The Many Faces of Dumuzi:

The Religious Impact of the Ancient Near East on Greek Mythology and Festivals

Rachel Drillings

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Professor Gatzke

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Introduction

Dumuzid of the Grain, Tammuz, Dumuzi-Ama-ushmagal-anna, and Damu, are just a few of the many faces of Dumuzi the Shephard, deity of ancient Sumer and the silent influence behind countless ancient gods. From Osiris to Attis, many deities associated with fertility, both known and forgotten, have stories in which they are trapped in the Underworld against their will. The purpose of these stories are to explain agricultural seasons.[1] Every one of these deities has their associated goddess of fertility resurrect them, at least partially, before they are able to replenish the earth with agricultural fertility and allow mortals to cultivate crops. These blatant similarities are not flukes, however, because just as there are correlations between Moses and Sargon's origins as babies floating down the river in baskets and the many Near Eastern flooding myths, the death of the agricultural gods and their impact on agricultural seasons are not similar due to chance.[2] Each one of these agricultural gods who are abducted or killed and must spend time in the Underworld are based off or at least inspired by Dumuzi.

This paper will explore the similarities and differences surrounding Dumuzi's impact on Greek mythology, specifically surrounding the mythology and celebrations of Adonis and Persephone. There is an undeniable similarity between the three deities' myths and festivals. In

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[1] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: Adonis Attis Osiris* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951); Radcliffe G. Edmonds, "The Many Faces of Dionysus in the Hexameters of the Sinai Palimpsest," *The Classical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2022): 535; Toufic Kerbage, "The Light Representation of Religion and Power in Sound," *Afreudite : Revista Lusófona de Psicanálise Pura e Aplicada* 8, no. 15 (2012): 17–39.

[2] Sargon and Moses shared an origin to their stories where they were abandoned by their original families and sent down a river to give them a better life (For more information, see Murat Turgut and Yeşim DiLek, "An Example of Meaningless Legitimization Tradition in Ancient Mediterranean Region: Expose to Water," *Archivum Anatolicum-Anadolu Arşivleri* 15 (2021) and Brevard S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 2 (1965): 109-10; Exodus, 2:1-10, *Christian Standard Bible*. Holman Bible Publishers, 2017; *The Birth Legend of Sargon*, CT 13 42-43.). The Near Eastern flood stories are the very similar myths across empires that include the world being flooded and almost the entire world dying. It is seen as a restart of sorts and can be seen in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the biblical Noah's Arc story, and the *Atrahasis* epic.

addition to understanding the Near Eastern influences of Greek mythology, the purpose of this paper will also be understanding the relationship between Adonis and Persephone's myths. How can there be two deities that have the same mythological purpose in ancient Greece?

Dumuzi

Dumuzi was originally an important fertility god in the ancient Sumerian pantheon. He is in many myths that include other Sumerian deities, such as Utu, the sun god, and Enkimdu the best friend of Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* yet he is most associated with Inanna, goddess of love, war, justice, and sex, amongst many other things. In earlier works, he is simply referred to as "Damu," an infant or child god associated with healing in addition to vegetation.[3] As time went on, he turned into "Dumuzi," the fertility and vegetation god that he is now most commonly known as.

It is important to note that Dumuzi had an Akkadian progenitor, Tammuz. Tammuz and Dumuzi were originally two different deities that became synthesized into one (as did Inanna and Ishtar, her Akkadian counterpart). This is due to the Akkadian king, Sargon the Great. Following Sargon's conquest of the southern Plain in the 24th century BCE, instead of taking over Sumer only by force and running the risk of creating a fractured empire, he combined the Sumerian and Akkadian gods, creating a united empire instead.[4] This religious take over was so effective that the name 'Tammuz' almost completely replaced Dumuzi both in ancient and contemporary scholarship meaning that Dumuzi and Tammuz are known as the same entity unless specified as

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[3] *Ninĝišzida's Journey to the Nether World,* c.1.7.3; *The Lament for Nibru,* c.2.2.4.
[4] Paul Collins, "The Sumerian Goddess Inanna," *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology University College London* 5, no. 1 (1994): 111; Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 211. A few other examples of change in the Sumerian pantheon included Utu who became Shamash and Enlil, the Sumerian god of the wind, who became Elil.

different.[5] The mythology of the original Tammuz and Dumuzi are similar, due to the Akkad Empire forming after, and very close to, the Sumerian Empire. However, it is important to note that Dumuzi and Tammuz eventually became synonymous with one another rather than always being the same.

Chronologically, the first myth of in Dumuzi's story cycle has Inanna repeatedly refusing Dumuzi's marriage proposal when he is in competition with Enkimdu.[6] This myth characterizes Dumuzi as a deity rather than the king and god he would come to represent. The story then continues to tell how Innana became trapped in the Nether World. When she found out that she could leave if someone else took her place, she looked across the world and noticed that Dumuzi had not properly mourned her, and so switched their places.[7] For a while, Dumuzi managed to escape the demons who dragged him to the Nether World with the help of his sister and Utu. However, the demons eventually caught him and he was sent to fill Inanna's place. The myth ends with Inanna regretting what she did and allows his sister, Gestinanna, to replace Dumuzi in the Nether World for half the year.

Dumuzi's death in *Inanna's Descent,* is the reason for ancient Near Eastern agricultural seasons. The Sumerian embodiment of fertility and agriculture is "dead" for half the year, every year, mirroring agricultural seasons. In the Near East, summers were incredibly hot and dry, making it hard to grow crops other than ones that flourished in the heat, such as grapes and dates. Instead, the growing season was from late autumn to late spring. By late June, crops grown in fields, such as barley and wheat were harvested, leaving the agricultural land mostly barren. This

[5] Such as in the myth of *Inanna's Descent to the Nether World* versus *Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World*, one specifically features Dumuzi and the other Tammuz. Specificity is needed in examples like these.
[6] *Dumuzid and Enkimdu,* c.4.08.33
[7] *Inana's Descent to the Nether World*, t.1.4.1

barrenness was seen as a "death" of sorts, that the earth was no longer capable of growing, attaching a deity's death to this phenomenon to explain its existence.

