The concept of divinity in non-Christian antiquity near the beginning of our era was complex. It was possible to speak of the two extremes, gods and men, and to mean by the former the eternals like Zeus/Jupiter in contrast to mere mortals. In this case, divinity was far removed from humanity. It was also possible, however, to speak of certain men as divine. There were two separate categories of divinity into which such men might fall that are of special interest to us in this article. On the one hand, certain men were believed in their historical existence to have displayed the divine presence in some special way and were hence regarded as θεῖοι ἄνδρες. Opinions have differed over exactly what constituted the divine presence. Whereas some circles looked for it in a man’s physical beauty or in his prophetic utterances and miraculous feats, others saw it manifest in extraordinary virtue and rationality. There were also divergent views about the origin or source of the divine presence. Some looked to a supernatural conception, others to the conscious cultivation of virtue by a man born as other men

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1 Morton Smith, “Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus,” *JBL* 90 (1971): 181–4. My paper is limited to conceptions of divinity near the beginning of our era. It focuses on the concept of the immortals because this is the concern of ancient writers like Diodorus of Sicily. It brings in the θεῖος ἄνήρ concept as an auxiliary concern because of its importance in current discussions in NT study (e.g., Paul J. Achtemeier, “Gospel Miracle Traditions and the Divine Man,” *Int* 26 [1972]: 174–197).


4 David Lenz Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBLDS 1; Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972).


normally are.\textsuperscript{7} At times these varying views, both of what constituted the divine presence and of the source of such divinity, merged into a synthetic portrayal of the \textit{θεῖος ἀνήρ}.\textsuperscript{8} If a mortal possessed in an unusual way that which was believed to constitute a sign of divine presence, however conceived, he was regarded as a divine man. On the other hand, a more select group of men were believed at the end of their careers to have been taken up into heaven, to have attained immortality, and to have received a status\textsuperscript{9} like that of the eternal gods. Such figures were designated immortals.\textsuperscript{10} The latter category of divinity is the primary concern of this paper.

### The Immortals

The concept of immortals must be understood within the context of a distinction between two types of divine beings, the eternals and the immortals. This typology is mentioned at least as early as Herodotus

\textsuperscript{7} Dio Chrysostom, \textit{d Regn.} 18–23, has Diogenes tell Alexander of the two criteria by which a man was regarded as divine, i.e., as a son of Zeus: (1) being conceived supernaturally; (2) being self-controlled and noble. Diogenes then says: “If, however, you are cowardly and love luxury and have a servile nature, then you are in no way related to the gods…” (cf. also 69.1). This constitutes Dio’s critique of (1) in the name of (2). For another statement of the second criterion, see Lucian, \textit{Demon.} 7.63. For the first criterion, see Lucretius, 1.729–33, who says of Empedocles: “He seems hardly to be born of mortal stock.” The same thing could be said of certain rabbis. See \textit{b. Nid.} 13a; also Jacob Neusner, \textit{History of the Jews in Babylonia} (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 3.107. According to Shirley Jackson Case (\textit{Experience with the Supernatural in Early Christian Times} [New York: Century, 1929], 129) another, less common, explanation of a divine man’s distinctiveness was reincarnation (e.g., Pindar, \textit{Thren.} frg. 113; Vergil, \textit{Aeneid}, 6.756–76). Justin seems to be aware of and involved in the debates over what constitutes the true \textit{θεῖος ἀνήρ} (1 \textit{Apol.} 22), when he says: “Even if he [Jesus] were only a man by common generation, he is, because of his wisdom, worthy to be called Son of God.”

\textsuperscript{8} Porphyry’s \textit{Life of Pythagoras} is a good example. Cf. Seneca, \textit{Vit. beat.} 26.8–27.1; also Tiede, \textit{Charismatic Figure}, 59.

\textsuperscript{9} That is, he is not only immortal but also rules. Cf. Seneca, \textit{Herc. Ot.} 1996–7, who speaks of Heracles now reigning in power.

\textsuperscript{10} The terminology is complex. The lines between demigods, heroes, and immortals are blurred. This is true both for the classical period and the Hellenistic age. In this paper I use “immortals” of those humans who became deities by virtue of their ascent to heaven at the end of their lives, “demigods” only of those individuals who had a supernatural parentage. Not all demigods became immortals. I avoid the term “hero” in any technical sense since heroes constituted a group larger than those who became immortals. On the problem, see Erwin Rohde, \textit{Psyche} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1925), 117–32, 141 n. 23; Arthur Darby Nock, “The Cult of Heroes,” \textit{HTR} 37 (1944): 141–74.