

Notaries could not be mistaken: honey was second, after wheat!...

Herodotus, father of history, wrote 450 years before Christ, in Book V of his *Histories*: “The inhabitants of Thracia say that the Istro lands are inhabited by bees and because of them people cannot move farther”.

For the ancient period there is more data on the beekeeping practiced by the Romanians.

Polibius (200-118 BC) in *Histories*, Book IV, wrote: About those needed for life, Pontus lands give us cattle and slaves, in great numbers and of a quality that all appreciate to be very good. Among the luxuries, these lands send us honey in abundance, wax and fish. Instead, they receive from our parts of the world the oil we have in surplus and all sorts of wines”.

Strabo (69-19 BC), in *Geography*, Book VII, writes with reference to the Thracians: “Posidonius says that the inhabitants of Thracia are stopped by their faith from eating beef, and for this reason they do not touch their cattle. They eat honey, milk and cheese and live a quite life which is why they are called “theosophers” and “capnobates”, which means those who adore gods and feed on air”.

Claudius Aelianus, of Italy, Peneste (around 200 BC), in *About animals*, Book II, also writes: From a certain writing I found out that in Scythia there are bees that do not fear the cold. And the Scythians do not sell foreign honey, only honey made in their own country, with the honeycombs”.

Therefore on our territory there were bees. Herodotus was right! The three authors mentioned above who were under the influence of Greek culture in the Mediterranean area, state that honey was used for food by the inhabitants of what is today Romania. A serious trade with honey was practiced between the Romanians and the Greeks in their colonies, as well as wax, between the Greeks in the colonies of the Black Sea, and the Romanians in our area.

These conclusions determined later, in our days, a search for proof and traces of the continuity of this noble occupation: beekeeping. What do we find at the Museum in Constanta – Black Sea port, former Greek colony? First of all a Greek amphora of the 4th-3rd century BC, was discovered in Mangalia, the old Callatis. The shape of this object, similar to many displayed in the hall, has a five-six liter capacity, and a special mark: a rectangular stamp on one of the handles, that writes on two rows of its origin in Thasos. On the top row says Nicodemus, the tradesman and owner, and on the lower one: Thasos, the name of the Greek port by the Dardanelles. Between the two writings there is the symbol of a bee.

The seal is small in size (3.5 /3cm). Clarifying is V. Canarache with his work *The import of stamped amphorae in Histria* (Academiei Publishers, Bucharest 1957), then the *The Amphora stamps from Thasos* by Antoinette Anne-Marie Bon (Paris, 1957), a British catalog of reproductions of similar seals, representing bees, made after 12 amphorae or fragments of amphorae discovered in the Greek ports Thasos, China, Sinope, Heraclion, Rhodes, Heghespolis and Nauson, in the 4th-3rd centuries BC. Recently, near Mangalia (former Callatis) an amphora was also found (dating 320-200 BC) provided with a circular seal and a bee, same as the other bees on the seals, presenting extremely rigorous external morphological details, with the name Atenipou, probably still an owner. Why should these owners choose the bee as a symbol? Of course for two reasons: 1) the bee was well known to the Greeks, as well as to the Dacians on the sea shore of the Pontus Euxinus, where beekeeping was of course practiced; 2) honey trade was certainly flourishing, the amphora being used for the transportation of honey from the colonized territories to the ones of the inhabitants in charge with this trade.

Difficult historical conditions in our area, people migration, wars, destroyed a good part of documents and the material proofs since the medieval times. For a better image of this historical period, foreign archives were called in, by help of which it was found that in the 13th and 14th centuries, both the Genoa people and the Venetians, tireless navigators, would have trade in extremely profitable conditions with two cities well known at the time: Chilia – the old Licostromion, and Cetatea Alba (White Fortress), the old Thyras, both on the Danube, at the crossroad of two continental commercial roads. The first crossed Moldavia and linked the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea through Cetatea Alba, and the second crossed Wallachia, and tied central Europe to the Greek-Byzantine countries by Chilia. In a certain period of time, the tradesmen from Genoa would exercise a political domination in the area.

Documentary sources from the 14th century, recently discovered, provide an even better opportunity to highlight a few unknown aspects about the contribution of the Romanian provinces in providing supplies to Byzantium. Specifically it is about a file of the former notary's register, Antonio de Podenzolo, actually in Chilia, a well preserved fragment in the State Archive of Genoa, contained a great number of notary's documents signed in the city by the Danube on October 29 1360 and June 9, 1361. These are sea navigation contracts. Most of them are letters to the country (33), documents of sale (29), mandates (12), prices (7), company contracts (4), documents identifying buildings (2), etc. Through all this, the public notary of Antonio Podenzolo presents a special interest with reference to agriculture, trade and bee products. Among the products traded: the first traded products include: wheat, salt, fish, wool and wine. Honey and was place second and third, after wheat. In the registries there are frequent Greek names of tradesmen: Ianis Zapos, Ianis Francopolos and Ianis Vassilikos, residents of Adrianople, but with trade houses in Constantinople.

A document dated April 27, 1361, shows that Marino d'Isola declares to have received from the Genoa Antibre d'Opizzi de Monelia money in exchange for providing in three weeks eight "cantarii" (one "cantarium" of honey would equate 150 Genoa pounds or 47.512 kg). Therefore, it was about 380 kg of honey. The register still reports four contracts whose purpose was to buy 113.5 "cantarii" of honey, which means 5,384.693 kg, therefore an important amount. The buyer was an inhabitant of Chilia, the Armenian Sarkis, who exported to Peru market, in Constantinople.

For centuries, the green Romanian wax was famous for its special quality and was known as "Bogdanian" wax, after the name of Bogdan, Prince of Moldavia. For a very long time, palaces of Constantinople and other European cities were lit with candles made out of this wax, and it was stated that by burning these candles, the air was purified and perfumed, possibly due to the propolis they contained. In a document dated February 2, 1361, in the register of the Genoa notar, an inhabitant of Chilia, Ion Cosina, stated he had received a sum of money in "aspri" from Geoffredo Marocelo, citizen of Genoa, in exchange for supplying by May 1, a canturium and a half of wax, therefore over 71 kilograms. In other documents registered on April 8 and 24 of the same year, the same tradesman, Antibre d'Opizzi de Monelia, bought 2.5 "cantarii" of wax (118.799 kg) from inhabitants of Chilia.

At the time, the north of Dobrudja was covered in forest and famous vineyards. The salt came from Ocnele Mari salt mines in Oltenia, the grains and the wool were sold in Chilia and came from the south of Moldavia, all the products that were the subject of trade were traditional Romanian products in surplus, that were being sold to south-east Europe since antiquity.

Along the lines of clearer coordinates of beekeeping, an important role is played by the documents issued by the Prince Chancery of Valachia, in the Fanar ruling era. Six documents issued by the Fanar princes Mihai Racovita, Mihai Constantin Sutu, Alexandru Ipsilante and Constantin Moruzi established that the one hundred hives belonging to the

Lutheran church of the Germans in Bucharest were tax exempt, although then the fiscal regime was very severe. Germans in Bucharest had been “contaminated” with the passion for beekeeping from the Romanians. These documents are kept in the archive of the Lutheran church in Bucharest, carrying the signatures and seals just mentioned.

The age and importance of beekeeping in the economic and social sphere shows clearly that it was a permanent occupation of a hard-working intelligent people who always knew how to valorize the favorable conditions created by a generous nature.

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