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we decide just who is right in this matter, let us take a good long look at the modern world and the result of banishing philosophical and ethical considerations from practical politics.

Cicero in one of his letters (*A. 2.5.1*) says that he is much more concerned about what men six hundred years from then will think of him than he is about the chitchat (*rumusculos*) of his contemporaries. But it was not necessary to wait so long: he was a hero and a martyr in less than ten years after his death.

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BEE DANCES AND THE "SACRED BEES"

There is in Greek literature a very old, very persistent, and very well documented tradition which connects the bee with mythology and with religious ritual. Many years ago, A. B. Cook¹ published an impressive synthesis of the literary and archaeological evidence for the tradition; and others have contributed studies along similar lines.² We may summarize here only a few of the more significant items in the tradition:

From remote prehistoric times down to the Greco-Roman era, the bee was in the Aegean area a holy creature (Pindar, frag. 123 Loeb, line 9; Petronius 56; cf. Vergil, *Georg.* 4.220-221), associated frequently with a major divinity. In Crete, the cave in which Rhea was believed to have given birth to Zeus was sacred to bees; and legend said that in it bees (or the daughters of King Melisseus) gave nourishment to the divine child.³ According to one story, Zeus himself had a son called Meliteus (*Ant. Lib.* 13), who was also fed by bees. Some scholars interpret the name of the Cretan divinity Britomartis as meaning "bee-maiden"⁴. The Cretan princess Melissa was said to have been the first priestess of the Magna Mater (Lactant., *Div. Inst.* 1.22), and in later times other priestesses of the cult were said to have been called, for her, Melissai. On the island of Rhodes, two gold plaques were found, on each of which was depicted a figure part woman and part bee, obviously

philosophisch-moralische Sphäre, als ob er die Freiheit besessen hätte, wie ein weltfremder Privatgelehrter nach deren Prinzipien zu wählen."—Matthias Gelzer in *RE* VII A 995. One must admire the courage of Gelzer, however, to speak so frankly in 1939.

¹ "The Bee in Greek Mythology," *JHS* 15 (1895) 1-24.

² E.g., W. Robert-Tornow, *De apium mellisque apud veteres significatione et symbolica et mythologica* (Berlin 1893); Olck, art. "Biene," in *RE*; Otto Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt* II (Leipzig 1913) 421-431; Norman Douglas, *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology* (New York 1929) 181-186; G. W. Elderkin, "The Bee of Artemis," *AJP* 60 (1939) 203-213.

³ Ant. *Lib.* 19; Callimachus, *Hymn. Iov.* 48-50; Diod. 5.70; Apollod., *Bib.* 1.1.6-7; Hyginus, *Fab.* 182; Vergil, *Georg.* 4.152; Columella 9.2.3.

⁴ Elderkin (above, note 2), 203-204.

Asiatic in inspiration, and probably to be associated with the Great Mother.⁵

In Greece proper, we find the people of Delphi asserting that their second temple had been built by "bees" (Paus. 10.5.5); and Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.59-60) calls the priestess of Apollo "the Delphic bee"—an epithet which reminds Cook⁶ of Deborah, the prophetic "bee" of the Hebrews (*Judges* 4.4; cf. Schol. Theoc. 3.13; Josephus, *Ant. Iud.* 5.6).

Artemis has a definite association with bees. Her chief priestesses are called "bee-keepers," *melissonomoi* (Aesch., frag. 43 Loeb; cf. Aristoph., *Ran.* 1274). At Ephesus, and probably elsewhere as well, her chief priest was called a "king bee," *essén*.⁷ The Ephesian Artemis herself, as moon and birth goddess, is sometimes called a bee, "Melissa" (cf. Porph., *De anbr. nymph.* 18). In fact, Elderkin sees in the whole Ephesian tradition many references to bees. On coins and in art in general Artemis of Ephesus is often associated with, or symbolized by, a bee; and she has cult connections with the Cretan Britomartis.

Whether Aphrodite was associated with bees or not is not completely clear. In a fragment of Pindar (123 Loeb, lines 5-9) there is a reference to Aphrodite and one to "holy bees" in fairly close juxtaposition; and in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, line 564, Aphrodite flies to the future mother of Dionysus *melissa d'hoia tis*. A skilled craftsman, traditionally Daedalus (Diad. Sic. 4.78.5), is said to have made for Aphrodite Erycina a golden honeycomb that looked just like a real one; a similar golden honeycomb was found at Knossos.⁸ Evidently honeycombs were an appropriate offering to the goddess.

