

A Dangerous Game:
Boar Hunting Symbolism from the Ancient Greeks to Romans

Cole S. Hollingsworth

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the differences in symbolism of the boar hunt between the ancient Greeks and the ancient Romans. Using a variety of primary sources, including vase paintings, mosaics and literary accounts from the period, this paper will seek to inform the reader how the mythic accounts of the boar hunt by the Greeks turned into a trophy hunt for the Romans. Besides looking at the two powers, a careful look at royal Macedonian boar hunting culture will seek to “bridge the gap” between the cultural transfer from Greek to Roman.

Introduction

Here was the lair of a huge boar among some thick brush-wood, so dense that the wind and rain could not get through it, nor could the sun's rays pierce it, and the ground underneath lay thick with fallen leaves. The boar heard the noise of the men's feet, and the hounds baying on every side as the huntsmen came up to him, so he rushed from his lair, raised the bristles on his neck, and stood at bay with fire flashing from his eyes. Odysseus was the first to raise his spear and try to drive it into the brute, but the boar was too quick for him, and charged sideways, ripping him above the knee with a gash that tore deep though it did not reach the bone. As for the boar, Odysseus hit him on the right shoulder, and the point of the spear went right through him, so that he fell groaning in the dust until the life went out of him.¹

With sheer terror gripping tight and the blood running from his torn flesh, Odysseus uses his long, iron-tipped spear to pierce the hide of the ferocious Parnassian Boar. As Homer so elegantly set the scene, the boar bellows a deep groan and falls dead at Odysseus' feet and he stands wounded but lucky to be alive. However, this hunt was not a solo effort. His grandfather Autolycus and his sons have helped Odysseus in achieving his honor as a boar slayer. This depiction of the mythic hunter and dangerous beast is a motif that spans the ancient Mediterranean world. Despite depictions ranging from the feeble hare to the ferocious lion in both literary accounts and artistic images across the Mediterranean, one that is often mentioned is the boar hunt. An act that spans across cultures, the wild boar is one of the most dangerous game to hunt in the ancient world. Needing courage, bravery and skill to hunt, the boar is a game that demands respect from the hunter. The Greeks knew this all too well, which shows in their inclusion of the boar in their myth as a dangerous animal that can only be pacified or slain by such great heroes as Heracles and Odysseus. Greek writers such as Xenophon have left writings on how to slay boars so that great kings of such cities as Sparta and Athens can display their

¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XIX. trans. Samuel Butler. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1993). 245 - 246.

grand *polis*' wealth during the grand hunt. However, as time passed, the whole symbolism behind the hunt changed. By the times the Romans had adopted the practice, the hunt had become a sport for Roman noblemen. Men like Scipio Aemilius looked at examples given by the Greeks and use their philosophies on hunting to further his political career. Some nobles established game parks to house tamed boars for either entertainment or trophy hunting. While the degree to which Rome used the hunt differed, one thing remained the same: the symbolism of the hunt itself did not fully develop with the Romans. These great game parks and hunts of the Romans later inspired the kings of the Middle Ages to create their own royal game parks, and they inspire the nobility of the 17th to 18th century. Even into the 20th century, Nicolae Ceausescu, dictator of Romania, seemed to have enjoyed the boar hunt from his private hunting park.

This paper seeks to explore the way by which the symbol of the boar hunt changed from the Greek context to the Roman context. Looking at possible intermediary cultures, mainly the Macedonians (especially Alexander the Great's empire and the Successor kingdom of Antigonid Macedonia), this essay seeks to connect the dots in terms of how the noble hunting practice that were highly reserved and mythicized by the Greeks turned into a noble sport and martial practice for the Romans.

Historiography

Various sources must be consulted in terms of tracking the rate by which boar hunts were performed and by whom. Some of the most reliable sources from the period include those written by mainly Greek and Roman scholars and naturalists. The chronologically first primary source to be used within this essay is the *Odyssey* by Homer. Homer, who wrote in around the 8th century BCE, is well known for his other work, the *Iliad*.² The *Odyssey*, however, has a passage that is significant to the idea of the boar hunt in Ancient Greece. The passage that is found in the introduction of this essay was the slaying of the Parnassian Boar by Odysseus before the Trojan War. While he does great with the description of the battle between man and beast, it is a quick passage that leads to the next section, in which Penelope embraces her husband after he has been absent for almost 20 years. While it is supposedly a work of fiction, it is an important piece of evidence to support the claim that Greek boar hunting tradition begins in the Age of Heroes, roughly around 1200 BCE to 900 BCE.

Of all ancient Greek sources, a large portion of information relating to Greek hunting comes from the historian Xenophon. Xenophon (430 – 354 BCE), a native of Athens, is well known for having participated in the March of the Ten Thousand, in which over ten thousand Greek mercenaries for the Persian usurper Tissaphernes had to march from modern-day Iraq to northern Turkey while being harassed by Persian forces the whole way.³ Writing a variety of treatises on topics from history to sports, the main treatise studied for this essay is *Cynegeticus*,

² *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Homer,” accessed 10/26/2018. <https://www.ancient.eu/homer/>

³ *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Xenophon,” accessed 11/02/2018. <https://www.ancient.eu/xenophon/>

which is on hunting with dogs. While Xenophon devotes an entire chapter on the hunting of the boar with dogs, most of the text is on simpler game including hares and deer.

Lucius Flavius Arrianus, or Arrian for short, was a Greek historian who wrote in the 2nd century CE. Being a Roman citizen in Athens, he is most famous for writing the Campaigns of Alexander the Great during his retirement years as archon of Athens from 145 CE until his death in 160 CE. Besides his works on Alexander, Arrian wrote various treatises and essays on various topics, one of which in particular is a rework of Xenophon's *Cynegeticus*.⁴ Despite being a rework, *Cynegeticus* reintroduces Xenophon's practices of hunting with added Roman technologies and tactics by Arrian himself.

