. Τοῦτου τοῦ ζῴου ἕκαστον μέλος πεποιήται πρὸς ἕκαστον μέλος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Pastoureau 2007. On the ancient belief in the union of men with bears and childbirth, see Miquel 1994, 60-68.

13 Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, III 15; Boglioni 1985, 935-993. Also on bears and honey, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, III 26; Naso 1989, 237 note 129; Montanari 1992, 571-587; Crane 1999, 26-27.

14 *Life of Christophoros*, Makarios and Sabbas, § 15. Anagnostakis 2011, 221. On the Saints and origin of Orestes, Re 2011, 228-229, 234, 247.

15 Luzzi 2006; Anagnostakis 2011, 219-223; Anagnos-

takis 2014, 189 and note 40.

Christopher's turn comes to guard the monastery's legume crops, he gets chatting with the bear. In fact the question he puts to the bear expresses his doubt as to how he should treat it, either as a beast or as something different, closer to man. It is an ecological approach that is only possible to a bear and almost never or very rarely to any other destructive animal. It is as though the saint is addressing a person with reason, feelings and morality when he asks it if it was sent by God to punish them or if the injustice committing to the monks by stealing their crops is its own choice. The bear is supposedly aware of the injustice like a sinful man, feels ashamed of his actions and is persuaded to move, to go to other places, as the story says<sup>16</sup>. The bear's removal that is repeatedly mentioned in the *Lives* simply refers to the expulsion of wild animals, the deforestation and cultivation of untamed wildernesses and their turning over to domestic apiculture. Moreover, widespread domestic bee-keeping and honey consumption emerges in the Merkourion region when someone from a village in the area wishing to receive the blessing of St. Sabas, came up with the idea of keeping honey as a gift, but as his own hives (σίμβλον) had no honey, he stole some from the hives belonging to his fellow villagers. As usual the saint becomes aware of the incident and reprimands him (also a common hagiographical topos) and we learn of the existence of more than one apiary in the region<sup>17</sup>.

Another story (similar to the previous ones) about dealing with a bear that eats honey from the hives of the monks in Byzantine Calabria (region of Merkourion) appears in the *Life of Phantinos the Younger* from the 10<sup>th</sup> century (late 9<sup>th</sup> – late 10<sup>th</sup> c.). The monks take up arms to kill it, but again Saint Phantinos, like Adam in Paradise before his disobedience who lived and talked with the animals (ἄλλος Ἀδὰμ πρὸ τῆς παρακοῆς γεγονώς), warned the bear of the fate that awaited it and persuaded it not to appear in the region again<sup>18</sup>. The bear moves on and is not seen there again. Phantinos in another incident calmed and drove away hungry wild boars that surrounded him menacingly after he came across them in the forest during the harsh winter eating wild pears<sup>19</sup>.

takis 2014, 189 and note 40.

16 *Life of Christophoros and Makarios*, § 15.

17 *Life of Sabas of Collesano*, §28. See also in 1007 the donation of 2 hives by a monk to the Greek monastery of saint Elias and Anastasios of Carbone in Lucania, Robinson 1929, 136. 38; Germanidou 2012, 264.

18 *Life of Phantinos the Younger*, § 24. Anagnostakis 2000, 172-173.

19 *Life of Phantinos the Younger*, § 12.





**Fig. 4** Eros the honey thief, detail from a basilica's 6th-century mosaic floor, Madaba Jordany.



**Fig. 5** Driving away the bear that has stolen honeycomb, cod. par. gr. 550, f. 94v (11th /12th c.), Bibliothèque Nationale Paris (Photo A. Grabar, Byzance. L'Art Byzantin du Moyen Âge du VIII e au XV e siècle, Paris 1963, 145).

In all the aforementioned cases the animal is simply pursued and driven away, as both its integrity and the protection of the hives are taken seriously into account. In addition, all these stories use in their narration as a commonplace the concept of the bear's well-known partiality for honey. In fact the Byzantines considered and called the bear *μελισσοφάγα* – honey eater<sup>20</sup> (**Fig. 5**).

