

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis  
Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1  
J.G. Frazer  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

BOOK FIRST  
ADONIS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis  
Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1  
J.G. Frazer  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis  
Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER I

## THE MYTH OF ADONIS

THE spectacle of the great changes which annually pass over the face of the earth has powerfully impressed the minds of men in all ages, and stirred them to meditate on the causes of transformations so vast and wonderful. Their curiosity has not been purely disinterested ; for even the savage cannot fail to perceive how intimately his own life is bound up with the life of nature, and how the same processes which freeze the stream and strip the earth of vegetation menace him with extinction. At a certain stage of development men seem to have imagined that the means of averting the threatened calamity were in their own hands, and that they could hasten or retard the flight of the seasons by magic art. Accordingly they performed ceremonies and recited spells to make the rain to fall, the sun to shine, animals to multiply, and the fruits of the earth to grow. In course of time the slow advance of knowledge, which has dispelled so many cherished illusions, convinced at least the more thoughtful portion of mankind that the alternations of summer and winter, of spring and autumn, were not merely the result of their own magical rites, but that some deeper cause, some mightier power, was at work behind the shifting scenes of nature. They now pictured to themselves the growth and decay of vegetation, the birth and death of living creatures, as effects of the waxing or waning strength of divine beings, of gods and goddesses, who were born and died, who married and begot children, on the pattern of human life.

The changes of the seasons explained by the life and death of gods.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Magical  
ceremonies  
to revive  
the failing  
energies of  
the gods.

Thus the old magical theory of the seasons was displaced, or rather supplemented, by a religious theory. For although men now attributed the annual cycle of change primarily to corresponding changes in their deities, they still thought that by performing certain magical rites they could aid the god, who was the principle of life, in his struggle with the opposing principle of death. They imagined that they could recruit his failing energies and even raise him from the dead. The ceremonies which they observed for this purpose were in substance a dramatic representation of the natural processes which they wished to facilitate; for it is a familiar tenet of magic that you can produce any desired effect by merely imitating it. And as they now explained the fluctuations of growth and decay, of reproduction and dissolution, by the marriage, the death, and the rebirth or revival of the gods, their religious or rather magical dramas turned in great measure on these themes. They set forth the fruitful union of the powers of fertility, the sad death of one at least of the divine partners, and his joyful resurrection. Thus a religious theory was blended with a magical practice. The combination is familiar in history. Indeed, few religions have ever succeeded in wholly extricating themselves from the old trammels of magic. The inconsistency of acting on two opposite principles, however it may vex the soul of the philosopher, rarely troubles the common man; indeed he is seldom even aware of it. His affair is to act, not to analyse the motives of his action. If mankind had always been logical and wise, history would not be a long chronicle of folly and crime.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As in the present volume I am concerned with the beliefs and practices of Orientals I may quote the following passage from one who has lived long in the East and knows it well: "The Oriental mind is free from the trammels of logic. It is a literal fact that the Oriental mind can accept and believe two opposite things at the same time. We find fully qualified and even learned Indian doctors practising Greek medicine, as well as English medicine, and enforcing sanitary restrictions to which

their own houses and families are entirely strangers. We find astronomers who can predict eclipses, and yet who believe that eclipses are caused by a dragon swallowing the sun. We find holy men who are credited with miraculous powers and with close communion with the Deity, who live in drunkenness and immorality, and who are capable of elaborate frauds on others. To the Oriental mind, a thing must be incredible to command a ready belief" ("Riots and Unrest in the Punjab, from a corre-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Of the changes which the seasons bring with them, the most striking within the temperate zone are those which affect vegetation. The influence of the seasons on animals, though great, is not nearly so manifest. Hence it is natural that in the magical dramas designed to dispel winter and bring back spring the emphasis should be laid on vegetation, and that trees and plants should figure in them more prominently than beasts and birds. Yet the two sides of life, the vegetable and the animal, were not dissociated in the minds of those who observed the ceremonies. Indeed they commonly believed that the tie between the animal and the vegetable world was even closer than it really is; hence they often combined the dramatic representation of reviving plants with a real or a dramatic union of the sexes for the purpose of furthering at the same time and by the same act the multiplication of fruits, of animals, and of men. To them the principle of life and fertility, whether animal or vegetable, was one and indivisible. To live and to cause to live, to eat food and to beget children, these were the primary wants of men in the past, and they will be the primary wants of men in the future so long as the world lasts. Other things may be added to enrich and beautify human life, but unless these wants are first satisfied, humanity itself must cease to exist. These two things, therefore, food and children, were what men chiefly sought to procure by the performance of magical rites for the regulation of the seasons.

