

The Epiphanies of the Dioscuri: Myth or History?¹

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The dictator Aulus Postumius led the Roman army to make their stand near Lake Regillus, while the Latin forces and their commander Octavius Mamilius drew up their battle lines opposite. Within the Latin ranks was a great threat to the newly founded Republic: the recently deposed Tarquinius Superbus and his sons, who sought to be restored to the throne of Rome.² The battle went to and fro; at one moment the Romans had the advantage, at the next the Latin forces pushed them back; good men were killed and deeds of great valour were performed on each side.³ When all seemed lost for the Romans, all of a sudden two young men, greater in beauty and stature than mortals, appeared astride snowy white horses and led the Roman cavalry in a charge, driving the Latin forces headlong before them. Aulus Postumius looked for the pair after the battle to thank them for their aid, but they were nowhere to be found. However, later that same day, the same two young men appeared in the Roman Forum, beside a spring dedicated to the nymph Juturna. As they looked as though they had just come from the battlefield, the citizens asked them for news. They announced the Roman victory to the crowd before leaving the Forum, once more eluding those who searched for them afterwards.⁴ Some years later, a young commander lay dying of a fatal wound in an army camp. His older brother, hearing of his injury, rushed to his side, travelling day and night to arrive at his brother's deathbed just in time. Despite his weakness, the younger man ensured that the proper respects were paid to his brother as he arrived. Shortly afterwards, as the young man passed

¹ Parts of this paper's argument are reprinted with permission from A. Gartrell, *The Cult of Castor and Pollux in Ancient Rome: Myth, Ritual, and Society* © Cambridge University Press 2021.

² Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.4.1. All translations used are those of the Loeb Classical Library, with any alterations noted.

³ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.10.2-6.11.3.

⁴ Dion Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1-5.

away, howls of wolves rang out, women were heard crying, stars streaked across the sky, and two young men were seen riding on horseback through the middle of the camp.⁵

The pair of young horsemen who appeared on these occasions are identified as Castor and Pollux, the twin brothers known as the Dioscuri. They were the sons of Leda, Queen of Sparta, who had been impregnated in the same night by both the god Zeus and her mortal husband King Tyndareus.⁶ The brothers had played significant roles in some of the greatest myths of the ancient world: sailing on the Argo with Jason to find the Golden Fleece and hunting the Calydonian Boar with Meleager.⁷ During their last adventure together, Castor, the mortal son of Tyndareus, was fatally wounded, but Pollux, the son of Zeus, begged his divine father to give his own immortality to his brother. Instead, Zeus divided it between them, so they shared their afterlives between Olympus and the Underworld, and he also deified the pair to celebrate their fraternal harmony.⁸

In this paper, I will use the epiphanies of the Dioscuri to explore the connections between myth and history, considering how the Roman authors engaged with this epiphanic tradition.⁹ For the purposes of this argument, I will be using a rather restricted definition of epiphany, to mean the physical manifestation of a god or goddess in anthropomorphic form to humans.¹⁰ I do not mean to engage here in the unanswerable questions of whether the gods existed or manifested themselves to humans, but rather to explore how ancient sources depicted the epiphanies of Castor and Pollux. Likewise, it is not possible to state that the views expressed in our sources accurately convey the authentic religious beliefs of the authors, who may be using the

⁵ Cass. Dio 55.1.3; Val. Max. 5.5.3.

⁶ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.6-7; Hyg. *Fab.* 155, 173, 224, 251, 273, 275; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.171-172, *Ol.* 3.31-40, *Nem.* 10.55.

⁷ Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.2, 1.9.16; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.146-150; Callim. *Aet.* 1.18.1-4.

⁸ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hom. *Cyp.* fr1; Hyg. *Fab.* 80, 224, 251, Poet. *Astr.* 2.22; Ov. *Fast.* 5.719; Pind. *Nem.* 10.75-90; Virg. *Aen.* 6.121.

⁹ A complementary argument appears in Platt 2018, who explores the inherent duality of the Dioscuri and their epiphanic tradition, arguing for their use as a model to analyse the validity of epiphanies.

¹⁰ Wider uses of the term include divine manifestations in dreams: Plut. *Them.* 30.6; divine healing of mortals: Diod. Sic. 1.25.3; or the manifestation of the god's power: Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.68.3-5.

epiphanies to make rhetorical or political points, rather than seeking to outline, or indeed perhaps without having, a coherent theological or ideological approach to epiphanies.¹¹ For the purposes of this argument, I will accept the views which they do express, suggesting that there were a range of perspectives on Dioscuric epiphanies which led some authors to depict them as historical events, whilst others expressed scepticism or omitted the epiphanies from their accounts altogether.

The Dioscuri were unusual in the frequency of their Roman epiphanies, being reported to appear nine times across the Roman Republic and into the early Empire.¹² As the most frequent epiphanic gods, the appearances of Castor and Pollux provide a number of interesting avenues to explore how consistently Roman authors depicted these appearances and whether the categories of myth and history influenced those choices. I shall endeavour to explore these throughout this paper. Initially, following a discussion of the concepts of myth and history, I shall address the question of ancient beliefs or scepticism concerning the appearances of Castor and Pollux, drawing on Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* to outline some of the arguments which could be used on either side. I shall then draw upon the case studies of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, two roughly contemporary historians who both wrote during the reign of Augustus, but who treated the epiphany of the Dioscuri at Lake Regillus in different ways. Whilst Dionysius included the epiphanies of the Dioscuri in detail in his *Roman Antiquities*, which underpins the account with which I opened this chapter, Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* omits

¹¹ See, for example, Miano in this volume on Dionysius of Halicarnassus' rhetorical and pedagogical use of myth and marvels.