In the cult of Demeter and Persephone the association is unquestioned. Priestesses of Demeter were called "bees," Melissai, as the goddess herself on occasion was called a "bee."⁹ The priestess-bees carry pure water in her ritual (Callim., *Hymn. Apoll.* 110-112; cf. Aelian, *Nat. An.* 5.49)—a function which has been likened by some writers¹⁰ to the *hydrophoria* of certain wasp-waisted (or bee-waisted!) therianthropic daemons shown

⁵ "Goldplättchen aus Kamiros," signed E.C., *Arch. Zeit.* 27 (1869) 110-112.

⁶ Above (note 1), 5-7.

⁷ *Et. Mag.*, s.v.; Schol. Callim., *Hymn. Iov.* 66; Paus. 8.13.1; cf. A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (Cambridge 1914-1940) I 443. The ancients thought of the queen bee as a "king."

⁸ Sir Arthur Evans, *The Palace of Minos* (London 1921-1935) IV 154-155.

⁹ Callim., *Hymn. Apoll.* 110-112; Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 4.60; Schol. Theocr. 15.94. Discussions as to whether the word *melissa*, when so used, is to be considered as the word for "bee," or rather as coming from *melesthai* or *meilissein* (see W. W. Merry, *Aristophanes, The Frogs* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905], Notes, p. 66) are really of little moment; for quite obviously throughout antiquity the title was connected with the bee.

¹⁰ S. Eitrem, art. "Tierdaemonen," in *RE*; cf. Elderkin (above, note 2), 212.

on pre-Greek rings and seals. Servius (*Aen.* 1.430) has a story of a woman named Melissa to whom Demeter revealed her mysteries, and who was torn to pieces by other women, to whom she refused to reveal the goddess's secrets. From her body, according to the legend, Demeter caused bees to be created. Women initiated into the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone,¹¹ or celebrating these mysteries, particularly those of the Thesmophoria,¹² are called "bees" or "holy bees." By extension, priestesses in general were called "bees" (*Et. Mag.*, s.v. "Melissa"; Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 4.60). Persephone herself is given the epithet Melitodes (*Theocr.* 15.94 and schol.; Porphyry, *De antr. nymph.* 18).

Bees figure in the legend of Dionysus;¹³ and Jane Harrison¹⁴ saw in the ambiguous lines of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* (552-563) a reference to Melissai in the cult of Dionysus. Zeus changes a beautiful woman named Melissa into a bee (Columella 9.2.3). Bees are sacred to the Muses, who are even said on occasion to have appeared as bees.¹⁵ In metaphor and simile, a poet is often likened to a bee (*Anth. Pal.* 2.69; 7.13; cf. Plato, *Ion* 534B). A nymph named Melissa is said to have discovered honey, and to have taught her fellow nymphs to mix it with water and use it as a drink. From her, bees were called *Melissai* (Schol. Pind. *Pyth.* 4.60). Nymphs named Brisai taught bee-culture to Aristaeus. In the cave of the Naiad nymphs on Ithaca there were stone "mixing-bowls and amphorae" in which bees dwelt (*Od.* 13.102-106). Nymphs themselves were sometimes spoken of as Melissai, and there are legends of their being changed into bees.¹⁶ Conversely, bees in the chrysalis stage were often called "nymphs" (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 11.16.48).

There is a possibility also that the bee may have had some association with the birth goddess Eileithyia. To this goddess Pindar (*Pyth.* 3.9) applies the adjective *matropолос*. The *Lexicon* of Hesychius glosses *mētropолос* as *tas palai Melissas*. Schmidt¹⁷ interprets the gloss further, in a note: "Intellegit Cereris antistites." Whether Melissai were priestesses of Eileithyia as well as of Demeter we cannot be sure; but in each case the divinity is associated with motherhood.

It is clear, then, that there is in Greek literature a persistent memory of "sacred bees" or "bee-women" over a wide area in prehistoric Crete, Greece, and Asia Minor.

¹¹ Hesychius, s.v. "Melissai"; Pindar, frag. incert. 158 Schroeder, and Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 60; Porphyry, *De antr. nymph.* 18.

¹² Cf. Cook, *Zeus* (above, note 7) III 1083.

¹³ Cook (above, note 7), 6-7.

¹⁴ *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1922) 442-443.

