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Women of Byblos, Adonis and Mount Lebanon*

Adonis is a character well attested in classical sources and a celebrated figure of modern comparative religion studies as the quintessential “dying-and-rising god” of *The Golden Bough* of Sir James George Frazer.¹ Adonis attracted the attention of some of the most prominent Greek and Roman poets and prose writers from Sappho in the seventh c. BCE, to Theocritus in the third c. BCE, Ovid at the turn of the eras, until Lucian in the second c. CE. In this paper we intend to look also into the evidence of the *Alexander Romance* of Ps.-Kallisthenes of the second half of the third c. CE. The name of Adonis points to his non-Greek origin, generally recognized in classical literature. This paper will review briefly who was Adonis of Greek mythology and literature, then it will relate his Levantine pedigree, finally trying to look into the possible association of Adonis and his worship with the mountains of Lebanon.

Judging by later testimonies, Hesiod, the earliest Greek author to refer to Adonis, makes him a son of a Phoenician king Phoinix and Alpheisiboa.² A second-c. CE mythographer Antoninus Liberalis listed Adonis as a son of Theias king of Assyria and of Smyrna the daughter of Theias.³ Most commonly, in the version of the myth made canonical by Ovid, but known also to the comedy author Plato of the late-fifth c. BCE, Adonis is a son of Kinyras and his daughter Myrrha,⁴ or Smyrna, certainly the same whom named also Antoninus Liberalis.⁵ Much the same we learn from a third-c. CE inscription from Attaleia in Pamphylia, in which a deceased youth is compared to Adonis son of Kinyras.⁶ The only attested role Adonis plays in myth is that of a young shepherd and hunter, beloved of

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¹ The first two-volume edition of the work was published in 1894. The second one, in three volumes, appeared in 1900, while the extended third edition in twelve volumes was published in 1906–1915. Consecutive decades witnessed publications of many abridged editions.

² Hes. fr. 139, MW – these are testimonies in Probus in Verg. *Ecl.* 10.18 and Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* III [183] 14.4.

³ Ant. Lib. 34.

⁴ Plat. Com. fr. 3; *Schol. Theocr.* I 107; *Ov. Met.* X 298–524; Panyas, fr. 27 = [Apollod.] *Bibl.* III 14.3. Reed 2000, 342, n. 108.

⁵ Hyg. *Fab.* 242.

⁶ *SEG* 17.599.

Aphrodite, with whom he is practically always associated in myth and cult, attested from at least the seventh c. BCE in Lesbos,⁷ with fifth-c. BCE evidence from Athens.⁸ While on a hunting expedition, Adonis was killed by a wild animal, in most versions of the myth, including that conveyed by the *Alexander Romance*, by a boar,⁹ sometimes believed to be jealous Ares in the guise of the animal.¹⁰ Our sources do not furnish unequivocal support for common modern interpretations of Greek Adonis as a “dying-and-rising god”, according to Frazer common in all religions, or a god associated with the cycle of vegetation,¹¹ or a solar deity,¹² or of his death as “a mythical paradigm of an act of personal atonement”,¹³ to name but a few modern readings of his myth.¹⁴

In the Hellenistic age, the cult of Adonis spread throughout the Mediterranean, some believe that with a Ptolemaic sponsorship,¹⁵ the most celebrated evidence for it being the 15th *Idyll* of Theocritus portraying the Adonia in Alexandria. Lamenting for the deceased youth (*heros*) was the essence of veneration of Adonis which in Athens and in many other places in the Greek world took the shape of an essentially private cultic event in Summer (July) in which only women were involved.¹⁶ It was neither organized by the state nor marked in the official Athenian cultic calendar.¹⁷ Its part was setting up “gardens of Adonis”: sowing lettuce and fennel seeds in potsherds this way, so that may sprout, wither and die fast.¹⁸

There is, however, a different strain of tradition presenting the cult of Adonis as a communal affair.¹⁹ Rhodes and the Rhodian Peraia knew a cult association of Adoniastai celebrating together Adonia.²⁰ In Cyprus and among the Cypriot diaspora Adonis, often in association with Aphrodite, was worshipped as a god, not as *heros*.²¹ This of course reminds us that in the Eastern context Adonis is a companion (*paredros*) of Astarte/Atargatis, i.e. of

⁷ Sappho, fr. 140, 168 Voigt.

⁸ Atallah 1966, 309–312.

⁹ Luc. *DDS* 6; Ps.-Callisth. I 12.5; Lact. *Inst. div.* I 17.6-10. Soyez 1977, 20–21.