Completely different though is the treatment of a bear in another *Life* that is not related to the geographical arc we are studying but which is worth mentioning. According to the *Life of Kyrillos Phileotes* (ca. 1015-1110/20), on the Bosphorus, not fifty kilometres from Constantinople (**Fig. 2**), in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century a wild bear tormented Kyrillos' spiritual father: it used to steal honey from the few *μελισσοφάτνια*, as he calls the hives<sup>21</sup>. Here though the monk kills the bear with one blow, wishing, according to the *Life*, to flaunt his bravery. The interesting reasoning behind the killing of the bear can be summarized as a simple dilemma between possession and ownership and thus survival: you or me. According to the *Life*, before the monk killed the bear, he put the following dilemma before it: either you will collect the honey or I will<sup>22</sup>. Here we find ourselves facing another type of monastic ideal and an entirely opposite view from that of Italo-Greek saints who clash ethically and ecologically with the bears stealing honey in Byzantine Calabria<sup>23</sup>. In all probability there would also have been similar stories of honey-eating bears in Byzantine Asia Minor. Byzantine sources inform us about bear activity in mountainous areas and about the production and collection of wild and domestic honey. Indeed the destruction of hives by fierce animals is verified by the tradition in Asia Minor of constructing tower-like apiaries aimed at protecting the hives by placing them many metres above the ground (**Fig. 6**).

20 Paidiofrastos diegesis, verse 844; Anagnostakis 2011, 228-230.

21 *Life of Kyrillos Phileotes*, 99, §19, 1. See also, Hesyhios, Lexicon, letter kappa entry 4759 : (4758) κυψέλη· πλεκτὸν ἀγγεῖον μελισσῶν, (4759) κυψελίδες· μελισσοφάτνια.

22 *Life of Kyrillos Phileotes*, 99, §19, 1.

23 *Life of Kyrillos Phileotes*, 99, §19, 1; Anagnostakis 2000, 172-173. In Anagnostakis 2011, 224-226 a comparison is attempted between two diametrically opposite types of behaviour to the bear, that of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Italian monks and those monks originating from the military aristocracy of Komnenian years.



**Fig. 6** Tower-like apiaries aimed at protecting the wooden, cylindrical hives from wild animals, Beydağları Antalya Turkey (Photo “Çamkuyusu, Turkey,” Bryn Mawr Collections, Bryn Mawr College Visual Resources Center)

Before however moving on to Asia Minor and then ending up in Crete, another hot, dry region is worth mentioning, this time in the Southern Peloponnese, in the Byzantine province of Lacedaemon, where Saint Nikon the Metanoieite (ca. 930-1000) was active, and his *Testament* (after 997) mentions wild bees (ἀγριομέλισσες) in a rocky, deserted area, full of ancient ruins, on a hill in Sparta<sup>24</sup>. The wild bees fly out from the ruins of monuments and the rocks that are being excavated to build the foundations of a Christian church or even as a swarm they prevent the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. However, the translator in the English version of the *Testament* translates them as wasps, influenced by the reference in the *Life* that says wasps (σφήκες), a *Life* written somewhere in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>. Demons and heretics are often equated and correlated with wasps or wild bees by the Byzantine authors of the *Lives* of saints. Probably in this case it is a commonplace, when in fact the wild bees or wasps emerge from ruins, wastelands and rocks in an area that still has many unbaptized persons. These wild bees could be the type of bees known as mason bees (*Chalicodoma murairia* F.) that are also called ἀγριομέλισσες by Greek people and they often make nests in various buildings and churches, defacing

24 Testament of Nikon the Metanoieite (ed. Lampisdis), 252. 48- 56. For this equation and correlation, see Anagnostakis 2000, 173-174.