¹⁵ Himerius, *Or.* 10.1; 28.7; Philostr., *Imag.* 2.8.6; Varro, *R.R.* 3.16.7.

¹⁶ Hesychius, s.v. "οροδεμνιαδες"; Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 4.60; Porphyry, *De antr. nymph.* 18.

¹⁷ Mauricius Schmidt, *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon* (Jena 1858-1862) III, s.v.

They are usually associated with prophecy, mysteries, and song, and with the cults of various female divinities or supernatural beings, most of whom bear some relationship to, attend upon, or inherit the functions of, the great nature goddess of prehistoric Crete and Asia Minor.

Although some of the literary references cited are obviously metaphorical, yet there seems little doubt that real women, not imaginary beings, are indicated in many of the passages which refer to the "sacred bees." That raises the question as to whether in ritual observances the women were costumed fancifully as bees, or whether, on the contrary, their designation as "bees" was purely figurative. In my opinion, there is a strong likelihood that, in early times, at least, the priestesses called "sacred bees" may in some cult ceremonies have worn costumes suggestive of the insect.

There is a great mass of evidence for ritualistic animal mummery of many kinds, performed by masked or unmasked worshippers clad in animal skins or disguises, for all the Mediterranean lands in ancient times.¹⁸ Also, there are found in Minoan art a great number of creatures part animal and part man, and also of "daemons" wearing the skins of animals over their heads and upon their backs, and in many cases having human hands and feet. Some of the creatures are actually garbed fantastically as bees.¹⁹ Many scholars regard these composite beings as votaries, engaged in ritual dance-mummery. We know that the dance played a great part in the religious ceremonies of the Cretans, and such mummery would not be alien to them. Certainly throughout the whole of the Greek period there was much animal mummery, in costume, in the cults of such divinities as Artemis, Despoina, Apollo, etc.

It may well be that by classical times the costume of the bee-priestesses and bee-votaries had become largely symbolic. However, if one be inclined to doubt the practical feasibility of an attempt to garb a human being as an insect, he need only consider the chorus in such plays as the *Gall-Flies* of Magnes, the *Wasps* of Aristophanes, the *Ants* of Plato Comicus, and, above all the *Bees* (*Melittai* or *Melissai*) of Diocles.

One other point has a bearing in this connection. It has been established by students of religion that genuine legends in which a human being is transformed into an animal are evidence for prehistoric animal cults, with accompanying mummery. We recall here the story that Zeus changed a woman into a bee (Columella 9.2.3), and also the legend of the creation of bees from the body of a woman (Serv., *Aen.* 1.430).

¹⁸ E. Sjöqvist, "Die Kultgeschichte eines cyprischen Temenos," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 30 (1933) 308-359 and especially 345-347; Lillian B. Lawler, "Dancing Herds of Animals," *CJ* 47 (1952) 317-324; also "Pindar and Some Animal Dances," *CP* 41 (1946), 155-159.

¹⁹ Adolf Furtwaengler, *Die antiken Gemmen* (Leipzig and Berlin 1900), Pl. II, 32.

If we grant, then, that there may actually have been in prehistoric times in Greek lands some form of ritual mummery or dance by women costumed as "holy bees," can we gain any knowledge of what the performance may have been like?

As we have seen, Jane Harrison (and other writers, to a lesser extent), laid much stress on lines 552-568 of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* as depicting the ritual of the three Thriai of Mt. Parnassus, whom she identified as Melissai, bee priestesses. She called particular attention to the poet's statement that they are winged (line 553), that their heads are sprinkled (554) with white barley-meal (to simulate pollen),²⁰ that they are associated with prophecy (556), that they "flit" from one place to another (558, 563) and feed on honey-combs (559), that they "rave in holy madness," *thyiōsin* (560), as do the Thyiades. "They hum and buzz," she says,²¹ "swarming confusedly." Evelyn-White²² thinks that possibly they "are here conceived as having human heads and breasts with the bodies and wings of bees"; and Allen, Halliday, and Sikes²³ believe that the Rhodian plaques support this view. Miss Harrison recognizes the song of the Thriai as the *thriambos*, a "confused, inspired, impassioned" song akin to the dithyramb (cf. Suidas, s.v. "thriambos"); and although the Thriai are generally spoken of as "nurses" (*trophoi*) of Apollo, and although in the Hymn Apollo bestows them upon Hermes (line 564), she sees in them attendants of Dionysus.

