**Dragon**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jump to: [navigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#mw-head), [search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#p-search)

*This article is about the legendary creature. For other uses, see* [*Dragon (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon_(disambiguation))*.*

[Page semi-protected](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy#semi)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ljubljana_dragon.JPG)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ljubljana_dragon.JPG)

The "Ljubljana Dragon" in [Ljubljana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ljubljana), [Slovenia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovenia)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stone_chinese_dragons.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stone_chinese_dragons.jpg)

Stone carving of [Chinese dragons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_dragons) at a temple in [Fuzhou](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuzhou), [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ninedragonwallpic1.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ninedragonwallpic1.jpg)

Carved imperial dragons at [Nine-Dragon Wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nine-Dragon_Wall), [Beihai Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beihai_Park), [Beijing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beijing)

A **dragon** is a [legendary creature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legendary_creature), typically with [serpentine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpentine_shape) or [reptilian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reptile) traits, that feature in the [myths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology) of many cultures. There are two distinct cultural traditions of dragons: the [European dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_dragon), derived from European folk traditions and ultimately related to Greek and Middle Eastern mythologies, and the [Chinese dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_dragon), with counterparts in Japan, Korea and other East Asian countries.

The two traditions may have evolved separately, but have influenced each to a certain extent, particularly with the cross-cultural contact of recent centuries. The English word ["dragon"](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/dragon) derives from [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) [δράκων](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%AC%CE%BA%CF%89%CE%BD) (*drákōn*), "dragon, serpent of huge size, water-snake", which probably comes from the verb [δρακεῖν](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B5%E1%BF%96%CE%BD) (*drakeîn*) "to see clearly".[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-0)

|  |
| --- |
| **Contents**  [[hide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon)]   * [1 Name](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Name) * [2 Morphology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Morphology) * [3 Comparative mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Comparative_mythology) * [4 Near Eastern and European](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Near_Eastern_and_European)   + [4.1 Greek mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Greek_mythology)   + [4.2 European](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#European)     - [4.2.1 Slavic dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Slavic_dragon)   + [4.3 Ancient India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Ancient_India)   + [4.4 Persian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Persian)   + [4.5 Jewish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Jewish) * [5 East and Southeast Asian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#East_and_Southeast_Asian)   + [5.1 Chinese dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Chinese_dragon)   + [5.2 Japanese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Japanese)   + [5.3 Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Vietnam)   + [5.4 Java](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Java) * [6 Modern depictions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Modern_depictions) * [7 Animals that may have inspired dragons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Animals_that_may_have_inspired_dragons) * [8 Cartography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#Cartography) * [9 See also](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#See_also) * [10 References](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#References) * [11 External links](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#External_links) |

**Name**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wen_Wu_Temple_13.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wen_Wu_Temple_13.jpg)

Dragon head on a roof of a temple in [Taiwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwan)

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", which is believed to have come from an earlier stem *drak-*, a stem of *derkesthai*, "to see clearly," from Proto-Indo-European *derk-* "to see" or "the one with the (deadly) glance." 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**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dragon_(PSF).png)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dragon_(PSF).png)

An illustration of an Eastern dragon.

A dragon is a mythological representation of a [reptile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reptile). In antiquity, dragons were mostly envisaged as [serpents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpent), but since the Middle Ages, it has become common to depict them with legs, resembling a [lizard](http://en.wikipedia.org/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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_dragon) has bat-type wings growing from its back. A dragon-like creature with no front legs is known as a [wyvern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wyvern).

**Comparative mythology**

*Further information:* [*Chaoskampf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaoskampf)*,* [*Sea serpent*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_serpent)*,* [*Proto-Indo-European religion#Dragon or Serpent*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-European_religion#Dragon_or_Serpent)*, and* [*Serpent (Bible)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpent_(Bible))

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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaanite_mythology) ([Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_mythology), [Ugaritic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugaritic)), [Hittite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hittite_mythology) and [Mesopotamian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_mythology). The [*Chaoskampf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaoskampf) motif entered [Greek mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_mythology) and ultimately [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_mythology) mythology, although the serpent motif may already be part of prehistoric [Indo-European mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-European_mythology) as well, based on comparative evidence of [Indic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigvedic_deities) and [Germanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norse_mythology) material. It has been speculated that accounts of [spitting cobras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spitting_cobra) may be the origin of the myths of fire-breathing dragons.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-1)

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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English) [poem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poem) [Beowulf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf).[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-2) They are commonly portrayed as serpentine or reptilian, hatching from [eggs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_(biology)) and possessing typically scaly or feathered bodies. They are sometimes portrayed as having especially large eyes or watching treasure very diligently, a feature that is the origin of the word dragon (Greek *drakeîn* meaning "to see clearly").[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-3) Some myths portray them with a row of dorsal spines. [European dragons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_dragon) are more often winged, while [Chinese dragons](http://en.wikipedia.org/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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_literature).

