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Pig, Pigs

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Ori Z. Soltes

See also → Hasid, Hasidism; → Hēsed; → Holiness; → Pietism

Pig, Pigs

- I. Ancient Near East
- II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- III. Greco-Roman Antiquity
- IV. New Testament
- V. Judaism
- VI. Christianity
- VII. Islam
- VIII. Literature
- IX. Visual Arts
- X. Film

I. Ancient Near East

1. Introduction. Pigs were among the earliest mammalian species domesticated in the Near East. Pigs played key roles in agropastoral production from the Neolithic to the Islamic Conquest, though they are not as extensively documented in texts or depicted in art as other animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, and equids. Ultimately encumbered by the biblical taboo on pork, there are nevertheless several extensive syntheses of pigs in Near Eastern cultures (Lion/Michel; Parayre; Price 2021; Volokhine).

2. Domestication, Husbandry, and Economic Importance. The domestication of pigs was a centuries-long process involving intensifying human management and biological adaptation on the part of wild boar populations. It is possible pigs were domesticated in multiple locations, but the best evidence comes from southern Anatolia/northern Mesopotamia, where human communities began managing suids beginning around 9000 BCE. Pigs developed clear morphological evidence for domestication by around 7500 BCE (Price/Hongo).

Pigs thrive in riverine, marshland, and parkland/forested environments. The bones of domestic pigs have been found in abundance at ANE sites in these ecosystems, suggesting that pig husbandry was a mainstay of most agropastoral production systems. Zooarchaeology has shed light on pig husbandry practices, including birth seasons (Frémont-deau et al.), diet (Weber/Price), and slaughter practices (Slim et al.).

Pigs were an important source of meat in the earliest cities, starting in the 4th millennium BCE. Pigs do well in urban environments, feeding on waste produced by households and food production facilities. They were particularly prominent in the Khabur region of Syria, southern Mesopotamia, and the Nile Delta (e.g., Price et al.). However, ancient texts are relatively quiet regarding pig husbandry. There are important exceptions (see sources in Lion/Michel), but it seems that pigs were not afforded the same amount of attention by the scribes of the great "institutions" (temples and palaces) and that they did not play a major role in state finance or as sources of animal wealth.

3. Pigs in Ritual and Imagery. Pigs were often excluded from the "high rituals" in the ancient Near East. Yet there is archaeological and textual evidence for their ritual significance in certain contexts. For example, sacrificial uses of pigs occurred in some rituals relating to chthonic deities (Collins; Price 2021).

Images of pigs tend to emphasize the ferocity of male boars, the fecundity of sows, or the filth of pigs. Examples include fearsome wild boars from the 11,000-year-old site of Göbekli Tepe (Peters/Schmidt) and Old Babylonian (ca. 1900–1650 BCE) plaques depicting pigs engaged in copulation (Price 2021: 85).

4. The Pig Taboo. Researchers and lay audiences alike have long been curious about the origins and meaning of the taboo on pigs recorded in the book of Leviticus. There are hints of proscriptions against pigs in certain religious contexts in Mesopotamia and other regions prior to the writing of the Bible, but their connection to the Leviticus taboo is unclear. Debate within archaeology has centered on whether Philistine-Israelite animosity at the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200–330 BCE) gave rise to the taboo on pork (Altmann et al.; Faust; Hesse/Wapnish; Price 2021; 2022; Sapir-Hen).

Recent historical, zooarchaeology, and textual analyses have argued that the pig taboo became an important component of Jewish identity only during the Roman period, with further elaborations and accentuations following the rejection of the Leviticus food prohibitions by the Christian church (Price 2021; Rhyder; Rosenblum).

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Max Price

II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

The pig (MT *ḥāzīr*; LXX *ῥε*) appears seven times in the HB/OT (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8; Isa 65:4; 66:3, 17; Ps 80:14; Prov 11:22), each time for the purpose of derision or for illustrating disdain. The LXX includes two additional occurrences (1 Kgs 21:19; 22:38), each text adding “pigs” (*ῥε*) to a scene of dogs licking the blood of the corpse.

Leviticus 11:7–8 and Deut 14:8 explicitly prohibit consuming pigs or touching their carcasses because of their “unclean” status, that is, because they carry and transmit ritual impurity. Besides “not chewing the cud,” these texts do not specify why the pig is impure. The ban on pork was likely not because the pig was especially unhealthy or prone to causing trichinosis (Zeder: 298; Harris: 137–38). Some have argued that pig avoidance is because the arid environmental conditions of the Judean highlands made it difficult or detrimental to raise pigs (Harris). However, this is probably not the root cause, since pigs do appear in the zooarchaeological records of Bronze Age highland sites (Faust: 36–37; Finkelstein: 206). After review of the ecological argument, Firmage (1134) rightly concludes that “had the Israelites wanted to raise pigs they could have done so.” Although environmental challenges may factor into the prohibition, most likely the pig avoidance is a way of marking Israelite ethnicity, specifically for Israelites to set themselves apart from the Philistines, who consumed a quite high

percentage of pork in Iron Age I (Faust: 37–39; Stager: 344). The lack of pig bones in the archaeological record of Iron Age I highland sites shows that pig avoidance was an early practice in the life of ancient Israel (Finkelstein: 206). The eventual transition toward centralized agricultural production in Iron Age II may also coordinate with the decrease in pig farming in the Levant (Zeder). Whatever the origins of the food prohibitions, Leviticus and Deuteronomy codify what are likely existing practices. These texts are more interested in legitimating the divine origin of food laws than explaining their practical emergence (Hawley).

The prohibition of pigs also appears in Isa 65:4; 66:3, 17, where pig sacrifice is included among other forbidden cultic practices, such as sacrificial rites in gardens (65:2), necromancy (65:4), and breaking the necks of dogs (66:3). The accusation of using swine’s blood for offerings (66:3) in the Jerusalem temple is part of a larger sectarian polemic against the priestly leadership of postexilic Yehud. Whether pigs were actually being offered in the Jerusalem temple is debatable, but pig sacrifice did occur elsewhere in the ancient Near East in rituals for protection and fertility (Collins: 180–83) and perhaps in association with chthonic deities (Firmage: 1132).