The placement of Dumuzi's death to when the earth is at its most barren gives the midsummer date of his festival credibility. The festival of Dumuzi, meant to take place around the same time as his yearly descent to the Nether World, was celebrated after snowmelt from the surrounding mountains flooded the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.[8] This yearly flooding allowed for natural, rich deposits of soil that were extremely beneficial to agriculture in the Near East. While the irrigation of these rivers was also an integral part of agriculture, allowing for water dispersal throughout farmland, it was the seasonal floods that caused the land to be fertile.[9] The rivers' flooding tended to stop by May, but there was still some irregular flooding around November to March due to rainfall. After the flooding in May came the hottest months of the year, making it unreasonable to plant staple crops such as barley and wheat as they must be planted in cooler weather and harvested after the May floods. The time of Dumuzi's death must match the time of agricultural fertility, shortly after the floods and harvest season, therefore the Lament of Dumuzi falls around midsummer.

The festival of Dumuzi, which will be referred to as the "Lamentation of Dumuzi," is the oldest known instance of the "weeping goddess" motif. The weeping goddesses, Inanna and Gestinanna, cry for their husband or brother trapped in the Underworld. This custom is mirrored by the crying and general lamentation that is taken up by women during his festival as they too

[8]Satoko Ehara, "Continuity and Transformation of the Weeping Ritual Focusing on the Tammūz Ritual during the Islamic Period," *Orient* 59 (2024): 91–106. The Euphrates river floods in May and Tigris river floods in June.
[9] Nasrat Adamo et al, "Global Climate Change Impacts on Tigris- Euphrates Rivers Basins," *Journal of Earth Sciences and Geotechnical Engineering*, no. 3 (2018): 67.

mourn, both to mimic their goddesses and to despair at the loss fertility the summer brings.[10] There is not a lot known about the Lament of Dumuzi other than the act of women publicly weeping for him and the date of the festival. It is a three-day celebration that takes place in late June during the last two days of the month of Simanu, and during the first of the month of Du'uzu.[11]

The weeping goddess motif impacted the celebration and festivals of many future deities and was commonly practiced in the ancient world. An example of this was when the Lament of Dumuzi was mentioned in the Old Testament in a way that makes it seem culturally common.[12] In Ezekiel 8, the narrator reads, "Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the Lord's house, and I saw women sitting there, weeping for Tammuz. And he said to me, 'Do you see this, son of man? You will see even more detestable acts than these.'"[13] The significance of this excerpt is not only that the cult of Tammuz (Dumuzi) is mentioned, but that it is not explained. The Old Testament has no problem going into extreme detail about blasphemy and the differences between the Hebrews and *goyim* during any other part of the text, yet not here.[14] Therefore, the fact that women are weeping over Tammuz, with very little explanation as to why,

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[10] Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Weeping Goddess: Sumerian Prototypes of the Mater Dolorosa," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 2 (1983): 70.

[11] J. M. K. Gray and J. M. Steele, "Studies on Babylonian Goal-Year Astronomy II: The Babylonian Calendar and Goal-Year Methods of Prediction," *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 63, no. 6 (2009): 612; Samuel Daiches, "Notes on the Gezer Calendar and Some Babylonian Parallels," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1909): 113–15. Du'uzu translates to Dumuzi or Tammuz. There was no standard name for Sumerian months, so this paper uses the names in the Babylonian calendar as it was a standardized calendar that followed the same month and year patterns as the Sumerian one. They both had twelve to thirteen months (an extra month was added some years to keep festivals and rituals around the same time each year) and each month started the day after the new moon when the waxing crescent first began to show in the sky. Tammuz begins just after the new moon in June.

[12] Kramer, "The Weeping Goddess," 70

[13] Ezekiel 8:14-15

[14] In Leviticus 24:15-22, a Blasphemer is put to death after an in-depth explanation as to why one should not use God's name alongside a curse; in Deuteronomy 32, God speaks through Moses for over forty lines about how the Hebrew god should be worshipped above all others.

shows how widespread and well known his cult was at that time. If the cult was as commonplace as this idea suggests, it would explain how easily his mythology may have spread.

The worship of Dumuzi and Inanna may have begun in ancient Sumer, but their cults quickly spread throughout the Near East.[15] Even after they became synonymous with Tammuz and Ishtar, their myth kept gaining popularity and evolving to fit the needs and gods of other empires' pantheons. Not only did this cause multiple versions of each god to develop, namely the four main versions of Dumuzi or the derivatives of the goddess Inanna such as Astarte and Aphrodite, but it also caused a variation between different myths.[16]

Adonis

While Dumuzi's realm explicitly included agriculture and animal fertility, Adonis was the Greek and Near Eastern god of beauty and fertility, not the harvest or crops of any kind. Most often, in Greek mythology, he is the object of obsession of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, sex, beauty, and fertility. His myth, which has two endings, displays his connection with Dumuzi.

The myth begins with Aphrodite offended by the Near Eastern princess Smyrna (or Myrrh), usually because someone calls her more beautiful than Aphrodite, and so the goddess makes her lust after her own father, the King of Phoenicia.[17] Unbeknownst to the King, Smyrna becomes pregnant with his child. When he finds out, Smyrna runs away to avoid being killed and begs the gods to not let her descend to the Underworld. The gods accept her prayer and turn her

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[15] From Osiris in Egypt to Attis in Anatolia.
[16] *Enki and the World Order* c.1.1.3; Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, 1951; Warner, "Cult of the Virgin Mary," 49. The for main versions of Dumuzi are Damu, Dumuzi the Shepherd, Dumuzi of the Grain, and Dumuzi Ama-ushumgal-anna.
[17] He is also sometimes referred to as the king of Assyria or the Levant.

into a tree. A few days later, Adonis is born from Smyrna's wooden form.[18] When Aphrodite finds him in the wilderness, she immediately becomes enamored with infant Adonis and decides to keep him, and this is where the myth splits into two different endings.

