

The Epiphanies of the Dioscuri

Gods were often thought to affect the human world through their actions: responding to vows and oaths; sending signs through auguries and auspices; and, at times, drawing on their power over the mortal realm to ensure a desired outcome. Most chose these more subtle ways of communicating their will to their worshippers, but some took it a step further and manifested themselves in human form, as an epiphany. Castor and Pollux were unusual in the number of their epiphanies: no fewer than nine epiphanies are reported to have occurred in Italy or connected to Roman interests elsewhere in the Mediterranean. These epiphanies are not simply proof of the divine brothers' power but are also closely bound to the political system of Rome: their first epiphany preserved the Republic at its very inception, while later epiphanies were used to claim the gods' favour for prominent generals. Further consideration of these epiphanies therefore suggests the variety of perspectives and responses of different individuals regarding interactions between gods and humans.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each taking a thematic group of Dioscuric epiphanies as its focus. The first shall examine those moments when the brothers appeared to aid the Roman army in securing a victory; the second group of epiphanies took place after the battle had been won, when Castor and Pollux appeared elsewhere to announce the victory; the third type occurred when the Dioscuri marked the death of a prominent individual. Although this structure leads to some repetition, especially for those events which were associated with more than one epiphanic type, it allows the exploration of the dialogue between the epiphanies, demonstrating that they were often carefully considered for political benefit, although we should not see this as negating their religious aspect. This

epiphanic phenomenon is discussed within a dual context: the moment at which epiphanies were reported to occur and when that report was publicised, asking whether there was an underlying purpose or benefit, either for the mortal or the gods. Having outlined these groups and explored each individual epiphany in detail, I shall then consider the bigger picture, taking the epiphanic habit of the Dioscuri as a whole to suggest that the emblematic first epiphany at the Battle of Lake Regillus was the model by which later epiphanies were measured, but that contemporary concerns affected later depictions. I conclude this chapter by suggesting why Castor and Pollux were ideally suited for this epiphanic role.

Scepticism and Belief

For the purposes of this chapter, I will use a relatively narrow definition of ‘epiphany’. The word ἐπιφάνεια is first attested in Greek literature of the fourth century BC and has a wide range of meanings.¹ Plutarch used the term to describe dreams in which the gods appeared,² and Diodorus Siculus to denote occasions when the gods healed the sick,³ while Dionysius of Halicarnassus used the word to characterise the power of the gods to affect the mortal realm.⁴ However, there is no specific Latin term for an appearance of the god: in a Ciceronian dialogue, Lucilius states that ‘the gods often manifest their power in bodily presence’.⁵ Latin authors tend to describe that the gods appeared,⁶ were seen,⁷ or, most commonly, report the appearance and the event at which it occurred.⁸ For my purposes, I shall use ‘epiphany’ in a restricted manner: only to describe the physical manifestation of a deity or hero in anthropomorphic form.

The impetus behind these epiphanies of the Dioscuri will also be significant, whether they were spontaneous at the whim of the gods or were invoked by humans. Such distinctions were made in antiquity concerning auspices: signs that appeared unasked for were *oblative*, whilst those that appeared when ritually invited were *impetrativa*.⁹ Both types of

¹ Pfister 1924 col 277; *LSJ*: ἐπιφάνεια. ² Plut. *Them.* 30.3. ³ Diod. Sic. 1.25.3.

⁴ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.68.1–5, when Aemilia, one of the Vestals, was accused of defilement which had extinguished the sacred fire, Vesta proved her innocence by relighting the fire upon her prayer.

⁵ Cic. *Nat. Deo* 2.2.6: *praesentes saepe di vim suam declarant*.

⁶ Val. Max 1.8.1; Cic. *Div.* 1.75. ⁷ Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3.

⁸ Cic. *Tusc.* 1.28; Flor. *Epit.* 1.5.2–4, 1.28.14–15; Suet. *Iul.* 84.3, *Ner.* 1.1.

⁹ Serv. *Aen.* 6.190. On auspices, see Linderski 1986: 2146–2312; Driediger-Murphy 2019.

epiphany may have the same or similar outcomes: the god may bestow knowledge or gifts upon humans, safeguard them from harm, or receive cult or a temple in thanks for their action. Cicero also refers to a third type of auspices, those which are forced, for officials could influence the outcome: a *pullarius*, in charge of the chickens who gave responses based on how they ate, might encourage them by restricting their food before the ritual or ensure that they did not eat by feeding them just before.¹⁰ There are a number of attested false epiphanies of the Dioscuri in Greece: a Spartan general falsified evidence of an epiphany to encourage his troops; and Jason of Pherae tricked his mother into giving him her valuables to give an offering to the Dioscuri in thanks for their epiphany, only to use her gift to pay his army.¹¹ During the second Messenian war, the Spartans were tricked once more, when a pair of Messenians dressed as Castor and Pollux and rode towards the Spartan army who, believing that they were witnessing an epiphany, were caught unawares and slaughtered.¹²

Although no such obviously fake Dioscuric appearances are attested in the Roman tradition, not all epiphanies were immediately recognised as such and some ancient sources indicate scepticism as to whether a reported epiphany was authentic. This is best demonstrated by Castor and Pollux's epiphany in 168 BC: the brothers appeared to Publius Vatinius on his way to Rome and bade him carry the news to the Senate of the Roman victory over Philip of Macedon.¹³ When he did so, the senators ordered him to be thrown into prison for disrespecting the Senate with idle talk. It was only after a message confirming the victory arrived from the commander of the campaign, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, that Vatinius was released and handsomely rewarded. That the Senate initially thought that he was lying demonstrates that scepticism existed concerning reports of such manifestations. Similar scepticism is offered in Cicero's dialogue *De Natura Deorum*, composed in 45 BC, which takes as its theme the theological views of three philosophic schools: Epicurean, Stoic, and Academic. This must be kept in mind when discussing his treatment of epiphanies, for the opinions expressed are naturally influenced by the

¹⁰ Cic. *Div.* 1.28: *auspiciū . . . coactum*.

¹¹ Frontin. *Str.* 1.11.8–9; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 1.41.1, 6.1.3. These staged epiphanies received no punishment from the gods.

¹² Paus. 4.27.1–3; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 2.31.4; Castor and Pollux were so angered by this impiety that they opposed the return of the Messenians to their homeland. On these epiphanies, see Ogden 2004: 62–68.

¹³ Val. Max. 1.8.1, as Publius Vatienus; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.6.

tenets of each school and may not be those commonly held. Nevertheless, Gaius Cotta, who is portrayed as the Academic representative, criticises the reports of this epiphany, questioning why the gods appeared to the rustic Vatinius, rather than his noble contemporary Marcus Porcius Cato.¹⁴ In response to Cotta's criticism, Lucilius asks him:

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?¹⁵

Thus, when arguing for the veracity of epiphanies, Lucilius does not debate theological issues. Instead, he adduces as evidence a temple dedicated in thanks after an epiphany, a *senatus consultum* and tradition, as indicated by a proverb. Like Lucilius, rather than debate the unanswerable questions about whether gods exist or whether they appeared to humans, I shall focus upon proofs that ancients believed that they did so. I will draw upon literary sources which describe epiphanies, as well as material evidence or actions claimed to be in response to epiphanies, such as temple dedications.

In scholarship, there has been a recent trend to rationalise epiphanies and provide scientific explanations. Santi has argued that not everyone believed in epiphanies: the tradition of the Dioscuri appearing at Lake Regillus was the 'popular' version, whilst the 'official' version, exemplified by Livy, contained no such account.¹⁶ Although there indeed were a variety of views in antiquity regarding the veracity of epiphanies, that the epiphany of the Dioscuri at Lake Regillus was prominently depicted on Republican denarii, as I will discuss later, argues against this being a 'popular' belief, compared with the sceptical official version.¹⁷ Herman, conversely, approaches the account from a psychological standpoint, drawing on both ancient and modern epiphanies, including an account from World War One in which British soldiers reported seeing cavalry

¹⁴ Cic. Nat. D. 3.11.

¹⁵ Cic. Nat. D. 3.13: *Nonne ab A. Postumio aedem Castori et Polluci in foro dedicatam, nonne senatus consultum de Vatinius vides? Nam de Sagra Graecorum etiam est vulgare proverbium, qui quae adfirmant certiora esse dicunt quam illa quae apud Sagram. His igitur auctoribus nonne debes moveri?*

¹⁶ Santi 2017: 31–36. She furthermore argues that the 'demythologised' Roman religion in the archaic era would not have accepted such a divine intervention, a characterisation of ancient religion I find unconvincing.

¹⁷ See below: 89–90.

wearing the armour of French medieval knights.¹⁸ He argues that ancient epiphanies, particularly those witnessed in a heightened emotional state such as during a battle, can be explained by the psychological impact of such circumstances, resulting in a ‘sensed presence’.¹⁹ This, wrongly identified as a manifestation of a god, hero or other supernatural force, could then be publicised by a range of people or groups with a variety of motivations.²⁰ Although these approaches are useful to consider the psychological aspect of divine manifestations, I do not, however, intend to explore ancient epiphanies from a rationalising or psychological viewpoint. Instead, for the purposes of my argument, it is the fact that ancients appear to have believed that epiphanies did occur, or at least that they represent themselves as believing this, which is more important.

Geographical Determinism

Kron has argued that the location of a hero’s tomb or burial place was of great importance for epiphanies, for heroes who were venerated at the site of their tombs sometimes manifested themselves nearby.²¹ However, when the hero Theseus, founder of Athens, appeared at the pivotal Battle of Marathon against the Persians in 490 BC, despite Kron’s emphasis on the hero’s burial place, his bones were still believed to be on Skyros, where he died. It was not until Cimon’s expedition in the 470s BC that they were repatriated and buried in Athens.²² Furthermore, Castor and Pollux are by no means bound to a single geographical location: their epiphanies occur across the ancient world: Greece, Italy, Germany and Syria. As noted in the introduction to this study, there was no clear tradition that one or both of the Dioscuri were buried at all; the only reference we do possess to a tomb is one of Castor at Sparta.²³ The great geographical spread of Dioscuric epiphanies may have many explanations: they were gods in their afterlife and perhaps their divine status enabled them to appear further afield than heroes could. They were also by their very nature transitory gods, constantly travelling between Hades and Olympus; they also possessed a maritime aspect and, as saviours of sailors, had responsibility over the entire Mediterranean Sea.

¹⁸ Herman 2011: 132.

¹⁹ Herman 2011: 134, 152–153; similarly, Harris 2013 classes epiphanies as hallucinations.

²⁰ Herman 2011: 152–153. ²¹ Kron 1999: 62–63.

²² Plut. *Cim.* 8.6; *Thes.* 36.1–2; Podlecki 1971: 141–142; Kron 1999: 62–63.

²³ Paus. 3.13.1.