This identification of the three "maidens" of the Homeric Hymn with frenzied bee-priestesses is certainly not a positive one. It is interesting, nevertheless. In connection with it we might note persistent mention in ancient literature of man's use of honey in prehistoric times, before he had wine, to produce intoxication or ecstasy (cf. Porph., *De antr. Nymph.* 16). Ecstasy or "possession" is characteristic of both animal dances and rituals associated with prophecy.²⁴ It is particularly common, of course, in the worship of Dionysus, Apollo, and the Great Mother.

A few years ago the late Ernst Riess published in this journal²⁵ a brilliant emendation of a corrupt gloss in Hesychius, s.v. "botrydia." ". . . Or a dance," he reads, "of the women celebrating the Thesmophoria, in which they danced *botrydon*, holding to one another, [lined up] to resemble a bunch of grapes." He interpreted the arrangement as: one dancer in the first row, two in the

²⁰ It is a fact that certain Greek priestesses did whiten their hair with flour. T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, and E. E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford 1936) 347, assemble the pertinent references.

²¹ Harrison (above, note 14), 442.

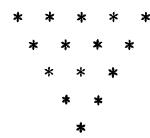
²² Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns, and Homeric* (London and New York 1914) 403.

²³ (Above, note 20), p. 347.

²⁴ Cf. Geoffrey Gorier, *Africa Dances* (London 1935) 49-50, 221-222.

²⁵ "Hesychiana," *CW* 37 (1944) 240.

second row, three in the third row, etc., in a triangular grouping of fifteen (a chorus of fourteen plus one leader), suggesting a cluster of grapes, thus:



He accepted studies of the present writer which pointed to the use of "pictures" in the dance—patterns made by the dancers from time to time, as they stood for a moment or two so that spectators might see the formation clearly. One of these "pictures" in both the Cretan dance and the dance of Greek women celebrating the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone seems to have been "the lily";²⁶ and Riess believed that "the bunch of grapes" was another. He scanned the *Thesmophoriazusae* of Aristophanes carefully for a likely place in which a "grape-shaped" dance figure of this sort might have been used. He found none that was entirely satisfactory, but he rather looked with favor on lines 988-1000, as containing a reference to Dionysus.

I believe that Professor Riess was on the right track; but I think that the allusion in the adverb *botrydon* is not directly to *grapes*, but rather, as in *Iliad* 2.87-90, to *bees* swarming in clusters that *look like* bunches of grapes. In other words, one of the figures of the dance of the women at the Thesmophoria was a grouping that resembled bees swarming—which in turn, as the ancients remind us repeatedly (Vergil, *Georg.* 4.558; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 11.18.55; Columella 9.9.7), resemble a bunch of grapes. This fits in most aptly with the specific statement (above, notes 11 and 12) that women celebrating the mysteries at the Thesmophoria were called "sacred bees." Riess' failure to find a particular place in the *Thesmophoriazusae* where such a dance figure might have been used need not disturb us; for the poet would hardly attempt to present a specific dance figure of the women's mysteries in his comedy.

Within recent years, animal psychologists have spent much time in studying the behavior of bees, among other creatures; and they have presented scientific confirmation of the tradition²⁷ that bees do actually dance. The ancients must have known of this dance. Certainly they were from prehistoric times deeply interested in bees; and they observed them closely, even to the point, in Roman times at least, of making the hives of transparent substances to facilitate study of the insects' habits (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 11.16.49-50; 21.14.80).

The most significant of recent studies of the dance of the bee are those of the Austrian scientist Karl von

²⁶ Lillian B. Lawler, "The Lily in the Dance," *AJP* 65 (1944) 75-80.

²⁷ Max von Boehn, *Der Tanz* (Berlin 1925) 8.

Frisch.²⁸ After a series of observations over a long period of time, Dr. von Frisch concluded that the honey bee performs two dances—the “round dance” and the “waggle dance.” Both are used by workers returning to the hive to report the finding of a good supply of food. If the distance of the food from the hive is less than about fifty meters, says Dr. von Frisch, the worker bee performs a round dance, describing circles about its own axis. The dance is spirited—even wild. The bee throws up its legs as high as it can, and moves in dizzy circles. Other bees at first look on; then the frenzy of the dance seems to communicate itself to them also, and they join in. After the dance, they fly out to seek the food. When, on the other hand, the food supply is farther away, the bee reporting that fact engages in a “waggle dance”; that is to say, it describes semi-circles about its own axis, first turning violently clockwise, then reversing direction and turning counter-clockwise, swinging the body with abandon and vigor. However, the speed and violence of the dance is less if the food is very far away, and it “decreases with the increase in distance.” Furthermore, the “waggle dance” is oriented to the direction of the food source “in relation to the relative position of the sun if the dance takes place on a vertical comb, and indicates actual direction if performed on a horizontal comb.” Other workers join this dance, too, before flying out; and the hive seethes with their mad “waggling.” Not long ago Americans were enabled to see this whirring “waggle dance” of the honey bee, enormously magnified, in a Walt Disney short picture entitled “Nature’s Half-Acre.”

