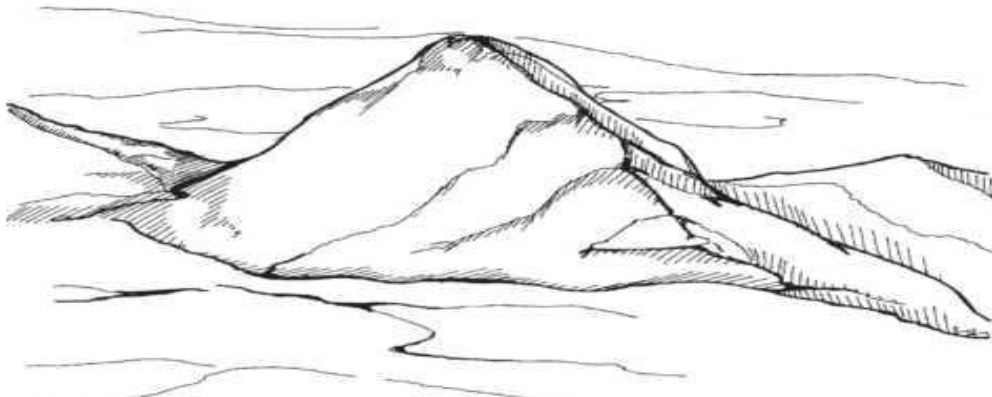


Another important earth god was **Dionysus** [die-on-IS-uhs] (the Roman **Bacchus** [BAK-uhs]), god of wine and revelry, dancing and drama. Myths tell of his coming from faraway lands, bringing with him a new ecstatic (emotionally rapturous) religion and dancing followers of wild behavior, including the Maenads ("raving women"), satyrs (half goat, like Pan), and silenī (half horse). His opponents, defenders of more dignified old-time religions, despised his cult and fought it. But in the end, Dionysus was recognized as a god—perhaps the most popular of all gods.

There were several groups of minor divinities. Beautiful young women called **nymphs** guarded different parts of nature. Nymphs called Dryads lived in the woods, sometimes inside trees. Other nymphs called Nereids, daughters of Poseidon, lived in the sea.

The nine **Muses**, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne [nee-MOSS-in-ee] (Zeus had several wives), lived on the heights of Mounts Parnassus, Pindos, and Helicon, whose springs and streams were sacred to them, as were the palm tree and the laurel. Apollo, god of poetry and music, was naturally their patron and leader. They were goddesses of various arts, mostly literary. Terpsichore [terp-SIK-oh-ree] was Muse of choral song and dance, Euterpe [yoo-TER-pee] of lyric poetry, Erato [AIR-at-oh] of love poetry, Polyhymnia [paw-lee-HIM-nee-uh] of sacred poetry (hymns), Thalia [tha-LIE-uh] of comic drama, Calliope [kuh-LIE-oh-pee] of epic poetry, and Melpomene [mel-POM-eh-nee] of tragic drama. Urania [yoo-RAY-nee-uh] was Muse of astronomy, and Clio [KLIE-oh] was Muse of history. Poets in need of inspiration have called upon the aid of the Muses for centuries.

Three goddesses called the **Fates** controlled the destiny of every mortal person, man or woman. There was Clotho [KLO-tho], who spun the bright threads of youth; Lachesis [LAK-eh-sis], who wound them on her distaff or spindle, distributing and directing them along the course of each human destiny; and Atropos [AT-roh-pos], the eldest, somber symbol of death, who cut the threads with her sharp slender shears. The gods who lived on Mount Olympus had control over the world and nature, but it was the Three Fates who decided the length of human life. Even the gods could not interfere.



Mt. Olympus was the home of the great gods and goddesses.