Greek Epiphanies

The Dioscuri have a long history of epiphanies; before their crucial appearance at the Battle of Lake Regillus, they had appeared in Greece on several occasions.²⁴ They held a prominent role in their native Sparta from an early date: when the Spartan army marched into battle, it was to the sound of pipes playing τὸ Καστόρειον μέλος: the hymn to or of Castor.²⁵ Herodotus also informs us that both Castor and Pollux used to accompany the army to war, but, following a dispute, it was decreed that one of the Spartan kings should remain at home, whilst the other led the campaign, and that a god should accompany each royal.²⁶ Although Herodotus does not identify which Dioscurus took each role, considering the martial hymn to Castor, it is probable that it was he who accompanied the campaigning king.²⁷ It seems that this tradition was successful for the Spartans, for the earliest epiphanies of Castor and Pollux occurred in Messenia to prevent Spartan defeats.²⁸ Exactly how the Dioscuri were carried into battle is unclear; it may have been part of their aniconic representation, the *dokana*, or as statuettes. Ogden argues that the story of the epiphanies against the Messenians, in which Castor and Pollux were spotted in trees, developed from representations of the Dioscuri being placed in trees near the battlefield.²⁹ They did not only appear in Spartan traditions, however; epiphanies of Castor and Pollux also feature in two tragedies by Euripides, *Elektra* and *Helen*, as the *dei ex machina*, probably on account of their familial bond with the two heroines: they were the uncles of Elektra and brothers of Helen.³⁰

Epiphanic Evidence

Analysis of the earliest epiphanies of the Dioscuri is rendered difficult by the lack of any contemporary evidence: all literary sources which describe their appearances are either Late Republican or imperial. We do not know how or if earlier literary works described their epiphanies. However, it may be possible to trace the transmission route of some of these early literary accounts of epiphanies. The appearance of the Dioscuri at the Battle of the River Sagra took place in Locri during the

²⁴ Pritchett 1979: 11–49; Kron 1999: 61–83; Wheeler 2004: 1–14. ²⁵ Plut. *Lyc.* 22.2.

²⁶ Hdt. 5.74–75; Pritchett 1979: 14–15.

²⁷ Michell 1952: 107 suggests that Castor's 'spirit' accompanied the king.

²⁸ Paus 4.16.5, 9. ²⁹ Ogden 2004: 67–68. ³⁰ Eur. *El.* 1233–1356; *Hel.* 1642–1687.

early sixth century BC.³¹ As explored in the introduction, it is probable that the cult of the Dioscuri came to Italy through the Greek colonies of Magna Graecia, and perhaps more specifically through the Spartan colony of Tarentum. The Tarentine colonists may have brought the epiphanic tradition of Castor and Pollux with them as well, explaining why their first appearance in Italy took place nearby. Their second Italian manifestation at the Battle of Lake Regillus is harder to explain. However, the bronze inscription to Castor and Pollux from Lavinium proves that their cult was known in Latium by the mid-sixth century BC.³² If the cult was introduced to Latium from the south Italian colonies during the first half of the sixth century BC, then it is certainly possible that the tale of their epiphany at the River Sagra was transmitted at the same time. This may have influenced the tale of their epiphany at Lake Regillus, which shares distinct similarities with the River Sagra epiphany.

Much of the work of transmission may have been done by oral accounts that were later preserved in literary sources. Several of the epiphanies of the Dioscuri possess similarities in how they are described. There are many possible explanations for such parallels, from one inspiring the other, both descending from a common ancestor, or later standardisation of separate traditions. There were cults of the Dioscuri near to both the River Sagra and Lake Regillus from the sixth and fifth centuries BC, respectively. Our fullest accounts of these epiphanies date from the first century BC, at least 400 years later, and are of little help in establishing the relationship between the two. However, we know that Timaeus of Tauromenium, writing between the late fourth to early third centuries BC, included a history of Rome in his work.³³ A preserved fragment reveals that he also wrote about Locri, where the River Sagra epiphany occurred.³⁴ Cohen-Skalli, following De Sensi Sestito, has argued that Diodorus Siculus' fragmentary account of the Locrian ambassadors' mission to Sparta drew upon the work of Timaeus.³⁵ If this is correct and Timaeus did record the embassy to Sparta and the request for Castor and Pollux's help, it is also likely that he included their response to this appeal: an epiphany on the battlefield. It is also possible that Timaeus wrote about the epiphany at Lake Regillus in his section on early Rome, or that later Roman authors drew upon his account of the

³¹ Bricknell 1966: 300; explored in more detail below: 82–83. ³² See above: 11–12.

³³ Gell. NA. 11.1.1. ³⁴ Polyb. 12.5.4–6; Brown 1958: 44–46.

³⁵ Diod. Sic. 8.32.1–2; Skalli 2012: 323 n116.

Sagra epiphany as inspiration for their accounts of the Regillus appearance.

We know that the early Roman historians Quintus Fabius Pictor and Marcus Porcius Cato both drew upon Timaeus.³⁶ Fabius Pictor was the first Roman to write a history of Rome in Greek during the late third century BC, his work spanning from the city's foundation to recent history, whilst Cato's *Origines*, composed in the middle of the second century BC, was the first Latin historical work.³⁷ As I argue later, we can identify depictions of the epiphany at the Battle of Lake Regillus on denarii dating from 211 BC,³⁸ which are contemporaneous with Fabius Pictor's work. It is certainly possible, therefore, that he was aware of the tradition which received a boost in prominence at this time and included it in his history. Later historians may also have played a part: Aulus Postumius Albinus, consul of 151 BC, was a descendant of Aulus Postumius, the victor at Lake Regillus, and would have had a distinct interest in publicising his ancestor's divine support and vow to build the temple of Castor and Pollux in his own work.³⁹ It remains, however, impossible to be certain which, if any, of these historians introduced the Dioscuric epiphanic tradition to Roman literary culture. It is likely that the stories about the appearances of Castor and Pollux would have been first described in the oral tradition, in plays, symposia songs, or family legends, of which no trace survives.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, we can identify 304 BC, the date of the introduction of the *transvectio equitum* by the censor Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus, as a key moment in the prominence of this tradition. The equestrian parade was celebrated annually on the anniversary of the Battle of Lake Regillus, following sacrifices to the Dioscuri and utilising the Forum temple as a focal location.⁴¹ Although the story of the epiphany at Lake Regillus was not necessarily created in 304 BC owing to this confluence, it may have been emphasised or repurposed at this date.⁴² A parade of *equites* following a sacrifice to Castor and Pollux on the anniversary of their epiphany at Lake Regillus cannot have done other than emphasise this connection.

³⁶ Mellor 1999: 16. ³⁷ FRHist: 'Q. Fabius Pictor', 'M. Porcius Cato'.

³⁸ Explored further below: 89–90.

³⁹ Richardson 2013: 906–907; Wiseman 1998: 86–87, 2007: 74.

⁴⁰ Flower 1995 and Clark 2007: 110–112 on *Fabulae Praetextae*, which took their plots from history.

⁴¹ See 117–122. ⁴² Contra: Weinstock 1937a: 14–15; Richardson 2013: 903–904.

HELPERS IN BATTLE

River Sagra

In the early sixth century BC, Locri and Croton were struggling for dominance in Magna Graecia. The Locrians sent messengers to Sparta to seek their assistance, but the Spartans declined to send any troops, instead instructing the envoys to request help from Castor and Pollux.⁴³ The messengers duly did so, offering sacrifice to the Dioscuri at a nearby shrine and praying for their aid. Following an auspicious result, the Locrians returned to their ship and prepared it to transport their new divine allies. The success of the embassy was proven when two young men of extraordinary size, riding white horses and wearing scarlet cloaks, appeared on the battlefield and fought among the Locrian ranks, ensuring their victory. Additionally, an eagle, a symbol of their divine father Jupiter, flew above the army until the victory was won.⁴⁴ The scale of this victory gave rise to the proverb Lucilius quoted above, 'more certain than the affair on the Sagra'.⁴⁵ The same saying is reported by the Augustan geographer Strabo, who does not mention the epiphany but does inform us that there were altars of the Dioscuri on the banks of the River Sagra.⁴⁶ These altars may have provided the *aition* for Castor and Pollux's epiphany and were thought likely to have been erected either in anticipation of or, more probably, in thanks for their aid in battle.⁴⁷

Material evidence suggests that Castor and Pollux were known in the area not long after the reported epiphany: a pair of acroteria from a temple at Marasà near Locri depict two young men dismounting from their horses, a triton undulating beneath each steed, supporting their front hooves with their hands.⁴⁸ The temple has been dated to the

⁴³ Just. *Epit.* 20.2.9–14; Diod. Sic. 8.32.

⁴⁴ Just. *Epit.* 20.3.7. A further epiphany may also have taken place at the Battle of the River Sagra: the Locrians of south Italy, being a colony of the Greek Locrians, had a close relationship with the so-called Lesser Ajax (Hom. *Il.* 2.527). Traditionally, the Locrian colonists left a space in their front ranks for Ajax, which Leonymus of Croton attacked at his cost. He was wounded in the chest and was only healed when he travelled to Ajax himself (Paus. 3.19.12). Speyer 1980: 62 has identified this battle as that of the River Sagra, owing to the fact it was between the Locrians and Crotoniates. However, the Dioscuri are not mentioned in connection with the wounding of Leonymus and Van Compernelle 1969: 749 has argued that the two epiphanies derive from separate traditions, of which the Dioscuric epiphany is the later.

⁴⁵ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.13. ⁴⁶ Strab. 6.1.10.

⁴⁷ Albert 1883: 11; Giangiulio 1983: 497; Edlund 1987: 131.

⁴⁸ LIMC Dioskouroi 24; Van Compernelle 1969: 754; De Franciscis 1979: 110. A similar acroterion depicts a young man on horseback, this time with a sphinx beneath his horse,

fifth century BC and identified as belonging to Jupiter.⁴⁹ If these acroteria do represent the Dioscuri, they clearly show that they were known, even if only by association with Jupiter, near Locri soon after their reported epiphany at the River Sagra. The tritons who support the horses' hooves may be an allusion to the Dioscuri's marine responsibilities as the protectors of sailors;⁵⁰ alternatively they could refer to their transmarine origins in Sparta,⁵¹ or even be a fanciful representation of their arrival in Italy to aid the Locrians, replacing the offered ships with their own method of transport.⁵²

The physical transportation of Castor and Pollux is significant for this epiphany, emphasised by the care for the comfort of the gods on board the ship.⁵³ However, this transfer did not remove their cult from Sparta; the Dioscuri ensured at least one further victory for their countrymen. At the Battle of Aigospotamoi against the Athenians in 405 BC, twin stars appeared on either side of the Spartan general Lysander's ship.⁵⁴ To commemorate this epiphany in thanks to Castor and Pollux, Lysander dedicated a pair of golden stars to them at Delphi.⁵⁵ These stars were later the subject of what Hekster has termed a 'reversed epiphany', in which gods disappear, signalling the loss of their favour.⁵⁶ After the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, which ended Sparta's military dominance, these stars vanished from the shrine, never to be seen again.⁵⁷ The disappearance of the Dioscuri's symbols signalled to the Spartans that they no longer held their favour and that the gods would no longer guarantee their victories.⁵⁸

whose hands support the youth's feet: LIMC Dioskouroi 23; Guzzo 1994: 27 fig. 39c. Although the pendant to this statue is lost, Sourvinou-Inwood 1974: 190 argues that he should be identified as a Dioscurus.

⁴⁹ Van Compernelle 1969: 754–755.

⁵⁰ Catull. *Carm.* 48a.63–65; Sen. *Q. Nat.* 1.1.13; this aspect is explored in Chapter 3.

⁵¹ Giangulio 1983: 497.

⁵² Langlotz 1965: 286. No such explanation can be offered for the helpful sphinx; however, it is interesting to note that this is not the only time the Dioscuri are depicted with sphinxes under their horses: Paus. 3.18.14. Langlotz 1965: 287 hypothesises that there may be some 'underlying religious significance' to this design.