The principles of animal and of vegetable life confused in these ceremonies.

Nowhere, apparently, have these rites been more widely

spondent," *The Times Weekly Edition*, May 24, 1907, p. 326). Again, speaking of the people of the Lower Congo, an experienced missionary describes their religious ideas as "chaotic in the extreme and impossible to reduce to any systematic order. The same person will tell you at different times that the departed spirit goes to the nether regions, or to a dark forest, or to the moon, or to the sun. There is no coherence in their beliefs, and their ideas about cosmogony and the future are very nebulous. Although they believe in punishment after death their faith is so hazy that it has lost all its

deterrent force. If in the following pages a lack of logical unity is observed, it must be put to the debit of the native mind, as that lack of logical unity really represents the mistiness of their views." See Rev. John H. Weeks, "Notes on some Customs of the Lower Congo People," *Folk-lore*, xx. (1909) pp. 54 *sq.* Unless we allow for this innate capacity of the human mind to entertain contradictory beliefs at the same time, we shall in vain attempt to understand the history of thought in general and of religion in particular.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Prevalence  
of these  
rites in  
Western  
Asia and  
Egypt.

and solemnly celebrated than in the lands which border the Eastern Mediterranean. Under the names of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, and Attis, the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. In name and detail the rites varied from place to place: in substance they were the same. The supposed death and resurrection of this oriental deity, a god of many names but of essentially one nature, is the subject of the present inquiry. We begin with Tammuz or Adonis.<sup>1</sup>

Tammuz  
or Adonis  
in Baby-  
lonia.

The worship of Adonis was practised by the Semitic peoples of Babylonia and Syria, and the Greeks borrowed it from them as early as the seventh century before Christ.<sup>2</sup> The true name of the deity was Tammuz: the appellation of Adonis is merely the Semitic *Adon*, "lord," a title of honour by which his worshippers addressed him.<sup>3</sup> In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament the same name Adonai,

<sup>1</sup> The equivalence of Tammuz and Adonis has been doubted or denied by some scholars, as by Renan (*Mission de Phénicie*, Paris, 1864, pp. 216, 235) and by Chwolsohn (*Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, St. Petersburg, 1856, ii. 510). But the two gods are identified by Origen (*Selecta in Ezechielem*, Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, xiii. 797). Jerome (*Epist.* lviii. 3 and *Commentar. in Ezechielem*, viii. 13, 14, Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, xxii. 581, xxv. 82), Cyril of Alexandria (*In Isaiam*, lib. ii. tomus. iii., and *Comment. on Hosea*, iv. 15, Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, lxx. 441, lxxi. 136), Theodoretus (*In Ezechielis cap. viii.*, Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, lxxxi. 885), the author of the Paschal Chronicle (Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, xcii. 329) and Melito (in W. Cureton's *Spicilegium Syriacum*, London, 1855, p. 44); and accordingly we may fairly conclude that, whatever their remote origin may have been, Tammuz and Adonis were in the later period of antiquity practically equivalent to each other. Compare W. W. Graf Baudissin, *Studien zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte* (Leipsic, 1876–1878), i. 299; *id.*, in *Realency-*

*clopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirchengeschichte*,<sup>3</sup> s.v. "Tammuz"; *id.*, *Adonis und Esmun* (Leipsic, 1911), pp. 94 *sqq.*; W. Mannhardt, *Antike Wald- und Feldkulte* (Berlin, 1877), pp. 273 *sqq.*; Ch. Vellay, "Le dieu Thammuz," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, xlix. (1904) pp. 154–162. Baudissin holds that Tammuz and Adonis were two different gods sprung from a common root (*Adonis und Esmun*, p. 368). An Assyrian origin of the cult of Adonis was long ago affirmed by Macrobius (*Sat.* i. 21. 1). On Adonis and his worship in general see also F. C. Movers, *Die Phoenizier*, i. (Bonn, 1841) pp. 191 *sqq.*; W. H. Engel, *Kypros* (Berlin, 1841), ii. 536 *sqq.*; Ch. Vellay, *Le culte et les fêtes d'Adonis - Thammouz dans l'Orient antique* (Paris, 1904).

<sup>2</sup> The mourning for Adonis is mentioned by Sappho, who flourished about 600 B.C. See Th. Bergk's *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*,<sup>3</sup> iii. (Leipsic, 1867) p. 897; Pausanias, ix. 29. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*,<sup>2</sup> i. 2 (Berlin, 1909), pp. 394 *sq.*; W. W. Graf Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun*, pp. 65 *sqq.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

originally perhaps Adoni, "my lord," is often applied to Jehovah.<sup>1</sup> But the Greeks through a misunderstanding converted the title of honour into a proper name. While Tammuz or his equivalent Adonis enjoyed a wide and lasting popularity among peoples of the Semitic stock, there are grounds for thinking that his worship originated with a race of other blood and other speech, the Sumerians, who in the dawn of history inhabited the flat alluvial plain at the head of the Persian Gulf and created the civilization which was afterwards called Babylonian. The origin and affinities of this people are unknown; in physical type and language they differed from all their neighbours, and their isolated position, wedged in between alien races, presents to the student of mankind problems of the same sort as the isolation of the Basques and Etruscans among the Aryan peoples of Europe. An ingenious, but unproved, hypothesis would represent them as immigrants driven from central Asia by that gradual desiccation which for ages seems to have been converting once fruitful lands into a waste and burying the seats of ancient civilization under a sea of shifting sand. Whatever their place of origin may have been, it is certain that in Southern Babylonia the Sumerians attained at a very early period to a considerable pitch of civilization; for they tilled the soil, reared cattle, built cities, dug canals, and even invented a system of writing, which their Semitic neighbours in time borrowed from them.<sup>2</sup> In the pantheon

His worship seems to have originated with the Sumerians.

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, ed. T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black, iii. 3327. In the Old Testament the title *Adoni*, "my lord," is frequently given to men. See, for example, Genesis xxxiii. 8, 13, 14, 15, xlii. 10, xliii. 20, xlv. 5, 7, 9, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24.

<sup>2</sup> C. P. Tiele, *Geschichte der Religion im Altertum* (Gotha, 1896-1903), i. 134 sqq.; G. Maspero, *Histoire Ancienne des Peuples de l'Orient Classique, les Origines* (Paris, 1895), pp. 550 sq.; L. W. King, *Babylonian Religion and Mythology* (London, 1899), pp. 1 sqq.; *id.*, *A History of Sumer and Akkad* (London, 1910), pp. 1 sqq., 40 sqq.; H. Winckler, in E. Schrader's *Die Keilinschriften und das alte Testament*<sup>3</sup> (Berlin, 1902),

pp. 10 sq., 349; Fr. Hommel, *Grundriss der Geographie und Geschichte des alten Orients* (Munich, 1904), pp. 18 sqq.; Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*,<sup>2</sup> i. 2 (Berlin, 1909), pp. 401 sqq. As to the hypothesis that the Sumerians were immigrants from Central Asia, see L. W. King, *History of Sumer and Akkad*, pp. 351 sqq. The gradual desiccation of Central Asia, which is conjectured to have caused the Sumerian migration, has been similarly invoked to explain the downfall of the Roman empire; for by rendering great regions uninhabitable it is supposed to have driven hordes of fierce barbarians to find new homes in Europe. See Professor J. W. Gregory's lecture "Is the earth drying up?"