Outside of ritual contexts, the pig appears twice in the HB/OT. Psalm 80:14 refers to the “pig from the forest” ravaging the vineyard, a metaphor for God’s people in Ps 80. This may be a reference to the wild boar (Forti: 50), which were abundant in the forests and wadis of Palestine (Firmage: 1130). Or it may entail a heard of domestic pigs roaming the forest (Borowski: 140).

Proverbs 11:22 juxtaposes a golden ring in the snout of a pig to a beautiful woman without sense. The actual comparison is between the ring and the woman, not the pig and the woman (Heim). The proverb assumes that a gold ring is ill fitting for a pig, which must be chosen for its especially repulsive and grotesque behavior (Forti: 51). In the rhetorical context of Proverbs, the young male audience is warned against seeking a beautiful wife who lacks discretion, lest he become like a pig (Heim: 27).

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Lance R. Hawley

III. Greco-Roman Antiquity

The pig (Greek: ὕς or χοῖρος; Latin: *sus* or *porcus*) played an important role in the economy of Greek and Roman societies. Unlike sheep (wool) and cows (sacrificial animals), pigs were primarily raised for their meat. Romans were particularly fond of the *porcus troianus*, a pig stuffed with various delicacies (Petronius, *Satyricon* 49). Pigs were also offered as sacrificial animals, particularly to Demeter, Poseidon, Heracles, and Athena (Gunnell: 42–43). Before the official opening of the Eleusinian Mysteries, pigs were sacrificed to purify the participants (see Burkert: 256–64). In Homer’s *Odyssey* (14.72–84), Eumaeus sacrifices a pig in honor of his guest, an aged beggar (Odysseus in disguise). In Virgil’s *Aeneid* (8.42–45; cf. 8.81–85), Aeneas is told in a dream that he will find a white sow (*alba sus* or *candida sus*) that will give birth to thirty piglets, signifying the thirty years until his son Ascanius founds Alba Longa. Pigs were associated with a simple life whose only goal is feeding. Thus, in an ironic self-description, Horace famously refers to himself as a “pig from the herd of Epicurus” (*porcus ex grege Epicuri*) in a letter to the poet Tibullus, humorously addressing the common accusation that Epicureans indulged excessively in material pleasures (see Horace, *Ep.* 1.4). In Plato’s *Republic* (372d–373a), on the other hand, Glaucon dismisses the simple, self-sufficient life of a city where inhabitants live modestly, fulfilling only essential needs, as a “city of pigs” (ὄων πόλις), criticizing its lack of refinement and sophistication (Usher: 91–109). The simplicity of the pig, however, can also be associated in a positive sense with simple-mindedness (εὐρήθης) in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonics* (69). In the *Odyssey*, Circe famously transforms Odysseus’s companions into swine (10.283, 338). Playing with the semantic spectrum of the pig, Plutarch revisits this scene in an ingenious parody in his “Gryllos” (*Beasts Are Rational* 985D–992E; Newmyer: 95–127). The treatise argues not only for the dignity but even for the ethical superiority of animals. In this short piece in the form of a dialogue, Odysseus, the wittiest of all Greeks, cannot convince his companion-turned-swine that being human is the more favorable condition.

Joining rhetoric and philosophy in a very typical manner, Plutarch combines ongoing discussions about the rationality of animals with a Pythagorean view of animals that – in *On Eating Flesh* (993B–

999B) – leads him to a critique of meat consumption, where the philosopher reflects on and criticizes human cruelty toward animals. Unlike most ancient authors, Plutarch grants animals rationality. In this writing, he mentions the pig as an example of a creature consumed in abundance, primarily because humans avoid personally killing it (*De esu* 995B). Plutarch also attributes a positive role to the pig in *On Progress in Virtue* 82E–F, where the pig’s calmness during a storm is interpreted as an example of the impossibility that a philosopher should attain through reason. Plutarch also devotes one of his *Table Talks* (669E–671C) to the question why the Jews refrain from eating pork: is it out of reverence or out of disgust? One explanation is that they abstain for ritual reasons, similar to Egyptian priests who consider swine unclean; they associate the white pustules on the belly of pigs with leprosy (see also *Is. Os.* 353E–354A); another reason is that the pig is said to have killed Adonis who is obviously identified with Adonai. But Plutarch also considers that it could be out of reverence. The reason provided is the usefulness of pigs: ploughs are unnecessary where a pig has dug with its snout. Another reason given is as obviously historically inadequate as it is ingenious: the pig is holy, he claims, because it immediately becomes calm when facing heaven (671B). This statement, of course, tells us more about Plutarch’s interests as a religious philosopher than about Jewish views. Just as he interprets Egyptian animal worship as an act of piety, he considers the same for the Jewish abstention from eating pigs.

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IV. New Testament

The NT mentions pigs thirteen times in four different contexts: in Mark 5:12–16 par., demons cast out by Jesus enter into a herd of pigs. Matthew 7:6 warns: “do not throw your pearls before swine,” and the Prodigal Son resorts to herding pigs before returning to his father (cf. Luke 15:15–16). All three of these texts use the Greek χοῖρος. Second Peter 2:22, however, uses ὕς to compare apostates to pigs wallowing in the mud.

In 2 Pet, a negative view of pigs is fairly obvious, the wallowing being associated with sin, impurity, and disgust.

Mark 5 draws a connection between pigs and demons. This connection appears also in nonbiblical contexts (e.g., the pig as companion of the demoness Lamashtu in Mesopotamian iconography; see



Fig. 21 "Lamashtu Feeding a Pig" (800 BCE)

fig. 21). The choice of animal is probably no coincidence and pigs seem to be connected to impurity/uncleanness here: "Unclean spirits belong in unclean animals" (Collins: 270, n. 81). The pigs in connection with Mark 5:9b can also be read as a hint to the Roman *legio X fretensis*, who carried a boar's head as one of their symbols. Nevertheless, the pigs are not represented as worthless: Mark 5 mentions that the swine herdsman and the people living nearby were less than friendly to Jesus after the herd of pigs rushed into the sea and drowned.

