

# The Myth of Aphrodite and Adonis in Roman Mosaics of Jordan, Arabia, Antioch, Mauretania Tingitana and Hispania

## Ürdün, Arabistan, Antakya, Mauretania Tingitana ve Hispanya'daki Roma Mozaikleri Üzerinde Aphrodite ve Adonis Miti

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### Abstract

*The myth of the love between Aphrodite and Adonis has a Syrian origin. It was known in Greece since 700 B.C. The early Greek vases, Athenian black figure vases and Athenian red figure vases do not represent it. It appears in Corinthian mirrors from the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. A huge celebration took place in the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria in honour of Adonis. During the Roman Empire it was represented in several Roman mosaics in Antioch. The myth is not known in mosaics of Orient, Greece and Northern Africa. It was represented in Madaba during the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In Western Roman mosaics it was represented in Lixus, Mauretania Tingitana, and in several mosaics of Hispania. A celebration in honour of Adonis took place in Hispalis in 287 A.D.*

**Keywords:** Aphrodite and Adonis, greek vases, mirror of Corinth, Ptolemaios, not Orient, not Northern Africa, Antioch, Lixus, Hispania, Hispalis.

### Öz

*Aphrodite ve Adonis arasında yaşanan aşk miti Suriyeli bir kökene sahiptir. Yunanistan'da, İ.Ö. 700'lerden beri bilinmektedir. Erken Yunan vazoları, Atina siyah ve kırmızı figürlü vazolar bu konuyu betimlememektedir. Bu konu, İ.Ö. 4. yüzyıl ortalarında, Korint paralellerinde görünmektedir. İskenderiye'de, Ptolemaios Hanedanı sarayında, Adonis onuruna büyük törenler düzenlenmekteydi. Roma İmparatorluğu Dönemi'nde, Antakya'da birçok Roma mozaiki üzerinde bu konu tasvir edilmiştir. Bu mit, Doğu, Yunanistan ve Kuzey Afrika mozaiklerinde bilinmemektedir. Bu konu Madaba'da, İ.S. 4. yüzyıl ortalarında tasvir edilmektedir. Söz konusu betim, Batı Roma mozaiklerinde ise Lixus, Mauretania Tingitana ve Hispanya'da bir çok mozaik üzerinde kullanılmıştır. Hispalis'te, İ.S. 287 yılında Adonis onuruna büyük törenler düzenlenmekteydi.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aphrodite ve Adonis, Yunan vazoları, Korint paralelleri, Ptolemaios, Doğu dışında, Kuzey Afrika dışında, Antakya, Lixus, Hispanya, Hispalis.

The myth of Adonis was sometimes located in Idalium and other times in Lebanon. A river called Adonis flows through Byblos, and each year it turned red when the death of a young man was commemorated. Several flower tales are linked with Adonis, not only that about the origin of myrrh but also that of the rose. The anemones came out of the blood of Adonis hurt by the beast.

A fragment (65) by Hellenistic poet Bion includes the news that Aphrodite spilled as many tears after the death of Adonis as blood drops flowed from the hurt young man; a rose came out of each of Aphrodite's tears, and an anemone from Adonis' blood drops.

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The myth of Adonis (Servais-Soyez 1981: I 222-1229, II 160-170) enjoyed great acceptance during the Roman Empire (Piccirillo 1989: 55; Dunbabin 1990: 199 fig. 213-214; Piccirillo 1990: 43-46 fig. 15-16; Piccirillo 1993: 51-57 fig. 65-66; Dunbabin 1999: 199 fig. 213-214; Piccirillo 2002: 156-160; Blázquez – López Montegudo – San Nicolás 2004: 338). The myth has a Syrian origin and was already mentioned by Hesiod (Fr. 139) towards 700 B.C. and by Sappho (Fr. 21, 101, 132B) towards 600 B.C.