25 Life of Saint Nikon Metanoieite, 72.36 (ed. Lampisdis), 124 §36 (ed. Sullivan) and Testament of Nikon the Metanoieite English translation, 318.

Byzantine monuments in Greece<sup>26</sup>. Anyway a swarm of bees flying over Byzantine Sparta, known as Lacedaemon, and which according to the *Testament* leaves, flies away and is lost at the edge of the river Eurotas, beyond the symbolism or the demonic relevance lent to it, must have been and is always a familiar picture in the Southern Peloponnese. This region with its pines, firs, chestnut trees, thyme and flowers, has always been a honey-producing area, located between Mounts Parnonas and Taygetos, Monemvasia and Mani.

Moving on now to Byzantine Asia Minor, the information we have on beekeeping from narrative sources and the *Lives of Saints* is sparse. An exception is the *Life of Philaretos* on beekeeping in 8<sup>th</sup>-century Paphlagonia where the saint lived (701-792), although the information provided by the *Life* written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (821/822) is probably loaned, as is the entire story of the saint's life and tribulations, from the life of Job in the Old Testament. It says therefore that the rich and charitable lord Philaretos from Amneia, who squandered all his riches by giving to the poor, had many estates, many slaves, many beehives and many herds of animals: 250 hives, six hundred head of cattle, one hundred yoke of oxen, eight hundred mares in the pastures, eighty saddle horses and mules, twelve thousand sheep, forty- eight estates and many slaves. Apart from possible exaggeration, it was a very large fortune for a provincial lord, which though when compared with the other items, the 250 hives does not seem excessive. The terminology used for beehives (μελίσεια βουτιά), apiary (μελισσιών), harvesting the honey from the beehive (τρυγᾶν τὸ βουτίον τοῦ μέλιτος) is of particular interest.<sup>27</sup>

However the most detailed information is provided by the *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion* (ca. 966/7-1053), from all aspects both unique as regards the subject we are studying (wild and domestic honey) and Byzantine beekeeping in Asia Minor in general<sup>28</sup>. Born in Western Asia Minor, near the Aegean coast in Magnesia on the Meander valley, during the second quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the third decade

26 Mourikis et alii 1978, 229-236. I thank Sophia Germanidou for this information.

27 Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful, 60.5-15, 74.249, 82.352-365 and translation 75 and 83. Nesbitt 1969, 150-158; Koukoules 1952, 297-300. On bees and grapes and τρυγᾶν μέλι, see Anagnostakis 2000, 179-182; Harissis - Harissis 2009, 45 and note 201.

28 Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion, 508-588, and particularly about honey 513§13, 530 § 65, 534 §81-82 and English translation by Greenfield, 91-92, 153-154, 169-173.

of his life he roamed Asia Minor, through Phrygia, Pamphylia, Cilicia, travelled to Jerusalem, returning through Cappadocia and Pontus, settling for the remainder of his life in Galesion in Magnesia (Fig. 2). His *Life* offers us a great deal of information on the production and consumption of wild and domestic honey in rural and monastic communities where the saint lived, referring repeatedly to the production and consumption of honey as well as to the existence of bears on Mount Argaios (present-day Erciyes) in Cappadocia and in the mountainous region of Ephesus on Mount Galesion, where he finally settled down. Previously, though, during his approximately seven-year stay in the area of Antalya (984/6-991/2) he would lead the life of a hermit in a cave on a mountain near to the city and was on good terms with an abbot from a monastery in this mountainous region, which to this day has not been identified<sup>29</sup>. The *Life* provides us with unique descriptions of the saint's activities during this period of his life in the area of Antalya and the wild hinterland, inhabited by honey collectors, heretics (probably Paulicians) and uncouth, uncivilized people, according to dominant Byzantine views<sup>30</sup>. One of the inhabitants' main occupations was to collect wild honey on the steep mountain peaks in the region. It is worth mentioning by the way that ever since antiquity and up to the present day, honey has been produced in the area of Antalya, where as previously mentioned, traditional tower-like apiaries can be found (Fig. 6). These tower-like constructions are apparently used to keep the hives high up away from cunning wild animals like the bear. Nowadays in the mountainous hinterland of the Antalya the Taurus mountain honey, *Toros balı*, and a pine honey, *çam balı*, are produced and one of the most important honey festivals in Turkey is also held there (Antalya Honey Festival: Gündogmus in August)<sup>31</sup>.