Polybius, who writes in the times of the Roman Republic, is one of the foremost historians on the Early to Middle Roman Republic. Being a captive of Rome since the invasion and, later, subjugation of Greece, Polybius found solace in the house of the Scipii, most famously Scipio Aemilianus (the same one who destroyed Carthage in 146 BCE). His writings, which cover the years 220 to 146 BCE, mostly cover the history of Rome from the Second Punic War until the conclusion of the Third Punic War. His forty-volume history of Rome was quoted extensively by such historians as Strabo, Plutarch and Arrian.⁵ Noted today as being a true historian by such authors as Erich Gruen, Polybius makes use of a grand array of sources, but does not write many of them down for citation. Despite this, he gives us a great insight into not just Roman history, but also Roman thoughts, which include xenophobia, political actions and Roman culture. When looking at passages pertaining to the boar, Polybius continuously makes

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Arrian," accessed 10/26/2018.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arrian>

⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Polybius," accessed 10/26/2018,
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Polybius>

remarks on hunting traditions in Greece and various other aspects of his homeland of Arcadia, Greece. Polybius proves throughout his work that he is very knowledgeable on hunting and warfare, being that he talks about both subjects frequently. For this paper, however, Polybius' book 31 will be analyzed extensively as a primary source due to a substantial amount of evidence of boar hunting within the text.

While primary sources are an essential tool for finding this information, secondary sources must also be analyzed. Within the last 35 years, an influx in scholarly work in the field of ancient hunting means we can more accurately look at ancient man's relationship to nature and his effect on the world around him. One such writer is J.K. Anderson, author of the book *Hunting in the Ancient World*. Published in 1985, his book relies exclusively on primary works spanning all over the Mediterranean world, from inscriptions by various Persian kings including Darius the Great to 5th century CE Roman descriptions on hunting practices. With a plethora of secondary and primary sources in his bibliography, Anderson is a great start to any author on hunting in the ancient world. Being mentioned by many other secondary sources, Anderson helped introduce many topics of hunting through especially the Greeks, Persians and Romans.

While looking into the possible intermediaries, one secondary source that stood out in the Macedonian context was Ada Cohen's *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great: Paradigms of Manhood and Their Cultural Traditions*.⁶ With descriptions in great detail on the imagery of the Macedonian boar hunt, Cohen gives insight on how the Macedonian royal family conducted the boar hunting tradition. While using the mythic imagery of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* to reinforce her point on the Hellenic Macedonians, she tends to focus her arguments more on the

⁶ Ada Cohen, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great: Paradigms of Manhood and Their Cultural Traditions*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

archaeological and literary portion of sources. With such medias as coins, frescos and vases, Cohen uses many available resources to drive home a solid base of a cultural Hellenic Macedonian royal boar hunting culture. She seems to hint as well that there is a cultural connection between the Hellenistic kingdoms in Greece and the Macedonian boar hunting culture, especially with the shared culture by the time of King Philip II to the fall of Rome (roughly from 400 BCE to 500 CE).

Analyzing these two sources, there is a key change in scholarly work between the two. While Anderson frequently makes mention of royally-mandated works and key primary sources, Cohen takes full advantage of artwork to describe the Macedonian boar hunting culture. Anderson, when talking about boar hunting in the Greek world, seems to only cite Xenophon and neglects to use much for art, with the exception of the painting of the Calydonian Boar hunt from Greek mythology.⁷ Cohen, meanwhile, uses two Macedonian coins from the time of Alexander and does a critical art analysis of the second coin to describe common hunting depictions in various Macedonian artworks.⁸ This cross examination shows a significant shift from traditional historical practices of the written work to using various media to interpret a concept or event within a historical lens. While both authors focus on the kingly aspects of the hunt, Cohen also dives into the martial lens of the hunt itself and how it reflects upon the masculine culture of the Hellenic cultures.

⁷ J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 51 – 56.

⁸ Ada Cohen, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great: Paradigms of Manhood and Their Cultural Traditions*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 71 – 74.

Where It All Began: Greek Mythology and the Image of the Boar Hunt

The first step in gaining an understanding for the boar hunt is to look to the hero Odysseus, the warrior Prince Hector, and the famous Hercules and how they did it. The boar, for most of human history, was considered a formidable foe to any hunter. With one swipe of its tusks it could gore a man through his leg or, worse, his torso. Besides the tusks, the beast has a razor back, which can cut the hands of the man who tries to grapple with it.

Before Homer graced the Greek world with his stories, the myth of the Twelve Labors of Hercules was passed down from the Proto-Greek cultures of the Myceneans and the Minoans. The Erymanthian Boar was a vicious boar who lived on Mount Erymanthos, a sacred mountain devoted to Artemis. The story goes that Hercules' task from King Eurystheus was to capture the boar alive and bring it back to him in Mycenae. Upon arriving at the mountain, he met his friend Pholus the centaur. While drinking with Pholus, other centaurs could smell the wine and began to drink before watering it down. Becoming drunk and rowdy, they began to brawl with Hercules. Still in possession of his poisoned arrows from the Hydra's blood, he shot and killed many of the centaurs. Unfortunately, one of the arrows poisoned Pholus while he was investigating how the centaurs died so quickly and he too was killed. Hercules proceeded to bury Pholus and continue on the boar hunt. Hearing the beast from the mountain, Hercules proceeded to chase the boar around the mountain several times before pushing it into deep snow. After prodding with his spear until it came out, brave Hercules wrestled it into a net and set out for Mycenae. Bringing it back to King Eurystheus, the old king was so afraid of it that he hid inside of a large vase and asked Hercules to get rid of it.⁹ This scene is shown to great detail in Figure

⁹ *Perseus*, s.v. "The Erymanthian Boar", accessed 10/26/2018.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/boar.html>

1. An interesting note about the amphora is that it is a black-figured pottery piece, meaning that it was a detail-oriented piece. For example, the lines on the body of the boar depict the enormous muscles, showing off the strength of the monstrous boar. This amphora is but one common representation of myth in an artistic medium throughout the Greek world.

