

Chapter 1 : Semele and Zeus

Semele was a daughter of Poseidon's grandson, Cadmus, the King of Thebes, and Harmonia. Through Harmonia, Semele was a granddaughter of Ares and my cousin Aphrodite, and therefore, great-granddaughter of Zeus.

Flying over the scene in the guise of an eagle, Zeus fell in love with Semele and repeatedly visited her secretly. Appearing as an old crone, [11] Hera befriended Semele, who confided in her that her lover was actually Zeus. Curious, Semele asked Zeus to grant her a boon. Zeus, eager to please his beloved, promised on the River Styx to grant her anything she wanted. She then demanded that Zeus reveal himself in all his glory as proof of his divinity. Though Zeus begged her not to ask this, she persisted and he was forced by his oath to comply. Zeus tried to spare her by showing her the smallest of his bolts and the sparsest thunderstorm clouds he could find. Mortals, however, cannot look upon the gods without incinerating, and she perished, consumed in lightning-ignited flame. A few months later, Dionysus was born. This leads to his being called "the twice-born". Jupiter gave his torn up heart in a drink to Semele, who became pregnant this way. But in another account, Zeus swallows the heart himself, in order to beget his seed on Semele. Hera then convinces Semele to ask Zeus to come to her as a god, and on doing so she dies, and Zeus seals the unborn baby up in his thigh. Since an Oriental inscribed cylindrical seal found at the palace can be dated 14th centuries BCE, [22] the myth of Semele must be Mycenaean or earlier in origin. At the Alcyonian Lake near the prehistoric site of Lerna, Dionysus, guided by Prosymnus or Polymnus, descended to Tartarus to free his once-mortal mother. Annual rites took place there in classical times; Pausanias refuses to describe them. And others yet, lord, say you were born in Thebes; but all these lie. The Father of men and gods gave you birth remote from men and secretly from white-armed Hera. There is a certain Nysa, a mountain most high and richly grown with woods, far off in Phoenice, near the streams of Aegyptus One-ninth was burnt on the altar in the Hellenic way; the rest was torn and eaten raw by the votaries. Semele embracing her son Dionysus, with Apollo looking on and a satyr playing an aulos In Etruscan culture[edit] Semele is attested with the Etruscan name form Semla, depicted on the back of a bronze mirror from the fourth century BCE. Roscher includes the name Stimula among the indigitamenta, the lists of Roman deities maintained by priests to assure that the correct divinity was invoked in public rituals. Inhabited, they say, by Italian Maenads. Ino, asking them their nation, learned they were Arcadians, And that Evander was the king of the place. Arcadas esse audit et Euandrum scepra tenere loci; dissimulata deam Latias Saturnia Bacchas instimulat fictis insidiosa sonis: The Romans viewed the Bacchanals with suspicion, based on reports of ecstatic behaviors contrary to Roman social norms and the secrecy of initiatory rite. In BCE, the Roman senate took severe actions to limit the cult, without banning it. Religious beliefs and myths associated with Dionysus were successfully adapted and remained pervasive in Roman culture, as evidenced for instance by the Dionysian scenes of Roman wall painting [31] and on sarcophagi from the 1st to the 4th centuries CE. The Greek cult of Dionysus had flourished among the Etruscans in the archaic period, and had been made compatible with Etruscan religious beliefs. This goddess had a major cult center at Satricum that was built 600 BCE. The female consort who appears with Bacchus in the acroterial statues there may be either Semele or Ariadne. In the Neoplatonic philosophy of Henry More 1650, for instance, Semele was thought to embody "intellectual imagination", and was construed as the opposite of Arachne, "sense perception".

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Semele was a princess of Thebes in Greek mythology, daughter of the hero Cadmus and theinnatdunvilla.com was the only mortal to become the parent of a god. Zeus fell in love with Semele while watching her sacrifice a bull on his altar and visited her many times afterwards.

Dionysus and his followers could not be bound by fetters. Word soon got around and Hera quickly assumed who was responsible. When Zeus visited her again, she made him promise to grant her one wish. She went so far as to make him swear on the River Styx that he would grant her request. Zeus was madly in love and agreed. She then asked him to show her his true form. He appeared in his true form and Semele was instantly burnt to a crisp by the sight of his glory. Zeus managed to rescue the fetal Dionysus and stitched him into his thigh until he would be ready to be born. His birth from Zeus conferred immortality upon him. Dionysus wandered the world actively spreading his cult. He was accompanied by the Maenads, wild women, flush with wine, shoulders draped with a fawn skin, carrying rods tipped with pine cones. While other gods had temples to be worshipped at, the followers of Dionysus worshipped him in the woods. Even though he had never seen Semele, he was concerned for her. Eventually, he journeyed into the underworld to find her. He faced down Thanatos and brought her back to Mount Olympus. One was rebirth after death; his dismemberment by the Titans and his return to life was symbolically echoed in viticulture, where the vines must be pruned back sharply, and then become dormant in winter for them to bear fruit. Another concept was that under the influence of wine, one could feel possessed by a greater power. The festival for Dionysus was held in the spring when vines would start bearing leaves. Most of the great Greek plays were initially written to be performed at the feast of Dionysus. All participants, writers, actors, spectators, were regarded as sacred servants of Dionysus during the festival.

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Semele (/ˈɛːsˈɛmɛˈliː/; Greek: Ἑλένη *Semelḗ*), in Greek mythology, was the youngest daughter of the Boeotian hero Cadmus and Harmonia, and the mother of Dionysus by Zeus in one of his many origin myths.

