

## Divine Agents of Healing and their Patients in Vedic

The two Aśvins are *the* divine physicians *par excellence*. Although, occasionally, also other gods are presented as agents of healing — e.g. Indra, Rudra and the Maruts, Sarasvatī — it is predominantly the Twin Gods who act as healers, *bhiṣájā*. Some of the legends surrounding them will be discussed in this paper, with a view to illustrate the diversity of their healing activities. Also, certain of their *rescue* operations will be interpreted as symbolic of *curing*.

As Young Men, *yúvānā*, the Aśvins convey (eternal) youth; as *nāsatyā*, they provide *Genesung* — *\*nasatī-* in the sense of ‘safe return home’ (cf. *su-astī-*, *ástam*) — to the one who has gone astray; as *divó nāpātā*, they impart a measure of immortality to the mortal; as *śubhás páti* and *sūryāyāḥ páti*, they give beauty together with health.

In a general way, the Ṛgveda mentions the blind (*andhá-*), the lame (*śroná-*), the emaciated (*krśá-*), the crippled or broken-limbed (*rutá-*) as human patients of the Aśvins. More specifically, the Twin Gods cure and rescue Atri, Ṛjṛāśva, Cyavāna, Bhujyu, Rebha, Vandana, Vartikā, Viśpalā, and many other mythological figures.

It is typical of the Aśvins always to be on the move: they drive a chariot overland in the daytime, or travel aboard a ship across the ocean at night. This characteristic mobility (ubiquity) allows them to be present ‘at once’ (*sadyás*) whenever their immediate help is needed.

Not only men (and animals), but sometimes also gods receive the Twins’ medical treatment. As a prominent case in point, the story of Indra’s sickness and purgation, which our texts tell in connection with the Sautrāmaṇī ritual, will be related. In the same context, a rather complicated recipe specifying how to prepare the remedy against the bad effects of a *soma* overdose or of *soma* adulterated with *surā* is given by the commentators on Vājasaneyi-Saṁhitā 19.1 and Kātyāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra 19.1.20–21.

The other gods, however, consider the two *twilight* physicians impure and unfit for sacrifice because, in pursuit of their profession, they move about among humans and have promiscuous contact with them. Therefore, a *brāhmaṇá-* should not practise medicine (cf. Taittirīya-Saṁhitā 6.4.9.1–2), lest he too become impure and unfit for sacrifice.

In an appendix, I will briefly introduce two newly identified diseases, both of which were discovered in recent editions of the Paippalāda-Saṁhitā: 1. *abhīlī-* ‘a facial skin disease’ (PSO 20.62.9–63.3 = PSK 20.58.7–59.2 [5x]) and 2. *yakṣma-jatravya-* ‘clavicular phthisis’ or ‘progressive wasting disease of the collar-bone (*jatrú-*)’ (PS 7.15.7b).