¹⁰ Cyrillus Theologus, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, PG LXX, 440–441; Ps.-Meliton §5. Cf. Lightfoot 2007, 83, 86–91; Declerck 1976, 184–185, 187.

¹¹ e.g. Nötscher 1950, 94; Eissfeldt 1970, 16; Baudy 2002.

¹² Atallah 1966, 317, 320–322.

¹³ Robertson 1982, 359.

¹⁴ For instance, Frazer’s approach was challenged by i.a. Detienne 1972.

¹⁵ Reed 2000; Aupert 2008, 358–359; Bonnet 2015, 171–188.

¹⁶ Soyez 1977, 30–36, 60–67; Robertson 1982; Grottanelli 1985.

¹⁷ Dillon 2002, 109.

¹⁸ Dillon 2002, 165.

¹⁹ Cf. Burkert 1985, 258.

²⁰ E.g. *AE* 1907, 215–217, no. 13; *SEG* 4.168; *SGDI* 4260.

²¹ Matricon-Thomas 2011.

Aphrodite to the Greeks.²² The most prominent literary conveyers of the Eastern tradition are Lucian's *De Dea Syria* (*DDS*) and Ps.-Kallisthenes' *Alexander Romance*, two pieces of narrative penned by authors imbued in pre-Greek traditions of the Levant. We agree with those scholars who accept the traditional attribution of *DDS* as the work of Lucian who introduces himself as an Assyrian (i.e. Syrian) and an eyewitness to holidays he describes²³ and we believe that the *Alexander Romance* was created, in its final version called *recensio α*, by an author living in Alexandria in ca. the mid-third c. CE, a Greek or Hellenized Egyptian.²⁴ Lucian says that the temple of Aphrodite in Byblos is the place of the worship of Adonis and that Byblians assert truthfulness of the story of Adonis having been mortally wounded by a wild boar and state their countryside as the scene of the event. In Byblos it was a two-day ceremony, the first day of which was devoted to lamenting dead Adonis, first at homes, then in public, while the resurrected god was celebrated on the second day.²⁵ The Egyptian logos of the *Alexander Romance* introduces the tale of Adonis and Aphrodite while relating the fictitious story of the birth of Alexander. Nektanebo, the exiled king of Egypt and astrologer, warns Olympias the mother of Alexander not to deliver her baby under baleful signs of Zodiac, one of which predicted: “For Aphrodite, goddess of marriage, mother of Eros the bowman, will lose Adonis the hunter. The one born in this hour, when he sees the light, arouses the wailing of the women of Byblos for himself”.²⁶ Although the text is cryptic, it quite obviously refers to the story, well-known to the readers of the *Alexander Romance*, of Adonis and loud celebrations of his death by women of Byblos. Lucian says that women of Byblos were expected to shave their heads on this occasion and those who did not want to do this had to engage in sacred prostitution for one day. This is perhaps an example of rites of feasting and sexual orgy, attested at funerals in the ancient Near East and North Africa as almost obligatory for young women.²⁷ A reflection of these practices is a Greek myth in which sisters of Adonis were credited with giving origin to prostitution.²⁸ As we learn from Ps.-Kallisthenes, the celebration of Adonia in Byblos by women, referred to as ὄργια, were

²² E.g. in Dura-Europos *SEG* 7.380 from Dura-Europos: ζωγρά[φημα Σαδ/δ]οῦδαν(?) [καὶ]/_Αδών[ιδος καὶ]/_Ατραγάτη[ς]. Lightfoot 2003, 53–55.

²³ Luc. *DDS* 1: γράφω δὲ Ἀσσύριος ἑών, καὶ τῶν ἀπηγέομαι τὰ μὲν αὐτοψίη μαθών. Lightfoot 2003, 184–208.

²⁴ Nawotka 2017, 3–5.

²⁵ Luc. *DDS* 6–7; Cyrillus Theologus, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, PG LXX, 441. Soyez 1977, 35–39; Baudy 2002.

²⁶ Ps.-Callisth. I 12.5. Tr. by E. Haight with an amendment.

²⁷ Soyez 1977, 39–41; Grottanelli 1985.

²⁸ [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.183.

notoriously noisy.²⁹ The greatest importance of these two sources, independent of each other, is that they indicate that Byblos was the cult centre of Adonis.