This myth is not represented in ceramic from Attica before the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Boardman 1974; Boardman 1975; Boardman 1998), whereas it is represented in mirrors from Corinth dating from halfway through the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Since these mirrors have been found in tombs, the myth has been given a funereal character (Boardman – La Rocca 1975: 133). It had an important tradition, because it had been celebrated during the Hellenistic period by Theocritus (XV) and Bion (Fr. 1-100).

The myth is documented in mosaics, although not in large numbers. It is the subject of this paper, which we dedicate to the memory of Dr. Salman, whose recent death is mourned by all of us devoted to mosaics. The paper follows a mosaic sequence from Orient to the Western world and does not intend to be a thorough study.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to study the mosaics with the myth of Adonis from the Roman Empire period throughout its Mediterranean provinces, and the cause of the locations of the myth, its chronology, and the relations of literary sources in the representations of mosaics. This myth has been forgotten in research work during the last decades.

## Madaba

A very important mosaic workshop was active in this town located in the south of the Arabia province and provided very original pieces of artistic quality. It was found in the southern hall of the palace. The mosaic that stands out is the one with Aphrodite and Adonis sitting on the throne, both recognizable through their names written in Greek on top of both figures (Fig. 1). It decorated the hall of Hippolytus, with the characters of Euripides' tragedy.

The goddess has a naked torso. A cloak with pleats covers the legs. She wears sandals on her feet. She combs her hair down to her shoulders. Two small pearl necklaces cling to her neck, and a big medallion hangs from them. She wears bracelets on both forearms and wrists. Her left hand holds a flower, the symbol of Aphrodite, in front of her body. Two bracelets decorate the ankles. The goddess lifts a sandal threatening Eros, who is naked and holds one of the Charites. All three of them wear tunics.

Adonis covers the lower part of his body with a pleated cloak and his torso with a blouse with two ribbons that hang from it. Large bracelets decorate the wrists. His hair is long. His right hand, lifted up to his head, holds a long spear. One of the Charites follows a naked Eros, who has wings and runs away from her turning his head back. The composition ends with a peasant carrying a basket full of fruit and a partridge that hangs from her right hand. The scene takes place in a field, as signalled by a tree placed in the middle, which naked Eros is climbing while trying to hold on to a further Charites. In between that group and Aphrodite is a third Charites that lifts a naked and winged Eros, whom Aphrodite is about to hit with a sandal.



Figure 1  
Madaba. Aphrodite, Adonis.  
The Charites. Erotes.  
Peasant. Madaba Museum.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.



Figure 2  
Madaba. Roma. Gregoria.  
Madaba Museum.  
Photo from the Internet.

Three naked and winged Erotes can be found in the lower part. The one on the left looks forward, his arms hang down on the right side of his body. The one in the middle touches Aphrodite. The one on the right has his head inside a wicker basket. Flowers lie scattered around the floor.

The personifications of Roma, Gregoria and Madaba (Fig. 2) are on top of the composition. Piccirillo attributed this highlight of mosaic art to the Master of Hippolytus. It shows very clearly all the qualities and imperfections attributed to the mosaic school of Madaba, which was one of the most homogenous regional expressions of the classical renaissance of the Justinian period. A huge polychromatic diversity can be seen. The mosaic has a very important technical quality and a vast figurative richness.





Figure 3  
Madaba. Achilles, Patroclus,  
Hube. Madaba Museum.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.