¹² For a more detailed analysis of the epiphanies of the Dioscuri, see Gartrell 2021, ch. 2. Other gods also were claimed to have appeared to human witnesses, including Mars on two occasions. First and most famously to impregnate Rhea Silva with the twins Romulus and Remus (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.77.1-3 includes a pertinent discussion of the credibility of this version of the twins' conception, on which see Miano, this volume pX). Mars was also reported to have appeared at the Roman siege of the town of Thurii in 282 BCE, leading the army to scale the walls and claim victory, before mysteriously disappearing (Val. Max. 1.8.6; c.f. Amm. Marc. 24.4.24). Romulus, upon his apotheosis into the god Quirinus, was also claimed in one version of his death and afterlife to have appeared to the senator Julius Proculus to announce his deification and give instructions for how the Romans should continue to live (Plut. *Rom.* 28.1-3, Liv. 1.16.6-8).

all mention of the epiphany itself, only alluding to it in passing. The final section will expand to a consideration of the wider epiphanic tradition of Castor and Pollux in Roman historiography, arguing that it is possible to identify a trend of diminishing activity and identification of the gods over time and suggesting why this may be.

1. Defining the Terms

First, we must define the terms of the debate: what is meant by ‘myth’ and ‘history’?¹³ As outlined in the introduction to this volume, a traditional view of myth relates to ideas of the far distant past, supernatural actors, superhuman actions, and fiction. According to this view, history is associated with what ‘really happened’, time periods for which we have clear evidence, realistic human actions, and truth. These views suggest two potential distinctions between the categories: chronology and credibility: myth was long ago and incredible, history was (relatively) recent and believable. However, the Dioscuric epiphanies that I retold above, as well as those I will continue to add, do not fit neatly or exclusively in either category of myth or history in terms of chronology or credibility. These epiphanies contain what might appear to be ‘mythical’ elements in varying degrees: sudden manifestations of supernatural beings at critical moments to alter the likely outcome of events. However, they also contain more ‘historical’ elements: these epiphanies took place in Italy and Germany, not in an exotic faraway location; they are described by historians, not poets; and occurred within the age of men, not of gods and heroes. The epiphanies of the Dioscuri related above occurred over five centuries apart: the Battle of Lake Regillus is traditionally dated to 496 BCE,¹⁴ while the unfortunate young commander was Drusus the Elder, the brother of the future emperor Tiberius, who died on campaign in Germany in 9 BCE.¹⁵ Whilst it might be possible to claim

¹³ For analysis of these categories more widely, see: Fox 1996; Feeney 2007, ch.3; Fowler 2011, 2019.

¹⁴ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1-5, or alternatively to 499 BCE: Liv. 2.20.10-13.

¹⁵ Cass. Dio 55.1.3; Val. Max. 5.5.3.

that the epiphany of the Dioscuri at Lake Regillus, at the very start of the Roman Republic, occurred in a (semi-)mythical time, the same cannot be said of their last epiphany, during the reign of Augustus, a period which most would regard as historical. Furthermore, while heroic or divine epiphanies of this type are a staple of mythology, they also are reported in ancient historiography.¹⁶ This is not always without scepticism, as I will discuss below, for some historians take a rationalising or euhemeristic approach to such events, whilst others retain the mythical elements unchallenged.¹⁷ Thus, even this very short retelling and analysis of two of the Dioscuri's epiphanies reveals how difficult it is to formulate, let alone apply, strict categorisations of 'myth' and 'history' to this tradition.¹⁸

Our understanding of Roman mythology has come a long way since assertions were made that Rome had no myths of its own, and instead merely borrowed them from the Hellenistic world.¹⁹ More recent scholarship has argued against such comparative arguments, suggesting that Roman myths were different to those of the Hellenistic east and should be assessed on their own merits, contexts and cultural significances.²⁰ Beard, North and Price, for example, argue that Rome did have myths, but that they differed significantly from those of ancient Greece, being "myths of place".²¹ Wiseman and Feeney have further argued for the existence of Roman mythology and that this corpus is a valuable source of evidence for our understanding of Roman society, culture, and religion.²² Indeed, myths were constantly retold and recreated within

¹⁶ For example, the famous epiphany of Pan to Pheidippides before the Battle of Marathon, and the epiphanies during that battle of Theseus, Athena, and Herakles, among other heroes: Hdt. 6.105; Plut. *Thes.* 35.5. On Greek epiphanies see Pritchett 1979, 11-49; Kron 1999, 61-83; Wheeler 2004, 1-14.

¹⁷ On this tension, see Fowler 2019; for one modern rationalising approach to ancient epiphanies, see Herman 2011.

¹⁸ A useful parallel might be drawn to Smith's discussion of the 'fuzzy edges' of what authors and texts should be included or excluded in the *Fragments of the Roman Historians* project: Smith 2018, 115.

¹⁹ For example: Rose 1949, 9-10; Ogilvie 1969, 4. For a wider discussion of Roman myth: see Wiseman, 2004; Rüpke 2007, 127-130; see the introduction to this volume for an overview of the relevant scholarly debates.

²⁰ Fox 2011, 243-245.

²¹ Beard, North and Price 1998, 171-174.

