Introduction

The cult of Castor and Pollux in Rome possessed extraordinary resonance and longevity: they were first worshipped in a public cult in the city soon after the ousting of the kings and the foundation of the Republic in the early fifth century BC. A thousand years later, in the late fifth century AD, Pope Gelasius I complained about their continued popularity, for the people of Rome refused to stop worshipping the brother gods.[1]

To the modern visitor to the Roman Forum, the three columns of their temple still make a striking impression, standing tall in the south-eastern corner, dwarfing the remains of the nearby temples of Vesta and Divus Julius. For those who approach closer, finer details emerge: the ornate decoration on the underside of the architrave, the lush foliage carved into the Corinthian capitals, fragments of the dedicatory inscription presented along the front. The sheer size of the temple's podium also becomes clear, made up of concrete and rubble, although with some vestiges of the marble facing that once concealed this rough core. Although these ruins date from the future Emperor Tiberius' rebuilding in AD 6, a temple to Castor and Pollux had already stood here for nearly five centuries before that date.

Several years ago, I stood before the remains of this magnificent temple and wondered how Castor and Pollux, a pair of Greek deified heroes, had received such a large temple in the centre of Rome's political and civic life from such an early date. Who had worshipped here? How had their cult developed over its lifetime? Why had these two gods remained so popular and prominent over such a length of time? This study has evolved from my attempts to explore, analyse and answer these questions, among others.

[1] Gelasius, *Letter against Andromachus* 18, Neil and Allen 2014.

Aims of this Study

This book has two principal objectives. The first is to analyse the history and development of the cult of the Dioscuri in Rome from its arrival in the early fifth century BC until the end of the Julio-Claudian period, as well as to locate this development within the wider socio-political context. The second is to join this detailed study of a single cult to wider considerations of the role of religion within Roman society, to move beyond the now widely accepted view that Roman religion, politics, society and culture were all enmeshed, to explore how these interactions manifested, functioned and developed.

The connections between Roman religion and politics have long fascinated scholars, and in recent decades there have been significant shifts in not only how these two areas of ancient life are thought to have interacted, but also the value judgements made about this relationship. In past scholarship, it was seen to be a close association, often to religion's detriment. By the Late Republic, so the argument goes, there was little genuine belief in the gods, at least among the elite, who used the hollow shell to manipulate the credulous people of Rome without any sincere belief in it themselves.[2] Temples and rituals were abandoned, prophecies were found at convenient moments to justify or frustrate political manoeuvrings, and priesthoods were left vacant until Augustus restored Roman religion. Scholars thus searched for a pure form of archaic religion, uncontaminated by foreign influences and political machinations to compare to the hollow and manipulated religion of the Late Republic.[3] This narrative is now mostly rejected and those aspects which were previously taken to be symptoms of decline are instead seen as proofs of continual adaptation, cultural interactions, and vitality.[4] Recent studies have furthermore fruitfully questioned to what extent we should see the elite as having complete freedom to adapt or manipulate religion for their own gain, instead seeing their use as a dialogue with wider society and the gods.[5]

New approaches to the study of ancient religion have continued to assert its enduring power and relevance, including projects focusing on

[2] Often following Polybius: Polyb. 6.56.9–11. For example: Warde-Fowler 1911; Taylor 1949: ch. 4; Dumézil 1970; Rawson 1974; Turcan 2000.
[3] For example: Wissowa 1912; Rose 1926.
[4] For example: Jocelyn 1966; North 1976; Feeney 1998; Beard, North and Price 1998; North 2000; Gradel 2002; Scheid 2003; Gordon 2003; Orlin 2007; Ando 2008; Rüpke 2012.
[5] Champion 2017; Driediger-Murphy 2019.

underrepresented actors[6] and on individual religious experience, rather than collective state manifestations.[7] Scholars have re-examined long-held theories about religious rules and rituals, be those practical or theoretical elements.[8] Instead of being a cold, formulaic series of manipulated rituals devoid of emotion or belief, scholarship now tends towards an understanding that ancients themselves saw their relationships with the gods in a variety of ways. There was no single religious experience, instead it was greatly individualised, ever evolving, emotively charged, often surprising, and at times uncontrollable.