Matthew 7:6 and Luke 15:15–16 have traditionally been interpreted as showing pigs in a negative context. However, in Matt 7:6, the pigs are the ones reacting naturally (by trampling the pearls that are useless to them). The ones acting inappropriately are the people giving pearls to the swine.

In Luke 15, the uncleanness of pigs is not explicitly mentioned, the main statement being that they have something to eat while the Prodigal Son does not (cf. Luke 15:16).

A text which draws a clear connection between pigs and uncleanness is the extracanonical P. Oxy. 840. This text, whose origins probably lie in the early 2nd century, mentions pigs and dogs while

discussing the matter of purifying oneself before entering the temple. Jesus and a Pharisee argue about how to prepare for going into the temple. Jesus makes it clear that washing oneself in running water like animals, or even prostitutes, is not the appropriate way of preparation.

Finally, the extracanonical book of Enoch in its Ethiopian form mentions pigs and wild boars in its Animal Apocalypse (1 En. 85–90). The pigs seem to be associated with the wild, life-threatening animals. However, the interpretation of this text, whose roots could go back to NT times, is not easy.

In conclusion, pigs are probably connected to ideas of impurity and used in context of negative NT events. But they are not portrayed as evil or aggressive and the allusions to impurity remain implicit, at least in the canonical texts. There is no explicit condemnation of pigs or direct prohibition of pork in the NT. More than that, Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16 has been interpreted as marking a critique or the end of food restrictions, doing away with the distinction between clean and unclean food altogether.

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Judith König

V. Judaism

■ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval Judaism

A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

The pig is curiously missing from many Second Temple sources that discuss Jewish dietary matters. For instance, it does not appear in the texts of Daniel that refer to food, although the claim in Dan 1:12 that Daniel only consumed "vegetables" (Heb. *zēro'im*) in the royal court may reveal a concern to avoid unclean meat. Likewise, the tales of Esther, Tobit, and Judith, while all including references to Jewish diet and banqueting practices, do not proscribe the consumption of pork specifically. The Letter of Aristaeas (128–71), for its part, contains a long section discussing food, drink, and unclean animals, which positions the food laws as a paradigm for understanding the entire Torah. Yet the

pig is conspicuously absent from its description of the animals that Jews are forbidden to eat.

When we turn to the sources that concern the Maccabean revolt, we find more references to the pig in the context of transgressive sacrificial practice. First Maccabees 1 reports how Antiochus IV travelled to Jerusalem in 167 BCE to instigate punitive measures against the Jewish population, including the sacrifice of “pigs and common animals” (1 Macc 1:47). It does not suggest, however, that Antiochus IV forced the Jews to consume the pigs that they had sacrificed. A similar tradition is found in Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*, which reports how Antiochus IV forced the Jews to sacrifice pigs daily in both the Jerusalem temple and on cultic installations established throughout Judea (*Ant.* 12.245–56). Second Maccabees, by contrast, accuses Antiochus IV of forcing the Jews, not only to sacrifice pig but also to eat its flesh. The book contains two lengthy tales about a Jewish scribe named Eleazar and seven anonymous sons and their mother who all refused to eat the flesh of the sacrificed pig and so faced a torturous death (2 Macc 6:18–7:42).

Why the pig became such a potent symbol for transgressive practice under Antiochus IV is difficult to say. Perhaps the pig’s popularity in Greek sacrificial rites lent it more readily than other unclean animals in Jewish tradition to symbolizing the distance between Greek and Jewish sacrificial practices. By emphasizing how Antiochus IV forced the Jews to sacrifice and, in the case of 2 Macc also to eat this animal, the authors of 1 and 2 Macc could present Seleucid rule in Judea as inherently defiling, and thus as posing an existential threat to the Jerusalem temple that warranted violent resistance.

In the later tradition of 4 Macc, the stories about the pig and Antiochus IV show a shift of focus, such that they now concern only the forced consumption of pork, with no mention of the forced pig sacrifice. This transformation arguably reflects the new pressures of the Roman era. Romans mocked and satirized the Jews for their refusal to eat pork, the meat *par excellence* of Roman menus. The author of 4 Macc exhorts the Jews to hold fast to the pig prohibition as part of a larger philosophical argument about the virtue of self-control. A similar philosophical treatment can be observed in Philo’s *On the Special Laws*, with the Jewish philosopher suggesting that pork avoidance promotes the virtue of temperance because it requires Jews to abstain from what was, by common consensus, the tastiest of all meats (*Spec. Laws* 4.100–102).

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Julia Rhyder

B. Rabbinic Judaism

The pig (*hāzīr*) was the only animal known to the rabbis that parted its hoof but did not chew its cud and was therefore impure and forbidden to be eaten (bHul 59a; cf. Lev 11:7–8; Deut 14:8). The rabbis differentiated between the “pig of a settlement” (a domestic pig) and a “wild pig” (probably a wild boar) mentioned in mHul 9:2, which was seemingly also the “pig from the forest” of Ps 80:14. It was not clear to the rabbis if the “pig of a settlement” and the “wild pig” (“pig from the forest”) were of the same species and might be mated with one another or were different species (mKil 8:6; tKil 1:8).

Numerous claims about pigs appear in rabbinic literature. Pigs were easy to breed as the pregnancy of a sow lasted only sixty days (tBekh 1:9–10) and the strength of a pig increased through age (bAZ 30b). For non-Jews, raising pigs was so profitable that it might make one’s face shine (yPes 10:1, 37c); not only could these animals be eaten, but their fat also had many uses (yAZ 2:8, 42a; bAZ 39b). Pigs of Alexandria were considered so special that before they were sold abroad, their wombs were cut to prevent procreation and competition (mBekh 4:6).