It is generally believed that Adonis, although never attested directly in Eastern written sources, is a Phoenician deity, at home in Phoenicia, Syria and Cyprus.³⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus shows that Adonis was still venerated in late-antique Antioch,³¹ while mourning of Tammuz, with whom he was juxtaposed or even assimilated, is attested in Harran well into the Muslim Middle Ages.³² His name is derived either from the Western Semitic *adon* (“lord”) with a Greek ending $-ις$ ³³ or *adoni* (“my lord”) with a Greek ending $-ς$.³⁴ The title/epithet *adon* is attested in a tablet from Ras Shamra (Ugarit) of the thirteenth c. BCE for the main god of Ugarit, Baal,³⁵ a ready analogy being also אֲדֹנַי (*Adonai*) as the epithet pronounced by pious Jews instead of the God’s name יהוה. The memory of the Semitic origin of the name Adonis survives in the *Lexicon* of Hesychius: ἄδωνις ... δεσπότης, ὑπὸ Φοινίκων. καὶ βόλου ὄνομα. ἔστι δὲ καὶ κύριον (“Adonis: ruler, among Phoenicians, and the name of Bolos; it also means lordly”), with βόλος as a corrupt name of Baal.³⁶ Thus Adonis of Greek mythology undoubtedly follows upon the Ugaritic myth of katabasis of Baal. A dying youthful god is a well-known feature of Semitic religions with the prime example of Babylonian Tammuz with whom Adonis was sometimes juxtaposed or identified.³⁷

In the Greco-Roman times, the cult of Adonis is quite well attested in a number of places in the Mediterranean world and the Near East. Throughout the ages, the sources allow one to reconstruct the cultic map of the worship of Adonis mainly by taking into account festivals held in honour of Adonis (*Adonia*), dedications to Adonis or the presence of priests of his cult. Thus, as we have already seen, Adonis used to be worshipped especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, i.e. Athens, Lesbos, Cyprus, Alexandria, Rhodes, and Antioch. The cult is also present in the Near East with the case of Dura Europos where the sanctuary of

²⁹ Ps.-Callisth. I 12.5. Robertson 1982, 341–344.

³⁰ Robertson 1982, 313–315; for the connections with the cult of Mesopotamian Dumuzi/Tammuz, see: Burkert 1985, 177.

³¹ Amm. Marc. XIX 1.11.

³² Green 1992, 158.

³³ Kretschmer 1916 and most later scholars.

³⁴ Eissfeldt 1970, 5–6.

³⁵ KTU 1.124. Loretz 1980.

³⁶ Hsch s.v. ἄδωνις [α 1229]. Eissfeldt 1970, 17; Lipiński 1995, 90.

³⁷ Origenes, *Selecta in Ezechielem*, PG XIII, 797, 800; Hieronymus, *Commentarium in Ezechielem*, PL XXV, 82–83; Ps.-Nonn. 5.38; Procop. Gaz., *Commentarii in Isaiam*, 2140; Theodoretus, *Intrpretatio in Ezechielem*, PG LXXXI, 885; Cyrillus Theologus, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, PG LXX, 441; Ps.-Meliton §5. Cf. Lightfoot 2007, 83, 86–91. Cf. Ribichini 1999, 7.

Adonis was discovered; the site produced several Greek dedications made to this deity.³⁸ In the West the cult is attested far less frequently. Moreover, we should keep in mind that the worship of a deity under the name of Adonis that appears in the Punic context is somehow problematic. For instance, due to a Latin epitaph from Bechater (Tunisia), we know of a certain Muthumbal son of Balliathon Labreconis, a priest of Adonis (*sacerdos Adonis*);³⁹ another piece of evidence is a Latin dedication to Adonis Augustus (*Adoni Augusto*) from Khanguet el-Hadjaj (Tunisia), commissioned for the well-being of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna.⁴⁰ However, these cases are quite difficult to interpret. It is believed that the deity called Adonis worshipped in Roman Africa should be rather considered a different figure from Adonis the hunter and the youthful lover of Aphrodite known from the East. In the Punic context of North Africa, one could presume that the name is simply a direct rendering of the Phoenician-Punic word *adon* in its basic meaning (“lord”) and not as a proper noun.⁴¹ Thus, the African Adonis is to be identified with the supreme god of the Punic West, Baal Hammon or Saturn, what might be indicated by the use of the epithet *Augustus*, a common feature in Latin dedications to Saturn from Africa.⁴² On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the name *Adonis* was apparently considered applicable in such a different religious context. Because of that, the case has to be kept in mind and we will return to it soon.