Demeter, goddess of the harvest wealth, was still more the divine sorrowing mother who saw her daughter die each year. Persephone was the radiant maiden of the spring and the summertime, whose light step upon the dry, brown hillside was enough to make it fresh and blooming, as Sappho writes. I heard the footfall of flowering spring But all the while Persephone knew how brief that beauty was; fruits, flowers, leaves, all the fair growth of earth, must end with the coming of the cold and pass like herself into the power of death. After the lord of the dark world below carried her away she was never again the gay young creature who had played in the flowery meadow without a thought of care or trouble. She did indeed rise from the dead every spring, but she brought with her the memory of where she had come from; with all her bright beauty there was something strange and awesome about her. She was often said to be "the maiden whose name may not be spoken" The Olympians were "the happy gods," "the deathless gods," far removed from suffering mortals destined to die. But in their grief and at the hour of death, men could turn for compassion to the goddess who sorrowed and the goddess who died. This story is very differently told from the story of Demeter. Dionysus was the last god to enter Olympus. Homer did not admit him. There are no early sources for his story except a few brief allusions in Hesiod, in the eighth or ninth century. He was the only god whose parents were not both divine. At Thebes alone do mortal women bear Immortal gods. Semele was the most unfortunate woman of all those Zeus fell in love with, and in her case too the reason was Hera. Zeus was madly in love with her and told her than anything she asked of him he would do; he swore it by the river Styx, the oath which not even he himself could break. She told him that what she wanted above all else was to see him in his full splendor as King of Heaven and Lord of the Thunderbolt. It was Hera who had put that wish in her heart. Zeus knew that no mortal could behold him thus and live, but he could do nothing. He had sworn by the Styx. He came as she had asked, and before that awful glory of burning light she died. But Zeus snatched from her her child that was near birth, and hid it in his own side away from Hera until the time had come for it to be born. Some say the nymphs were the Hyades, whom Zeus afterwards placed in the sky as stars, the stars which bring rain when they near the horizon. So the God of the Vine was born of fire and nursed by rain, the hard burning heat that ripens the grapes and the water that keeps the plant alive. Grown to manhood, Dionysus wandered far to strange places. The storm-swept country of Medes; And Araby the Blest. Everywhere he taught men the culture of the vine and the mysteries of his worship and everywhere they accepted him as a god until he drew near to his own country. On a great headland by the shore they saw a beautiful youth. His rich dark hair flowed down over a purple cloak that covered his strong shoulders. He looked like a son of kings, one whose parents could pay a great ransom. Exulting, the sailors sprang ashore and seized him. On board the ship they fetched rude bonds to fetter him with, but to their amazement they were unable to bind him; the ropes would not hold together; they fell apart when they touched his hands or feet. And he sat looking at them with a smile in his dark eyes. This must be a god and should be set free at once or deadly harm would come to them. But the captain mocked him for a silly fool and bade the crew hasten to hoist the sail. The wind filled it and the men drew taut the sheets, but the ship did not move. Then wonder upon wonder happened. Fragrant wine ran in streams down the deck; a vine with many clusters spread out over the sail; a dark green ivy plant twined around the mast like a garland, with flowers in it and lovely fruits. Terror-stricken, the pirates ordered the helmsman to put in to land. Too late, for as they spoke their captive became a lion, roaring and glaring terribly. At that, they leaped overboard and instantly were changed into dolphins, all except the good helmsman. On him the god had mercy. He held him back and bade him take courage, for he had found favor with one who was indeed a god -- Dionysus, whom Semele bore in union with Zeus. When he passed through Thrace on his way to Greece, the god was insulted by one of the kings there, Lycurgus, who bitterly opposed this new worship. Dionysus retreated before him and even took refuge from him in the depths of the sea. But later he came back, overpowered him and punished him for his wickedness, though mildly, by Imprisoning

him within a rocky cave until his first fierce maddening rage passed slowly and he learned to know the god whom he had mocked. But the other gods were not mild. Zeus struck Lycurgus blind and he died soon after. None lived long who strove with gods. Some time during his wanderings, Dionysus came upon the princess of Crete, Ariadne, when she was utterly desolate, having been abandoned on the shore of the island of Naxos by the Athenian prince, Theseus, whose life she had saved. Dionysus had compassion upon her. He rescued her, and in the end loved her. When she died Dionysus took a crown he had given her and placed it among the stars. The mother whom he had never seen was not forgotten. He longed for her so greatly that at last he dared the terrible descent to the lower world to seek her. When he found her, he defied the power of death to keep her from him; and Death yielded. Dionysus brought her away, but not to live on earth. He took her up to Olympus, where the gods consented to receive her as one of themselves, a mortal, indeed, but the mother of a god and therefore fit to dwell with immortals. The God of Wine could be kind and beneficent. He could also be cruel and drive men on to frightful deeds. Often he made them mad. They rushed through woods and over mountains uttering sharp cries, waving pine cone tipped wands, swept away in a fierce ecstasy. Nothing could stop them. They would tear to pieces the wild creatures they met and devour the bloody shreds of flesh. They sang, Oh, sweet upon the mountain The dancing and singing Oh, sweet to sink to earth outworn When the wild goat has been hunted and caught. Oh, the joy of the blood and the raw red flesh! The gods of Olympus loved order and beauty in their sacrifices and their temples. The mad women, the Maenads, had no temples. They went to the wilderness to worship, to the wildest mountains, the deepest forests, as if they kept to the customs of an ancient time before men had thought of building houses for their gods. They went out of the dusty, crowded city, back to the clean purity of the untrodden hills and woodlands. There Dionysus gave them food and drink: Their beds were on the soft meadow grass; under the thick leaved trees; where the pine needles fall year after year. They woke to a sense of peace and heavenly freshness; they bathed in a clear brook. There was much that was lovely, good and freeing in this worship under the open sky and the ecstasy of joy it brought in the wild beauty of the world. And yet always present, too, was the horrible bloody feast. The worship of Dionysus was centered in these two ideas so far apart - of freedom and ecstatic joy and of savage brutality. The God of Wine could give either to his worshipers. Dionysus came to Thebes to establish his worship there. He was accompanied, as was his custom by a train of women dancing and singing exultant songs, wearing fawn-skins over their robes, waving ivy-wreathed wands. They seemed mad with joy. They sang, O Bacchanals, come.

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Semele was the daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia, king and queen of Thebes, and the mother of Dionysus, god of wine. Zeus fell madly in love with her and made an oath to do anything that she asked. Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, realized Zeus was in love with Semele and tricked Semele into asking.

