

Ἐρινύς is the name of a deity of vengeance and punishment for crimes against kin and relatives. The name often occurs in the plural, as the Ἐρινύες were considered to be a group of minor deities.

First and most prominent attestations

- Mycenaean Greek has the noun *E-ri-nu* (but maybe related to Demeter Erinys)
- The earliest literary attestation is in the Homeric poems
- The most well known Erinyes are found in Aeschylus, namely in the Oresteia trilogy.

This name has no clear etymology. Since ancient times, scholars have tried to give it an explanation.

- Ancient etymologies take into consideration mostly the context in which Ἐρινύς appears, giving little attention to word formation rules and tendencies (e.g. Ἐρινύς from the verb ἐρινύειν ‘to be angry’, or as a compound ἔρρειν ‘to destroy’ + νοῦς ‘mind’; other examples in Zerhoch 2015: 338-342)
- Modern etymologies usually analyse the name as a verbal-governing compound. Neumann (1986: 43-51) proposes a reconstruction from PIE **eri-snh₁-u-* ‘the one who causes conflict’ which does not appear coherent with the goddess(es)’ main features.

Alternative proposal:

Ἐρινύς can be considered as an exocentric verbal-governing compound, that could be possible to reconstruct as **seri-nuH-* ‘the one who screams a lot’, from PIE **sér-i-*, originally meaning ‘above’ (Dunkel 2014: 682) but ‘very, much’ in Greek and PIE **nuH-* zero grade of PIE **neuH-* ‘to scream’ (LIV²: 456)

Ἐρινύς would be a root noun formed from a *-u-* verbal root. Regarding this category’s semantics, root nouns are generally *nomen actionis* but can have an agentive role when in composition. The absence of the second member as *simplex* would not be a problem, since there are many root nouns in composition that do not appear as *simplicia* (Chantraine 1933: 2-4). There would be many compounds as *comparanda* both in the onomastics, where many names with a first element ἐρι are attested, both among adjectives with a similar meaning and a second member derived from a verbal root that is connected to sound emission (e.g. Ἐρίανθος; ἐριβρεμέτης ‘loud-thundering’; ἐρίγδουπος ‘loud-sounding’)

Even if the screaming is not immediately connected to the Erinyes, in the texts where these deities appear there are many cases where one can find words and expressions related to noises and strong sounds.

Phraseology

[...] ἡμᾶς δὲ δίκη πρότερον φήμης
τὸν δυσκέλαδόν θ’ ὕμνον Ἐρινύος
ἰαχεῖν Αἶδα τ’

ἐχθρὸν παιᾶν’ ἐπιμέλειν

“But it is right for us, before their singing, to cry out **the awful hymn of the Erinys** and thereafter sing the hated victory song of Hades.” (Sept. 866-69)

[...] τοιῶνδε μέντοι πημάτων σεσαγμένον
πρέπει λέγειν **παιῶνα τόνδ’ Ἐρινύων.**

“packed with woes like this, he should sing **the triumph-song of the Erinyes**” (Ag. 644-5)

[...] πομπᾷ Διὸς ξενίου,
νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς

“Sent by Zeus warder of guests, **an Erinys who brings tears to brides**” (Ag. 748-9)

[...] ποίαν Ἐρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλη
ἐπορθιάζειν

“What **Erinys** is this that you bid **raise its voice** over this house?” (Ag. 1118-9)

Indo-European parallels

There are no Indo-European onomastic formations parallel to Ἐρινύς, but groups of female divine beings related to screaming and strong sounds can be found in other Indo-European traditions. In Old Norse mythology one can think about the *Disir*, goddesses of imminent death, sometimes addressed to with the epithet *dynfúsir* ‘thunderous’. In Vedic the verb *nū* ‘to scream’ (from the PIE root **neuH-* ‘to scream’) is associated in many occasions with groups of female characters, like the *Apsaras*. In Greek itself, the Maenads are an example of a female group with screaming and shouting as a prominent feat.

[...] þás **dynfúsir dísar**
dreyra svells á eyri

“These **thunderous Dísir** bleed over money of ice” (VGI Lv 10V)

[...] ἦν δὲ **πᾶσ’ ὁμοῦ βοή.**

ὁ μὲν στενάζων ὅσον ἐτύγγαν’ ἐμπνέων,
αἱ δ’ ἠλάλαζον.

“**Screams were everywhere.** He groaning as much as he had life left in him, while **they shouted in victory.**” (Bacc. 1131-3)

a yá sujūrñih śráyañih+ sumnáāpir

b hradécakšur ná granthīnī caranyūh

c tā añjāyo aruñāyo ná sasruh

d śriyē gāvo ná dhenávo **navanta**

“The beautifully glowing rank (of Apsarases), friends in good favor, interlaced like a pond’s-eye [=lotus], (always) on the move— these flowed like reddish salves; like milk-cows **they bellowed** for beauty.” (RV. 10.95.6)