Generally, though, pigs had a negative image in rabbinic literature. The form of their mouth and tail were considered as templates of blemishes in other animals (mBekh 6:8–9). Of ten measures of sores descended to the world, nine were taken by swine (bQid 49b). Disease afflicting pigs could also infect humans as there were physiological similarities between humans and swine (bTaan 21b). Pigs were voracious eaters and might even devour a corpse buried in a house (mOhal 18:8). They would roll in excrement (Tan Pekude 3) and were compared to a moving toilet (yBer 2:3, 4,6). They were symbols of lust (bAZ 20b) and prostitution (mMish 11). Pigs were also cited to illustrate negative actions. Being among gentiles was like eating pig (ARN B 19), as was eating bread baked by a Samaritan (mShevi 8:10). Raising dogs was compared to raising pigs (tBB 8:17). Indeed, the pig’s image was so negative that sometimes the animal was simply called “something else” to avoid using its name (*hāzīr*) (bShab 100b).

Pigs were also linked to traumatic events in Jewish history. Not only was it forbidden for a Jew to raise pigs anywhere (mBQ 7:7), but one who did so was cursed because the pig had been used as part of a subterfuge of “Greek wisdom” to bring a halt to the temple service and conquer Jerusalem “when the kings of the Hasmonean house fought one another.” Every day, out of devotion to the temple service, the forces laying siege to the Temple Mount sent up to the defenders a basket with an animal for sacrifice so that the temple service might continue. However, an old man proficient in Greek wisdom told those sending up the animal that as long as the temple service took place, the Temple Mount could

not be conquered. On the next day the basket was sent with a pig (which on the way up stuck its claws into the Temple Mount wall), and the land of Israel shuddered (bSot 49b; bMen 64b; bBQ 82b). In a different version, this occurred during the times “of the evil kingdom,” i.e., Rome (yTa’an 4:8, 68c; yBer 4:1, 7b), apparently leading to the destruction of the temple. A related story has the Roman general Vespasian setting up a catapult and hurling a pig’s head toward the temple altar (ARN A 4). In a tradition theoretically describing the destruction of the First Temple but probably referring to Rome, the Chaldeans sprinkled pig’s blood on the temple to get its gates to open (Targum Sheni Esther 1:3).

Those who ate pig were disqualified from serving as witnesses (bSan 26b), and eating pork was considered as a sign of apostasy (tHor 1:5) – although ironically, it was when Elisha’ ben Abuyah saw the tongue of R. Hutzpit being dragged by a swine that he apostatized (bQid 39b). Nevertheless, there are indications that pigs were present among Jews. The carcass of a pig could be sold to a non-Jew (mUq 3:3), implying that some Jews might have raised them. On the Sabbath, one may place food before a dog, but not before swine (bShab 155b), hinting at pigs found in Jewish areas. The Babylonian sages Abaye and Raba disputed whether a divorce granted on the condition that the wife eat pork was considered valid or not with one assumption being that she might actually eat it in spite of being punished (bGit 84a). The rabbis contemplate that Queen Esther might have eaten pork in Ahasuerus’s court (bMeg 13a). Rabbi Meir, while a fugitive, pretended to eat pork to avoid detection (QohR 7:12), and a proselyte did not have to sell all his pigs immediately upon converting (bBQ 80a). Archaeological evidence complements this textual material: the appearance of pig bones in apparently Jewish sites during the Roman-Byzantine period would seem to hint at some Jewish consumption at those times (Lev-Tov).

The pig was often identified with an oppressive “other,” such as the Philistines in the biblical period, the Greeks during Hellenistic times, or Rome during the rabbinic era. It became especially potent as a symbol of foreign domination during Hellenistic times (see above, “V. Judaism A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism”). This association also appears in rabbinic literature, which states that the nations mocked the Jews for not eating pork (*Sifra Aharei Mot* 13:10); by contrast one must not mock a convert by saying that he still had pork between his teeth (*MekhY Nezikin* 18).

The identification with Rome served as a particular basis for derision. According to a rabbinic legend, the emperor Diocletian (242–311/12) began his career as a pig herder in Tiberias and was taunted by Jewish children (yTer 8:11, 46b; BerR 63:8); Pharaoh was also described as a pig herder (ShemR

20:1). Associating the fourth beast of Dan 7:6 with the “pig of the forest” of Ps 80:14, the rabbis stated that this pig-beast was Edom/Rome (WayR 13:5) and drew a number of connections between the animal and the oppressive empire. Just as the pig pretended to be “kosher” because of its split hoofs, so Rome pretended to hold court when it was robbing and pillaging (WayR 13:5; BerR 65:1); cast as a pig, Rome does not praise God, but blasphemes (WayR 13:5); as the last empire, Rome is described as a pig (*hāzīr*) because it will return (playing on the Hebrew root for “return”: *hẓr*) the crown to Israel (WayR 13:5).

Some late traditions hint that in the future the flesh of the pig will be permitted (“*hāzīr*”).

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Joshua Schwartz

C. Medieval Judaism

While the talmudic sages refused to give rational explanations to the biblical prohibition of pork, some medieval Jewish thinkers, most famously Maimonides (1138–1204), offered hygienic and medical explanations (Maimonides, *Guide* 3:48).

During the Middle Ages, particularly in Europe, eating – or not eating – pork marked a clear border between Jews (pork-haters) and Christians (pork-eaters). Hence, while only a minor offense from the perspective of Jewish law (that is, halakhically speaking, it “merely” carried a punishment of lashes: see Judah ha-Levi, *Kuzari* 3.49), eating pork, from a symbolic point, was of great significance. For Christians, consuming pork marked their “passage” from the OT to the NT, from the yoke of the law, materiality, or animality, to salvation by Christ (Boyarin). Correspondingly, for Jews, respecting the avoidance of pork was not just a sign of rejecting the Christian view of Jesus as the Messiah, but also signified their own waiting for the “true” messianic event at the end of time. Thus, the very lynchpin of messianic hope, and its implication for the status of the law, was at the heart of the debate about the avoidance of pork, and thus became a recurrent topic of Jewish-Christian debate literature. Christians argued that, after the coming of Christ, the law forbidding the consumption of pork must be



Fig. 22 “Judensau” (ca. 1300)

understood allegorically: that by commanding us not to eat pork, God commands us not to behave as pigs (i.e., not to follow our low desires). In contrast, arguing that the avoidance of pork will remain even in the messianic era, Jews insisted that God will timelessly punish the eaters of this meat (Resnick).