The Priests and Augurs proclaim that the omens for the marriage seem propitious, but Semele has been inventing one excuse after another to delay the wedding because she is secretly in love with Jupiter. She pleads to Jupiter for help, and his thunder interrupts the ceremony and extinguishes the sacrificial flames on the altar of Juno, his wife. Ino reveals to the astonished Athamus that she loves him. Iris reports that Jupiter has built his new mortal lover an elaborate new palace on Mount Cithaeron, and warns that it is guarded by fierce dragons that never sleep. The enraged Juno swears vengeance, and hastens to visit Somnus, the God of Sleep, in order to enlist his aid. Semele, attended by Loves and Zephyrs, yearns for Jupiter. He arrives, in human form, reassures her of his fidelity, and reminds her that she is only mortal and needs time to rest between their bouts of lovemaking. Semele professes devotion to him, but reveals her discontent that she has not been made immortal. Jupiter, recognising that Semele has dangerous ambition, transforms the palace to Arcadia, charms her with its pastoral delights, and magically summons her sister Ino to keep her company. The enraptured Ino describes the heavenly music she has heard on the way to Mount Cithaeron whilst carried by two winged Zephyrs. The sisters, and a chorus of nymphs and swains, sing of the joys of music. He lethargically refuses to help Juno, but is enlivened when Juno promises him the reward of his favourite nymph, Pasithea. She assumes the form of Ino, pretends to believe that Semele has been made immortal, and gives Semele a magical mirror that deceives the foolish girl into thinking herself even more beautiful than usual. Semele eagerly accepts this advice. Juno departs when she senses the approach of Jupiter. Inflamed by desire for Semele, Jupiter is astonished when she acts coldly toward him. He rashly swears an irrevocable vow to grant her whatever she desires, and she demands that he visit her in his natural guise. He reacts with horror, knowing that his lightning bolts will certainly kill her, but Semele refuses to listen to reason, assuming that Jupiter does not wish to grant her immortality. Juno gloats in triumph at her victory. Semele sees Jupiter descend as a fiery cloud of lightning and thunder, laments her folly, and dies consumed in flames. Ino, safely returned to Boeotia, announces the tragic news that Semele has perished. However, some good has come of it: The success of his English oratorios, confirmed by the reception of Messiah in London in 1741, led him into a new creative phase. But his company, as with the two Italian opera companies that had played in London before, was collapsing. I have found it a most dear undertaking! I was not in the management: Lord Middlesex was chief. We were thirty subscribers, at two hundred pounds each, which was to last four years, and no other demands ever to be made. Instead of that, we have been made to pay fifty-six pounds over and above the subscription in one winter. I told the secretary in a passion, that it was the last money I would ever pay for the follies of directors. For his next work, Handel turned away from Old Testament texts to Greek mythology. Reviving a libretto that had been written by William Congreve in 1691, and possibly with the assistance of Newburgh Hamilton, Handel chose the story of Semele. It is clear from his re-arrangement of the text that he considered this work an Italian opera in all but name. Semele was first performed at the Covent Garden Theatre on 10th February 1744. Handel already had many enemies in London at this time, and this direct challenge to the opera company in the Haymarket did not make him any new friends. Indeed, he had argued with the Prince of Wales himself. The day after the first performance, Mary Delaney reported her impressions of Semele to her sister: Semele ran for just four performances initially, with two further performances in December of the same year. The music for these last two was slightly re-written, and Handel interpolated arias from Arminio, Giustino and Alcina. But this was no more successful, and after Handel never revived Semele again.

Chapter 5 : Notes on Book 3: Semele and The Birth of Bacchus from Metamorphoses

SEMELE THYONE was the mother of Dionysos and the goddess of the Bacchic frenzy which seized female devotees of the god during the Orgies. Thyone's mortal name was Semele. She was a Theban princess loved by the god Zeus. When his wife Hera learned of their affair, she tricked the girl into having.

She was a Theban princess loved by the god Zeus. When his wife Hera learned of their affair, she tricked the girl into having Zeus swear an oath to appear before her in his full glory. Bound by his pledge the god did so and Semele was consumed by the fire of his lightning-bolts. Zeus recovered their son Dionysos from her womb and upon reaching adulthood he fetched her from the underworld to join the gods on Olympos. She was beloved by Zeus Hom. Zeus, who had promised that he would grant her every request, did as she desired. He appeared to her as the god of thunder, and Semele was consumed by the fire of lightning; but Zeus saved her child Dionysus, with whom she was pregnant Apollod., iii. The inhabitants of Brasiae, in Laconia, related that Semele, after having given birth to Dionysus, was thrown by her father Cadmus in a boat upon the sea, and that her body was driven to the coast of Brasiae, where it was buried ; whereas Dionysus, whose life was saved, was brought up at Brasiae Paus. After her death, the common account continues, she was led by her son out of the lower world, and carried up to Olympus as Thyone Pind. A statue of her and her tomb were shown at Thebes. Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology. Sandys Greek lyric C5th B. Aldrich Greek mythographer C2nd A. Jones Greek travelogue C2nd A. His daughters too have made him a name; Semele was famed for having a child by Zeus" Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 4. Oldfather Greek historian C1st B. Grant Roman mythographer C2nd A. Rouse Greek epic C5th A. Then Semele fourth of the daughters grew up, the image of the Kharites Charites, Graces in her lovestriking looks, preserved for Zeus; although youngest of the sisters, she alone was given by nature the prerogative of unconquerable beauty. Evelyn-White Greek epic C8th or 7th B. And now they both are gods. Evelyn-White Greek epic C7th to 4th B. And others yet, lord, say you were born in Thebes: Child of fair-faced Semele. Conway Greek lyric C5th B. But Semele was deceived by Hera into asking her to come to her as he came to Hera during their courtship. So Zeus, unable to refuse her, arrived in her bridal chamber in a chariot with lightning flashes and thunder, and sent a thunderbolt at her. Semele died of fright, and Zeus grabbed from the fire her sixth-month aborted baby, which he sewed into his thigh. Accordingly, Zeus visited her in a way befitting a god, accompanied by thundering and lightning, revealing himself to her as he embraced her; but Semele, who was pregnant and unable to endure the majesty of the divine presence, brought forth the babe untimely and was herself slain by the fire. Thereupon Zeus, taking up the child [Dionysos], handed it over to the care of Hermes, and ordered him to take it to the cave in Nysa. Semele, who was no longer alive when found, received a splendid funeral, but they brought up Dionysos. For this reason the name of their city, hitherto Oreiatai, was changed to Brasiai after the washing up of the chest to land. The people of Brasiai add that Ino in the course of her wanderings came to the country and agreed to become the nurse of Dionysos. They show the cave where Ino nursed him, and call the plain the garden of Dionysos. Fairbanks Greek rhetorician C3rd A. A cloud of fire encompassing Thebes breaks into the dwelling of Kadmos Cadmus as Zeus comes wooing Semele; and Semele apparently is destroyed, but Dionysos is born, by Zeus, so I believe, in the presence of the fire. And the form of Semele is dimly seen as she goes to the heavens, where the Mousai Muses will hymn her praises: Liber [Dionysos] by Semele daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia. He took Liber [Dionysos] from her womb, and gave him to Nysus to be cared for. Her request was granted, and Jove, coming with lightning and thunder, burned Semele to death. From her womb Liber [Dionysos] was born. Mercury [Hermes] snatched him from the fire and gave him to Nysus to be reared. In Greek he is called Dionysus. Melville Roman epic C1st B. That girl herself must now be dealt with. Yet secret stolen love may well be all she wants. My marriage bonds suffer brief harm. Her budding womb carries her glaring guilt. She means to be a mother by great Jove [Zeus]--luck hardly ever mine! Such confidence in her good looks! She was Beroe, the Epidaurian nurse of Semele. They talked of many things and then the name of Jove [Zeus] came up. So often men, claiming to be gods, have gained the beds of simple girls. But even to be Jove is not enough; he ought to prove his love, if he is Jove. The girl,