The myth, while inspiring the belief of Herculean strength with the wresting of the boar and fighting off of the centaurs, gives a modern audience undertone of symbolism throughout the hunt. The pursuit of the game shows us the determination Hercules has towards obtaining the boar, alive no less, for King Eurystheus. This story would resonate well with hunters, due to its message of pursuit and courage to grasp the prize. While Herculean strength was used to capture the Erymanthian boar alive, it could still inspire hunters to take up the same internal strength in Ancient Greece.

As the old kingdoms died off and tribes such as the Dorians and Ionians established the city-states of Sparta and Athens respectively, Homer began recalling the great tale of Odysseus and his thrilling hunt against the Parnassian boar. Homer paints us an image of what that hunt would have been like for early Bronze-Age hunters by depicting the hunt. Referring back to the introduction of this paper, it is clear Homer is setting a lush scene for the hunt.

“When the child of morning, rosy-figured Dawn, appeared, the sons of Autolycus went out with their hunting hounds, and Odysseus went too. They climbed the wooded slopes of



Figure 1: Hercules and Erymanthian Boar. (Pottery – Amphora). Ca. 540 – 530 BCE. London, The British Museum 1843,1103.63. Photo Museum.

Parnassus and soon reached its breezy upland valleys. Just as the sun was beginning to bet upon the fields, fresh risen from the slow still currents of Oceanus, they came to a mountain dell.”¹⁰

The opening scene to this passage is the beginning of the hunt, which tells the reader information about boar hunters. What Homer is saying is that hunters typically would go out in the morning. The passage also tells us about the wilds of Parnassus. Mount Parnassus is the home to the Oracle of Delphi, the most famous oracle in all of Ancient Greece. Homer paints the reader a picture of what the area surrounding Parnassus looks like. Describing the woods, ocean coastline and mountain itself, Homer describes for us what Odysseus was seeing and feeling during his hunt for the Parnassian boar.

“The dogs were in front searching for the tracks of the beast they were chasing, and after them came the sons of Autolycus, among whom was Odysseus, close behind the dogs, and he had a long spear in his hand.”¹¹ Homer is now telling the reader the basic tools used by the hunters. The first tool described is the dog. He gives a fairly brief mention of what they do, which is pick up the scent of the prey and track it for the hunters. The inclusion of the plural “dogs” gives an indication that a pack of dogs is required to hunt this beast, so one simple bloodhound will not do the job. Another tool mentioned is the spear. Homer describes Odysseus’ spear simply as “long”, which gives no clear sign as to what kind of spear he uses. It can be hypothesized though that the long spear would be mainly used for keeping the creature back and striking it from a safer distance. One final clue Homer gives is that the hunter was never alone in

¹⁰ Homer, *the Odyssey*. XIX. trans. Samuel Butler. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1993). 245.

¹¹ Homer, *the Odyssey*. 245.

his quest. “The sons of Autolycus” accompanied Odysseus, which is a clear tell that a large quantity of manpower is needed to hunt one boar.

Here was the lair of a huge boar among some thick brush-wood, so dense that the wind and rain could not get through it, nor could the sun’s rays pierce it, and the ground underneath lay thick with fallen leaves. The boar heard the noise of the men’s feet, and the hounds baying on every side as the huntsmen came up to him, so he rushed from his lair, raised his bristles on his neck, and stood at bay with fire flashing from his eyes.¹²

Here is where Homer introduces the boar with poetic elegance. The boar’s lair is described as a dark, mysterious and dreadful place, where “wind and rain could not get through... nor could the sun’s rays pierce it”¹³. Perhaps as a symbolism to the wild and man’s perception of untamed wilderness, Homer uses carefully chosen descriptive language to paint the lair as worthy of what can only be described as a chthonic (or inhabiting the underworld) monster sent by the gods themselves against humankind. Then Homer introduces the boar, with hunters and dogs surrounding his lair. The Parnassian boar is then given qualities of a monster, mainly the phrases “raised bristles” and “fire flashing from his eyes”. Using dark imaging, Homer reshapes the common wild boar as a monster from Hades itself.

“Odysseus was the first to raise his spear and try to drive it into the brute, but the boar was too quick for him, and charged him sideways, ripping him above the knee with a gash that tore deep though it did not reach the bone.”¹⁴ Showing us the bravery of Odysseus, Homer has the hero of the epic take the first stab. However, the most important part of the passage is when he misses, and the boar gores his leg. Within *the Odyssey*, Odysseus has always managed to

¹² Ibid, 245 - 246.

¹³ Ibid, 246.

¹⁴ Homer, *the Odyssey*. 246.

come away unscathed from every scrap he is in. The only mention of an injury to his person is with the Parnassian boar, which in a way makes him a much more relatable person to an audience. Odysseus, a man who is cunning and intelligent, is shown to bleed just like his mortal audience, giving him a humanizing component to his character. His injury also is evidence of the danger that holds for any man willing to go about a boar hunt. Despite having the reputation of being a cunning foe for any who oppose him, Odysseus shows how arrogance and ill-patience can result in making life-threatening mistakes (i.e. the boar's tusk ripping open his leg).

“As for the boar, Odysseus hit him on the right shoulder, and the point of the spear went right through him, so that he fell groaning in the dust until the life went out of him.”¹⁵ In the epic struggle between man and beast, Homer concludes how Odysseus is able to finish off the Parnassian boar with a well-placed strike to the shoulder. This hit is especially painful when looking at the anatomy of most game animals. As any hunter will attest to, hitting a game animal just below the shoulder should pierce either the heart or a lung, which is a quick and fatal blow. Odysseus shows his courage and strength when, after just been given a weakening blow to his knee, is still able to strike a mortal wound to the boar moments after the injury.

