

Demigods and Duals: Theocritus' Ἡμίθεοι and the Dioscuri

Abstract: <https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2021/abstracts/2552TheocritusandDemigods.pdf>

a) *Idyll 12.17-23*<sup>1</sup>

δὴ τότε μητιῶντο Ποσειδάων καὶ Ἀπόλλων  
τειχος ἀμαλδῦναι, ποταμῶν μένος εἰσαγαγόντες,  
ὅσσοι ἀπ' Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἄλαδε προρέουσι,  
Ῥήσος θ' Ἑπτάπορος τε Κάρησός τε Ῥοδίος τε  
Γρήνικός τε καὶ Αἴσηπος δῖός τε Σκάμανδρος  
καὶ Σιμόεις, ὅθι πολλὰ βoάγρια καὶ τρυφάλεια  
κάππεσον ἐν κονίησι καὶ **ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν**.

...Indeed, then Poseidon and Apollo planned  
To sweep away the wall, bringing in the power of the  
rivers—as many as flow from the Idaean mountains  
to the sea—Rhesus and Heptaporus and Caresus and  
Rhodius, and Granicus and Aesepus, and noble  
Scamander, and Simoïs, where many leather shields  
and helmets fell in the dust, and the offspring of half-  
divine men.

b) *Idyll 13.68-70*

ναῦς γέμεν ἄρμεν' ἔχοισα μετάρσια τῶν παρεόντων,  
ἰστία δ' **ἡμίθεοι** μεσονύκτιον αὐτε καθαίρουν,  
Ἡρακλῆα μένοντες...

The ship was full, keeping her canvas on high, with  
those present, but in the middle of the night the half-  
divine men took down the sails again, as they waited  
for Heracles...

c) *Idyll 24.132-3*

Κάστορι δ' **οὔτις ὁμοῖος ἐν ἡμιθέοις πολεμιστῆς**  
ἄλλος ἔην πρὶν γῆρας ἀποτρῖψαι νεότητα.

For Castor, there was no equal warrior among the  
half-divine men until old age wore away his youth.

d) *Idyll 15.136-142*

ἔρπεις, ᾧ φίλ' Ἄδωνι, καὶ ἐνθάδε κῆς Ἀχέρωντα  
**ἡμιθέων**, ὡς φαντί, **μονώτατος**. οὔτ' Ἀγαμέμνων  
τοῦτ' ἔπαθ' οὔτ' Αἴας ὁ μέγας, βαρυμάνιος ἦρω,  
οὔθ' Ἐκτωρ, Ἐκάβας ὁ γεραίτατος εἵκατι παίδων,  
οὐ Πατροκλῆς, οὐ Πύρρος ἀπὸ Τροίας ἐπανενθών,  
οὔθ' οἱ ἔτι πρότεροι Λαπίθαι καὶ Δευκαλίωνες,  
οὐ Πελοπηιάδαι τε καὶ Ἄργεος ἄκρα Πελασγοί.

You come, o beloved Adonis, both here and into  
Acheron, as they say, are the one and only of the half-  
divine men. Agamemnon did not accomplish this,  
nor Ajax the mighty, the grim-tempered hero,  
nor Hector, eldest of Hecuba's twenty sons,  
nor Patroclus, nor Pyrrhus who returned from Troy,  
nor the still-earlier Lapiths and the sons of  
Deucalion, nor Pelops' sons, nor even the Pelasgian  
leaders of Argos.

e) *Idyll 18.18-20*

**μόνος ἐν ἡμιθέοις** Κρονίδαν Δία πενθερὸν ἐξεῖς.  
Ζανός τοι θυγάτηρ ὑπὸ τὰν μίαν ἴκετο χλαῖναν,  
οἷα Ἀχαιιάδων γαῖαν πατεῖ οὐδεμί' ἄλλα·

...Alone among heroes, you'll have Zeus son of Cronus  
as your father-in-law. Zeus' daughter came to your  
bed alone, a girl such as no other who walks the land  
of the Achaeans.

<sup>1</sup> Texts are from Murray and Wyatt 1999, Hopkinson 2015; translations are my own.

f) Idyll 17.4-6

...ὁ γὰρ προφερέστατος ἀνδρῶν.  
ἥρωες, τοὶ πρόσθεν **ἀφ' ἡμιθέων** ἐγένοντο,  
ρέξαντες καλὰ ἔργα σοφῶν ἐκύρησαν αἰοιδῶν·  
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Πτολεμαῖον ἐπιστάμενος καλὰ εἰπεῖν  
ὕμνησαιμ'· ὕμνοι δὲ καὶ ἀθανάτων γέρας αὐτῶν.

...For he is the most outstanding of men.  
Heroes, those born before from half-divine men,  
accomplishing good deeds found wise poets,  
But I, trained to sing, will hymn Ptolemy:  
hymns are a reward even for the immortals  
themselves.

g) Idyll 17.135-7

Χαῖρε, ἄναξ Πτολεμαῖε· σέθεν δ' ἐγὼ ἴσα καὶ **ἄλλων**  
μνάσομαι **ἡμιθέων**, δοκέω δ' ἔπος οὐκ ἀπόβλητον  
φθέγγομαι ἐσσομένοις· ἀρετὴν γε μὲν ἐκ Διὸς αἰτεῦ.