⁵³ Just. *Epit.* 20.2.14 (*pulvinaria*); Diod. Sic. 8.32.2 (κλίνη); Platt 2018: 232; Graf 2004: 125–126; such physical translocation of gods is also seen in the transport of statues of the gods in the *pompa circensis*, noted below: 114–115.

⁵⁴ Plut. *Lys.* 12.1; Cic. *Div.* 1.75. ⁵⁵ Plut. *Lys.* 18.1; Cic. *Div.* 1.75.

⁵⁶ Hekster 2010: 601–615.

⁵⁷ Cic. *Div.* 1.75, 2.68, Plut. *Lys.* 18.1; Graz 1992: 117; Bravo 2004: 66–67.

⁵⁸ Graz 1992: 117; Shapiro 1999: 107.

Lake Regillus

The Dioscuri's next and most famous epiphany occurred at the Battle of Lake Regillus. The battle, dated to 499 BC by Livy or 496 BC by Dionysius, followed shortly after the expulsion of the Kings from Rome.⁵⁹ Among the Latin forces led by the general Octavius Mamilius of Tusculum were the recently deposed Tarquinius Superbus and his sons,⁶⁰ and thus the battle played a significant role in the defence of the new Republic. During the battle, two young men appeared on horseback and led the Roman cavalry in a charge, driving the Latin forces headlong before them. The youths were described as 'far excelling in both beauty and stature those our human stock produces'⁶¹ and were identified as Castor and Pollux.⁶² In thanks for their aid, Aulus Postumius vowed to build their first temple in Rome and, in recognition of this achievement, he received the *cognomen* Regillensis.⁶³ Another monument to this epiphany was a curved mark in a rock on the shore of the lake, which was believed to be the print of Castor's horse and could still be seen in Cicero's day.⁶⁴

Not all sources who describe the battle at Lake Regillus include the epiphany. In contrast to the treatment by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy, a near contemporary, omits any account of the epiphany. His description of the battle is highly detailed, including strategies, troop movements and deeds of the commanders.⁶⁵ In his version it was not an epiphany which saves the day, but the daring deed of Titus Herminius, who slayed the Latin commander, and the actions of Aulus Postumius, who begged the Roman cavalry to dismount and fight alongside the exhausted infantry, restoring their courage and forcing the Latin battle lines to yield before the fresh onslaught.⁶⁶ The end of Livy's description may preserve an allusion to the epiphany: 'then, the dictator, neglecting no help, divine or human, is said to have vowed a temple to Castor' before the rout of the Latin forces.⁶⁷ It would be surprising if Livy was unaware of the tradition of the epiphany; it was well known in the

⁵⁹ Liv. 2.19–20; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.2.1–13.5.

⁶⁰ Plut. *Aem.* 25.2; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.4.1, 6.5.4.

⁶¹ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1: κάλλει τε καὶ μεγέθει μακρῷ κρείττους ὧν ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς φύσις ἐκφέρει.

⁶² Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.3, Flor. *Epit.* 1.5.4, Plut. *Cor.* 3.4, Val. Max. 1.8.1.

⁶³ Liv. 5.16.1; *CIL* 6.40959; Geiger 2008: 138. ⁶⁴ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.11.

⁶⁵ Liv. 2.19.1–2.20.13. ⁶⁶ Liv. 2.20.8–9, 10–12.

⁶⁷ Liv. 2.20.12–13: *Ibi nihil nec divinae nec humanae opis dictator praetermittens aedem Castori vouisse.*

Augustan period and is likely to have received a boost in prominence at this time, owing to the rededication of Aulus Postumius' temple to the Dioscuri by Tiberius in AD 6 and the widely celebrated parallels between Castor and Pollux and young men of the imperial household.⁶⁸ Livy's motivation for writing his history is, in his own words, 'to commemorate the deeds of the foremost people of the world'.⁶⁹ He argues that it is impossible for him to provide an accurate historical account before the Gallic sack of Rome in the fourth century BC, over a century before the battle at Lake Regillus. However, although it is in his view 'the privilege of antiquity to mingle divine things with human', he is sceptical of such accounts.⁷⁰ Levene has persuasively argued that Livy's motivation for excluding the epiphany is not a statement of the author's own belief or scepticism, but instead that it demonstrates his wish to depict the most significant battles as being won or lost owing to the actions of humans.⁷¹ Through his omission of the gods' actions at the Battle of Lake Regillus, Livy commemorates the deeds of two famous Romans who won the battle: Titus Herminius and Aulus Postumius. Despite this, the reference to Aulus Postumius giving thanks for divine aid and vowing a temple to Castor during the battle still provides a nod to the epiphanic tradition.

Pydna

The third and final battle epiphany of the Dioscuri occurred at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC against the Macedonian king Perseus.⁷² Although their most prominent epiphany followed the battle when they announced the victory, there are suggestions that the Dioscuri also appeared during the battle itself. According to the second-century AD author Florus, during the battle two young men appeared who:

⁶⁸ The focus of Chapter 4.

⁶⁹ Liv. 1. Praef. 3: *rerum gestarum memoriae principis terrarum populi*.

⁷⁰ Liv. 1. Praef. 7: *Datur haec venia antiquitati, ut miscendo humana divinis*.

⁷¹ Levene 1993: 153; cf Forsythe 1999: 87–98 on Livy's caution regarding miraculous happenings, and Liebschuetz 1967 on Livy's approach to religion more widely.

⁷² Lieu and Monserrat 1996: 31 suggest that Nazarius in his panegyric to Constantine states that two young men who should be recognised as the Dioscuri appeared at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in AD 312 (*Pan. Lat.* 10(4)15.4–7). However, the reference cited, rather than relating a new epiphany of the Dioscuri in this battle, refers to past epiphanies to glorify Constantine, for where previously two horsemen had appeared, now entire armies do so: Liebschuetz 1979: 290–291; Van den Hoek 2013: 292.

were popularly believed to have been Castor and Pollux 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.⁷³

Minucius Felix, perhaps writing at a similar time, reports that Castor and Pollux ‘announced the victory over Perseus on the same day on which they had achieved it’.⁷⁴ Despite the suggestion of these two statements, no account of an epiphany at Pydna is preserved in our sources.⁷⁵ This may be circumstantial: Dionysius of Halicarnassus concluded his *Roman Antiquities* at 264 BC and we should not be surprised, given the above discussion, that Livy doesn’t mention the epiphany. However, these two imperial sources reveal that there existed a tradition in which the Dioscuri once again appeared to lead the Roman army to victory.

A New Type of *Evocatio*?

The epiphanies at the River Sagra and Lake Regillus have been linked to the practice of *evocatio*, the ‘calling out’ of a city or state’s protecting deity to win his or her support for Rome, whilst removing it from their enemies.⁷⁶ The best attested example of such a ritual (although it should be noted one that no source names as an *evocatio*) occurred in 396 BC, following the capture of Veii by Marcus Furius Camillus.⁷⁷ The statue of Juno, when asked if she was willing to go to Rome, reportedly gave her assent by nodding or speaking. Another account is found in Macrobius, who preserves the invocation he claims was used by Scipio Aemilianus to call out the gods of Carthage after its conquest in 146 BC.⁷⁸

Did either of the first two Dioscuric epiphanies in Italy function as an *evocatio*? The one with the greatest similarity is the invoked epiphany at the

⁷³ Flor, *Epit.* 1.28.12–15: *Castorem et Pollucem fuisse creditum volgo, quod gemini fuissent; interfuisse bello, quod sanguine maderent; a Macedonia venire, quod adhuc anhelarent.*

⁷⁴ Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3: ... *de Perse victoriam eadem die qua fecerant nuntiaverunt.*

⁷⁵ Also suggested by Richardson 2013: 905. The fragments of *Paullus* by Pacuvius, a *fabula praetexta*, are tantalising; the play may have focused on the general’s victory at Pydna, if so, perhaps also including the epiphany. On the fragments: Flower 1995: 186–187.

⁷⁶ On *evocatio*: Basanoff 1947; Gustafsson 2000. Lake Regillus as an *evocatio*: Albert 1883: 25; Wissowa 1912: 383–384; Basanoff 1947: 203; Cancellieri 1994: 65; Smith 2007: 37. Gustafsson 2000: 11 argues that it is a purely Roman phenomenon.

⁷⁷ Liv. 5.21.3–6; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 13.3.1–2; Plut. *Cam.* 6.1–2; Val. Max. 1.8.3; Gustafsson 2000: 47–48.

⁷⁸ Macrobius *Sat.* 3.9.6–8; Kloppenborg 2005: 435–436. Macrobius is drawing on Sammonicus Serenus, an author likely of the Severan period. Serenus himself claims to use the work of Furius as a source, perhaps Lucius Furius Philus, consul of 136 BC and friend of Scipio Aemilianus: Kloppenborg 2005: 435–436.

River Sagra, for the Lake Regillus and Pydna appearances were spontaneous. After the earliest two epiphanies, the gods received worship in a new location, although only the Locrian epiphany has elements of physical translocation of the gods. However, there are significant differences: most importantly, an *evocatio* removed the deity from their previous place of worship, transferring their cult to Rome, whereas Castor and Pollux continued to be worshipped at the original location following both epiphanies. As noted earlier, they appeared to aid the Spartans at Aigospotamoi after the River Sagra epiphany. Although it is less clear which Latin cult would have been transferred to Rome following the epiphany at Lake Regillus, most probable would be the one from Tusculum, the home of the Latin general.⁷⁹ However, Latium in general and Tusculum in particular continued to possess cults of the Dioscuri for centuries.⁸⁰ The foundation of the cults of Castor and Pollux at Locri and Rome, therefore, despite being related to their epiphanies, did not require the removal of their cult from their defeated foes and are not *evocationes*.⁸¹

Further Epiphanies

Although the Romans made particular use of this type of Dioscuric epiphany, their use was not exclusive. As we have seen, Castor and Pollux continued to aid others elsewhere, such as at the Battle of Aigospotamoi. A further epiphany of Castor and Pollux has been proposed to have occurred on the island of Chios from a fragmentary inscription which may date to the late third or early second century BC, during the war between Rome and Antiochus.⁸² The names of the gods who appeared are missing from the text, but the editors have hypothesised that they should be identified as Castor and Pollux, seemingly drawing upon their epiphanic habit as well as the plurality of the manifesting gods and that the Dioscuri are worshipped both in Rome and on Chios.⁸³ However,

⁷⁹ Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.6. ⁸⁰ Cic. *Div.* 1.98; *RRC* 515/1.

⁸¹ Ogilvie 1969: 570–571 has suggested that instead the epiphanies should be termed an *exoratio*, ‘by which a deity’s allegiance would be alienated and which was followed by the establishment of a temple or cult as a reward.’ Cf. *OLD*: *exoratio*: ‘the act of imploring, entreaty’; *LSJ*: *exoratio*: ‘a moving by entreaty, effectual entreaty ... an appealing’. Servius uses the term in this sense in relating a request for Juno to leave Carthage in the Second Punic War: Serv. *ad Aen.* 12.12.841, although Ando argues it has no technical ritual sense: Ando 2008: 129 n24–25.

⁸² Derow and Forrest 1982: 87, although they note on epigraphic grounds the inscription should date to the third century BC: 86–87, on the discrepancy: 90–91.