29 A reference in the *Life* indicates that ecclesiastically the monastery and the area belonged to the bishopric of Philetos who came under the metropolitanate of Lycian Myra, *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 512§10 and English translation 88, note 61. For this reason the monastery and honey-collecting incident are probably placed erroneously by some somewhere in Lycian Myra, Kaplan 1992, 38, Hellenkemper - Hild 2004, vol. 1, 153. Contrary to this, see Lambropoulou 1986, 78 note 67 and 149-150 note 52; Anagnostakis 2000, 186 note 71.

30 *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, English translation 88, note 60. Also Lambropoulou 1986, 149-156; Anagnostakis 2000, 186 notes 173-174.

31 On these constructions, see Germanidou 2017. On timeless honey production in the area,

So Lazaros in an effort to tame this wild place, again according to the *Life*, advised the inhabitants to give up the dangerous task of collecting wild honey from steep cliffs. Some, though, asked for his blessing to go to the precipitous part of the mountain to collect honeycombs (ὅπως ἀπέλθωσιν ἐπὶ τὸ κρημνώδες τοῦ ὄρους πρὸς τὸ τρυγῆσαι μελίσσεια). The saint underlines the danger of such work and by sharing with them the honey from the monastery, he demonstrates the safety of domestic honey and implicitly encourages them to set up apiaries. There were obviously reactions to the attitude of the saint, his opposition to a traditional occupation and practice. The *Life* describes precisely such a reaction. One honey collector claims he knows this job very well and is an expert (τεχνίτην εἶναι), that he has been doing it for many years and in defiance of the saint he goes to collect wild honey. At this point the *Life* describes how his helpers tied a rope to him and lowered him down the steep mountainside to the cave in which were the wild honeycombs, and that just as he was about to collect the wild honey the rope broke and the unfortunate craftsman fell to his death. This is in actual fact a unique description of wild honey collecting (it is considered the first such record and account in the Western world)<sup>32</sup>. I believe that this description could in a unique way annotate modern photographic material showing wild honey collection in the Himalayas, where honey collectors hang on rope ladders over precipices (Fig. 7)<sup>33</sup>. I quote the whole excerpt:

"Some people went out to Lazaros from the village that lay near the mountain and asked for his blessing to go to the precipitous part of the mountain to collect honeycombs. The father, however, told the brothers to bring some honey and, when they had brought it, said to these people, "If it's honey that you want, look, here's honey! Eat as much as you want and then go back to your homes; but don't go onto the cliff there lest you return with a harvest of bitterness instead of the sweetness of the honey." One of them replied brashly to the father, "I've collected many such honeycombs and nothing bad has ever happened to me, so I'm not worried about going onto the cliff now." But the father answered him, "Believe me, brother, this time it won't do you any good to go there." However, when Lazaros was unable to dissuade them, despite

see Hellenkemper - Hild 2004, vol. 1, 153.

32 Crane 1983, 28-31; Kaplan M. 1992, 38; Anagnostakis Ilias 2000, 175-177.

33 Crane 1983, 28-31, and 82 fig. 86; Crane 1999. See also the commentary and bibliography of the honey hunting of Nepal in English translation by R. P. H. Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 91-92 note 70. And read more <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2584541>.





