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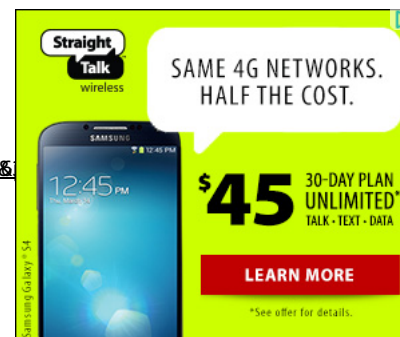
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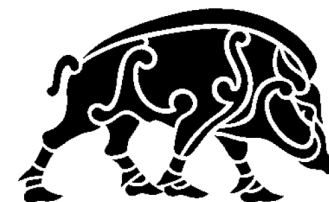
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When it comes to symbolic meaning, the boar can be distinctly different from the “pig”, so in this article we will only be addressing the former. While there are some general connotations to the boar that are fairly easy to understand, there are also innumerable cultural associations that follow in the tracks of this animal, wherever it happens to reside.



In terms of geographic range, the boar is unusually widespread, and cultures from across the world have all assigned it some form of symbolic meaning. Before discussing those meanings, however, there are some basic associations that should be mentioned.

The boar is famous for its aggressive personality, and the creature’s tusks are a formidable weapon against both predators and any unlucky humans that may wander into its territory. For these reasons, the boar is a widely accepted symbol of courage, ferocity, strength and power. A number of religious and mythological traditions also feature individual boars (sometimes named) that embody these qualities on a massive scale. Typically, these “über” boars are closely associated with a particular deity or mythological story/event:

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ASIA: in China, besides being a symbol of strength and virility in its own right, the boar is also the 12th animal to appear in the cycle of the zodiac. People born in the year of the boar are said to have passionate natures and to be very courageous, honest and loyal. One of the boar's most famous habits is using its snout to root around in the ground for food, and in Hinduism, India's majority religion, this rather simple phenomenon is connected to a powerful story. A boar called Varaha is one of the avatars- earthly forms/incarnations- of the god Vishnu, and this creature plays an important role in the story of creation. In this form, Vishnu descends beneath the primordial waters of the world and, using the boar's tusks, hooks the landmass of the earth and flings it out of the water into its current position on the surface.

CELTS: one defining aspect of traditional Celtic culture was war, and in this vein the boar was one of, if not the most, important symbolic animals to appear among the Celts. The connection here is fairly straightforward- a warrior culture valuing a creature famous for its aggression and fierce temperament- but Celtic veneration of the boar goes far beyond this simple association. In Celtic society, roasted boar was a popular item at great feasts, and the best quality meat from these boars- known as the "hero's portion" or "champion's portion"- was traditionally served to the bravest and strongest warrior. Unfortunately, just as in modern times, arguments can plague the dinner table, and certain accounts testify that if another warrior felt he was more worthy to receive the hero's portion, a full-fledged brawl would break out over the meat. In fact, such an instance is the centerpiece in the story of Fled Bricrenn (meaning "Feast of Bricriu"), part of the famous Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology. In other Celtic mythological stories, the boar is given a further association with warriors, but more often as their prey rather than embodying the virtues of the warriors themselves. One such example is the tale of Twrch Trwyth, the boar who was hunted by King Arthur's nephew Culhwch.

Even without any of these symbolic meanings, however, the archeological record speaks volumes to the boar's importance within Celtic culture; images of the animal have been discovered on helmets and other war gear excavated from sites throughout the Celtic world. Additionally, a number of standing stones and other monoliths erected by the Celts have been found carved with boar imagery, a further testament to its importance.

GREECE: in Greek mythology, one aspect of the boar that is heavily played up is the creature's role as a mission/prize for heroes and warriors. The two major examples of this phenomenon are the Erymanthean boar, who's capture was one of the famous twelve labors of Heracles (Hercules to the Romans) and the Calydonian boar, sent by Artemis to ravage the city of Calydon and for which many heroes of Greece were gathered to hunt and kill. The boar is also associated in Greek mythology with the story of Adonis, the beautiful youth (and lover of Aphrodite) who was slain by one while out on a hunt. Although the origins of Adonis' story are murky- it is believed he first began as a deity in the Near East- and there are multiple versions of his parentage, the boar remains a constant figure in the myth.

NORTHERN EUROPE: among the peoples of Scandinavia, as well as culturally related groups such as the Anglo-Saxons, the boar carried much the same meaning as it did for their Celtic cousins; a strong association with warriors. In Norse mythology, for example, a boar called Saerhinnir is perpetually sacrificed, cooked, reborn and sacrificed again to provide food for the slain warriors who dwell in the hall of Valhalla. Among the Anglo-Saxons, the boar was a symbol of protection and kingship, and images of the animal have also been found on war gear excavated from archeological sites. Both the Norse and the Saxons also had a tradition of sacrificing a boar to the gods during Yuletide (i.e. the shortest day of the year) and then feasting on the animal itself.

Since boars are creatures with a strong physical connection to the earth, they can also be considered symbols of fertility. In this context, they are associated with the Norse god Freyr (also spelled “Frey”), who rides atop a boar called Gullinbursti (also spelled “Gullinborsti”). Translated, this name means “the one with the golden bristles”, which some have interpreted as being related to the sun and solar symbolism as well.

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Boar
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Bǎikè
quǎnshū
(simplified)
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