The hunt of the Parnassian boar shows a modern audience just how Homer and others in his time viewed those from the Age of Heroes (circa 1200 – 900 BCE). Another famous work by Homer, *the Iliad*, also uses the boar coupled with the lion to symbolize stubborn courage:

Hector, brought to a stand by the great ditch in front of the Greek ships, is likened to a boar or a lion who turns about and glares in his might among the hounds and hunters. ‘And they, closing themselves like a rampart, withstand him and dart from their hands spears in great number. Yet never is his noble heart troubled or afraid; his valor is the death of him. Wherever he makes a rush, there the ranks give way.’¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, 246.

¹⁶ J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 2.

The idea of likening the boar to the lion may seem like an odd statement, but when comparing the tenacity of the two creatures throughout a hunt, as so keenly depicted later on by Xenophon, both are equal in strength against the hunters pursuing them. However, with the frequency of the boar as compared to the lion, the boar is much more frequently mentioned in myth than the lion ever was.

Moving even further back from Homer's epics was the myth of the Twelve Labors of Hercules. The Erymanthian Boar was a vicious boar who lived on Mount Erymanthos, a sacred mountain devoted to Artemis. The story goes that Hercules' task from King Eurystheus was to capture the boar alive and bring it back to him in Mycenae. Upon arriving at the mountain, he met his friend Pholus the centaur. While drinking with Pholus, other centaurs could smell the wine and began to drink before watering it down. Becoming drunk and rowdy, they began to brawl with Hercules. Still in possession of his poisoned arrows from the Hydra's blood, he shot and killed many of the centaurs. Unfortunately, one of the arrows poisoned Pholus while he was investigating how the centaurs died so quickly and he too was killed. Hercules proceeded to bury Pholus and continue on the boar hunt. Hearing the beast from the mountain, Hercules proceeded to chase the boar around the mountain several times before pushing it into deep snow. After prodding with his spear until it came out, brave Hercules wrestled it into a net and set out for Mycenae. Bringing it back to King Eurystheus, the old king was so afraid of it that he hid inside of a large vase and asked Hercules to get rid of it.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Perseus*, s.v. "The Erymanthian Boar", accessed 10/26/2018.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/boar.html>

The myth, while inspiring the belief of Herculean strength with the wrestling of the boar and fighting off of the centaurs, gives a modern audience undertone of symbolism throughout the hunt. The pursuit of the game shows us the determination Hercules has towards obtaining the boar, alive no less, for King Eurystheus. This story would resonate well with hunters, due to its message of pursuit and courage to grasp the prize. While Herculean strength was used to capture the Erymanthian boar, it could still inspire hunters to take up the same internal strength in Ancient Greece.

The Reality of the Game: Xenophon on Hunting

Moving away from the realm of myth is the reality of Ancient Greek life. Hunting was a way of life for the Greeks ever since prehistoric times. By the 8th century BCE, more dangerous game like lions, panthers, bears and boars were extremely laborious and expensive affairs. This is illustrated in descriptions of comparing even boars to lions in terms of hunting. “Exciting as lion hunting must have been, particularly with weapons that required close combat with the beast, hunting the wild boar made lion hunting seem tame by comparison, for the wild boar is generally acknowledged to be the most dangerous and difficult animal in the world to hunt.”¹⁸ Because they are so dangerous, boars are required to be hunted with a variety of tools. When analyzing the equipment and procedures needed to hunt the boar as told by Xenophon, it is clear that only the extremely wealthy of Greek society (i.e. the βασιλευς (*basileus*, or “king”) of a πολις (*polis*, or “city-state”) have the ability to hunt the boar.

Xenophon, writing from his estate on the coast of Ionia, takes a section of his *Cynegeticus* on how to properly hunt the boar around the mid - 4th century BCE. “First, it is necessary to have dogs of each breed, not just any old kind, so that they may be ready to fight the wild animal.”¹⁹ The importance of dogs to Greek hunters cannot be overstated enough. Dogs were a vital part of the hunting traditions for a variety of game, from hares to panthers. Specifically, Xenophon makes mention of “Indian, Cretan, Locrian and Laconian [Spartan] dogs”²⁰ It seems rather ponderous to have different stocks of dogs from such far off places, but

¹⁸ Denison Bingham Hull, *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). 103.

¹⁹ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X.I. trans. Perseus, “Xenophon, *On Hunting*”. Accessed 12/14/18. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0210%3Atext%3DHunt.%3Achapter%3D10%3Asection%3D1>

²⁰ Ibid.

when looking into the context of the dogs themselves, it makes sense why: Indian dogs are well known from Xenophon's time to be the strongest of the breeds (possibly a relative of modern mastiffs?), while “*Λακαίνας*” (*Lakainas*), or Spartan, dogs were known for their tracking abilities.²¹ The Spartan hound, however, seems to be the most prized dog, for it is the one that picks up the scent. “First, coming where they think the quarry may be, loose one of the Laconian hounds, and, keeping the others tethered, go around with the dog.”²²

Arrian, who writes much later in the 2nd century CE, believes that Xenophon has left an important breed of hound out of his list: the Celtic hound. Particularly exceptional in both sense of smell and speed, the Celtic hounds “are no worse than Carian and Cretan hounds in hunting and finding the hare that has bolted, except in speed.”²³ While it is in the frame of hunting hares, Arrian neglects to look at the other possibilities of a hound that is on-par with Greek hounds in terms of tracking: boar hunting. While the Celtic breed may be slow, it would be an ideal boar hunting dog for its ability to track prey. Arrian, however, only views most of his revision of *Cynegetica* on the hunting of hares and deer, fairly common game around Athens. Arrian describes the Celts that raised these hounds as those who hunt “without purse nets... for the pleasure of the sport,”²⁴ which is comparable to the Macedonians, who shall be discussed later on.

²¹ Denison Bingham Hull, *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). 104.

²² Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X.IV. trans. Perseus.

