

Adonis ([Greek](#): Ἄδωνης, also: Ἄδωνις) is a figure of West Semitic origin, where he is a central cult figure in various [mystery religions](#), who enters [Greek mythology](#) in [Hellenistic times](#). [1] He is closely related to the Egyptian [Osiris](#), the Semitic [Tammuz](#) and [Baal Hadad](#), the Etruscan Atunis and the Phrygian [Attis](#), all of whom are deities of rebirth and [vegetation](#). [2] Some mythologists believe that [Balder](#) is to be read as his counterpart in [Germanic mythology](#).

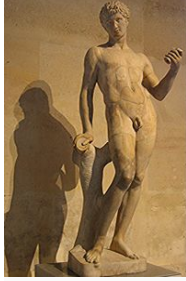
Adonis is one of the most complex cult figures in classical times. He has had multiple roles, and there has been much scholarship over the centuries concerning his meaning and purpose in [Greek religious beliefs](#). He is an annually-renewed, ever-youthful vegetation god, a [life-death-rebirth deity](#) whose nature is tied to the calendar. His [cult](#) belonged to women: the cult of dying Adonis was fully-developed in the circle of young girls around [Sappho](#) on [Lesbos](#), about 600 BCE, as a fragment of Sappho reveals. His name is often applied in modern times to handsome youths.

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Origin of the cult



Adonis, a naked Roman torso, restored and completed by [François Duquesnoy](#), formerly in the collection of [Cardinal Mazarin](#) ([Louvre Museum](#))

Ancient Near Eastern deities

Levantine deities

Adonis | [Anat](#) | [Asherah](#) | [Ashima](#) |
[Astarte](#) | [Atargatis](#) | [Ba'al](#) | [Berith](#) |
[Chemosh](#) | [Dagon](#) | [Derceto](#) | [El](#) | [Elyon](#)
 | [Eshmun](#) | [Hadad](#) | [Kothar](#) | [Melqart](#) |
[Mot](#) | [Moloch](#) | [Qetesh](#) | [Resheph](#) |
[Shalim](#) | [Yarikh](#) | [Yam](#) | [YHWH](#)

Mesopotamian deities

[Adad](#) | [Amurru](#) | [An/Anu](#) | [Anshar](#) |
[Ashur](#) | [Abzu/Apsu](#) | [Enki/Ea](#) | [Enlil](#) |
[Ereshkigal](#) | [Inanna/Ishtar](#) | [Kingu](#) |
[Kishar](#) | [Lahmu & Lahamu](#) | [Marduk](#) |
[Mummu](#) | [Nabu](#) | [Nammu](#) | [Nanna/Sin](#) |
[Nergal](#) | [Ningizzida](#) | [Ninhursag](#) | [Ninlil](#) |
[Tiamat](#) | [Utu/Shamash](#)

Egyptian deities

[Amun](#) | [Ra](#) | [Apis](#) | [Bakha](#) | [Osiris](#) | [Ptah](#)

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Adonis was based very heavily on [Tammuz](#). His name may be Semitic, a variation on the word "[adon](#)" meaning "[lord](#)" that was also used, as

"Adonai", to refer to [Yahweh](#) in the [Old Testament](#). When the Hebrews first arrived in Canaan, they were opposed by the king of the [Jebusites](#), Adonizedek, whose name means "lord of Zedek" (Justice). Yet there is no trace of a Semitic cult directly connected with Adonis, and no trace in Semitic languages of any specific [mythemes](#) connected with his Greek myth; both Greek and Near Eastern scholars have questioned the connection (Burkert, p 177 note 6 bibliography). The connection in cult practice is with Adonis' Mesopotamian counterpart, [Tammuz](#):

"Women sit by the gate weeping for Tammuz, or they offer incense to [Baal](#) on roof-tops and plant pleasant plants. These are the very features of the Adonis cult: a cult confined to women which is celebrated on flat roof-tops on which sherds sown with quickly germinating green salading are placed, Adonis gardens... the climax is loud lamentation for the dead god." —Burkert, p. 177.



A 19th-century reproduction of a Greek bronze of Adonis found at [Pompeii](#)

When the [cult](#) of Adonis was incorporated into Greek culture is debated: [Hesiod](#) made him the son of [Phoinix](#), [eponym](#) of the [Phoenicians](#), and his association with [Cyprus](#) is not attested before the classical era. W. Atallah[3] suggests that the later Hellenistic myth of Adonis represents the conflation of two independent traditions.