⁸³ Derow and Forrest 1982: 82.

their cult on the island is only attested from the first century BC and even then, only by the depiction of their *piloi* with stars above an inscription to Θεῶν πάντων / καὶ πασῶν.⁸⁴ Garbrah has linked the larger inscription to the Chian festival of the Theophaneia, arguing that it commemorated an epiphany of the gods, perhaps the one celebrated by the inscription.⁸⁵ He furthermore suggests that the naval battle in 201 BC at the siege of Chios by Philip of Macedon may be a candidate for the battle at which the gods appeared.⁸⁶ Although this is a possibility, Castor and Pollux were by no means the only gods who appeared in the Hellenistic world to aid armies, and therefore this inscription cannot be definitively used to identify a Chian epiphany of Castor and Pollux.

One further Dioscuric epiphany connected to a battle should be noted: it is included in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, an epic retelling of the Second Punic War, probably written from the late 80s AD.⁸⁷ The gods feature prominently in this poem, and as the Roman and Carthaginian forces meet at Cannae, the gods also wage war. Ranged on the side of Rome are Apollo, Mars, Poseidon, Venus, Vesta, Hercules and Cybele, as well as 'the native gods of Italy – Faunus and father Quirinus; and Pollux who takes turns of life with his brother Castor'.⁸⁸ Facing them are Juno, Minerva, Ammon and many other lesser deities.⁸⁹ This is striking as it is the only battle with which a Dioscuric epiphany is associated that the Romans lost; furthermore, it was one of their greatest defeats. Also unique among Dioscuric epiphanies, Pollux appears alone, for Silius is following the variant of their mythology in which the brothers are separated in the afterlife, exchanging their places in Hades and on Olympus. Pollux is included in the list of the *indigentes dei*, the native gods of Italy, alongside Faunus and Quirinus, both of whom are associated with archaic times. No other account of such a mass of gods appearing at Cannae is attested, and this description bears greater similarities to Virgil's description of the Battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas, where the gods of Rome are represented defeating those of Egypt, than to a historical account of the battle of Cannae.⁹⁰ It thus seems that this epiphany is Silius' invention and part of his epic style rather than a historical event.

⁸⁴ Forrest 1963: 61–62. ⁸⁵ Garbrah 1986: 207–208.

⁸⁶ Garbrah 1986: 208, followed by Platt 2018: 231.

⁸⁷ OCD: 'Silius Italicus, Tiberius Catius Asconius'.

⁸⁸ Sil. *Pun.* 9.294–295: *indigetesque dei Faunusque satorque Quirinus / alternusque animae mutato Castore Pollux.*

⁸⁹ Sil. *Pun.* 9.287–299. ⁹⁰ Virg. *Aen.* 8.675–708.

Dating the Tradition

In the introduction to this chapter, I noted the difficulty in establishing the origin of the epiphanic habit of Castor and Pollux in the literary tradition. However, material evidence and particularly numismatics allow us to establish a *terminus ante quem* for when this tradition became widespread. The most enduring depiction of the Dioscuri was first minted in 211 BC and depicts on the obverse two horsemen with spears in full gallop, cloaks streaming behind them (Figure 6).⁹¹ They wear their distinctive *piloi* hats and stars fly above their heads, whilst on the reverse is a goddess' head, usually identified as Roma. These coins were minted alongside two other designs associated with military power, with Jupiter and a Victory crowning a trophy on one and Mars paired with an eagle on a thunderbolt on the other.⁹² The connection between the Dioscuri becomes even clearer on a contemporary issue: Victory herself joins the brothers, flying behind them and holding a wreath above their heads.⁹³ As these issues were all minted during the Second Punic War and before Rome had won any decisive victories, it is unsurprising to see a preoccupation with gods and victory.⁹⁴ There is a noticeable difference between the representation of the Dioscuri and other gods depicted on coins at the same time: Castor and Pollux appear on the reverse of the coin and are depicted full-length, including their horses, riding along a ground line, the other gods are depicted on the obverse and only their heads are shown. This is not a generic representation of Castor and Pollux, but shows them in their triumphant charge at the head of the Roman cavalry at the Battle of Lake Regillus.⁹⁵ The numismatic depiction bears many similarities to the literary descriptions given of that epiphany and, furthermore, they are represented in an unusually active way.⁹⁶ The

⁹¹ RRC 44/5. Other coins depicting the Dioscuri in a similar image had previously appeared in Italy: a 315 BC Tarentine Stater: Jenkins 1972 n444; and an issue from the Brettioi dated between the 280s and 203 BC: *HN Italy* 157. Both issues are associated with victories, however, as they bear palm fronds and wreaths rather than spears. Similar images had also appeared in the east, on coins from Antiochus II between 264 and 246 BC: Poulsen 1992a: 49; Houghton, Lorber, Hoover and Kritt 2002 nos.565–567; and Seleucus III between 226 and 223 BC: Houghton, Lorber, Hoover and Kritt 2002 nos.937–938.

⁹² RRC 44/1, 44/2. ⁹³ RRC 61/1.

⁹⁴ The Dioscuri are not the only gods associated with victory in this issue: heads of Janus, Saturn, Minerva, Hercules and Roma all appear on the obverses of other coins in the issue, with a reverse depicting Victory above a prow: RRC 61/2–8.

⁹⁵ Sidnell 2006: 161 suggests that this image commemorates an unspecified victory over the Capuans. However, as no such epiphany is attested, this appears unlikely.

⁹⁶ Although unusual compared to the static images on other coins, other gods also were depicted in a similar way: earlier *drachm* and *didrachm* coinage dated from 225–212 BC,



FIGURE 6 Anonymous denarius, Rome, 211 BC (*RRC* 44/5). Obverse: X, Helmeted head of Roma, right; behind, denominational mark. Border of dots. Reverse: ROMA, Dioscuri galloping, right; in linear frame, inscription. Line border. Image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, the University of Oxford.

appearance of Castor and Pollux on these coins might serve, if not as an invocation to the gods to appear again, then at least as a reminder that the gods who had previously ensured the survival of the Republic were on Rome's side during this fraught period.

This design remained prominent, appearing virtually unchanged on coinage until 121 BC, except for small variants, such as the pose of the horses, legends and minter's marks. In 136 BC, a new design appeared alongside the older representation on an issue minted by Gaius Servilius (Figure 7).⁹⁷ On this denarius, Castor and Pollux, stars above their heads, are on horseback; however, instead of riding alongside each other, they ride in opposite directions whilst looking back towards the centre, crossing the butts of their spears in the air between them, spear points directed into the ground. Crawford proposes that it refers to the moneyer's descent from Publius Servilius Geminus, consul of 252 and 248 BC.⁹⁸ He and his

depicted Jupiter in an active manner, standing in a quadriga driven by Victory and in the process of hurling a thunderbolt: e.g. *RRC* 28/3. We know of no epiphany of Jupiter with which this numismatic portrayal can be associated, although it is possible that there was an earlier tradition which has since been lost.

⁹⁷ *RRC* 239/1; Välimaa 1989: 113; Petrocchi 1994: 102–103.

⁹⁸ *RRC* 271; Van Ooteghem 1967: 389 conversely proposes that it refers to another ancestor: Marcus Servilius Pulex Geminus, who was famed for winning a number of single combats during the Second Punic War. This, however, misses the detail that the spear tips are reversed, not in combat.



FIGURE 7 Denarius of Gaius Servilius, Rome, 136 BC (RRC 239/1). Obverse: X (crossed) ROMA, Helmeted head of Roma, right; behind, wreath and denominational mark. Border of dots. Reverse: C·SERVEILI·M·F, Dioscuri riding apart, with spears reversed. Border of dots. Image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, the University of Oxford.

twin Quintus were used by Cicero as a proverbial example of how similar identical twins could be, inspiring their *cognomen*.⁹⁹ The representation of the divine twins is therefore likely a play upon a familial name, and the new design perhaps used to ensure it and its issuer stood out from the common type. Although this image was not reproduced in Rome, it was replicated by the Italians during the Social War, adding Oscan text to identify the goddess' head as Italia and with the name of the Samnite commander, Gaius Papius Mutilus, on the reverse.¹⁰⁰ The motives of this image being adapted for the Italian cause is complicated by the question of what the *socii* were seeking: Roman citizenship¹⁰¹ or independence from Rome.¹⁰² If the former, the Italian allies may have been drawing on the common worship of Castor and Pollux in Rome and throughout Italy, highlighting their similarities and worthiness to possess citizenship. If the latter, they may have been attempting to reverse the outcome of the Battle of Lake Regillus, reclaiming the Dioscuri as Latin gods, who might now choose to support their former worshippers and ensure their victory

⁹⁹ Cic. *Acad.* 2.56, 2.84. See also Badian 1984 esp. 52.

¹⁰⁰ RR 2.32, 330; Ogilvie 1969: 571.

¹⁰¹ App. *B.Civ.* 1.34; Keaveney 1987: 50–58; Brunt 1988: 95, 102–103.

¹⁰² Scullard 1982: 64–65; Brunt 1988: 111–113, although after attempts to attain citizenship had failed; Lomas 1996: 84; Mouritsen 1998: 137–138, 140–141; Pobjoy 2000: 190–193.

against Rome.¹⁰³ These coins must be seen in the wider context of the issues minted by the allies. Other Roman gods also appear, although as busts on the obverse, rather than in such an active fashion on the reverse, including Mars, Minerva and Bacchus.¹⁰⁴ The inclusion of Bacchus is interesting, considering the highhanded *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 BC, in which Rome attempted to regulate the worship of the god throughout Italy. Perhaps again the Italians were attempting to reclaim a god for their side.

The final denarius issue which may be linked to an epiphany of the Dioscuri was minted in 126 BC by Titus Quinctius Flaminius, and reverted to the traditional design, with the addition of a Macedonian shield beneath the horses' hooves.¹⁰⁵ This shield has been suggested to be a reference to the victory won by an earlier Titus Quinctius Flaminius at Cynoscephalae in 197 BC, who had dedicated a pair of shields to Castor and Pollux at Delphi after his victory.¹⁰⁶

The epiphanies of Castor and Pollux as helpers in battle had a long, albeit intermittent, history in Italy. At least seventy years passed between the epiphanies reported at the Battles of the River Sagra and Lake Regillus, and a further three centuries before Castor and Pollux appeared once more at the Battle of Pydna. Nevertheless, the common denarius type of the Dioscuri riding into battle on Rome's behalf was minted for over a century, no doubt helping to keep the story in the minds of the citizens, along with the annual procession on the anniversary of their epiphany at Lake Regillus. Castor and Pollux also continued to appear within these chronological gaps in their other epiphanic roles.

MESSENGERS OF VICTORY

Castor and Pollux played a dual role in some battles, not only assuring the Roman victory, but also announcing the joyful news. Over time, as the Dioscuri no longer appeared as helpers in battle, instead they only announced the victory won. This type of Dioscuric epiphany is only found in the Roman tradition, so it is no surprise that most of these appearances occur in Rome or close by. The only exception to this

¹⁰³ The Dioscuri also appeared as single busts on the obverse of other coins minted by the allies with Italia in a chariot on the reverse: for example: *HN Italy* 417.

¹⁰⁴ For example: *HN Italy* 409, 416, 427. ¹⁰⁵ *RRC* 267/1.

¹⁰⁶ *Plut. Flam.* 12.6; Poulsen 1992a: 49; Petrocchi 1994: 102; Sumi 2009: 175; Richardson 2013: 910. Less probably, Albert 1883: 75 suggests it is a reference to the epiphany at the Battle of Pydna, 42 years earlier.

geographical element is the final epiphany of this type, which occurs in Syria in 48 BC.

