

# Ἀδωνις

The hardest habit of all to break is the terrible habit of happiness.  
Theodosia Garrison

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## Ancient Greek

### Alternative spellings

### Etymology

Believed to be from Canaanite *ʾAdōn* "lord"

### Pronunciation

- (*Classical*): IPA: [ádɔːnis]
- (*Koine*): IPA: [ˈadɔːnis]
- (*Byzantine*): IPA: [ˈaðonis]

### Proper noun

**Ἀδωνις** (*genitive* **Ἀδώνιδος**) *m*, *third declension*; (Adōnis)

1. Adonis

### Inflection

Inflection

*Case / #*  
*Nominative*  
*Genitive*  
*Dative*  
*Accusative*  
*Vocative*

*Singular*  
Ἀδωνῖς  
Ἀδώνιδος  
Ἀδώνιδι  
Ἀδώνιδᾶ  
Ἀδώνι

## Derived terms

- Ἀδώνια

## Descendants

- Greek: Ἀδωνίς (Ádonis); Ἀδώνιδας (Adónidas)
- Latin: Adonis

## References

- Woodhouse's English-Greek Dictionary page 999 ([http://colet.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/chuck/woodhouse\\_pages.pl?page\\_num=999](http://colet.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/chuck/woodhouse_pages.pl?page_num=999))

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# Ἀδωνις

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## Ancient Greek

### Etymology

Believed to be from Canaanite *ʾAdōn* "lord"

### Pronunciation

- *(5th BC Attic)*: IPA: /ádɔ̌ɔ̌nis/
- *(1st BC Egyptian)*: IPA: /ádoːnis/
- *(4th AD Koine)*: IPA: /áðonis/
- *(10th AD Byzantine)*: IPA: /áðonis/
- *(15th AD Constantinopolitan)*: IPA: /áðonis/

### Proper noun

**Ἀδωνις** • (Ádōnis) (*genitive* **Ἀδώνιδος**) *m*, *third declension*

- Adonis

### Inflection

**Third declension of Ἀδωνις, Ἀδώνιδος**

[show ▼]

### Derived terms

- Ἀδώνια (Adōnia)

## Descendants

- Greek: Ἀδωνις (Ádonis); Ἀδώνιδας (Adónidas)
- Latin: Adonis

## References

- Woodhouse’s English-Greek Dictionary page 999 ([http://artflx.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/efts/dicos/woodhouse\\_test.pl?pageturn=1&pagenumber=999](http://artflx.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/efts/dicos/woodhouse_test.pl?pageturn=1&pagenumber=999))

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# Adonis

For the Syrian poet, see Adunis.

For other uses, see Adonis (disambiguation).



Aphrodite and Adonis, Attic red-figure aryballos-shaped lekythos by Aison, ca. 410 BC, Louvre.

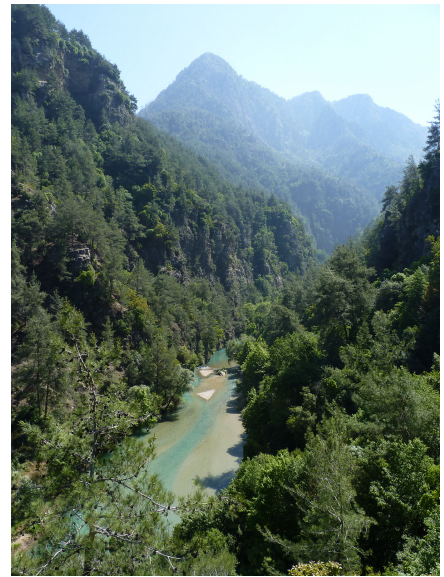
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**Adonis** (/əˈdɒnɪs, əˈdoʊnɪs/; Greek: Ἄδωνις), in Greek mythology, is the god of beauty and desire, and is a central figure in various mystery religions. His religion belonged to women: the dying of Adonis was fully developed in the circle of young girls around the poet Sappho from the island of Lesbos, about 600 BC, as revealed in a fragment of Sappho's surviving poetry.<sup>[2]</sup>

Adonis 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 name is often applied in modern times to handsome youths, of whom he is the archetype.

## Etymology and origin

The Greek Ἀδωνις (Greek pronunciation: [ádɔːnis]), *Adōnis* was a borrowing from the Semitic word *'adōn*, meaning "lord",<sup>[3]</sup> which is related to *Adonai*, one of the names used to refer to the god (אֲדֹנָי) of the Hebrew Bible and still used in Judaism to the present day. Syrian Adonis is *Gauas*<sup>[4]</sup> or *Aos*, akin to Egyptian *Osiris*, the Semitic *Tammuz* and *Baal Hadad*, the Etruscan *Atunis* and the Phrygian *Attis*, all of whom are deities of rebirth and vegetation (see life-death-rebirth deity).