unwittingly, asked of Jove a boon unnamed. In bitterest grief he soared ascending to the ethereal sky, and by his nod called up the trailing clouds and massed a storm, with lightnings in the squalls, and thunder and the bolts that never miss. That was too fierce. There is another bolt, a lighter one, in which the Cyclops forged a flame less savage and a lesser wrath, called by the gods his second armament. Then her mortal frame could not endure the tumult of the heavens; that gift of love consumed her. Down on earth as destiny ordained these things took place, and Bacchus [Dionysos], baby twice born, was cradled safe and sound. With the immortals Semele of the flowing locks lives still--who died in the roar of thunder--and Pallas [Athene] loves her ever, and Zeus no less, and dearly too the ivy-bearing god [Dionysos], her son. It is here that they say Semele was brought out of Hades by Dionysos, and that Herakles dragged up the Hound of Hades. But I cannot bring myself to believe even that Semele died at all, seeing that she was the wife of Zeus. Father Liber [Dionysos]; he descended for Semele, his mother, daughter of Cadmus. When Liber [Dionysos] received permission from his father to bring back his mother Semele from the lower world, and in seeking a place of descent had come to the land of the Argives, a certain Hyplipnus met him, a man worthy of that generation, who was to show the entrance to Liber [Dionysos] in answer to his request. So then, when Liber came to that place and was about to descend, he left the crown, which he had received as a gift from Venus [Aphrodite], at that place which in consequence is called Stephanos, for he was unwilling to take it with him for fear the immortal gift of the gods would be contaminated by contact with the dead. When he brought his mother back unharmed, he is said to have placed the crown in the stars as an everlasting memorial. Miller Roman tragedy C1st A. What more do you want after heaven and the starry sky. You have conceived a son who will make mortals forget their troubles,, you shall bring forth joy for gods and men. So the babe half-grown, and his limbs washed with heavenly fire, was carried by Hermes to his father for the lying-in. Zeus was able to change the mind of jealous Hera, to clam and undo the savage threatening resentment which burdened her. So her new body bathed in the purifying fire. Instead of Kadmos Cadmus and the soil of earth, instead of Autonoe and Agaue Agave , she found Artemis by her side, she had converse with Athena, she received the heavens as her wedding-gift, sitting at one table with Zeus and Hermaon [Hermes] and Ares and Kythereia Cytherea [Aphrodite]. Zeus brought forth my son, he was the mother in my place! The father begot, the father brought forth his begotten. He brought forth a child from a makeshift womb of his own, and forced nature to change. Bakkhos Bacchus was stronger than Enyalios; your Ares he only begot, and never childed with his thigh! Thebes has eclipsed the glory of Ortygia! For Leto the divine was chased about and brought forth Apollon on the sly; Leto brought forth Phoibos Phoebus , Kronion Cronion had no labour for him; Maia brought forth Hermes, her husband did not deliver him; but my son was brought forth openly by his father. See Dionysos in the arms of your own mother, he lies on that cherishing arm! The Dispenser of the eternal universe, the first sown Beginning of the gods, the Allmother, became a nurse for Bromios; she offered to infant Bakkhos the breast which Zeus High and Mighty has sucked! What Kronides Cronides was ever in labour, what Rheia was ever nurse for your boy? But this Kybele Cybele who is called your mother brought forth Zeus and suckled Bakkhos Bacchus in the same lap! She dandled them both, the son and the father. Semele mother of Dionysos], because she owed it to Bromios that she was a goddess. Semele in her joy addressed her seafaring sister in mockery: I had an immortal husband in Kronides [Zeus] the plower of my field, who brought forth the fruit of my birth instead of me; but you were wedded to a mortal mate Athamas, the murderer of your family. I will not compare heavenly Dionysos with Melikertes down in the water! The chamber of Semele, still breathing sparks of the marriage thunders, was shaded by selfgrowing bunches of green leaves which intoxicated the place with sweet odours. Taylor Greek hymns C3rd B. Born from the deathless counsels, secret, high, of Kronion Cronion Zeus, regent of the sky; whom Persephone permits to view the light, and visit mortals from the realms of night. Now I invoke thee, great queen Kadmeis, to bless thy mystics, lenient and serene. Dionysos, Insewn, with your mother Semele who men call Thyone. Then, oh then, are flung on the immortal earth the lovely tresses of violets, and roses are entwined in the hair; then ring the voices of songs to the sound of flutes; then ring the dances in honour of diadem-wreathed Semele. Zeus and Hermes are conversing; near stand Dionysos and [the apotheosized] Semele, with [her apotheosized sister] Ino by her side.

