

AYŞENUR MULLA

... ANIMALS IN BYZANTIUM

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“AND TO EVERY BEAST OF THE EARTH AND TO
EVERY BIRD OF THE HEAVEN AND TO
EVERYTHING THAT CREEPS ON THE EARTH”:
ANIMALS IN BYZANTIUM

A Master’s Thesis

by

AYŞENUR MULLA

The Department of History
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University
Ankara
May 2022



To the Loving Memory of My Grandmother, Hafize Gülsüm Şen

“AND TO EVERY BEAST OF THE EARTH AND TO EVERY BIRD OF THE
HEAVEN AND TO EVERYTHING THAT CREEPS ON THE EARTH”: ANIMALS
IN BYZANTIUM

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by

AYŞENUR MULLA

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“And to Every Beast of the Earth and to Every Bird of the Heavens and to Everything that Creeps on the Earth”: Animals in Byzantium

By Ayşenur Mulla

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

Luca Zavagno (Advisor)

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

Paul Latimer

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

Selim Tezcan

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

Refet Soykan Gürkaynak (Director)

ABSTRACT

“AND TO EVERY BEAST OF THE EARTH AND TO EVERY BIRD OF THE HEAVEN AND TO EVERYTHING THAT CREEPS ON THE EARTH”: ANIMALS IN BYZANTIUM

Mulla, Ayşenur

M.A, Department of History

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Luca Zavagno

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This thesis examines the relationship between the Byzantines and animals (in particular small ones like worms and bees) in terms of practical, socio-economic, and religious terms mainly using the written sources (hagiographies, ancient scientific sources, miracle stories, or legal documents), archaeological, zooarchaeological, and architectural remains from different areas of the Byzantine Empire. The main idea of the thesis stems from socio-cultural and religious studies of the Byzantine society, which (with the exception of a few scholars like Sophia Germanidou, Henrietta Kroll, Nancy Sevcenko, and Tristan Schmidt, who have studied the Byzantine animals and their mentality about the world of bestiary), has mostly focused on the economics of animals and their rearing. In fact, and contrary to the mainstream historiography, this study tries to bridge a gap between the role of the animals, especially the smallest ones like worms, bees, insects, and silkworms, as they have tended to be forgotten when examining the socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Byzantine society at large. Bearing in mind the limits and the problems

of sources, both primary and secondary, the main goal of this thesis is to scrutinize the Byzantine narrative about these animals, to recreate the Byzantine perception and utilization of the other living beings as well as to understand the multi-faceted benefits of the presence of animals in the daily life of the Byzantines.

Key Words: Animals, Bees, Byzantine, Hagiography, Silkworms.



ÖZET

“YABANIL TÜM HAYVANLARA, CENNETTEKİ TÜM KUŞLARA, YERYÜZÜNDE SÜRÜNEN TÜM CANLILARA”: BİZANS DÜNYASINDA HAYVANLAR

Mulla, Ayşenur

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Bu tez, Bizanslılar ve hayvanlar (özellikle solucan ve arı gibi küçük olanlar) arasındaki ilişkiyi, esas olarak yazılı kaynakları (azizlerin hayatları, eski bilimsel kaynaklar, mucize hikayeleri veya yasal belgeler), arkeolojik, zooarkeolojik ve Bizans İmparatorluğu'nun farklı bölgelerinden mimari kalıntıları kullanarak; pratik, sosyo-ekonomik ve dini terimler açısından incelemektedir. Bizans toplumunun sosyo-kültürel ve dini incelemeleri (Henrietta Kroll, Sophia Germanidou, Nancy Sevcenko ve Tristan Schmidt gibi bilim insanları hariç) çoğunlukla hayvan ekonomisine ve yerleştirmesine odaklanmıştır. Aslında - ana akım tarih yazımının aksine - bu çalışma, Bizans toplumunun sosyo-kültürel ve ekonomik dinamiklerini incelerken gözden kaçırılabilirdikleri için, özellikle de solucanlar, arılar, ipekböcekleri ve diğer böcekler gibi küçük hayvanların rolü ile diğer hayvanlar arasındaki boşluğu kapatmaya çalışmaktadır. Hem birincil hem de ikincil kaynakların sınırlılıklarını ve

sorunlarını göz önünde bulundurarak, bu tezin temel amacı, Bizanslıların hayvanlar hakkındaki anlatısını incelemek, Bizans'ın hayvan algısını ve diğer canlıları kullanımını dikkatle incelemek ve Bizanslıların günlük yaşamında hayvanların varlığının çok yönlü faydalarını anlamaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Arı, Azizlerin Hayatı, Bizans, Hayvanlar, İpekböceği



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PREFACE

Scholars who have studied animals and their behavior have often used the word “non-human animals” to simply refer to animals. For instance, Sarah Chan and John Harris state that “human” continues to be used widely as an indicator of privileged moral status and is regarded as a quality of morally significant beings—that is, of ourselves. Accordingly, when we talk of “human dignity” as an essential property that should be respected or protected, while “human rights”¹ are similarly assumed as the natural patrimony of human beings simply because they are human.”² In my opinion, debating the terminology which is used for animals such as non-human animals or other animals is essential, because the language we have in mind and use in our daily life indicates our intentions and beliefs. For example, according to Vitoria O’Sullivan’s article called “Non-Human Animal Trauma During the Pandemic”, scientists who used kittens and puppies as subjects of the experiment refer to them as “subadult cats” and an “unquantified number of juveniles” which suggests that if they used the words kittens or puppies, the tone of the article, the experiment, and the way of interpretation, especially the reader’s perspective, would be changed.³ Peter Singer calls our different behavior towards different species

¹ “Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.”

www.un.org

² Sarah Chan and John Harris, “Human Animals and Nonhuman Persons,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–29.

³ Victoria O’Sullivan, “Non-Human Animal Trauma During the Pandemic,” *Postdigital Science and Education* 2, no. 3 (2020): 588–96.

speciesism which can be understood to mean the domination of one species over others. He argues that if a person does not want to do something to another human, s/he should not do that action to another species. Therefore, he prefers to use the term “non-human” to describe animals -which are not humans-. This term brings people and animals to the same level of consciousness. According to him, any creature which is aware of its own existence and has the ability to feel pain is the possessor of its own particular rights which should be recognized by other species; they should not be abused.⁴

With these preliminary caveats in mind, I consider animals as independent individuals who have moral agency, intelligence, and their own prerogatives. Also, I would like to state that through my thesis, I use the term “animals” so as not to create misunderstanding since the term “non-human animals” belongs to our modern society and its mentality. Therefore, this definition naturally reflects the new debates on animals, their rationality, and the human-animal relationship. In this light, one may safely assume that the definition of “animal” and comprehending the animals’ existence were truly different in pre-modern societies.

⁴ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement* (New York: Open Road Media, 2015), 38.

CHAPTER 1

1.Introduction

The title of Hal Herzog's book summarizes the conflict between the human-animal relationship in the following way: *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals*. Indeed, this issue has preoccupied humans' minds for centuries: What shall we do with animals? Should they simply be reared as an emergency stock of food? Are they to be feared? Or are they meant to keep us company?⁵ Obviously, these "functions" are not mutually exclusive, but the last assertion is too often equated with our contemporary world where animals can be seen sleeping in the same room and acting as daily companions for people. In fact, even in Greco-Roman times, people sometimes kept particular animals as pets, although Ingvild Sælid Gilhus suggests the concept of house animals in past times was very different from today's viewpoint. It is for this reason that she uses "personal animals" to refer to house animals.⁶ According to her the most distinctive features of "personal animals" are that they shall not be killed for meat, they have their own names, and people share their living space and food with them (as in the case of dogs). She states that "a relationship with a dog was different from a relationship with a snake or for that matter with an eel. In some occupations, there was daily contact between humans and animals. In some

⁵ Konrad Lorenz, *Man Meets Dog* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), vii-x.

⁶ Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29.

cases, this contact also created mutual bonding and a personal relationship.”⁷ This justifies the general tendency of people to make connections between the animals which are in some way similar to them, (that is with animals which have anthropomorphic connotations); for example, they can bond more easily with dogs rather than serpents which have no visible arms and legs, and has eyes located on both sides of its head. The strangeness of the animal or more correctly the obscurity of the animals arise from their more distant relationship with humans. Thus, there is a psychological explanation why human beings feel distant from the ‘little animals’ like insects or worms: Exoskeletons are not to be trusted. The human brain might react with a quantifiable fear even to the bare sight of bugs and other arthropods. Generally, reactions related to revulsion can also occur. This is believed by psychologists to be natural as these feelings are responses related to human evolution and concerns about a being that may bite, injure or carry an illness. However, there is also a gaping sense of alienation about those fragile segmented beings.⁸

“Even from a safe distance, we know that such creatures would give a sickening crunch if stepped upon. Mammals like us belong to the vertebrates, animals who all share the chaste trait of tucking their structural parts out of sight inside the body in the form of the bones.”⁹

Due to their appearance, they do not experience much appreciation in our daily lives, nor are they the center of research attention. For this reason, I want to give a voice to these “little animals” from a different historical perspective. Indeed, I would like to analyze pre-industrial civilization’s socio-cultural and economic attitudes towards “little animals”. In particular, I have chosen to focus on the Eastern Roman Empire, better

⁷ Gilhus, 29-30.

⁸ Thor Hanson, *Buzz: The Nature and Necessity of Bees* (New York: ICON, 2018), 15.

⁹ Hanson, *Buzz: The Nature and Necessity of Bees*, 15.

known as the Byzantine Empire.¹⁰ This is not because I believe Byzantium showed a peculiar sensibility to them, but rather in my opinion, the Byzantine society had an idiosyncratic relation to animals stemming from the socio-political preeminence of Christianity in daily life vis-à-vis a fiscally oriented and monetarized economy. In fact, as will be seen, we encounter many animals in Byzantine religious and secular texts as well as in the embroidery details on clothes, frescoes, and mosaics in churches. In this light, although have overlooked the “little animals” like bees and worms in the abovementioned sources, they are nevertheless there to be discovered. Therefore, I want to explore the role of “little animals” in the Byzantine Empire across its whole millennium, starting from the fourth century to the end of the fifteenth century. This has mainly to do with the possibility of mining a wider array of primary sources in a diachronic perspective: for instance, hagiographies started to be systematized only after the Metaphrastes’ Reform in the tenth century.¹¹ As sources for analyzing the socio-cultural (symbolic) and economic role of (little and non) animals became more frequent after the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, they will hopefully allow me to show that the “little animals” have as important a role as bigger-sized animals in terms of the practical life of Byzantium in both religious and symbolic meanings. As I will also take advantage of archaeology and material culture to sketch a picture of the importance of

¹⁰ Peter Sarris, *Byzantium: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), Chapter I.

¹¹ Stephanos Efthymiades, *The Ashgate Research Companion in Byzantine Hagiography Volume I: Periods and Places* (Burlington: Routledge, 2011), 74-77.

“little animals” in Byzantium, I must admit that these types of sources are better published for either the Late Antique or the Late Byzantine period.¹²

As mentioned, I will compare the role of the bigger-sized animals and “little animals” in terms of both practical usage and religious meaning. Here, it is crucial to notice that the very short entry on animals in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, the unavoidable starting point for any research on the Byzantine world, only focuses on exotic, imaginary, and even mythical animals, and thus exclusively on the big ones.¹³ This has obviously a lot to do with the genres of sources, literary or documentary, Byzantine scholars have mainly relied on. Only big animals’ matter, while insects and worms do not appear at all. However, the little animals have particular roles and importance; they appear in agricultural lore, legislation documents, and religious literature such as the aforementioned hagiographies, miracle stories, and secular literature.

These literary sources allow us to focus on the practical roles of “little animals”, but only when they are paired with material ones in order to draw a picture of the mentality towards them. In this light, my attention will be given mainly to apiculture and sericulture as I will investigate the medical and nutritional usage of honey. I will also talk about beeswax for making candles and its importance for monastic foundations; it is my intention to explain its importance for the Byzantine economy. While discussing apiculture, I will mostly use written documents and archeological hive findings to bolster my argument. Regarding sericulture, I will focus on evidence stemming from the

¹² Michael Decker, “The Current Status of Byzantine Archaeology,” *History Compass* 16, no. 9 (2008): 1-8.

¹³ “Animals,” in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 102-103.

industry of textile and mulberry cultivation throughout the Byzantine Empire. I will look at the role of silk textiles in Byzantine society and their significance in economy and trade.

I will also concentrate on the symbolic meaning of insects and worms as their definitions present us with a dichotomy. First, I will explain how the primary sources such as *Physiologus* and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* define the "little animals" and after that I would like to delve into the religious and symbolic meaning of "little animals". Even though, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* cannot be regarded as a Byzantine source, I want to use it to compare the western perception of both little and bigger-sized animals to the Byzantine perception. I will then analyze insects as a tool of the devil and their engagement with evilness. In order to do this I will look at the demonologies and the books of interpretation of dreams. Just like larger animals, insects were used allegorically to give a moral lesson. Afterwards, I will look at the insects which take the side of the good and holy men. As Brown describes during the passage between the second and fifth centuries, the post-Roman world had been going through many transformations, and one of them produced a new type of personality, the Holy Man. Instead of traditional paganism, which basically constructed a relationship based on the interests, love, and care for holy things between the gods and humanity, Christianity transformed the role of an intercessor into a person who is representative of celestial powers. Therefore, such an agent was supposed to gain their supernatural powers by suffering, sacrificing, and giving up on their personality to acquire a place in the heavenly hierarchy. A pagan priest also performed peculiar rituals and held particular ceremonies in order to keep deities happy and content as well as the society

itself. However, a Holy Man (or indeed a Holy Woman) did everything in order to fulfill his/her responsibility to the one and only God. Here, I would like to emphasize the very fact that this mentality stemmed from the new ideas related to the discovery of divine power, as it was not unique to the Christian doctrines since pagans and Gnostics also shared the same sentiments. What made the Christian belief system special was its different perception; this had to do with the relationship between diabolical and celestial powers. In lieu of Classical writings, Christian theologians had drawn a strict line between these two powers and placed them on a cosmic battlefield to which I will return in the following pages. This understanding of the contradiction of evil and good produced the Holy Men, who were supposed to fight against every kind of diabolical activity by performing special rituals and miracles. When Christianity named the devil as the antagonist of religion, the universe became a battlefield for dogmatic powers of saints and holy men fighting against evil powers. Since Jesus Christ had already defeated the devil, his representatives walking on the Earth could do the same. Indeed, one has to mention that the rapid growth of Christianity was also based on the exceptional performances of the Holy Men, which were concentrated on healings, exorcism, sanctification, and miraculous treatments. The one who endured all the earthly pain in order to gain God's approval became an intercessor between believers and God himself. *Salva me ab ore leonis* (save me from the mouth of the lion) turned into a popular saying amongst the Early Christians in the light of this cosmic fight, and the believers felt the dire need for an intermediary on behalf of themselves since not all of them had made the same set of sacrifices.¹⁴

¹⁴ Peter Brown, *Geç Antikçağ Dünyası*, trans. Turhan Kaçar (İstanbul: Alfa, 2016), 57-112.

