



Domestic Pigs in Antiquity – Morphology and Husbandry

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Subject of the study is the morphology and husbandry of domestic pigs in classic Greece and Italy (7th century BC to 4th century AD). For the characterisation of the different varieties of swine pictorial, osteoarchaeological and written sources were evaluated. Nearly **200 images of domestic pigs** on coins, gems, glasspastes, vases and reliefs as well as sculptures and statues provide evidence about pig breeding. Using these sources the following varieties of swine may be distinguished – in a more or less schematic way:



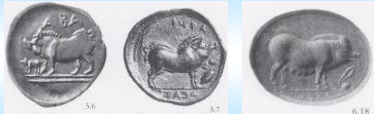
Long-legged pigs: With a relative chest depth < 50 % most of them display long straight snouts and erect ears. Their existence has been proved for early times in Greece and Asia Minor but also in Italy up to the times of the Roman Empire. They were kept in forests as well as on extensive pastures. With the decline of the forests they were moved back to marginal lands.



Pigs with a compact stature: They are characterised by a chest depth of > 60 %, short bend-in snout (sometimes pug-like) and with mostly erect but bigger ears. After sporadic occurrence in very early times they are demonstrated in Greek and Etruscan documents from 6th and 5th century BC, but mostly in Italy during the Roman Empire. In all probability these were quickly maturing pigs that may have been used for intensive feeding with more easily digestible forage (i. e. young green-fodder, grains).



Large-framed pigs: They are characterised by a large body conformation, medium sized, mostly straight snouts and bigger, sometimes lop ears. This type is mostly found on illustrations from Roman times. Their utilisation was presumably located between the two varieties mentioned above, with more affinity to the long legged type.



Pigs with higher rear than front part: This variety was depicted in the 5th to the 3rd century BC on coins and gems from South Italy, Sicily and Asia Minor. They have probably been used in a more intense way.



Medium-sized pigs: This group displayed a large variety of single details in size of ears, diameter of limbs and profile of the skull. These animals were presumably primarily fed with garbage and by-products from vegetables, fruits and arable lands.



Morphological details: For some morphological details the following evolution seems to be reasonable: During antique times the **size of the ears** got bigger (probably for better thermal regulation), leaning forward or became floppy. The **backline** did mostly extend in a horizontal direction. By the time the **diameter of legs** showed a tendency to a gross, more spongy appearance. The number of **visible teat pairs** averaged from 5 to 6 (variation from 3 to 6). Within the investigated period no tendency of a change was observed. The **bristle on the back** was well marked in early times but disappeared by time, so that since the first century AD only few animals were seen with this feature.



The **large variation of morphologic qualities in pig populations** of antique times may be the result of specific local breeding efforts. The change from forest herding (with an intensive selection pressure for fitness qualities which are typical for wild pigs) to an increasing intake of easily digestible feeds (by-products, garbage, young green-fodder) promoted an intensive differentiation of body shape caused by diminished natural selection factors and probably by increasing human interventions. References of pig importation from countries outside the Mediterranean region do not exist.

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