Dragons are often held to have major spiritual significance in various religions and cultures around the world. In many [Asian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia) cultures dragons were, and in some cultures still are, revered as representative of the primal forces of [nature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature), religion and the [universe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universe). They are associated with [wisdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom)—often said to be wiser than humans—and longevity. They are commonly said to possess some form of [magic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_(paranormal)) 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speech). In some traditions dragons are said to have taught humans to talk.

Narratives about dragons often involve them being killed by a [hero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero). This topos can be traced to the [*Chaoskampf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaoskampf) of the [mythology of the Ancient Near East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology_of_the_Ancient_Near_East) (e.g. [Hadad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadad) vs. [Yam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yam_(god)), [Marduk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk) vs. [Tiamat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat), [Teshub](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teshub) vs. [Illuyanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illuyanka), etc.; the Biblical [Leviathan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan) presumably reflects a corresponding opponent of an early version of [Yahweh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh)). The motive is continued in Greek [Apollo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo), and the early Christian narratives about [Archangel Michael](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangel_Michael) and [Saint George](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_George). The slaying of [Vrtra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vrtra) by [Indra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra) in the [Rigveda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigveda) also belongs in this category. The theme survives into medieval legend and folklore, with dragon slayers such as [Beowulf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf_(hero)), [Sigurd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigurd), [Tristan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tristan_and_Iseult), [Margaret the Virgin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_the_Virgin), [Heinrich von Winkelried](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_von_Winkelried), [Dobrynya Nikitich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dobrynya_Nikitich), [Skuba Dratewka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smok_Wawelski)/[Krakus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krakus" \o "Krakus). In Biblical myth, the archetype is alluded to in the descendants of [Adam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam) crushing the head of the [Serpent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpent_(Bible)), and in Christian mythology, this was interpreted as corresponding to [Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ) as the "New Adam" crushing the [Devil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil).

The [blood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood#Cultural_and_religious_beliefs) of a slain dragon is depicted as either beneficient 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigurd)'s skin or [Ortnit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ortnit)'s armor. In the [Slavic myth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavic_mythology), the Earth refuses it as it is so vile that [Mother Earth](http://en.wikipedia.org/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*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf)has [acidic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acid) qualities, allowing it to seep through iron. [Heinrich von Winkelried](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_von_Winkelried) dies after the blood of the dragon slain by him accidentially drips on him.

**Near Eastern and European**

**Greek mythology**

*Main article:* [*Dragons in Greek mythology*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragons_in_Greek_mythology)

In [Ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece) the first mention of a "dragon" is derived from the [*Iliad*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad) where [Agamemnon](http://en.wikipedia.org/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.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-4) However, the Greek word used (δράκων *drákōn*, [genitive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genitive) δράκοντοϛ *drákontos*) could also mean "snake". Δράκων *drákōn* is a form of the [aorist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aorist) [participle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participle) [active](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_voice) of Greek δέρκομαι *dérkomai* = "I see", *derkeîn* = "to see", and originally likely meant "that which sees", or "that which flashes or gleams" (perhaps referring to reflective scales). This is the origin of the word "dragon". (See also [Hesiod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesiod)'s [*Theogony*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theogony), 322.)

In 217 A.D., [Flavius Philostratus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philostratus) ([Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language): Φλάβιος Φιλόστρατος)[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon" \l "cite_note-5) discussed dragons (δράκων, drákōn) in India in The Life of [Apollonius of Tyana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollonius_of_Tyana) (II,17 and III,6–8). The [Loeb Classical Library](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loeb_Classical_Library) translation (by F.C. Conybeare) mentions (III,7) that “In most respects the tusks resemble the largest swine’s, but they are slighter in build and twisted, and have a point as unabraded as sharks’ teeth.”