Speaking of these punishments, “little animals” were frequently used to penalize sins like adultery sins by the saints. Such animals do not only play on the diabolical ground, but they also, just like the larger animals, assisted the celestial forces and players such as holy men, saints or martyrs, as little animals emerge in the hagiographies as they had a special role during the saints’ journey to the holiness. In my opinion, they had the power of turning the typical animal-human relationship upside- down, because the “little animals” have the power to eat the human beings in their ascetic sufferings. While they are eating the holy men’s flesh, they strengthen the saints’ ascetic endurance and the “little animals” may also indicate that everyone, even holy men, are equal in front of God, as well as the “little animals”. They never abandon their nature on any occasion, unlike the larger animals which constantly do so. Consequently, while I am explaining the religious and symbolic meanings of insects, I will rely on hagiographies and miracle stories.

Considering this, the first chapter of my thesis will focus on the selection of the sources that I chose to use. Therefore, I will be reviewing the essential primary sources and the material culture to support my argument. After this review of primary sources, I will present an overview of the secondary sources and the archeological findings that helped me to create my argument. The focal point of the second chapter will be centered on the pragmatic, reasonable and economic importance of the “little animals” in comparison to larger animals and the third one will be about the symbolic and the religious meaning of the little animals with the same comparison. Finally, the last chapter evaluates the relationships between humans and animals. In this way, I will be examining the animal-human relationship in a different way in a wider context. If we

think about it, we will be able to get to know and understand people better by learning how animals can be in all aspects of this history range Therefore, I am going to compare the roles of large animals and “little animals” in terms of practical and economic life as well as their religious and symbolic meaning in Byzantium.



CHAPTER 2

2.Sources for a History of Byzantine (and not) Animals

This chapter will focus on several primary and secondary sources about animals in Byzantium from Late Antiquity to the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. Conventionally the mentioned time span can be named as the Byzantine millennium; indeed as it lasted from the foundation of Constantinople in 324-30 to the conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottomans, when Mehmed II (1432-1481) took the capital.¹⁵ First, this chapter explains the different types of primary sources I have selected; my selection includes hagiographies, miracle stories, and secular literature dealing with, for instance, agricultural production and bestiary lore as well as poetry from a wide range of periods. I will also use material culture to strengthen my argument as I intend to reference the bones and other examples of organic waste from archaeological excavations as well as textiles. After the primary sources, the secondary sources will be presented and commented upon, as the scholarly center of attention has mostly focused on bigger-sized animals. In fact, scholars have tried to explain how the Byzantines used animals in their daily life and how they drew an allegory based on symbolic meanings of the animals that they could easily encounter in their environment. Last but not least, I will try to show the relationship between these primary and secondary sources in terms of the role of small animals, insects and maggots, and how they were addressed. Most scholars do not pay attention to the role of the “little animals” but as I will be inquiring in the

¹⁵ Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 12-21.

following chapters, their role is extremely important and can not be underestimated in a full evaluation of any pre-industrial daily life in terms of economy and religion. My focus is on silkworms and the honeybee's significance in the Byzantine economy and later on the religious roles of "little animals"; their symbolic meanings will serve the aim of discussing their economic, religious significance in the literature and material culture.



2.1. Primary Sources

The main sources of this dissertation are the *Physiologus* (dated to the second century) and Isidore of Seville's (c. 560-636 CE) *Etymologies*. Even though *Etymologies* is not a chronologically Byzantine source, it was useful for understanding of western thought about animals. The lack of encyclopedic Byzantine sources lead me to Isidore of Seville's book, as I want to define "little animals before I delve into their practical and religious roles in the Byzantine world. I would like to explain these two sources together, as they both have encyclopedic features and thus I have used them to demonstrate the viewpoint of both bigger-sized animals and "little animals". The reason for my selection is based on their importance. First of all, it is crucial to understand their perception of bigger and "little animals", and secondly to note the fact that *Physiologus* is a Greek text written by an unknown author around the second century in Alexandria. It has several chapters which focus on different animals or plants.¹⁶ On the one hand *Physiologus* has encyclopedic information, on the other hand the anonymous writer mentions also the religious stories. First, the book consists of secular information, and then it explores Christian didactic stories with a lot of references to the Bible itself. The book is also somewhat problematic as there are many versions of *Physiologus* and many Medieval Bestiary¹⁷ books based on these versions. I wielded the Latin *Physiologus*,

¹⁶Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Bestiary," Encyclopedia Britannica, April 18, 2013. <https://www.britannica.com/art/bestiary-medieval-literary-genre>.

¹⁷"Bestiaries were one of the most popular illuminated book types in Northern Europe from around 1180 to 1300.[...]The bestiary was not a zoological work and was never intended to be used as such, even if much of the lore from the bestiary was eventually incorporated into early attempts at natural science. Instead, the bestiary was designed to impart a largely symbolic worldview based on Christological truths."

which was translated into English by Michael Curley as well as by Harry Weiss, who used many different manuscripts. The other encyclopedic source is Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*. Isidore of Seville "compiled the work between c.615 and the early 630s and it takes the form of an encyclopedia [...]. It contains much lore of the late classical world beginning with the Seven Liberal Arts¹⁸, including rhetoric, and touches on hundreds of topics ranging from the names of God, the terminology of the law, the technologies of fabrics, ships."¹⁹ I use the aforementioned sources to display the knowledge of them and their comprehension of animals, in particular, the insects, because before I delve into the practical and religious role of animals, I strongly believe that defining the concept of the animal is essential. I intentionally chose these two sources because *Physiologus* combines encyclopedic information and Christian didactic lessons, whereas Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, the first encyclopedia which was written by a Christian author, refers to all the ancient works. As Ceylan Borstlap mentions, the purpose of the encyclopedias is to recover and rearrange the information from antiquity by careful consideration of the ancient knowledge through the eye of a needle. In doing so, the appropriateness of the information to the Bible is evaluated and if it was found not suitable, it was made so.²⁰

Elizabeth Morrison, Larisa Grollemond, and Timothy Potts, *Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World* (Los Angeles, CA: Paul Getty Museum, 2019), 4.

¹⁸ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Liberal arts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 10, 2010. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberal-arts>. Grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy.

¹⁹ Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, eds. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), i.

²⁰ Ceylan Borstlap, *İzmir'de Bir Ortaçağ Hayvan Kitabı: Smyrna Physiologus* (İstanbul: Cinius Yayinevi, 2020), 23.

My research is mostly based on the *Lives of Saints*, *Acts of Martyrs*, and miracle stories. I will use various hagiographies from different time periods. Although it is impossible to mention all of them, I would like to present some of the major sources that are intensively used throughout my dissertation. First, I am going to analyze the miracles of Saint Thecla (c.30-? CE)²¹. She is one of the protagonists of an apocryphal story, the *Acts of Saint Paul and Thecla*. The compilation of the Acts started to occur around the end of the second century in order to elaborate the lives of saints, giving examples and narrating their deeds for the promulgation of the new religion. According to the aforementioned Acts, Thecla was born in Iconium (Konya), an important city in Roman Asia Minor²², where she listened to the preaching of Saint Paul from her window. She was enraptured by his words and her spiritual journey resulted in her conversion to Christianity and led her to a life of permanent virginity.²³ Her constant miracles are quite important to my argument, because she used the “little animals” to punish an immoral man. Another example is Saint Makarios the Egyptian (300-390), a desert father and an ascetic. He wrote the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* and *The Great Letter*. I refer to his writings to explain the importance of insects in the path of holiness. Saint Basil the Great (329-379 CE) and his work, *Hexaemeron*, which was written around 370 CE, elaborates on the steps of *Creation* in six days, and it follows the same order found

²¹ Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, *The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church* (Holy Monastery of Simonos Petra, 2013) vol. 1 September-October, 180-182.

²² Alice Mary Talbot and Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *Miracle Tales from Byzantium* (London: Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library: DOML 12. Harvard University Press, 2012), viii-ix.

²³ Carolyn L Connor, *Bizans'ın Kadınları*, trans. Barış Cezar (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011), 19-28.

in *Genesis*. I use this source to compare the role of bigger-sized animals and “little animals” in the Creation.

Geoponika is one of my main primary sources for explaining the economic importance of both bigger-sized animals and “little animals”. This source is a collection of agricultural knowledge and this anonymous book was composed in the tenth century during the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (905-959 CE).²⁴ *Geoponika* has twenty chapters, and each chapter focuses on different issues of agriculture, including apiculture which is indeed a crucial topic for my thesis. By perusing *Geoponika*, my main aim is to demonstrate the usage of bigger-sized animals in the daily activities of Byzantine farmers. Moreover, I would like to explain Byzantine people’s knowledge about apiculture and bees, and in the end, I will compare the practical roles of both bigger and “little animals” in Byzantium. Finally, I will also make use of the so-called Byzantine Dreambooks to analyze the perceived evilness of “little animals” in Byzantine religious life. The earliest Byzantine Dreambook is dated to the tenth century and others were written later in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁵ “When a Christian living on the eastern borders of the empire immersed himself in early Arabic dream manuals. Calling himself Achmet, this writer [...] Christianised his Arabic materials and published one of the longest and most comprehensive works on dream interpretation in Greek history.”²⁶

²⁴ Scholasticus Cassianus Bassus, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *Geoponika: Farm Work: A Modern Translation of the Roman and Byzantine Farming Handbook*, trans. Andrew Dalby (London: Prospect Books, 2020), 9-18.

²⁵ Steven M. Oberhelman, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica in Translation, with Commentary and Introduction* (Farnham: Routledge, 2008), Introduction.

²⁶ Steven M. Oberhelman, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica in Translation, with Commentary and Introduction* (Farnham: Routledge, 2008), Introduction.

As I will pair literary and documentary sources with material ones, I believe that archaeology has to be addressed as well. For instance, the Yenikapı Metro excavations shed light on many major issues, one of which was the animals of Constantinople and their place in its daily life. These excavations taking place on the geographical connection with the Marmaray railway project revealed significant discoveries on the European and Asian continents and under the Bosphorus.²⁷ The excavation started in 2004 under the guidance of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum and “shed light on earliest signs of human activity some 8000 years ago. On the 58000 m2 area under investigation so far 37 ships and thousands of other objects of scientific interest have been discovered, including a large number of animal skeletons scattered over the entire area.”²⁸ I will use this archaeological evidence to compare the role of large animals and "small animals" in the Byzantine economy and social life. Different species were found in this excavation, some of which are very "peculiar" to the heart of Byzantium and by using these animals, I will illustrate the different purposes of using larger and "little animals".

The other material which I am going to use is the *Catalogue of the Textiles* in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection. This collection has a variety of textiles from the second century to the seventeenth century coming from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Byzantine heartland. They provide us with an invaluable cache of information on animals and their representations as I will use a textile piece which depicts a lion and a

²⁷Vedat Onar et al., “A Bridge from Byzantium to Modern Day Istanbul: An Overview of Animal Skeleton Remains Found During Metro and Marmaray Excavations”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Veteriner Fakültesi Dergisi* 39, no. 1 (2013): 1-8.

²⁸Onar et al., “A Bridge from Byzantium to Modern Day Istanbul: An Overview of Animal Skeleton Remains Found During Metro and Marmaray Excavations,” 4.

hero on silk, and a child's tunic which was made from wool but imitates the silk embroidery details. By using these pieces, I will try to examine the role of silk in the economy and daily life.

2.2. Secondary Sources

Although research on the Byzantine Empire has produced many works about animals, it has tended to focus on larger animals. There are only a few studies on insects and worms. I have nevertheless chosen to present the reader with a selection of these because these sources will allow us to grapple with different understandings of Byzantine animals at large while also delving into the fact that all the animals (large and small) have clear symbolic meanings along with practical and economic uses. For instance, Tristan Schmidt's article "Father and Son Like Eagle and Eaglet" concentrates on the images of the eagle, lion, peacock, and phoenix which were usually known for their extraordinary capacity of manifesting power as symbols.²⁹ As the author notes, these animals were generally used to emphasize the symbolic political meaning and ancestral relationship. Indeed, Schmidt shows that the eagle and eaglet image were intended for "looking for a model to justify hereditary succession on the throne. His study can be backed up by the work of Eustathios of Thessaloniki (1115-1195), who refers to the animal world, transferring the idea of the immutability of species to a highly political context. [...] Their aim is to prove a particular similarity between the

²⁹Tristan Schmidt, "Father and Son Like Eagle and Eaglet: Concepts of Animal Species and Human Families in Byzantine Court Oration (11th- 12th c.)," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 112, no.3 (2019): 959-990.

generations of a (human) family with regard to physical appearance, character traits and abilities”.³⁰ Eustathios of Thessaloniki was a scholar and author who produced chronicles, a monk and officially regarded as a saint as well. Eustathius also elaborates on the subject of the religious meaning which the aforementioned animals had.³¹ He refers to Saint Basil the Great’s *Hexameron* in which animals are characterized according to their several behaviors. Schmidt also indicates that even if the main aim is legitimization, there is a religious reference behind these animals as well: the eagle and the lion are embodiments of the universal order, and in Christianity, these two wild animals were thus the ruler from Judah and the leadership of Christ.³² Kirsty Stewart provides us with further knowledge about the political symbolic meaning of animals. In particular her work focuses on the *Synaxarion of the Honorable Donkey* telling a story of a miserable donkey and the fox and the wolf who are trying to eat the donkey in a journey on the board.³³ Indeed, this story frequently resurfaces in hagiographies and other literary sources as these animals are popular characters from the world of bestiary. I will use these sources to show the symbolic meaning of select large animals, but I will interpret this information with a comparison with the religious and symbolic meanings that little animals carried on, and the contrast between these two different classes.