Abraham River (Lebanon), one of the claimed sites of Adonis

## Myths

The most detailed and literary version of the story of Adonis is a late one, in Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>[5]</sup> The central myth in its Greek telling, Aphrodite fell in love with the beautiful youth (possibly because she had been wounded by Eros' arrow). Aphrodite sheltered Adonis as a new-born baby and entrusted him to Persephone.

Persephone was also taken by Adonis' beauty and refused to give him back to Aphrodite. The dispute between the two goddesses was settled by Zeus (or by Calliope on Zeus' behalf): Adonis was to spend one-third of every year with each goddess and the last third wherever he chose. He chose to spend two-thirds of the year with Aphrodite.



The Death of Adonis - Museo Gregoriano Etrusco (Vatican).



*The Death of Adonis*, by Giuseppe Mazzuoli,  
1709 (Hermitage Museum).

Adonis was killed by a wild boar, said to have been sent vicariously by Artemis, jealous of Adonis' hunting skills or in retaliation for Aphrodite instigating the death of Hippolytus, a favorite of the huntress goddess; or by Aphrodite's paramour, Ares, who was jealous of Aphrodite's love for Adonis; or by Apollo, to punish Aphrodite for blinding his son, Erymanthus.<sup>[6]</sup> Adonis died in Aphrodite's arms, who came to him when she heard his groans.

When he died she sprinkled the blood with nectar, from which sprang the short-lived anemone, which takes its name from the wind which so easily makes its petals fall. And so it is the blood of Adonis that each spring turns to red the torrential river, the Adonis River (also known as Abraham River or *Nahr Ibrahim* in Arabic) in modern Lebanon. Afqa is the sacred source where the waters of the river emerge from a huge grotto in a cliff 200 meters (660 feet) high. It is there that the myth of Astarte (Venus) and Adonis was born.

## Parentage and birth

Adonis' birth is shrouded in confusion for those who require a single, authoritative version, for various peripheral stories circulated concerning Adonis' parentage.

The most widely accepted version is recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Adonis is the son of Myrrha and her father Cinyras. Myrrha turned into a myrrh tree and Lucina helped the tree to give birth to Adonis.<sup>[7]</sup>

The patriarchal Hellenes sought a father for the god, and found him in Byblos and Cyprus, which scholars take to indicate the direction from which Adonis' had come to the Greeks. Pseudo-Apollodorus, (*Bibliothèque*, 3.182) considered Adonis to be the son of Cinyras, of Paphos on Cyprus, and Metharme. According to pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliothèque*, Hesiod, in an unknown work that does not survive, made of him the son of Phoenix and the otherwise unidentified Alpheisiboea.<sup>[8]</sup>

In Cyprus, Adonis gradually superseded that of Cinyras.<sup>[9]</sup> Hesiod made him the son of Phoenix, eponym of the Phoenicians, thus a figure of Phoenician origin; his association with Cyprus is not attested before the classical era. W. Atallah<sup>[10]</sup> suggests that the later Hellenistic myth of Adonis represents the conflation of two independent traditions.

Alternatively the late source *Bibliothèque* calls him the son of Cinyras and Metharme. Another version of the myth is that Aphrodite compelled Myrrha (or Smyrna) to commit incest with her father Theias, the king of Assyria. Fleeing his wrath, Myrrha was turned into a myrrh tree. Theias struck the tree with an arrow, whereupon it burst open and Adonis emerged. Another version has a wild boar tear open the tree with its tusks, thus foreshadowing Adonis' death. The city Berytos (Beirut) in Lebanon was named after the daughter of Adonis and Aphrodite, Beroe (mythology). Both Dionysus and Poseidon fell in love with her.

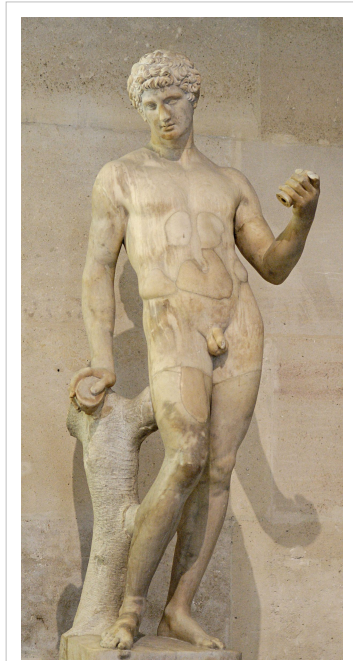


## Origin of the cult

Adonis was certainly based in large part on Tammuz. Wikipedia: Citation needed His name is Semitic, a variation on the word *adon* meaning "lord". Yet there is no trace of a Semitic deity directly connected with Adonis,<sup>[11]</sup> 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.<sup>[12]</sup> The connection in 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 legend: 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.<sup>[13]</sup>

When the legend of Adonis was incorporated into Greek culture is debated. Walter Burkert questions whether Adonis had not from the very beginning come to Greece with Aphrodite."<sup>[14]</sup> In Greece," Burkert concludes, "the special function of the Adonis legend 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."



