

## PREFACE

# BEEKEEPING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT

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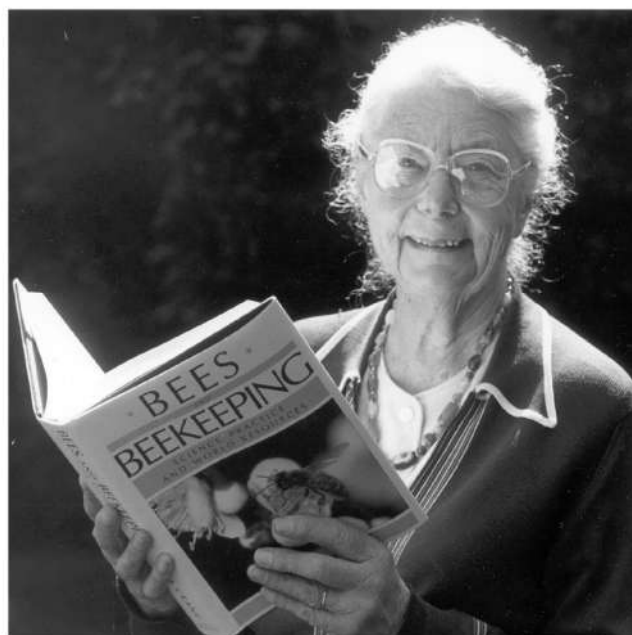
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**T**he Eva Crane Trust was established in 2000 by Dr Crane herself. It is a grant giving organization dedicated to continuing her work and interests.

The content of this symposium would have delighted Dr Crane. The contributors to the talks and to this book are learned academicians who are very informed on different beekeeping developments in the eastern Mediterranean. It is an area which can rightly hold the title the “cradle of beekeeping as we know it today”. Dr Crane recognised this in her work. By seeking out and recording beekeeping through the ages in the area she set the foundations and gave impetus and inspiration to many who have followed. By outlining Dr Crane’s work I hope to set the stage on which others, more expert than I, can show you how beekeeping developed in the region.

Eva Crane was born just over 100 years ago she went to University and studied mathematics and physics. She became interested in bees during World War II when she had her first hive. From then on she started gathering everything that was written on bees, bee products and bee science and then set about making that information available to everyone through her publications. Her books became, and still are, valuable textbooks for all who have any interest in bees, bee science and beekeeping.

*Honey – A comprehensive Guide, published by Heinemann, London 1976.*



*The Archaeology of Beekeeping, published by Duckworth, London 1983.*

*Bees and Beekeeping – Science, Practice and Resources, published by Heinemann, London 1990.*

*The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting, published by Duckworth, London 1999.*

These are but a few titles from a total of over 300 publications.

Dr Crane made visits to Greece and the islands in 1979, 1986 and 1995. She travelled with her friend Penelope Papadopoulo, affectionately known as Poppy,





who went to Crete to teach beekeeping but the men did not like being taught by a woman so she taught the beekeepers' wives instead. When they became the better beekeepers the men were prepared, after all, to take lessons from a woman!

Dr Crane's theories on the transmission of beekeeping techniques around the Mediterranean were based on:

- Evidence of excavated material.
- Written texts including those from Ancient times.
- Comparison of traditional beekeeping methods with what is done today.

All these sources indicate that the area, usually referred to as the Middle East, was probably the birthplace of beekeeping as we know it today. Until the 21st century, the earliest hives found had been in Greece and dated from the 5th century BCE. However, the recent (2008 onwards) discoveries at Tel Rehov in Israel show hives in an apiary from the time of King Solomon (circa 990–970 BCE). In these early historical times one of the quickest ways to travel was by boat using coastal routes, some of which had been established by the Phoenicians as early as 1500 BCE. The Greek Islands, at the centre of the then known world, would almost certainly have been a stop-off points in this transport network. Some of the islands' inhabitants would have been sailors themselves and

many others would have had contact with the travellers, which in turn gave access to ideas and practices found in the wider world. These outside influences could affect all facets of life including beekeeping.

Wild bees gave a product for which there was a continual and increasing demand – honey. Therefore, to try and meet the demand human beings attempted to create/copy the nests used by the cavity nesting honey bee - *Apis mellifera*.

These nest sites (hives) were constructed out of whatever material was plentiful in the area. Upright cork hives were to be found in Sardinia, log hives in Tuscany, clay horizontal cannon hives in Crete and so on. The cannon clay cylinder hives on Crete open at both ends are similar to those seen in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. The proximity of Crete to Africa would give credence to the theory that beekeeping using this type of hive may have spread northwards through the islands to the mainland. When these clay hives were placed on terraces between fields they were worked from the same end as the bees entered. The other open end became redundant and so by the time clay cylinder hives had developed on Syros they had a closed end.

In a publication of 1682 George Wheler described





a coiled straw hive (which could also be made out of willows) with flat sticks (top bars) which could be removed individually but “had to be separated one from another with a knife”. He saw the hive on Mount Hymettus. Many replicas of this hive have been created since using plant materials and pottery.

#### Advantages of top bar hives

- Top bars with correct spacing make it easy:
- To remove comb from the hive
- To check the combs e.g. for adequate stores
- To harvest just honey leaving brood to develop
- To manipulate colonies – change frames
- To carry out swarm control
- To divide colonies.

These are, in effect, moveable frame hives – at least it is the beginning of the moveable frame. In this form it only consists of a top bar not a rectangular structure. Also the bars are not interchangeable as, due to the circular nature of the body of the hive, there is a long bar in the middle and the others reduce

in length as they are further from the centre.

The true moveable frame hive tends to be credited to Lorenzo Langstroth (1810 – 1895) and is easily dated to 1851 when it was first given publicity in English language books and journals. However, there are others who can lay very serious claim to its invention. In particular the Prussian Dr Johannes Dzierzon (1811 – 1906) developed a large moveable frame hive but he probably copied the ideas of the Ukrainian, Petro Prokopovych (1775 – 1850). Before that the Swiss naturalist Francois Huber (1750 – 1831) had created a frame observation hive. However, there is little doubt in my mind that the principles of a moveable frame structure were originally established in Greece.

Greece is often referred to as the “Cradle of Democracy”, it is also without doubt the Cradle of Modern Beekeeping as well!

When attending a conference in Nikiti in 1996 Dr Crane was both humbled and delighted when she





received an award. She was amazed that the people, who did not read English, knew anything about her – she was told “everyone in Greece loves Eva Crane”. She recalls this event in her book *Making a Beeline*, (page 238) published by IBRA, Cardiff, 2003. Her work continues through her Trust and a huge gallery of photographs she took on her visits all over the world, including her Greek visits, and many of her publications can be found on the website: [www.evacranetrust.org](http://www.evacranetrust.org).

The Trust wants to develop and continue the dissemination of information on the history of beekeeping and is prepared to consider funding such work.

Again details are to be found on the web site. As a direct result of the conference held on Syros a new book in English by George Speis has emerged: *Beekeeping on Andros*, and another publication telling of the discoveries at Tel Rehov in Israel is due shortly.

In conclusion I must add my own huge debt of gratitude to Dr Eva Crane for her work, her books and her photographs, for her kindness as a mentor but above all for being a dear friend.