

The word “honey” is not a trademark for combs

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Honey is a word for sugary, mostly used for sweet, even though honey is also sour. Therefore, the descriptor “sour-sweet” was wisely suggested by Dr. DW Roubik (2007), during a pot honey sensory workshop held in Venezuela. Honey can also be moderately astringent, piquant, savory, umami, and even bitter if the bees visited *Castanea* spp., or extremely bitter after *Arbutus unedo*. On odors and aromas, this sugar and water matrix —of eusocial origin, holds kaleidoscopic possibilities of entomological, microbiological, botanical, environmental, geographical, handling, extractive, post-harvest processing, age and cultural clues to inform similar or distinctive origin.

The first honey in the planet should have been originated in a pot from a stingless bee (Meliponini) because the oldest fossil of a bee is from *Trigona prisca*, dating back to the late Cretaceous (Michener & Grimaldi, 1988a,b), as kindly informed by Prof. JMF Camargo (2008) during his conference in Venezuela. These honeys were widely relished by Amerindians (Schwarz, 1848) and are still delighted in the tropical and subtropical ecosystems. Paradoxically the honey produced in pots by Meliponini has not been incorporated in the Codex standard for honey by the *Codex Alimentarius Commission* (CAC, 1969; 1981; revised in 1987; 2001). Although the CAC was exclusive for *Apis mellifera*, it has expanded to other honey bees that also store honey in combs. Souza et al. (2006) revised the Meliponini honey components on the way to set their quality standards. The following year, ICONTEC (2007) made the first regulatory attempt to insert pot honey produced by a 120 Meliponini species in Colombia, as Native Bee Honey (Annex B), and such action deserves our admiration.

Honey, as the word for the sugary product bees process in combs or pots, is mostly sugar, but also water (also missed in the CAC description). The water is so important in the biology of honey, but current application is restricted to a quality standard on maximum moisture.

Mayá is an Amerindian word for honey, currently used by Huottujas from Southern Venezuela. *Sugarbag* is the name of Australian stingless bees. *Divine elixir* (Vit et al., 1988) was a poetical approach from a myriad of proposals to name a bubbling treasure packed in wondrous intelligent designs for fermentation we can still contemplate with awe today. And yet, hypothesize on unravelled phylogenetic relationships between the bees and their surrounding universe, just looking at pot honey.



Honey pots of *Tetragonisca angustula*, Mérida, Venezuela. The top of a sealed cerumen pot was opened to harvest the honey. The foam shows an active fermentative process.

Photography: Patricia Vit

Natural history of pot honey by means of sensory strings... The contact achieved in the sensory experience and the effort to identify, describe and quantify descriptors of the bee world perceived by human senses exposed to honey.

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