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

## Mystery cults

Adonis was worshipped in unspoken mystery religions: not until Imperial Roman times (in Lucian of Samosata, *De Dea Syria*, ch. 6) does any written source mention that the women were consoled by a *revived* Adonis. The third century BCE poet Euphoriion of Chalcis in his *Hyacinth* wrote "Only Cocytus washed the wounds of Adonis".<sup>[15]</sup>

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 death of the vegetation god.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Cultural references to the rebirth mythology

The myth of the death and rebirth of Adonis has featured prominently in a variety of cultural and artistic works. Giovan Battista Marino's masterpiece, *Adone*, published in 1623, is a long, sensual poem, which elaborates the myth of Adonis, and represents the transition in Italian literature from Mannerism to the Baroque. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote the poem *Adonais* for John Keats, and uses the myth as an extended metaphor for Keats' death.

Such allusions have continued to the present day. Adonis (an Arabic transliteration of the same name, أدونيس) is the pen name of a famous Syrian poet, Ali



*Death of Adonis*, by Luca Giordano.

Ahmad Said Asbar, who was nominated more than once for a Nobel Prize for literature, including in 2006. His choice of name relates especially to the rebirth element of the myth of Adonis (also called "Tammuz" in Arabic), which was an important theme in mid-20th century Arabic poetry, chiefly amongst followers of the "Free Verse" (الشعر الحر) movement founded by Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. Adonis has used the myth of his namesake in many of his poems, for example in "Wave I", from his most recent book "Start of the Body, End of the Sea" (Saqi, 2002), which includes a complete retelling of the birth of the god.



*The Death of Adonis, by Auguste Rodin.*

## Modern association with physical beauty and youth

An extremely attractive, youthful male is often called an Adonis, often with a connotation of deserved vanity: "the office Adonis." The legendary attractiveness of the figure is referenced in *Sarrasine* by Honoré de Balzac, which describes an unrequited love of the main character, Sarrasine for the image in a painting of an Adonis and a castrato. The allusion to extreme physical attractiveness is apparent in the psychoanalytical Adonis Complex which refers to a body image obsession with improving one's physique and youthful appearance.

Bodybuilders use the expression "Adonis belt" to refer to the two shallow grooves of the surface anatomy of the human abdomen running from the iliac crest (hip bone) to the pubis. Also, the Golden Ratio of a tape measure of shoulder-to-waist ratio is called the Adonis Index.



A 19th-century reproduction of a Greek bronze of Adonis found at Pompeii.

## Notes

- [1] [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Middle\\_Eastern\\_deities&action=edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Middle_Eastern_deities&action=edit)
- [2] The standard modern survey and repertory of Adonis in Greek culture is W. Atallah, *Adonis dans la littérature et l'art grecs*, Paris, 1966.
- [3] W. Burkert (1985), *Greek Religion*, pp. 176–77.
- [4] Detienne, Marcel (1994). *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-00104-3 (p.137)
- [5] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X, 519–741
- [6] According to Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 42.1f. Servius on Virgil's *Eclogues* x.18; *Orphic Hymn* lv.10; Ptolemy Hephaestionos, i.306u, all noted by Graves. Atallah (1966) fails to find any cultic or cultural connection with the boar, which he sees simply as a heroic myth-element.
- [7] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X, 298–518
- [8] Ps.-Apollodorus, iii.14.4.1.
- [9] Atallah 1966
- [10] Atallah 1966.
- [11] R. S. P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Brill, 2009, p. 23.
- [12] Burkert, p 177 note 6 bibliography
- [13] Burkert, p. 177.
- [14] Burkert 1985, p. 17.
- [15] Remarkd upon in passing by Photius, *Bibliotheca* 190 ( on-line translation ([http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/photius\\_copyright/photius\\_05bibliotheca.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/photius_copyright/photius_05bibliotheca.htm))).

[16] Detienne 1972.

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# Ἄδωνις

In some Mystery schools this angel [of discernment] was called Adonis.

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