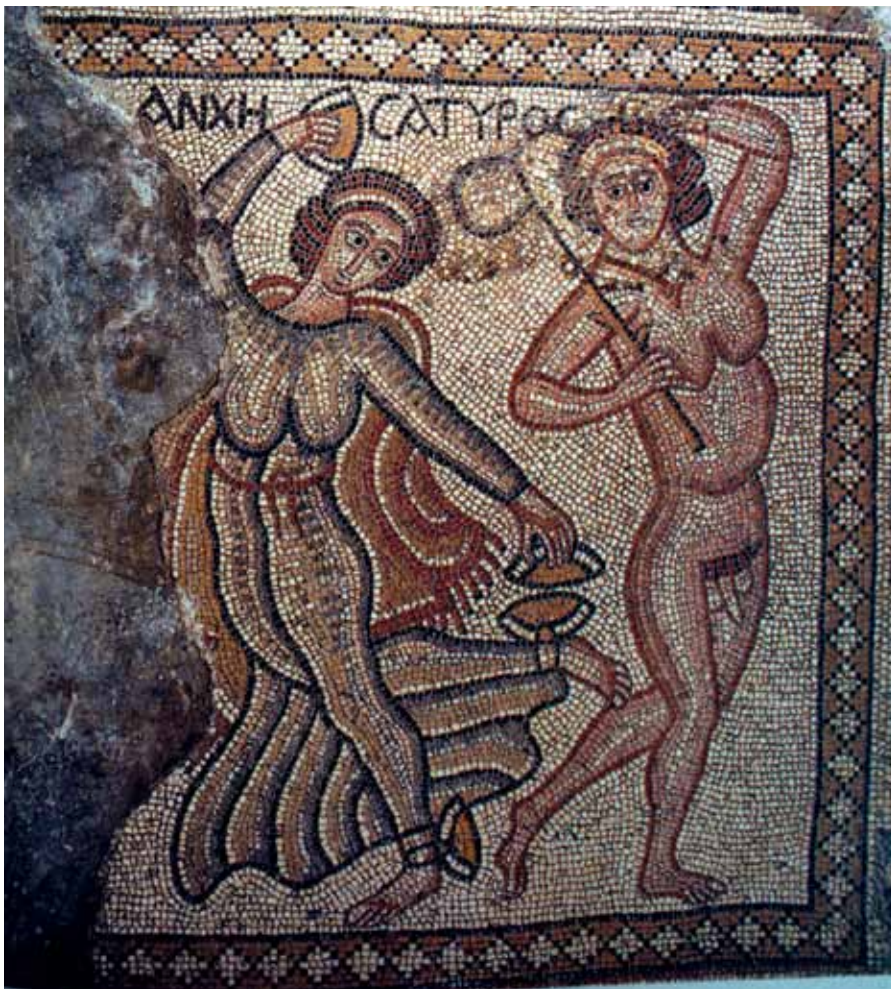


Figure 4  
Madaba. Maenad and Satyr.  
Madaba Museum.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.

Because of its style, the mosaic belongs to the school of Madaba, which worked during the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The classical renaissance of the Justinian period of the 6<sup>th</sup> century had other ways of representing pagan subjects, as the one that portrays a naked Achilles playing the lyre (Fig. 3) in between Patroclus and a lady crowned by two cupids (Piccirillo 2002: 142-143). The three characters



are identified by their names in Greek (Blázquez – López-Monteagudo – San Nicolás 2004: 334-335 fig. 21). This mosaic was found in the southern district of Madaba and is currently in the Dionysian Procession Hall of the Archaeological Museum of the city.

The second mosaic belongs to the Dionysian Procession. A Maenad dances (Fig. 4) naked, with a cloak over her back. She plays the castanets with hands and feet. Her companion, a Satyr, is fully naked. They also go with their respective names. This mosaic dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., is therefore contemporary of the Aphrodite and Adonis mosaic, but this one surpasses it in the intricacy of its composition (Piccirillo 2002: 144; Blázquez – López-Monteagudo – San Nicolás 2004: 334 fig. 25).

### Antioch

The capital of Syria has offered a great amount of mosaics with a mythological subject. Those representing the myth of Adonis have are interesting for this paper.

In the mosaic of the Yakto complex, Megalopsychia (Fig. 5), given that name because of the bust at the centre of the composition surrounded by scenes of hunting that probably dates from 450-469 A.D, we find Adonis, Meleager and some others. They wear costumes of the time and clearly represent venatores

Figure 5  
Antioch. Yakto complex.  
Megalopsychia. Adonis spearing  
a wild boar. Antioch Museum.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.







