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## Senior Research Abstract: Pigs in Antiquity

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*Abstract for Senior Research*  
*Pigs in Antiquity*  
By Chris Bungard

For the Greeks and the Romans, pigs and their wild counterpart, boars, were a crucial part to life. Pigs were essential in the practice of religion, being sacrificed to a wide variety of gods and goddesses. As religion and public life were fully intertwined, it is not surprising that the pig was such an important animal. A young pig was the cheapest sacrifice a family could offer up in private worship. The blood of a piglet was seen as a means of purification. Pork was one of the primary meats consumed by the Greco-Roman people, by far more common than beef. Considering all of this, it is not surprising that stories of pigs, wild and domestic, and their keepers pervade the passages of Greco-Roman literature, especially mythology.

This study looks at the way in which the image of the pig and the boar changed over the passing of the centuries. In both Greece and Rome, early history revolved around the agrarian life. As the city developed, more people in both societies spent more of their time away from farms. The farm itself sits at the edge of the civilized world. It is the boundary between the domestic and the wild. The less time people

are exposed to this halfway world, the less they see wild nature as glorious. The wild is the haunt of beasts and barbarians. Any idyllic portrayal of nature is the nature of the farm.

The pig is the ideal subject for such a study as it is one animal that exists on either side of the wild-domestic line. The pig can be tended by a swineherd, like Homer's Eumaeus, or it can be the destructive agent of the gods, like the Calydonian boar or Phaea the Crommyonian sow. In Homer, nature is much more noble. Heroes are likened to boars in attempt to glorify the furious power of the wild beast. The domestic pig is seen only around the character of the swineherd, who slaughters them for the feasts of the suitors. The pig nourishes. By the time of Vergil, the boar is only used in a simile with the warrior Mezentius, the cruel king of the Etruscans who was banished by his own people for tying the living to the dead, just to mention one of his barbarous acts. The image of the domestic pig is similar to Homer's. Vergil's Aeneas sees a white sow suckling thirty piglets, a symbol of the future position of Rome, nourishing the neighboring communities.