The issue which we would like to investigate in this paper is the place of Mount Lebanon in the cult and myth of Adonis. Mount Lebanon, extending ca. 160 km throughout the Phoenician coastland, with its highest peak of 3,088 m at al-Qurnat al-Sawda’, is one of the most significant mountain chains in the Levant and it is impossible to overestimate its role as an environmental factor in the history of the region.⁴³ The importance of the mountain, famous in ancient times for its cedar forests, is clearly reflected in the culture of the Near Eastern peoples with an example of the Gilgamesh epic, where the cedar forests of Lebanon were guarded by a demon Humbaba. Throughout the ages, the mountain was obviously present in stories and myths of the indigenous people that used to live there: Mount Lebanon appears as early as Ugaritic texts down to the times of the mythological narrative of Philo of

³⁸ Rostovtzeff/Brown/Welles 1939, 135–175.

³⁹ *CIL* VIII 1211 = *ILT* 1188.

⁴⁰ *CIL* VIII 24031 = *ILT* 825.

⁴¹ This might be the case of the dedication (*KAI* 159) l’dn b’l ḥmn (“to the Lord Baal Ḥamon”) in Althiburus (Henchir Medeine); Schmitz 2010.

⁴² Lipiński 1995, 104.

⁴³ Klein 2013, 39–87.

Byblos.⁴⁴ The available evidence indicates a cultic aspect of the place, since the sources mention divinities directly associated with the mountain: from an inscription from Cyprus, carved on silver bowls and dated to the eighth c. BCE, we know that this dedication was made to a rather obscure deity, namely “Baal Lebanon” (b‘l lbnn);⁴⁵ on the other hand, an inscription from Carthage, dated to the second c. BCE, bears the name of a deity called “Tanit in the Lebanon” (tnt blbnn).⁴⁶ All of this, together with the vivid development of the religious life of the area in the Greco-Roman times (see below), somehow provide us with a context for tracing the connections between Mount Lebanon and Adonis in the Phoenician homeland at that time. On the testimony of Lucian and Ps.-Kallisthenes, the place of worship of Adonis is the city of Byblos where it was practised in a large temple of Byblian Aphrodite. What Lucian certainly has in mind is the temple of Astarte or Ξένη Ἀφροδίτη (“foreign Aphrodite”), the shrine perhaps to be identified with a first-second c. CE temple which occupies a part of the archaic temple of Reshep.⁴⁷ It may well have been the structure called by Plutarch the palace of Malkander (Melqart) and Astarte.⁴⁸

Almost certainly Adonis, in one form or another, was worshipped and lamented in Byblos in pre-Hellenistic times. While sometimes equated with ^dDA.MU, a god mentioned in the Amarna letters,⁴⁹ Adonis is also sometimes considered to be a complex syncretic creation of the Phoenician origin, diffused throughout the Mediterranean and later somehow re-implemented at Byblos under the Ptolemaic influence.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the earliest Classical written evidence for his ties to this city is quite late. They are attested directly in the *Alexandra* (828–833) of Lykophron and indirectly in the *Histories* of Kleitarchos, both of the first half of the third c. BCE.⁵¹ For Strabo, who was writing in the early Roman age, Byblos was already “sacred to Adonis” (ἱερά ἐστι τοῦ Ἀδώνιδος),⁵² which shows how deeply rooted the cult was at that time. Perhaps due to strong and long-lasting ties between Byblos and Egypt, Adonis in Byblos assimilated many features of Osiris, both in myth, literature and in iconography.⁵³ There is a number of reference to the extra-urban part of the cult and the story of Adonis. First of all, Lucian says that mourning of Adonis takes place in the rural territory

⁴⁴ Rölling 1999, 506–507.

⁴⁵ CIS I 5 = KAI 31; cf. Lipiński 1995, 306–308.

⁴⁶ CIS I 3914 = KAI 81.

⁴⁷ Lyc. 832. Lightfoot 2003, 307–309, 319.

⁴⁸ Plut. *mor.* 357a–d. Robertson 1982, 322–323.

⁴⁹ EA 84:33; Moran 1992, 154–156; cf. Ribichini 1999, 7.

⁵⁰ Bonnet 2015, 171–188.

⁵¹ *FGrH* 137 F3, ap. Stob. IV 20.73. Soyez 1977, 9–11.

⁵² Str. XVI 2.18.