The view of religion taken by this book is that its essential character was that of a set of dialogues, often interlocking and sometimes contradictory. These dialogues had varying importance, depending on individual beliefs, circumstances and perspectives. The most significant for the majority of individuals would likely have been the dialogue between mortals and gods, termed 'vertical' communication by Rüpke.[9] This had many manifestations, from the dedication of grand public temples, rituals and sacrifices offered by the state, to the smaller, personal dedications, prayers and gifts given by individuals. But religion was also part of the interpersonal dialogues that made up ancient society, 'horizontal' communication in Rüpke's model: participation in festivals, public reverence for the gods, and the status that holding a priesthood could give, might all be part of this dialogue.[10] Some dialogues might be in competition or collaboration with contemporaries, others engaged with the past, emulating or rejecting the actions of ancestors or heroes of times gone by, or even anticipatory, setting oneself up as a model to be remembered and reacted to by later generations. Other forms of these religious dialogues were less personal, but still significant: religion was constantly interacting with other aspects of ancient life, including politics, past or contemporary events, societal needs, circumstances and values. This book, through the lens of the single cult of the Dioscuri in Rome, aims to reveal some of these dialogues and demonstrate how they influenced and were influenced by the development of the cult.

The cult of the Dioscuri is ideal for exploring these complex webs of interactions. Castor and Pollux had tied themselves to the political life of the city from their very arrival, instigated by an epiphany which secured the future of the young Republic. Their first temple was located in the Roman

[6] Mantle 2002; Lennon 2015; Wendt 2016. [7] Scheid 2015; Rüpke 2016.
[8] For example: Aldrete 2014; Schultz 2016; Driediger-Murphy 2019.
[9] Rüpke 2016: ch. 7. [10] Rüpke 2016: ch. 7.

Forum, the very heart of Rome's civic life. It was used for meetings of the Senate and speeches delivered to the people, as well as being the location for many significant clashes of the Late Republic. It was also a part of daily life: used as a meeting place, as a stronghold for personal wealth and the standard weights and measures, as well as a commercial venue, hosting shops in the podium. The divine brothers were active and comprehensive in their responsibilities and protection for Roman citizens: ranging from the highest ranks in society, including the potential heirs to the imperial power and the elite *equites* to the lower-class boxers and sailors. The sheer variety of interactions found within the Roman cult of the Dioscuri provides a valuable window into the role that a single cult, as well as religion more widely, might play in the lives of a great number of Romans.

This study takes a wide interpretation of 'cult' to include not only the deities themselves, but also the buildings in which they were worshipped, the ways in which they were represented, the actions taken to honour them, and the relationships mortals claimed with them. Each of the four chapters of this book will focus on an aspect of the cult of Castor and Pollux, examining its development and exploring the motivations and significance of these interactions.

Mythology

Castor and Pollux were the sons of Leda, the Queen of Sparta, and the brothers of Helen and Clytemnestra.[11] Their fathers, however, differed, as Leda had been impregnated in the same night by her husband King Tyndareus and Zeus. The god had visited her in the guise of a swan, so when Leda came to give birth, it was to two eggs. In one were the children of Zeus, Pollux and Helen; and in the other were Tyndareus' offspring, Castor and Clytemnestra.[12] This varying parentage differentiated the brothers, for Pollux was immortal, whilst Castor had the frailties inherent to mortality.[13] However, this did not weaken the relationship between the brothers, who were devoted to each other. They grew up together, each specialising in an

[11] Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.146–150; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.44–46; Eur. *El.* 988–993, *Hel.* 1643–1645; Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.25–32, *Ep.* 17.42–43; Hyg. *Fab.* 14.3, 79; Ov. *Her.* 8.76–78, 13.61–62, *Met.* 8.301–302; Pind. *Ol.* 3.1–4, 31–40.

[12] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.6–7; Hyg. *Fab.*77; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.171–172, *Ol.* 3.31–40. Hor. *Ars P.* 146–147.

[13] Hom. *Cyp.* fr.7, although referring to Pollux as Ares' son, demonstrating that other variants existed.

athletic skill: Castor was renowned for his equestrian prowess, and Pollux for his talents as a boxer.[14] When Theseus kidnapped their sister Helen to be his bride, her brothers led the army to bring her home.[15] Castor and Pollux answered the call to hunt the fearsome Calydonian boar, defeating the beast alongside Meleager, Atalanta and many other heroes of ancient Greece.[16] When the time came for Jason to set sail on the Argo in the quest for the Golden Fleece, they joined his crew.[17] As the heroes fled from Colchis with the fleece, the ship ran into a storm and it was only due to the intervention of Castor and Pollux that they survived, bestowing upon them the responsibility for aiding sailors.[18]