Nevertheless, even as Christians criticized Jews for maintaining their literal adherence to the biblical prohibition on consuming pig, European Christian folklore (at least since the 12th cent.) associated the Jews with that animal, often with the further allegation that Jews, in fact, do not eat pork because Jesus transformed some Jewish children into pigs. This etiological legend, or a version of it, could also be at the origin of the image, popular in German-speaking regions, of the *Judensau* (German for “Jewish sow”) and the image of Jews gathering around a sow: sucking its nipples, drinking its urine, eating its excrements, or kissing the animal on its mouth or anus (Shachar; see also fig. 22). In Spain, however, the association of the Jews with the pig manifested itself in the “pig libel legend” (Har-Peled 2016b): according to this story, Jews seeking to murder non-Jews by acquiring the heart of a Christian – which would then be employed in black magic with the eucharistic host – were thwarted by being sold a pig’s heart instead.

As demonstrated by Claudine Fabre-Vassas (1997), the association of the Jews with the “abominable” pig continued in European folklore as late as the 20th century.

In turn, Jews also often associated non-Jews with pigs. The identification of Rome with biblical Esau and Edom, and with the pig, developed in early rabbinical literature, was reinforced in medieval Jewish literature by casting this impure animal as the emblem of Christendom. This identification is found in liturgical poetry (*piyyut*) starting in the 6th century (see Yannai’s *qerovah* to Deut 2:2). In Ashkenazi *piyyut*, this is also a common topos. A

good example is the following line in the *piyyut* of Eli’ezer bar Nathan (1090–1170), composed to commemorate the victims of the persecutions during the First Crusade (1096): “now boars of the wood oppress us” (Haberman: 82–83). Similarly, in the lamentation of Moses bar Ele’azar ha-Kohen for the victims of the Rindfleisch massacres of 1298 in Germany, we find the following statement: “But the pig that devours us is the latest to oppress us ... by the sword, fire, and water, from the earth to eliminate us” (Haberman: 220).

Later kabbalistic sources went so far as to state that only Jews are human while non-Jews are pigs (Ross).

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Misgav Har-Peled

VI. Christianity

■ Medieval Times and Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America ■ New Christian Churches and Movements ■ Asia Pacific

A. Medieval Times and Reformation Era

Prompted by the notion that Christ had “declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19) and Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9–16, medieval Christian thinkers reinterpreted OT biblical prohibitions of pork consumption as moral instructions (Resnick: 75–76). Medieval Christians could eat pig meat, but they should avoid the sinful behaviors associated with swine, especially gluttony and lechery (Kearney: 176–77). Literal pork consumption thus became one of the defining features of medieval Christianity and a way for Christians to distinguish themselves from other monotheistic religions. Indeed, pork played an important role in medieval anti-Jewish propaganda, which suggested that Jews did not eat pigs because they were, in fact, pig-like – a harmful stereotype

that would later be reinforced by Martin Luther among others (Shachar: 33–66).

Another prominent motif in medieval and early modern Christianity was the association between pigs and demons, inspired by the miracle of the Gadarene swine (Kreiner: 182–96) and the “boar from the forest” ravaging God’s vineyard in Ps 80. Its associations with sins and demons made the *porcus diabollicus* an unlikely, but not uncommon, companion animal of Christian saints, such as Anthony (Kearney: 183–89).

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Thijs Porck

B. Modern Europe and America

The biblical record expresses divergent views of pigs. The foundational HB/OT text of Lev 11:7–8 proclaimed pigs “unclean,” and yet NT allusions to pigs (e.g., Jesus declaring all foods clean in Mark 7:19 and Peter’s vision in Acts 10 revealing an end of food restrictions) indicate no explicit prohibition to eating pork. Although pigs are not declared unclean in the story of Jesus casting demons out of a possessed man and sending those demons into a herd of pigs who plunged to their death (Mark 5; Matt 8; Luke 8), modern commentators in Europe and America often followed the lead of their medieval and Reformation predecessors in associating pigs with uncleanness or spiritual impurity. In his well-known commentary, Matthew Henry (1662–1714) wrote that worldly persons, like the unclean swine in Mark 5, “delight in the mire of sensual lusts.” Similarly, in differentiating true from false religious affections, the American colonial theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) noted that a swine that is filthy by nature can be washed clean and yet “the swinish nature remains” (341). Without a change of nature, the pig will still wallow in the mire. So it is with those without true religious affections – they remain in an unconverted state.

For contemporary Christians, the focus has shifted from the spiritual implications of “unclean” pigs to their consumption and therapeutic use. This emphasis encompasses broader ethical discussions ranging from animal food operations to medical applications. With 128 million pigs slaughtered in the US (Statista) and 237 million slaughtered in the European Union (Shuttleworth), the unhealthy conditions under which these pigs live in intensive factory farming systems have become increasingly contested in Christian circles. Questions also arise about the use of pigs in medical research and the implementation of new medical technologies, such

as xenotransplantation. Tadeusz Pacholczyk from the National Catholic Bioethics Center maintains, “While we have a duty to treat animals well and should try to avoid causing them undue suffering, it’s also clear that human beings have been given by God a legitimate dominion over members of the animal kingdom.” Interestingly, this statement seems in tension with Pope Francis’s own words in “Laudato Si” when he speaks of a “misguided anthropocentrism” leading to a “misguided lifestyle” as one of myriad issues currently plaguing humanity (Francis: 122). Others criticize the continued inhumane treatment of pigs, threats of zoonotic infection, and poor stewardship in “wasting” the remnants of the pig after a transplant (Hurst et al.). Amid these concerns, some Christians embrace pigs as a site for finding the sacred, such as Elaine West, an evangelical Christian, who credits her Rooterville Animal Sanctuary in Melrose, Florida, to a pig named Stella.