⁵³ Luc. *DDS* 7. Fani 2008.

of Byblos: πένθεα ἀνὰ τὴν χώραν ἴσταται.⁵⁴ Whoever has ever been to Jbeil in Lebanon (ancient Byblos) will immediately recognize that *chora* of Byblos means Mount Lebanon as the mountains nearly touch the sea close to this city. Theodore Bar Koni, a late (ca. 800) but reliable Syriac author, says that mourning took place on Mount Lebanon for Balti/Astarte and Tammuz,⁵⁵ and this surely refers to Astarte - Ba'alat Gebal (Lady of Byblos) and Adonis.⁵⁶ Another Syriac author, presumably dated to an early-third c. CE, Meliton (Ps.-Meliton?) says that it was on Lebanon that Hephaistos slew Tammuz hunting wild boars. Also, Lucian says that Adonis was wounded on Lebanon.⁵⁷ Then, there is the celebrated story of the river Adonis, now Nahr Ibrahim, related by Lucian: “Each year the river grows bloody and, losing its normal hue, flows into the sea and incarnadines the greater part of it, signalling the rituals of mourning to the Byblians. The story is that on these days Adonis is wounded on Lebanon, and the blood that reaches the water changes the colour of the river and gives the stream its name”.⁵⁸ Although Lucian rationalizes the myth pointing out at red soil being washed into the river by rain causing its red colour, he still keeps the miraculous in the timing of discolouring of the river, every year on the same day: “the wind's timing seemed to me to the miraculous indeed”. The phenomenon of the river Nahr Ibrahim changing its colour in early spring is well known to modern observers too.⁵⁹

However, despite the literary sources, in the Greco-Roman times the cult of Adonis is rather poorly attested in the local evidence, which contrasts the general context of the religious life in the area of Mount Lebanon at that time.⁶⁰ In order to realize this discrepancy one should briefly acknowledge the wealth of attestation of the religious life of Phoenicia throughout the ages. One of its aspects is a vivid religious exchange that took place not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Phoenician homeland: for centuries, Phoenician cult sites were a destination for foreign pilgrims. This is attested both in the case of major cult centres, like Bostan esh-Sheikh, the Sidonian sanctuary of Eshmun-Asklepios, and in some other sites, like Sarepta or Wasta, a holy grotto of Aphrodite in the coastal area between Tyre and Sidon. In both these sites we encounter foreigners dedicating votive texts to the local divinities by

⁵⁴ Luc. *DDS* 6.

⁵⁵ Bar Koni, *Liber scholiarum*, Memra IV, no. 38.

⁵⁶ Lightfoot 2003, 306, 316.

⁵⁷ Luc. *DDS* 8.

⁵⁸ Luc. *DDS* 8, tr. by J. L. Lightfoot.

⁵⁹ Lightfoot 2003, 316–317.

⁶⁰ For the religious life in Hellenistic and Roman Phoenicia and the area of Lebanon, see: Bonnet 2015; Aliquot 2009.

using their own means of expression and their own languages.⁶¹ In the Hellenistic period, this foreign cultic presence in the area of Mount Lebanon is also attested through a fragmentary Aramaic dedication dated according to the Seleukid era to 110/109 BCE once discovered in the site of Yanouh,⁶² that is often thought to be another sign of the Ituraean presence, known from the literary sources too.⁶³

But it is the Roman times that provide us with the most material evidence of social and economic prosperity that allowed the local elites and rural communities to undertake an extensive building effort in order to develop the cultic infrastructure. Indeed, so far, in the range of Lebanon and its immediate vicinity, there are 43 identified sacred sites that can be dated to this period.⁶⁴ Most of them are rural sanctuaries with some significant infrastructure including a shrine or a temple. This growth, both in number and quality of local sanctuaries, seems to be a common tendency in the region and is also attested in the area of Mount Hermon in the south.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, in most cases it is difficult to identify the cult exercised at a particular site: the preserved evidence rarely contains any specific indicator that could allow one to associate a place with a deity. When it is the case, the indication is provided by preserved inscriptions or iconographic representations. One of the most important cultic sites of Mount Lebanon is the sanctuary at Qalaat Faqra, which produced several inscriptions dedicated to Atargatis and the local deity called Zeus Beelgalasos.⁶⁶

Keeping in mind both the wealth of the religious life of the region and its significant development in the Greco-Roman period, it is somehow surprising that the non-literary evidence for the cult of Adonis in Phoenicia is very limited. There are only some material signs that could possibly attest the cult. One can perhaps mention an iconographic representation of mourning Aphrodite (*Venus lugens*) at Qassouba near Byblos, usually associated with the mythological story of her love affair with Adonis and his tragic death.⁶⁷ The epigraphic evidence is modest. An inscribed altar from Byblos (ca. the first c. BCE) dedicated to “our Lord/Adonis(?)” (l’dnnw) is quite problematic, since one cannot tell if a proper noun or an epithet is applied here.⁶⁸ We know of only one dedication to Adonis, most

⁶¹ Greek dedications in Cypriot syllabary at Bostan esh-Sheikh: ICS 343, and at Sarepta: Daly 1980; a presumed Safaitic graffito at Wasṭa: Ryckmans 1947/1948, 20.