²² Feeney 1998, 2007, 78-79; Wiseman 2004; Ando 2008.

ancient religion, serving as aetiologies and explanations for the deities and their rituals, an aspect I will argue can be identified for the cult of Castor and Pollux in Rome.²³

2. The Credibility of Epiphanies.

Questions of belief are always complicated; there were both ancient sceptics and believers in divine epiphanies. It will therefore be instructive to examine how Roman authors described these epiphanies: are they depicted as events which truly happened, as mythical events which might have happened, or as entirely false tales?²⁴ As an example of the debates that might be had regarding the credibility of epiphanic reports, we can explore another appearance of the Dioscuri. This occurred three centuries after Lake Regillus, following the Battle of Pydna against King Perseus of Macedon in 168 BCE. Valerius Maximus' account reveals how dangerous reporting an epiphany to a sceptical Senate might be:

Likewise in the Macedonian War Publius Vatinius, a man belonging to the prefecture of Reate, travelling towards Rome by night thought that two exceptionally handsome young men on white horses met him and announced that on the previous day King Perseus had been taken prisoner by Paullus. When he informed the Senate of this, he was thrown into gaol as having flouted its majesty and grandeur with idle talk. But after a dispatch from Paullus made it clear that Perseus had been taken prisoner that day, he was released from custody and given land and exemption from service to boot.²⁵

²³ See Scheid 2003 for a discussion of the links between cult, myth, and politics in the early imperial period. As noted later in this paper, the ceremonies held on the anniversary of the Dioscuri's epiphany at Lake Regillus were closely related to the tradition of this epiphany.

²⁴ False Dioscuric epiphanies are reported to have been claimed in the Hellenistic east. I include as false epiphanies those which ancient sources describe as being deliberately manufactured in word or deed by the humans involved: Jason of Phalerae lied about an epiphany to be able to pay his mercenaries (Polyaenus, *Strat.* 6.1.3) and a pair of Messenian soldiers dressed as Castor and Pollux to launch a surprise attack on the Spartan forces (Paus. 4.27.1-3; Polyaenus, *Strat.* 2.31.4). On a more positive note, a Spartan general staged an epiphany to provide a morale boost to his troops (Frontin. *Str.* 1.11.9; Polyaenus, *Strat.* 1.41.11). For further discussion of false epiphanies of the Dioscuri, see Ogden 2004, 62-68; Platt 2018, 241-244.

²⁵ Val. Max. 1.8.1: *Item bello Macedonico P. Vatienus, Reatinae praefecturae vir, noctu urbem petens, existimavit duos iuvenes excellentis formae, albis equis residentes, obvios sibi factos nuntiare die qui praeterierat Persen regem a Paulo captum. quod cum senatui indicasset, tamquam maiestatis eius et amplitudinis vano sermone contemptor in carcerem coniectus, postquam Paulli litteris illo die Persen captum apparuit, et custodia liberatus et insuper agro ac vacatione donatus est.* Although Valerius does not explicitly identify these young men as Castor and Pollux, it followed his report of their epiphany at Lake Regillus, where he does name them. Other authors explicitly link the Dioscuri to an epiphany following the Battle of Pydna: Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.2.6; Flor. 1.28.12-15; Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3.

The fact that the Senate initially did not believe in Vatinius' report demonstrates the presence of ancient scepticism regarding divine epiphanies. Similar expressions of doubt regarding this epiphany can be found in Cicero's *de Natura Deorum*, a dialogue composed in 45 BCE, which presents the theological arguments of the three major philosophic schools. Although, owing to this philosophic focus, when discussing the treatment of epiphanies within this dialogue, it is necessary to remember that the opinions expressed are influenced by the tenets of each school and may not be representative of wider beliefs. Gaius Cotta, the Academic representative, expresses the greatest scepticism of this epiphany, questioning why Castor and Pollux chose to appear to the rustic Vatinius, rather than to his noble contemporary Marcus Porcius Cato.²⁶ Quintus Lucilius Balbus' rebuttal of this criticism, representing the Stoics, is of particular interest owing to the evidence he cites to express belief in the truth of this epiphany:

Are you not aware of the temple in the Forum dedicated to Castor and Pollux by Aulus Postumius, or of the resolution of the Senate concerning Vatinius? As for Sagra, the Greeks actually have a proverbial saying about it: when they make an assertion, they say that it is 'more certain than the affair on the Sagra'. Surely their authority must carry weight with you?²⁷

His evidence is drawn from three separate epiphanies: the Forum temple of Castor and Pollux was dedicated in thanks for their aid at Lake Regillus as narrated above; the decree concerning Vatinius, as just seen, followed the Dioscuri's appearance in the aftermath of the Battle of Pydna; and the final proof is drawn from their epiphany to aid the Locrians against Croton at the Battle of the River Sagra in South Italy around 580 BCE.²⁸ This argument is not made on theological grounds or by drawing on the many examples of divine epiphanies to mortals that might be found in mythology. Instead, it relies upon evidence which would have been familiar

²⁶ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.11.

²⁷ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.13: *Nonne ab A. Postumio aedem Castori et Polluci in foro dedicatam, nonne senatus consultum de Vatino vides? Nam de Sagra Graecorum etiam est volgare proverbium, qui quae adfirmant certiora esse dicunt quam illa quae apud Sagram. His igitur auctoribus nonne debes moveri?*

²⁸ On the Battle of the River Sagra: Just. *Epit.* 20.2.9-14, 20.3.7-9; Diod. Sic. 8.32.1-2; Bricknell 1966. Platt 2018, 235-238 persuasively highlights the pairing of narrative events in this tradition, which she argues is used to increase the authenticity of these epiphanies. These Roman narrative pairs include the battle and announcement epiphanies of the Dioscuri connected to the Battle of Lake Regillus, and the letter of Aemilius Paulus confirming the news announced to Vatinius by the Dioscuri's appearance in 168 BCE.

to Cicero's audience: a magnificent temple still standing in the Forum, a senatorial decree proclaiming rewards to a witness of an epiphany, and a tradition that was so well known that it had become proverbial.