Figure 6  
Antioch. House of the Red  
Pavement. Aphrodite and  
Adonis. Antioch Museum.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.

of the amphitheatre. Only Adonis seems to follow a traditional iconography. Adonis stabs a hefty wild boar with the spear. A dog is beside him. The scene is located in the countryside (Levi 1974: 338 fig. 136; Dunbabin 1999: 181 fig. 194; Cimok 2000: 252-253).

In a mosaic of the Atrium House of Antioch, Aphrodite and Adonis are chatting together. The heads and shoulders of the lovers are missing. They sit on thrones. Both are naked from the waist up. A cloak covers the legs of the young man. The goddess wears a chiton, a himation and sandals. A footstool is in front of the throne, on which the goddess rests her feet. On the left in front of Adonis, a standing dog rears back its head (Levi 1974: 24-25 Table IIa.CXLIIa). The mosaic dates from before the earthquake of the year 115 A.D.

The mosaic of the House of the Red Pavement (Fig. 6) represents the farewell of Adonis. Only two figures take part in it. A little Eros is in between both lovers. The mosaic artist probably wanted to represent a temple and trees. Adonis is a beautiful young man who holds two hunting spears. The lady wears a chiton. Her right arm is decorated with a golden bracelet. Her left hand holds a scepter. Eros wears a cloak (Levi 1947: 80-82). Aphrodite set up some funeral rites in honour of Adonis that are celebrated each year during the spring by young Syrian women. In a christened city such as Antioch during the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., according to the last historian of Antiquity, Ammianus Marcellinus (XII.9.14),



when his friend the emperor Julian visited the town, he found a group of women mourning the death of Adonis (Festugière 1959; Kondoleon 2001).

It is noteworthy that the myth of Adonis, having a Syrian origin, did not call the attention of owners of villas and is therefore not represented in Orient, with the exception of Antioch and the mentioned mosaic of Madaba. It cannot be found in present Syria (Balty 1977; Blázquez – Cabrero 2010: 49-50 fig. 7), in Lebanon, although in this country the small village of Geiné was called Adonis during Antiquity (Chéhab 1958: 41), nor in Phoenicia (Blázquez – López-Monteagudo – San Nicolás 2004: 325-328), nor in Israel (Ovadia 1947). It is also not documented in the Anatolian coast (Blázquez – López-Monteagudo – San Nicolás 2004: 362-370), nor in Greece (Blázquez – López-Monteagudo – San Nicolás 2004: 349-362). There is no easy explanation for the fact that the Adonis and Aphrodite myth has never showed up in Cyprus (Daszewski – Michaelides 1988; Michaelides 1992; Blázquez – López-Monteagudo – San Nicolás 2004: 339-342). There is also no testimony of Adonis in mosaics from Egypt (Daszewski 1985) (XV).

The myth of Adonis is not present in the Roman province of Africa (Fantar et al. 1994; Blanchard-Lémée – Ennaïfer – Slim 1995; Abed-ben Khader – Balanda - Uribe Echevarría 2003), even though hunting scenes are frequently represented in mosaics (Dunbabin 1978: 46-64). The myth of Meleager and Atalanta with the hunt of the Calydonian wild boar is only found once, in the Villa Nile of Leptis Magna (Dunbabin 1978: 52, 264), and dates from the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. or early next century.

It must be highlighted that the two big myths of wild boar hunting, that of Aphrodite and Adonis and that of Meleager and Atalanta, had no acceptance in

Figure 7  
Lixus. Aphrodite and Adonis.  
Erotes. Tétouan Museum.  
Photo by M.L. Neira.



Roman mosaics from Africa, even though wild boar hunting scenes are often represented, as in Carthage, Hill of Juno, dating from 210-230 A.D. (Dunbabin 1978: 262 table 21); in Carthage, Dermech, from the early 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Dunbabin 1978: 252 table 26); from the same place, early 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Dunbabin 1978: 252 table 27); in Henchir-Tougar (Dunbabin 1978: 262 table 23); and in Djemila, dating from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. or 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Dunbabin 1978: 256 table 45).