⁶² For the Aramaic dedication, see: Briquel-Chatonnet/Bordreuil 2001; Briquel-Chatonnet 2005; cf. Aliquot 2009, 34; 253–258; Bonnet 2015, 192–194.

⁶³ For the Ituraean presence in the Lebanon, see: Aliquot 2003.

⁶⁴ cf. Aliquot 2009, 233–278.

⁶⁵ cf. Aliquot 2008; Aliquot 2009, 71–126.

⁶⁶ Rey-Coquais 1999b (*SEG* 49.2006); cf. Aliquot 2009, 261–267.

⁶⁷ Ronzevalle 1930; cf. Aliquot 2009, 250–251; Bonnet 2015, 190–194.

⁶⁸ KAI 12; cf. Bonnet 2015, 187–188.

likely dated from the second to the third c. CE but of uncertain provenance. The text, carved in a block of marble, is highly damaged and bears only a fraction of the dedicatory formula indicating the deity it was made to *Deo Adon[i]* (“To god Adonis”) with the rest of the text no longer in existence.⁶⁹ What is most noteworthy is the fact that the dedication is written in Latin. This could possibly indicate, as the editor of the inscription believes, that it comes from the area of Berytos, where Latin is most widely attested in the epigraphic evidence. On the other hand, however, we need to keep in mind that in the Roman times Phoenicia, when compared with other regions of the Eastern Mediterranean, is a land where Latin is exceptionally well represented in the local epigraphic evidence with almost 23% of all preserved inscriptions written in this language.⁷⁰ Furthermore, although the Latin evidence is mainly attested in the region of Berytos and Heliopolis-Baalbek, where two Roman veteran colonies were established, the inscriptions in Latin occur in a substantial number also in other areas of the region, usually at major cities like Tyre or Sidon. However, the language is occasionally attested in other areas of the region too, including the countryside of the Bekaa Valley.

In general, we can distinguish several types of Latin inscriptions in Phoenicia: honorific inscriptions, epitaphs, religious dedications and so-called *inscriptions forestières*. While specimens of those three first types of Latin inscriptions occur mainly in the aforementioned areas, the last one, a group of almost two hundred boundary marks dated to the times of Hadrian and denoting the forests of the imperial domain, is specifically grouped within the range of Mount Lebanon.⁷¹ Furthermore, also other kinds of Latin inscriptions can be encountered in the area, as it is the case of a fragmentary text commemorating the imperial building activity in Byblos during the reign of Hadrian or a highly damaged Latin inscription from the vicinities of Aphaka.⁷² This Roman influence in the area of Byblos and Mount Lebanon seem to correspond to the increased imperial Roman involvement in Phoenicia at that time. The Romans promoted the development of the Phoenician cities: for instance, according to the *Book of Suda*, a Byzantine encyclopedia dated to the late tenth c. CE,⁷³ the status of metropolis was granted to the city of Tyre by Hadrian thanks to the request of a Tyrian ambassador Paulus of Tyre, a famous rhetor and lawyer.⁷⁴ It can hardly be a

⁶⁹ *IMNB* 48.

⁷⁰ Głogowski 2020, 173; Nawotka et al. 2020, 217, 231–232.

⁷¹ cf. *IGLS* VIII.3; cf. Aliquot 2009, 49–50.

⁷² *CIL* III 6696; *CIL* III 178, cf. Aliquot 2009, 47–49.

⁷³ cf. Dickey 2007, 90–91.

⁷⁴ *Suda* s. v. Παῦλος [π 809].

coincidence that the Antonine era was the time when the work by Philo of Byblos on the Phoenician histories was written: the imperial involvement and an aroused Roman interest seem to have stimulated cultural activity in the region; indeed some modern scholars conjecture that Philo's work could come into existence inspired, directly or indirectly, by Hadrian.⁷⁵

Since Latin was a principal language of the imperial power, its application in the epigraphy in the region was of symbolic significance.⁷⁶ The presence of the Latin inscriptions shows clearly that in the Roman period Latin was also an important aspect of the cultural landscape of the area of Mount Lebanon. Furthermore, when discussing the role of Latin dedications in Phoenicia, in some cases we can see that the language becomes a mean of religious expression of a purely indigenous cult. This is the case of the cult of a Phoenician deity worshipped in the sanctuary of Deir el-Qalaa in the area of Berytos, Baalmarcod, to whom some Latin dedications were offered.⁷⁷ The imperial involvement in the area in Byblos could perhaps reinforce also other kinds of behaviour, including the Roman increased interest in the cults of this region: the aforementioned pilgrimage attested in the coastal area in earlier centuries could possibly suggest some later parallel too. Therefore, one cannot exclude the possibility that the Latin dedication to Adonis should not be immediately associated with Berytos merely based on its language. The text could rather originate from some other site where the cult of Adonis himself was observed. If that was the case, the area of Byblos and Mount Lebanon would be the most likely place of origin of this dedication.

