[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Semiprotected](/wiki/Template:Semiprotected) [Template:Infobox mythical creature](/wiki/Template:Infobox_mythical_creature) [thumb|right|Carved imperial Chinese dragons at](/wiki/File:Ninedragonwallpic1.jpg) [Nine-Dragon Wall](/wiki/Nine-Dragon_Wall), [Beihai Park](/wiki/Beihai_Park), [Beijing](/wiki/Beijing) A **dragon** is a [legendary creature](/wiki/Legendary_creature), typically scaled or fire-spewing; with [serpentine](/wiki/Serpentine_shape), [reptilian](/wiki/Reptile) and [avian](/wiki/Bird) traits, that features in the [myths](/wiki/Myths) of many cultures. There are two distinct cultural traditions of dragons:

* [European dragon](/wiki/European_dragon), derived from European folk traditions and ultimately related to [Balkans](/wiki/Balkan_peninsula) and [Western Asian](/wiki/Western_Asia) mythologies. Most are depicted as reptilian creatures with animal-level intelligence, four legs and a detached set of wings.
* [Chinese dragon](/wiki/Chinese_dragon), with counterparts in Japan (namely the [Japanese dragon](/wiki/Japanese_dragon)), Korea and other East Asian countries.[[1]](#cite_note-1) Most are depicted as serpentine creatures with above-average intelligence, four legs and wingless.

The two traditions may have evolved separately, but have influenced each other to a certain extent, particularly with the cross-cultural contact of recent centuries. The English word [*dragon*](/wiki/Wikt:dragon) derives from [Greek](/wiki/Greek_language) [δράκων](/wiki/Wikt:δράκων) (*drákōn*), "dragon, serpent of huge size, water-snake".[[2]](#cite_note-2)

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## Name[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[right|thumb|Dragon](/wiki/File:Metal_dragon_half_frontal_view.jpg) The word *dragon* entered the English language in the early 13th century from Old French *dragon*, which in turn comes from Latin *draconem* (nominative *draco*) meaning "huge serpent, dragon", from the Greek word δράκων, *drakon* (genitive *drakontos*, δράκοντος) "serpent, giant seafish". The Greek and Latin term referred to any great serpent, not necessarily mythological, and this usage was also current in English up to the 18th century.

## Morphology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

A dragon is a mythological representation of a [reptile](/wiki/Reptile). In antiquity, dragons were mostly envisaged as [serpents](/wiki/Serpent_(symbolism)), but since the Middle Ages, it has become common to depict them with legs, resembling a [lizard](/wiki/Lizard).

Dragons are usually shown in modern times with a body like a huge lizard, or a snake with two pairs of lizard-type legs, and able to emit fire from their mouths. The [European dragon](/wiki/European_dragon) has bat-like wings growing from its back. A dragon-like creature with wings but only a single pair of legs is known as a [wyvern](/wiki/Wyvern).

## Comparative mythology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

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The association of the serpent with a monstrous opponent overcome by a heroic deity has its roots in the mythology of the Ancient Near East, including [Canaanite](/wiki/Canaanite_mythology) ([Hebrew](/wiki/Jewish_mythology), [Ugaritic](/wiki/Ugaritic)), [Hittite](/wiki/Hittite_mythology) and [Mesopotamian](/wiki/Mesopotamian_mythology). [Humbaba](/wiki/Humbaba), the fire-breathing dragon-fanged beast first described in the [Epic of Gilgamesh](/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh) is sometimes described as a dragon with Gilgamesh playing the part of dragon-slayer. The legless serpent ([*Chaoskampf*](/wiki/Chaoskampf)) motif entered [Greek mythology](/wiki/Greek_mythology) and ultimately [Christian mythology](/wiki/Christian_mythology), although the serpent motif may already be part of prehistoric [Indo-European mythology](/wiki/Indo-European_mythology) as well, based on comparative evidence of [Indic](/wiki/Rigvedic_deities) and [Germanic](/wiki/Norse_mythology) material. The folk-lore motif of the dragon guarding gold, may have come from earlier Bronze Age customs of introducing serpents to village granaries to deter rats or mice.[[3]](#cite_note-3) [thumb|left|160px|*Saint George Killing the Dragon*, 1434/35, by](/wiki/File:Martorell_-_Sant_Jordi.jpg) [Martorell](/wiki/Bernat_Martorell)

Although dragons occur in many legends around the world, different cultures have varying stories about monsters that have been grouped together under the dragon label. Some dragons are said to breathe fire or to be poisonous, such as in the [Old English](/wiki/Old_English) poem [*Beowulf*](/wiki/Beowulf). They are commonly portrayed as serpentine or reptilian, hatching from [eggs](/wiki/Egg_(biology)) and possessing typically scaly or feathered bodies. They are sometimes portrayed as hoarding treasure. Some myths portray them with a row of dorsal spines. [European dragons](/wiki/European_dragon) are more often winged, while [Chinese dragons](/wiki/Chinese_dragon) resemble large snakes. Dragons can have a variable number of legs: none, two, four, or more when it comes to early [European literature](/wiki/European_literature).

