

Topic Page: [Dionysus \(Greek deity\)](#)

Definition: **Dionysus** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Greek god of wine and fertility, identified with the Roman god Bacchus. The son of Zeus and Semele.

Summary Article: **Dionysus**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

In Greek mythology, the god of wine, mystic ecstasy, and orgiastic excess; son of princess Semele and Zeus. In his original savage form he was attended by satyrs, lustful, drunken creatures; and **maenads**, women considered capable of tearing animals to pieces with their bare hands when under his influence. Later, as a more benign deity, his rites became less extreme; the Roman Bacchus embodied this form.

Dionysus was the personification of nature's power to stir emotion, and the element of creativity opposite the law and order of Apollo, the two being complementary in the act of creation.

Childhood After Zeus consumed Semele with his fire, he hid the unborn Dionysus in his thigh until birth to shield the child from his jealous wife Hera. In another tradition, Dionysus was the son of Persephone by Zeus transformed as a snake. He was reputed to have invented wine as a child under the care of the Hyades, nymphs and daughters of the Titan Atlas, on Mount Nysa, in Libya.

Adventures and deeds Driven mad by Hera, Dionysus travelled through the world accompanied by numerous rowdy companions, including his old tutor Silenus, a rural god; they spread his worship and allegedly the use of wine. He was abducted by Lydian pirates, but entwined the ship with ivy and transformed himself into a lion, the oars into serpents, and the pirates into dolphins as they jumped overboard in terror. Landing at Naxos, he married Ariadne, who had been deserted there by the hero Theseus.

During the Trojan wars Dionysus supported the Greeks, empowering Anius, son of the god Apollo, to sustain their fleet with endless supplies of corn, oil, and wine.

His son by Aphrodite was Priapus, the god of fruitfulness.

Worship Reference to Dionysus in early Aegean tablets, suggests that he was introduced from Thrace. His original cult appealed mainly to women, and followers abandoned their homes to wander in bands over the mountains. The ritual climax of his worship involved the ripping apart and raw consumption of an animal, such as a deer, calf, goat, or occasionally even a human, held to represent the god himself. As a fertility rite, this may have stemmed from a belief that a god must die to be reborn in his followers, or simply that a being's power may be inherited by eating it.

His cult spread swiftly despite strong opposition from the authorities, illustrated through such legends as the tragedy of Pentheus of Thebes, who was torn apart by the maenads, including his own mother, after resisting the introduction of his worship. The event was dramatized in Euripedes' *Bacchae*.

A milder form of worship also existed in which Dionysus was simply the god of wine, honoured with song and celebration. His festivals, the Dionysia, were particularly associated with Athens and other centres in Attica.

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Dionysus. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dionysus>



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.

APA

Dionysus. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dionysus>

Chicago

"Dionysus." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dionysus>

Harvard

Dionysus. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dionysus> [Accessed 14 November 2019].

MLA

"Dionysus." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dionysus>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2019.