**Fig. 7** Honey hunters who risk their lives in the foothills of the Himalayas to collect honey  
(Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2584541>)

saying many things, he let them go and do what they wanted. So they went off and, after attaching a rope to the man who had told the father he was expert at this, began lowering him toward the cave. Before he reached it, however, the rope was cut through as if by a human hand, causing the wretched man to be flung down the cliff; he was smashed on the rocks and expired at once. So the others went down and picked him up, and then, amidst much weeping and wailing, went off to the village to bury him. But they told everyone about the father's prediction and the words that he had spoken to them in trying to prevent them from going there.<sup>34</sup>

The important thing here is that once again the *Life* of a Middle Byzantine saint records the transition process from collecting wild honey to collecting domestic honey, as Lazaros "was trying to prevent them from going there". The monks showed

<sup>34</sup> Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion), 513§13 and English translation, 91-92.

themselves willing to provide the inhabitants with honey from the monastery's hives. This offers two possibilities a) either that we are dealing with a transition period, namely that domestic honey from the monastery is temporarily provided to the villagers until they can set up new hives and give up their wild life, or b) that the monastery produced such plentiful amounts of honey that it had a surplus to distribute and this constituted a means of approaching, proselytizing and subduing the heretics<sup>35</sup>. Certainly both cases could apply. However the distribution of domestic honey leads us to yet another conclusion, that most likely not a lot of honey was consumed in monastic communities due to specific regulations in the monasteries' *Typika*. We have many accounts stating that honey was treated ambiguously by monks and was regarded as a delight and a temptation; it was either partly excluded from the diet or the clay hives were considered demonic and smashed<sup>36</sup>. We are not sure that this kind of treatment applied everywhere, judging from the recorded amounts of honeycombs (κηρία μέλιτος) consumed, but this term may conceal mainly wax which the monasteries needed. Probably an exceptional case is that of the annual rations of a simple monk Damianos, based on a document from the Monastery of Great Lavra on Mount Athos, dated 1101/ 1102. What is strange for a single monk is the excessive amount of 102 litres of honey (μέλι) but only 3.4 litres of oil: this amount of honey corresponds to 306,000 calories. One explanation that could be put forward for the large amount of honey, usually given as honeycomb, is the need for making candles (but here the wax is mentioned separately), or even that the said honey makes up for the lack of calories and other basic nutrients caused by the absence of meat and dairy products in the monastic diet<sup>37</sup>. Getting back now to the case of Lazaros, at the monastery of the saint on Mt. Galesion, inhabitants of the area sent honeycombs (κηρία μέλιτος) to the saint who lived the life of an ascetic on a pillar (a similar gift to that in the *Life* of Spelaiotes previously mentioned), a fact that can be interpreted to mean that the monastery sought honey and also that there was beekeeping activity in the greater area of Galesion<sup>38</sup>. It is also mentioned

<sup>35</sup> Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion, 512§10 and English translation 88, note 61.

<sup>36</sup> *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, §12, §26.33-34; Life of George of Chotzeba, § 13; Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, 1704-1705, 1708; Anagnostakis 2000, 173-175; Androudis 2000, 211-220.

<sup>37</sup> Acts of Lavra I, 280-282; Kaplan 1992, 26; Androudis 2000, 211; Papagelos 2000, 190.

<sup>38</sup> Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion, 530 § 65 and En-



that the saint consumed a drink of honey or a mixture of honey and water, and boiled concentrated must, a kind of grape syrup (μέλι ἢ ἔψημα ἢ γλυκί) and that at New Year his fellow ascetics ate *lalangia* (λαλάγγια), something like pancakes with honey, at that time the only sweetener in existence, along with raisins, prunes and figs<sup>39</sup>. We can mention yet another example from the *Life of Leontios Patriarch of Jerusalem*, given in a monastic and symbolic context, that of a sweet similar to *lalangia* called *chartopittouta* (χαρτοπιττούτα), “a paper-thin cake” composed of flour and sweetened with “garden honey” (κηπευτόν)<sup>40</sup>.

