Eva Crane Trust

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TITLE: The Prince, the Inquisition and the bee book that was never published

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FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN HISTORY

The prince, the Inquisition and the bee book that was never published

In 1625 Prince Cesi dedicated to Pope Urban VIII a broadsheet containing the first known drawings of a bee under a microscope; in 1630 these illustrations were reproduced in an edition of Persius's satires published by Francesco Stelluti. These facts are common knowledge, but the details of the story are less widely known than they deserve to be.

The early part of the seventeenth century was an exciting time in a number of sciences. In 1610 Galileo, then a professor at Padua, published a pamphlet in which he described how he had made a compound microscope the year before; a Scotsman, John Wodderborn, records hearing Galileo describe how he 'perfectly distinguished . . . the organs of motion and of sense in the smallest animal and notably in a certain insect in which each eye is covered by a thick membrane, which septum, however, is perforated with holes like the vizor of a warrior, thus affording a passage to the images of visible things.' It was not until 1624 that the name *microscope* was invented, by a member of a small but very active scientific society in Rome, the *Accademia dei Lincei* — the Academy of the Lynxes, i.e. those with piercing eyes to seek out new things. In that year Galileo, a member of the Academy, gave a microscope to another member, a young nobleman Federigo Cesi, sending it with the message 'I hope that from it you will have as much use and enjoyment as I,' and the explanation: 'That there may be just the right distance between lens and object, the glass must be advanced or withdrawn, the little tube being made movable on its base and adjustable as desired. With infinite wonder I have examined very many minute creatures . . . You have now vast opportunity to observe thousands and thousands of details and I beg you to send me news of the most curious of them.'

All was not enjoyment, however: the Inquisition had for various reasons become suspicious of the Academy, and this was a serious matter for its members. In an attempt to improve their relationship with the Church, the Lynxes invited Cardinal Francesco Barberini (later the Vatican Librarian) to be their President. He declined, so further ways were sought of demonstrating the Academy's allegiance. In 1623 Barberini's uncle became Pope Urban VIII, and it so happened that the arms of the Barberini family consisted of three bees. What could be a more suitable expression of devotion than to use the new microscope to show the structural details of the bee, and to present the discoveries so made to the Pope in a form which linked them up with the three heraldic Barberini bees ? So the bees were drawn, probably by Stelluti, redrawn and engraved by Mathias Greuter (twenty times magnified), and an accompanying text written by Cesi. At Christmas 1625 the presentation 'of an accurate delineation of the bee' was made to His Holiness Pope Urban VIII, 'as a token of everlasting devotion'. The complete illustration is reproduced on page 22, 2/5 of its original size. The verses at the bottom of the drawings finish up, rather ingenuously: 'It is fitting that, while the world looks up to thee in wonder, thy bee should show itself to be an even greater wonder.'

This *Apiarium* was a large broadsheet, the printed opening being 39½ × 25 inches; it was designed as a presentation document, not as a

means of imparting information to the public. But the Lynxes were interested in publishing scientific books, and it was decided to use the drawings and text of the broadsheet as the basis for a textbook on bees. Cesi started to prepare it by cutting up the text of the broadsheet and pasting each item on a separate sheet of paper in a notebook. He made handwritten notes and additions in the margins left for the purpose. The illustrations were to be presented in a less heraldic way; the book was to be properly indexed and made suitable for quick reference and not, like the presentation edition, ' to give pleasure above all to its patrons'. Fabio Colonna, to whom it was shown in 1626, reported back : ' I liked not only the various differences and properties of the Bees, but also the restrained eulogies and praise therein '.

It would be pleasant to report that the bee saved the day as far as the Academy was concerned. But the story has a sad ending, both for the history of beekeeping and for the Lynxes themselves. Cesi died prematurely in 1630, and the new scientific edition of the *Apiarium* was never published. Stelluti used part of the material in an edition of the satires of Persius which was issued in 1630, and here the anatomical drawings of the parts of the bee, which were used as ornaments in the *Apiarium*, are rearranged and separately identified (compare the illustrations on pages 22 and 23).

Cesi's pasted-up draft for the scientific book still exists, and can be seen in the Library of the *Accademia dei Lincei* in Rome. Near to it is the Secretary's handwritten report of Galileo's examination before the Inquisition for maintaining his ideologically unsound scientific theories: one after another the Lynxes testified in favour of their fellow-member. But the Establishment was not won over, and he was sentenced on 22nd June 1633, to incarceration at the pleasure of the tribunal, being ' vehemently suspected of heresy '.

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The B.R.A. Library has English translations of the parts concerning bees in the works of Alessandrini and Stelluti above.