Lake Regillus

The earliest messenger epiphany of Castor and Pollux occurred following their appearance at Lake Regillus in 496 BC. Our most detailed description comes from the Augustan historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus:

two youths are said to have appeared in the same manner in the Roman Forum attired in military garb, very tall and beautiful and of the same age, themselves retaining on their countenances as having come from a battle, the look of combatants, and the horses they led being all in a sweat. And when they had each of them watered their horses and washed them at the fountain which rises near the temple of Vesta and forms a small but deep pool, and many people stood about them and inquired if they brought any news from the camp, they related how the battle had gone and that the Romans were the victors. And it is said that after they left the Forum they were not seen again by anyone, though great search was made for them by the man who had been left in command of the city. The next day, when those at the head of affairs received the letters from the dictator, and besides the other particulars of the battle, learned also of the appearance of the divinities, they 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.¹⁰⁷

The location of this epiphany is significant: the Dioscuri appear in most variants at the *Lacus Iuturnae*, a spring beside the future site of their Forum temple. The spring provides a reason for this choice, as they were using the water to care for their horses. An interesting detail of Dionysius' account is that the divine pair were not immediately recognised: instead, the crowd assumed that they were soldiers. Their divine nature is far clearer in their battle epiphany which immediately precedes this section. Although the brothers are still described in their role as messengers as

¹⁰⁷ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1–3: ... ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἀγορᾷ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὀφθῆναι δύο νεανίσκοι λέγονται, πολεμικὰς ἐνδεδυκότες στολὰς μήκιστοι τε καὶ κάλλιστοι καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν ἔχοντες, αὐτοὶ τε φυλάττοντες ἐπὶ τῶν προσώπων ὡς ἐκ μάχης ἦκοντες τὸ ἐναγώνιον σχῆμα, καὶ τοὺς ἵππους ἰδρῶτι διαβρόχους ἐπαγόμενοι. ἄρσαντες δὲ τὸν ἵππον ἑκάτεροι καὶ ἀπονίψαντες ἀπὸ τῆς λιβάδος ἢ παρὰ τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς Ἑστίας ἀναδίδωσι δίδωσι λίμνην ποιούσα ἐμβύθιον ὀλίγην, πολλῶν αὐτοὺς περιστάντων καὶ εἴ τι φέρουσιν καινὸν ἀπὸ στρατοπέδου μαθεῖν ἀξιούντων, τὴν τε μάχην αὐτοῖς φράζουσιν ὡς ἐγένετο καὶ ὅτι νικῶσιν· οὗς μεταχωρήσαντας ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἔτι λέγουσιν ὀφθῆναι, πολλὴν ζήτησιν αὐτῶν ποιουμένου τοῦ καταλειφθέντος τῆς πόλεως ἡγεμόνος. ὥς δὲ τῇ κατόπιν ἡμέρᾳ τὰς παρὰ τοῦ δικτάτορος ἐπιστολὰς ἔλαβον οἱ τῶν κοινῶν προεστῶτες, καὶ σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ μάχῃ γενομένοις καὶ τὰ περὶ τῆς ἐπιφανείας τῶν δαιμόνων ἔμαθον, νομίσαντες τῶν αὐτῶν θεῶν εἶναι ἄμφω τὰ φάσματα, ὥσπερ εἰκός, Διοσκούρων ἐπέστησαν εἶναι τὰ εἰδῶλα.

‘very tall and beautiful’, on the battlefield Dionysius states that they were divine: ‘far excelling in both beauty and stature those our human stock produces’.¹⁰⁸ A similar lack of immediate identification is found in another account of the same epiphany at the *Lacus Juturnae*: in his *Life of Aemilius Paullus*, Plutarch writes that the apparitions ‘were conjectured to be the Dioscuri’, although in his *Life of Coriolanus*, he is more certain, stating that they were the divine twins.¹⁰⁹ Even if the brothers were not immediately recognised, they were soon afterwards, and this epiphany led to the construction of the Forum temple of the Dioscuri next to the spot on which they had appeared.

Plutarch provides a further variant: whilst in Dionysius’ account Castor and Pollux reveal the victory to the crowd of people who gathered around them, Plutarch identifies the man to whom they revealed the glad tidings at the *Lacus Juturnae*. To prove that they were telling the truth, the brothers touched the questioner’s beard which transformed from black to red. He was a member of the *gens Domitia* and it was from this encounter that his descendants ascribed the origin of their *cognomen Ahenobarbus* or ‘bronze-beard’.¹¹⁰ Suetonius also provides this variant, but does not explicitly locate this epiphany at the *Lacus Juturnae*, instead relating that the Dioscuri met Domitius as he came back from the country.¹¹¹ Although this might appear to place the epiphany in another location, a house associated with Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, the consul of AD 32, is described by the *Acta Fratrum Arvalium* as being on the upper *Sacra Via*.¹¹² This has been identified with the remains of a Late Republican house now underneath the northern corner of the Hadrianic temple of Venus and Roma.¹¹³ We cannot say for certain that the Domitii Ahenobarbi had lived in this house from its creation or in an older building on the same site. If, however, the later position of the house of the Domitii Ahenobarbi was projected back, correctly or not, to the early fifth century BC, then it could be said that the first Domitius Ahenobarbus was passing the *Lacus Juturnae* on his way home from the country. This would therefore eliminate the geographical variant, which is particularly important for this appearance, for the location of the Dioscuri’s epiphany provided the aetiology for the site of their foremost temple.

¹⁰⁸ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1.

¹⁰⁹ Plut. *Aem.* 25.3: τούτους εἶκασαν εἶναι Διοσκούρους; *Cor.* 3.4.

¹¹⁰ Plut. *Aem.* 25.1–7. On the Ahenobarbi, see Carlsen 2006.

¹¹¹ Suet. *Ner.* 1.1; Tertull. *Apol.* 22.12. ¹¹² Carlsen 2006: 99; Scheid 1998: 24, 1.2–5.

¹¹³ Carlsen 2006: 99, Palombi 1997: 89, n68; Schingo 1996: 151, Morricone 1987.

Suetonius' version of their appearance is given to describe the ancestors of the Emperor Nero, which may reveal the impetus behind this variation lay within the Domitii Ahenobarbi, his family. Although both Suetonius and Plutarch were writing after the reign of Nero and thus could be drawing upon a tradition which was emphasised by Nero himself, it seems more probable that this story developed among the Republican Domitii Ahenobarbi, for Nero himself reportedly spurned his Domitian ancestry upon his adoption by Claudius.¹¹⁴ The tradition most likely originated in the second century BC when the *gens* grew in prominence, culminating in the censorship of Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus in 115 BC.¹¹⁵ Between 189 and 180 BC, another Gnaeus Domitius minted a series of coins which included the conventional image of the Dioscuri riding into battle.¹¹⁶ If the tradition that Castor and Pollux had appeared to his ancestor were current during his time as moneyer, it is surprising that this Domitius replicated the stock type rather than highlighting the personal connection his family possessed to the gods. This is an argument *ex silentio*, but the tradition of the Dioscuri meeting the first Domitius Ahenobarbus may post-date this issue. It is perhaps clearer that the tradition was known in 41 BC when another moneyer in the family, Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, struck coins on which his famous ancestor appeared complete with his eponymous beard.¹¹⁷

Pydna

Three centuries passed before Castor and Pollux announced another victory which they had helped the Roman army secure, this time at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC. We can trace two variants of this epiphany: one follows closely the template of the Lake Regillus epiphany, locating this epiphany at the *Lacus Juturnae* where they appeared with their horses and announced the victory.¹¹⁸ The other variant I have already noted, when Castor and Pollux appeared to the unfortunate Publius Vatinius.¹¹⁹ Although Cicero identifies the messengers as the *Tyndaridae*, Valerius

¹¹⁴ Suet. *Ner.* 7.1; Tac. *Ann.* 12.41.

¹¹⁵ Carlsen 2006: 17; Wiseman 2004: 188 suggests that it was created around the time of the reported epiphany at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC and cast back to the early Republic.

¹¹⁶ *RRC* 147/1; Carlsen 2006: 17, n16, 164 identifies him as the suffect consul of 162 BC.

¹¹⁷ *RRC* 519/2; Bradley 1978: 25–26; Carlsen 2006: 17.

¹¹⁸ Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3. Plin. *HN.* 7.86 also mentions this epiphany but does not specify the location nor the person to whom the Dioscuri spoke.

¹¹⁹ See 76–77; this may be a gentilicial tradition of the Vatinii.

Maximus does not, despite being the later source, merely describing them as ‘two exceptionally handsome young men on white horses’.¹²⁰

One source whom we might have expected to include an account of this epiphany, however, does not do so: Plutarch’s biography of Lucius Aemilius Paullus, the commander at the Battle of Pydna. Instead, Plutarch records another supernatural phenomenon following the victory: four days after the battle a rumour spread that Perseus had been defeated.¹²¹ As there was no proof, the rumour subsided, but it was validated by a later announcement. Plutarch also includes similar spontaneous knowledge of a victory following the Battle of the River Sagra, which reached the Peloponnese on the same day, although again he does not mention the Dioscuric epiphany.¹²² Earlier sources attest that the tradition pre-dates him, so it would be surprising, although not impossible, for Plutarch to have been unaware of the story.¹²³ It may be that he, like Livy, wishes to focus upon the deeds of the biography’s subject, rather than crediting their victories to the gods.

Vercellae

The next messenger epiphany of the Dioscuri follows Gaius Marius’ victory over the Cimbri at the Battle of Vercellae in 101 BC. Florus reports that on the same day as the battle:

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.¹²⁴

Although Florus neither specifies the number nor identity of the *iuvenes*, he states that the news came from the gods. However, their identification as the Dioscuri is simple: the youths appear in front of their temple and perform the role of messengers of victory that the divine twins have played close by

¹²⁰ Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.6; Val. Max. 1.8.1: *duos iuvenes excellentis formae, albis equis residentes.*

¹²¹ Plut. *Aem.* 24.4–6. ¹²² Plut. *Aem.* 25.1. ¹²³ Plin. *HN.* 7.86; Val. Max 1.8.1.

¹²⁴ Flor. *Epit.* 1.38.19–20: *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.* The significance of the inversion of the temple’s traditional name is examined below: 168–169.

twice before. Unlike his previous reports of epiphanies at the Battle of Lake Regillus and both during and after the Battle of Pydna, it is interesting that Florus chooses to qualify this account with ‘if we may believe the tale’.¹²⁵

Valerius Maximus does not explicitly relate this epiphany in his account of Marius’ deeds; however, he may do so without naming the Battle of Vercellae. He includes a messenger epiphany of the Dioscuri which cannot be clearly linked to either the aftermath of the Battles of Lake Regillus or Pydna explored above. He relates that:

Castor and Pollux were found vigilant on behalf of the Roman people’s empire on another occasion when they were seen washing the sweat from themselves and their mounts at the pool of Juturna and their temple adjoining the spring was found open, though unbarred by no man’s hand.¹²⁶

Although it has been suggested that this should be identified as the messenger epiphany after the Battle of Pydna, it immediately follows the description of Castor and Pollux appearing to Vatinius and Valerius explicitly states that this epiphany occurred at a different time.¹²⁷ The mention of the temple means that this cannot be the epiphany after Lake Regillus, for it was not yet built. It is tempting to link Valerius’ account to the only other attested messenger epiphany in Rome, following Marius’ victory in 101 BC. However, the depiction of the Dioscuri washing sweat from themselves and their horses suggests active participation in the battle which is unattested at Vercellae. There are thus two possibilities: that Valerius has preserved an otherwise unknown epiphany; or more probably that he is recounting the Vercellae epiphany but adding further details.

