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What's in a Name: Examining the Etymology of Poludeukês

Many attempts have been made through the years to work out a fully satisfactory etymology of Poludeukês. The puzzle of the etymology is that it does not seem to fit the logical PIE root one would expect for this word - **deuk-* (PIE, to lead or draw) which does not occur elsewhere in Greek, which is a mystery due to the general tendency for Greek to follow the structure of the PIE root very closely. Due to this, a formal approach to the problem has been most difficult, and no one has attempted to do so. Thus, in taking a more semantic based approach, the solution a scholar derives is quite possibly not the best possible one.

In approaching Poludeukês, scholars have proposed various PIE roots as the source of his name, such as **d/lewkw* - 'be clear, see (as), look (like)'. This is the basis of N.E. Collinge's etymology for Poludeukês, which, while formally feasible, lacks a sustainable semantic argument. Gregory Nagy, in his work on the etymology of Poludeukês, does accept that **deuk-* is the most likely source of Poludeukês' name, but that **deuk-* here means something more akin to 'drawing continuously toward a definite goal' (Nagy, 1996; 48). Nagy's argument draws heavily on the Latin use of this root to make his argument, while there is no evidence for this same usage in Greek.

To gain a better etymology of Poludeukês, many things must be considered - the role of the Divine Twins in other Indo-European pantheons (most notably Slavic and Indic), the tales that are told specifically about the Dioskouroi in Greek myth, and textual evidence from all sources, including Mycenaean. Furthermore, there is a necessity to examine Greek dialectal variation to see if there are any clues as to another possible root that is in hidden form due to this variation. In Linear B tablets, the gloss *ze-u-ke-si* (inflected in the dative plural) is found and has been translated as 'ox-teams', derived from the PIE root **(h₂)yeug-* 'yoke, join'. Fraser notes that *Deuxippos* in Boeotian came out as *Zeuxippos* in Thessalian - a Bahuvrhi compound meaning 'having yoked horses'. In Sparta, the main cult center of the Dioskouroi, there was a powerful family, noted in Pindar (*Isthmian*) and Herodotus, who claimed its descent from Theban rulers.

Furthermore, Poludeukês' role in Greek mythology must also be given consideration. The Dioskouroi were known for their wealth and benevolence and appearances to sailors who were in danger. The twins appeared in several tales, but the one in which they play the most prominent role is in that of the Arcadian cattle raid. Poludeukês' role here is that of victor, and thus, he became wealthy due to having a preponderance of that by which wealth was measured in the ancient world - cattle. Given this, it is not unreasonable to begin making a case for Poludeukês as a Bahuvrhi with a meaning of 'having many ox (or yoked) teams.'