Chapter 6 : Handel House - Handel's Operas: Semele

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The background to his return is presented in the prologue, in which Dionysus tells the story of his mother, Semele, once a princess in the royal Theban house of Cadmus. She had an affair with Zeus, the king of the gods, and became pregnant. Zeus, too powerful for a mortal to behold, emerged from the sky as a bolt of lightning and burnt Semele to a cinder. He managed, however, to rescue his unborn son Dionysus and stitched the baby into his thigh. He arrives in town disguised as the stranger, accompanied by a band of bacchants, to punish the family for their treatment of his mother and their refusal to offer him sacrifices. Cithaeron to worship him and perform his rites on the mountainside. As the ruler of the state and preserver of social order, Pentheus finds himself threatened by the Dionysian rites bringing the women from the city into the forest. Unconvinced of their divinely-caused insanity, he sees their drunken cavorting as an illicit attempt to escape the mores and legal codes regulating Theban society. His response is therefore a political one, as he orders his soldiers to arrest the Lydian stranger and his maenads, whom he sees as the root of the troubles. Deviously, Dionysus allows himself to be easily arrested and taken to Pentheus with the others. In the first of three encounters, Dionysus begins the long process of trapping Pentheus and leading him to his death. The encounter begins with the powerful Pentheus thinking he has caught the delicate stranger. He orders his androgynous prisoner to be chained, bound, and tortured but soon finds it impossible to do so. When Pentheus tries to tie Dionysus he ties only a bull, when Pentheus plunges a knife into Dionysus the blade passes only through shadow. Suddenly an earthquake shakes the palace, a fire starts, and Pentheus is left weak and puzzled. In their second exchange, Dionysus tries to persuade Pentheus to abandon his destructive path, but Pentheus does not relent. A cowherd arrives and describes his sighting of the maddened women of Cadmus. All the women were seen resting blissfully in the forest, feasting on milk, honey and wine that sprang from the ground. They played music, suckled wild animals and sang and danced with joy. But when they saw the cowherd, they flew into a murderous rage and chased after him. Pentheus, on the verge of launching a military expedition to arrest the band, suddenly cannot resist the opportunity to see the forbidden. He agrees to do all Dionysus suggests, dressing himself in a wig and long skirts. The effeminate Pentheus, stripped of his masculinity and authority, is revealed as a vain, boastful and lecherous creature. Once in the woods, Pentheus cannot see the bacchants from the ground, and wants to mount a tree for a better vantage. Dionysus miraculously bends a tall fir tree, puts Pentheus on top, and gently straightens the tree. At once the maenads see him, and Dionysus orders them to attack the vulnerable ruler. With rolling eyes and frenzied cries the women attack, bringing Pentheus down and dragging him to the ground. But Agaue, driven mad by Dionysus, proceeds to rip her son to death. At the palace the chorus is exultant and sings the praise of Dionysus. She is still deluded and boasts to all about the young lion she hunted and beheaded. Old Cadmus, who knows what has happened, sadly approaches his daughter and draws her mind back to the palace, her family and finally what she is holding in her hands. Agaue begins to weep. Cadmus remarks that the god has punished the family rightly but excessively. In the end, Dionysus finally appears in his true form to the city. He banishes Agaue from Thebes and ordains that Cadmus and his wife will turn into snakes, destined to invade Greek lands with a horde of barbarians.

Chapter 7 : Semele | Religion-wiki | FANDOM powered by Wikia

Semele. A daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia, at Thebes, and accordingly a sister of Ino, Agave, Autonoe, and theinnatdunvilla.com was beloved by Zeus, 1 and Hera, stimulated by jealousy, appeared to her in the form of her aged nurse Beroë, and induced her to pray Zeus to visit her in the same splendor and majesty with which he appeared to Hera.

He was depicted as either an older, bearded god or an effeminate, long-haired youth. His attributes included the thyrsos a pine-cone tipped staff , a drinking cup and a crown of ivy. He was usually accompanied by a troop of Satyrs and Mainades wild female devotees. Bound by oath, the god was forced to comply and she was consumed by the heat of his lightning-bolts. Zeus recovered their unborn child from her body, sewed him up in his own thigh, and carried him to term. As punishment, the god inflicted him with madness causing him to murder his wife and son and mutilate himself with an axe. However, some shepherds, upon drinking the wine, thought they had been poisoned and killed him. The sorrowful god then set him amongst the stars as the constellation Bootes. The god infested their ship with phantoms of creeping vines and wild beasts, and in terror the men leapt overboard and were transformed into dolphins. His other attributes included a drinking-cup kantharos , fruiting grapevines and a panther. The god was usually clothed in a long robe chiton and cloak himation and crowned with a wreath of ivy-leaves. Below are some examples of his attributes as depicted in ancient Greek art: Pine-cone staff thyrsos ; 2. The god rode on the back of a panther or drove a chariot drawn by a pair of the beasts. His sacred plants were the grapevine, ivy, bindweed prickly ivy and pine tree. Devotees of the god wore wreaths of ivy and carried pine-cone tipped staffs. COM This site contains a total of 14 pages describing the god, including general descriptions, mythology, and cult. The content is outlined in the Index of Dionysus Pages left column or below. Cicero De Natura Deorum 3. The god was known as the "twice-born" for his mother was slain by the lightning-bolts of Zeus during the course of her pregnancy, but rescued by his father who carried him to term sown up inside his thigh. He married Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Krete Crete , and their sons became kings and princes of the best wine-producing regions in ancient Greece. He is also called both by Greeks and Romans Bacchus Bakchos , that is, the noisy or riotous god, which was originally a mere epithet or surname of Dionysus, but does not occur till after the time of Herodotus. Ammon there entrusted the child to Nysa, the daughter of Aristaeus, and Athena likewise undertook to protect the boy. Others again represent him as a son of Zeus by Persephone or Iris, or describe him simply as a son of Lethe, or of Indus. The same diversity of opinions prevails in regard to the native place of the god, which in the common tradition is Thebes, while in others we find India, Libya, Crete, Dracanium in Samos, Naxos, Elis, Eleutherae, or Teos, mentioned as his birthplace. It is owing to this diversity in the traditions that ancient writers were driven to the supposition that there were originally several divinities which were afterwards identified under the one name of Dionysus. The common story, which makes Dionysus a son of Semele by Zeus, runs as follows: Hera, jealous of Semele, visited her in the disguise of a friend, or an old woman, and persuaded her to request Zeus to appear to her in the same glory and majesty in which he was accustomed to approach his own wife Hera. When all entreaties to desist from this request were fruitless, Zeus at length complied, and appeared to her in thunder and lightning. Semele was terrified and overpowered by the sight, and being seized by the fire, she gave premature birth to a child. Zeus, or according to others, Hermes Apollon. Mastaura , who took the child to Ino and Athamas at Orchomenos, and persuaded them to bring him up as a girl. Hera was now urged on by her jealousy to throw Ino and Athamas into a state of madness, and Zeus, in order to save his child, changed him into a ram, and carried him to the nymphs of mount Nysa, who brought him up in a cave, and were afterwards rewarded for it by Zeus, by being placed as Hyades among the stars. The inhabitants of Brasiae, in Laconia, according to Pausanias iii. The chest was carried by the wind and waves to the coast of Brasiae. Semele was found dead, and was solemnly buried, but Dionysus was brought up by Ino, who happened at the time to be at Brasiae. The plain of Brasiae was, for this reason, afterwards called the garden of Dionysus. The traditions about the education of Dionysus, as well as about the personages who undertook it, differ as much as those about his parentage and birthplace. Mystis, moreover, is said to have

