



The Athens Greek Religion Seminar, Tuesday October 17 2018

Linda Talatas: *Pregnant sows in the cult of Demeter*

ABSTRACT:

Pigs have an undeniable importance in the cult of Demeter: the Eleusinian mysteries could not be attended without a preliminary sacrifice of a piglet, for example. However, pregnant sows appear as a more specific category of victims in direct link with the cult of Demeter, as indicated by pregnant swine statuettes found in the sanctuary of the goddess at Knidos.

The aim of this paper is to understand why pregnant sows were important for the cult of Demeter.

Why were pregnant sows offered as sacrificial victims? Why were they represented in the form of statues? Are the sculptures representing domesticated or wild sows? Was Demeter the only recipient of these sows? Who made such offerings and why?

To address these questions, this paper will examine the way pigs were herded, contextualize domestic and wild swine biologically and ideologically, and consider their status in Greek mythology and religion, taking into account archaeological finds as well as literary sources. Finally, the collected data will be used to better understand who made these offerings and what the choice of pregnant sows tells us about Demeter's worshippers.