The similarities between the brothers even extended to their marriages, for they took sisters as wives: Phoebe and Hilaira, known as the Leucippides, who bore them both sons.[19] Their last adventure ended in a conflict with another pair of brothers who shared the same mother but different fathers: Idas, the son of Neptune, and Lynceus, son of the Messenian king Aphareus.[20] During the fight, Idas dealt Castor a mortal blow.[21] However, when Pollux discovered his dying brother, he begged his father Zeus to allow him to give up his own immortality so that his brother might live, preferring to surrender his place on Olympus than to be without his twin.[22] Zeus agreed, sharing Pollux's immortality between the brothers, allowing them to divide their afterlives between Olympus and Hades.[23] To honour their fraternal love, the

[14] Castor: Hes. *Cat.* 68.27; Hom. *Hymn* 33.3, *Cyp.* fr.12; Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.25–27, *Sat.* 2.1.26–27; Mart. 7.57; Ov. *Am.* 3.2.54, *Met.* 8.301–302; Prop. 3.14.17–20; Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 10.13. Stat. *Silv.* 5.3.138–140; Pollux: Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.19–109; Dio Chrys. 37.14; Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.26–27, *Sat.* 2.1.26–27; Mart. 7.57; Ov. *Am.* 3.2.54, *Met.* 8.301–302, *Fast.* 5.700; Paus. 5.8.4; Plut. *De Frat. Am.* 15; Prop. 3.14.17–20; Sid. Apoll. *Pan.* 5.177–184, *Epist.* 9.186–189, 10.13; Stat. *Silv.* 5.3.138–140; Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 4.222–314.

[15] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.7; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.44–46; Diod. Sic. 4.63.5; Hyg. *Fab.* 79; Paus. 1.17.5, 1.41.4–5, 2.22.5–6; Strab. 9.1.17.

[16] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.2.

[17] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.16; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.146–150; Callim. *Aet.* 1.18.1–4.

[18] Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.649–653; Callim. *Aet.* 1.18.1–4; Diod. Sic. 4.43.2; Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 1.568–573.

[19] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hyg. *Fab.* 80; Ov. *Her.* 16.327–329, *Ars. Am.* 1.679–680, *Fast.* 5.699–704; Paus. 1.18.1–2, 2.22.5, 3.12.8; Prop. *El.* 1.2.15–16.

[20] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.3. These brothers had also participated in the Calydonian boar hunt: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.2.

[21] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hom. *Cyp.* fr.1, 12; Ov. *Fast.* 5.709–710 (killed by Lynceus).

[22] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hyg. *Fab.* 80; Ov. *Fast.* 5.715–720; Philo. *Leg.* 84–85; Pind. *Nem.* 10.55–60, 75–79; Plut. *De. Frat. Am.* 12.

[23] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Hom. *Cyp.* fr.1; Hyg. *Fab.* 80, 224, 251, *Poet. Astr.* 2.22; Ov. *Fast.* 5.719; Pind. *Nem.* 10.75–90; Virg. *Aen.* 6.121. How Castor and Pollux shared their time

two were also celebrated amongst the stars by the constellation Gemini.[24]

The fate of their mortal remains is less clear. In the *Iliad*, Castor and Pollux are said to be buried in their native Lacedaemonia, with no reference to their deification.[25] However, in the *Odyssey*, this description is enlarged upon, stating that although they lie beneath the earth, they alternately die and live again.[26] Pausanias reports that only one of the brothers had a tomb: Castor, located in Sparta, and that there was an associated sanctuary at which both brothers received worship forty years after Castor's death.[27] That Pollux has no attested tomb seems logical: he was, after all, the immortal brother.

Iconography

The Dioscuri's collective identity as a pair of brothers is also highlighted in their ancient depictions. Although there are still two colossal statue groups of Castor and Pollux in Rome today, many of their other representations have suffered the common fate of ancient art works and have been lost or destroyed. They appeared in a variety of media: Pliny records that statues of the Dioscuri by Hegias, probably in bronze, stood in front of the temple of Jupiter Tonans on the Capitoline, and that Apelles' painting of Alexander the Great with Castor, Pollux and Victory was displayed in the Forum of Augustus.[28] Throughout much of the Republic, coins bearing the image of the Dioscuri circulated through people's hands and some

between the underworld and Olympus is unclear: some versions have the brothers remaining together: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2; Eur. *El.* 988–993; Pind. *Pyth.* 11.61–64, *Nem.* 10.55–60; others have one in each realm: Hyg. *Fab.* 80 (Grant 1960: 75 suggests that this section may be an interpolation from Virgil), *Poet. Ast.* 2.22; Lucian *Dial. D.* 4.276, 25.286–287, *Dial. Mort.* 1.1, Macr. *Sat.* 1.21.22, Mart. *Carm.* 9.51.7–8; Ov. *Fast.* 5.719–720, Sil. *Pun.* 9.295, 13.804–805; Virg. *Aen.* 6.121.