Pharsalus

Castor and Pollux’s final appearance as messengers of victory occurred in the aftermath of the Battle of Pharsalus between Caesar and Pompey in 48 BC. It is a fleeting reference noted by Cassius Dio, who reports that ‘in Syria, two young men announced the result of the battle and vanished’.¹²⁸ Although there are few identifying elements, the similarity

¹²⁵ Flor. *Epit.* 1.5.4, 1.38.15: *si credere fas est.*

¹²⁶ Val. Max. 1.8.1: *Castorem vero et Pollucem etiam illo tempore pro imperio populi Romani excubuisse cognitum est quo apud lacum Iuturnae suum equorumque sudorem abluentes visi sunt, iunctaque fonti aedis eorum nullius hominum manu reserata patuit.*

¹²⁷ Poulsen 1992a: 49.

¹²⁸ Cass. Dio 41.61.4: τοῖς τε Σύροις δύο τινὰς νεανίσκους τὸ τέλος τῆς μάχης ἀγγεῖλαντας ἀφανεῖς γενέσθαι.



FIGURE 8 *Lacus Juturnae, Forum Romanum, Rome.* Author's photograph.

to their other epiphanies, being two supernatural young men announcing a victory, allows them to be recognised as Castor and Pollux. This epiphany is included in a long list of other prodigies following the battle, which span from Pergamum to Patavium in Italy.¹²⁹ It seems that Dio has compiled this list from several sources, including Livy, a native of Patavium.¹³⁰ The geographical range of these prodigies signals the wide-ranging effects of Caesar's victory and are perhaps associated with cities or colonies that honoured Caesar after Pharsalus, some of whom may have claimed these supernatural incidents as impetus for their honours.¹³¹ That Castor and Pollux appeared in Syria to announce the victory is unusual, although the Dioscuri were known in the area.¹³² It may be that the difference stems from the difficult nature of this battle.

¹²⁹ Cass. Dio 41.61.3–5.

¹³⁰ Plut. *Caes.* 47.3–6 cites Livy as his source for another prodigy that also appears in Dio's list (Cass. Dio 41.61.4–5) in which Gaius Cornelius, an acquaintance of Livy, narrated the course of the battle from the actions of birds.

¹³¹ Weinstock 1971: 296–299, 401.

¹³² For example: two issues of Antiochus II, one with the Dioscuri on horseback (Houghton, Lorber, Hoover and Kritt 2002 no. 567), and the other showing their *piloi* (Houghton, Lorber, Hoover and Kritt 2002 no. 568), or jugate busts of the Dioscuri on coins of Seleucus II (Houghton, Lorber, Hoover and Kritt 2002 nos. 776–778).

All previous messenger epiphanies of the Dioscuri had celebrated a Roman victory over a foreign enemy. In contrast, two Roman armies had met at Pharsalus and thus the victory celebrations needed to be tactfully done, for both the victors and the defeated were Romans.

Epiphanic Locations

The location of these messenger epiphanies is central to this tradition; only the last of the epiphanies occurs any great distance outside Rome and the majority are located at the *Lacus Juturnae* (Figure 8). The first epiphany here provided the aetiology for the construction of their temple, and the later epiphanies followed in its footsteps. The connection between the Dioscuri and the *Lacus Juturnae* was monumentalised by an altar found in the pool: Castor and Pollux are depicted on one side, wearing their *piloi*, leaning on their spears and holding swords but without their horses.¹³³ Juturna herself is depicted on an adjoining face, and the other two sides represent Helen, the sister of Castor and Pollux, and Jupiter, their divine father. Minucius Felix vividly describes the ‘statues of the horsemen brothers, consecrated, even as they appeared, in the lake waters, who, breathless with their foaming and smoking steeds announced the victory over Perses on the same day on which they had achieved it’, which could still be seen at the time of this work, probably in the late second century AD.¹³⁴ Like the temple, Platt argues that this statue group recreated the multiple epiphanies of the Dioscuri at this site, monumentalising their appearance and the *aition* for their nearby temple.¹³⁵ Fragments of statues of two young men and horses found in the *Lacus* are very likely those described by Minucius.¹³⁶ The date of these statues has been debated, mostly on stylistic grounds, varying from Greek originals of the early Classical period,¹³⁷ the fifth century BC,¹³⁸ to an archaising style of the second century BC.¹³⁹ If they were originally Greek statues, the possibility has been suggested that

¹³³ LIMC Dioskouroi/Castores I.

¹³⁴ Min. Fel. Oct. 7.3 after Glover and Rendall: *testes equestrum fratrum in lacu, sicut se ostenderant, statuae consecratae, qui anhelis spumantibus equis atque fumantibus de Perse victoriam eadem die qua fecerant nuntiaverunt.*

¹³⁵ Platt 2003: 154–155.

¹³⁶ Clarke 1968: 147–148; Platt 2003: 154–155. For an overview of scholarship and dating of these statues, see La Rocca et al. 2010: 261–262.

¹³⁷ Richardson 1992: 230. ¹³⁸ Alföldi 1963: 93, 270; Clarke 1968: 147.

¹³⁹ Coarelli 1976: 27, 2007: 76; Harri 1989: 187–188.

they were brought to Rome by Aemilius Paullus, who displayed numerous works of art in his triumph.¹⁴⁰ This potential connection has been used to reinforce Steinby's identification of Aemilius as the rebuilder of the *Lacus Juturnae* and the second-century BC alterations to the Forum temple.¹⁴¹ Sihvola suggests the interesting idea that these statues could be identified as a pair described by Pausanias as having been transported to Rome from Pharae in Achaea.¹⁴²

There are a number of interesting parallels between the Dioscuri and Juturna, the goddess of this spring.¹⁴³ In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Juturna was the sister of Turnus and was transformed into a goddess by Jupiter after he had seduced her. Despite her efforts on her brother's behalf, when she realised that Turnus was doomed, she flung herself into a stream, emerging from her spring, perhaps the one on the (then) future site of Rome's Forum.¹⁴⁴ Manning identifies an intriguing series of parallels between Virgil's telling of the story of Turnus and Juturna and the mythology of the Dioscuri. Both pairs of siblings are close, but one is mortal (Turnus and Castor) while the other is immortal (Juturna and Pollux), and during a battle, the immortal siblings discover that their mortal brother is about to die.¹⁴⁵ Here, however, the parallels cease; whilst Pollux saves his brother, sharing his immortality between them, Juturna is not so fortunate. These parallels may be Virgilian in origin, suggested by Manning to draw heavily upon the account of the Dioscuri's fight against Idas and Lynceus in Pindar's *Nemean Ode*.¹⁴⁶ Juturna also possessed a spring near Lavinium, which connects her geographically with the cult of the Dioscuri, who we have seen were worshipped at the Latin sanctuary at Lavinium from the sixth century BC.¹⁴⁷

Epiphanies on Coins

Castor and Pollux also appear on Roman coinage as messengers of victory, although not so frequently as they are depicted riding to the rescue at Lake Regillus. The earliest numismatic depiction of this role is a significant change

¹⁴⁰ Plut. *Aem.* 32.4; Clarke 1968: 147; Steinby 1985: 82–83, 1987: 167–169; Sihvola 1989: 86–87; Nielsen and Poulsen 1992b: 86. Coarelli 2007: 76 dates these statues to the second century BC but suggests that Aemilius may have commissioned them.

¹⁴¹ See above: 54; Steinby 1985: 82–83, 1987: 167–169, 2012: 53–54; Poulsen 1992a: 50; Platt 2003: 156; Boyle 2003: 190.

¹⁴² Paus. 7.22.5; Sihvola 1989: 86–87. ¹⁴³ Aronen 1989: 57–75.

¹⁴⁴ Virg. *Aen.* 12.139–160, 843–886. ¹⁴⁵ Manning 1988: 211–222.

¹⁴⁶ Manning 1988: 211. ¹⁴⁷ Pietilä-Castrén 1987: 46.



FIGURE 9 Denarius of Lucius Memmius, Rome, 109–108 BC (RRC 304/1). Obverse: X (crossed), Young male head (possibly Apollo) right, wearing oak-wreath. Border of dots. Reverse: L·MEMMI, Dioscuri standing facing between their horses, each holding a spear. Border of dots. Image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, the University of Oxford.



FIGURE 10 Denarius of Aulus Postumius Albinus, Rome, 96 BC (RRC 335/10b). Obverse: ROMA X, Laureate head of Apollo right; behind, star with six rays. Border of dots. Reverse: A·ALBINV[S·S·F], Dioscuri watering horses at the *Lacus Juturnae*; in field, crescent. Border of dots. Image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, the University of Oxford.

from the earlier active type. The issue, minted by Lucius Memmius in 109 or 108 BC, depicts Castor and Pollux standing in a *contrapposto* pose, holding their spears, with stars above their heads (Figure 9). Their horses prance on the spot, one foreleg raised, a very similar representation to the *Lacus*

Juturnae statues.¹⁴⁸ The next design, minted in the late 90s BC, closely resembles the literary treatments of the Dioscuri at Juturna's spring (Figure 10).¹⁴⁹ Castor and Pollux are easily recognisable by their *piloi*, stars and spears, but this time their horses are depicted drinking from a basin, probably intended to represent the *Lacus*.¹⁵⁰ The identity of the moneyer allows the identification of the epiphany: he is Aulus Postumius Albinus, a descendant of the victorious dictator at the Battle of Lake Regillus.

Although not as grand a gesture of divine support as physically assuring a victory, the Dioscuric messenger epiphanies are their most frequent type in the Roman tradition. The earliest epiphanies were matched with a battle epiphany, whilst later occurrences did not credit the gods for the victory. This development suggests a growing desire for Romans to regard their victories as being achieved by their armies, although the gods might join them in celebration afterwards.

COMPANIONS AT DEATH

The final and least attested category of Dioscuric epiphanies occurs on only two occasions and constitutes a significant change in their epiphanic habit. Instead of ensuring or announcing a victory, Castor and Pollux appear at the funeral and deathbed of two prominent individuals: Julius Caesar and Drusus the Elder. The gods are not named in either appearance, but can be identified by their attributes and similarities to their previous epiphanies. The Dioscuri are well suited to the role of psychopomps, owing to their own liminal nature and constant transitions between Olympus and Hades.¹⁵¹ The brothers are attested to have held this role from an early date, appearing on either side of Etruscan tomb doors, symbolising that they would accompany the soul of the interred to the underworld.¹⁵² Another parallel is

¹⁴⁸ RRC 304/1. ¹⁴⁹ RRC 335/1ob.

¹⁵⁰ Petrocchi 1994: 103 suggests the inclusion of Apollo on the obverse as representing the time of day when the epiphany occurred, but also as a reference to the dual nature of the Dioscuri as passing between death and life, day and night. This explanation seems overly complex, and although we do not know why Apollo was chosen for the obverse, his sister Diana also featured on the obverses of other coins minted by these moneyers: RRC 335/9; Välimaa 1989: 121. The reverse of this issue depicted three horsemen charging an unidentified fleeing or fallen warrior: Luce 1968: 30. As these horsemen appear as a trio and bear no stars above their heads, they should not be identified as the Dioscuri, but instead perhaps as the cavalry whom they led to victory.