The more used, and likely newer myth of Adonis myth includes Persephone.[19] When Aphrodite finds Adonis as a baby, she hides him in a box and gives him to Persephone for safekeeping. Like Aphrodite, Persephone falls in love with him and refuses to give him back. The two goddesses argue over him so much that Zeus has to intervene and settle the dispute. He declares that Adonis will spend a third of the year with Persephone in the Underworld, a third of the year with Aphrodite in the land of the living, and a third of the year with whomever he chooses.

The older version of the Adonis myth is less common in ancient and contemporary sources and but had a greater influence on Greek cultural practices. Here, Aphrodite raises Adonis herself and Persephone is not involved. However, Ares, the lover of Aphrodite, gets so jealous of her obsession with the mortal that he sends a boar to kill him while Adonis is still an adolescent.[20] Aphrodite is distraught and goes to Zeus, begging him to let Adonis live again. Zeus agrees, but on one condition—that Adonis spends half his time in the Underworld.

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[18] Antoninus Liberalis. *The Metamorphoses*. Translated by Francis Celoria. New York: Routledge, 1992: 34; Hyginus. "Fabulae," *The Myths of Hyginus*. Translated and Edited by Mary Grant. Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1960: 58.

[19] Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.14.4, trans. by James George Frazer (Loeb Classical Library, 1921); Hyginus, "Astronomica" *The Myths of Hyginus*, 2.7.4, trans. and ed. Mary Grant (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1960); Agathias Scholasticus, *Greek Anthologies*, 5.289, trans. William Roger Paton (Loeb Classical Library, 1916).

[20] There are some versions of the myth where it is Artemis who kills him as a punishment for his arrogance (See Alexandra, *Lycophron*, 820; Lactantius, *Divine Institutions*, 1.17)

Aphrodite is not satisfied and declares that the whole world shall mourn and be barren while Adonis spends his time in the Underworld.

Though they are substantially different, both myths connect Adonis to Dumuzi. It is agreed that he is Near Eastern not only in his mythology (being the son of Near Eastern royalty) but also in his identity as many scholars, both ancient and modern, believe Adonis to be a progenitor of Dumuzi.[21] Even so, evidence of his origin is plausible due to the timeline of Greek and Near Eastern trade, ancient texts, and geographical names.

The agreed upon date of the earliest major interactions between the Greeks and the Near East was during the early Iron Age, around the tenth century, in Cyprus and Crete.[22] Due to trade with Phoenicia, there was an eventual boom of trading art and ideas that inspired, and became a major part of, Greek culture. The of disconnect between archaeological and historical evidence often allowed historians to fall into the trap of believing that after the Early Iron age into the Greek Dark Ages there was little to nothing happening in Greece by way of advancements, trade, and life. Contrary to this belief, however, Greeks were thriving during this period.[23] There was overall less writing and literacy, and conquest slowed down, but there was also little to no raiding going on during this time either. The greedy and arrogant ruling class of Mycenae came to an end and a decentralized form of socio-economic organizations, later called *poleis*, formed.

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[21] Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 58; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca*, 1.3.3; Antoninus Liberalis *Metamorphosis*, 34; George A. Barton, "The Genesis of the God Eshmun," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 21 (1900): 188–90; Radau Hugo, *Sumerian Hymns and Prayers God Dumu-Zi Babylonian Lenten Songs From the Temple Library of Nippur*, vol. 30, The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania,(Leipzig: August Press, 1913): 1-6; Kerbage, "Light Representation" 2012.

[22] Vincent Robin d'Arba Desborough, *The Greek Dark Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972): 228.

[23] Dan Stanislawski, "Dark Age Contributions to the Mediterranean Way of Life," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 63, no. 4 (1973).

While Mycenae's turbulent struggle and eventual collapse due to the devolvement of their ruling class, a series of natural disasters, and overpopulation, the Phoenicians had begun trading.[24] The Phoenicians were a people bound by a language and general homeland rather than being a cohesive group ruled over by one leader, making it likely that they did not have their own collective name for themselves outside of their cities. They are called Phoenician (Greek) or Canaan (Hebrew) by the groups that interacted with them. Nonetheless, known for their aquatic prowess, the Phoenicians had already surpassed the western routes previously explored by the Minoans and Mycenaeans by the ninth century BCE.[25] By this time they had already begun trade with Spain and they were facing pressure from Assyria as the kingdom wanted access to their ships and ports.

After Dumuzi became Tammuz, his mythology spread further west and by the time his myth reached Phoenicia, he was referred to as Adonis. As he became the divine lover of Astarte, the western Semitic progenitor of Ishtar, his mythology continued to travel west due to Phoenicia's trade with Cyprus. While Adonis did appear in texts with Astarte in Cyprus, it was around this time that he was more commonly associated with Aphrodite.[26] The Greeks, who had regular contact with Cyprus even before Phoenicia began to trade with them, took the mythology

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[24] Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th ed (2012), s.v. Phoenicians; Kathryn Tanner, "The Greeks, the Near East, and Art Dring the Orientalizing Period," *Nebraska Anthropologist* 28 (2013): 23–34.
[25] Stanislawski, "Dark Age Contributions," 400.
[26] Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.105, trans. George Campbell Macaulay (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1904); Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.14.7, trans. W.H.S. Jones. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918); Tanner, "The Greeks," 31; Martin L. West, "The Name of Aphrodite," *Glotta* 76, no. 1 (2000): 134. The first appearance of the goddess Aphrodite is from Cyprus rather than Mycenaean Greece. This hypothesis is likely true as she is not mentioned in any Linear B texts, her name is not Greek nor Indo-European, and her cult centers around Cyprus, especially at Paphos.