instructed him in the mysteries Nonn. On mount Nysa, Bromie and Bacche too are called his nurses. Mount Nysa, from which the god was believed to have derived his name, was not only in Thrace and Libya, but mountains of the same name are found in different parts of the ancient world where he was worshipped, and where he was believed to have introduced the cultivation of the vine. Hermes, however, is mixed up with most of the stories about the infancy of Dionysus, and he was often represented in works of art, in connexion with the infant god. When Dionysus had grown up, Hera threw him also into a state of madness, in which he wandered about through many countries of the earth. A tradition in Hyginus Poet. One of two asses he met there carried him across the water, and the grateful god placed both animals among the stars, and asses henceforth remained sacred to Dionysus. According to the common tradition, Dionysus first wandered through Egypt, where he was hospitably received by king Proteus. He now traversed all Asia. When he arrived at the Euphrates, he built a bridge to cross the river, but a tiger sent to him by Zeus carried him across the river Tigris. The most famous part of his wanderings in Asia is his expedition to India, which is said to have lasted three, or, according to some, even 52 years. He did not in those distant regions meet with a kindly reception everywhere, for Myrrhanus and Deriades, with his three chiefs Blemys, Orontes, and Oruandes, fought against him. But Dionysus and the host of Pans, Satyrs, and Bacchic women, by whom he was accompanied, conquered his enemies, taught the Indians the cultivation of the vine and of various fruits, and the worship of the gods; he also founded towns among them, gave them laws, and left behind him pillars and monuments in the happy land which he had thus conquered and civilized, and the inhabitants worshipped him as a god. Dionysus also visited Phrygia and the goddess Cybele or Rhea, who purified him and taught him the mysteries, which according to Apollodorus iii. With the assistance of his companions, he drove the Amazons from Ephesus to Samos, and there killed a great number of them on a spot which was, from that occurrence, called Panaema. According to another legend, he united with the Amazons to fight against Cronus and the Titans, who had expelled Ammon from his dominions. He is even said to have gone to Iberia, which, on leaving, he entrusted to the government of Pan. On his passage through Thrace he was ill received by Lycurgus, king of the Edones, and leaped into the sea to seek refuge with Thetis, whom he afterwards rewarded for her kind reception with a golden urn, a present of Hephaestus. All the host of Bacchantic women and Satyrs, who had accompanied him, were taken prisoners by Lycurgus, but the women were soon set free again. The country of the Edones thereupon ceased to bear fruit, and Lycurgus became mad and killed his own son, whom he mistook for a vine, or, according to others Serv. When this was done, his madness ceased, but the country still remained barren, and Dionysus declared that it would remain so till Lycurgus died. The Edones, in despair, took their king and put him in chains, and Dionysus had him torn to pieces by horses. After then proceeding through Thrace without meeting with any further resistance, he returned to Thebes, where he compelled the women to quit their houses, and to celebrate Bacchic festivals on mount Cithaeron, or Parnassus. Pentheus, who then ruled at Thebes, endeavoured to check the riotous proceedings, and went out to the mountains to seek the Bacchic women; but his own mother, Agave, in her Bacchic fury, mistook him for an animal, and tore him to pieces. After Dionysus had thus proved to the Thebans that he was a god, he went to Argos. As the people there also refused to acknowledge him, he made the women mad to such a degree, that they killed their own babes and devoured their flesh. According to another statement, Dionysus with a host of women came from the islands of the Aegean to Argos, but was conquered by Perseus, who slew many of the women. Afterwards, however, Dionysus and Perseus became reconciled, and the Argives adopted the worship of the god, and built temples to him. One of these was called the temple of Dionysus Cresius, because the god was believed to have buried on that spot Ariadne, his beloved, who was a Cretan. The last feat of Dionysus was performed on a voyage from Icaria to Naxos. He hired a ship which belonged to Tyrrhenian pirates; but the men, instead of landing at Naxos, passed by and steered towards Asia to sell him there. The god, however, on perceiving this, changed the mast and oars into serpents, and himself into a lion; he filled the vessel with ivy and the sound of flutes, so that the sailors, who were seized with madness, leaped into the sea, where they were metamorphosed into dolphins. In all his wanderings and travels the god had rewarded those who had received him kindly and adopted his worship: After he had thus gradually established his divine nature throughout the world, he led his mother out of Hades, called her Thyone, and rose with her into Olympus. The