The myth of Adonis is not known in Libya and Mauretania Caesariensis. Some have wanted to recognize the myth of Adonis in Lixus (Fig. 7), Mauretania Tingitana, an ancient Phoenician foundation on the Atlantic coast (Dunbabin 1978: 264; Blázquez 2006: 1408 fig. 16). Both lovers, Venus and Adonis, are represented embracing themselves in a rectangular panel. They are naked. Venus' cloak falls down to her knees, and Adonis' cloak hangs over his back. Adonis holds a basket full of plants with his left hand. We are probably dealing with the Gardens of Adonis. They are surrounded by several winged and naked Eros who wear garlands, and there are also birds, a parrot and bouquets. Even though there have been doubts about this representation, we think it is authentic, because the presence of baskets with plants can have no other meaning than the Gardens of Adonis (Blázquez 1981: 23-24 table 9.35, table 83; Blázquez 2008: 8-9 figs. 1-2).

A mosaic from Volubilis, the capital of the kingdom of Mauretania, has been interpreted as being Venus and Adonis. A naked young man with a cloak falling over his back and tied at the front, a spear thrust into the floor and a naked woman, would be Adonis watching a woman that lies on the floor. The mosaic lacks an important part of the body that would be Aphrodite, who holds an unknown posture for a representation of this myth. The feet of a flying Eros are on top of the goddess. This would prove that the scene represents Venus and Adonis.

## The myth of Aphrodite and Adonis in Hispanic mosaics

Most of the myths are represented in Hispania, even several times (Blázquez 1993: 275-335, 380-444). Nevertheless, the amount of Hispanic mosaics with Adonis as its main character is scant, five in all.

### Arellano

A mosaic from the oecus in the Villa of Arellano (Navarra) located in the Pyrenees. It is crowned with the scene in which Aphrodite says goodbye to Adonis (Fig. 8), who leaves for the hunt. The emblem has a rectangular shape and is placed inside a broad frame.

The scene is represented in front of the fortified tower of a villa. A row of windows from it can clearly be seen in the upper part, with an attic separated from the lower body of the tower by two thick dark stripes. A landscape with palms and different trees is represented on the right. The scene is well preserved. The left half has almost completely disappeared. This destruction may be attributed to the Christians destroying Pagan temples.

On the left side is a woman with her head hanging down and obvious signs of sadness. She is standing and wears a cloak, a reddish palla, and a thick pearl necklace. Her hair is held with a ribbon. A part of her hair, behind the turban, falls over her back. A double border decorates the cloak in red and black colours. She is lying on a chair with her head tilted sideways. The woman shows a vivid





Figure 8  
Arellano. Parting of Adonis. In situ.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.

expression of sadness and despondency. The midwife combs her hair with a part in the middle. The hair falls down on both sides of her face. She has a double necklace around her neck, and wears a tunic and a blue-greenish cloak. A white veil covers the head and falls over her shoulders and back and over her knee.

In front of her stands a bearded man with a cap on his head, who wears a dark ribbon tunic. Its borders are red and black. A cloak covers the left shoulder and the back.

On the lower part, the most damaged, only two legs wearing soldier boots are preserved. The cloak covers the back. Then the front legs of a horse and a dog with its head turned back can be seen. The scene represents the farewell of Adonis, who leaves for the deadly hunt. Aphrodite has collapsed, destroyed because she already knows the disastrous end of the hunt (Mezquíriz 2003: 228-331; Blázquez 2013: 88).

A second farewell of Aphrodite and Adonis (Fig. 9) is only known in picture. It was found in 1802 in the so called quarry of the port of Tarragona. The farewell takes place in front a double portico of Corinthian columns decorated with garlands. A naked Aphrodite stands backwards in front of a throne and wears a brassiere. On her side, Adonis wears a cloak and looks absorbed to her loved one. He carries two spears leaning them against his shoulder (San Nicolás 1994: 400 fig. 3; Blázquez 2013: 88).