²³ Arrian, *Cynegetica*, 3.4. trans. A.A. Phillips and M.M. Willcock, *Xenophon and Arrian On Hunting*. (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1999). 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

After discussing dogs, Xenophon goes on to discuss the proper nets to use for trapping the animal. He compares his nets to those that must be used for hare hunting, which include rings for allowing it to be run on a wire:

The purse nets should be of the same linen threads as those for hares, of forty-five threads, in three strands, each strand of fifteen threads; and the height from the top should be of ten knots, and the width of the meshes fifteen inches. The outside cords should be one and a half times the thickness of the nets; at their ends they should have rings, and they should be inserted under the meshes.²⁵

The addition of a skirting net should be noted as almost identical as the hare nets Xenophon describes in the previous chapter, with the exception of a few modifications. Operated by a “net watcher”, the net is anchored to a fixed position like a tree and secured to another with a long rope. Anderson mentions that unlike hare hunting, the “net watcher” does not tighten the net around the boar, but lets the creature tighten it itself during the struggle of being caught in the net.²⁶

Immediately preceding the process of handling nets, Xenophon talks of what kind of spears to have: “There should be javelins of every kind, with broad, razor-sharp heads and sturdy shafts. The boar-spears, first, should have heads five palms long, with sturdy teeth made of bronze at the midpoint of the socket, and cornel-wood shafts the thickness of a lance.”²⁷ Breaking down the layout of the spear, it is obvious that the spears themselves had to be extremely strong to be used against boars. A blade around “five hands long”, which is an ancient

²⁵ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X. trans. A.A. Phillips and M.M. Willcock, *Xenophon and Arrian On Hunting*. (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1999). 73.

²⁶ J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 52.

²⁷ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X.III. trans. Perseus.

way of measuring length. A “hand” constitutes about four inches, or the width of the hand. An Ancient Egyptian idea carried over to Greece, the “hand” was a subunit to the cubit. The cubit was an anthropometric (or “human measuring”) device that used the palm and fingers to measure the length of an object, with one cubit being the average length of a forearm (seven palms). The Egyptians used four fingers to equal one palm, with each finger being approximately 1.8 cm (7.4 cm with four).²⁸ The average blade length of Xenophon’s spear blades of five hands long were around thirty centimeters (almost one foot) in total length.

The next section of the spear is the crossbar that goes across the bottom of the blade, which Xenophon describes as a blade with “stout teeth at the middle of the socket, forged in one piece but standing out...”²⁹ This crossbar was designed so that when the boar was speared, it could not climb its way up the shaft of the spear to the hunter once it was impaled.³⁰ Anderson’s translation mentions that the crossbar, or teeth, should be “forged out of the same piece of bronze, and solid.”³¹ This suggests that instead of making another piece of bronze to be inserted into the socket before the spear blade was put in, Greek blacksmiths seem to have made it all in one piece. This practice would only guarantee the reliability of the spear for the hunter in theory. This style of blade would become commonly known as the “boar spear” by the Romans, who then influenced other European noble hunters later on.

²⁸ Eleanor Robson and Jacqueline Stedall, *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Mathematics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). 409.

²⁹ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X. III. trans. Perseus.

³⁰ Denison Bingham Hull, *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). 104.

³¹ J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 51.

Cornel wood is described by Xenophon as “thick as a soldier’s spear”.³² The soldier’s spear, the *δορυ* (*dory*), was a spear also made of cornel wood that was two to three meters long with an iron tip and bronze butt-spike.³³ This was the main fighting spear throughout all of Greece, but none used it to the effect that the Spartans and their allies did at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE. Although facing impossible odds, Spartan technology, including the *δορυ*, and tactics managed to hold off the Persians for three days, delaying their march on Athens. Herodotus, main historian of the Greco-Persian Wars, writes:

... but when they [the Immortals of Xerxes’ army] joined battle with the Hellenes, they fared no better than the Medes, and indeed they suffered the very same setbacks... the Persians using shorter spears than those of the Hellenes and unable to derive any advantage from their superior numbers.³⁴

The notion that the hunter would copy the soldier’s spear in thickness and length makes complete sense. If hunting was synonymous with military training to the Greeks, it is ideal to train with a spear like one the soldier will use in combat by going against wild, tough and dangerous game like the boar. The practice of aiming a proper blow onto the game, perfecting timing of the strike and teamwork with the hunting party would only benefit the Greek boar hunter if he is to soon be involved in military conflict.

In going about the hunt itself, Xenophon describes it as what any reader would expect: a dangerous game.

³² J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. 51.

³³ Paul Cartledge, *Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World*. (New York: First Vintage Books, 2006). 145.

³⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*. 7.211.2. trans. Andrea L. Purvis, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007). 586.

The hunters will have many clear signs of it: tracks in the soft ground, broken branches in the thick woods, and, where there are trees, the scars of its tucks. The dog that is tracking will generally come to a wooded place. For the most part, the boar rests in such places, for they are warm in winter and cool in summer. When the dog comes to the den, it bays, but the boar usually does not get up...³⁵

“Make a long, continuous tunnel of the net itself, standing supporting sticks on both sides, so the interior may be as bright as possible... When they are set up, go to the dogs and loose them all, and take the javelins and boar-spears and advance. Let the one who is most experienced urge on the dogs; let the rest follow in order, leaving plenty of room between them, so that the boar may have enough room to run, for if in his retreat he should rush into a crowd, there is danger of being gored, since he vents his fury on whomever he runs into.³⁶

There is one debate amongst scholars who have studied *Cynegetica*, which pertains to this passage. When approaching any wild animal, it should be well known that if there are multiple hunters in the party, they must be spread out to avoid the animal taking flight, only to be never found again. Xenophon’s advice of approaching in a single file line seems rather dangerous to a modern reader. A more logical proposition for a strategy is brought up by Denison Bingham Hull, who states that the hunters “followed in single file. When the Laconian hound struck, the huntsman slipped the rest of the pack, and the field [hunting party] spread out in open order, approaching the lair abreast.”³⁷

While approaching the lair, sometimes the boar emerged from his burrow, to which now the true test of strength was on. “Their clamor will arouse the boar, and if any of the hounds attacks him from the front, he will toss it. He will run and fall into the net, but if he does not you must give chase.”³⁸

³⁵ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X.V – VII. trans. Perseus.