When tracing the connections between the cult of Adonis and Mount Lebanon, one has to keep in mind the mythological and cultic association between Adonis and Aphrodite or Atargatis, whose cult is well attested in that area in a number of sites. The most important one seems to be Aphaka on the slopes of Mount Lebanon, located ca. 30 km southeast from Byblos at an altitude of 1255 m at the spring of Nahr Ibrahim (Adonis river).⁷⁸ Most likely it is Aphaka that should be identified with an extramural sanctuary of Byblos described by Lucian, who says that he “went up from Byblos into Lebanon, a day's journey, having learnt there was an ancient temple of Aphrodite there, which Kinyras had founded.”⁷⁹ One can presume that at least some rituals associated with the joint cult of Adonis and Aphrodite could take place there in the Greco-Roman times: although it is not mentioned by Lucian directly,

⁷⁵ MacAdam 2001, 196–199.

⁷⁶ cf. Millar 1995; Eck 2009; Isaac 2009.

⁷⁷ cf. Rey-Coquais 1999a; Aliquot 2009, 268–271.

⁷⁸ cf. Lipiński 1995, 105–108; Bonnet 2015, 188–190; Aliquot 2009, 58–61; 258–260.

⁷⁹ Luc. *DDS* 9; tr. by J. L. Lightfoot.

earlier on he describes the rituals at Byblos as being held “in the temple of Aphrodite” and not in the temple of Aphrodite and Adonis. This impression is somehow supported by later remarks of lexicographers. *Etymologicum Magnum*, a Byzantine lexicon of the twelfth c.,⁸⁰ says that the name Aphaka is Syrian and it refers to the place where Aphrodite embraced Adonis for the last time, presumably just before his death.⁸¹ Moreover, Ps.-Meliton states that it was Aphaka where the tomb of Tammuz-Adonis was located: “Belti remained in Gebal, and she died in the city Aphaka, where Tammuz was buried”.⁸² It is perhaps Aphaka where, as Macrobius says, “on Mount Lebanon” (*in monte Libano*) stood a statue of mourning Venus.⁸³

The sanctuary is known both from the literary evidence and the archaeological remains, however, the latter does not allow us to identify the monument mentioned by Ps.-Meliton. Moreover, the site did not produce much epigraphic evidence and the only known religious inscription is, surprisingly, a fragmentary dedication to Zeus of Heliopolis.⁸⁴ But is noteworthy that, when compared with other sacred sites of the region, the textual sources provide us with exceptionally abundant material about this very sanctuary. Some rites in honour of Aphrodite at Aphaka are described by Zosimus in the passage concerned with the struggle between the Romans and the Palmyrenes under Zenobia: the goddess is said to reject the usual offerings of gold, silver and precious clothing that were to be ritually thrown by the Palmyrenes to a pond near the temple.⁸⁵ For Christian authors the sanctuary was a lair of pagan abomination and debauchery that was eventually put to an end by Constantine.⁸⁶ Although these late sources do not mention Adonis himself, one could presume that their descriptions might refer to rituals in honour of Aphrodite and Adonis mentioned by our earlier sources.

All of this leads us to consider the local role and importance of the cult of Adonis in Mount Lebanon. Although the evidence, except for the literary sources, usually overburdened with the Greek concept of this divine figure, is quite meagre, there are still some indications that could provide us with insight into this issue. Firstly, the Latin dedication to Adonis clearly shows that during the Roman era he was worshipped as a god in Phoenicia (in Mount Lebanon?) what indicates the high status of Adonis in the religious life of the region. This is

⁸⁰ Cf. Dickey 2007, 91–92.

⁸¹ *Etym. Magn.* s.v. Ἀφακα [175]: Σύρων μὲν ἐστὶν ἡ λέξις· δύναται δὲ καθ' Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσαν, εἰ δεῖ τὸ δημῶδες εἰπεῖν ῥήμα, περίλημμα, περιλαβούσης τὸν Ἄδωνιν τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἐκεῖ ἢ τὴν πρώτην ἢ τὴν ἐσχάτην περιβολήν.