of Aphrodite and Adonis back with them, or at least to Lesbos at first, and began to integrate into the Greek pantheon and mythology.[27]

While Aphrodite's origin seems to be from Cyprus, that is only where her name first appears. Like Adonis, she came from the Near East as well. Scholars believe that Astarte, the Semitic goddess of love, war, and fertility, was to Aphrodite as Inanna was to Ishtar. They are the same goddess, but their name changes and powers lessen as she gets adopted by other pantheons.[28] Additionally, Astarte was the western Semitic version of Ishtar, the Akkadian goddess of love, war, and fertility, who was preceded by Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love, fertility, justice, war, and wisdom. The commonality between these four goddesses, as well as the devolution of her realm as she moved west can clearly be seen here. From Inanna to Ishtar, she loses her powers of justice and wisdom. From Astarte to Aphrodite, she loses any overt association with violence, which may have been why Aphrodite was associated with Ares, the Greek god of war.

In addition to the trade and mythology that connect Adonis to the Near East, and therefore to Dumuzi, there are two important natural features that were named after Adonis in modern day Lebanon: The Hills of Adonis and the Adonis River.[29] Neither are still named after Adonis in modern geography, but in ancient times they would have been referred to as such.[30] The Hills of Adonis, currently known as Mount Lebanon or Qurnat as Sawda, is the main mountain range that runs along the coastline of the Mediterranean. According to mythology, the

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[27] Lesbos is where the oldest known lament of Adonis involving Aphrodite is written (See Sappho, *A Lament for Adonis*).
[28] David T. Sugimoto, *Transformation of a Goddess: Ishtar-Astarte-Aphrodite*, vol. 263 (Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014): 213; Stephanie Budin, "A Reconsideration of the Aphrodite-Ashtart Syncretism," *Numen* 51, no. 2 (2004): 95–145.
[29] They were both located in Phoenicia which is now partially modern Lebanon.
[30] Strabo *Geography*, 16.2.19; Aaron Brody, "From the Hills of Adonis through the Pillars of Hercules: Recent Advances in the Archaeology of Canaan and Phoenicia," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65, no. 1 (2002): 69.

top of a mountain on the Adonis (now Ibrahim) River was where Adonis was killed by Ares's boar, his blood is said to have turned the river red, though in actuality it was snow melt carrying down the erosion of red rocks.[31] The modern names for these landmarks are based off names from Islam, the main religion of contemporary Lebanon. [32] While the names have changed, the choice of name remains important to the surrounding empire. Where once Adonis was important enough to have a river and mountains named after him, now Islamic names hold the same noteworthiness.

The festival lamenting Adonis's death on top of the mountain was called the Adonia. The festival was celebrated in Greece, possibly originating in Lesbos before moving to west to the mainland and is a festival that mourns Adonis in loud exaltation. During the festival, women make mock funerals, go through burial rites, and lament loudly from the rooftops.[33] In addition to crying and being distraught over his death, mourners also planted lettuce and fennel, the crops of Aphrodite, in shallow planters, possibly sea shells, so that the plants would never properly take root and would die before they reached maturity, just as Adonis did when Ares killed him.[34]

While there is not a lot of information on how the Lament of Dumuzi was celebrated, the festival of Adonis has provided essential information on its reconstruction. Since Dumuzi and Adonis were almost synonymous with one another, it can be assumed that some of the Adonia's traditions mirrored the Lament of Dumuzi. For example, the tradition of praying and worshipping from rooftops is definitively Near Eastern in origin, not Greek. However, there have also been some arguments against this idea as some scholars believe Adonia to take place April

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[31]Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, 1951, 8, 184; Angè Aouad-Rizk et al, "Snow in Lebanon: A Preliminary Study of Snow Cover over Mount Lebanon and a Simple Snowmelt Model," *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 50, no. 3 (2005).
[32] Qurnat as Sawda translates to "The Holy Quran" and Ibrahim River is named after Abraham the prophet.
[33] Rooftop worship is a Near Eastern tradition.
[34] Matthew P. J. Dillon, "'Woe for Adonis': But in Spring Not Summer," *Hermes* 131, no. 1 (2003): 4.

or May rather than late June as the Lament of Dumuzi does. If the celebration itself and the main deities featured in it are known to be from the Near East, it is more plausible than not that the Adonia takes place at the beginning of Du'uzu, just like in the Lamentation of Dumuzi.

Despite this, many modern historians believe that the Adonia takes place in spring as that is the time of year some ancient scholars have hinted at it being.[35] Aristophanes and Thucydides, for example, imply that the Adonia takes place in the spring because the lamentation of women for Adonis happened at the same time as Demostratus's speech, which is assumed to have happened during the second meeting of the *ekklesia*, in the spring.[36] Other proof that scholars use to prove the springtime celebration theory is that spring was when the Adonis River started to turn red, Greeks may have combined or confused Adonis and Eros, and early spring was when lettuce and fennel were typically grown.[37] The problem with these arguments for a springtime celebration is that, more often than not, they solely rely on written texts rather including any archaeological or agricultural evidence. Greek authors, such as Aristophanes and Thucydides, tended to not always tell the truth or rely on accuracy when writing their histories, and especially not with dramas. The Greeks were known to record hearsay as fact and make much of the rest up; there was no way that some of their "fact" was not made up or at least hyperbolized. Additionally, there is no reason why lettuce and fennel would have been grown in early spring

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[35] Of the ancient sources that mention the Adonia, very few mention a season or month, instead having it be contextualized via other events in the text. This makes it more difficult to firmly place the festival in one month over another.