³⁶ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*. X. VII-VIII. trans. Perseus.

³⁷ Denison Bingham Hull, *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). 104

³⁸ J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 52.

At this opportunity the dogs will attack him, so it is necessary to be careful in throwing javelins and rocks at him... Let whoever is most experienced and powerful of those present advance and strike him in front with a boar-spear... but if... he refuses to pull the noose [of the net] tight, but loosens it and makes a run at his attacker, the latter must, whenever this happens, attack with the boar-spear, holding it in front of him in his left hand, with the right behind. For the left hand keeps it straight, while the right drives it home... Approaching, he should put the spear forward, his legs not much farther apart than in wrestling, turning his left side toward his left hand, then watching the animal's eyes and observing the movement of its head. Let him present the spear, taking care lest the boar knock it from his hands with a toss of the head, for a charge follows the knocking.³⁹

All translations agree with the approach of the strongest man in the hunting party, which is usually the king, and allowing him to strike the first blow. Being the first, however, also means being in the most precarious spot: directly in front of the beast (Figure 2).

In the event of a missed spear thrust, Xenophon explains how to protect oneself from a worst-possible scenario: the boar knocks the spear from the hand and attempts to gore him. Xenophon says:

...he must throw himself on his face and clutch the undergrowth beneath him; for if the beast attacks him in this position, on account of the curving of the tusks it cannot lift him, but if the hunter is raised off the ground he is certain to be gored. So the beast tries to lift him; if it cannot, it bestrides him and tramples him.⁴⁰

The only way of possible escape from this attack is if other hunters distract the beast long enough for the man to escape. "He must attack again in the same way and offer it inside the shoulder-blade, where the throat is, and press hard."⁴¹ The man who was almost gored must

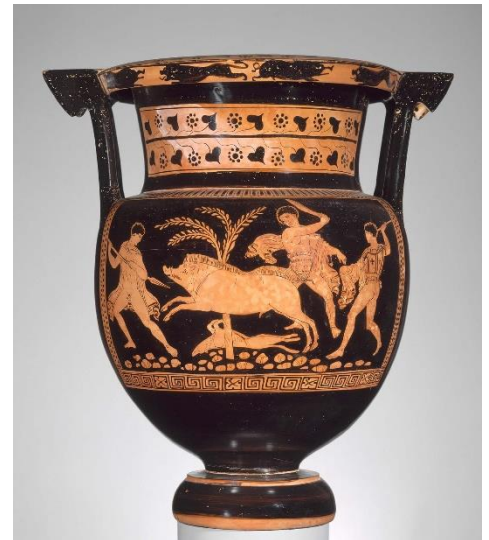


Figure 2: Boar hunt. Mixing bowl (Column – Krater). Ca. 400 – 390 BCE. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 1970.236. Photo Museum.

³⁹ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X. X-XII. trans. Perseus.

⁴⁰ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*. X. XIII. trans. Perseus.

⁴¹ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*. X. XVI. trans. Perseus.

continue the attack and continue to attack until he strikes a killing blow, because according to Xenophon, “safety is dishonorable unless it is attended with victory.”⁴² This saying ties directly into the belief that hunting represents martial practice, for safety can only be guaranteed with victory on the battlefield.

When the final blow has been struck and the beast lies dead, Xenophon gives any hunter caution when approaching the beast.

He has such great strength that he has properties no one would think possible: for when he is freshly killed, if someone lays hands on his tusk, they contract, for the tusks are hot. In the living animal they are red-hot when it is aroused, or the hairs on the bodies of the dogs would not be set on fire round about when he misses goring them.⁴³

While highly unrealistic that the heat from a boar’s tusks would set dogs on fire, it is perhaps a metaphor to describe the male boar’s ferocity in combat.

In the entire description of how to handle a boar, it is evident that a boar is not to be so easily trifled with. Precautionary planning and sufficient supplies and funds are required to carry out such an expedition. With the costs of acquiring dogs, feeding and maintaining dogs, training dogs, buying nets, buying appropriate spears and javelins, and hiring the necessary help to hunt a boar all adds up to a heavily expensive venture. The added costs of such a venture only reinforces the point that only the extremely wealthy or politically influential could afford to go on such lavish hunts in Ancient Greece.

⁴² Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X. excerpted in J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 53.

⁴³ Xenophon, *Cynegetica*, X. XVII. trans. Perseus.

A Masculine Game: The Royal Macedonian Boar Hunting Practice

Far north of mainland Greece lies the ancient land of Macedonia, a land filled with people the Greeks commonly referred to as “*barabaroī*”, or barbarians. These barbarians though were the Hellenized Macedonians, whose hold on the region north of Greece since 600 BCE has been unwavering. The Land of Alexander though was still vastly different than its Greek neighbors. One such way was in the rite of passage for most boys in the royal court of Macedon: slaying a boar with only a spear, alone in the wild.

Hunting appears as a rite of passage appears in the written record with Athenaeus from the 3rd century CE, who refers to the Macedonian Hegesander.

Hegesander says that it was not the custom in Macedonia for any one to lie down at a banquet, unless he had slain a boar which had escaped beyond the line of nets; but with that exception, every one sat at supper. And so Cassander, when he was thirty-five years of age, supped with his father in a sitting posture, not being able to perform the above-mentioned exploit, though he was of man’s estate, and a gallant hunter.⁴⁴

To summarize Athenaeus’ description of the custom, royal Macedonian boys were only permitted to recline during feasts if they had slain a boar. The idea of one not being able to recline was seen as “womanly”. The idea of the hunt in Macedonia transformed from a pastime to a rite of passage for the Macedonian noble boys, one rite it would seem to be a challenging one.