According to a collection of books by [Claudius Aelianus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudius_Aelianus) ([Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language): Κλαύδιος Αιλιανός)[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon" \l "cite_note-6) called *On Animals*, Ethiopia was inhabited by a species of dragon that hunted elephants. It could grow to a length of 180 feet and had a lifespan rivaling that of the most enduring of animals.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-7)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Graoully.JPG)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Graoully.JPG)

Dragon effigy, the [Graoully](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement_of_Metz), in [Metz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metz), [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France)

**European**

*Main articles:* [*European dragon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_dragon)*,* [*Saint George and the Dragon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_George_and_the_Dragon)*,* [*Margaret the Virgin*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_the_Virgin)*, and* [*Dacian Draco*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dacian_Draco)

European dragons exist in folklore and mythology among the overlapping [cultures of Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Europe). Dragons are generally depicted as living in rivers or having an underground lair or cave.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-Ormen-8) They are commonly described as having hard or armoured hide, and are rarely described as flying, despite often depicted with wings.

European dragons are usually depicted as malevolent though there are exceptions (such as [Y Ddraig Goch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y_Ddraig_Goch), the Red Dragon of Wales).

**Slavic dragon**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ivan_Bilibin_065.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ivan_Bilibin_065.jpg)

[Zmey Gorynych](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zmey_Gorynych), the [Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) [three-headed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-headed_animal) dragon

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:VarnaDragons.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:VarnaDragons.jpg)

"Dragon Family" in [Varna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varna)

*Main article:* [*Slavic dragon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavic_dragon)

In [Slavic mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavic_mythology), the words *“zmey”*, *"zmiy"* or *"zmaj"* are used to describe dragons. These words are masculine forms of the Slavic word for "snake", which are normally feminine (like Russian *zmeya*). In [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania), there is a similar figure, derived from the Slavic dragon and named [*zmeu*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zmeu). Exclusively in Polish and Belarusian folklore, as well as in the other Slavic folklores, a dragon is also called *smok* (смок, цмок, smok). In South Slavic folklores, the same thing is also called *lamya* (ламйа, ламjа, lamja). Although quite similar to other [European dragons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_dragon), Slavic dragons have their peculiarities.

[Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) dragons usually have heads in multiples of three. Some have heads that grow back if every single head isn't cut off. In [Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine) and [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia), a particular dragon-like creature, [*Zmey Gorynych*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zmey_Gorynych), has [three heads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-headed_animal) and spits fire. According to one [bylina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bylina), Zmey Gorynych was killed by [bogatyr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bogatyr) [Dobrynya Nikitich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dobrynya_Nikitich).

Other Russian dragons (such as [Tugarin Zmeyevich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tugarin_Zmeyevich)) have [Turkic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkic_languages) names, probably symbolizing the [Mongols](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongols) and other [nomadic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomadic) [steppe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steppe) peoples. Accordingly, [St George](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_George) (symbolizing [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity)) killing the Dragon (symbolizing [Satan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satan)) is represented on the [coat of arms of Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Moscow). Some prehistoric structures, notably the [Serpent's Wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpent%27s_Wall) near [Kiev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiev), have been associated with dragons.

**Ancient India**

In the [early Vedic religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_Vedic_religion), [**Vritra**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vritra) ([Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit): वृत्र ([Devanāgarī](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devan%C4%81gar%C4%AB" \o "Devanāgarī)) or Vṛtra ([IAST](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IAST))) "the enveloper", was an [Asura](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asura) and also a "[naga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga_(mythology)" \o "Naga (mythology))" (serpent) ([Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit_language): नाग)[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-9) or possibly dragon-like creature, the personification of [drought](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drought) and enemy of [Indra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra). Vritra was also known in the [Vedas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedas) as **Ahi** ("snake") ([Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit_language): अहि),[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon" \l "cite_note-10) and he is said to have had three heads.

The [*Life of Apollonius of Tyana*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_of_Apollonius_of_Tyana) by [Flavius Philostratus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flavius_Philostratus):[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-11) contains a long detailed description of India heavily infested with dragons, but this does not correspond with modern Indian belief, and likely not with Indian belief as it was in his time, whether Apollonius invented this story, or whether he believed someone else who told him it.