⁸² Ps.-Meliton §5, tr. by W. B. Cureton, cf. Lightfoot 2007, 83, 91.

⁸³ *Macr.* I 21.5.

⁸⁴ Hajjar 1977, 258 [no. 4] (*non vidimus*); cf. Aliquot 2009, 160.

⁸⁵ *Zosim.* I 58.

⁸⁶ *Euseb. Vit. Const.* III 55–56; *Socrates Hist. eccl.* I 18; *Sozom. Hist. eccl.* II 5.5.

supported by the account of Strabo stating that Byblos was a city devoted to Adonis. Keeping this in mind, one could wonder if we cannot look for some parallels in the evidence from Roman Africa, where Adonis, rather than a minor deity or *heros*, was likely to be identified with the supreme god of the local pantheon. One could perhaps ask if in the local tradition Adonis, as a god whose name might be understood in its Semitic rather than Greco-Roman meaning, should be considered as an aspect of Baal-Zeus. In fact, many local divinities identified with Zeus/Jupiter are attested in the region: Juppiter Balmarcodus at Deir el-Qalaa,⁸⁷ Zeus Beelgalasos at Qalaat Faqra,⁸⁸ Zeus “who is in Rhesa” at Mar Yaqoub,⁸⁹ Zeus Baithmares at Bâb Marè',⁹⁰ Zeus Thamaneitanos at Mo'Allaqat-Zahlé,⁹¹ Zeus Saarnaios at Abedat,⁹² or Zeus Bakathsaphrein.⁹³ However, we have to remember that the scarcity of evidence, together with the apparent wealth and complexity of the religious life in Lebanon in the Greco-Roman times (see above), prevent us from making definite conclusions at this point. But what can be observed beyond any doubt is the connection between Adonis and Mount Lebanon attested in the Greco-Roman period.

The true nature of this association is elusive due to the limitations of the evidence. However, its very existence is evident in the light of literary texts. The sources very often set the cult of Adonis and myths of Adonis/Tammuz and Aphrodite in this very region. Sometimes they do that directly by pointing either Byblos and its environs or Mount Lebanon as a landscape of the cult and myths of Adonis. But most often the sources do that indirectly by focusing on the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Aphaka without mentioning the ceremonies in honour to Adonis that used to be held there or by dealing with mourning Aphrodite. At this point, we can see the relative consistency in the setting of the story. This tendency can be observed in a number of sources dealing with Adonis that were discussed in this paper. The recent emergence of the unprovenanced Latin dedication provides us with the only piece of evidence attesting the cult of Adonis the god in Phoenicia. This leaves us with the hope that coming years might provide us with further evidence shedding some new light on this issue.

In conclusion, we would like to stress first of all the long way Adonis made: from an unnamed Phoenician god to a deity worshipped throughout the Eastern Mediterranean under the epithet-turned-name, and then back to his Phoenician place of origin, this time known

⁸⁷ *AE* 1906.189.

⁸⁸ *SEG* 49.2006, 2007, 2010.

⁸⁹ *IMNB* 3.

⁹⁰ *IGLS* VI 2989.

⁹¹ *IGLS* VI 2960.

⁹² *IGR* III 1060.

⁹³ *IMNB* 21.

under his Western-born name. Then we would like to point to vagaries of ancient literary source tradition. Adonis, a pre-Greek god of Byblos, is attested best by late sources, beginning with Lucian's *De Dea Syria* of the second half of the third c. CE, to reappear a few times in Syriac authors, all Christian, hence hostile to pagan cults but in this case surprisingly well informed. The other regretful aspect of the source tradition is the weakness of local epigraphic evidence, with Semitic Adonis being securely attested, paradoxically, in a Latin dedication only. This is on the one hand the evidence of the reluctance of the Phoenician people to inscribe for display, and on the other of the cult of Adonis attracting people from across the ethnic origins, including Roman settlers. The weight of literary evidence, being Lucian, Ps.-Kallisthenes, (Ps.)-Meliton, Theodore Bar Koni, *Etymologicum Magnum*, point in the direction of the *chora* of Byblos in Mount Lebanon as the place of the extra-urban sanctuary where women of Byblos celebrated the second day of the festival of Adonis. The most likely identification of the temple of Aphrodite in the mountains of Lebanon where her *paredros* Adonis was celebrated is Aphaka, even if it, to our disappointment, does not produce any inscription which would provide secure evidence of this identification.

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