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

of this ancient people Tammuz appears to have been one of the oldest, though certainly not one of the most important figures.<sup>1</sup> His name consists of a Sumerian phrase meaning "true son" or, in a fuller form, "true son of the deep water,"<sup>2</sup> and among the inscribed Sumerian texts which have survived the wreck of empires are a number of hymns in his honour, which were written down not later than about two thousand years before our era but were almost certainly composed at a much earlier time.<sup>3</sup>

In the religious literature of Babylonia Tammuz appears as the youthful spouse or lover of Ishtar, the great mother goddess, the embodiment of the reproductive energies of nature. The references to their connexion with each other in myth and ritual are both fragmentary and obscure, but we gather from them that every year Tammuz was believed to die, passing away from the cheerful earth to the gloomy subterranean world, and that every year his divine mistress journeyed in quest of him "to the land from which there is no returning, to the house of darkness, where dust lies on door and bolt." During her absence the passion of love ceased to operate: men and beasts alike forgot to reproduce their kinds: all life was threatened with extinction. So

Tammuz  
the lover  
of Ishtar.

Descent of  
Ishtar to  
the nether  
world to  
recover  
Tammuz.

delivered before the Royal Geographical Society and reported in *The Times*, December 9th, 1913. It is held by Prof. Hommel (*op. cit.* pp. 19 *sqq.*) that the Sumerian language belongs to the Ural-altaic family, but the better opinion seems to be that its linguistic affinities are unknown. The view, once ardently advocated, that Sumerian was not a language but merely a cabalistic mode of writing Semitic, is now generally exploded.

<sup>1</sup> H. Zimmern, "Der babylonische Gott Tamūz," *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Klasse der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, xxvii. No. xx. (Leipsic, 1909) pp. 701, 722.

<sup>2</sup> *Dumu-zi*, or in fuller form *Dumu-zi-abzu*. See P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-Babylonische Mythen und Epen* (Berlin, 1900), p. 560; H. Zimmern, *op. cit.* pp. 703 *sqq.*; *id.*, in E. Schrader's

*Die Keilschriften und das Alte Testament*<sup>3</sup> (Berlin, 1902), p. 397; P. Dhorme, *La Religion Assyro-Babylonienne* (Paris, 1910), p. 105; W. W. Graf Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun* (Leipsic, 1911), p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> H. Zimmern, "Der babylonische Gott Tamūz," *Abhandl. d. Kön. Sächs. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, xxvii. No. xx. (Leipsic, 1909) p. 723. For the text and translation of the hymns, see H. Zimmern, "Sumerisch-babylonische Tamūzlieder," *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse*, lix. (1907) pp. 201-252. Compare H. Gressmann, *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder* (Tübingen, 1909), i. 93 *sqq.*; W. W. Graf Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun* (Leipsic, 1911), pp. 99 *sqq.*; R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (Oxford, N.D.), pp. 179-185.



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis  
Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

intimately bound up with the goddess were the sexual functions of the whole animal kingdom that without her presence they could not be discharged. A messenger of the great god Ea was accordingly despatched to rescue the goddess on whom so much depended. The stern queen of the infernal regions, Allatu or Eresh-Kigal by name, reluctantly allowed Ishtar to be sprinkled with the Water of Life and to depart, in company probably with her lover Tammuz, that the two might return together to the upper world, and that with their return all nature might revive.

Laments for the departed Tammuz are contained in several Babylonian hymns, which liken him to plants that quickly fade. He is Laments  
for  
Tammuz.

*“ A tamarisk that in the garden has drunk no water,  
Whose crown in the field has brought forth no blossom.  
A willow that rejoiced not by the watercourse,  
A willow whose roots were torn up.  
A herb that in the garden had drunk no water.”*

His death appears to have been annually mourned, to the shrill music of flutes, by men and women about midsummer in the month named after him, the month of Tammuz. The dirges were seemingly chanted over an effigy of the dead god, which was washed with pure water, anointed with oil, and clad in a red robe, while the fumes of incense rose into the air, as if to stir his dormant senses by their pungent fragrance and wake him from the sleep of death. In one of these dirges, inscribed *Lament of the Flutes for Tammuz*, we seem still to hear the voices of the singers chanting the sad refrain and to catch, like far-away music, the wailing notes of the flutes :—