In the case of the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum, the most recent archaeological examinations of the site have confirmed that the earliest phase of the temple does concur with the tradition that it was dedicated soon after the Battle of Lake Regillus in the early fifth century BCE, suggesting a historical basis for at least part of the account: the arrival of the state cult of Castor and Pollux in Rome, if not their epiphany itself.²⁹ This potentially would have acted as historical proof and strengthened belief in the epiphany, for why else, a Roman audience might ask, would a pair of Greek gods have received such a large temple in the Roman Forum at such an early date? It is not possible, however, to prove that the story of the epiphany circulated around the foundation date of the temple. Our earliest evidence for the tradition, as I have argued elsewhere, is the common Republican *denarius* design of the Dioscuri first minted in 211 BCE, which depicts the brothers riding into battle at Lake Regillus, thus providing a *terminus ante quem*.³⁰ Our literary evidence for the tradition is even later, as the earliest extant accounts of Dioscuric epiphanies do not appear until the first century BCE or later, four hundred years or more after their first epiphany on the behalf of Rome.³¹ It is certainly possible, and indeed likely, that earlier authors whose works are now lost to us, would have written about the epiphanies, but we are restricted to those that survive. The frequency of the depictions of Dioscuric epiphanies in ancient literature, archaeology, and material evidence nevertheless suggests that it was a widely accepted aetiology for the foundation of their cult in

²⁹ Nielsen and Poulsen 1992, 67-79. On the temple see the reports of the Scandinavian team from their excavations between 1983 and 1985: Nielsen and Poulsen 1992; Slej and Cullhed 2009; Sande and Zahle 2009. For an exploration of the potential use of material or archaeological evidence to suggest the partial historicity of literary figures linked to early Rome without necessarily accepting the historicity of the actions ascribed to them, see Di Fazio 2018.

³⁰ Gartrell 2021, 89-90.

³¹ On Roman historiography, particularly pertinent for this discussion are Marincola 1997; Feeney 2007, ch. 3.

Rome. However, not all accounts of the Battle of Lake Regillus treat its epiphanies the same way, and this may help us identify conflicting views on their mythical or historical nature.

3. Conflicting Accounts: Dionysius and Livy.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides the most detailed account of Castor and Pollux's epiphany at the Battle of Lake Regillus itself and afterwards, when they appeared to announce the victory in the Roman Forum.³² As noted by Miano in this volume, his account of their epiphany is prefaced with the phrase "it is said that", which can be read as an expression of uncertainty.³³ However, no ambiguity appears in his description of the epiphanies themselves, which are highly detailed in the physical description of the Dioscuri which would be instantly recognisable from the iconography of their statue groups which could be found across the city of Rome.³⁴ As Miano continues to argue, any potential uncertainty disappears by the end of Dionysius' account of both epiphanies, when he states his agreement with those in charge of the state who "concluded, as we may reasonably infer, that it was the same gods who had appeared in both places, and were convinced that the apparitions had been those of Castor and Pollux."³⁵ Following his description of the Dioscuri's victorious charge against the Latins and subsequent refreshment at the *Lacus Juturnae*, Dionysius then continues to offer proofs of the epiphanies' veracity that could still be witnessed by contemporaries in Rome:

Of this extraordinary and wonderful appearance of these gods there are many monuments at Rome, not only the temple of Castor and Pollux which the city erected in the Forum at the place where their apparitions had been seen, and the adjacent fountain, which bears the names of these gods and is to this day regarded as holy, but also the costly sacrifices which the people perform each year through their chief priests in the month called Quinctilis, on the day known as the Ides, the day on which they gained this victory. But above all these things there is the procession performed after the sacrifice by those who have a public horse and who,

³² Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1-3.

³³ Miano, in this volume, pX.

³⁴ Most clearly in the surviving monumental statue groups that now stand on the Capitoline and Quirinal in Rome; but also likely in their lost cult statues.

³⁵ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.3: νομίσαντες τῶν αὐτῶν θεῶν εἶναι ἄμφω τὰ φάσματα, ὥσπερ εἰκός, Διοσκούρων ἐπέισθησαν εἶναι τὰ εἶδωλα.

being arrayed by tribes and centuries, ride in regular ranks on horseback, as if they came from battle, crowned with olive branches and attired in the purple robes with stripes of scarlet which they call *trabeae*. They begin their procession from a certain temple of Mars built outside the walls, and going through several parts of the city and the Forum, they pass by the temple of Castor and Pollux, sometimes to the number even of five thousand, wearing whatever rewards for valour in battle they have received from their commanders, a fine sight and worthy of the greatness of the Roman dominion. These are the things I have found both related and performed by the Romans in commemoration of the appearance of Castor and Pollux; and from these, as well as from many other important instances, one may judge how dear to the gods were the men of those times.³⁶

Once more, we see historical buildings and contemporary events, including sacrifices, rituals, and processions adduced as proof of an epiphany. The Forum temple, unsurprisingly, again plays a pivotal role, but Dionysius adds the annual sacrifices and the parade of the *transvectio equitum*, which took place on the anniversary of the battle from 304 BCE.³⁷ There is a performative aspect to this parade, as Platt has noted: every year the *equites equo publico* recreated their ancestors' triumphal return to the city.³⁸ In doing so, they gave thanks for the epiphany of the Dioscuri, passing by the temple dedicated on account of this event, but also by their statues which stood close to the temple in the *Lacus Juturnae*, "consecrated, even as they appeared, in the lake waters... breathless on their foaming and smoking steeds", as described by the later Minucius Felix.³⁹ For Dionysius, there does not appear to be any doubt as to the veracity of the epiphany; he expresses no scepticism or rationalising explanation for the