Hail, lord Ptolemy! You, just as much as the others  
half-divines, I will remember; and for future  
generations I think I will voice a poem not to be  
discarded. Demand your excellence from Zeus.

h) Idyll 22.27-9

Ἦ μὲν ἄρα προφυγοῦσα πέτρας εἰς ἔν ξυνιούσας  
Ἄργῳ καὶ νιφόεντος ἀταρτηρὸν στόμα Πόντου,  
Βέβρυκας εἰσαφίκανε **θεῶν φίλα τέκνα** φέρουσα.

Then fleeing the Clashing Rocks and the grim mouth  
of the wintry Pontus, the Argo arrived at the land of  
the Bebryces carrying the beloved children of the  
gods.

i) Idyll 22.1-5

Ὑμνέομεν **Λήδας τε καὶ αἰγιόχου Διὸς υἱό,**  
Κάστορα καὶ φοβερὸν Πολυδεύκεα πύξ ἐρεθίζειν  
χεῖρας ἐπιζεύξαντα μέσας βοέοισιν ἰμάσιν.  
ὕμνέομεν καὶ δις καὶ τὸ τρίτον **ἄρσενά τέκνα**  
**κούρης Θεστιάδος...**

We hymn the two sons of Leda and aegis-bearing  
Zeus, Castor and Polydeuces, a fearsome to challenge  
in boxing when he's wrapped his palms with leather  
strips. We hymn twice and three times again the male  
children of Thestius' daughter...

j) Idyll 22.88-9

...τοῦ δ' ἄκρον τύψε γένειον  
Τυνδαρίδης ἐπιόντος·

The son of Tyndareus hit him edge of his chin as he  
advanced.

k) Idyll 22.95-7

ἦτοι ὄγ' ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα παριστάμενος Διὸς υἱός  
ἀμφοτέρησιν ἄμυσεν ἀμοιβαδῖς, ἔσχεθε δ' ὀρμῆς  
παῖδα Ποσειδάωνος ὑπερφιάλόν περ ἐόντα.

The son of Zeus, truly weaving here and there, stung  
him with both hands in turn, and he checked the son  
of Poseidon in his tracks, although he was powerful.

l) Idyll 22.115

Πῶς γὰρ δὴ Διὸς υἱός ἀδηφάγον ἄνδρα καθεῖλεν;

For how did the **son of Zeus** fell the gluttonous  
man?

m) Idyll 22.135-40

Καὶ σὺ μὲν ὕμνησαί μοι, ἄναξ· σὲ δέ, Κάστορ, αἰείσω,  
**Τυνδαρίδη** ταχύπωλε, δορυσσοέ, χαλκεοθώρηξ.  
Τὼ μὲν ἀναρπάξαντε δῦο φερέτην **Διὸς υἱὸν**  
δοιᾶς Λευκίπποιο κόρας· δισσοῦ δ' ἄρα τῶγε  
ἔσσυμένως ἐδίωκον ἀδελφεὸν υἱῶν Ἀφαρήος,  
γαμβρὸν μελλογάμω, Λυγκεὺς καὶ ὁ καρτερὸς Ἴδας.

n) Idyll 22.201-2

ἀλλὰ μεταίξιας πλατὺ φάσγανον ὅσσε διαπρὸ  
**Τυνδαρίδης** λαγόνος τε καὶ ὀμφαλοῦ·

ο) Idyll 22.212-23

Οὔτω **Τυνδαρίδαις** πολεμιζέμεν οὐκ ἐν ἐλαφρῶ·  
αὐτοὶ τε κρατέουσι καὶ ἐκ κρατέοντος ἔφυσαν.  
χαίρετε, **Λήδας τέκνα**, καὶ ἡμετέροις κλέος ὕμνοις  
ἔσθλον ἀεὶ πέμποιτε. φίλοι δέ τε πάντες αἰοῖδοι  
**Τυνδαρίδαις** Ἑλένη τε καὶ ἄλλοις ἠρώεσσι,  
Ἴλιον οἱ διέπερσαν ἀρήγοντες Μενελάω.  
ὕμιν κῦδος, ἄνακτες, ἐμήσατο Χίος αἰοῖδός,  
ὕμνήσας Πριάμοιο πόλιν καὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν  
Ἰλιάδας τε μάχας Ἀχιλλῆα τε πύργον ἀντῆς·  
ὕμιν αὖ καὶ ἐγὼ λιγεῶν μελίγματα Μουσέων,  
οἳ αὐταὶ παρέχουσι καὶ ὡς ἐμὸς οἶκος ὑπάρχει,  
τοῖα φέρω. γεράων δὲ θεοῖς κάλλιστον αἰοῖδαί.

So I've hymned you, lord; and, Castor, I will sing of  
you, son of Tyndareus, swift rider, spearman, bronze-  
cuirassed. The two sons of Zeus seized and carried off  
the two daughters of Leucippus; chasing after, two  
brothers pursued, sons of Aphareus, both  
bridegrooms who had been about to marry the girls,  
Lynceus and mighty Idas.

Leaping after him, the son of Tyndareus thrust his  
broad blade through his side and out through his  
navel.

Thus, it's not an easy matter to fight the sons of  
Tyndareus: they are powerful, and they were born  
from a powerful one. Farewell, children of Leda; and  
always may you send good repute to my hymns. All  
bards are dear to the sons of Tyndareus, and to  
Helen, and to other heroes Who sacked Ilium,  
assisting Menelaus. For you, lords, the Chian bard  
devised fame, having hymned the city of Priam, the  
ships of the Greeks, the Trojan battles, and Achilles  
the bulwark of war-cry. To you again I bring such  
melodies of the keen Muses, As much as are available  
and as my household yields. For the gods, songs are  
the loveliest of rewards.

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