[24] Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.110, 114 (quoting his translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*); Germanicus, *Aratus,* Fr. 3.6–7, fr. 4.1120 (quoting his own translation of the *Phaenomena*); Hor. *Carm.* 1.3.2, 1.12.26–27; Hyg. *Poet. Astr.* 2.22; Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.152–161, 5.157–159; Ov. *Met.* 8.372, *Fast.* 5.720; Vitr. *De Arch.* 9.3.1–2, 9.5.2. Macr. *Sat.* 1.21.22 identifies them with the sun.

[25] Hom. *Il.* 3.236–244.

[26] Hom. *Od.* 11.299–304; this alternative explanation may be the work of an elaborator or the work of a different author from that of the *Iliad.* See Kirk 1985: 300; Dawe 1993: 445–446 notes that an ancient critic, Aristarchos, believed that lines 301–304 of the *Odyssey* passage were spurious.

[27] The reason for this gap is not elaborated upon: Paus. 3.13.1.

[28] Plin. *HN.* 34.78, 35.94.

FIGURE 1 Statues of the Capitoline Dioscuri, Rome. Author's photograph. Su concessione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Museo Nazionale Romano.

individuals chose to adorn their walls with their images, as we see in the house of the Dioscuri at Pompeii.

Like other gods and heroes of the ancient world, Castor and Pollux possessed certain attributes by which they can be recognised when not explicitly identified. The majority of these are represented in the Capitoline Dioscuri statues (Figures 1a, 1b): in one hand, Castor and Pollux hold the reins of their horses, who prance on the spot. Their other hand is outstretched and clenched to hold an object which no longer survives. Both are depicted as beautiful and muscular youths, nude except for cloaks and conical hats, known as *piloi*, set back on the crown of their heads.[29] In front of the *pilos* of the right-hand Dioscurus is a hole, probably intended for a metal

[29] On the history of the *pilos*: Santi 2017: 106–112; on its connotations with *libertas* in Rome: Arena 2012: 30–45. Richardson 2013 argues that the Dioscuri were connected more widely with the liberty of the Republic. Castor and Pollux are also sometimes represented aniconically by *dokana*, objects formed of two vertical beams crossed by two horizontal ones: Plut. *De Frat. Amor.* 1.1.

attachment which is likewise lost. Unfortunately, both statues were damaged when they were found near the Circus Flaminius in 1561 and have needed many repairs. Metal attachments are often missing from ancient statues, melted down in previous centuries, so we must rely on other depictions to suggest what these statues may have held and had above their hats. For this, we can look to the most frequent Roman representations of Castor and Pollux, which appear on a series of denarii, first minted in 211 BC and remaining virtually unchanged until 121 BC. The brothers are depicted on their horses, cloaks streaming behind them and wearing *piloi* on their heads.[30] They carry spears in their hands and stars are depicted above their hats; these are probably the lost metal adornments of the Capitoline statues.

The typical depiction of Castor and Pollux can be summarised thus: an identical pair of handsome, nude youths, wearing cloaks and *piloi*, accompanied by their horses, carrying spears and with stars above their heads. However, this is by no means a constant scheme; not all attributes appear in every depiction, and in some, none of them do, meaning that the figures can only be identified as the Dioscuri by inscriptions.

Divine Brothers

Castor and Pollux are by no means the only pair of divine brothers in ancient mythology or religion; as noted above, their final fatal adventure was conducted alongside another fraternal pair, Idas and Lyncaeus, with whom they share many similarities. Both pairs of brothers possessed mixed ancestry, with one brother descended from a god, the other from a mortal king, and were known by a single name: Dioscuri and Ampharidae. Each pair shared danger and adventure; all four are said to have participated in the hunt for the Calydonian boar and the voyage of the Argo.[31]

Scholars have drawn upon the similarities between these and other pairs of brothers to argue that all derive from an Indo-European 'divine twins' archetype.[32] These brothers are often linked to horses, as the Dioscuri themselves are, from the Vedic Aśvins[33] to the Germanic

[30] Discussed below: 89–92, figure 6. [31] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.2, 1.9.16.
[32] For example, Rendel Harris 1903, 1906; Ward 1968; Dumèzil 1970; Lehmann 1988. More recently, Walker 2015 has criticised the principles of 'Dioscurism', instead focusing upon a proposed shared 'lowly status'. To complicate these studies further, some scholars, in particular Ward, use 'Dioscuri' or 'Dioskouroi' to refer to both the archetype of divine twins, but also to Castor and Pollux specifically.
[33] Walker 2015.