*“ At his vanishing away she lifts up a lament,  
‘ Oh my child !’ at his vanishing away she lifts up a lament ;  
‘ My Damu !’ at his vanishing away she lifts up a lament.  
‘ My enchanter and priest !’ at his vanishing away she lifts up a  
lament,  
At the shining cedar, rooted in a spacious place,  
In Eanna, above and below, she lifts up a lament.  
Like the lament that a house lifts up for its master, lifts she up a  
lament,  
Like the lament that a city lifts up for its lord, lifts she up a  
lament.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04734-0 - The Golden Bough: The Third Edition: Volume 5: Adonis Attis  
Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 1

J.G. Frazer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*Her lament is the lament for a herb that grows not in the bed,  
 Her lament is the lament for the corn that grows not in the ear.  
 Her chamber is a possession that brings not forth a possession,  
 A weary woman, a weary child, forspent.  
 Her lament is for a great river, where no willows grow,  
 Her lament is for a field, where corn and herbs grow not.  
 Her lament is for a pool, where fishes grow not.  
 Her lament is for a thicket of reeds, where no reeds grow.  
 Her lament is for woods, where tamarisks grow not.  
 Her lament is for a wilderness where no cypresses (?) grow.  
 Her lament is for the depth of a garden of trees, where honey and wine  
 grow not.  
 Her lament is for meadows, where no plants grow.  
 Her lament is for a palace, where length of life grows not.”<sup>1</sup>*

Adonis  
in Greek  
mythology  
merely a

The tragical story and the melancholy rites of Adonis are better known to us from the descriptions of Greek writers than from the fragments of Babylonian literature or

<sup>1</sup> A. Jeremias, *Die babylonisch-assyrischen Vorstellungen vom Leben nach dem Tode* (Leipsic, 1887), pp. 4 sqq.; *id.*, in W. H. Roscher's *Lexikon der griech. und röm. Mythologie*, ii. 808, iii. 258 sqq.; M. Jastrow, *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston, 1898), pp. 565-576, 584, 682 sq.; W. L. King, *Babylonian Religion and Mythology*, pp. 178-183; P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-babylonische Mythen und Epen*, pp. 81 sqq., 95 sqq., 169; R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature* (New York, 1901), pp. 316 sq., 338, 408 sqq.; H. Zimmern, in E. Schrader's *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*,<sup>3</sup> pp. 397 sqq., 561 sqq.; *id.*, “Sumerisch - babylonische Tamüzlleder,” *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse*, lix. (1907) pp. 220, 232, 236 sq.; *id.*, “Der babylonische Gott Tamüz,” *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Klasse der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, xxvii. No. xx. (Leipsic, 1909) pp. 725 sq., 729-735; H. Gressmann, *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder zum Alten Testamente* (Tübingen, 1909), i. 65-69; R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (Oxford, N.D.), pp. 121-131; W. W. Graf Baudissin, *Adonis und*

*Esmun* (Leipsic, 1911), pp. 99 sqq., 353 sqq. According to Jerome (on Ezekiel viii. 14) the month of Tammuz was June; but according to modern scholars it corresponded rather to July, or to part of June and part of July. See F. C. Movers, *Die Phoenizier*, i. 210; F. Lenormant, “Il mito di Adone-Tammuz nei documenti cuneiformi,” *Atti del IV. Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti* (Florence, 1880), i. 144 sq.; W. Mannhardt, *Antike Wald- und Feldkulte*, p. 275; *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, s.v. “Months,” iii. 3194. My friend W. Robertson Smith informed me that owing to the variations of the local Syrian calendars the month of Tammuz fell in different places at different times, from midsummer to autumn, or from June to September. According to Prof. M. Jastrow, the festival of Tammuz was celebrated just before the summer solstice (*The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, pp. 547, 682). He observes that “the calendar of the Jewish Church still marks the 17th day of Tammuz as a fast, and Houtsma has shown that the association of the day with the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans represents merely the attempt to give an ancient festival a worthier interpretation.”