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## BEES AND BEEKEEPING IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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faculty of tourism and hotels

### Abstract

Throughout the ancient Egyptian history until the Roman times,[i] the bee was a favored insect by the ancient Egyptians.[ii] It was used as a symbol of Kingship in Lower Egypt and appeared in ancient texts and tomb monuments.[iii] It was also linked to several major gods and was mentioned in the Pyramid texts and the ancient Egyptian Mythology. Its honey was included in several religious rituals, was presented as offerings not only to the gods but also to the dead and was used in many aspects of their lives.[iv] Historical evidences today show that the ancient Egyptians were the first to practice beekeeping in history. The earliest evidence of such practice was as early as the Fifth Dynasty, Old Kingdom, in the sun temple of king Nyusera, which contains a relief depicting beekeeping.[v] This article will focus on the nature, name of bees, historical evidence of beekeeping, its culture and religious role in ancient Egypt.

### Bibliography

[i]G.T. THOMAS, 'Religious Background for Virgil's Bee Symbol in the Georgics', *Vergilius (1959-) No.24* (1978),32.

[ii] M.R. BUNSON, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (New York, 2002), 67.

[iii]THOMAS, *Vergilius (1959-) No.24* (1978), 32.

[iv] N. B. HANSEN, 'Insects', in B.D. REDFORD (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt, vol.2* (Oxford, 2001), 161.

[v]G. KRITSKY, *The Quest for the Perfect Hive, A History of Innovation in Bee Culture* (Oxford, 2010), 11

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Bee-keeping methods are conservative in this region, well adapted to local conditions, for instance the kind of hives shown in these ancient reliefs, apparently woven baskets covered with clay, are still seen in the Sudan today. The main centre of bee-keeping was Lower Egypt with its extensive cultivated lands, where the bee was chosen as a symbol for the country. One of Pharaoh's titles was Bee King, and the gods also were associated with the bee. The sanctuary in which Osiris was worshiped was the Hwt bjt, the Mansion of the Bee. The ancient Egyptians kept animals as pets ranging from domesticated dogs and cats to baboons, monkeys, fish, gazelles, birds (especially falcons), lions, mongoose... Dogs in Ancient Egypt. The dog was still very important to the Egyptians, no matter their social status. According to historian Jimmy Dunn, dogs "served a role in hunting, as guard and police dogs, in military actions, and as household pets" (1). The Egyptian word for dog was iwiw which referenced their bark (Dunn, 1). The dog breeds of ancient Egypt were the Basenji, Greyhound, Ibizan, Pharaoh, Saluki, and Whippet and dogs are referenced in the Predynastic Period of Egypt (c.