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C. New Christian Churches and Movements

Although Peter’s vision (Acts 10:9–16) has usually been taken to suggest that all foods may be eaten by the Christian community, some new Christian groups continue to regard the pig as an unclean animal, and refrain from eating pork and shellfish, in accordance with Jewish law (Lev 11:7–8; Deut 14:8). Notable examples have included the Worldwide Church of God and its offshoots, Messianic Jews, some followers of the Sacred Name Movement, and some Adventists. The Messianic Light organization, which describes itself as part of the Hebrew Roots Movement, offers a distinctive interpretation of Peter’s vision. Its followers believe that Peter was not given permission to eat both clean and unclean foods, but rather that “clean” animals were not defiled by their proximity with unclean ones.

Some Christians, including Adventists, engage in pig farming, which has proved controversial on account of animal welfare rather than dietary prohibitions. The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics' concerns include pig farming, and draw on biblical sources in support. These include noting that humankind's original diet was vegetarian (Gen 1:29), and that their suffering forms part of creation's "groaning" to which Paul refers (Rom 8:22) and which awaits redemption.

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D. Asia Pacific

Rather than adopt Judaic laws of impurity concerning pigs (Lev 11), and instead of assuming the demeaning Christian attitude toward pigs (Mark 5), some Pasifika communities honor the pig in their cosmologies (Toap). The pig, apart from being a source of food, is also a cultural symbol of respect, power, life, and forgiveness in everyday Pasifika life.

The pig was a constant companion of the first settlers of Oceania 3,500 years ago (Whipps). Since then, it has become a valuable cultural symbol in Pasifika communities. In the Woala communities in Papua New Guinea, the pig is central to their culture, symbolizing life, power, and forgiveness. In Woala indigenous theology, the pig is Christ (Toap). In Indigenous Vanuatu communities, the pig represents wealth and power. Pigs are also penalty payment for a variety of transgressions (Miles). In Samoa, the village *fono* (council) penalizes offenders in terms of sows slaughtered for community consumption. Lost stock takes time and effort to replenish. In Samoan culture, the pig is a key component of the *sua* presentation, an offering of the highest respect given to chiefs. On the occasion of the loss of human life through murder or manslaughter, the *sua* is incorporated in the ritual of the *ifoga*, that seeks forgiveness from the victim's family. *Ifoga* is of such spiritual power that forgiveness and reconciliation takes place, ending the possibility of further loss of life. The *ifoga* resonates strongly with Christ's own self-offering (cf. Phil 2:5–11).

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Afereti Uili

VII. Islam

Few animals are as much maligned and detested in Islam as the pig (*khinzīr*, fem. *khinzīra*, pl. *khanāzīr*) or the swine (*suidae*). The only close rival in this regard is the ape (*qīrā*, pl. *qīrada*; Kruk 1995). The Qurʾān thematizes the pig in two contexts. First, the proscription against ingesting, in whatever form, "carriage, blood, pig's meat (*lahm al-khinzīr*) [and] of what has been hallowed to other than God," that is, sacrificed before idols (S 2:173; 5:3 [expands on different kinds of carriage]; 16:115; Kister) – God commands Muḥammad to declare (*qul*) to the believers that consuming any member of this dietary quaternary is "an abomination" (*rijs*; S 6:145; the latter signification of abomination, or filth and ritual impurity, applies also to [drinking] wine [*khamr*] and [practicing] belomancy [*maysir*], both counted among Satan's works [S 5:90]; on pork, cf. Lev 11:7–8 and Deut 14:8–9; and on belomancy, cf. Ezek 21:21 and Hos 4:12). Second, pigs are mentioned alongside apes in Muḥammad's interfaith polemic against contemporary members of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). In what came to be collected into the canonical text, or readings (*qirāʾāt*), of the Qurʾān, Muḥammad contends that God cursed some of the ancient forebears of the Jews, or Israelites (Banū Isrāʾīl), and Christians, because they desecrated his commands (e.g., fishing, in the case of the Jews, on the Sabbath [S 7:163]), by transforming them into apes and pigs, apparently respectively (S 5:59–60; cf. S 2:63–5, where God says to the disobedient Jews, "Be you apes, miserably slinking!" [*kūnū qīrad khāṣʾīn*; Rubin]). In Islamic eschatological tradition, the literary *topos* of associating the pig with Christians appears in narratives about the second coming of Jesus, the son of Mary (Ibn Maryam). According to these accounts, before his mortal death and the final resurrection, Jesus will return as a just judge (*ḥakam ʿādil*) over the Christians to, *inter alia*, smash their cross (*salīb*), slay the swine, marry and beget children (Juynboll: 608; Wensinck: 2:86); moreover, Muḥammad reportedly prophesized that in the end of days the world will be filled with evil-doers who along with the apes and pigs will be cast into the hellfire (Wensinck: 2:86).

In Muḥammadan traditions (*ḥadīth*), beyond the apocalyptic narratives, several other themes are associated with or addressed to the pig. First, the question arose as to whether those Jews and Christians whom God fashioned into apes and pigs, respectively, were as such able to leave a progeny (*nasl*), to which Muḥammad responded in the negative, adding that this metamorphosis (*maskh*) also did not, in case anyone was wondering, constitute the origins of these two species (Wensinck: 5:362; 6:432); adding insult to injury, Muḥammad's youngest wife, ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr (d. 678), curses in another interfaith-polemical tradition a contingent of Jews who maligned her husband by calling