[36] Aristophanes, "Lysistrata," *Eleven Plays*, 387-98, trans. The Athenian Society; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* 6.8-6.20, trans. Richard Crawley (Dent/Dutton Edition, 1910). Dillon, "Woe for Adonis," 6-7. This *ekklesia* was when Athens decided to invade Sicily again. It was dated to spring as that was the season this particular *ekklesia* and is hypothesized to have taken place;

[37] Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, 1951, 184-5; Ronda R. Simms, "A Date with Adonis," *Antichthon* 31 (1997): 45–53; Francis Redding Walton, "The Date of the the Adonia at Athens," *The Harvard Theological Review* 31, no. 1 (1938): 71-2. Eros is the Greek god of love, passion, and desire and the son of Aphrodite and Eros.

when they were supposed to only live for a few days anyway. Their purpose was to represent a life cut short, not produce a harvest.

This specific example is discussed in *Phaedrus*, where Plato writes a fictional dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus and the gardens of Adonis are discussed. Plato uses the trademark ceremonial rooftop gardens that women plant in the name of Adonis and Aphrodite to show how a proper farmer would not plant his seeds in the "heat of summer."[38] When discussing cool-weather crops like lettuce and fennel, when planted in too warm weather, instead of slowly growing the leaves that are the edible part of the vegetable, they flower too quickly, turning the plant inedible and unusable. Socrates states:

> Would a sensible husbandman, who has seeds which he cares for and which he wishes to bear fruit, plant them with serious purpose in the heat of summer in some garden of Adonis, and delight in seeing them appear in beauty in eight days, or would he do that sort of thing, when he did it at all, only in play and for amusement? Would he not, when he was in earnest, follow the rules of husbandry, plant his seeds in fitting ground, and be pleased when those which he had sowed reached their perfection in the eighth month?

Here he is purposefully using the gardens of Adonis, which he implies are planted the heat of summer, to show that it is only an inexperienced farmer sows his seeds during the height of summer. Instead, Socrates suggests that it is only for amusement that he plant his crops when he knows they would fail. Therefore, in this text, Plato is fully stating that the Adonia is in "the heat of summer," actually referencing concrete season.

When ancient texts are used alongside the agricultural seasons to date the Adonia, rather than explicitly only using one over another, it becomes clear that summer is a much more likely time for the celebration. Barley and wheat were two of the staple crops that ancient Greece grew, sowed from mid-fall to mid-winter and threshed and winnowed in late spring to early summer.[39]

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[38] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276a, trans. Harold North Fowler (Loeb Classical Library, 1914).

[39]World History Encyclopedia (2016), s.v. Food and Agriculture in Ancient Greece.

There is no sense in lamenting the loss of a fertility god and the subsequent dry season he brings if the festival lamenting his death does not happen during a time of no plant growth nor harvesting. They are mourning not only the ritual death of the agricultural deity, but also the lack of growth in the earth. Additionally, the timeline for Greek crops mirrors the Near East, even today.[40] Crops were planted in the fall and winter and harvested in mid to late spring. The earth was too dry and the climate too hot in the summer to plant anything without it bolting or losing some of its projected yield. This is not to say that there was no agriculture at all during the hot season, in fact, olives and grapes, the basis for olive oil and wine, two of the most important Greek exports, were grown in the heat of summer.[41]

Using both historical and agricultural evidence, the conclusion that the Adonia took place in the summer has some accuracy. It most likely occurred between mid-June and mid-July when the weather would really start to heat up, and around the same time as the summer solstice. Therefore, a logical time for the date of the Adonia would be during the first few days of Du'uzu. This would allow for a correlation with Dumuzi's lamentation and orient the Adonia with the ancient Greek agricultural calendar. It would also fit in better with ancient written texts like *Phaedrus*.

Persephone

Between the three deities, Persephone was most dissimilar from Adonis and Dumuzi, both mythologically and involving her festival. Persephone was the goddess of spring and flowers, and her myth is about how her becoming Queen of the Underworld led to agricultural

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[40] Foreign Agricultural Service. "Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Israel, Syria), Turkey and Yemen - Crop Calendars." USDA. 22 April 2025. https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/rssiws/al/crop_calendar/metu.aspx

[41] Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th ed (2012), s.v. olive

seasons. Though her myth is likely much older, the first instance of the "Abduction of Persephone" is dated to around the 8th-7th centuries BC in Hesiod's *Theogony*.[42] While it is the oldest mention of Persephone and her myth, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is the most agreed upon and extensive myth about Demeter's search for her daughter after Hades kidnaps and traps her.[43] Meanwhile, *Theology* gives a brief mention of her being kidnapped and taken to the Underworld by Hades where she becomes his wife. The *Homeric Hymn*, on the other hand, gives a universally accepted, in-depth story and description of Demeter's trials to find Persephone.

Beginning with a short ode to Demeter's beauty and power, the hymn immediately delves into the myth. Persephone picks a flower that opens a hole beneath her, dropping her into the Underworld. Here she is forced to be with Hades, lord of the Underworld. Demeter heard Persephone's cries for help, but could not find her, spending days wandering the earth, looking for her and stopping all agriculture from growing. She disguises herself and travels to Eleusis, where she is taken in by the princesses of the *polis* and told to look after one of their sons.[44] Demeter had halted agriculture for weeks at this point, starving the mortals and worrying Zeus, the king of the gods and lord of the sky, so he tells Demeter where Persephone is. Zeus tells Hermes to bring Persephone back, and back she came, but she must return again eventually for she ate food in the Underworld, forcing her to remain there for a third of the year. For this reason, Demeter is still rageful and so no crops may grow in the winter.[45]

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[42] The "Abduction of Persephone" and "Rape of Persephone" are the names by which her mythological capture is referred to as.