³⁶ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.4-5 : Ταύτης ἐστὶ τῆς παραδόξου καὶ θαυμαστῆς τῶν δαιμόνων ἐπιφανείας ἐν Ῥώμῃ πολλὰ σημεῖα, ὃ τε νεῶς ὁ τῶν Διοσκούρων, ὃν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς κατεσκεύασεν ἡ πόλις ἔνθα ὄφθη τὰ εἰδῶλα, καὶ ἡ παρ' αὐτῶ κρήνη καλουμένη τε τῶν θεῶν τούτων καὶ ἱερὰ εἰς τόδε χρόνου νομιζομένη, θυσίαι τε πολυτελεῖς, ἃς καθ' ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ὁ δῆμος ἐπιτελεῖ διὰ τῶν μεγίστων ἱερέων ἐν μηνὶ Κυντιλίῳ λεγομένῳ ταῖς καλουμέναις εἰδοῖς, ἐν ἧ κατάρθωσαν ἡμέρᾳ τόνδε τὸν πόλεμον· ὑπὲρ ἅπαντα δὲ ταῦτα ἡ μετὰ τὴν θυσίαν ἐπιτελουμένη πομπὴ τῶν ἐχόντων τὸν δημόσιον ἵππον, οἱ κατὰ φυλάς τε καὶ λόχους κεκοσμημένοι στοιχηδὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ἵππων ὀχούμενοι πορεύονται πάντες, ὡς ἐκ μάχης ἤκοντες ἐστεφανωμένοι θαλλοῖς ἐλαίας, καὶ πορφυρᾶς φοινικοπαρύφους ἀμπεχόμενοι τηβέννας τὰς καλουμένας τραβέας, ἀρξάμενοι μὲν ἀφ' ἱεροῦ τινος Ἄρεος ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ἰδρυμένου, διεξιόντες δὲ τὴν τε ἄλλην πόλιν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς παρὰ τὸ τῶν Διοσκούρων ἱερὸν παρερχόμενοι, ἄνδρες ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ πεντακισχίλιοι φέροντες ὅσα παρὰ τῶν ἡγεμόνων ἀριστεῖα ἔλαβον ἐν ταῖς μάχαις, καλὴ καὶ ἀξία τοῦ μεγέθους τῆς ἡγεμονίας ὄψις. ταῦτα μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς γενομένης ἐπιφανείας τῶν Διοσκούρων λεγόμενά τε καὶ πραττόμενα ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ἔμαθον· ἐξ ὧν τεκμήρῃται ἂν τις ὡς θεοφιλεῖς ἦσαν οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι, σὺν ἄλλοις πολλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις.

³⁷ Established by Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus during his censorship: Liv. 9.46.15; Val. Max. 2.2.9; Aur. Vict. *De Vir. Ill.* 32.1-4. For the significance of this procession, see Gartrell 2021, 117-122 with further bibliography.

³⁸ Platt 2003, 161-162.

³⁹ Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3: ...*sicut se ostenderant, statuæ consecratae, qui anhelī spumantibus equis atque fumantibus...*

epiphanies, depicting the gods as truly having appeared and acted and thus been justly rewarded.

Not all historians, however, elected to include the epiphany in their account of the Battle at Lake Regillus. In contrast to Dionysius, Livy omits any account of the epiphany of Castor and Pollux. Livy's treatment of the battle is nevertheless lengthy, detailing strategies, troop movements, and the deeds of the commanders.⁴⁰ However, in his account, the battle is won by the daring of Titus Herminius, who spots the Latin commander Octavius Mamilius and slays him, but later dies of his own wounds in the Roman camp.⁴¹ Livy also credits the stratagem of Aulus Postumius for achieving the victory, as the dictator begged the Roman cavalry to dismount and fight alongside the exhausted infantry, restoring their courage and forcing the Latin battle lines to give way.⁴² There is no reference to the epiphany and actions of Castor and Pollux to save the day, but they are not entirely omitted from Livy's version, for he describes that "the dictator, neglecting no help, divine or human, is said to have vowed a temple to Castor".⁴³ The historian here is likely alluding to the tradition of the Dioscuric epiphany by including a reference to divine help and the vow to build the Forum temple of Castor and Pollux connected to the victory, without reporting the epiphany itself. These two almost contemporary accounts of the Battle of Lake Regillus, therefore, suggest an investigation into how different historians approached the subject of epiphanies. The question should thus be asked: why would Dionysius choose to include the epiphany, while Livy omitted it? Was this owing to their different perspectives on the mythical or historical nature of these events, or were there other motivations at play?

⁴⁰ Liv. 2.19.1-2.20.13.

⁴¹ Liv. 2.20.8-9.

⁴² Liv. 2.20.10-12.

⁴³ Liv. 2.20.12-13: *Ibi nihil nec divinae nec humanae opis dictator praetermittens aedem Castori vovisse.*

The tradition of the epiphany of Castor and Pollux at the battle was well known by the first century BCE when both authors were writing, as discussed above. There was a significant interest in both the cult and Forum temple of the Dioscuri under Augustus, for the temple had rebuilt on a grand scale by Tiberius in 6 CE and Castor and Pollux were used as divine parallels for pairs of young men of the *Domus Augusta*, including the pairing of Tiberius and his younger brother, which was marked, as we have seen, by the epiphany of the divine twins at Drusus' death.⁴⁴ The origin of the temple was not forgotten, however, for Aulus Postumius' victory and his vow for the temple were included on his *elogium* beneath his statue among the *summi viri* in Augustus' Forum.⁴⁵ It is, therefore, highly unlikely that Livy was unaware of the tradition, and thus, it must have been a conscious choice for him to omit this famous deed from the battle narrative.

There are many factors which might have influenced each author to include or exclude the epiphany: their own personal backgrounds and beliefs; their purposes and aims in their works, and their methodologies for assessing historicity. Dionysius, for example, states that his intention is to explore how Rome came to be the great power of his time and to prove that the founders of Rome were Greek in origin.⁴⁶ Livy records that his intention is "to commemorate the deeds of the foremost people of the world".⁴⁷ His programmatic statement of his methodology is well known, but important for this point:

Such traditions as belong to the time before the city was founded, or rather was presently to be founded, and are rather adorned with poetic legends than based upon trustworthy historical proofs, I purpose neither to affirm nor to refute. It is the privilege of antiquity to mingle divine things with human... But to such legends as these, however they shall be regarded and judged, I shall, for my own part, attach no great importance.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Suet. *Tib.* 20. On these parallels, see Gartrell 2021 ch.4, 2014; also, Poulsen 1991; Champlin 2011.