Figure 9  
Tarragona. Aphrodite and Adonis.  
According to A. Balil.





Figure 10  
Carranque. Adonis spearing  
a wild boar. In situ.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.

### Adonis fights with the wild boar

The fight of Adonis with the wild boar has been represented in two Hispanic mosaics from the Late Empire. It is represented in a mosaic from Carranque (Toledo) (Blázquez 1993: 214-215; Fernández-Galiano – Patón 1994: 324 fig. 5; Blázquez 2013: 88). The villa might have belonged to Maternus Gynegius, a high level civil servant in the court of Theodosius I, whose corpse was brought to Hispania by her spouse Acanthia (Chastagnol 1965: 289-290) (Fig. 10).

Mars and Venus are in the upper left corner. Mars is naked. The cloak hangs over his back and he covers his head with a plumed helmet. He wears caligae. His right hand holds a spear. Venus wears a long tunic bearing her spread arms. Both characters are chatting.

The centre of the composition is taken by a naked Adonis, who stabs the spear into a fierce wild boar. The mosaic artist splendidly expressed the body shape and the muscle tension, the effort of the whole body needed to thrust the spear inside the beast. Two wounded dogs are in the lower part with their respective names, Menander and Titurius. Their open jaws point out that they have been seriously wounded by the wild boar. Beneath the wild boar is a bent spear; undoubtedly, Adonis broke it. A running hare flees in the lower right corner. The back half of a wild boar is also represented, which indicates that Adonis attacked a herd of wild boars, not just a single animal.

The names accompany the hunting dogs or wild animals in amphitheatres, a very frequent habit in mosaics from the Roman province of Africa, and a multitude of examples can be mentioned. This habit does not usually repeat itself in other Roman provinces. We have insisted (Blázquez 1993: 70-92) in several of our studies that some Hispanic mosaics respond to copy-books with an African origin. This thesis was offered by Dunbabin years ago (Dunbabin 1978: 219-222).

### Augusta Emerita

A mosaic from the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in a villa located in El Hinojal (Las Tiendas), close to Augusta Emerita, the capital of the Lusitania province, is decorated with what is most probably the fight of Adonis with the wild boar (Fig. 11) (Blanco





Figure 11  
El Hinojal. Adonis spearing a  
wild boar. Museo Nacional  
de Arte Romano, Mérida.  
Photo by G. López Monteagudo.

1978: 52 fig. 12, Table 95-96; Blázquez 2008: 28 fig. 22; Blázquez – Cabrero 2012: 51-52 fig. 8). The mosaic is subdivided in three parts. Only the central part of it is interesting for this paper. It is decorated with the hunt of a wild boar by a hunter who resists the charge of the beast standing firmly with a spear. The mosaic was thoroughly restored in some of its parts during Antiquity. The hunter dresses like men of that time. The inscription of the already mentioned mosaic from Antioch with the bust of Megalopsychia has a similar subject. It indicates that the hunter is Adonis. The fight takes place in a field, as shown by the brushes in broad daylight, because the shadows of the hunter and the wild boar project themselves on the ground.

#### Arcos de la Frontera

In Arcos de la Frontera (Cádiz) (Fig. 12) a highly damaged mosaic represents the parting of Venus and Adonis. He stands naked with a spear resting on his left shoulder and wears a cloak that covers his back and hangs from his left shoulder. Left of him are the rear part of a horse, the feet of a man and the tip of a spear. On the right of Adonis stands Venus, naked and looking frontwards. The cloak flutters in the wind over her back, hanging from the left side and wrapping the legs. The goddess looks at Adonis. His right hand is held by a naked Eros. The legs of a second horse stick out behind the young man (Blázquez 1982: 50-51 fig. 13 table 17; San Nicolás 1994: 398 fig. 6).