[43] Hesiod, "Theogony" *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, 767-912, trans. Hugh Gerard Evelyn-White, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Loeb Classical Library 57, 1914). Demeter is Persephone's mother and the goddess of fertility, agriculture, and the harvest.

[44] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 475-78, Translated by Colin Young (2019). Due to the kindness the Eleusinians showed Demeter, she taught them how to grow barley. Only because of the Eleusinian's magnanimity did they share it with the rest of Greece.

[45] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 450-454. Wheat is harvested in the spring.

When discussing the goddesses Persephone and Demeter, the differences between the two involving their popularity as goddesses is an important feature of their mythological characters. Persephone as her own individual deity was of little importance to the Greeks, therefore the task of tracing only Persephone to her origin would be nearly impossible because she was always tied to another, more revered god in some way. Known as Kore, the maiden daughter of Demeter or Persephone, the wife of Hades, she is never seen as her own individual deity, she is always associated with another.[46] Dumuzi and Adonis share a similar fate: each myth involving the deity being forced into the Underworld is told from the perspective of their attributed goddess rather than from their own point of view. However, where Dumuzi and Adonis's festivals are named after themselves and celebrated for the fertility gods sent to the Underworld, the Thesmophoria, a festival surrounding the abduction of Persephone and the yearly loss of agriculture, centers around Demeter. Therefore, when discussing Persephone and Demeter's origin, it is easier to track Demeter's origin and assume that Persephone was always associated with her.

Persephone and Demeter have a much more ambiguous origin than either Adonis or Dumuzi. There are some scholars who firmly believe that the two deities had a Near Eastern origin before moving to Crete while others are staunchly against this idea, claiming they originated in Attica.[47] This contemporary idea that Demeter is Minoan comes from the *Hymn to Demeter*; when Demeter is looking for Persephone and goes to Eleusis, she disguises herself as an old crone, telling the princesses who took her in that she is from Crete.[48] However, Demeter was in disguise here, she was lying about her identity including who and what she was, why

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[46] Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th ed (2012), s.v. Demeter. Persephone is usually never individualized, so much so that her actual name is sometimes replaced with "the girl" or "the Demeters."
[47]ODC Demeter; George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Vincent Arieh Tobin, "Isis and Demeter: Symbols of Divine Motherhood," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 28 (1991): 187–200.
[48] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 123-125.

would she not also lie about where she was from? In addition, this was a story meant to embellish the goddess and Eleusis. Just as barley seeds were not sown first by Eleusinians, Demeter likely did not come from Crete.

On the other hand, there is much more evidence towards her being Mycenean, as there are many indications of them descending from *Potnia*, a Mycenean goddess.[49] *Potnia* was first mentioned around the 15th to 13th centuries and was never referred to by her actual name as it was so well known that she only had to be referred to by an epithet and everyone would know who she was.[50] This deity first influenced Gaia, the mother earth goddess of early Greek religion due to her relationship with birth and motherhood while also being associated with the Earth, as she came before many of the goddesses in the Greek Pantheon.[51] However, certain aspects of *Potnia* lived on in other Olympian goddesses as well. Due to her association with vegetation, birth, horses, and Poseidon, and the fact that in return Poseidon was later very closely tied to "the two queens," *Potnia* could be very close to Demeter as well.[52] Demeter is associated with horses as one of her children is Areion, a divine horse that was birthed from the nonconsensual union between herself and Poseidon, the god of horses, the sea, and rivers.[53] It is also said that *Potnia* could be the origin of Artemis and Athena, which may be additionally true alongside the overwhelming themes between *Potnia* and Demeter.

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[49] George E. Mylonas, *Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966): 159. Her name was not *Potnia*, but she was only referred to as such. *Potnia* translates to "lady" or "Mistress."
[50] A similar circumstance to the previously mentioned women wailing in the streets being associated with the Lament of Dumuzi and the Adonia, even with little context.
[51] Noriko Yasumura, "Potnia of the Mycenaean Period," *Classical Society of Japan* 38 (1990): 141-2.
[52] Mylonas, *Mycenaean Age*, 159; Dietrich, *Origins Greek Religion*, 181; Yasumura, "Potnia," 141; Carolina López-Ruiz, "Gods—Origins," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, 2015), 7. The "two queens" refer to Persephone and Demeter
[53] Lopez-Ruiz, "Gods—Origins," 7. Poseidon may have originally been the consort of Demeter.

Demeter is one of the oldest gods in the Greek pantheon and therefore it is difficult to trace her back to her origin.[54] From the evidence that comes from *Potnia*, it is safe to assume that Demeter was originally Mycenaean, yet she and Persephone still have Near Easter attributes. Rather than having a Near Eastern background like Adonis, Demeter and Persephone were heavily influenced by Dumuzi's mythology, beginning during the ninth century BCE when there began regular trade between the ancient Near East and Greece.

Similarly, the Thesmophoria was not a Near Eastern festival in the same way the Adonia or the Lament of Dumuzi was, however, it was distinctly shaped the mythology of the "Abduction of Persephone." This can be seen in the *Hymn* where it states why only women may laugh during the festival and why it is celebrated in Eleusis.[55] Additionally, out of the three agricultural festivals listed in this paper, the Thesmophoria has the most structure and planning around its celebration. Where the Adonia and the Lament of Dumuzi both have certain traditions tied to them, with women practicing burial rites and planting short-living crops, the multi-day festival of the Thesmophoria has different celebrations, rituals, and religious events for each day. Due to this structure, the Thesmophoria was also the most documented out of the three.