Many peoples have imitated bees in mimetic dance. The traditional dance of the Hindus has a formalized gesture known as Bhramara, “the bee”;²⁹ and a bee figures in the Hindu dance-drama of Sakuntala.³⁰ Even our modern dance theater sometimes shows us a bee dance: New York newspapers of November 15, 1950, e.g., recorded a portrayal of a bee by a dancer in *The Enchanted Mill* of the De Cuevas Grand Ballet Company at the New Century Theater the preceding evening. Folk dances miming the actions of bees survive from mediaeval times to this day in several lands, notably France³¹ and the Scandinavian countries.³² In the latter, the bee dance makes use of a large number of people, representing bees, the queen bee, the hive, and

flowers outside the hive. Whether this particular dance has its roots in classical antiquity or not would be very difficult to determine, since comparatively little scholarly work has been done on the antecedents of the folk dances of Europe. A classical source would not be beyond the bounds of possibility; for a few ancient dances did survive in mediaeval Europe.³³ Also, the influence of classical mythology upon that of the Norse peoples seems definitely established. In the Scandinavian dance we miss the frenzy and the deep religious significance indicated for the ancient bee dance; but those elements would have passed, of course, with the “mysteries” of which they formed a part. More than one of the ritualistic animal dances of antiquity deteriorated into amusing dances, and, finally, into children’s games.

It seems entirely possible, then, that the Cretans and Anatolians, and, later, the Greeks, had an appropriate mimetic dance of “bee priestesses,” in rituals of deities associated with the bee. Such a dance would have been a vigorous one. It would have included “flying” and “flitting” movements; the unflinging of arms in abandon or invocation; swirling in dizzy circles (here one recalls Cretan paintings of women with hair flying out as they circle rapidly in the dance); half-circles to right and to left, with shaking of the hips; on occasion, a grape-like figure or “picture” representing a swarming cluster of bees, and, probably, similar “pictures” representing lilies³⁴ and other flowers visited by bees; and a mimetic or symbolic portrayal of the feeding of honey to a divine child. Throughout, there would have been much humming, buzzing, or intoning of sacred songs. The dance would probably have been accompanied with cymbals (cymbals were actually found in the Idaean cave),³⁵ and would have increased in frenzy until one or more of the priestesses was seized with the spirit of prophecy, and cried out words of dread import. Performed by “winged,” “pollen-dusted” women, perhaps in the secrecy of a celebration of “mysteries,” it would have had a powerful effect upon all observers.

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²⁸ “The Dances of the Honey Bee,” *Bull. of Animal Behav.* 5 (1947) 1-32; summarized in *Psycholog. Abstr.* 23 (1949) 1140.

²⁹ P. S. Naidu, “Hastas,” *New Indian Antiquary* 1 (1938) 345-361, No. 18 and Fig. 22.

³⁰ Caroline and Charles H. Caffin, *Dancing and Dancers of Today* (New York 1912) 41.

³¹ Germaine Weill, *Gais Refrains du Pays de France* (Paris 1933), “L’abeille,” p. 18.

³² Cecilia van Cleve, *Folk Dances for Young People* (Springfield, Mass. 1916), No. 2, “The Bees,” pp. 8-9.

³³ Lillian B. Lawler, “Dancing with the Elbows,” *CJ* 38 (1942) 161-3; “The Geranos Dance,” *TAPA* 77 (1946) 112-130; “Periekkokkasa,” *AJP* 72 (1951) 300-307; “Dancing Herds of Animals,” *CJ* 47 (1952) 317-324.

³⁴ It is significant that the lily served as a basis for a “picture” in the Cretan and Greek dance, that it seems to have been a sacred flower in Crete, and that it is particularly mentioned among the flowers that bees favored; cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 21.12.70.

³⁵ Martin P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion* (London 1927) 504.