them, “the brothers of apes and pigs” (Wensinck: 2:86). Second and relatedly, the transformation of other people into apes and pigs – this time due to a natural and not a divine cause – is prophesied by Muḥammad about an unspecified-group, mayhap Muslims, who will pass through the salt marshes in the environs of a would-be town named al-Baṣra (evidently a reference to the garrison town founded by the caliph Umar I [r. 634–644] in the year 638) and after passing the night there, they would awaken as apes and pigs (Wensinck: 5:362); yet others who may be transformed into apes and pigs include members of Muḥammad’s own polity (*umma*), that is, Muslims, who would make the use of silk fabrics (*al-khazz wa-l-ḥarīr*) licit [for and by men] (Wensinck: 2:27). Third, the ritual (and likely supererogatory) prayers (*ṣalāt*) are invalidated if a donkey, pig, Jew, Zoroastrian, or woman passes in front of the one praying, except when the distance between them is (literally) a stone’s throw (*qadhfa bi-ḥajar*; Wensinck: 2:86). Fourth, the pig and Islamic ritual purity concerning the legal question of using cooking and drinking vessels belonging to neighboring People of the Book who eat pork, to which Muḥammad responds that it would be best to find other vessels to use, but if not, you may wash them with water and eat and drink from them (Wensinck: 5:316). Fifth, the playing of backgammon or trictrac (*nardashīr*), the preeminent gambling game of medieval Islam, is compared to the abomination of eating pig’s flesh and blood curd, that is, “[h]e who plays backgammon” Muḥammad reportedly said, “is like someone who plunges his hand into the flesh and blood of swine” (Juynboll: 632–33; Wensinck: 2:86; Rosenthal 1975: 40–43; cf. Maghen [tr.]: 291). Fifth, there are the general proscriptions against Muslims raising, selling and buying, butchering, and utilizing the various bodily parts of the pig, including using lard to calk ships and to make candles and lamp oil (Wensinck: 2:86; Raggetti: 70–75). And sixth, the pig is mentioned in a Muḥammadan adage about the Islamic obligation (*fariḍa*) to seek and protect knowledge (*‘ilm*), which advises Muslims not to share such knowledge with those unworthy of it, since that would be like placing a necklace of precious stones, pearls, and gold around a pig’s neck (Wensinck: 2:86; Rosenthal 1970: 89; cf. Matt 7:6).

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VIII. Literature

The biblical story of the pigs into which Jesus exorcised the demons of a possessed man, causing them to run down a precipice and drown in a lake (Luke 8:26–39), plays a central hermeneutical role in Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky’s (1821–81) politically and religiously charged novel *Demons/The Devils* or *The Possessed* (*Biesy* or *Besy*, 1871/72). This is made clear by a special framework: Luke 8:32–35 (part of the above mentioned exorcism story) is one of two mottoes that precede the novel’s narrative and is read verbatim from the NT toward the end, at the express request of Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, one of the novel’s main characters, as he lies on his deathbed. The first-person narrator explicitly emphasizes that he himself placed this biblical passage at the beginning of his chronicle. In doing so, he makes it clear that the novel’s theme is the demonic forces that are making Russia sick: the currents of nihilism and materialism emanating from Western Europe since the middle of the 19th century. These forces must be expelled from sick Russia and placed into pigs that, possessed, will destroy themselves. The terminally ill Stepan Trofimovich, who had previously read from the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt 5:1–8:1) and the book of Revelation (Rev 3:14–16), explains why he wanted to hear precisely that passage about the pigs: because he, a Russian liberal inclined toward nihilism, recognizes himself as both one of the demons making Russia sick and one of these possessed pigs, who have to kill themselves. However, his self-knowledge leads him, on his deathbed, to faith, and he discovers the Johannine confession of God as love. In contrast, another main character of the novel, Nikolai Stavrogin, who directly or indirectly destroyed people, a former pupil of Stepan Trofimovich, whom readers recognize again, according to Stepan’s interpretation, as both a demon making Russia sick and a demonically possessed pig, commits suicide at the end of the novel doing exactly what the pigs do in Luke’s exorcism story: he kills and destroys himself.

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Christina Hoegen-Rohls

IX. Visual Arts

Pigs are known from the Bible and in particular from Deut 14:8: “And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses”; from Lev 11:7: “The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you”; as well as from Matt 7:6: “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.” In all three references, the pig appears as an unclean animal and it is this quality that characterizes the majority of Bible-inspired imagery. It is forbidden for Jews to consume pork, and although Christians do not adhere to this dietary restriction, they too attribute to pigs qualities contrary to Christian ethics. For example, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (see Matt 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39), frequently known as the miracle of the (Gadarene) swine and the exorcism of legion, is one of the miracles performed by Jesus. The miracle appears as early as the 6th century in the Basilica of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Italy) and visualizes the malicious quality of these mammals that Christians held them account for. The scene was popular in the Christian world as it appears in mosaics, wall paintings, ivories and illuminated manuscripts, such as the 11th-century Hilda Codex (Darmstadt, Germany, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, MS 1640, fol. 76r) and the Canterbury Psalter (1200, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 8846, fol. 3v). The miracle was also the theme of Briton Riviere’s painting in 1883 (oil on canvas, Tate, London), a British painter known for his animal paintings.

In the realm of politics, apart from a symbol of immorality and evil, pigs were regarded as a threat for the vineyard, a symbolic reference to the empire, so they were identified with enemies of the Byzantine East and the Latin West. This notion derives from Ps 80:13: “The boar from the woods has destroyed [the vine] and the singular beast has devoured it,” illustrated in the 9th-century Stuttgart Psalter (Stuttgart, Germany, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod.bibl.fol.23, fol. 96v; see → plate 8.a), one of the most prestigious illuminated manuscripts of the Carolingian era, where a boar is shown devouring a plant. The malicious character of pigs led to their prosecution in France, where between 1250 and 1500, twenty-five pigs were put on trial like human criminals, often for killing infants. Pigs appear also in the scene of the second coming in

Byzantine art and particularly as part of the damned, especially among livestock thieves in areas of mainland Greece where pig-farming was common, as it is the case of the town of Trikala (Saint Nikolaos in Megalochori, 1568), where wall paintings with pig stealing reflect a social problem of the area. Luke’s gospel on the parable of the prodigal son and particularly Luke 15:15–16, “So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything,” inspired religious imagery in both East and West, as it is the case with the 16th-century fresco painting of the parable of the prodigal son at the Chilandar Monastery in Mt. Athos (Greece) and with Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving *The Prodigal Son amid the Swine* (1496), where the prodigal son is depicted kneeling among pigs.