**Persian**

Aži Dahāka is the source of the [modern Persian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_language) word azhdahā or ezhdehā اژده ها (Middle Persian azdahāg) meaning "dragon", often used of a dragon depicted upon a banner of war. The Persians believed that the baby of a dragon will be the same color as the mother's eyes. In [Middle Persian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Persian) he is called Dahāg or Bēvar-Asp, the latter meaning "[he who has] 10,000 horses." Several other dragons and dragon-like creatures, all of them malevolent, are mentioned in [Zoroastrian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrian) scripture. (See [Zahhāk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zahh%C4%81k)).

**Jewish**

In Jewish religious texts, the first mention of a dragon-like creature is in the [Biblical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh) works of [Job](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Job) (26:13), and [Isaiah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Isaiah) (27:1) where it is called *Nachash Bare'ach*, or a "[Pole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographical_pole) Serpent".[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-oalkvs-12) This is identified in the [Midrash Rabba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midrash_Rabba) to Genesis 1:21 as [Leviathan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan) from the word *Taninim* (תנינים) "and God created the great sea-monsters."[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-13) In [modern Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language) the word *Taninim* is used for [Crocodiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crocodile) but this is a 20th century usage unconnected with the original Biblical meaning.[*[citation needed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed" \o "Wikipedia:Citation needed)*]

In later Biblical texts, the [Book of Isaiah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Isaiah), the [Book of Job](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Job), and [Psalm 89](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_89) refer to a sea-demon called [Rahab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahab_(demon)) (not to be confused with [Rahab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahab), the woman of [Jericho](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jericho) mentioned in the [Book of Joshua](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Joshua)). [Isaiah 51:9](http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Isaiah&verse=51:9&src=AB) equates this Rahab with a dragon or monster. "Rahab" is the English transliteration of רהב (*reb*) with the several meanings: pride, a mythical sea-monster, or Egypt (as an emblematic name).[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-14) In the [Douay-Rheims](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douay-Rheims) version, translated via [Medieval Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_Latin) from the [Vulgate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulgate), the word *reb* is rendered "the proud one" in [Isaiah 51:9](http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Isaiah&verse=51:9&src=DRA) and [Job 26:12](http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Job&verse=26:12&src=DRA) and "the power of the sea" in [Psalm 88:10](http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Psalm&verse=88:10&src=DRA) (Psalm 88 is equivalent to Psalm 89 in other versions due to different verse numbering in the Vulgate). The connection between the sea-monster and "Leviathan the serpent" is made in [Isaiah 27:1](http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Isaiah&verse=27:1&src=KJV).[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-15)

In Jewish astronomy this is also identified with the [North Pole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Pole), the star [Thuban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thuban) which, around 4,500 years ago, was the star in the [Draco constellation's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draco_(constellation)) "tail".[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-oalkvs-12) However this can also have been either the [celestial pole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial_pole) or the [ecliptic pole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecliptic_pole). The ancient observers noted that Draco was at the top of the celestial pole, giving the appearance that stars were "hanging" from it, and in Hebrew it is referred to as *Teli*, from talah (תלה) – to hang.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-16) Hebrew writers from Arabic-speaking locations identified the *Teli* as *Al Jaz'har*, which is a Persian word for a "knot" or a "node" because of the intersection of the inclination of the orbit of a planet from the elliptic that forms two such nodes. In modern astronomy these are called the [ascending node](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascending_node) and the [descending node](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descending_node), but in [medieval astronomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_astronomy#Western_European_Astronomy_in_the_Middle_Ages) they were referred to as "dragon's head" and "dragon's tail".[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-17)

The [Merthyr Synagogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merthyr_Synagogue) features a dragon on the front gable.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-Kadish203-18)

**East and Southeast Asian**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dragon_on_Longshan_Temple.JPG)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf2/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dragon_on_Longshan_Temple.JPG)

Dragon sculpture on top of Longshan Temple, Taipei, Taiwan.