The challenge of the rite is the way that it must be done. It seems that there were areas of land devoted to this practice, as cited by Polybius. “For the members of the royal house of

⁴⁴ Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*. 1.31. trans. Perseus, “Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*”. Accessed 10/27/2018.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2013.01.0003%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D31>

Macedon had always been devoted to hunting, and the Macedonians had reserved the most suitable areas for breeding game.”⁴⁵ These areas devoted to growing big game would have been almost impossible for hunters on horseback to operate and the mountainous region of Macedonia making all horseback travel precarious, so going on foot was more than likely the only option for the royal hunters. Cohen tells us that, “nets and traps were prohibited because, by mediating the violence inflicted on the animal and allowing it to occur from a distance, they compromised the hunter’s heroism and made the killing psychologically and physically easier.”⁴⁶

The violence of the hunt was an obvious ode to the heroes of Hercules and Odysseus, the latter of whom used the boar hunt as a rite of passage into the realm of heroes. The ferocity of such hunts can be shown in Figure 3, which may be a Roman work, but is still the idea of the solo hunter. Armed with only a spear, the hunter on the left spears the boar on the right through the left shoulder.

The idea of bravery in the face of danger reflects the thrill of the hunt that is embodied in Alexander the Great’s feelings on the matter through Plutarch. Writing in the 1st to the 2nd centuries CE, Plutarch wrote various biographies, only one of which was Macedonian: Alexander the Great. On the subject of cultural appropriation within Alexander’s army during the



Figure 3: Boar Hunt. Floor mosaic. 4th century CE. Merida, Spain. By Helen Rickard, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3474380>

⁴⁵ Polybius, *The Histories*. 31.29.3. trans. W.R. Paton, *Polybius: the Histories*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). 223-225.

⁴⁶ Ada Cohen, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great: Paradigms of Manhood and Their Cultural Traditions*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 72.

campaign through the Persian Empire, many of his officers took to Persian customs, as explained in the following: “When Alexander noticed that his courtiers had become spoiled by luxurious living and were vulgarly flaunting the extravagance of their lifestyles – for instance... Philotas owned hunting-nets 100 stades long... he criticized them gently and reasonably.”⁴⁷ Alexander is displeased that Philotas, a loyal *hetairoi* (“companion”), would turn to such non-manly practices of hunting with nets, for it goes against time-honored Macedonian customs. Many loyal Macedonian and Greek soldiers were so far from home that it only encouraged this behavior. As Philotas demonstrates, grand hunting gestures such as large nets must have been a part of Persian hunting customs. Alexander, a fierce Macedonian king, laments the fact that his companion Philotas should stoop so low as to take on an “un-manly” way of hunting.

Conquering most of the known world (the whole Persian Empire and parts of India), Alexander died in 323 BCE, leaving his great empire in the hands of his generals. Unsure as to who was the true successor to the throne, his empire was divided into various kingdoms and they began to war with each other over supremacy. Macedonia and Greece were given to a man by the name of Polyperchon, the officer of one of Alexander’s *hetairoi*, Antipater. Cassander, son of Antipater, found this decision troubling, so he allied himself with the Ptolemy of Egypt and Antigonus Monophthalmus of Asia Minor to wage war on Polyperchon.⁴⁸ After killing Polyperchon and waging war against Antigonus, Cassander gained supreme control of Macedonia.⁴⁹ However, Cassander’s newly founded dynasty would fall before one of Antigonus’

⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Alexander*. 40.1. trans. Robin Waterfield, *Plutarch: Greek Lives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 350.

⁴⁸ Robin Waterfield, *Dividing the Spoils: The War for Alexander the Great’s Empire*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 74-76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 90 – 92, 154.

generals: Demetrius I. Successfully overthrowing Cassander's son from the Macedonian throne, Demetrius established the Antigonid dynasty in Macedonia and Northern Greece.⁵⁰ From this point, traditions in Macedonia remained unchanged, as the royal hunting grounds were still secure for young royals under the newly founded Antigonid dynasty would prove their worth. All of their bravery and strength going against the boar as young men could not prepare them for the enemy that would cross the Adriatic and bring merciless warfare to Macedon's shores. This enemy was Rome.

⁵⁰ Robin Waterfield, *Dividing the Spoils*. 186 – 190.

A Noble Game: Rome and the Boar Hunt

Rome by the onset of the Macedonian Wars had established itself as the Master of Italy. Ever since the defeat of Pyrrhus at the Battle of Asculum in 279 BCE, Roman control of Italy was secure, even with the exception of rebellious Greeks on its southern shores, Samnites in the interior and Celts in the far north of the peninsula. "... for the first time the Romans attacked the remainder of Italy, their view being that most of what they were going to fight for was not foreign territory, but already properly belonged to themselves as private property."⁵¹ Fighting Greeks was not uncommon, but this particular instance by Pyrrhus' invasion of Italy to "assist" the Tarentines only reinforced the Romans that Greeks could be easily beaten with sword in hand and eagle standard highly raised. Within the spoils of victory came the taking of the Macedonian customs to be integrated into Roman society, one example of which was the Macedonian boar hunt.

After eighty years of being sidetracked fighting Carthaginians, Rome was finally able to invade Macedonia and Greece. Philip V of Macedon had entered a military alliance with Hannibal of Carthage in 215 BCE, thus giving Philip a powerful ally against Rome should it try to take Macedon's interests in Hellas (Greece) or Illyria.⁵² Fearing a second invasion from the east, the Roman senate created a fleet at Tarentum to watch Macedonian movements in the region. Called the First Macedonian War, Roman naval intervention in Greek affairs was the primary focus of conflict with Philip.⁵³ It would not be until the Third Macedonian War of 171 –

⁵¹ William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome: 327 – 70 B.C.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). 107 – 108.