Henriette Kroll’s monograph *Tiere im Byzantinischen Reich Archäozoologische Forschungen im Überblick* is one of the broadest studies on the Byzantine animals. Her

³⁰Schmidt, 961.

³¹ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, John R. Melville Jones (ed), The Australian National University, (Canberra: Central Printing: 1988)

³²Schmidt, 974.

³³Alexander P. Kazhdan ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1991).

approach to animals completely covers the practical usage of these animals of Byzantine daily life as she examines dietary habits of Byzantines through recent archaeozoological reports. These reports help her to map the consumption of meat through the imperial lands. She divides her research into chapters based on regional differences and peculiarities; she gives the pride of place to the western areas of the empire such as Italy, the Balkans, Peloponnese, Crete and North Africa and she also focuses on Constantinople as an entity that deserves more attention. Moreover, Kroll classifies the animals as farm animals, game animals, and animals that live in water. Her groundbreaking research and very detailed graphics led us to think and re-evaluate the data concerning which animals are consumed in specific regions.

Another important work is Nancy Ševčenko's article, "Wild Animals in the Byzantine Park". As can be understood from the title, this article divides the usage and mentality of Byzantine gardens into three sections. The first category is game parks which were simply a secluded area for hunting activities, and this special type was situated near to the "pavilion" or "residence" and generally had towers near to the park so that people could watch the game. Her observations are based on Columella's (4-70 CE) *On Agriculture* and Liutprand of Cremona's (920-972 CE) writings about his travel to Constantinople and his memories; the first source provides us with the organization of the gardens and the dietary regime of the game animals, the latter presents us with the exact location of the park opposite the Blachernae walls (on the northmost end of the Constantinopolitan enceinte and so just outside Constantinople).³⁴ She continues her

³⁴Nancy Ševčenko, "Wild Animals in the Byzantine Park," in *Byzantine Garden Culture*, ed. Anthony Littlewood, Henry Maguire, Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), 72.

article with the importance of animals to diplomatic relationships as the animals were used as special gifts between the rulers or members of the upper class. The second category is menageries; “In addition to their stocked game parks, the Romans and early Byzantines had animal farms where beasts were raised for eventual use in the hippodrome.”³⁵ For this category, she uses the Arab physician al-Marwazi (c. 1056/57-1125/26 CE), and Benjamin of Tudela’s (1130-1173 CE) notes on Constantinople and the Hippodrome. According to her research, there is no certain information about how long the animal combat continued and as she quotes from Benjamin of Tudela: “Men from all the races of the world come before the king and queen with jugglery and without jugglery, and they introduce lions, leopards, bears, and wild asses, and they engage them in combat with each other; and the same thing is done with birds. No entertainment like this can be found in any other land.”³⁶ In light of this quotation, the animal combats were of much significance and unique events in the Byzantine Empire. The last category is animal parks which are for the animals appealing to the eyes of an audience: Areas where valuable species might be raised without causing harm or risking being hunted.³⁷ It seems to me that the animal parks were more peaceful places than the other two carefully designed areas; especially in these animal parks, birds had a particular importance. For example, it is known that the white peacock played the role of the main protagonist of the park as it cast its spell over the visitors’ attention. In the end, Ševčenko draws two extremely important conclusions; the first is about the importance of a “royal imagery of animals” and the second is about the physical places where

³⁵Ševčenko, 75.

³⁶Ševčenko, 76.

³⁷Ševčenko, 82.

animals were kept. All the aforementioned sources will be used to analyze the importance of bigger sized animals, however, as can be seen, “little animals” are still out of the picture.

Things are a bit different as one approaches Robert M. Grant’s work as he talks about the religious and symbolic meaning of animals. This is done with particular reference to the animals (big and small) which appear in the Gospels, and he also compares the role of the animals in important works of ancient literature such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The first chapter is mainly focused on the Biblical animals and inevitably the snake has the pride of place in this chapter. He begins with the story of the Snake in the Garden of Eden; the Snake deceived Eve to eat the Fruit of the Forbidden Tree and as a result of his malicious act, he is condemned to crawl instead of walking, stripped of a physical ability as a punishment for all eternity. Grant asks the question about language and its ability to speak and therefore he compares the role of the snakes continues to be argued through the chapter: the moral allegory of snake stands for food, drink, and sex.³⁸ After the discussion of the snake, dogs and pigs appear in the chapter. He argues that the most obviously terrible thing Circe the Witch in the *Odyssey* could do was change men into nine-year-old pigs, while Sextus Empiricus called the canine ‘the most useless of creatures.’³⁹ After these non-Christian interpretations of dogs and pigs, he takes the references from the Bible into his consideration, as he shows that in the Christian interpretation of the aforesaid animals, dogs and pigs generally appear

³⁸Robert M. Grant, *Early Christian and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.

³⁹Grant, *Early Christian and Animals*, 11.

together which means both animals were considered as ‘dirty’.⁴⁰ His claims in the chapter are followed by the ‘allegorized ox’ and fish. While he discusses Christian and Pagan perspectives of the aforementioned animals, he mentions that the most common theological questions are about the dietary habits and vegetarianism as well as the irrationality or rationality of animals. Although Grant mainly focuses on the wild and “bigger animals”, he emphasizes the role of worms and insects as well in the chapter called “Unusual Animals”, and he follows the same method by examining the insects while giving examples from the non-Christian authors. For example, he mentions passages from Pliny the Elder (79 BCE- 23 CE) and *Acts of John*, he quotes Pliny who apologizes to the insect because he was disgusted by them once.⁴¹ Grant claims that “this seems derived from Aristotle, who says he is not passing over any animal, ‘no matter how mean’ and unattractive.”⁴² In a nutshell, Grant’s book covers both the bigger sized and “little animals” and I will refer to his book to indicate particularly the definition and importance of “little animals” in a religious context.

As we have seen, one can safely assume that the wild and bigger animals get most of the attention from the scholars. Indeed, the nature of wild animals is mostly emphasized because they are seen as untamable and scary, however, in front of the Holy Men, they abandon their wild nature and become submissive. The little animals are not generally regarded as a focal point since their tiny and disenchanting bodies led people to overlook or neglect their existence easily. While talking about the insects, I want to

⁴⁰Robert M. Grant mentions these verses which talk about the pigs and dogs; Rev.22:15, Luke 15:16, Matt.15:26-27, Mark 7:27-28, Luke 16:21, Rev. 22:15, Matt 7:6.

⁴¹Grant, *Early Christians and Animals*, 25.

⁴²Grant.

continue with the secondary literature which focuses on insects, especially bees, and worms, particularly silkworms.

As I start my journey with bees, I must admit that most of the studies on the history of apiculture in Byzantium focus on a particular region. For example, Christos Giannas' article "Beekeeping Practices in Agathonisi During Antiquity". This article analyzes the beehives in Agathonisi, figuring out which type of hives were used, how they were in practice and what they tell us, besides dating the first apiculture act through the analyses. He says that beekeeping and bee products had an essential role as a luxurious material apart from the purple color used in textile in Mediterranean trade from Antiquity.⁴³ Ilias Anagnostakis's article "Wild and Domestic Honey in Middle Byzantine Hagiography: Some Issues Relating to Its Production, Collection, and Consumption" mainly presents the Peloponnese and southern Asia Minor as its case studies, but one may point that this article combines the religious symbolic meaning and the practical meaning of the bees and their products. However, his article mainly concentrates on the religious meaning, the practical and economic importance of bees and honey are generally beyond his scope. He talks about climate change and its effect on honey making as he says there is not a very big influence on bees.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, worms played a crucial role for the Byzantine economy, even the basic equation provides us with a deduction as without the bees and silkworms. David Jacoby's study "Silk Economics and Cross- Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim

⁴³Christos Giannas, "Beekeeping Practices in Agathonisi During Antiquity" in *Beekeeping in the Mediterranean from Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Fani Hatjina, Georgios Mavrofridis, and Richard Jones (Nea Moudania: 2017). 79-83.

⁴⁴David Jacoby, "Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West," *Dumbarton Oaks Paper*, 58 (2004): 197-240.

World, and the Christian West” draws a detailed picture of how the silk trade began in Byzantium and the interaction between the three worlds through silk. He uses written sources produced by both Byzantine and Muslim authors; besides the documents, Jacoby also relies on the scientific analyses of fabrics which indicates the date or the colour. Silkworms are easy to transport, and silk was valuable, so clothes made of high-quality silk are among the most significant indicators of social status and prestige. According to sixth century historians such as Procopius (c.500-565 CE) and Theophanes of Byzantium (c. 6th century CE), silk moths were introduced by two Byzantine monks returning from a mission on which they seem to have stolen a silk-egg moth from Sasanian Persia.⁴⁵

On a different and more fiscally oriented note, Nicholas Oikonomides talks about not only the importance of and high demand for silk in the Byzantine Empire, but also the legislation of the silk trade in the Empire, for example, the lower classes were forbidden by imperial laws from purchasing silk.⁴⁶ Silk production had started earlier; the Byzantine Empire was not self-sufficient in terms of production of raw silk until the 10th century, because the production of silk is a very long process: mulberry trees need time to grow enough to feed the silkworms and the quality of the leaves of mulberry trees are also important for the quality of the silk. In agricultural and climate terms, mulberry trees can grow on all kinds of land except in very humid areas and this suggests that mulberry trees could be grown in many areas under the Byzantine rule, for

⁴⁵Jacoby, “Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West,” 197-240.

⁴⁶Nicholas Oikonomides, “Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 40 (1986): 33-53.

instance, Syria and Phoinike and the Aegean Islands, yet one cannot yet see any systematic attempt at cultivation of mulberry trees in the sources.⁴⁷ As can be seen many scholars prefer to focus on the economic function of animals and only a few highlight the symbolic meaning of those animals.

The aforementioned sources will help my research to analyze the practical usage and religious meaning of both bigger sized animals and “little animals.” Primary sources offer contemporary testimonies for the usage and understanding of animals in both the secular and religious world and the secondary sources will assist me to comprehend different points of views. It is my intention to present how “little animals' ' were as important as the bigger sized animals in Byzantine terrestrial and ethereal comprehension. The next section explains the roles of animals in the Byzantine economy.

⁴⁷Oikonomides, 38.

CHAPTER 3

3. Practical Usage of Animals in Byzantium

With the preliminary remarks of the previous chapters in mind, my intention is to delve into the variety of the roles that were played by both bigger-sized animals and “little animals” in Byzantine daily life, as well as the practical aspects of the matter since animals had a place as a commodity in the Byzantine economy. Indeed, the driving force of this chapter is making a comparison between bigger-sized and “little animals” in order to present a clear picture. On the one hand I examine the usage of bigger-sized animals both in mundane and ethereal aspects of the Byzantine mentality, on the other hand I will be inquiring into the role of little animals to exhibit the significant impact they made on Byzantine life. I will only address some glimpses of the Byzantine economy and daily life, since these topics are enormous and complex structures which are beyond the arguments of a master’s thesis.⁴⁸ In fact, I will scrutinize the topic as it relates with my subject. For example, *Oikonomia* is a Greek compound word which comprises two different words; *oikos* which means household and *nemein*, that can be translated as management. In this light, the word itself can be translated into English as the good management of the household, and this chapter will be related with the definition of *oikonomia*⁴⁹ since the definition can cover what I aim to demonstrate. Furthermore, in this chapter, I will only mention the animals’ side of the Byzantine

⁴⁸Angeliki E. Laiou and Cecile Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Introduction.

⁴⁹Dotan Leshem, “Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by Oikonomia?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no.1 (Winter 2016): 225-31.

economy, as I will mostly concentrate on the daily usage of the animals and animal products such as honey as the main sweetener, as well as being used for purposes of medical or lighting as Byzantines made candles out of honey wax, hence, these were produced in the circle of village-level or monastic institutions. After addressing the bigger-sized animals, I will elaborate upon the role of apiculture in Byzantine life.

The Byzantine economy, just like any pre-industrial society, was based on agriculture and animal husbandry, one may safely assume that the animals were the crucial creatures allowing human beings to pursue their lives.⁵⁰ On the contrary, in industrial societies, modern people need technology to live. We need computers to work, cars, planes, and trains to go somewhere and we are in need of agricultural tools to harvest easily or milking machines to fulfill mass demands. However, for every daily activity throughout the Byzantine lands, animals themselves were “the highest technology”. As in any pre-industrial society, bigger-sized animals were rudimentarily used for food, transportation, and entertainment in Byzantium.⁵¹

Since the Empire occupied vast territories in terms of land, it had different climatic features that had resulted in a lot of animal diversity. For instance, although the pig was conveniently raised in some provinces where the process was cost-effective, time and labor saving, they were not popular as expected in other regions, because a pig cannot provide secondary products such as milk, wool, or leather.⁵² In view of this, it is

⁵⁰ Patricia Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (Princeton University Press, 2010), Introduction.

⁵¹ Laiou and Morrison, 3-30.

