

Demigods and Duals: Theocritus' *Ἡμίθεοι* and the Dioscuri

Though perhaps best known for its rustic herdsmen, Theocritus' corpus provides his readers with a diverse spread of characters: bucolic workers, urban housewives, Homeric heroes and heroines, Ptolemaic rulers, and mythical gods. Falling somewhere in the middle of these last three categories, the poet also alludes to *Ἡμίθεοι*, a class of figures explicitly evoked in five of the *Idylls*. Yet interpreters and translators have struggled to define this word; A. S. F. Gow dismissed *Ἡμίθεοι* as interchangeable with *ἥρωες*, and even the most recent Loeb edition of Theocritus, published in 2015, renders *Ἡμίθεοι* inconsistently as both “demigods” and “heroes” (Gow 1965; Hopkinson 2015). Yet previous analyses have revealed the poignant historical context of *Ἡμίθεοι*, which has Homeric resonance yet developed new nuance after the Classical period (Fantuzzi 2001; Kowerski 2008). In this paper, I will argue that Theocritus' use of the term continues its semantic development during the Hellenistic Age, when the Ptolemies' deification problematized and politicized apotheosis.

Careful examination Theocritus' application of the term *Ἡμίθεοι* throughout his corpus cautions against any straightforward translation or dismissive synthesis. In this paper, my first aim is to determine the semantics of this term in the Theocritean corpus by systematically investigating the application of *Ἡμίθεοι* within *Idylls* 15, 17, and 24. This catalogue of poems includes demigods such as Adonis of poem 15 (whom Theocritus calls “*monotatos*”), Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II of poem 17 (demigods who eventually became the *theoi adelphoi*), and Herakles of poem 24 (unequal twins, only one of whom was immortalized).

After this overview of the explicit uses of *Ἡμίθεοι*, the current study turns to Theocritus' *Idyll* 22, the hymn to the Dioscuri, for comparison. The poem is anomalous among

the experimental hymns of the Hellenistic Period for its structure, and presents the Dioscuri by many terms; but *ἡμίθεοι* is not among them (Laursen 1992; Sens 1997; Abritta 2017).

Theocritus' Idyll 22, however, is nevertheless still an exploration of semi-divinity: one embodied through duality. In the framework for the poem, when the twins are addressed as gods, Castor and Polydeuces' symbiotic and coterminous natures as gods makes them an instance of "two in one," immortals existing as a single unit, both in life and in death—all within a single poem that is, itself, split into two sections (Hunter 1996). Like *Idyll 22* itself, this paper will be in two parts, and second half of this paper will attempt to reconcile the apparent paradox of the presence of demigods and the absence of *ἡμίθεοι* by revealing how the Dioscuri represent a quintessential aspect of the Theocritean semi-divine: twinship.

With this particular subset of demigods, *ἡμίθεοι* and Dioscuri alike, Theocritus explores the interactions of divinity and semi-divinity while implementing word with Homeric resonance, granting it additional pointedness against the backdrop of the reign of the Ptolemies, descendants of gods and thus demigods themselves (Griffiths 1979; Heerink 2010). I will argue that, through this particular set of demigods—the "most lonesome" Adonis, two wedded siblings, a singular demigod with a mortal twin, and the twinned Dioscuri—Theocritus not only explores the interactions of divinity and semi-divinity, but also juxtaposes apotheosis with twinned or shared existences. This exploration, in turn, allows his poetry to address evolving attitudes towards immortality during the Hellenistic Age.

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