We shall close with a deliberately naïve question that leads us to an obvious answer and to general conclusions from this review of wild and domestic honey mentioned in Middle Byzantine Hagiography. Really, what purpose did apiaries in monasteries serve, if ultimately the monks did not eat much honey, at least openly and officially, and when the impression is given that, except in cases of illness, honey, just as oil, was a luxury, constantly in short supply and sought after<sup>41</sup>? The answer, although naively obvious, is based on yet another example from the *Life* of a saint in the ever driest, hottest, biggest honey-producing area in the arc we are exploring, Crete. Indeed what we shall present below is essentially a reproduction of what we maintained in a former article of ours, but updated with new data and bibliography<sup>42</sup>. The *Life and Testament* (1031) of *John Xenos* (fl. ca. 970 - after 1027 or 1035), who came from southern-central Crete, states that the saint toured many places and villages in Central and Western Crete (present-day prefectures of Heraklion, Rethymnon and Chania). Working alongside the locals, he built churches, constructed water tanks and bee-gardens (μελισσοουργεῖον), planted vineyards, orchards with numerous kinds of trees, and founded monasteries which he endowed with many animals, sheep, goats, beasts of burden and with all the technical tools required by monastic

and agricultural life<sup>43</sup>. This creative work to redevelop a province, sometimes described as abandoned, desolate, dry, without wood and vegetation, occurred some decades after the island’s liberation from Arab occupation (963). This is clearly a missionary and civilizing project aimed at boosting agriculture and production with the help of Byzantine ecclesiastical and imperial power, continuing the corresponding short mission of Nikon the Metanoite.

As regards the saint’s intervention in apiculture, he founded the *metochion* (a dependency) of Saint Patapios in the village of Mousela (probably to the west of Rethymnon, where today there is only a river of the same name), and created an apiary (κηριανός) with 150 hives (μελίσσια). This *metochion* was a dependency of the monastery founded by the same saint in honour of the Mother of God Antiphonetria “on the mountain of Myriokephala” in Rethymnon and therefore the apiary belonged to the monastery which had 12 monks<sup>44</sup>. While active in southern Crete the saint also created a bee-garden (μελισσοουργεῖον, very lush according to the late codex K) at the monastery of St. George at Azogyre, which it was recently suggested should be placed in the thyme, savory and herb-filled area of Sfakia, on the Libyan sea coast, at the western end of Crete near the present village of Azogyres<sup>45</sup>.

Of these two cases of creating a bee-garden, the first is of particular interest that will allow us to answer the question we posed. The *Life* states the following: “from the godly Christians in the area the saint collected 150 hives (μελίσσια) which he placed in the monastery’s bee-garden, *kerianon* (κηριανόν); *kerianon* from *kerion* (κηρίον), wax and candle<sup>46</sup>. Thus the place where the monastery’s hives are kept takes its name from the product that is of greatest interest to the monks, wax. The monasteries were always interested primarily in wax and created the

glish translation, 153-154. On honey hunting in more modern times in the same area and in Asia Minor in general, see Crane 1999, 46-47, 387.

39 *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 534 §81-82 and English translation, 169-173. On sweets with honey in Byzantium, see Anagnostakis 2013, 87-92; Leontsini 2014, 123-131.

40 *Life of Leontios Patriarch of Jerusalem*, 58 § 23. 10-13 and commentary 175.

41 *Life of Sabas of Collesano*, § 28; *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 530 § 65 and English translation, 153-154; *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, 1704-1705, 1708*; Montanari et alii 2002 ; Ditchfield 2007, 157 note.

42 Anagnostakis 2000, 177-178.

43 *Life of John Xenos*, 4-8; *Testament of John Xenos*, 11-12 and English translation of the testament with commentary by Fiaccadori, 143-147.

44 *Life of John Xenos*, 6. 80-85 (12 monks, codex C), 9. 46-51 (6 monks, codex K). For all references to place names, suggested identifications and the activity of the saint, we hereinafter refer, without noting it, to the edition Tomadakes, *Life of John Xenos*, 13-22. See also Psilakes 2014, 217-235.