Dragons are often held to have major spiritual significance in various religions and cultures around the world. In many Asian cultures dragons were, and in some cultures still are, revered as representative of the primal forces of nature, religion and the universe. They are associated with wisdom—often said to be wiser than humans—and longevity. They are commonly said to possess some form of magic or other supernatural power, and are often associated with wells, rain, and rivers. In some cultures, they are also said to be capable of [human speech](/wiki/Speech). In some traditions dragons are said to have taught humans to talk.

[thumb|200px|The](/wiki/File:Dragon_order_insignia.jpg) [Order of the Dragon](/wiki/Order_of_the_Dragon) was created to defend Europe against the invading Ottoman Turks in the 15th century. Narratives about dragons often involve them being killed by a hero. This topos can be traced to the [*Chaoskampf*](/wiki/Chaoskampf) of the [mythology of the Ancient Near East](/wiki/Mythology_of_the_Ancient_Near_East) (e.g. [Hadad](/wiki/Hadad) vs. [Yam](/wiki/Yam_(god)), [Marduk](/wiki/Marduk) vs. [Tiamat](/wiki/Tiamat), [Teshub](/wiki/Teshub) vs. [Illuyanka](/wiki/Illuyanka), etc.; the Biblical [Leviathan](/wiki/Leviathan) presumably reflects a corresponding opponent of an early version of [Yahweh](/wiki/Yahweh)). The motif is continued in Greek [Apollo](/wiki/Apollo), and the early Christian narratives about [Michael the Archangel](/wiki/Michael_(archangel)) and [Saint George](/wiki/Saint_George). The slaying of [Vrtra](/wiki/Vrtra) by [Indra](/wiki/Indra) in the [Rigveda](/wiki/Rigveda) also belongs in this category. The theme survives into medieval legend and folklore, with dragon slayers such as [Beowulf](/wiki/Beowulf_(hero)), [Sigurd](/wiki/Sigurd), [Tristan](/wiki/Tristan_and_Iseult), [Margaret the Virgin](/wiki/Margaret_the_Virgin), [Heinrich von Winkelried](/wiki/Heinrich_von_Winkelried), [Dobrynya Nikitich](/wiki/Dobrynya_Nikitich), [Skuba Dratewka](/wiki/Smok_Wawelski)/[Krakus](/wiki/Krakus). In the Bible, the archetype is alluded to in the descendants of [Adam](/wiki/Adam) crushing the head of the [Serpent](/wiki/Serpent_(Bible)), and in Christian mythology, this was interpreted as corresponding to [Christ](/wiki/Christ) as the [Last Adam](/wiki/Last_Adam) crushing the [devil](/wiki/Devil).

[Template:Anchor](/wiki/Template:Anchor) The [blood](/wiki/Blood#Cultural_and_religious_beliefs) of a slain dragon is depicted as either beneficent or as poisonous in medieval legend and literary fiction. In German legend, dragon blood has the power to render invincible skin or armor bathed in it, as is the case with [Siegfried's](/wiki/Sigurd) skin or [Ortnit's](/wiki/Ortnit) armor. In the [Slavic myth](/wiki/Slavic_mythology), the Earth refuses it as it is so vile that [Mother Earth](/wiki/Mother_Earth_(deity)) wishes not to have it within her womb, and it remains above ground for all eternity. The blood of the dragon in [*Beowulf*](/wiki/Beowulf) has [acidic](/wiki/Acid) qualities, allowing it to seep through iron. [Heinrich von Winkelried](/wiki/Heinrich_von_Winkelried) dies after the blood of the dragon slain by him accidentally drips on him.

## Europe[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

### Greek mythology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|Ancient Greek mosaic from](/wiki/File:Reggio_calabria_museo_nazionale_mosaico_da_kaulon.jpg) [Caulonia](/wiki/Caulonia_(ancient_city)), [Italy](/wiki/Italy) depicting a [*cetus*](/wiki/Cetus_(mythology)) or sea-dragon In [ancient Greece](/wiki/Ancient_Greece) the first mention of a "dragon" is derived from the [*Iliad*](/wiki/Iliad) where [Agamemnon](/wiki/Agamemnon) is described as having a blue dragon motif on his sword belt and an emblem of a three-headed dragon on his breast plate.[[4]](#cite_note-4) However, the Greek word used (δράκων *drákōn*, [genitive](/wiki/Genitive) δράκοντοϛ *drákontos*) could also mean "snake".[[5]](#cite_note-5) In [Template:Nobr](/wiki/Template:Nobr), [Flavius Philostratus](/wiki/Philostratus) ([Template:Lang-el](/wiki/Template:Lang-el))[[6]](#cite_note-6)