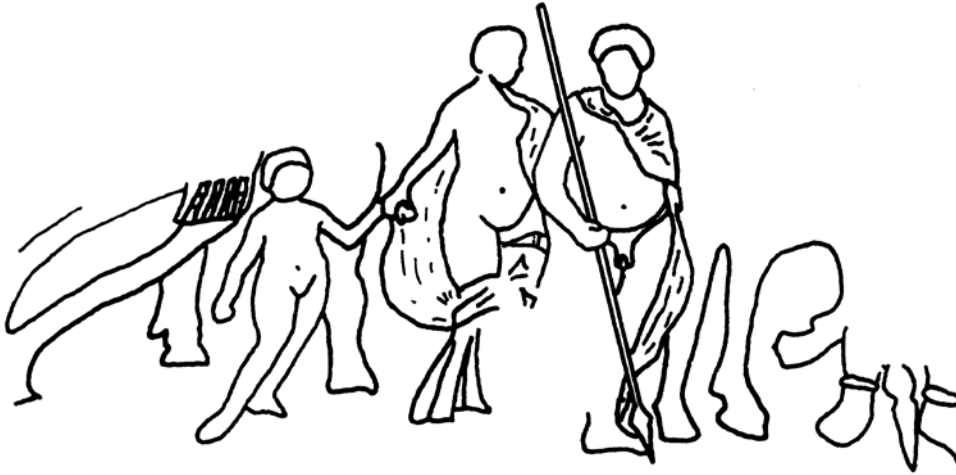


Figure 12  
Arcos de la Frontera. Aphrodite  
and Adonis. Museo Provincial  
de Bellas Artes. Museo de Cádiz.  
Photo by P. San Nicolás.

### Italica

One last Hispanic mosaic should be recalled with the subject of Venus and Adonis. It appeared in Italica, in the vicinity of Hispalis. The mosaic, called of Galatea, dates from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., is lost today and is only known through a painting from 1876 (Blanco 1978: 54-55 table 77; San Nicolás 1994: 398). It has three lines of medallions decorated with hens, ducks and other birds. The parting of Venus and Adonis is represented in the upper central medallion. The young man is fully naked, and the cloak is gathered around his left leg, while the spear is held with his right hand. He stands frontwards. Venus talks to her lover and directs her right arm towards him. She is naked, stands frontwards and wears long hair down to her left shoulder. The cloak hangs over her back, over her left leg and hangs from her left arm. Both characters are naked. He holds a mace with his hand and rests his foot on a ball. The woman holds a spear in her hand. The scene recalls that of Venus and Adonis engraved in the Augustan plate of Arlen, one of the best Hispanic mosaics, dating from around 400 A.D., that appeared in the Villa of Fraga (Huesca) (Fig. 13). Both lovers are naked and look frontwards. Adonis lifts a basket full of fruits with his left hand. This mosaic has been interpreted as Eros and Psyche, but it is highly probable that the characters are Venus and Adonis in a Garden of Adonis, just as in the already mentioned mosaic of the Lixus (Levi 1947: 82 fig. 30; Fernández-Galiano 1987: 93-94 table XI; Blázquez 2008: 8 fig. 1; Blázquez 2011: 163 fig. 13). Both scenes may come from the same cardboard, which could be a part of Adonis' cloak.

Hispanic mosaics with the subject of Adonis and Venus are truly scarce. Nevertheless, the Adonis festivities were held in Hispalis, nearby Italica. The ritual and the cause of death of the young Christian girls Justa and Rufina are known through the Breviarium from Évora (Portugal). Justa and Rufina were two Christians who sold ceramic on the street. One day, a procession of women dancing around a stone image passed in front of them. This was a part of the ritual. The god was called Salambó, and was akin to Adonis. They requested the two young Christians to support the worship of their god and asked Justa and Rufina for some ceramic glasses, the so called Gardens of Adonis (Detienne 1965). Seeds were planted and watered with hot water for the plants to come up quickly. The plants withered immediately, thus symbolizing the death of Adonis. The women carried out funeral rituals to celebrate the tragic destiny of Aphrodite's loved one. The two Christians rejected this and the women attacked their stand and destroyed the ceramics. Enraged, Justa and Rufina leapt on the image of the idol and tossed it to the floor breaking it in pieces. Diogenianus, the governor,