In most places, the Thesmophoria spanned three days and began on the 11th day of Pynapsion (around October and November), around the time when plants were first put into the ground.[56] The Thesmophoria stimulated not only agricultural production, but also human

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[54] Lopez-Ruiz, "Gods—Origins," 7.; Dietrich, *Origins Greek Religion*, 142.
[55] Mylonas, *Eleusinian Mysteries*, 224. When Demeter is in Eleusis, the first person who was able to make her laugh since she lost her daughter was a woman which is why only women are allowed to laugh and jest during the celebration.
[56] Başak Emir, "Thesmophoria," *Journal of Ancient History and Archeology* 1, no. 4 (2014), 4. The Thesmophoria in Athens, a three-day celebration, will be the example used for this paper. However, in others, such as Syracuse, it may have lasted for as long as ten days.

fertility.[57] On the first day, called *Anatos* ("ascent"), women would walk up to the Thesmophorion, situated on top of the Pnyx in Athens.[58] The second day, *Nesteia* ("the fast") had women fasting in the Thesmophorion and there were no public business or sacrifices being performed within the city.[59] This day represented the sadness that Demeter experienced when Persephone was taken to the Underworld. The final day, *kalligeneia* ("beautiful birth") is for praying for healthy childbirth and mirrors Persephone's return to Demeter. A feast is eaten, and the celebration ends on a hopeful and celebratory note. Additional rituals and rites that take place throughout the festival include women being lightly beaten with baskets woven from bark to increase fertility, picking flowers and eating pomegranates were banned in solidarity with Persephone, and phallic symbols and obscene jokes were welcomed.[60]

Unlike the Lament of Dumuzi and the Adonia, the Thesmophoria focuses on the happy and joyful aspects of the myth more so than the negative parts. While it did have a day of mourning and loss, it was outweighed by the last day which focused on the end of the myth when Persephone returns and fertility is brought back to Greece. The festival's aim is to focus on Persephone coming back to the mortal world and bringing agriculture back with her. It directly contrasts the Near Eastern tradition of strictly lamenting the fertility god, only focusing on the negative emotions that the death of Dumuzi and Adonis cause. Additionally, the celebration of the Adonia and the Lament of Dumuzi and the Thesmophoria fall not only on different days, but in different seasons as well.

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[57] Allaire Chandor Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and Their Relation to the Agricultural Year* (New York: Arno Press, 1981):82.
[58] Brumfield, *Attic Festivals*, 82. The Thesmophorion was a sanctuary where the Thesmophoria was held. It was located on top of a hill named Pnyx in Athens. The "ascending" that the women were doing on the first day is likely rooted in ritual or mythical events before it described their climbing of Pnyx.
[59] Brumfield *Attic Festivals*, 83
[60] Emir, "Thesmophoria," 4

Comparisons

The first, and possibly most important comparison that must be made are the parallels between the myths. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and *Inanna's Descent* are very alike in the way that a minor deity representing fertility and agriculture is captured and sent to the Underworld against their will, yet a deal is made so that they only have to spend half their time there rather than the rest of eternity. Here, Persephone and Dumuzi take on symbolic deaths (marriage and capture) leading to the result of the earth being barren for half the year and causing a lapse in agriculture and the procreation of animals.

The version of Adonis's myth that includes him being gored by a boar is the most similar to these myths, as he spends half his time in the Underworld, dead, and the other half with Aphrodite. However, the later and more popular version of his myth includes him staying in the Underworld for a third of the year because of a quarrel between two goddesses, not because he dies. Similar to Persephone and Dumuzi in their myths, his death is symbolic because he did not actually die, but is forced to spend his time in the Underworld due to divine obsession.

An additional similarity between Persephone and Adonis's mythology and festivals that connects them as distinctly Greek is their relationship to pigs. While this may not seem like a very important reason to connect the two, it is distinct nonetheless due to the reasoning behind the inclusion of the animal. In ancient Greece, pigs were known to devour and destroy crops, which were sometimes referred to as "Adonis." This was likely a reason why they were

sacrificed during the Thesmophoria, an agricultural festival.[61] Additionally, Adonis was killed by a boar in many versions of his myth. This exact death may connect Adonis to the destruction of crops, that his death mirrored the destruction of agriculture ("Adonis"). While this may not connect the two myths to Dumuzi, it does state something about the overarching Greek culture: that the importance of pigs in ancient Greece connected Adonis and Persephone's myths, not with their common Near Eastern connection, but with one another. Whether or not the relationship between the deities and pigs shows that they were connected under an older god is unlikely , but it does connect them within their own culture.

In addition to the individual connections between the three myths, they are also all connected to one another. One narrative similarity is that with each story being told, the point of view does not change from the primary goddess who rescues their fertility deity from the Underworld. *Inanna's Descent* is told from Inanna's point of view, *Hymn to Demeter* from Demeter's, and the many myths of Adonis are all told from the point of view of Aphrodite. All three myths are about the grief that Inanna, Aphrodite and Demeter feel rather than the emotions or reactions of the deities who are actually the victims of the circumstances.

The reason for picking the more important or powerful deity as the narrator was likely because they were the ones who changed the agricultural seasons. It was Inanna's choice to put Dumuzi in the Nether World and in most myths her choice to bring him up every six months. It was Aphrodite and Demeter whose mourning and anger caused the agricultural seasons rather than the actual event of Adonis and Persephone being sent to the Underworld. Praying to and worshiping these powerful and influential deities is the closest that the people of the ancient

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[61] Lucius, Annaeus Cornutus, *Greek Theology*, 54, trans. George Boys-Stones (Durham University: SBL Press, 2016).

world could get to having control of their environment as it was these narrators that controlled their agriculture.