45 *Life of John Xenos*, 7.109-117 (codex C), 11. 107-119 (codex K); *Testament of John Xenos*, English translation, see commentary, 144; Psilakes 2014, 223.

46 *Life of John Xenos*, 6. 81 (codex C), codex K does not mention anything.

infrastructure to give them trouble-free access to this raw material. Therefore, the number of 150 hives is in no way excessive, as is the opinion of some who focus their attention only on honey production and its consumption by 6 or 12 monks, and do not take into account the production of wax<sup>47</sup>. Besides, even in the case of a disproportionately large honey production in relation to the number of monks, the honey could be distributed to the country people, as we have already seen in the *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, and we cannot even rule out the possibility of the monastery exchanging it for other products or trading it.

But of even greater interest is the way in which the *kerianon* is created. While no details are given about the creation of the bee-garden of Azogyres, it is clarified that the creation of the bee-garden of Mousela was made possible by the contribution of the faithful<sup>48</sup>. If in other cases that we saw previously the faithful gave honey to the monasteries (*Life of Sabas of Colessano*, *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*), here the faithful offer entire hives and help the monastery acquire its own bee-garden, its own honey and wax. Besides, even during the Arab occupation, Crete was renowned for its rich honey<sup>49</sup>, and the bee-garden of Azogyres is described as very wealthy, opulent, consequently the superabundance of bees and hives could not be ruled out which could be generously given away. This fact of the superabundance of bees and the offer of hives is attested and emphasized even more by the creative activity of John Xenos, who along with vineyard and orchard crops, promoted bee-keeping.

Based on the *Lives* of the saints we have studied, I believe that we have been able to see how from wild nature or abandoned countryside we are led to the creation of areas clear-felled for crops, to the not so ecological onslaught by medieval man on the environment, and the development of bee-keeping through monasteries. Domestic production, as opposed to the hazardous and unpredictable or chance element of wild production, was one of the monasteries' priorities which ultimately contributed to the spread of beekeeping in Byzantium<sup>50</sup>. *Lazaros of Mt. Galesion's* exhortation to the boorish collectors

of wild honey reveals in a unique way this change and the monasteries' offer: "Look, here's honey! Eat as much as you want!"

From the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards the production of honey became widespread in Byzantium and this brought about the introduction of special taxes. In the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century (1152) evidence can be found for the first time of the *melissoennomion* (μελισσοεννόμιον), a tax or charge levied on bee-hives<sup>51</sup>. In the same century a Jewish writer, Samuel ben Meir (Troyes, c. 1085 – c. 1158), affirmed "that beekeeping in the Greek kingdom stood on a higher level than in his own land, northern France"<sup>52</sup>, although we are not sure if this was ultimately an impression formed from ancient Greek and Roman medical authors.

In conclusion, monks, like the Italo-Greek saints and Lazaros of Mt. Galesion and John Xenos from Crete, who civilized wild, desolate or abandoned places, all these hermits (from ἐρημίτης, a person living in solitude, in the desert or wilderness), all these solitary bees<sup>53</sup>, as they are described by their biographers, offer us the unique experience and account of the transition from wild honey collecting to domestic, well protected and organized beekeeping.

47 Kaplan 1992, 38; a different view by Anagnostakis 2000, 177.

48 See also in 1007 the 2 hives given by a monk to the Greek monastery of saint Elias and Anastasios of Carbone in Lucania, Robinson 1929, 136. 38.

49 Christides 1984, 98, 117; Anagnostakis 2000, 177.

50 Papaggelos 2000, 190-210. For much of that previously mentioned, see Anagnostakis 2000, 177-178.

51 Bartusis 1991, 701; Oikonomides 1996, 74-76.

52 Kraus S. 1914, 113; Kazhdan et alii 1991, 130; Kazhdan 1997, 56; Anagnostakis 2000, 178.

53 Geoponika, Book 15, 2, 9 and English translation Dalby 330; Anagnostakis 2000, 171-173.

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