On a different level, pigs were acculturated as symbolic images of the kingdom of God for the Christians, and they appear as such in the 6th-century Byzantine church of Petra (Jordan), also known as “The Petra Church,” shown in medallions on the floor mosaics along with other animals. This type of floor mosaics was popular until the 6th century where the coexistence of wild with non-wild animals refers to the heavenly Jerusalem and the creation of the natural world by God.

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Eirini Panou

X. Film

The biblical prohibition against eating pork, found in Lev 11:3–7 and Deut 14:8, is occasionally mentioned in film. In the episode “Matthew 4:24” of the series *The Chosen* (dir. Dallas Jenkins, 2017–, US, season 2, ep. 3, 2021), a scene features a discussion between Jesus’s disciples about times when they have broken Jewish food laws. Thaddeus acknowledges that he tried pork once. A famous scene in *Pulp Fiction* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1994, US) references this prohibition; when hitmen Vincent Vega (John Travolta) and Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson) are eating together at a diner, Vincent finds that Jules doesn’t eat pork. “Are you Jewish?,” Vincent asks. Jules says he is not, but that he views pigs as “filthy animals.” He continues: “Sewer rat

may taste like pumpkin pie, but I'd never know because I wouldn't eat the filthy ..."

In a more serious vein, the documentary *Magnificent Beast* (dirs. Josh and Tess Gerritsen, 2022, US) explores the roots of Jewish and Muslim prohibitions against eating pork through interviews with scholars and experts from a wide range of disciplines.

In the NT, pigs feature in one of Jesus's famous sayings, one of his parables, and one of his miracles. The phrase "cast not your pearls before swine" (Matt 7:6), is included in Nicholas Ray's 1961 *King of Kings* (US), although many cinematic adaptations of this scene end with either the beatitudes or the Lord's Prayer as the sermon's culmination. The saying is also used in films without an explicit reference to the Bible as its source. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (dir. Elia Kazan, 1951, US), Blanche chides herself for "being foolish," and "casting her pearls before swine," for pursuing a relationship in which she isn't valued. And in the animated *The Secret of NIMH* (dir. Don Bluth, 1982, US), Auntie Shrew declares her wisdom to be "pearls before swine" when the children refuse to heed her advice.

Pigs also play a prominent role in Jesus's parable of the prodigal son, as a means of showing the degradation to which the wayward son has fallen (Luke 15:15). *Godspell* (dir. David Greene, 1973, US) has Jesus and his troupe of actors stage this parable in the off-broadway Cherry Lane Theatre, with silent film clips used to illustrate the narrative. When the son is sent "to mind the pigs," the screen shows a clip from the 1926 silent film *Hired and Fired* (dir. Ray Grey, US) in which Chaplin-esque comedian Paul Parrott scampers away from a herd of pigs. In Franco Zeffirelli's 1977 *Jesus of Nazareth* (UK/IT), Jesus tells the story while his disciples and other listeners are gathered around a fire. The scene mostly alternates between close-ups of Jesus and reverse shots of his listeners, and includes the detail regarding the son descending to his role as pigkeeper.

Finally, pigs feature prominently in Jesus's exorcism of the demoniac (Mark 5:1–20; Matt 8:28–34; Luke 8:26–39). While this scene has not been frequently filmed, it is included in *The Jesus Film* (dirs. John Krish/Peter Sykes, 1979, US), which features a number of close-ups of the squealing herd of pigs. As they proceed to stampede away (presumably over the cliff, although this happens off-screen), two of the villagers shout for them to "Come back!," providing some explanation for why the village is so upset with Jesus for performing this exorcism in the biblical account. This extrapolated detail is repeated in the 2019 animated short film *Legion* (dir. Dominic M. Carola, US), which uses CGI graphics to retell the story.

The horror film *Unholy Song* (dir. Arthur G. Night, 2025, US) centers on a contemporary exorcism in which the exorcist attempts to trap the of-

fending spirit within pig bones. Promotional material for the film states that it was "inspired by" the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Cranswick).

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Brandon Graffius

Pigeon

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Reception History

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

In the HB/OT it is hardly possible to differentiate between rock dove and domestic pigeon. These animals belong basically to the same species (*Columba livia*), and are both designated by the Hebrew word *yôṇâ*. Moreover, the possibility that in ancient taxonomy *yôṇâ* was a supraspecific term indicating a class correspondent to the modern genus *Columbae*, or even to the family of *Columbidae*, cannot be excluded. Overall, *Columbiformes* are a very homogeneous group including different species of pigeons and doves, which share several features. Modern translations of the Bible usually reserve the term "pigeon" for sacrificial contexts (Lev 1:14; 5:7–11; 12:6, 8; 14:22, 30; 15:14, 29; Num 6:10) while they employ "dove" in poetic passages (see "Dove I. Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament"). In sacrificial texts young pigeons (*benê yôṇâ*) are always paralleled with *tôr* (turtledove or partridge, or a generic name for fowls; Altmann/Spicarih). They are mentioned as a cheap option for purification or sin sacrifices for those who cannot afford more expensive offerings. The contexts suggest that pigeons/doves and *tôr* are equivalent in their economic value and their sacrificial treatment (briefly described in Lev 5:8). However, nothing in the context indicates that the pigeons used for sacrifice are domestic. There is no evidence of pigeon domestication in ancient Palestine before the late Hellenistic-Roman times, when pigeon breeding increased to satisfy the demand of dung, used as a fertilizer (Hirschfeld/Tepper). Moreover, most of the poetic references to doves/pigeons in the HB/OT underline their wild behavior, such as nesting among the rocks, and their migratory nature (e.g., Pss 56:1; 55:7; Jer 48:28; Hos 11:11). An indication of domestication of pigeons could be found in Isa 60:8, a very late text. Further support for the use of domesticated carrier pigeons/doves could also come from the flood story in Gen 8:8–12 (Keel: 80–91). However, the presence of the dove/pigeon in this account