⁵² Angeliki E. Laiou, “The Human Resources,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century, Volume I*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 46-54.

readily apparent that getting the maximum yield from a single species was essential for the Byzantines. Pig was not the first preference in some regions because of religious prohibitions in Jewish communities, seasonal peculiarities or practical reasons such as the lack of possible productions. Some regions such as Italy and Egypt had been breeding pigs to larger extents as the zoo-archaeology provides us with the proof.⁵³

“Meat has been described as a famine reserve, since cattle consume grain and “store” it, to be consumed in times of grain shortage. In Byzantium, it seems that the consumption of meat was more considerable than would be the case if it functioned mostly as famine reserves.”⁵⁴

3.1. Practical Usage of Apiculture and its Place in Byzantine Economy

As a scientific fact, environmental history revolves around the existence of bees, as Hanson emphasizes as the following “People kept bees long before they tamed horses, camels, ducks, or turkeys, not to mention familiar crops like apples, oats, pears, peaches, peas, cucumbers, watermelon, celery, onions, or coffee beans.”⁵⁵ Apiculture was thus as important and old as livestock husbandry activities. Indeed, even today, our lives depend on bees’ existence.⁵⁶

⁵³Cécile Morrisson and Jean-Pierre Sodini, “The Sixth-Century Economy,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century, Volume I*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 165-213.

⁵⁴Laiou, 53.

⁵⁵Hanson, 19.

⁵⁶Hanson, Preface.

Environmental features such as temperature, natural water supplies and vegetation and the proximity of pollen are crucial for beekeeping activity. Warm weather is the best for bees. The temperature should not be below 8°C and the optimal temperature range is calculated as roughly between 15°C- 30°C. Bees need to be protected from the winds or the other weather peculiarities such as storms and heavy rains. In this light, forested lands, gardens if they are specially prepared for the bees, or woodlands can be mentioned as suitable areas for bees and beekeeping.⁵⁷ For example, pine trees are accepted as one of the best options for beekeeping. As Alexander Olson states that “Pine’s secretions which are especially beneficial to honeybees who in turn make honey from them.”⁵⁸ With these preliminary caveats in mind, it should not be very surprising to find the archeological remains of beekeeping equipments⁵⁹ and beehives⁶⁰ in the islands, seacoasts and shores⁶¹, or the warmer inland regions of the Byzantine Empire.⁶²

Indeed, honey was used for several purposes, especially in a time when there was no refined sugar, honey is the best and the most common sweetener for culinary needs in

⁵⁷Dharam P. Abrol, *Beekeeping: A Compressive Guide to Bees and Beekeeping* (Jodhpur, India: Scientific Publisher, 2013), 8-21.

⁵⁸Alexander Olson, *Environment and Society in Byzantium 650-1150: Between the Oak and the Olive* (Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2020), 60.

⁵⁹ Christos Giannas, “Beekeeping Practices in Agathonisi During Antiquity” in *Beekeeping in the Mediterranean from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Fani Hatjina, Georgios Mavrofridis, and Richard Jones, (Nea Moudania: 2018), 79-84.

⁶⁰ Sophia Germanidou, “Honey Culture in Byzantium: An Outline of Textual, Iconographic and Archaeological Evidence” in *Beekeeping in the Mediterranean from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Fani Hatjina, Georgios Mavrofridis, and Richard Jones, (Nea Moudania: 2018), 93-104.

⁶¹Thanassis Bikos and Ekaterini Rammou “Beehives of the Aegean Islands” in *Bee World*, (2002), 83:1, 5-13.

⁶²Ilias Anagnostakis, “Wild and Domestic Honey in Middle Byzantine Hagiography: Some Issues Relating to Its Production, Collection and Consumption,” in *Beekeeping in the Mediterranean from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Fani Hatjina, Georgios Mavrofridis, Richard Jones (Nea Moudania: 2018), 105-118.

the Byzantine Empire.⁶³ Meanwhile, beside the consumption of honey as an edible itself, it was also often used to protect food from deterioration. Rich indicates that honey was utilized as a tool of preservation of food throughout the Mediterranean since ancient times and he reckons that Because of their hygroscopic (drying) qualities, anaerobic nature, and high sugar content, honey and wax are excellent food preservatives.⁶⁴ His assertion can be bolstered by the observations of 11th century Byzantine scientist Simeon Seth (c. 1035- 1110 CE) who indicated also in his work, *Σύνταγμα κατὰ στοιχείων περὶ τροφῶν δυνάμεων* (On the Properties of Foods), that honey purifies the body of pollutants and maintains everything that is placed into it without degradation.⁶⁵ Honey and honey vinegar played a major role in the Byzantine kitchen. Last but not least, another cardinal but atypical utilization of honey was the production of special pills in order to prevent feelings of hunger and thirst. Indeed, these innovative pills were definitely vital, and the Byzantines were in need of them especially during the years of war, famine or starvation. This was basically a honey bar which was shaped as a modern pill which on the one hand could help people survive, and on the other could prevent the user from consuming a lot of food for their daily needs⁶⁶.

⁶³Petros Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation in Byzantine Medicine The Writings of John Zacharias Aktouarios (c.1275- c.1330)*, GEPCOMM Diagnostic Essay, 1st Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 163

⁶⁴Sofia Germanidou, "Honey Culture in Byzantium An Outline of Textual, Iconographic and Archaeological Evidence" in *Beekeeping in the Mediterranean from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Fani Hatjina, Georgios Mavrofridis and Richard Jones, (Nea Modania: 2018), 93-104.

⁶⁵Alison Noble, "Foodstuffs in Symeon Seth's Syntagma de Alimentorum Facultatibus Complete List of Foodstuffs in Symeon Seth's Syntagma de Alimentorum Facultatibus," in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, and Margaret Mullet, *Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017).

⁶⁶ Pan S. Codellas, "The Epimonidion Pharmacon of Philon The Byzantine: 'The Hunger and Thirst Checking Pill' and Other Emergency Foods," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 22, no. 5 (1948): 630-634.

According to Pan S. Codellas, one small portion of honey bar was enough for an adult.

One can also mention another problem which was the accessibility of clean water on the battlefield. In light of this lack of food and water supplies, people consumed foods that do not make them thirsty. This pill is explained as follows:

“[...] then peel the squills, cut away their roots and leaves, divide them into small pieces, put them into a mortar and grind them as fine as possible. After these manipulations, rub evenly the honey with an equal quantity of the ground squill together with the oil; pour the mixture into an earthen pot and put it upon a charcoal fire to cook. When it has become very firm, take it away and divide it into small pieces and whoever consumes one in the morning and one in the evening will have sufficient food. This pharmakon happens to be good for the armies, too, for it is pleasant, filling and does not cause thirst.”⁶⁷

It is also crucial to note that honey was not only used on the battlefield, it was also used excessively in daily life of the Byzantium. Honey appears in many recipes from beverages such as herbal teas or wine to desserts and meals.⁶⁸ Unsurprisingly, its main aim is to sweeten the comestibles. After the aforementioned utilizations of honey either in the battlefield or the process of seasoning the food, honey appears in the sources as a substance used in healing methods and equipment. Sofia Germonidou mentions that honey and wax were employed in both medical practices and pharmaceutical receipts, in particular, the prescriptions of cosmetics and gynecology.⁶⁹ The first example of the medical usage of honey comes from Ioannes Zacharias Aktouarios (c. 1275-1328 CE), a thirteenth century Byzantine physician, who talked about his experience with his

⁶⁷Codellas, “The Epimonidion Pharmacon of Philon The Byzantine: ‘The Hunger and Thirst Checking Pill’ and Other Emergency Foods,” 630-634.

⁶⁸Andrew Dalby, *Taste of Byzantium: The Cuisine of a Legendary Empire* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2016).

⁶⁹Germanidou, “Honey Culture in Byzantium: An Outline of Textual, Iconographic and Archaeological Evidence,” 93-104.

patients who had urinary problems; he prepared a lozenge and added oxymeli which is basically a mixture of honey and vinegar. Furthermore, he also talked about some special drugs which also contained honey. In addition, he noted that even if sugar cane cultivation expanded in the seventh and eighth centuries since the sugar cane cultivation first became known in India, later on Persia to the Islamic East⁷⁰ honey-based medicine was more common than sugar cane-based medicine.⁷¹

Over and above all of these, Byzantines took advantage of honey as a cure for otolaryngological illnesses. Aetius of Amida (c. 502-575 CE), a sixth century Byzantine physician, exploited a combination which included honey for a patient whose tonsils were removed. “[...] the physician applied meliktraton which was a blend of honey and milk or roses.”⁷² Alexander of Tralles (525-605 CE), one of the most famous physicians of Late Antiquity, came up with a special treatment for cleansing of ears with a mixture which contained honey, acid and nitre, also used for curing tinnitus.⁷³ His ministrations resemble a lot to Andromachus’ (3rd century BCE) drops⁷⁴ which were made of *halvani*,

⁷⁰Bouras -Vallianatos, *Innovation in Byzantine Medicine: The Writings of John Zacharias Aktouarios (c.1275-c.1330)*,164

⁷¹Bouras-Vallianatos, 39-69.

⁷²Ioanna A. Ramoutsaki et al, “Therapeutic Methods Used for Otolaryngological Problems During the Byzantine Period,” *The Annals of Otology, Rhinology, and Laryngology* 6, no.111 (2002), 553-57.

⁷³Ramoutsaki et al., “Therapeutic Methods Used for Otolaryngological Problems during the Byzantine Period,” 553-557.

⁷⁴Philip Wexler, “History of Toxicology and Environmental Health: Toxicology in Antiquity II,” in *History of Toxicology and Environmental Health* (London: Academic Press, 2015), 176-177.

“Andromachus’s concoction, Galene Theriaca (tranquility theriac), was an improved version of Mithridates’s elixir, containing 65 ingredients with higher proportion of opiates and minerals and with the original lizard flesh replaced by that of a viper. The recipe for Galene was written in Greek by Andromachus in the form of elegiac couplets and the prose rendition was quoted by his son Andromachus the Younger.” The very detailed recipe contained several different kinds of herbs and “Attic honey 150 drachms.” 177.

opium and honey as a remedy for infected ears.⁷⁵ It seems to me that honey was widely used for ear illnesses, and considering the receipts, one can suggest that the Byzantines utilized honey as an external medicine as they produced drops and cleaning solutions with it. Furthermore, as Sofia Germanidou suggests, honey was specifically used for the purposes of cosmetics. For example, the Byzantines created a solution which contained different types of herbal and animal products with honey in order to moisturize the scalp and reduce hair loss.⁷⁶ On the other hand, honey was a component of therapeutics for gynecological surgical diseases; Aetius of Amida prescribed solutions for abscesses on the abdomen and around the womb. His first suggestion for the physicians is to take the abscesses off and then to cure the surgical area with a special prescription containing plants such as linden and turpentine with honey. On the other hand, the tenth century Byzantine physician Theophanes Nonnus or Theophanes Chrysobalantes (c. 950-? CE) tried to cure the uterine cancer with “ointments and intravaginal pessaries based on mixtures of honey, wax, eggs, fat, bone marrow of several animals and birds, sheep wool, sea sponge, and *oxymeli*”⁷⁷ which can be explained as a special mixture of sweet wine, honey, raisins and figs.

Animal products play the main role in another primary source, the *Dynameron* written by Nikolaos Myrepsos, a Byzantine physician (c. 1240-1280 CE) in the middle of the thirteenth century⁷⁸, which illuminates how Byzantines perceived the ingredients

⁷⁵John Lascaratos et al., “The Roots of Cosmetic Medicine: Hair Cosmetics in Byzantine Times (AD 324-1453),” *International Journal of Dermatology* 43, no. 5 (2004): 397–401.

⁷⁶Ramoutsaki et al., “Therapeutic Methods Used for Otolaryngological Problems during the Byzantine Period,” 553-557.

⁷⁷Marianna Karamanou et al., “Uterine Cancer in the Writings of Byzantine Physicians,” *Journal of B.U.ON.* 20, no. 6 (2015): 1647.

⁷⁸John Scarborough and Anthony Cutler, “Nicholas Myrepsos,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

and how they used the animal products to correspond to medical needs. It is regarded as the broadest Byzantine medical pharmaceutical book in terms of its prophylactic and therapeutic knowledge.⁷⁹ Valiakos clearly indicates that, in addition to the prescriptions which consist of body parts of animals, there are a lot of animal products such as honey, that were in use for the medication of different types of diseases in the *Dynameron*. Honey being used for respiratory system diseases and Myrepsos suggests that its consumption was preferable to protect the human body against illnesses related to cardiovascular problems. On the other hand, honey and milk were crucial for treatments of illnesses of the nervous system. Indeed, they had played an important role in the remedies for psychological disorders such as melancholia and depression.⁸⁰ Paul of Aegine (c.625-690 CE), a Byzantine physician, mentions that he used honey for the treatment of the wounds on the nerves in his work *Medical Compendium* (7th century) in Seven Books. Therefore, if the nerves are inflectional, he suggests making a paste from barley flour and lye mixed with honey and vinegar.⁸¹

3.2. Role of Sericulture in the Byzantine Economy and Social Life

In this chapter, I would like to delve into another layer of animal production which is more related to material culture. Silk is one of the oldest textiles which was generally

⁷⁹Elias Valiakos et al, "Remedies of Animal Origin and Their Indications in Nikolaos Myrepsos *Dynameron*," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 276, no.5 (2021): 1-12.

⁸⁰Valiakos et al, "Remedies of Animal Origin and Their Indications in Nikolaos Myrepsos *Dynameron*," 7-8.

⁸¹Symeon Missios, Kimon Bekelis, and David W Roberts, "Neurosurgery in the Byzantine Empire: The Contributions of Paul of Aegina 625-690 AD," *Journal of Neurosurgery* 1, no. 120, (2014): 244-49.

perceived as a luxury item, as expensive gifts and fine dresses that were made of silk served as an indicator of status between elites and in court culture. Indeed, silk was frequently chosen by the upper class members or royalty and mainly circulated among them.

Sericulture includes the cultivation of mulberry trees, raising the silkworms (*Bombyx mori* which is the domesticated species of silkworm) and the production of the silk itself. The first evidence of sericulture comes from the Chinese historical records and it dates back to the third millennium BC.⁸² Even if some kind of wild silkworms were found on Mediterranean Islands contemporaneously in China, there is no sufficient proof that any Mediterranean civilizations were engaged in sericulture and production of the textile as proven in China. In lieu of the assumptions on the first evidence about sericulture, one should mention that the peculiar needs of sericulture illuminate the possible explanation on its origins. For example the mulberry tree, which is a crucial element for the cultivation of *Bombyx mori*, requires warmer climates.⁸³ This is not to deny the fact that there are many different species of silkworm that were recognized by the ancient writers, but *Bombyx mori* was widely chosen because of its pure white color, instead of the wild silkworms who have brownish shadows and distinctive characteristics in order to avoid possible threats.⁸⁴ Oikonomides elaborates that the

⁸²Mark Cartwright, "Silk in Antiquity," in *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified July 28, 2017. <https://www.worldhistory.org/Silk/>.