¹⁵¹ Lucian, *Dial. D.* 4.276.2, 25.281–287; Pind. *Nem.* 10.55–59; Lycoph. *Alex.* 564–566.

¹⁵² De Grummond 1991: 22–26; Simon 2006: 54; Krauskopf 2006: 76–77.

found in a fragment of Callimachus, as he describes the apotheosis of Arsinoë II in 270 BC: ‘O bride, already up under the stars of the wain . . . snatched away, you were speeding past the (full) moon . . .’¹⁵³ Although the agents of her divinisation do not survive in this fragment, a *diegesis* preserves this detail, recording that the Queen was ‘snatched up by the Dioskouroi’.¹⁵⁴

Julius Caesar’s Funeral

Julius Caesar had previously been connected to Castor and Pollux, for they had appeared to announce his victory over his rival Pompey at Pharsalus in 48 BC. Four years later, after his assassination, they appeared again when the crowd at his funeral in the *Forum Romanum* were arguing where his body should be cremated. Suetonius records that in this midst of this debate:

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 by-standers heaped upon it dry branches, the judgment seats with the benches, and whatever else could serve as an offering.¹⁵⁵

This spot was eventually consecrated by Augustus as a shrine to his adoptive father; the temple of Divus Julius stood almost directly in front of the temple of Castor and Pollux.¹⁵⁶ Although the identity of these beings is remarkably unspecific, beyond being a pair, supernatural, male and carrying spears, the proximity of Dioscuri’s temple to this incident and the frequency of their previous epiphanies in this area makes the identification relatively simple.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Callim. fr.228.1–7: νόμφα, σὺ μὲν ἀστερίαν ὑπ’ ἄμαξαν ἦδη / Ἀνάκων ὕπο κλεπτομένῃα παρέθει<ς> σελάνῃ. Kloppenborg 1993: 284; Sumi 2009: 182.

¹⁵⁴ Diegesis 10.10 on Callim. fr.228.

¹⁵⁵ Suet. *Iul.* 84.3 after Rolfe: *repente duo quidam gladiis succincti ac bina iacula gestantes ardentibus cereis succenderunt confestimque circumstantium turba virgulta arida et cum subsellis tribunalia, quicquid praeterea ad domum aderat, congessit.* See also App. *B.Civ.* 2.148.

¹⁵⁶ Cass. Dio 47.18.4; App. *B.Civ.* 2.148.

¹⁵⁷ Conversely, Sumi 2009: 177–178 argues that these two figures may be the Dioscuri assimilated with the *Penates Publici*. The sacred objects of the *Penates Publici* were kept in the temple of Vesta, they also had a temple on the Velia, and are suggested to have once been the private Penates of the Kings, who lived in the *Regia*. However, there are no attested epiphanies of the Penates; thus, as Castor and Pollux were believed to have appeared on three occasions in this area of the Forum, the weight of evidence lends itself to the identification of these figures as the Dioscuri.

The Deathbed of Drusus the Elder

The second epiphany of this type occurs thirty-five years later, when Drusus the Elder, the stepson of Augustus, was dying on campaign in Germany in 9 BC. As he lay on his deathbed in the camp, various portents were reported, including howling wolves and the sound of women weeping. Most significantly, Cassius Dio includes in his list of prodigies that two young men were seen riding through the camp as well as shooting stars.¹⁵⁸ Although this account is again bereft of details, the presence of a pair of supernatural horsemen and stars indicates that these young men were Castor and Pollux. This is made even more certain as Drusus and his elder brother Tiberius were compared to the Dioscuri.¹⁵⁹

This is the last epiphany of Castor and Pollux; they do not appear at the deaths of any other imperial youths, despite being compared to them, as explored in Chapter 4. Furthermore, somewhat surprisingly, considering the context of these last epiphanies, the Dioscuri do not appear to be linked to deification, for although Caesar became a god, this is credited to Venus and there is no suggestion of an apotheosis for Drusus.¹⁶⁰ Instead, the Dioscuri took on a new role during the imperial period, transforming from Republican military saviours to divine parallels for pairs of imperial young men, demonstrating once more that myths and traditions were adapted to the needs and circumstances of contemporary society.¹⁶¹

OTHER GODS' EPIPHANIES

Although they are by far the most numerous and significant, Castor and Pollux are not the only gods who are reported to have appeared in the Roman tradition. Two other gods closely linked to the origins of Rome are claimed to have manifested themselves: Mars and Romulus (as Quirinus). Mars' most famous epiphany occurred when he appeared to impregnate Rhea Silvia, fathering the twins Romulus and Remus. His surviving son, Romulus, also appeared, following his mysterious disappearance, to Julius Proclus, a senator, and announced that the gods had determined that he was now to live among them on Olympus.¹⁶² Mars appeared on another occasion which bears many similarities to the epiphanies of the Dioscuri as helpers in battle. In 282 BC, during an attack on the city of Thurii by the Brutians and the Lucanians, the Roman army were reluctant to join the battle, when a young

¹⁵⁸ Cass. Dio 55.1.5.

¹⁵⁹ Explored in Chapter 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ov. *Met.* 15.843–851.

¹⁶¹ Sumi 2005: 111.

¹⁶² Plut. *Rom.* 28.1–3.

man of exceptional size urged them on, leading by example as he scaled a ladder up the ramparts. After the victory, a reward was offered:

but nobody was found to claim the reward, and it was discovered and likewise believed that Father Mars had come to his people's aid at that time. Among other clear indications thereof a helmet decked with two feathers, with which the divine head had been covered, furnished evidence.¹⁶³

As the god of war, Mars was particularly suited to appear in military epiphanies; but this is the only time he is attested to have done so. The battle for Thurii was not a particularly significant moment in the history of the Republic and although the consul in charge, Gaius Fabricius Luscinus, was awarded a triumph in the same year, he is not otherwise attested to have been linked with Mars.¹⁶⁴ Although the detail of Mars leaving behind his helmet, which is taken as proof of the epiphany, would well suit an aetiological tale for the establishment of a new cult or temple to the god, none are associated with this epiphany.

Such brief accounts serve as warnings that epiphanies of other gods may well have been claimed but have failed to make a mark upon our preserved evidence. Nevertheless, Castor and Pollux remain the most prominent and popular epiphanic gods in our surviving sources.

THE DIOSCURIC EPIPHANIC HABIT

During the Republican period, Castor and Pollux's epiphanies were strongly associated with military victories. So much so, that the divine brothers were associated with victories even without an epiphany. After Flaminius' victory over Philip V of Macedon at Cynoscephalae in 197 BC, he made a series of dedications at Delphi, including a golden wreath to Apollo himself, but also:

some silver bucklers and his own long shield, he provided them with this inscription: 'O you sons of Zeus, whose joy is in swift horsemanship, O you Tyndaridae, princes of Sparta, Titus, a descendant of Aeneas, has brought you a most excellent gift, he who for the sons of the Greeks wrought freedom.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Val. Max. 1.8.6: *nec inveniretur qui id praemium peteret, cognitum pariter atque creditum est Martem patrem tunc populo suo adfuisse. inter cetera huiusce rei manifesta indicia galea quoque duabus distincta pinnis, qua caeleste caput tectum fuerat, argumentum praeibit.*

¹⁶⁴ OCD: 'Fabricius, Luscinus, Gaius', 585; Broughton 1951–1960 vol. 1 189.

¹⁶⁵ Plut. *Flam.* 12.6 after Perrin: ἀσπίδας ἀργυρᾶς καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ θυρεὸν ἐπέγραψε· Ζηνὸς ἰὼ κραυγναῖσι γεγαθότες ἵπποσύναισι κοῦροι, ἰὼ Σπάρτας Τυνδαρίδαι βασιλεῖς, Αἰνεάδας Τίτος ὕμνιν ὑπέρτατον ὤπασε δῶρον, Ἑλλήνων τεύξας παισὶν ἐλευθερίαν.

Plutarch, who was a priest at Delphi during the second century AD, may have seen these shields himself, if they had survived the depredations of Sulla, and were still present in his day.¹⁶⁶ However, there is no reference here to an epiphany of Castor and Pollux, so why did the general choose to make this dedication to the Dioscuri?¹⁶⁷ The brothers were well known as saviour gods in both Greece and Rome and thus they may have been seen to be particularly appropriate deities to receive a dedication from the Roman general who had announced the ‘freedom of the Greeks’ at the Isthmian games in 196 BC.¹⁶⁸

Another victory monument, this time in Rome, included depictions of Castor and Pollux on shields. The monument, found in fragments in the church of S. Omobono near the *Forum Boarium*, includes several victory emblems, including trophies, victories and an eagle holding a palm adorned with two wreaths in its beak and a thunderbolt in its claws. On either side of the central relief, Castor and Pollux are depicted on shields, facing towards the centre on rearing horses, brandishing spears. The best preserved of the two shields retains the shape of a *pilos* and star. Although the brothers are depicted singly on each shield, there is nevertheless a distinct resemblance between these relief carvings and the common denarius type of Castor and Pollux riding into battle.

The identification of this monument has been debated: the similarity to the literary descriptions of a monument dedicated by Bocchus of Mauretania in 91 BC to glorify Sulla’s capture of Jugurtha has led some scholars to identify this relief as part of Bocchus’ dedication.¹⁶⁹ In support, the argument has been made that the wreaths and trophies equate to honours won by Sulla; Hölscher, for example, proposes that the two trophies represent those Sulla erected at Charonea in 86 BC.¹⁷⁰ In order to explain the chronological discrepancy between these honours and the

¹⁶⁶ Plut. *Sull.* 12.4–6

¹⁶⁷ This dedication, as explored above: 92, may be referred to by his descendants on a denarius of 126 BC: RRC 267/1. Rebggiani 2013: 55 proposes that this is in response to an epiphany of the Dioscuri at Cynoscephalae, but there is no extant tradition that an epiphany occurred at this battle.

¹⁶⁸ See Demetrius Poliorcetes’ complaint (Strabo 5.3.5) discussed above: 35. Although Plutarch does not state when these dedications were made, he describes them after Flamininus’ Isthmian Declaration: Plut. *Flam.* 10.3–5.

¹⁶⁹ Plut. *Mar.* 32.2, *Sull.* 6.1–2; Hölscher 1994: 58–72; Kinnee 2016: 212–215; Stein-Hölskcamp 2016: 225–226; Brill et al. 2011. Contra: Thein 2002: 374–377 argues strongly that these reliefs should not be identified as the Bocchus monument, although he preserves the Sullan dating; Giardina 2012 suggests that the Bocchus monument would have been destroyed by Marius; Kuttner 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Hölscher 1994: 70–71; Paus. 9.40.7.

date of dedication, he proposes that the monument was altered to add the trophies. Kuttner, however, argues that there is no evidence that the central slab was ever recut.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, she drastically re-dates the reliefs to the second century BC, based on her identification of the wreaths as the *corona graminea* and *corona muralis*. Only one Republican general is attested to have won both: Scipio Aemilianus, the destroyer of Carthage in 146 BC, whom Kuttner argues to be the honouree of the monument.¹⁷² Scholarly consensus is therefore now dubious as to whether this monument should be identified as that erected by Bocchus. Although the event which the reliefs commemorate as well as the individual honoured are uncertain, the imagery is undoubtedly triumphalist. Castor and Pollux are therefore again connected with a Roman victory; and perhaps also one in which the cavalry played a significant role, for beside the shields on which the Dioscuri ride are two bardings or equine armoured faceplates.

