

Ancient mythology and history contain several interesting examples of twin children. One such pair was the god Apollo and his sister Artemis. Their mother Leto had a love affair with the god Zeus and became pregnant, but Zeus' jealous wife Hera issued orders that no land under the sun should allow her to give birth. Poor Leto wandered a long time, until eventually Zeus sent his brother Poseidon to her aid. Poseidon, god of the sea, took her to the island of Ortygia (sometimes identified with Delos) and covered it with waves so that it would not be under the sun. Here she gave birth to the twins. Artemis and Apollo became expert archers, and were very protective of their mother. On one occasion they shot a giant who tried to sexually assault her. On another, they killed the children of Niobe, a foolish mortal who boasted that she was a better mother than Leto.

Hercules and Iphicles were the twin sons of Alcmena (princess of Tiryns and granddaughter of the hero Perseus) but had different fathers, because Alcmena had unknowingly slept with Zeus as well as with her own husband Amphitryon. Hera, angered by her husband's extramarital affair, sent two snakes to kill Hercules and Iphicles in their crib, but Hercules strangled them. While lacking his half-brother's divine parentage and superhuman strength, Iphicles was nonetheless of royal descent and had no trouble finding a wife of high birth. He first married Automedusa, a princess of Megara, by whom he had a son, Iolaus. This boy became the charioteer of Hercules and helped him defeat the Hydra, one of the hero's twelve labours. Iolaus also participated in the Calydonian boar hunt, and eventually founded a settlement in Sardinia. Iphicles later married a daughter of King Creon of Thebes. According to one tradition, Iphicles was killed helping Hercules in a war against the city of Elis. He was buried in Arcadia and worshipped after death as a hero.

Another famous set of twins was Castor and Pollux, commonly known as the Dioscuri. Dioscuri means "sons of Zeus", but most ancient scholars considered that they were half-brothers, Pollux being the son of Zeus and Castor the son of King Tyndareus of Sparta. Tyndareus' wife Leda, whom Zeus visited in the disguise of a swan, bore the twin boys as well as two daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra. Helen, daughter of Zeus and the most beautiful woman in the world, was the cause of the Trojan War, while her

sister married (and later murdered) King Agamemnon of Mycenae. The Dioscuri were heroes, participating in the Argonaut expedition. When the Argonauts landed among the Bebryces, King Amycus challenged them to a boxing match. Pollux accepted the challenge and dealt the king a fatal punch. After returning to Greece, they rescued their sister Helen when she was abducted by the Athenian hero Theseus. Some years later, the Dioscuri aided their cousins, Idas and Lynceus, in a cattle raid. Unfortunately the cousins tricked them and drove off the entire herd for themselves. When the Dioscuri caught up with them, a fight broke out in which Idas killed Castor, while Pollux slew Lynceus. Idas next tried to kill Pollux, but was struck with a thunderbolt by Pollux's father, Zeus. Pollux then begged Zeus to let him share his immortality with Castor. They were placed in the sky as the constellation Gemini ("The Twins"). In later legend, the Dioscuri were believed responsible for the Roman victory at Lake Regillus in 484 BC, and a temple was erected to them in the forum at Rome. Part of this temple can still be seen today.

Perhaps the most famous pair of mortal twins was Romulus and Remus. Legend has it that King Numitor of Alba Longa was deposed by his wicked brother Amulius. Amulius made Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, a Vestal Virgin so that she could not produce children. When Rhea Silvia bore twin sons, claiming that the god Mars was their father, Amulius threw her into jail and cast the babies adrift on the river Tiber to die. But the basket carrying the twins washed ashore, where the boys were nursed by a female wolf and later raised by a shepherd. When they grew up, Romulus and Remus returned to Alba Longa, overthrew Amulius and restored their grandfather to his throne. Then, with a small band of followers, the twins decided to build a city of their own, in the place where they had grown up. Romulus laid out the sacred limits of the new town and began to build a wall around it, but while the wall was still low, Remus jumped over it in scorn. One of Romulus' followers then killed Remus for breaching the sacred boundary. The new city, Rome, was thus named after Romulus alone. Here myth meets history, because Romulus is recorded as the first of Rome's seven kings, reigning from 753 to 716 BC.

This brings us to another historical Roman twin, who might be called "the emperor that never was". His official name was Tiberius Julius Caesar Nero, but he was known as Gemellus ("little twin") because he was the only survivor of a pair of twins. Gemellus was born in AD 19 to Drusus Caesar (son of the emperor Tiberius) and his wife Livilla. His twin brother,

Germanicus, unfortunately died four years later. Drusus also died in 23, poisoned by Sejanus, the prefect of the Praetorian Guard. Toward the end of his life, the emperor named Gemellus as his heir, together with the emperor's nephew, Gaius Caligula. When Tiberius died in March of 37, the two young men should have become joint emperors. But Caligula, who was seven years older than Gemellus, persuaded the Senate to revoke the will and make Caligula sole heir, on the grounds that Tiberius must have been mentally unbalanced to name a teenager as emperor. Caligula put a good face on the situation by adopting Gemellus and appointing him Princeps Juventutis (literally "chief of the youth", but roughly equivalent to our "crown prince"). Before the year was over, however, Caligula accused Gemellus of treason and had him put to death.