⁴⁵ *CIL* 6.40959; Geiger 2008, 138; As Roller 2013, 124 argues for other monuments included in the *elogia* and restored during Augustus' reign, this was a technique by which he could anchor these monuments in his own new monumental landscape.

⁴⁶ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.1-5.

⁴⁷ Liv. 1. *Praef.* 3: *rerum gestarum memoriae principis terrarum populi.*

⁴⁸ Liv. *Praef.* 1.6-9: *Quae ante conditam condendamve urbem poeticis magis decora fabulis quam incorruptis rerum gestarum monumentis traduntur, ea nec adfirmare nec refellere in animo est. Datur haec venia antiquitati,*

Livy later states that he will only be able to give an accurate account of the period following the Gallic sack of Rome, which took place in the fourth century BCE, over a century after the Battle of Lake Regillus.⁴⁹ This reveals the methodology behind his treatment, or rather lack thereof, of the epiphany of Castor and Pollux; although it may be the “the privilege of antiquity to mingle divine things with human”, he is not writing in antiquity and therefore views such accounts sceptically.⁵⁰ This suggests that the epiphany of the Battle of Lake Regillus does not meet Livy’s standard of historicity. This is supported by the fact that he does not include any reference to any of the epiphanies of the Dioscuri which occurred after the Gallic sack, it was not just a matter of chronology. It can therefore be suggested that whilst for Dionysius the epiphanies are accepted and depicted as historical events, for Livy, they are relegated to the realm of myth and thus not included in his work. However, Levene argues that Livy’s motive for neglecting to include this epiphany was not necessarily a statement of his personal belief or scepticism regarding epiphanies. He suggests that Livy prefers to depict the most significant battles of the Romans as being won or lost owing to the actions of humans, listing Lake Regillus with Cynoscephalae, Pydna, and Cannae.⁵¹ By omitting the actions of the gods, Livy may be attempting to fulfil his promise to commemorate the deeds of famous Romans, particularly those of Aulus Postumius and Titus Herminius in this battle. The question of why Dionysius includes, and Livy excludes the epiphany of the Dioscuri at Lake Regillus, therefore, has many potential answers and factors to be considered: the distinction between whether epiphanies are seen as myth or history is only one of them.

ut miscendo humana divinis.... Sed haec et his similia, utcumque animadversa aut existimata erunt, haud in magno equidem ponam discrimine.

⁴⁹ Liv. 6.1-3; Gabba 1991, 94; Miles 1995, 19.

⁵⁰ Liv. *Praef.* 1.7; for a discussion of the life of Romulus, who also straddles the line between myth and history to varying degrees see Feeney 2007, 88-89.

⁵¹ Levene 1993, 153; c.f. Forsythe 1999, 87-98 on Livy’s caution regarding miraculous happenings.

4. The Dioscuri's Epiphanic Habit.

There is a further development between the two sets of epiphanies with which I began this discussion, which, when put into context of the wider Dioscuric epiphanic habit, suggests one way that the distinctions between myth and history might be presented. Firstly, in the actions of the divine brothers, and secondly, in the explicitness of their identification. In their first epiphany the Dioscuri acted to save the Republic, but in their last Drusus was not so fortunate, for Castor and Pollux only appeared as passive markers of his passing, not to save his life. In their epiphanies at the Battle of Lake Regillus and subsequent announcement of the victory, the two young men who appeared on both occasions are explicitly identified by sources as Castor and Pollux.⁵² However, the last attested epiphany of the Dioscuri at the death of Drusus is far more vague: the horsemen are not identified and only appear amongst several other portents.⁵³ Although it is not possible to explore all the Roman epiphanies of the Dioscuri in detail here, these two chronological trends can easily be traced through the brief recounting of their appearances.⁵⁴

Following their miraculous appearances at the Battles of the River Sagra and Lake Regillus, the Dioscuri are credited with securing one further Roman victory. We have already seen Valerius Maximus' account of their announcement of the victory over Perseus of Macedon at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE to the unfortunate Publius Vatinius. The second-century CE author Florus, unlike Valerius, however, credits them also with having achieved the victory:

But the Roman people had already received the glad news of the victory long before it was announced by the victorious general's despatches. For it was known in Rome on the very day on which Perseus was defeated through the presence of two young men with white horses washing off dust and gore at the pool of Juturna. These brought the news, and were popularly believed to have been Castor and Pollux

⁵² Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 6.13.1-5; Flor. 1.5.2-4; Plut. *Cor.* 3.4, Val. Max. 1.8.1.

⁵³ Cass. Dio 55.1.3.

⁵⁴ For a fuller analysis of the Dioscuri and their epiphanies, see Gartrell 2021, ch. 2.

because they were twins, and to have taken part in battle because they were dripping with blood, and to come from Macedonia because they were still out of breath.⁵⁵

Minucius Felix also follows this tradition, stating that Castor and Pollux “announced the victory over Perseus on the same day on which they had achieved it”.⁵⁶ The implication in these accounts is clear: the brothers did not only announce the victory, but they themselves had fought in the battle and secured the outcome for Rome.