**Chinese dragon**

*Main article:* [*Chinese dragon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_dragon)

In China, depiction of the dragon ([traditional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_characters):龍;[simplified](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simplified_Chinese_characters):龙) can be found in artifacts from the Shang and Zhou dynasties with examples dating back to the 16th century BC.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-statue-19) Archaeologist Zhōu Chong-Fa believes that the Chinese word for dragon is an [onomatopoeia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onomatopoeia) of the sound thunder makes.[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-20) The Chinese name for dragon is pronounced "lóng" in [Mandarin Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandarin_Chinese)[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-statue-19) or "lùhng" in the [Cantonese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantonese).[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-21) Sometime after the 9th century AD, Japan adopted the Chinese dragon through the spread of Buddhism.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-statue-19) Although the indigenous name for a dragon in Japanese is tatsu (たつ**[?](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Installing_Japanese_character_sets" \o "Help:Installing Japanese character sets)**), a few of the Japanese words for dragon stem from the Chinese word for dragon, namely, "ryū" (りゅう**[?](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Installing_Japanese_character_sets" \o "Help:Installing Japanese character sets)**) or "ryō" (りょう**[?](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Installing_Japanese_character_sets" \o "Help:Installing Japanese character sets)**) ([traditional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ky%C5%ABjitai):龍;[simplified](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinjitai):竜).[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-statue-19) The [Vietnamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_dragon) word for dragon is "rồng" ([hán tự](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C3%A1n_t%E1%BB%B1" \o "Hán tự):龍) and the [Korean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_dragon) word for dragon is "ryong" ([hangul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hangul" \o "Hangul):용) ([hanja](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanja" \o "Hanja):龍).

The [Chinese dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_dragon) ([simplified Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simplified_Chinese_characters): 龙; [traditional Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_characters): 龍; [pinyin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinyin): *lóng*) is the highest-ranking animal in the Chinese animal hierarchy, strongly associated at one time with the emperor and hence power and majesty (the mythical bird [fenghuang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenghuang) was the symbol of the Chinese empress), still recognized and revered. Its origins are vague, but its "ancestors can be found on Neolithic pottery as well as Bronze Age ritual vessels."[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-22) Tradition has it composed of nine different animals, with nine sons, each with its own imagery and affiliations. It is the only mythological animal of the 12 animals that represent the [Chinese calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_calendar). 2012 is the Chinese year of the Water Dragon.

**Japanese**

*Main article:* [*Japanese dragon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_dragon)

Japanese dragon myths amalgamate native legends with imported stories about dragons from China, Korea and India. Like these other Asian dragons, most Japanese ones are [water deities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_deity) associated with rainfall and [bodies of water](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_of_water), and are typically depicted as large, wingless, serpentine creatures with clawed feet. Gould writes (1896:248),[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon" \l "cite_note-23) the Japanese dragon is "invariably figured as possessing three claws".

**Vietnam**

Vietnamese dragons (Vietnamese: rồng or long 龍) are symbolic creatures in the folklore and mythology of Vietnam. According to an ancient creation myth, the Vietnamese people are descended from a dragon and a fairy. To Vietnamese people, the dragon brings rain, essential for agriculture. It represents the emperor, the prosperity and power of the nation. Like the Chinese dragon, the Vietnamese dragon is the symbol of yang, representing the universe, life, existence, and growth. Extant references to the Vietnamese Dragon are rare now, due to the fierce changes in history that accompanied the sinicization of the Nguyễn Dynasty.

**Java**

*For the description in Indonesian see* [*id:Naga Jawa*](http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga_Jawa)*.*

[*Link to read 'id:Naga Jawa' translated into English*](http://translate.google.com/translate?u=http%3A%2F%2Fid.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FNaga_Jawa&sl=id&tl=en&hl=&ie=UTF-8)

The [**Javanese**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javan) **Dragon** (*Naga Jawa* in Javanese) is a creature of mythology, the [world serpent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_serpent) of traditional Javanese mythology. It is a derivative from the Hindu [Shiva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva) with Javanese [animism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism). In a [wayang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayang) theater story a snake ([Naga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga)) god named Sanghyang Anantaboga or [Antaboga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antaboga) is supposedly as a guardian deity in the bowels of the earth. The Javanese dragon is described as a figure of a giant magic snake without, and wearing a crown on his head. Sometimes the Javanese Dragon is depicted wearing earrings and a necklace of gold jewelry. Unlike the Chinese Dragon and European Dragon, the Javanese Dragon Java looks very unique and special because it wears a crown like a king and had no legs. Compare with the Chinese dragon which has four legs and horns on its head, and the European dragon which is like a giant long-necked lizard with wide wings.[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-24)[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-25)

**Modern depictions**

In the early 20th century sculpture of the Norwegian artist [Gustav Vigeland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Vigeland), inspired by [Medieval art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_art), dragons are a frequent theme—as symbols of [sin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin) but also as a nature force, fighting against man.