⁸³Angeliki E. Laiou and Cecile Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33-36.

⁸⁴Berit Hildebrandt, *Silk: Trade, Exchange along the Silk Roads between Rome and China in Antiquity* (Oxbow Books, 2017), 11.

thread may be reeled off as a single strand with a length of up to 2 kilometers and does not require spinning like the shorter fibers produced by most wild moths.⁸⁵

As mentioned above, silk was a material which was highly demanded by Mediterranean societies since ancient times. The Byzantine traders had to pass through Persian territory to reach China in order to obtain silk products and as the primary sources testify, the Persians taxed this trade excessively. The other route across Russia was dangerous and also expensive. Under these circumstances, purchasing silk had been a problem for the Byzantine market in terms of effort and price before the Byzantines started to produce silk by themselves.

In the matter of sericulture in the Byzantine Empire, there are two different explanations about how the Byzantines managed to get silkworms to the Empire. First, Procopius relates the story of two monks who allegedly stole the silkworms from China and carried them in their pockets in one of his well-known works, *History of the Wars* (Ὑπὲρ τῶν Πολέμων Λόγοι).⁸⁶ He rightfully thanks these two monks for stealing silk moths, since their embezzlement paved the way for the Byzantine economy's gradual improvement in terms of silk production, as the Byzantines would no longer have to buy the silk from the faraway lands, and they could find a way to break the Persian monopoly over the silk trade. Muthesius and Oikonomides both agree that the *kommerkiariori* seals were used as the "quality stamps" for imported silk; furthermore, Muthesius argues that these seals might also be an indicator of domestic silk production.

⁸⁵Oikonomides, "Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi," 33-53.

⁸⁶ Procopius, *History of the Wars, Volume I: Books 1-2. (Persian War)*. Translated by H. B. Dewing. Loeb Classical Library 48. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

The *kommerkiarioi* were basically fiscal officials in charge of the collection of imperial taxes. The office itself appeared during the reign of Anastasios I (491-518) as *kommerkiarioi* were controlling the trade on the frontiers, just as the Roman officers called *comes commerciorum* had done⁸⁷. Procopius of Caesarea⁸⁸ states that Justinian I ordered the construction of customs stations for trade under the control of *kommerkiarioi*⁸⁹. Their duties also included the monopoly of the silk trade and production as their lead seals allow us to define their competence. The seals of the *kommerkiariori* bore the image of the ruling emperor and allow us to link to a warehouse (*apothekai*) under their control. More importantly, a *kommerkiarios* performed his duties under the imperial authority.⁹⁰ After the end of the seventh century, the office itself was altered, and the duties of the *kommerkiarioi* now turned to controlling imports and exports as well as collecting customs taxes. The seals, which are safely dated back to the passage between the ninth and eleventh centuries, also allow us to say that the geographical area under their control expanded.⁹¹

Kommerkiariori had the privilege of procuring silk from foreign merchants, as they are the “state officials making profits for themselves as well as for the state”.⁹² According to Oikonomides, the earliest evidence of the title *kommerkiarios* was under the reign of Anastasios (491-518) and was the *kommerkiaroi* of Tyre, and as aforementioned, Tyre was one of the important cities for silk production. In addition

⁸⁷Alexander P. Kazhdan ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁸⁸Kazhdan.

⁸⁹Kazhdan.

⁹⁰Kazhdan.

⁹¹Kazhdan.

⁹²Oikonomides, “Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century : The Seals of *Kommerkiarioi*,” 33-53.

Muthesius mentions that the first *kommerkiarioi* seal that was found under the reign of Justin II (565-578) belonged to the *kommerkiarioi* of Antioch. Antioch was located very close to the frontiers between Byzantine and Persia and thus to the Silk Road. Even if there is a debate about the interpretations on these two *kommerkiarioi*, it is clear that *kommerkiarioi* are extremely important to tracing the silk production and trade in light of the seals found in cities which had a particular role in sericulture. However, this explanation applied to the period between the sixth and early ninth centuries. After the ninth century, the type of the *kommerkiarioi* seals changed.⁹³ Therefore, the private silk industry became more visible during the 10th century.⁹⁴

The *Book of Eparch* (Τὸ ἐπαρχικὸν βιβλίον), that is traditionally dated to the reign of Leon VI (866-912), includes five chapters dedicated to the commercial silk trade, from the silk dyers to the merchants. These chapters provide us with the fact that silk production was important in the Byzantine economy, as it is recorded in the book, three different titles were used for those in charge of the silk commerce and trade. First, the *boullotai* was responsible for checking the silk producers' and the merchants' claims about the quantity of the silk. Second, the *mitotes* were checking the quality of the thread, and last but not least the *exarchoi* were the regulators who were empowered by the Eparch. One may safely define them as the chiefs in the silk corporations. Apart from the fact that the titles were carefully delineated, it is pretty obvious that the production of silk and its commerce was heavily controlled by the Byzantine government during the 10th century. Indeed, the Byzantine silk industry was dominated

⁹³Oikonomides.

⁹⁴George C. Maniatis, "Organization, Market Structure, and Modus Operandi of the Private Silk Industry in Tenth-Century Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 263.

by the imperial officers and strictly ruled by laws and prohibitions. Since the production of silk was possible only in the southern areas of the empire due to the climate conditions, the restricted area made the control of commerce easier.⁹⁵ For instance, the production of silk and the colour of purple (Porphyry/πορφύρα) were special for the royal people, and it was forbidden to freely sell these items.

The reasons behind the strict imperial authority over the circulation of silk provide us with a tripartite understanding, as silk was not only important in terms of economy but also crucial in respect to political and religious values. Muthesius explains this tripartite mentality as the following: In both the imperial and ecclesiastical domains, the employment of valuable clothing in a 'cult' environment, whether secular or religious, tended to emphasize the manifestation of power.⁹⁶ Not only the clothing but also the tapestries which were displayed in the churches or other places, depicting different Biblical scenes were woven on silk as "Hero and Lion" (BZ.1934.1) bears witness to this usage. The cloth is dated between the seventh and ninth centuries, assumedly was found in Constantinople, Egypt, or Syria. "The ornamental vocabulary of the Dumbarton Oaks silk, however, is decidedly Greco-Roman. The fluid, curvilinear shapes of the anatomy, drapery, and the man's hair are characteristic of Byzantine style."⁹⁷ The scene with the lion and the man may refer to Daniel and David.⁹⁸ Another example is the shroud of Charlamagne which was fabricated in Constantinople and was

⁹⁵Robert Sabatino Lopez, "Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire," *Speculum* 20, no. 1 (1945): 1–42.

⁹⁶Anna Muthesius, "The 'Cult' of Imperial and Ecclesiastical Silks in Byzantium," *Textile History* 32, no. 1 (2001): 44.

⁹⁷<https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles/catalogue/BZ.1934.1>

⁹⁸<https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles/catalogue/BZ.1934.1>

made out of silk. This silk and embroidered shroud collects both religious and political functions of silk. Beside these examples, the products of Byzantine silk manufacture took pride of place in the international market.⁹⁹

Low quality silk was sold in the domestic market and even the ordinary people could sometimes afford it.¹⁰⁰ For instance, a child's tunic (BZ.1970.46) was made of wool but the embroidery details imitated silk clothes.¹⁰¹ The same practice is seen in a tunic clavus (BZ.1953.2.6). It was made of wool and it had red, purple and beige embroidery details; the wool tapestry weaves imitate the opulence of silk fashion in a more economical wool tapestry weave.¹⁰² In the light of these examples, one may say that silk was the most popular and desirable textile among not only the upper class circles but also for more ordinary people. In lieu of the restrictions, obtaining silk products was not impossible for them, if they could find the low quality commodities in the markets and obviously if they could afford to buy them. There is also another option, because even though the low class members generally could not manage to purchase a silk product, there are imitations of silk embroidery patterns on linen or wool cloth.¹⁰³

Silk played an important role for diplomatic relationships besides its commercial value. For instance, Konstantinos V (741-775 CE) gifted the Slavs silk garments in return for captives and Leon IV (775-780 CE) sent silk fabric to his Frankish counterpart

⁹⁹Laiou and Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy*, 90-93.

¹⁰⁰Lopez, "Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire," 1-42.

¹⁰¹<https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles/catalogue/BZ.1970.46>

¹⁰²<https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles/catalogue/BZ.1953.2.6>

¹⁰³<https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles/catalogue/BZ.1953.2.112>

as a gift.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the silk garments and fabric vividly reflect the Byzantine art and social life, and therefore, one may safely mention that silk products acted as a mediator in the complex world of politics and diplomatic relationships between upper class members; the dynamics of gift culture indicates that there was a common language which transcended different societies.¹⁰⁵ Another example can be Byzantine silk curtains, as they also have practical implications, since the curtain practically functions as protecting people from cold or warm or dividing the living space, though they also were in used as decorative objects¹⁰⁶. As Parani clearly defines they would have added to the decoration of the areas in which they were hung, either in and of themselves or as a backdrop or frame for the exhibition of items or people, providing aesthetic enjoyment and conveying a feeling of solemnity, grandeur, warmth, or intimacy, depending on the setting.¹⁰⁷ In view of this, silk curtains appear as an indicator of the social status and the power of the master of the household as only the elites could have decorative Byzantine silk curtains.

¹⁰⁴ Angeliki E Laiou, "Exchange and Trade, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries," in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century Exchange and Trade*, ed. Angeliki E Laiou (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 697-770.

¹⁰⁵ Maria Evangelatou, "Textile Mediation in Late Byzantine Visual Culture," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 73 (2019): 299–354.

¹⁰⁶ Maria G. Parani, "Curtains in the Middle and Late Byzantine House," in *Catalogue of the Textiles in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection*, ed. Gudrun Bühl and Elizabeth Dospěl Williams (Washington, DC, 2019).

¹⁰⁷ Maria G. Parani, "Curtains in the Middle and Late Byzantine House".

CHAPTER 4

4.The Symbolic Meaning of Animals in Byzantine Hagiographies and Miracle Stories

“Animals have long been central to human culture. From stone-age depictions of bison in the caves at Altamira to characters in Disney cartoons, animals have been a constant presence in human art, literature, and belief systems. They have shaped how we live, how we work and how we think.”¹⁰⁸ In light of Cowie’s claims, one may indicate that human beings tend to express themselves with symbols and figures, especially animal figures, since they have the ability to convey the burden of abstract concepts as symbols which make the concept easier to understand. For instance, laziness is associated with the donkey, while canniness and mischievousness are associated with the fox in many cultures.¹⁰⁹ These are just two most common examples of animal symbolism which we are familiar with in our contemporary lives. Loraine Daston and Gregg Mitman give

¹⁰⁸Helen Cowie, “Cultural History,” in *Handbook of Historical Animal Studies*, eds. Mieke Roscher, André Krebber and Brett Mizelle (The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek: De Gruyter, 2021), 147-164.

¹⁰⁹Ancient Near Eastern sources are full of donkeys associated with laziness and obstinacy. “[...] the donkey is characterized as beast of burden, having a large appetite, licentious, stubborn/lazy, noisy, stupid, slow, and having a foul odor.”

“The donkey is frequently featured in the Hebrew Bible. Many of the biblical references to donkeys even recalls (positively or negatively) the beliefs or practices that are present in ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeology.”

The Donkey is associated with stubbornness and laziness in Gen 49:14b; Exod 23:5; Deut 22:4; Prov 26:3.

The fox is associated with trickiness, mischievousness, and canniness in Cant. in Cant.2:15-17; Luke 13:32; Judges 15:4.

Kenneth Way, *Donkeys in the Biblical World: Ceremony and Symbol. History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 28-161.

more examples of the metaphoric usage of animals in literary works to teach indispensable moral and practical lessons. One of their common examples of this kind of literature is Aesop's fables.¹¹⁰ The authors also add that Naturalists have associated bees with monarchs, ants with honesty, and dogs with delicate consciences, which are based only on observation.¹¹¹ It is clear that animals occupied humans' abstract world, just as they occupied the practical world. While talking about the role of animals as literary devices or the explanatory mission of morality in secular literature, religion also embraces the aforementioned usage of animals to teach the religion and/or simplify the complex concepts. In this chapter, I will concentrate on the symbolic usage of animals in both secular and religious texts. In the second part, I will narrow the scope only to the "little animals" in religious contexts. My aim is to demonstrate that "little animals" are significant and different compared to larger animals, because many scholars chose to concentrate upon larger animals since they can be literally seen everywhere both in daily life and also in the sources and their resemblance to human beings can help people feel closer to them. On the other hand, "little animals" occupy our daily symbolism and culture as well. One of the best-known examples is bees and ants which are associated with diligence and busyness.¹¹² The contrast between the size of the work that "little animals" do, and their own dimensions can be the reason for our perception of these "little animals" as hardworking and busy creatures. Despite their hard-working character and unbelievable talents, smaller animals, like indeed insects, were mostly ignored or regarded as disgusting. The reason for this primordial revulsion will be

¹¹⁰ Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman eds, *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹¹¹ Daston and Mitman eds., *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*.