Following the Battle of Pydna, there were no more victories ensured by Castor and Pollux, but they continued to serve as announcers of Roman conquests. Their next epiphany was reported after the Battle of Vercellae in 101 BCE, following Marius’ victory over the Gallic Cimbri. Florus is again our source and reports that it happened on the same day as the battle took place:

The joyful and happy news of the deliverance of Italy and the salvation of the empire was received by the Roman people not, as usual, through human agency but from the lips of the gods themselves, if we may believe the tale. For on the same day as that on which the battle was fought, young men were seen to present to the praetor a despatch decked with laurels in front of the temple of Pollux and Castor, and the rumour of a victory over the Cimbri spread far and wide through the theatre.⁵⁷

Florus neither specifies the number nor the identities of the young men who appear; however, he clearly identifies them as being supernatural, for the message came from the gods themselves. Furthermore, the location of this epiphany outside the temple of Castor and Pollux, a location where the gods had previously appeared twice to perform the same duty, allows the easy identification of the young men as the Dioscuri. It is furthermore interesting to note that Florus qualifies his report of this epiphany, stating “if we may believe the tale”, a qualification

⁵⁵ Flor. 1.28.12-15: *Sed multo prius gaudium victoriae populus Romanus quam epistulis victoris praeceperat. Quippe eodem die, quo victus est Perses in Macedonia, Romae cognitum est, cum duo iuvenes candidis equis apud Iturnae lacum pulverem et cruorem abluabant. Hi nuntiavere. Castorem et Pollucem fuisse creditum volgo, quod gemini fuissent; interfuisse bello, sed sanguine maderent; a Macedonia venire, quod adhuc anhelarent.*

⁵⁶ Min. Fel. Oct. 7.3: *de Perse victoriam eadem die qua fecerant nuntiaverunt.*

⁵⁷ Flor. 1.38.20: *Hunc tam laetum tamque felicem liberatae Italiae adsertique imperii nuntium non per homines, ut solebat, populus Romanus accepit, sed per ipsos, si credere fas est, deos. Quippe eodem die quo gesta res est visi pro aede Pollucis et Castoris iuvenes laureatas praetori litteras dare, frequensque in spectaculo rumor victoriae Cimbricae.*

he had not appended to his accounts of the Lake Regillus or Pydna epiphanies.⁵⁸

The motif of not identifying the gods who appeared continues: after Caesar's victory over Pompey's army at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BCE, in a list of portents, Cassius Dio reports that "in Syria, two young men announced the result of the battle and vanished".⁵⁹ The identifying features here are even more scarce than in Florus: it is only the fact that there were two supernatural young men appearing to make this announcement which allows their identification, and only when this is linked to the pattern of previous Dioscuric epiphanies. It is unusual within this tradition for the Dioscuri to announce the victory elsewhere than in Rome. Both the brevity and distance from Rome of this epiphany might be explained by the complicated nature of this battle. All previous announcements made by the Dioscuri had celebrated the victory of a Roman army over a foreign enemy; in this case, the two armies who had met at Pharsalus were both Roman.

The Dioscuri never appeared again in a military context, but two further epiphanies are claimed to have occurred at the funeral or death of a prominent man. The brothers had a long association with the afterlife and funerary sphere, unsurprisingly, when one considers their mythology and constant transitions between Olympus and Hades.⁶⁰ In Etruria, they were depicted on either side of the doors of tombs⁶¹ and they were also claimed to have previously acted as psychopomps during the apotheosis of Arsinoë II in 270 BCE.⁶² At Caesar's funeral in 44 BCE, following Antony's famous funerary oration, the crowd who had gathered before the rostra in the Forum argued where Caesar's body should be burnt. As they did so, Suetonius records that:

two beings with swords by their sides and brandishing a pair of javelins set fire to it with blazing torches, and at once the throng of bystanders heaped upon it dry

⁵⁸ Flor. 1.5.4, 1.30.15.

⁵⁹ Cass. Dio 41.61.3-5: τοῖς τε Σύροις δύο τινὰς νεανίσκοις τὸ τέλος τῆς μάχης ἀγγείλαντας ἀφανεῖς γενέσθαι.

⁶⁰ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hom. *Cyp.* fr1; Hyg. *Fab.* 80, 224, 251, *Poet. Astr.* 2.22; Ov. *Fast.* 5.719; Pind. *Nem.* 10.75-90; Virg. *Aen.* 6.121

⁶¹ De Grummond 1991, 22-26; Simon 2006, 54; Krauskopf 2006, 76-77.

⁶² Callim. *Ia.* 228.1-7; Diegesis 10.10 on Callim. fr228; Kloppenborg 1993, 284; Sumi 2009, 182.

branches, the judgment seats with the benches, and whatever else could serve as an offering.⁶³

Once more the paired nature of these two supernatural male beings and location in front of the Forum temple of Castor and Pollux allows their identification as the divine twins. Their final epiphany, as we have already seen, occurred at the deathbed of Drusus the Elder. Although the description of this epiphany is even briefer, the near contemporary comparisons made between the imperial brothers Drusus and Tiberius and the divine pair Castor and Pollux makes their identification clear. Valerius Maximus makes the parallel explicit in his praise of both the dead Drusus and the living Tiberius: “I for my part know that no example of kindred affection can be suitably added save Castor and Pollux.”⁶⁴

What does this exploration of the epiphanic habit of the Dioscuri reveal about the boundaries between myth and history in the ancient accounts? The development of the tradition may suggest one way in which the Romans themselves saw the relationship between the two categories. At their first Roman epiphany at the Battle of Lake Regillus, Castor and Pollux ensured the favourable outcome of the battle; they also participated in the next conflict against Perseus, but the last two battles with which an epiphany is associated were merely reported, not achieved, by the Dioscuri. Furthermore, although Castor and Pollux were explicitly identified in accounts of the Lake Regillus epiphany, their identities were only implied by knowledge of their previous appearances in the later epiphanies. Ancient authors, therefore, when they choose to record these epiphanies, characterised the most prominent and active epiphanies of the Dioscuri as belonging to the distant past, whilst more recent epiphanies were more passive or less obviously identified. An explanation for this trend might be a growing