⁵² Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome: Volume II.* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1984). 376.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 378 – 379.

168 BCE when Perseus of Macedon tried to rebel against Roman domination over the western half of Macedon and most of Greece as a result of the Second Macedonian year some ten years prior.⁵⁴ The man called to invade Macedonia was consul Lucius Aemilius Paulus, who brought his son, Scipio Aemilianus, after the defeat of another legion at the Battle of Callinicus in 171 BCE by Perseus.

The most prominent figure in this story is Scipio Aemilianus, the future destroyer of Carthage (ergo, his later title of Africanus). His father, Lucius, had Scipio tutored in the Greek fashion, “training his sons, not only in the nature and ancestral discipline in which he himself had been trained, but also, and with greater ardor, in that of the Greeks. For not only the grammarians and philosophers and rhetoricians, but also... the overseers of horses and dogs, and the teachers of the art of hunting, by whom the young men were surrounded, were Greeks.”⁵⁵ By the time that Lucius had conquered Perseus after the Battle of Pydna in 167 BCE, he appointed Scipio to be in charge of the royal hunting fields, which Polybius gives details on.

“When the war had been brought to a conclusion, Aemilius, thinking that hunting was the best training and amusement for the young men, placed the royal huntsmen at Scipio’s disposal, and gave him complete control over the preserves. Scipio, availing himself of this and regarding himself as being nearly in the position of king, spent the whole time that the army remained in Macedonia after the battle of Pydna in this pursuit, and, as he became a very enthusiastic sportsman, being of the right age and physique for such an exercise, like a well-bred dog, this taste of his for hunting became permanent.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*. 414 - 415.

⁵⁵ Plutarch, *Aemilius Paulus*. 6.8-9. Trans. Robin Waterfield, *Plutarch: Roman Lives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). 46.

⁵⁶ Polybius, *Histories*, 31.29.6-8. trans. W.R. Paton, *Polybius: the Histories*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). 225.

The entry by Polybius gives insight into the Roman psyche, especially those exposed to Greek culture, that hunting is a pastime to test not only martial skill, but also cunning, resourcefulness and physical conditioning. Aemilianus, wanting his son Scipio to achieve greatness, allows hunting to be a fundamentally Greek idea with Macedonian images of bravery and strength that must be taught. Scipio later uses the character traits obtained in hunting through his political career.

“...When he found in Polybius one equally devoted to the chase, all the time that other young men gave up to law affairs and greetings, spending the whole day in the forum and thus trying to court the favour with the populace, Scipio was occupied by the chase, and by his brilliant and memorable exploits, acquired a higher reputation than anyone... Scipio, without ever vexing a soul, gained this universal reputation for courage, matching his deeds against their words.”⁵⁷

Using Greek customs and adapting them for his use, the Roman politician and general Scipio Aemilianus had successfully brought the ideals of boar hunting in Macedon and Greece to Rome, only to influence others upon his death by following his examples set in his life. The trend seems to be that for the Roman aristocracy who are Roman traditionalists, they argue against hunting boar as a useless waste of time. One such critic of the hunting trend amongst Roman nobility was written by Sallust, who records the playwright Varro’s dialogues:

“For the hunter himself, Varro has only scorn: ‘There you go, chasing wild boars on the mountains with your spear... What a splendid art!’ Varro turns to Meleager from a tragic hero into a figure of fun. Somebody asks him: ‘What is the point of running around, missing your night’s rest and your dinner? Do you hunt for profit or for pleasure? If for profit, sell your game; if for pleasure, watch the sport in the Circus and keep your legs whole instead of scratching them to bits jogging in the woods.’”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Polybius, *Histories*. 225-227.

⁵⁸ J.K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 87.

Sallust himself seems to be an anti-hunter, since he has been described as saying he would not be “wasting his retirement in idleness and sloth or passing his life in those slavish occupations farming and hunting.”⁵⁹

While the old Roman elite scoffed at the new hunting ways, many young men saw it as a fantastic pastime. By the turn of the 1st century BCE, game farms had begun to be established in Italy. “On the estate at Tibur that Varro here bought from Piso, a trumpet was sounded at regular hours and you saw boars and wild goats come for food, which was thrown down from the exercise ground above, mast for the boars...”⁶⁰ These game parks would be frequented by many Roman young nobles, who sought to not only practice martial skill, but also have talks of life and philosophy immediately following the hunt. “If these martial Roman pursuits weary one who is accustomed to affect Greek ways, hold the discussion after playing ball or throwing the discus.”⁶¹ Anderson makes the point that Roman noblemen would use the hunting pastime to reflect on their either potential political careers or waning careers before retirement. One point also made is how young men would seek, “as Scipio had done, to catch the eye of the voters by his skill at field sports.”⁶² While furthering their own careers by showing their *gravitas* as Scipio had done, they also standardized the use of hunting boars with dogs and nets throughout the late Republic and early Augustan Imperial ages.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*. 86.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 86.

⁶¹ Ibid, 89.

⁶² Ibid, 89.

Conclusion

The boar hunt, which changed from a symbol of heroic strength to the Ancient Greeks to a symbol of bravery and manliness to the Macedonians to a noble sport to the Romans, has clearly had a dramatic and turbulent 800 years of change across Europe before the common era. When looking at where trophy hunting and game farm hunting has come from with the Romans through the Middle Ages to today, the lineage of progression for the modern-day hunter has also changed. In recent movements across Spain, the old Greek and Roman ways of hunting have reemerged as a test of skill without the use of modern firearms. Even though firearms are extremely popular hunting tools today, many of the old ways have remained the same: nets and dogs are still used to assist in hunting boars in some areas of the world, including Italy and Germany. The evolution of this sport can still be traced back to the brave Odysseus, as he faces off against the Parnassian Boar. He, truly, has begun the odyssey of the boar hunt across the centuries.

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