¹¹² Noah Wilson-Rich, *The Bee: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2014), 9.

clarified according to their physical appearance. As Thor Hanson attests, human beings detest an exoskeleton which stimulates fear and disgust in the brain. Psychologists argue that this is an evolutionary reaction because any exoskeleton can sting or bite in a way that causes pain and naturally with this bite can spread illness. People unintentionally intend to feel close to the vertebrates because they are also included in this class. Vertebrates hide their bones inside their bodies unlike exoskeleton therefore people feel more distant towards the latter.¹¹³

However, the role “little animals” played in religious texts is rather significant and different from the bigger-sized animals such as wild animals, lions and wolves and beasts of burden. “Little animals” can be considered as liminal characters in religious contexts, because their roles cannot be clearly classified as those of the bigger-sized ones. Bigger animals appear as good characters such as saviour of the saints who were condemned to *Damnatio ad bestias* (the Roman capital punishment condemning people to be killed by beasts) and appear as evil to deceive human beings. “Little animals” come into view as the punisher of the sinner, the helper of saints on the path of holiness, and exemplary of the perfect life in the community such as bees. Therefore, it is hard to categorize “little animals.” Even if their actions seem dreadful such as eating a living body, in fact they are just obeying the will of God or His believers and show them the path of God. Thus, this chapter will explain first the symbolic meaning of the bigger-sized animals in both secular literature and religious texts, and afterwards the roles and

¹¹³Hanson, *The Nature and Necessity of Bees*, 15.

acts of “little animals” in religious texts will be elaborated upon with a comparison between bigger-sized-animals and insects.

Animals are portrayed as inferior to human beings in the Old and New Testaments. According to the Old Testament, God created livestock, the animals that crawl under the earth and the wild beasts, and afterwards he created man in His image, and He made them to rule over all kinds of creatures, which emphasizes strongly that animals were seen as inferior to humans. Moreover, creating people in God’s image also stressed the difference and significance of people compared to animals as repeated four times in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. In the fourth century, Saint Basil the Great (c.d. 379) clarified the difference between a human’s soul and an animal’s souls in the eighth homily of the Hexaemeron through the verse from Genesis: “Let the earth bring forth a living soul.”¹¹⁴ He argued that beasts do not have souls as humans do. Their souls belonged to earth. “[H]ear now about the soul of creatures devoid of reason. Since, according to Scripture, ‘the life of every creature is in the blood,’ as the blood when thickened changes into flesh, and flesh when corrupted decomposes into earth, so the soul of beasts is naturally an earthy substance.”¹¹⁵ As it can be seen, even if humans and animals shared the same environment, their souls and naturally their value before God are different which can be observed again in Genesis when Adam gives name to the animals. Giving names has significant meaning in many cultures and it indicates that the one who gives name has the right to dominate whoever takes the name.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴Gen 1:24.

¹¹⁵“Hexaemeron (Homily 8)”, New Advent, 2021,
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32018.html>

¹¹⁶Chiara Frugoni, *Uomini e Animali Nel Medioevo: Storie Feroci e Fantastiche* (Società editrice Il mulino, 2018), 82-87.

Some animals have had notoriously infamous connotations since the very beginning, for instance the serpent. Their unlucky existences go back to the Creation of Adam and Eve. The viper was there to deceive Eve to eat the forbidden fruit which was the most famous story of the evilness of reptiles and other wild animals. Even in this story, the Serpent teaches a moral lesson to the believers. As Grant asserts¹¹⁷ “Philo of Alexandria (ca. 50 CE)¹¹⁸ explains that the snake is called ‘wiser than all the beasts’ first because it really is wiser, second because it was going to lead humanity astray through sexual passion.”¹¹⁹ Therefore, the snake is the symbol of earthly desires such as lust for sexual intercourse, jealousy, and greediness.¹²⁰

The fox and the wolf have disrepute as inciting human beings in both secular and religious literature. The second century *Physiologus* defines the fox as a deceitful animal which can do every trick when it is in need. “The fox is a figure of the devil. To those who live according to the flesh he pretends to be dead. Although he may hold sinners within his gullet.”¹²¹ Another example of the fox as a deceitful character is from *An Entertaining Tale of Quadrupeds*, (fourteenth century political satire); the conversation in the poem between a fox and a dog indicates that the latter kept protecting the

¹¹⁷Grant, *Early Christians and Animals*, 37.

¹¹⁸Philo of Alexandria is a Jewish philosopher who was born in Alexandria around 10 BC and died around 50 AD in Alexandria, as well. He is considered as a precursor of Christian theology. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Philo Judaeus." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 14, 2021.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Philo-Judaeus>

¹¹⁹Grant, 14.

¹²⁰Grant, 3.

¹²¹Michael J. Curley, trans., *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 76.

household and the hunt. The dog explains how humans love him: “They feed me raw and cooked and strangled meats/ They feed me, cuddle me, and pamper me/ They even put a collar round my neck” According to the commentary, strangled meat is forbidden in the Old Testament. They give him meat which is not suitable for people to eat. At the same time, they give the dog the meat that they can eat which suggests that humans and dogs share the same environment and people give both the leftovers and the strangled meat that they cannot consume. While in this context the fox comes into view as an undesirable, unlovable creature which must hide in a hole throughout its entire life without sharing any household with human beings and eating any leftovers it can eat. Nobody gives food to the fox intentionally, it has to earn or steal its food.

Fast forward to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, where in the *Synaxarion of the Honourable Donkey*, the fox and wolf want to eat the donkey. The fox is the leader of the group and towards the end, both the fox and the wolf confess that they lied to the donkey to eat it, and they beg for forgiveness.¹²² As Kirsty Stewart notes the confession of the fox is the longest monologue in the poem and the fox indicates that she wants to cry for her sins however she is not able to do so. The desire to weep contrite tears was as essential as the actual act in Orthodox religion.¹²³ One may safely assume that the fox does not really want to cry, instead she intends to deceive the humans with her tears, so she could escape from the punishment.

The other animals commonly seen in religious texts are bears, boars, and lions. The martyrdom narrative is important for Christian literature and its relationship with

¹²²Kirsty Stewart, “Who Has the Most Faults?” in *Fallen Animals: Art, Religion, Literature* ed. Zohar Hadromi-Allouche (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 71-88.

¹²³Stewart.

the animals was significant. As Ingvild Gilhus notes, animals have four main roles in the *Acts of Martyrs*, the first is to kill the Christians, the second is to be sacrificed to God, the third is to threaten the Christians, and the last one to “appear as symbols of polarized cosmos.”¹²⁴ In this part of the chapter, I will mostly focus on the role of the animals as torturers and an embodiment of evil. “Wild animals have something resembling evil. Demons transform themselves into different shapes, but their preferred forms are bestial, and they appear as lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents, wolves.”¹²⁵ Animals were the main characters of *Damnatio ad Bestias* -Condemnation to the animals- between the first and third century in the Roman Empire, therefore there are many martyrdom stories from that time. In the arenas, animals occasionally took the side of evil and tortured Christians. Their evilness is explained as follows: In Satan's cosmic battle against God, animals are converted into instruments. [...] The role of wild animals in the *Acts of the Martyrs* is to threaten, torment, and murder the martyrs, symbolizing a split universe on a metaphysical level.¹²⁶ According to this explanation, animals are the embodiment of evil and their mission is to torture the believers of God.¹²⁷ For instance, in the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas dated to third century, Perpetua has a young child and Felicitas is a pregnant slave girl. She gives birth to her daughter in captivity and when they put them in the arena, her milk is still dripping from her breast.¹²⁸ They were

¹²⁴Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas*, 187.

¹²⁵Gilhus, 221.

¹²⁶Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, “Animals in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. Gordon Lindsay Campbell, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 357.

¹²⁷Gilhus, “Animals in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity,” 357.

¹²⁸Barbara K. Gold, “Perpetua’s Life: Family (Natal and Christian), Education, and Social Status.” in *Perpetua: Athlete of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-24.

captured and condemned to fighting with the beast in the arena since they announced themselves as Christians and refused to renounce their beliefs. There were six catechumens with Perpetua and Felicitas. All of them fight with different species of wild animals. Perpetua and Felicitas fight against a wild cow, while the catechumens fight against a leopard, a boar, and a bear. The wild cow hunts both Perpetua and Felicitas but can not manage to kill the female martyrs. The martyrs were then executed by sword. Even though they are not murdered by a beast in the arena, they are severely injured which leads to their martyrdom by sword.¹²⁹

Another example of the evilness of animals is found in the Life of Saint Ignatius of Antioch (d.110 CE), a theologian martyred by the wild beast in the arena in the reign of Trajan (98-117 CE).¹³⁰ Ignatius wrote epistles on martyrdom and suffering.¹³¹ According to his letters to different people and the Christian community, when he was captured by the Romans, he wished to suffer and die to reach God. During his journey to Rome as a captive, he wrote epistles and one he also mentions that he was suffering and fighting with wild beasts. “Suffer me to belong to the wild beasts, through whom I may attain unto God. I am God’s grain, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread” (*Romans*, IV, 1).”¹³² One can clearly see the role of animals

¹²⁹*The Acts of Christian Martyrs*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 106-131.

¹³⁰Paul Gilliam III. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Arian Controversy. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, 0920-623X. (Leiden: Brill,2017), 69.

¹³¹“The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans,” in *Ignatius’ Letter to the Romans* (MasterFILE Complete, 2000)

¹³²Reuben Loan Ivan, “The Connection Between Salvation, Martyrdom and Suffering According to St. Ignatius of Antioch,” *KAIROS: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 7, no. 2 (2013): 172.

in the path of holiness and martyrdom. The species of the wild beasts are not specified, however the martyr generally is depicted with two lions.¹³³

The placement of animals on the side of God is very common as well. A lot of religious stories with animals indicate that animals were created by God and they were aware enough of their Creator to obey His orders. The most significant example of the good side of animals is the Nativity of Jesus Christ which is depicted with two beasts of burden: the donkey and the ox. Jesus is placed in the middle of the crib and the donkey, and the ox stand near him to emphasize that the nativity occurred in a barn.¹³⁴ These kinds of frescoes can be seen in many works of art, for instance, the marble relief from the fourth-fifth century exhibited in the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens. The ivory depicts the baby Jesus lying with the Virgin Mary, and the ox and donkey are watching them from just above.¹³⁵ One may observe that they are protecting baby Jesus from the cold. The choice of the animals may seem a little bit strange. The first reason is that they are beasts of burden and the second is that they are considered as unintelligent animals. However, this unusual choice of animals can be seen in the above mentioned *Synaxarion of the Honourable Donkey*. The she-fox and the wolf want to deceive the donkey and at the end they are planning to eat it. However, at the end, the donkey kicks both the fox and the wolf out of the boat. In that story, the donkey represents the Byzantine Empire at that time.¹³⁶ Therefore, one may deduce that the choice of the

¹³³Martyrdom of St Ignatius of Antioch — fresco detail from a church in North Africa.

¹³⁴Sacit Pekak and Durmuş Gür, “İsa’nın Doğumu,” *Sanat Tarihi Dergisi* 24, no.2 (2015): 175-226.

¹³⁵Pekak and Gür, 175-226.

¹³⁶Kirsty Stewart, “Who Has the Most Faults?: Animal Sinners in a Late Byzantine Poem,” in *Fallen Animals: Art, Religion, Literature*, ed. Zohar Hadromi-Allouche (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 71-88.

donkey as a Byzantium itself has a close relationship with the Christian connotation of the animal, as well. Apart from the role of the donkey in the Nativity, all the Gospels relate that Christ entered Jerusalem riding on the back of a male donkey.¹³⁷

Although the wild animals such as lions, wolves, and boars kill the Christian martyrs, they sometimes come into sight as a metaphor for describing truthful people and sometimes Jesus himself. The Lion as a Savior is not a strange metaphor for modern people, as in the movie *Narnia: the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Lion lets the Witch humiliate him and sacrifices himself to save his people, resurrecting like Jesus. In the New Testament, Jesus comes as the “Lion of the Judah” (Rev.:5). In this connotation, the lion is seen as a powerful, dignified creature who saves the human nation. Here, the wild nature of lions indicates the victory won against the evil, unlike the blood-thirsty beast in the arenas which kills the Christians. Just as the lion is the king of the animals, Jesus is like a lion who is “the king of kings.”¹³⁸ Another important metaphor of the lion can be seen in *Hosea* 11:10. Here again, Jesus is compared to the lion in terms of the strength of his faith and fearlessness. Lions also show up in *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion* (d.1053 CE). While Lazaros and Paul are lying down and resting after they satisfy their thirst, they see four lions coming towards them. They start to pray because only God can save them from this dangerous situation. “And, indeed, they did not fail in their request for, just as He miraculously tamed the wild beasts for

¹³⁷Peter Mitchell, “The Triumph of the Mule,” in *The Donkey in Human History: An Archaeological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 149.

¹³⁸Revelation 16:19.

Daniel, so also did He for them.”¹³⁹ The lions approached and smelled them and licked them then they wagged their tails as if they were domestic dogs.¹⁴⁰

Another example of a lion in this context is the famous story of Abba Gerosimos of Jordan and the wounded lion. Gerosimos was a monk and later saint of the Orthodox Church who lived in the fifth century. He found the injured beast in the wilderness, and cured him. The lion gives its gratitude and refuses to leave the saint alone.¹⁴¹ Therefore, the monk accepts it in the monastery and feeds him with bread and vegetables. It can be understood that the lion lives as a monk and does not follow its instinct to consume flesh but rather chooses to be a vegetarian. Just like the one of the brethren, he has a job as well, to check the wild ass. When a wild ass was stolen, the monk accused the lion of succumbing to its instincts and eating the wild ass. Therefore, the monk punished him. After a while the wild ass came back to the monastery as it had left it once. “The elder had thought that the lion had eaten the ass, but now he realized that the lion had been falsely accused. He named the beast Jordanes and it lived with the elder in the lavra¹⁴², never leaving his side, for five years.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹Gregory the Cellarer and Richard P. H. Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint. Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation:3* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 106.

¹⁴⁰Gregory the Cellarer, 106.

¹⁴¹ For the story and its representation in art see Hope D. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 34-67.

¹⁴²Lavra; a type of community that allowed monks to live daily life independently, as solitaries, with the requirement that they accept authority of an abbot and come together regularly as a community to celebrate the liturgy and receive both instruction and supplies [...] Numerous lavras appeared in the later Byzantine countryside from the mid-ninth century onwards, most notably Great Lavra of Mount Athos.” Bernice M. Kaczynski, and Thomas Sullivan, *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Monasticism. Vol. First edition*, (Croydon: OUP Oxford, 2020).