⁶³ Suet. *Iul.* 84.3, adapted from Rolfe...*repente duo quidam gladiis succincti ac bina iacula gestantes ardentibus cereis succenderunt confestimque circumstantium turba virgulta arida et cum subselliis tribunalia, quicquid praeterea ad donum aderat, congessit.*

⁶⁴ Val. Max. 5.5.3: *His scio equidem nullum aliud quam Castoris et Pollucis specimen consanguineae caritatis conuenienter adici posse.*

scepticism regarding such interactions between mortals and deities: epiphanies of the gods belong to the mythical age of great heroes rather than to more contemporary times. This very attitude is given to Cicero's brother Quintus in another of his scholarly dialogues, in which he argued:

Then what do we expect? Do we wait for the immortal gods to converse with us in the Forum, on the street and in our homes? While they do not, of course, present themselves in person, they do diffuse their power far and wide - sometimes enclosing it in caverns of the earth and sometimes imparting it to human beings.⁶⁵

However, whilst it might seem initially straightforward to claim that our authors view divine epiphanies as inherently mythical rather than historical in nature and thus link myth to chronology, I would argue that this is an anachronistic argument and based on a modern rationalistic viewpoint which assumes disbelief that such divine appearances could occur.⁶⁶ Livy does not reject all divine interventions in human affairs, as shown by his frequent inclusion of omens, auguries, and portents in his work, neither does Quintus in the passage just noted. The epiphanies of the Dioscuri need to be seen in their wider socio-religious context, and although they are unusual, they are neither entirely unique nor unprecedented and should not, therefore, be automatically viewed as myth or incredible. For, although there existed sceptical accounts concerning these epiphanies, several of which have been noted here, most ancient sources who report the appearances of the Dioscuri do so matter-of-factly, with seemingly no issues of belief that the gods appeared and performed these actions.⁶⁷ Some authors are sceptical, others are more accepting; we must allow for personal interpretation and motivations among our sources. Any attempts to class epiphanies as either mythical or

⁶⁵ Cic. Div. 1.79: *Quid igitur expectamus? an dum in foro nobiscum di immortales, dum in viis versentur, dum domi? qui quidem ipsi se nobis non offerunt, vim autem suam longe lateque diffundunt, quam tum terrae cavernis includunt, tum hominum naturis implicant.*

⁶⁶ Such miraculous happenings have been reported in relatively recent times, for example in the reports of angels or knights appearing to protect British soldiers during the Battle of Mons in 1914. See Herman, 2011 for a psychological analysis of such epiphanies.

⁶⁷ Marincola 1997, 117-119 argues that ancient historians had three options open to them for their treatment of myth: to avoid including them, to rationalise or demythologise them, or to include them but leave it to the reader to decide their veracity.

historical on the grounds of chronology or credibility without allowing for this flexibility, are thus, in my view, reductive. Indeed, as I hope to have shown, moving beyond questions of fact or fiction allows us to broaden our analysis of why certain authors included or excluded epiphanies from their narratives. They could be included to demonstrate the worthiness of the Roman state to be preserved, or omitted to celebrate the agency of the human participants. The border between myth and history, in the case of Dioscuric epiphanies at least, appears to be more permeable and flexible than might have first been assumed: it would be an anachronistic simplification and schematisation to attempt to place a rigid boundary between the two.

5. Conclusions.

Wiseman has argued that we should redefine myth as “a story that matters to a community, one that is told and retold because it has a significance for one generation after another. Such a story may be (in our terms) historical, pseudo-historical or totally fictitious, but if it matters enough to be retold, it can count as a myth”.⁶⁸ He continues to argue, which I would agree with, that “myth and history do not exclude each other”.⁶⁹ With this in mind, to the Roman conception, the epiphanies of the Dioscuri could be mythical but they could at the same time be historical: myths could grow up around historical events and be used to explain or fill historical gaps. The boundary between myth and history for the Romans could be a permeable one – a border in a constant state of movement.⁷⁰ As Miano writes in the introduction to this volume, “myth... escapes any clear and straightforward definition”.⁷¹ Therefore, rather than attempt to impose a permanent line between myth and history on artificial grounds or anachronistic rules, one should see this boundary, when or if it exists, as temporary, highly

⁶⁸ Wiseman 2004, 10-11.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ A useful analogy to the offside rule in football is provided by Feeney 2007, 85-86, who argues that there was a functioning border between myth and history in ancient historiography, but that “it was never universal or clear-cut and could serve many different purposes”.

⁷¹ Miano, this volume, pX.

debated, transitory, and relative to the positions of various perspectives, events, and individuals. This aids our understanding of how ancient authors can differ on their treatment of epiphanies: some, including Dionysius of Halicarnassus, place them on one side of that line, representing them as historical events, while others locate them on the far side, debating their veracity or excluding them from historical accounts, as Livy does. Some epiphanies might be described in detail, others only suggested. It is this very transience and ability to constantly reassess the boundary which makes both the distinction between myth and history and the epiphanic habit of the Dioscuri so fascinating and useful to explore. Like the divine brothers themselves, who are unique individuals with their own roles and responsibilities, but whose partnership is intrinsic to their divinity, so too are myth and history two inextricable parts of our understanding of early Rome.⁷² Castor and Pollux are the perfect symbols for this transience, for they themselves constantly cross boundaries and definitions: they are mortal and immortal; heroes and gods; forever travelling between Olympus and Hades, and between life and death. It is, therefore, no great surprise that they and their epiphanies are also both mythical and historical.

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⁷² Despite being depicted as inseparable and identical, according to their own mythology, each had their own athletic specialism leading to a divine responsibility: Castor for horsemen, Pollux for boxers: Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.26-7; Mart. 7.57; Ov. *Am.* 3.2.54, *Met.* 8.301-302, *Fast.* 5.700; Prop. 3.14.17-18.

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