Additionally, cyclical regeneration, symbolic or not, is a commonality that Dumuzi gave to both the myths of Adonis and Persephone. Their regeneration stories include the fertility-adjacent deity associated with a fertility goddess being sent to the Underworld where the goddess mourns them.[62] She tries to save them and is able to let them live part of their life in the land of the dead and part in the land of the living. Their time spent in the land of the dead creates a time of death where nothing can grow in the ground and no animals reproduce. This distinction is part of what links them to the earth. The earth never truly dies, neither does agriculture. The land goes through a death-adjacent experience of little growth, but ultimately in the fall, planting begins again. This yearly cycle was what caused seasons and shaped mythology around tradition and festivals.

A reason behind the multiple Greek agricultural festivals that centered around the many agricultural gods could be due to how important agriculture was to the ancient Greek economy.[63] The Hittites relied on trading metalwork and the Phoenicians on trading textiles and material goods, but Greece, with its Mediterranean climate, central location, and massive amount of usable farmland, was incredibly economically reliant on agriculture.[64] Due to this relationship between Greece and agriculture, it makes sense that they would focus many of their festivals and celebrations around it.

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[62] In the version of Adonis's myth where he gets gored by a boar, in *Inanna's Descent*, and partially in *Inanna and Bilulu,* c.1.1.3.
[63] Other agricultural festivals include Anthesteria, Haloa, Thargelia, Kronia and Eleusinia.
[64] Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th ed (2012), s.v. Greek trade. The Greeks mainly grew grapes and olives but not as much wheat or barley. Their lack of ability to grow such staple crops could be an additional reason for the importance for praying for its good growing season and harvest.

Another possible reason could be that since the Adonia and the Thesmophoria were two opposing festivals, one lively and lamenting with only a few rituals needing to be heeded, the other, while also lively, was joyous and hopeful, they may have represented two different parts of agriculture. Adonis, coming from the Near East, represented the lack of agriculture due to the similarly hot and dry Greek summers and their milder winters.[65] It is therefore plausible for Adonis to represent Dumuzi, though in Greece rather than the Near East.[66] On the other hand, the Thesmophoria, takes place in the fall, shortly after the sowing of the first seeds.[67] The festival is a Greek representation of the hope that, like Persephone, agriculture will return.

Having a deity that comes from the Near East and one that comes from Greece would allow for the Adonia to stay in the summer with traditions that somewhat oppose the culture it is being celebrated in. That is where the Thesmophoria comes in and celebrates the actual Greek growing season. While the Adonia does represent loss rather than hope and vice versa for the Thesmophoria, it is important to note why they are celebrated at different times in a manner that addresses their differing origins. The Adonia was a transplant while the Thesmophoria was built around Mycenean and Greek culture and customs specifically. This would explain the bigger differences between Persephone's and Dumuzi's myth than Dumuzi's and Adonis's.

Additionally, it is possible that the two representations of fertility are the two emotions attributed to agriculture. Adonis represents the fear and sadness at the death (harvesting) of the main crops for the year. Women prayed for and lamented his death so that he will come back again just like in his myth. The Thesmophoria is more ritualistic and structured, reenacting the

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[65] Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th ed (2012), s.v. climate.
[66] While Near Eastern and Greek agricultural seasons were similar, they were not exactly the same. Greece relied heavily on olives and grapes which grew in the height of summer. There is also some ancient evidence of crops being grown in early spring as well (See: Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276a)
[67] OCD Persephone; Oxford Classical Dictionary 4th ed (2012), s.v. The Thesmophoria.

loss and return of Persephone in the hopes that she will come back and bring a bountiful harvest with her in the spring. Adonis embodied the hope for an eventual end to the hot, dry summer and the ability to begin to plant again while Persephone was a representation of the wish for a bountiful harvest. The opposing meanings and origins of the Adonia and the Thesmophoria still explain the reasons for seasons, yet also represent the Greek's hope for that year's agriculture.

Finally, there may be one more reason for this split between Persephone's myth and Adonis's which is that in the Dumuzi's myth, he only spends half his time in the Underworld and his sister takes on the other half.[68] An interesting, though unlikely, reason that there were two of the same myth for a male and female deity in ancient Greece could be that they mirrored the same pattern that Dumuzi and Gestinanna followed. Dumuzi, same as Adonis, is in the Underworld for the warmer seasons while in the cooler seasons, Geshtinanna takes his place and Persephone goes to her husband in the Underworld. It was a stretch to come to this conclusion as there are many other differences between the Adonis and Persephone, such as a lack of *hieros gamos*, symbolic resurrection, and Persephone was not Demeter's consort, therefore this theory is improbable. It is more likely that, as stated previously, the Adonia was an adopted, though well accepted myth, whereas the Thesmophoria and the *Hymn to Demeter* were structured around Greek culture.

Conclusion

Dumuzi, Adonis, and Persephone have far too much in common to not be linked together in some way. While modern scholars tend to focus on Adonis and Dumuzi more so than

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[68] *Dumuzid and His Sisters*, t.4.1.3, *Inanna's Descent to the Nether World*, t.1.4.1, 404-410.

Persephone, whether due to her being eclipsed by her mother or simply because she was a minor female deity, there is ample evidence towards her myth being influenced by the Near East. Where Adonis is both mythologically and culturally linked to Dumuzi, and Persephone's ties are based in mythology, the exploration of how Dumuzi connects to two distinctly different Greek gods is apparent. However, not only do Adonis and Persephone relate to Dumuzi, but also to one another: how there can be two different agricultural fertility gods with a very similar myth, whose cyclical death impacts the growing seasons in Greece? Cultural similarities, the differences between their festivals, and a possible aspect of their relationship to Dumuzi through the details of his myth are the catalysts for this way of thinking.

Overall, Dumuzi heavily impacted mythology and the lamentation style of celebration that embodied the Adonia. Though annual death, Near Eastern origin, and general scholarly belief, Dumuzi's relationship to Adonis as his progenitor is clear to see. On the other hand, while Persephone was not nearly as linked to Dumuzi as Adonis was, it is easy to claim that her mythology was, at the very least, influenced by him.

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