place, where he had come forth with Semele from Hades, was shown by the Troezenians in the temple of Artemis Soteira Paus. There is also a mystical story, that the body of Dionysus was cut up and thrown into a cauldron by the Titans, and that he was restored and cured by Rhea or Demeter. Various mythological beings are described as the offspring of Dionysus; but among the women, both mortal and immortal, who won his love, none is more famous in ancient history than Ariadne. The extraordinary mixture of traditions which we have here had occasion to notice, and which might still be considerably increased, seems evidently to be made up out of the traditions of different times and countries, referring to analogous divinities, and transferred to the Greek Dionysus. We may, however, remark at once, that all traditions which have reference to a mystic worship of Dionysus, are of a comparatively late origin, that is, they belong to the period subsequent to that in which the Homeric poems were composed; for in those poems Dionysus does not appear as one of the great divinities, and the story of his birth by Zeus and the Bacchic orgies are not alluded to in any way: Dionysus is there simply described as the god who teaches man the preparation of wine, whence he is called the "drunken god" *mainomenos*, and the sober king Lycurgus will not, for this reason, tolerate him in his kingdom. As the cultivation of the vine spread in Greece, the worship of Dionysus likewise spread further; the mystic worship was developed by the Orphici, though it probably originated in the transfer of Phrygian and Lydian modes of worship to that of Dionysus. As far as the nature and origin of the god Dionysus is concerned, he appears in all traditions as the representative of some power of nature, whereas Apollo is mainly an ethical deity. Dionysus is the productive, overflowing and intoxicating power of nature, which carries man away from his usual quiet and sober mode of living. Wine is the most natural and appropriate symbol of that power, and it is therefore called "the fruit of Dionysus. Dionysus is, therefore, the god of wine, the inventor and teacher of its cultivation, the giver of joy, and the disperser of grief and sorrow. As the god of wine, he is also both an inspired and an inspiring god, that is, a god who has the power of revealing the future to man by oracles. Thus, it is said, that he had as great a share in the Delphic oracle as Apollo Eurip. The notion of his being the cultivator and protector of the vine was easily extended to that of his being the protector of trees in general, which is alluded to in various epithets and surnames given him by the poets of antiquity Paus. This character is still further developed in the notion of his being the promoter of civilization, a law-giver, and a lover of peace. As the Greek drama had grown out of the dithyrambic choruses at the festivals of Dionysus, he was also regarded as the god of tragic art, and as the protector of theatres. In later times, he was worshipped also as a *theos chthonios*, which may have arisen from his resemblance to Demeter, or have been the result of an amalgamation of Phrygian and Lydian forms of worship with those of the ancient Greeks. The orgiastic worship of Dionysus seems to have been first established in Thrace, and to have thence spread southward to mounts Helicon and Parnassus, to Thebes, Naxos, and throughout Greece, Sicily, and Italy, though some writers derived it from Egypt. Respecting his festivals and the mode of their celebration, and especially the introduction and suppression of his worship at Rome, see Dict. In the earliest times the Graces, or Charites, were the companions of Dionysus Pind. This circumstance is of great interest, and points out the great change which took place in the course of time in the mode of his worship, for afterwards we find him accompanied in his expeditions and travels by Bacchantic women. Sileni, Pans, satyrs, centaurs, and other beings of a like kind, are also the constant companions of the god. The temples and statues of Dionysus were very numerous in the ancient world. Among the sacrifices which were offered to him in the earliest times, human sacrifices are also mentioned. Subsequently, however, this barbarous custom was softened down into a symbolic scourging, or animals were substituted for men, as at Potniae. The animal most commonly sacrificed to Dionysus was a ram. Among the things sacred to him, we may notice the vine, ivy, laurel, and asphodel; the dolphin, serpent, tiger, lynx, panther, and ass; but he hated the sight of an owl.

Chapter 8 : Semele (Handel) - Wikipedia

Whether Semele is an opera or an oratorio is a question that's pretty much up for grabs. Handel said it should be performed "in the manner of an oratorio," which might suggest that he didn't think.

Zeus fell madly in love with her and made an oath to do anything that she asked. Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, realized Zeus was in love with Semele and tricked Semele into asking Zeus to let her see him in his majesty. Bound by an oath, Zeus appeared before the unfortunate woman in all his divine glory. Morford-Lenardon As she looked at him, she was consumed by the lightning bolts and light that radiated from him. Zeus was able to rescue her unborn child, Dionysus, and hid him in his side until it was ready to be born. Hamilton 65 When Dionysus had grown up, he wandered to many far and strange places. Everywhere he went he taught men the culture of the vine and mysteries of his worship and everywhere he had been, he was accepted as a god. He was accompanied by the Maenads. Pentheus, the King of Thebes, was not happy with the behavior of this group of strangers. He ordered his soldiers to imprison the visitors, but he had no idea that Dionysus was a new god. The soldiers tried to imprison the maidens but said that the doors unbarred themselves. He ordered his soldiers to imprison Dionysus but the prison could not hold him. Dionysus tried to show that the wonders of this new worship of a new and great god was divine but when Pentheus only heaped insults and threats upon him, Dionysus left him to his doom. Hamilton 71 When Pentheus went to pursue the maidens that had escaped his prison, many Theban women joined him, and that is when Dionysus made them mad and they thought Pentheus was a wild beast and tore him apart. That is when Pentheus realized that he had fought with a god and must now pay with his life. Some time during his wanderings, Dionysus came upon the princess of Crete, Ariadne, when she was utterly desolate, having been abandoned on the shore of the island of Naxos by the Athenian prince, Theseus, whose life she had saved. Hamilton 67 Dionysus rescued her and later fell in love with her. When she died, Dionysus took her crown and put it among the stars. His mother, Semele, whom he had never seen, was not forgotten. He longed for her so much that he went to the lower world, defied the power of Death and brought her to live on Olympus. Even though she was a mortal, the gods accepted her as one of themselves since she gave birth to a god. The Maenads, or the Bacchantes, were women frenzied with wine. They were the followers of Dionysus. The most important festival, the Greater Dionysia, was held in Athens for five days each spring. They were days of pure enjoyment. It was held in a theater, and the ceremony was the performance of a play. The greatest poetry in Greece was written for him. Dionysus died with the coming of a cold, but he was always brought back to life. It was this joyful resurrection celebrated in his festivals.