Rebeggiani, following the traditional identification, has used this monument to argue that that Marius and Sulla were '[struggling] to appropriate the support of the Dioscuri' from the other.¹⁷³ He suggests that Marius' claim was based on their epiphany following his victory at Vercellae and by the coin issue of Aulus Postumius Albinus explored earlier, who has been identified as a Marian supporter.¹⁷⁴ Sulla, in his view, was attempting to use the decorative scheme of this monument to claim that Castor and Pollux had helped secure his capture of Jugurtha.¹⁷⁵ Putting aside for the moment the difficulties noted above in identifying the honouree of this monument, if Sulla did claim that Castor and Pollux had aided him in capturing Jugurtha, it is surprising that no reference to the epiphany is preserved. Literary sources attest Sulla's interest in publicising his divine support, likely drawing upon his own memoirs,¹⁷⁶ and coin issues minted by Sulla's son advertised the surrender of Jugurtha to Sulla.¹⁷⁷ In his description of the Bocchus monument, Plutarch only mentions representations of trophies and the

¹⁷¹ Kuttner 2013: 244.

¹⁷² Kuttner 2013: 251–253, 244–245; followed by Clark 2007: 131–133 based on an earlier paper of Kuttner's article.

¹⁷³ Rebeggiani 2013: 56. He also sees a suggested epiphany of the Dioscuri to Augustus at Actium, based on Virgil's account of the battle on the shield of Aeneas. This argument, however, depends on the assimilation of the Dioscuri to the Penates.

¹⁷⁴ See above: 102. Rebeggiani 2013: 56; also Van Ooteghem 1967: 389; Luce 1968: 30, although who identifies the scene, as I do, as a reference to the epiphany at Lake Regillus, not after Vercellae. Contra Carney 1961: 7 n35, who argues that Albinus minted this coin to discredit Marius while celebrating his own family's connection to the Dioscuri.

¹⁷⁵ Rebeggiani 2013: 56. ¹⁷⁶ Plut. *Sull.* 9.4, 12.5, 29.6, 34.2; App. *B. Civ.* 1.97.

¹⁷⁷ RRC 426/1; likely drawing on the true 'Bocchus monument' which does not survive.

gilded figures of Sulla, Bocchus and Jugurtha.¹⁷⁸ It would also be an anomalous Dioscuric epiphany, for all the military exploits they are claimed to have been involved in were active battles in which the cavalry played a role. Sulla's capture of Jugurtha, as preserved in our sources, was a diplomatic victory, persuading Jugurtha's son-in-law Bocchus to betray him.¹⁷⁹

A DIMINISHING TRADITION

Throughout the epiphanic tradition of Castor and Pollux, we can trace a chronological trend of diminishing activity. In their first appearances, they secured the Roman victories at Lake Regillus and Pydna; subsequently, they only announced the successes at Vercellae and Pharsalus. In their final epiphanies, they determined the location of Caesar's pyre and honoured the death of Drusus the Elder. A further chronological strand can also be seen in the historiographical treatment of their manifestations: accounts of the earlier epiphanies explicitly identify Castor and Pollux, whilst the later appearances only imply their identity. It is worth noting, furthermore, that even in the earliest epiphanies, Castor and Pollux are never represented as introducing themselves; we must rely upon the identification of the mysterious pair by those who witnessed the epiphany, as depicted by the authors of later sources. This is, of course, problematised by the fact that all our literary sources for these epiphanies are Late Republican or imperial and we may have lost earlier accounts. Nevertheless, ancient authors characterised the most prominent and explicitly identified epiphanies as belonging to the more distant past, whilst more recent appearances are treated with greater circumspection. Perhaps an explanation for this diminishing activity and more implicit references lies in growing scepticism: epiphanies of the gods were thought to belong to the age of heroes. Quintus exemplifies this position in Cicero's *De Divinatione*:

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.¹⁸⁰

If such scepticism did exist in antiquity, the ambiguity present in the literary accounts of Castor and Pollux's epiphanies would have allowed

¹⁷⁸ Plut. *Sull.* 6.1. ¹⁷⁹ Sall. *Iug.* 113.1–7.

¹⁸⁰ 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.*

the audience, either of the epiphany itself, or of the literary work, to make up their own minds.¹⁸¹

POLITICAL ADVANTAGES OF EPIPHANIES

In the Late Republic, when prominent individuals were promoting themselves in a variety of ways, it is not surprising that the epiphanies of Castor and Pollux were another weapon in this fight for glory. Poulsen has argued that the epiphany of Castor and Pollux following Marius' victory at Vercellae was a response to the rebuilding of the Forum temple by Metellus Dalmaticus sixteen years prior.¹⁸² Rebggiani argues that Augustus' programme for the *Forum Romanum* was intended to connect himself and his victory at Actium to the Battle of Lake Regillus and other Republican victories.¹⁸³ Certainly, associating oneself with Castor and Pollux, either through an epiphany connected with one's own victory or that of an ancestor or rebuilding their temple, might be a method by which an individual might have attempted to gain symbolic capital or political advantage over their opponents. However, the sheer variety of individuals and families connected with Castor and Pollux reveals that this was not an exclusive relationship.

Epiphanies of the Dioscuri were associated with members of the Postumii, Domitii, Aemilii, as well as individuals such as Publius Vatinius, Marius and Caesar, and through their temples with the Postumii, Metelli and other unknown (re)builders. Instead of being seen solely as an element of political competition, it is useful here to reflect upon the interesting work that has been undertaken in recent years within the field of memory studies.¹⁸⁴ These epiphanies should be seen in their wider tradition, particularly those associated geographically with the Forum temple of Castor and Pollux. Each new Dioscuric epiphany would have referenced, recalled and revitalised the previous appearances within the tradition, reaffirming them in the collective memory. Subsequent epiphanies would have recalled the first epiphany of the Dioscuri at the pivotal Battle of Lake Regillus, associating the contemporary general with a great hero of the Republic, Aulus Postumius Regillensis.

¹⁸¹ A similar technique may have been used for depictions of imperial youths potentially assimilated to the Dioscuri: discussed below: 150–151.

¹⁸² Poulsen 1994: 94. ¹⁸³ Rebggiani 2013: 57.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example: Hölkeskamp 2016, 2005 on 'collective memory'; Galinsky, 2014; Rebggiani, 2013.

The sight of the statues of Castor and Pollux in the *Lacus Juturnae*, recreating their epiphanies, would have recalled their own victory as well as the first time the gods assured Roman victory.

It is surprising, not that the Dioscuri are associated with so many different families, but that they are not associated with more. In a tradition that spanned from 496 to 9 BC, only eight Roman epiphanies of Castor and Pollux are reported. It is true that more generals might have claimed that the Dioscuri appeared to ensure or announce their victory, but no trace of these remains in the tradition. Some individuals may have had similar feelings to Livy and not have wished to diminish their own part in winning the victory by giving the credit to the gods. However, there are certain similarities within the battles with which epiphanies of Castor and Pollux are associated. These were all major engagements featuring the cavalry, to which manifestations of the Dioscuri, as the protecting gods of horsemen, would have been particularly suited.¹⁸⁵ The four battles of Lake Regillus, Pydna, Vercellae and Pharsalus can all be characterised as significant moments in the history of the Republic. At least two of these battles were described as being crucial to the Republic's survival: if either Lake Regillus or Vercellae had been defeats, the Tarquins would have ruled Rome and the Gauls would have destroyed the city.¹⁸⁶ The Battle of Pydna was seen by contemporaries as being a significant moment for Roman expansion in the East; the defeat of the Macedonian army confirmed their reputation as the heirs to Alexander the Great and secured Rome's interests in Greece.¹⁸⁷ The Battle of Pharsalus marked the end of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey and confirmed Caesar's ascendancy to sole power. These elements by no means provide a hard and fast checklist by which it could be assessed whether a given battle merited an epiphany, but there must have been a requirement of plausibility for claimed appearances of the Dioscuri: they wouldn't deign to appear for a mere scrap with brigands, but only in times of Rome's greatest need. The impetus behind these epiphanies is also important to note: only their earliest epiphany in Italy, at the Battle of the River Sagra, was invoked, while all the Roman epiphanies of Castor and Pollux were spontaneous. Thus, the Dioscuri themselves chose when to appear; they could not be

¹⁸⁵ Regillus: Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.12.3–4, 6.13.1; Flor. *Epit.* 1.5.2–4. Pydna: Liv. 44.42; Plut. *Aem.* 18.1. Vercellae: Plut. *Mar.* 25.3. Pharsalus: Plut. *Caes.* 44.3–4, 45.6–7 (although here the cavalry are Pompey's); Cass. Dio 41.60.1–3.

¹⁸⁶ Plut. *Mar.* 11.8–9.

¹⁸⁷ Polyb. 1.1.5 describes 167 BC as the date at which Rome had 'succeeded in subjecting nearly the whole inhabited world to their sole government'.

called upon to ensure military success, but instead added divine support to those generals and at those battles when they chose to manifest themselves.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, I have avoided engaging with any debate regarding whether the gods did exist and appear in this way, choosing instead to focus on what the ancients reveal about their beliefs. This reveals that the Dioscuri were seen as being actively involved in the life of the city and its continued existence. Instead of being restricted to their temples and specific days for their rituals, the gods were seen as taking an active role in public life. They ensured the salvation of the Republic at a time of their greatest threat and continued to lend their aid to repel significant enemies who would threaten the state. Their appearances added lustre to the great accomplishments of the generals at these battles and reassured the anxious populace of their victory. When the Republic faltered, the epiphanies evolved to suit the new political system, marking the funeral and death of two prominent individuals. The fact that the Dioscuri did not continue to serve as agents of apotheosis is significant, for, as I will argue in Chapter 4, a different aspect became more prominent instead.

This reveals the importance of trial and error for developments within the cult: not all adaptations were successful, and some would fall by the wayside. It also provides a glimpse at the interactions between the religious and political spheres. As argued above, there could be political benefits won by claiming that the gods appeared to secure your victory. However, the fact that it was not more common to do so suggests that it wasn't universally accepted or indeed even necessarily easy to do; there was scepticism and there may have been a burden of proof for such claims to be trusted. Furthermore, that it is Castor and Pollux who are so commonly claimed to appear, rather than any other god, suggests that there was a religious reason for this.

This may lie in the transitory nature of the Dioscuri themselves, constantly crossing the boundaries between mortality and immortality, gods and heroes, and life and death. This made them particularly well suited to serve as conduits between the mortal and divine realms, living in and affecting both. The frequency of their epiphanies in Greece may have begun this trend in Italy, but there must be a reason why they continued to appear. Their first manifestation at the Battle of Lake Regillus and the subsequent foundation of their cult in Rome was highly significant. All

other epiphanies derived from this appearance during a battle for which the stakes for the Republic were the highest possible. The Dioscuri acted as guarantors for the continuation of the Roman Republic and way of life: little wonder that they would continue to appear to safeguard it at times of trouble.

This chapter has introduced the concept of individuals being closely connected, or even able to call upon the Dioscuri to ride to their aid. Chapter 3 will expand upon these divine relationships, moving from the individual to the collective. Although Castor and Pollux continued to maintain their relationship with the *equites* of Rome, established by their epiphany at Lake Regillus, I will argue that this was not the only group that the Dioscuri protected in Rome.