Adonis was worshiped in unspoken [mystery religions](#): not until Imperial Roman times (in [Lucian of Samosata](#), *De Dea Syria*, ch. 6 [1]) does any written source mention that the women were consoled by a *revived* Adonis. The third century BCE poet [Euphorion of Chalcis](#) in his *Hyacinth* wrote "Only [Cocytus](#) washed the wounds of Adonis".[4] Women in Athens would plant "[gardens of Adonis](#)" quick-growing herbs

that sprang up from seed and died. The Festival of Adonis was celebrated by women at midsummer by sowing fennel and lettuce, and grains of wheat and barley. The plants sprang up soon, and withered quickly, and women mourned for the untimely death of the vegetation god (Detienne 1972).

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Birth and death of Adonis



[Aphrodite](#) and Adonis, Attic red-figure [aryballos](#)-shaped [lekythos](#) by Aison, ca. 410 BC, [Louvre](#).

Adonis' birth is shrouded in confusion for those who require a single, authoritative version. The resolutely patriarchal Hellenes sought a father for the god, and found him in [Byblos](#) and [Cyprus](#), faithful indicators of the direction from which his cult had come to them. In Cyprus, the cult of Adonis gradually superseded the cult of [Cinyras](#) [\[5\]](#). [Walter Burkert](#) questions whether Adonis had not from the very beginning come to Greece with Aphrodite (Burkert 1985, p. 177)

Multiple versions of the birth of Adonis exist: The most commonly accepted version is that [Aphrodite](#) urged [Myrrha](#) to commit [incest](#) with her father, [Theias](#), the King of [Smyrna](#) or [Syria](#) (which helps confirm the area of Adonis' origins). Myrrha's nurse helped with the scheme, and Myrrha coupled with her father in the darkness. When Theias at last discovered this deception by means of an oil lamp, he flew into a rage, chasing his daughter with a knife. Myrrha fled from her father, and Aphrodite turned her into a [myrrh](#) tree. When Theias shot an arrow

into the tree — or alternately when a boar used its tusks to rend the tree's bark — Adonis was born from the tree. This myth fits both Adonis' nature as a vegetation god and his origins from the hot foreign desert lands where the myrrh tree grew. (It was not to be seen in Greece.)

1. Pseudo-Apollodorus, ([Bibliothèque](#), 3.182) considered Adonis to be the son of [Cinyras](#), of [Paphos](#) on Cyprus, and [Metharme](#).
2. [Hesiod](#), in a fragment, believes he is the son of [Phoenix](#) and [Aephesiboea](#).



Death of Adonis, by Luca Giordano.

As soon as Adonis was born, the baby was so beautiful that Aphrodite placed him in a closed chest, which she delivered for security to [Persephone](#), who was also entranced by his unearthly beauty and refused to give him back. The argument between the goddess of love and the goddess of death was settled, either by [Zeus](#) or [Calliope](#), with Adonis spending four months with Aphrodite, who [seduced](#) him with the help of [Helene](#), her friend, four months with Persephone and four months of the year to himself. Some say Aphrodite eventually seduced Adonis into spending his four months alone with her.



The Death of Adonis, by [Giuseppe Mazzuoli](#), 1709 ([Hermitage Museum](#))

Adonis died at the tusks of a wild [boar](#), sent by either [Artemis](#) in retaliation for Aphrodite instigating the death of [Hippolytus](#), a favorite of the huntress goddess, or Aphrodite's paramour, [Ares](#).^[6] As Aphrodite sprinkled [nectar](#) on his body, each drop of Adonis' blood turned into a blood-red [anemone](#), and the river Adonis (modern [Nahr Ibrahim](#)) flowing out of [Mount Lebanon](#) in coastal Lebanon ran red, according to Lucian (chs. 6 – 9). Therefore, Persephone ultimately laid claim to Adonis as his shade was transported forever more to the [Underworld](#). Lucian, who attributes the color of the river Adonis to [siltation](#), adds "Nonetheless, there are some inhabitants of Byblos who say that [Osiris](#) of Egypt lies buried among them, and the mourning and the ceremonies are all made in honor of Osiris instead of Adon" ^[2]. Certainly there are many parallels with the myth of Osiris, encased in the coffin, imprisoned in the tree from which he issues forth.

"In Greece" Burkert concludes, "the special function of the Adonis cult is as an opportunity for the unbridled expression of emotion in the strictly circumscribed life of women, in contrast to the rigid order of [polis](#) and family with the official women's festivals in honour of [Demeter](#)."

The most detailed and literary version of the story of Adonis is [Ovid](#), [Metamorphoses](#), x