Chapter 9 : SEMELE THYONE - Greek Goddess of the Bacchic Frenzy

More used to sacred works from Handel's pen during the Lenten period, the 'baudy' nature of Semele's story was a little too much for them. Mrs. Delaney was concerned that, as Semele was a 'profane story' her husband 'does not think it proper for him to go.'

Synopsis[edit]
Precis: Jupiter, King of the gods, takes the mortal Princess Semele to a secret hiding place on a mountain to be his mistress. Jupiter reluctantly agrees but his thunderbolts burn and consume Semele. From her ashes, though, arise her unborn child by Jupiter - Bacchus, god of wine and ecstasy. Zeus and Semele embracing, 18th century engraving
Scene: Greece, in legendary antiquity The scene is the temple of Juno. Near the altar is a golden image of the goddess In the temple of Juno, Cadmus, King of Thebes, is preparing for the marriage of his daughter Semele to Athamas, Prince of Boeotia. Signs from the goddess indicate she approves of the match
Accompanied recitative: Auspicious flashes rise and chorus: Lucky omens bless our rites. However, the bride has been inventing one excuse after the other to put off the wedding and her father and would-be bridegroom urge her to hesitate no longer
Duet: To herself, Semele reflects on her dilemma - she does not wish to marry Prince Athamas as she is in love with Jove himself and calls on him to assist her
Accompanied recitative: What refuge now is left me? In pity teach me which to choose and aria: Athamas, observing her, takes her physical signs of emotional upheaval as evidence she is in love with him
Aria: Hymen, haste, thy torch prepare. Why dost thou thus untimely grieve? The priests of Juno order the wedding abandoned and everyone to leave the temple
Chorus: Cease, cease your vows , which all do except for Athamas, in despair at his wedding being cancelled, and Ino, hopelessly in love with him
Aria: Athamas can see she is upset, without guessing why, and he can feel for her in her distress because he is upset too
Aria: Your tuneful voice my tale would tell. Athamas is astonished when she tells him bluntly that she loves him
Duet: Cadmus interrupts their confusion and describes the extraordinary event he has just witnessed: The priests and augurs identify this eagle as Jupiter himself
Chorus: Endless pleasure, endless love. Juno and Iris descend in different machines. Juno in a chariot drawn by peacocks; Iris on a rainbow; they alight and meet. Iris reports that Jove has installed Semele as his mistress in a palace atop a mountain
Aria: There, from mortal cares retiring. The outraged Juno swears to have revenge
Accompanied recitative: Awake, Saturnia, from thy lethargy! Iris warns her it will not be an easy task - the palace is guarded by dragons that never sleep
Accompanied recitative: Juno decides that she and Iris will pay a visit to the god of sleep in his cave, in order to get magical assistance to put the dragons to sleep
Aria: Hence, Iris, hence away.
Scene Two An apartment in the palace of Semele. She is sleeping, Loves and Zephyrs waiting. Semele awakes and regrets that the dream she was having of being with her lover has ended
Aria: O sleep, why dost thou leave me? When Jupiter enters, in the form of a young man, she tells him how difficult it is for her when he is absent. He explains that she is a mortal, unlike him, and needs to rest from their love-making from time to time. He attempts to assure her of his fidelity
Aria: Lay your doubts and fears aside. Semele sings of her passionate love for him
Aria: How engaging, how endearing. Semele, however, is beginning to be unhappy that her lover is a god and she a mere mortal. This sign of an ambition to immortality from Semele worries Jupiter who decides he must distract her from such thoughts
Aria: I must with speed amuse her. The Loves and Zephyrs advise Semele to put aside worries and enjoy the delights of love while she can
Chorus: Now Love that everlasting boy invites. He leaves, and Ino appears, describing the wondrous experience of being flown there by winged zephyrs
Aria: The sisters sing of the joy they are experiencing, hearing the music of the spheres
Duet: Prepare then, ye immortal choir and nymphs and swains declare that this part of the earth has become a heaven
Chorus: Bless the glad earth. The God of Sleep lying on his bed. Juno and Iris arrive and wake Somnus
Accompanied recitative: Somnus, awake , to his displeasure
Aria: Leave me, loathsome light. He only gets out of bed when he hears Juno mention the beautiful nymph Pasithea
Aria: More sweet is that name.
Scene Two An Apartment. Semele alone
Semele is still feeling rather unhappy about the discrepancy between herself and her lover
Aria: She exclaims that Semele must have become a goddess herself and gives her a mirror Behold in this mirror. Semele is enraptured by her own beauty
Aria: Myself I shall adore. Conjure him by his oath.

Semele is very grateful for this advice Aria: Thus let my thanks be paid. Come to my arms, my lovely fair but she puts him off Aria: I ever am granting. He swears to give her whatever she desires Accompanied recitative: By that tremendous flood, I swear and she makes him promise to appear to her in his godlike form Accompanied recitative: Then cast off this human shape. He is alarmed and says that would harm her Aria: Ah, take heed what you press , but she insists he keep his oath Aria: Jupiter knows this will mean her destruction and mourns her impending doom Accompanied recitative: Ah, whither is she gone. Juno triumphs in the success of her scheme Aria: Above measure is the pleasure. She looks up and sees Jupiter descending in a cloud; flashes of lightning issue from either side, and thunder is heard grumbling in the air. Semele, granted her wish to see Jupiter in his true godlike form, is consumed by his thunderbolts, and as she dies she regrets her own foolishness and ambition Accompanied recitative: Too late I now repent. Watching this, the priests of Juno express their amazement Chorus: Oh, terror and astonishment! Athamas is now glad to accept Ino as his bride Aria: Despair no more shall wound me. The god Apollo descends on a cloud and announces that the unborn child of Semele and Jupiter will arise from her ashes Accompanied recitative: Apollo comes, to relieve your care. The child will be Bacchus, god of wine and ecstasy, a god "more mighty than love". All celebrate the fortunate outcome Chorus: Happy, happy shall we be. Comedy is interwoven into the drama, notably in the scene in the cave of the god of sleep. The monumental chorus "O terror!