¹⁴³Patricia Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 130-132.

Thus far, the roles of the bigger-sized animals in selected secular and religious texts have been explained. The bigger-sized animals come to view both as an embodiment of evil, and as believers and helpers of God. It can be said that both secular literature and religious texts have used the advantage of the bigger-sized animals which are all somehow familiar to human beings to explain moral issues and religious concepts. As can be seen in this part of the chapter, the bigger-sized animals always have a side, either good or bad. This situation cannot be applied to “little animals.” Even if their actions can be considered as disgusting and disturbing, they are only doing what God or the saints order. They do not reject their natural behavior, unlike the vegetarian lion. The next part of the chapter will explain the liminality of “little animals” to show that they indeed do have as significant a role as the larger animals.

“Little animals” have important roles in the abovementioned cosmic fight between good and evil. In this fight, they take part in both the good side and the bad side, just as the bigger-sized animals. However, these “little” creatures’ appearances are slightly different from that of the bigger-sized animals. As it can be seen, big animals sometimes protect the saints and refuse to harm them, and sometimes¹⁴⁴ they obey their nature and tear apart the martyrs.¹⁴⁵ Occasionally, they act like a monk and repent when they sin. Nevertheless, such behavior cannot be observed in insects. They do not repent,

¹⁴⁴Gregory the Cellarer and Richard P. H. Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint. Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation*:3 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 106.

¹⁴⁵Barbara K. Gold, "Perpetua's Life: Family (Natal and Christian), Education, and Social Status." In *Perpetua: Athlete of God*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018. 1-24.

and they do not have a voice in the religious texts.¹⁴⁶ Insects just come to the scene, play their part, leave. Unlike the bigger-sized animals, they can sometimes communicate with the saints, and sometimes they can show their feelings with their body language. Insects and worms do not reflect their feelings. In fact, the birth of insects and maggots is described differently from other living things.¹⁴⁷ A distant picture of emergence is drawn for the idea of birth like other living things. For example, Isidore of Seville describes the worms according to their living space such as earthworms, flesh worms and water worms. His description of worms is not scientific, and he describes them according to his observation and inevitably uses previous works especially Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* which is the notable collection of ancient works, and was used as a reference for centuries.¹⁴⁸ Isidore of Seville also had a pseudo-scientific perspective and transferred what was in nature and explained it according to a cause-and-effect relationship. When he saw a dead animal body which was naturally eaten by the worms, he thought that the worms were born in ox's flesh which is partly correct because flies and other insects and worms leave their eggs on the carcass, although they are not of course created by the dead body itself. The worm is an animal that can be born from flesh, wood, or any other earthy substance; it can also be created from an egg. There are many different types of worms, including earthworms, water worms, air

¹⁴⁶Frederick Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, Vol. IV," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 35 (1915): 156.

Alice-Mary Marry Talbot and Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *Miracle Tales from Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library: DOML 12. Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁷Joyce Irebe Whalley, *Pliny the Elder: Historia Naturalis*, (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982).

¹⁴⁸Isidore of Seville, and Stephen A. Barney *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 258-260.

worms, meat worms, leaf worms, wood worms, and clothing worms.¹⁴⁹ One may notice the similarities between the creation of the insects and that of Adam and Eve. All of them were born without sexual intercourse. Adam was made of dust and in the image of God, just like so-called earthworms. Eve was created from Adam's rib, in other words, she was made out of Adam's flesh similar to the flesh-worms as Isidore of Seville mentions.¹⁵⁰ One may also notice that Isidore of Seville makes a connection between worms and insects; the understanding of worms and insects are not quite different from each other. For instance, he describes spiders as air-worms because they eat their food in the air and the scorpion is an earthworm. One may come across the same type of definition in the *Physiologus* which is an anonymous, second century bestiary lore and a didactic poem with biblical references.¹⁵¹ The *Physiologus* defines the spider as a worm. There are two stanzas about spiders, the first one is about their physical appearance, and the second one is about their symbolic meaning where the first stanza about spiders describes the spiders and their characteristic features as "Always employed in the threads that they weave,/ He is accustomed to live in this snare,/ Which as the builder he loves to prepare,"¹⁵² The next stanza is a moral lesson from the spider's behavior and Alan W. Rendell dwells upon the allegory that draws parallels with the Spider and human-kind. "Just like the Spider, laying its web to deceive flies, people like thieves or corpse-bearers, also take lives with deceit and abandon the body. Just like the Spider

¹⁴⁹Grant, *Early Christians and Animals*, 97.

¹⁵⁰ Isidore of Seville, and Stephen A. Barney *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 258-260.

¹⁵¹Elizabeth Morrison, Larisa Grollemond, and Timothy Potts, *Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World* (Los Angeles, CA: Paul Getty Museum, 2019), 86.

¹⁵²Alan Wood Rendell, *Physiologus: A Metrical Bestiary of Twelve Chapters by Bishop Theobald*, ed. David Badke (Oxford: John & Edward Bumpus., 1928), 81.

making its web and waiting for its prey, it is possible to catch human-kind by their sins. When he does so, he bares their body, and bereave their grace, the only solution to get rid of this is by confession and repentance.”¹⁵³

As can be seen, the spider is used as a literary device to embody moral instruction. The author says the spider is the reflection of the devil himself on the earth. However, there is also a supernatural explanation of their creation that proves their power and relationship with evil. Moving to a Byzantine source, Michael Psellos points out that “some demons ever produce sperm and with it give birth to worms.”¹⁵⁴ This is not the first or last connection between insects and demons. In addition to their role as the devil’s seed, they are the irreplaceable characters of hell. Saint Basil the Great illustrates hell in his *Homilies* as a dark and deep hole, even the fire there does not have any light. There are the deadly, flesh-eating worms, who feed voraciously and never stop, creating terrible sufferings as a result of their greediness.¹⁵⁵ Not only are they part of the depictions of hell, but they are the ones who carry out the punishments there. In many miracle stories and hagiographies, worms and insects come out of the wounds and decaying bodies or they are eating the guilty one alive. The most popular example of worms used for punishment is Judas’ suffering¹⁵⁶ “His genitals appeared more loathsome and larger than anyone else’s, and when he relieved himself there passed through its puss and worms from every part of its body, much to his shame.”¹⁵⁷ One

¹⁵³Rendell, 82-83.

¹⁵⁴ Michael (Pseudo-) Psellos and Marcus Collisson, *Psellus’ Dialogue on the Operation of Deamons* (Sydney: J. Tegg and D.L. Welch, 1843).

¹⁵⁵Richard P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1988), 75.

¹⁵⁶Greenfield, 215.

¹⁵⁷Papias quoted in Andrew Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh, Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 17.

may safely assume that the body surrounded with worms and insects along with being eaten alive are the last steps of the punishment. Therefore, Judas deserves that severe punishment because of his betrayal. Another monk, Heron, whose story was told by Palladius (c.363-431), had sexual intercourse with a woman and “then developed a ‘carbuncle (anthrax) on the head of his penis. [...] Venereal ailments are almost inherently symptomatic of sin, and not befitting a holy man.”¹⁵⁸ One may notice that adultery and Judas’ sin, the betrayal of Jesus, are sentenced to the same punishment; being eaten by a worm. Sexual sins are thus as bad as betraying Jesus in the face of God. If someone commits adultery, their punishment would be related to their genital organs which shows their sin to everyone. Another example of this kind of punishment can be found in the Miracles of Saint Thecla (c.d. 180). According to a story from the Miracles, during the saint’s feast day, a man called Orention went to pray and saw a lady. He prayed to have that lady to Saint Thecla. After his strange prayer, he saw a vision and in this vision the virgin saint was giving gifts according to their wishes. Saint Thecla gave what Orention wanted in this vision. An hour later, a furious and ferocious evil strikes Orention, splits him into pieces, and tears him apart; skinning him according to the Persian traditions, the Demon later bares him of his skin and gives him worms and purulence. [...] In fact, the woman was a disguise of the Demon itself whom Orention had looked upon cruelly and immorally. The demon was the one with whom he had intercourse, ending with a destruction of the unhappy man.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh, Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity*, 18.

¹⁵⁹Alice-Mary Talbot and Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *Miracle Tales from Byzantium* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 137.

As can be seen, the allegory of worms indicates how the devil makes people's souls sick and unclean. The devils use the human's soul to fulfill its everlasting aim, to deceive human beings and cause them to sin, just like the worms need to dwell in a living body to survive and reproduce. Things being so, a similar and important moral lesson is taught in the *Acts of John* (c. 180). In this story, John and his disciples wanted to rest in a deserted inn. John was so tired that he wanted to fall asleep immediately, but the bedbugs disturbed him by making noises and biting him. He says, "I say unto you, O bugs, behave yourselves, one and all, and leave your abode for this night and remain quiet in one place, and keep your distance from the servants of God."¹⁶⁰ Upon his command, the bedbugs immediately left the bed and settled on the door as the saint ordered. After John woke up, however, he ordered them back to their home. At the end, he taught a moral lesson upon uttering: "these creatures heard unto voice of a man, and abode by itself and were quiet and trespassed not; but we which hear the voice and commandments of God disobey and are light-minded: and for how long?"¹⁶¹ He therefore compares the bedbugs to the human beings, although the bedbugs are not morally incorrupt like humans. Yet, Janet Spittler suggests that there may be an allegory between humans and bedbugs. The word bedbugs (κόρεις) and the word girl (κόραι) may be puns.¹⁶² In other words, when John gets the bug out of the bed, it sounds like he is ordering the girl to get out of bed-this is thus an easy reference to his fanatical lifestyle¹⁶³ This is an unusual comparison of insects and women. The other important

¹⁶⁰<http://gnosis.org/library/actjohn.htm>

¹⁶¹<http://gnosis.org/library/actjohn.htm>

¹⁶²Janet E. Spittler, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: The Wild Kingdom of Early Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 105.

¹⁶³Spittler, 105.

mission of worms and insects is to lead the holy men through the path of holiness. They accomplish this in two different ways. The first is that the holy men can heal the people who suffer from incurable diseases that mostly seem disgusting. Unlike the punishment of Orention, in the stories -which will be discussed later in this chapter- the person who suffers can be cured by the saints if s/he is faithful to God. It can be summarized thusly: “life is restored to the dying faithful person through the saint’s miraculous intervention.”¹⁶⁴ The miracle story of the noble lady named Barbara from Lazaropoulos’s *Synopsis*¹⁶⁵ is an example of above mentioned healing power. The protagonist drank water, and she accidentally swallowed a leech which caused unbearable pain while it was moving. Barbara gets rid of the leech by simply pouring oil from the saint’s lamp into her right nostril.¹⁶⁶ It is discernible that even if the saint does not intervene with the situation in person, the problem may be solved through using his personal belongings. Therefore, the miraculous event intensifies the saint’s holiness and healing power regarding the “uncanny” and “supernatural” sickness. There are other miracle stories which are related to healing uncommon diseases. “The saint cuts out the patient’s tumor with a sword, filling the church with unbearable stench, and the previously sick man is covered with blood, pus, and less frequently, worms.”¹⁶⁷ One may find very distinguished miracle stories in fourth century hagiography like the Life of Saint Anthony the Great (d.356): “There was also a maiden from Busiris Tripolitana, who had a terrible and very hideous disorder. For the running of her eyes, nose, and ears

¹⁶⁴Stavroula Constantinou, “Grotesque Bodies in Hagiographical Tales: The Monstrous and the Uncanny in Byzantine Collections of Miracle Stories,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 64, (2010): 53.

¹⁶⁵Lazaropoulos, *Synopsis*, ll. 1626-1629; translated in Rosenqvist, *Hagiographic Dossier*, p. 337

¹⁶⁶Constantinou, 52.

¹⁶⁷Constantinou, 48.

fell to the ground and immediately became worms. She was paralyzed also and squinted.”¹⁶⁸ Similar to Barbara’s healing, the little girls were cured by praying. The saint did not do anything physically. This can be interpreted as saints being able to control even the little animals which are mostly disgusting and avoided. One may observe that saints were dealing with the worms and insects due to various reasons, and to show their holiness and ability to work miracles are two of these reasons.

Isolation and suffering are the key features of an ascetic life. Holy men isolate themselves from society to focus on their spirituality and prayers; therefore they sometimes go to the desert, a mountain, or ascend a pillar.¹⁶⁹ They also discipline their earthly desires by staying away from various foods, beverages, sexual intercourse, having a home or a nice place to stay and any luxuries. The holy man was able to act in this way because his asceticism had placed him at a distance from the world and hence rendered his authority unassailable. In the light of this explanation, it can be said that the worms and the insects also have an intermediary role in the saint’s ascetic life. They help the saint to feel the more pain so s/he can be isolated from the corporeal world. They are the saints’ company on the path of holiness, and like the saints, are themselves the intercessor and eye-opener for ordinary people and sinners.¹⁷⁰ Worms can also have a different function in hagiography as shown by the seventh century *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*. In this *Life* and many other lives of ascetics, one may discover the reverse relationship between worms, insects, and human beings. As usual, people have eaten

¹⁶⁸“Life of St. Anthony”, New Advent, 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2811.htm>

¹⁶⁹Peter Brown, *The Society and Holy Men in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 6-10.