Alcis.[34] This posited shared heritage is utilised to contrast or, more commonly, to equate, different divine twins from a variety of cultures and to suggest that these cultures possessed similarities, not only in their language, but also in societal structure and religion. For example, Ward attempted to utilise the mythological conflict of Idas and Lyncaeus with the Dioscuri to explain historical events. In his view, the cults of the two sets of divine twins came into conflict, with Castor and Pollux emerging as the victors to be worshipped henceforth: the mythological story of the fatal conflict between the two pairs was thus created to explain the rise of one pair and the fall of the other.[35]

Although similarities can certainly be found and are interesting to explore, some scholars overstate their significance, arguing that aspects attested for one example of these divine brothers are found among them all. Rendel Harris stated that the Dioscuri came to be seen as 'patrons of agriculture and bestowers of rain', despite there being no evidence for these roles in Rome.[36] A danger of such comparativist studies is that the focus on the similarities forces the misinterpretation or omission of other aspects in order to make the pairs fit the overarching pattern. Little account is given to the significance of the individuality or variances: although they may derive from an original archetype, these pairs should also be studied within the context of their own society.

Walker's recent study argued that it was not that these pairs were twins which was significant and linked them, but instead their lowly status, derived from their being too closely associated with mortals and horses.[37] However, whilst Walker criticises the 'extraordinary and implausible generalisations' made by previous scholars about divine twins, at times he falls into the same trap himself, arguing for the lowly status of the Dioscuri in Greece and Rome primarily based upon the low status of the Aśvins.[38] Although it is possible that the archetypal pair of divine twins were of low status, Walker does not allow for development over time and in different cultures. Thus, although he argues convincingly for the lower status of the Aśvins, the case for a similar low status for the Dioskouroi in Greece is less well made and the single chapter devoted to the Dioscuri in Rome does not make the case at all. Instead, as I will argue throughout this study, Castor

[34] Unusually, this similarity was identified in antiquity: Tac. *Germ.* 43.4 notes that these gods are, according to the Roman interpretation (*interpretatione Romana*), Castor and Pollux.
[35] Ward 1968: 44. [36] Rendel Harris 1906: 28. [37] Walker 2015.
[38] Walker 2015: 4.

and Pollux in Rome possessed many functions and relationships with different groups in society, from wealthy *equites* to humbler sailors. An overwhelming focus on the pattern prevents us from exploring the reasons behind the variances and their significance.

The History of the Cult

The cult of Castor and Pollux probably had its origins in Sparta, the twins' birthplace, where they held a prominent role from an early date, being associated with the two kings.[39] Herodotus relates that it was decreed that when Sparta was at war, one of the Dioscuri should accompany the king who led the campaign, whilst the other should remain with the second king in Sparta.[40] However, their cult is attested across Greece, with Pausanias listing temples, altars and shrines from Sparta and Athens to Argos and Elis.[41] It is unclear where or when their cult was first celebrated in Italy, but it is likely that the first point of contact would have been in Magna Graecia, where many Greek states founded colonies. The inhabitants of these colonies continued to worship the same cults in their new homes as they had done in the metropolis, building temples and performing rituals.[42] Following the establishment of the cult of the Dioscuri in this area, it may have spread from Magna Graecia further into Italy through migration or trade routes.

It is difficult to identify when any myth of Castor and Pollux was first told in Italy, let alone Rome. The account of their adventures given above is drawn from a variety of Greek, Roman, Late Republican and imperial authors. Ancient audiences would have become familiar with the tales of heroes and their adventures primarily through oral retellings; from nurses, family members or performers, perhaps also at *symposia*, festivals or dramatic performances.[43] Mythology is inherently flexible, each telling adapted to suit the audience, location, context or date. For almost every detail in the version I provided of the mythology of Castor and Pollux, there exists at least one alternate account. Did Idas and Lynceus fight Castor and Pollux because they had been betrothed to the Leucippides

[39] On the Dioscuri in Spartan religion: Parker 1989.
[40] Hdt. 5.75; Pritchett 1979: 14–15. Previously, both Dioscuri accompanied the army on campaign; the change in custom was reportedly due to a disagreement between the kings Demaratus and Cleomenes, Hdt. 5.74–75.
[41] Sparta: Paus. 3.13.1, 3.13.6, 3.14.6–7; Athens: 1.18.1–2; Argos: 2.22.5–6; Elis: 5.15.5.
[42] Dunbabin 1948: 177-1–82.
[43] For discussion of Roman mythology and its transmission: Wiseman 2014, 2004, 1995.