Figure 13  
Fraga. Aphrodite and Adonis.  
Museo de Huesca.  
Photo by D. Fernández-Galiano.

arrested the two Christian girls and brought them to Hispalis. He stretched them on a rack and caused them an atrocious torture with the help of hooks (Cumont 1927: 330-341; García y Bellido 1967: 102-104). A few days later, Diogenianus decided going to Mons Marianus. He ordered that the two young Christians should walk barefoot through rough and uneven places. Justa died in prison. The governor gave the order of throwing her body into a deep well, but Bishop Salinus removed it and gave it a pious funeral.

Modern research has accepted the version of the Évora Breviarium. Alvar, an outstanding researcher of Mystery Religions, has made a critique to the accepted narrative. The cult of Adonis has been associated in the lower Betis with the existence of several beatylus in Carmona, some 40 kilometres from Hispalis. The ceramic wells, an egg and a beatylus have been identified as ritual deposits of an Adonis cult. Salambó, who is cited in the Breviarium, is never mentioned here. There must have been a public altercation in Hispalis that needed the intervention of the governor, who lived in Córdoba. The clash between Christians and worshippers of Salambó was not related to the persecution of Diocletian. The Breviarium may respond to a historic fact, but is largely embellished by fantasy (Alvar 2011: 361-394).

## Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this brief analysis of the mosaics: During the Roman Empire period there are two regions where the mosaics with the myth of Adonis are located, namely Orient, Antioch, Madaba; and Hispania and Mauretania Tingitana.

The location in Antioch is logical, because it was the richest, best educated and most important city in Syria, and due to its proximity to Lebanon, one of the regions where the myth was located. Every year during spring, Syrian women held a funeral festivity in honour of Adonis established by Aphrodite herself. They planted seeds and irrigated them with hot water. They sprouted very quickly, but withered immediately. These are the so called Gardens of Adonis. It makes sense that the owners of the Antioch house wanted to represent the Adonis myth at an early date, before 115 A.D. (mosaics of the Atrium House), and during the Age of the Antonines (mosaic of the House of Red Pavement), and that this interest remained until as late as 450-469 A.D. (Megalopsychia Pavement).

Madaba, due to its proximity to Antioch and Syria, enjoyed this interest for the myth, whereas Hispanic mosaics and those from Mauretania Tingitana, a region that belonged to the administration of Hispania since the Diocletian reform, are all from the Late Roman Empire, which is the time when there is proof that the festivities of the Gardens of Adonis were held in Hispalis in 287 A.D.

There are relations between literature and the representations with the myth of Adonis in Madaba. The mosaic is inspired by the Greek tragedy of Hippolytus of Euripides and dates from the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The best literary sources in describing the myth of Adonis are Ovid and Apollodorus, but only the first one deals with the three subjects of his life, the love of Aphrodite, the advices given by the goddess to her lover about the dangers of the hunt, the death of Adonis with dogs with the beast coming out from behind a scrub, and the establishment of the festivities of the Gardens of Adonis. We believe that it was Ovid who inspired the mosaics, and that its subject was chosen by the house owner.

Christians kept on frequently representing Pagan myths until a late date, as in the mosaics of Megalopsychia and Madaba (Hippolytus, The Bacchia Procession, Achilles and Patroclus). The mosaics with the myth of Adonis from Carranque and Fraga in Hispania, dating from around 400 A.D., come from Christian villae. The first one has five love myths, and the second one two.

The absence of the myth of Adonis in Northern Africa, in Cyprus – which bears a strong relation to Aphrodite –, in Greece and Anatolia, is probably due to the fact that the myth had no official acknowledgment by the Roman Empire, since it was a women's cult.



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