¹⁷⁰Peter Brown, *The Society and Holy Men in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 6-10.

animals for many centuries, however in many lives of saints, the little insects and worms are eating the saint's body. One may assert that worms and insects act as independent creatures, unlike bigger-sized animals. In the other hagiographies which were explained earlier, many animals act against their nature. There were vegetarian lions and affectionate bears, yet in the *Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon*, the little creatures do not leave their natural behavior and by eating the saint's body, they help him to fulfill his aim to become an ascetic monk. When Theodore of Sykeon decided to be an ascetic, he spent a few years in a cave. With ease, the rural villagers traveled to the mountain and found Theodore looking like a corpse. They brought him to the small chapel of Saint George. When he emerged from his cave, he blacked out and did not say a word for a long time. Wounds and purulence were all over his head, his hair was dry, a huge amount of worms were clogged in it; his bones weren't damaged yet the stink from his flesh was so strong that nobody could be around him¹⁷¹ According to this description, his body is more like a corpse than a living man. Becoming a living-corpse emphasizes that he has renounced all earthly desires. There is a reference to maggots in the fifth century *Life of Saint Symeon the Stylite*. His ascetic life was exemplary for his contemporaries and posteriors. He opted to live on the top of a pillar in all weather conditions. He had a minuscule place to live, and he couldn't move or lie down. People gave him food through the little bucket, although he hardly ate. One day, one of the bishops visited him and noticed he was astringently injured. The condition of the Saint was explained in details, his body was full of abscesses, and after these lesions would

¹⁷¹Elizabeth A. S. Dawes and Norman Hepburn Baynes. eds. *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver* (London: Lowe & Brydone Printers Limited, 1977), 101.

rupture, uncountable amounts of living maggots fell out, and the smell coming from him was so unbearable that some of his pupils could not approach him without putting strong essences to their noses.¹⁷² The worms and insects on his body make his suffering more insufferable, therefore more holy, turning him into what Peter Brown describes as a Holy Man.¹⁷³

The case of bees is barely specific; contrary to “little creatures” or larger animals in that they produce honey, one might also be aware that their product can be found in non-secular literature. Nevertheless, the symbolic meaning of bees is just like the formerly referred to animals, bees have both evil and good symbolic meanings. Isidore of Seville defines them in a similar way with how he defines the other insects and worms. According to his *Etymologies*, “bees are born from the carcasses of oxen, for the flesh slaughtered calves is beaten to create these bees, so that worms are created from the putrid gore, and the worms become bees.”¹⁷⁴ One may thus safely say that the creation of bees is just as disgusting as that of the other insects and worms. After he defines bees, he classifies the type of bees according to the animal carcasses which they come from. For example, he says that “the ones called bees originate from oxen, just as hornets come from horses, drones from mules and wasps from asses.”¹⁷⁵ Although how they come to life is not very prominent, the different species of bees were recognized. Generally, there is not any information on bees in *Physiologus*. However, the

¹⁷²Frederick Lent, “The Life of St. Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan’s *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, Vol IV,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 35 (1915): 156.

¹⁷³Peter Brown, *The Society and Holy Men in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 6-10.

¹⁷⁴Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, eds. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 269.

¹⁷⁵Isidore of Seville, 269.

Epiphanius version of *Physiologus*¹⁷⁶ contains a chapter on bees and two different chapters on other insects such as wasps and ants.¹⁷⁷ According to *Physiologus* referring to Solomon, the bees are the smallest bird, and they can make the sweetest “fruit.” The part about the bees continues with their characteristic behavior. He points out that they move as a group and work for the same purposes, and he indicates that they have a king, and they obey him and work to satisfy him and make him happy. The author emphasizes that the other bees do not choose the king, as the king is already ‘enthroned’ by the Creator. The author says; with the help of their mouths and feet, the bees pick honey out of flowers; and they attract wax out of the plants. The bees take away the honey they pick, and with great expertise, they make their cells with the wax. They divide the wax into holes smoothly and they spill the honey into them.¹⁷⁸

After this description of the animals, it continues with the moral lessons which the bees teach. The author draws an analogy between the bees and the Christian community. They both dwell around the one Lord and both should do the same work for their Lord. The allegory of the bee’s sting is quite different and important, and the same allegory can be found in Saint Basil the Great’s *Hexaemeron* which will be discussed later in this section. Every candidate has a sting, but they do not use them, but when they have to do so and they kill somebody, they themselves die as well. The author draws an allegory between the sting and the freedom and he explains this as follows: “Yet the

¹⁷⁶“Properties of the Bee,” McPherson Library University of Victoria, accessed 14 February 2022,

<http://spcoll.library.uvic.ca/Digit/physiologum/animal/bee.htm#:~:text=Epiphanius%20Physiologus%3A%20Bee,for%20the%20sweetness%20it%20produces>.

¹⁷⁷Harry B. Weiss, “The Bee, the Wasp, the Ant, Insects of the *Physiologus*,” *Journal of the New York Entomological Society* 33, no. 4 (1925): 238–242.

¹⁷⁸Weiss, 239.

leader wounds not with the sting, that is he guards holiness with his liberty and turns not to licence.”¹⁷⁹ There is another allegory between honey and the Church, as well; “also the holy ones of the Church pasture on the plant of God and on the holy flowers of the godly books and collect from them the one food of spiritual sweetness.”¹⁸⁰ As already hinted at, Saint Basil the Great mentions bees many times in his *Hexaemeron*. He draws an allegory between bees and the gifts of the Spirit while he explains that drunkenness dispels all the goodness just like smoke disperses the bees.¹⁸¹ As it was previously mentioned, Saint Basil draws an allegory between the sting and revenge and hurting somebody. He gives the bees’ way of life as an example for the Christians. Bees have a sting, but if they use it against each other, they will die. Saint Basil asks Christians to do the same thing in the face of evil. He warns them not to harm anyone even if they have been hurt by them. They should embrace evil with goodness.¹⁸² Apparently, Saint Basil praises the bees and their behavior here. He emphasizes that they are living in a community, and they do not hurt each other; they completely focus on their job and they work peacefully but diligently. They collect the honey from the flowers without harming anything and according to his words, believers should also act like bees and collect goodness and spirituality from God, the ascetic and religious leaders or even each other. “the contrast between physical weakness and mental strength, the comparison of the

¹⁷⁹Weiss, 240.

¹⁸⁰Weiss, 240.

¹⁸¹Saint Basil the Great, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II: Basil*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 8 (New York: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1895), 101.

¹⁸²Saint Basil the Great, 8:336.

divine dicta to sweetener than honey, the attribution of the insects as industrious and diligent.”¹⁸³

Elias Spelaiotes (864-960)¹⁸⁴ was a Byzantine monk who lived in Southern Italy and was known as a protector of honey and bees; his monastery had many beehives. They tried to protect the hives from wild animals such as bears, and therefore they built wall-like structures. In agreement with the Life, Elias Spelaiotes had a dream in which the monastery was a beehive, and the brethren were like bees, a swarm of bees were flying around his head buzzing melodiously. After this vision he decided to establish the monastery.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, in his dream he put a bucket on his head while the bees buzzed and after he removed the bucket, he saw that the bees stayed inside. He used this vision to build a beehive in the garden of the monastery, in this way the first beehive was explained.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, the relationship between bees and monks is close. As it can be seen the communal life of bees and their gentle behavior towards each other and their queen – even if in that time the queen bees’ gender was thought to be male- was considered as an exemplary for monasteries.

Besides their divine connotations, seeing bees in dreams was mostly interpreted as evil. According to Daniel’s Dreambook, if somebody sees bees in the house, it means that the person has enemies.¹⁸⁷ Another interpretation of bees in a

¹⁸³Germanidou, “Honey Culture in Byzantium. An Outline of Textual, Iconographic and Archaeological Evidence,” 266 –71.

¹⁸⁴Elias Spelaitoes, in BHG (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca) 581, AASS Sept. III, 843-88.

¹⁸⁵Stephanos Efthymiadis, *Hagiography in Byzantium: Literature, Social History and Cult (Variorum Collected Studies)* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁸⁶Ceylan Borstlap and Lale Doğer, “Kutsal Bal: İkonografisi ile Bizans Sanatında Arı ve Bal”, *Sanat Tarihi Dergisi* 30, no.2 (2021): 13-35.

¹⁸⁷Oberhelman, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica in Translation, with Commentary and Introduction*, 216.

dream can be found in Manuel II Palaiologus' *Dreambook*, which indicated that if somebody sees a lot of bees in a dream it signifies there will be a rebellion.¹⁸⁸

Moreover, the sweetness of honey was considered as tempting, therefore, sometimes monks would argue that it should not be consumed inside the monastery because of its incompatibility with asceticism. Its sweetness was extremely good and that might cause the monks to lose their control over their earthly desires.

In the Creation in the Old Testament the animals were regarded as subordinate to human kind by their nature. They were not designed in God's mind as humans were produced as an image of Him, and this hierarchy between Man and Animal highlighted the ascendancy of humans over the other living inhabitants of the Earth. This traditional and religious perception of the world of animals clearly affected the Church Fathers as seen in the martyrologies which were stemming from the events of the Age of Persecutions, as well as later Byzantine ecclesiastical authorities like St. Basil. In these sources, animals appear either as instruments of violence and punishment or manifestations of God's will in order to give a lesson to the humans, enlightening the true path, but they were not depicted as the real protagonists of the stories with only a few exceptions such as *An Entertaining Tale of Quadruples*.

Even though all animals were accepted as inferior creatures, one should also mention the very fact that there are upper and lower echelons in their universe. As aforementioned, in lieu of the bigger animals such as lions, wolves, donkeys, foxes

¹⁸⁸Anagnostakis, "Wild and Domestic Honey in Middle Byzantine Hagiography: Some Issues Relating to Its Production, Collection and Consumption," 107.

or dogs who were regarded either in amicable or inimical contexts, little ones like worms, insects or wasps were generally perceived in neutral settings, appearing in the texts as tools for fulfilling God's will. Instead of bigger animals who can be tamed by the humans, leading them to perform human behaviors such as being friends with monks, changing dietary regimes or choosing not to attack the saints, the natural manners of the little animals were not depicted as a set of mutable characteristics. The little animals strictly followed their natural conditions, and therefore, when they emerged in a story, they played a role of punisher or helper by eating the bodies of the humans. In the Byzantine sanctity, the little animals had a peculiar set of characteristics however their roles are depicted in contrast to the bigger animals which can be tamed.

CHAPTER 5

5. Conclusion

The sheer excess of insect-killing techniques provides the clearest proof that humans have been dealing with insects for centuries and they often try to dispose of them. Seeing the fact that poisons can easily be found almost everywhere, it is a possibility that humans perceive them as a necessity in the house and they do not even have a second-thought about using them against the insects or exoskeletal creatures in general. Committing a bloodless crime makes the killing easier. Even technology has gradually entered the fight against insects, producing electric insectifuge which can be plugged into sockets, and electrical nests to hit the insects. We internalize the idea that the insects are beings to be detested so much that we use special lotions to protect our body while we are walking on the grass or enjoying a sunset on the beach. In other words, we occupy their environment, their home, and then we do not wish to encounter them. Although human beings do everything to avoid insects, their lives still depend on “little animals”. As Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson suggests: “Everything that impacts insects has an impact on us as well. Insect extinction or a reduction of insect species would have a domino effect on the ecosystem, with far-reaching consequences over time since it affects many essential ecological activities.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, instead of an anthropocentric approach to the insects, we need to grasp a more ecocentric approach.

¹⁸⁹ Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson, *Böcekler Gezegeni: Tuhaf, Yararlı ve Hayranlık Uyandıran Dostlarımız Üzerine*, trans. Dilek Başak (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018), 145.

The anthropocentric approach has occupied the social sciences as well. Scholars tend to explore the world of bigger-sized animals, since they can be found in various primary sources and are obvious in the material culture.¹⁹⁰ When the earth is visibly collapsing, the climate changes, pandemics, pollution, and the enormous amount of extinct animals can trigger scholars to focus on the “little animals” to which we owe our lives. These small creatures digest our waste and use it for fertilizing the earth, and they are the most important factor in pollination which directly affects our life cycle.

In this thesis I wanted to compare the practical and symbolic roles of “little animals” to bigger-sized ones in Byzantium. I wanted to give a voice to these small creatures and aim to show that they have always been essential for human beings. It can be said that bees are more visible in the lives of ordinary people compared to silkworms. Bees and bee’s products such as honey and beeswax can be found both in common people’s lives and in the Palace. Since honey is used for several different purposes; a sweetener for food and beverages; medical purposes, particularly as a drop or solution for external usage and also used as an ingredient in medical potions. The other significant bee’s product is beeswax which was used for making candles and protecting food from deterioration. Honey was also a great product to make a special pill which contained enough calories for an adult human; these pills saved many lives during periods of war and famine.

Silkworms are different from bees. It can be said that bees are more related to common people while silkworms are an indicator of power and wealth. As mentioned

¹⁹⁰ Tristan Schmidt, Henrietta Kroll, Kirsty Steward, Nancy Sevcenko.

above, silk was a very important and expensive textile and the demand for silk goes back to ancient times and this situation applies also for Byzantium. Because of this high demand of silk and its value, silk production and mulberry cultivation were under the control of the Empire. Only royal people were allowed to wear silk and the color purple. A lower quality of silk could be found in local markets and sometimes ordinary people could afford to buy it. Even if the ordinary people could not afford to wear silk, they would embroider the details of silk clothes which suggests that silk was not only popular among the upper-class people, but also it was popular and desirable among the ordinary people. Silk also had a political role in the Byzantine Empire, it was a valuable gift and was generally sent to build a strong diplomatic relationship between the foreign rulers. Thus it can be seen that small creatures had a great place in the Byzantine economy and day to day life just as the larger animals had.

“Even a worm’s soul causes it to move with precision, to seek things suitable for it, to avoid or overcome difficulties as far as possible. Having regard always to the sense of safety, its soul hints much more clearly than its body the unity which creates all natures”¹⁹¹

The quotation from Saint Augustine of Hippo is the basis of my main argument. Although the “little animals” were not seen as much as the bigger-sized creatures, their presence in the miracle stories and hagiographies shows they were essential throughout the path of holiness. As can be seen above, the bigger-sized animals chose their side very distinctively; either they were with God or evil. The

¹⁹¹ Patricia Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 157.

role of the “little animals” was slightly different; they were the embodiment of good or evil. They had direct connection with the divine powers, and they never deserted their own natures. This could be explained by noting that small animals were not used as a literary device to teach moral lessons, because their roles were to directly deliver God’s messages or the devil’s messages. They showed the horror of hell and the punishment of people’s sins through dreams or through sickness. They made holy men suffer by eating their wounds and showing the way of holiness. While eating the flesh of the holy men, they might symbolize that corporeal life is temporary just as the body itself, after life is the real life therefore they train the human beings to set their temporary shell aside and focus on their eternal temple, the after life. After all, “[...] I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.”¹⁹²

¹⁹² Psalms 22:6.



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