Dragons and dragon motifs are featured in many works of modern literature, particularly within the [fantasy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy) and [science fiction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_fiction) genres. Prominent works depicting dragons include [J.R.R. Tolkien](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.R.R._Tolkien)’s [*The Hobbit*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hobbit), [J. K. Rowling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._K._Rowling)’s [*Harry Potter*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter) novels, and [Anne McCaffrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_McCaffrey)’s [*Dragonriders of Pern*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragonriders_of_Pern).

The popular [role playing game](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_playing_game) system [*Dungeons & Dragons*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons) (D&D) makes heavy use of [dragons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragons_(Dungeons_%26_Dragons)), and has served as inspiration for many other games' dragons. Though dragons usually serve as adversaries, they can be either good or evil, with their [alignment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alignment_(role-playing_games)) being determined by their color (species). For example, a [red dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Dragon_(Dungeons_%26_Dragons)) is evil and breathes fire.

Some modern pseudo-biological accounts of dragons give them the [generic name](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name_of_a_biological_genus) *Draco*, although the generic name [*Draco*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draco_(genus)) is used in real-world biology for a genus of small gliding agamid lizard. An infectious disease called [Dracunculiasis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracunculiasis), caused by infection with the Guinea worm which grows up to 3 feet (0.91 m) long before emerging from its host, also derives its name from dragons (literally "infestation with little dragons"), based on the burning pain experienced by sufferers.

Some [creationists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationist_perspectives_on_dinosaurs#Paleontology_and_dinosaurs) believe that dragons of mythology were actually [dinosaurs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur), and that they died out with other creatures around the end of the [ice age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice_age).[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-26)[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-27)

**Animals that may have inspired dragons**

[Nile crocodiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nile_crocodile), today very restricted in range, were in ancient times occasionally found in Southern Europe, having swum across the [Mediterranean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean). Such wayward crocodiles may have inspired dragon myths.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-Ormen-8) Skeletons of whales, as well as dinosaur and mammalian fossils may have been occasionally mistaken for the bones of dragons and other mythological creatures; for example, a discovery in 300 BC in [Wucheng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wucheng)[[*disambiguation needed [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d1/InterlanguageLinks-Asset-Pencil-Hover.gif](http://toolserver.org/~dispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=Dragon&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn)*](http://toolserver.org/%7Edispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=Dragon&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn)], [Sichuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sichuan), [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China), was labeled as such by [Chang Qu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chang_Qu).[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-Ormen-8)[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-28) [Adrienne Mayor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrienne_Mayor) has written on the subject of fossils as the inspiration for myths in her book *The First Fossil Hunters*,[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-29) and in an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Geology* she wrote: "Fossil remains generated a variety of [geomyths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geomythology) speculating on the creatures' identity and cause of their destruction. Many ancient cultures, from China and India to Greece, America, and Australia, told tales of dragons, monsters, and giant heroes.."[[31]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon" \l "cite_note-30) In Australia, stories of such creatures may have referred to the land crocodiles, [*Quinkana*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quinkana) sp., a terrestrial crocodile which grew to 5 to possibly 7 metres long, or the 4 tonne monitor lizard [*Varanus priscus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varanus_priscus) (formerly *Megalania prisca*) a giant carnivorous [goanna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goanna) that might have grown to 7 metres, and weighed up to 1,940 kilograms, or rainbow serpents (possibly [*Wonambi naracoortensis*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonambi_naracoortensis)) that were part of the extinct [megafauna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megafauna) of Australia.[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-31) Today the Komodo monitor lizard *Varanus komodoensis* is known in English as the [Komodo dragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komodo_dragon).

In the book [*An Instinct for Dragons*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Instinct_for_Dragons)[[33]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon#cite_note-32) [anthropologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropologist) [David E. Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_E._Jones&action=edit&redlink=1) suggests a hypothesis that humans just like monkeys have inherited instinctive reactions to snakes, large cats and birds of prey. Dragons have features that are combinations of these three. An instinctive fear for these three would explain why dragons with similar features occur in stories from independent cultures on all continents. Other authors have suggested that especially under the influence of drugs or in dreams, this instinct may give rise to fantasies about dragons, snakes, spiders, etc., which would explain why these symbols are popular in drug culture.

Another explanation to the folklore dragons does however not rely on human instinct, but on the assumption that fossil remains of [dinosaurs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaurs) gave rise to similar speculations all over the world.[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)]