

The Twin Motif in Comparative Mythology

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Mythic themes of twins exist in most cultures; for instance, twinning is a common motif in the diverse traditions of both Greek and West African myth. Twin myths are multi-thematic; however, the image of dualism is universally consistent. Oppositional elements such as light and dark, heaven and earth, day (Sun) and night (Moon), good and evil are easily paired, hence many mythic twins represent polarised forces.¹ Whether twins are destined to remain polar opposites or become united is a pattern pervading their stories. Duplicity is often represented in myth as rivalrous twins championing antithetical forces (nature-nurture, marginal-civilised, divine-instinctual) however the union of symmetrical twins (Sun/Moon, love/devotion) is also portrayed.

Doniger, in critically discussing Levi-Strauss' models, draws on his comparative study of twinship myths stating that European and North American ideologies of twins have 'striking dissimilarities'. Pursuing Levi-Strauss' ideas, she points out that European myths emphasise the similarity of twins which lead to an annihilation of differences (the ideology of identity); North American myths stress the dissimilarities of twins, where each must co-exist with their differences (the ideology of opposition).² Another way to observe this split is to compare tribal cultures whose myths concern the killing of one or both twins with literate cultures whose myths tell of the union of twins. Mythic motifs centring on twins cover a broad spectrum, yet scholastic examination of twinship is often caught in dualism itself, forming dyadic conclusions.³ While common twin motifs exist in all cultures, the ideological dissimilarity seems to be whether the twin-other is absorbed and integrated symbolising a holistic/androgynous nature, or is banished and killed off suggesting an eternity of polarity and opposition.

¹ Greek mythic tradition abounds with twinning and this coupling is apparent in later Greek myth. For instance Eros, the power and madness of love, is doubled with Anteros, the avenger of unrequited love; Prometheus, the visionary forward-thinker, is doubled with Epimetheus, after-thought; or Deimos and Phobos are twin images of terror and fear fathered by the war god, Ares. Bruce Lincoln in *Death, War and Sacrifice*, page 40, argues that Rhadamanthys and Minos may be twins and that Aeschylus poetically referred to Menelaus and Agamemnon as twins. A common theme in myth and literature casts twins in the polar roles of the 'light' and 'dark' twin. For the West African cultural examination of twin myths, see Bonnefoy, *Mythologies*, Volume 2: 33 ff.

² Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider Politics and Theology in Myth*. Columbia University Press (New York: 1998). p.151-2

³ Ugo Bianchi in his entry Twins says "Another privileged expression of duality in *both physiology and symbology*, is the notion of twinship." He also examines twin myths in both non-literate and Indo-European cultures, summarising "the motif of twins in the ideologies of non-literate cultures takes two main expressions; (1) symmetry and (2) disparity in value". Many of his conclusions show the dualistic nature of twins. Mircea Eliade (editor), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 15: 99 - 107.

Twins, as doubles or copies, naturally represent a consciousness of ‘other’. Whether they are trickster figures, psychopomps, cultural heroes, city-fathers, warriors, or gods, twins activate consciousness and portend conscious development. Birth and civilisation constellate the twin image. A central motif of Greek cosmogony and myth is the evolution from chaos to order. The triumph of Zeus’ Olympian realm and the myths of heroic conquests could be interpreted as striving towards consciousness. Twin figures are more abundant in Greek myth (see appendix) consistent with the theme of conscious development and order. Their mythologies, in contemporary terms, symbolise an awareness of ‘shadow’, or a personification of an alter ego. The twin may be a rival, a ‘dark’ or unheroic twin, who must be overcome; or a partner, who is essentially a part of us, a counterpart or a twin-soul. The emergent consciousness of other and attempt to either co-exist or obliterate the other often requires a sacrifice which marks this evolutionary process. Themes of conscious awakening or development requiring sacrifice are woven throughout twin myths, and these are the motifs I will examine.

Bruce Lincoln postulated that in the Proto-Indo-European cosmogonic myth, the world results “from a primordial act of sacrifice in which the first priest, whose name was Manu (‘Man’), sacrificed his twin brother, the first king, whose name was Yemo (‘Twin’).”⁴ Vedic myth conforms to this prototype in the guise of Manu⁵, the first man to offer an oblation to the gods. Manu sacrificed his twin, Yama, who became the overseer of the Underworld, escorting the dead to the realm of their ancestors. “Yama was the sacrificial victim essential to the act of creation over which Manu presided. In other words ‘Man’ sacrificed his ‘Twin’.”⁶ This primordial creation motif is similar to myths of certain West African tribes where one twin prematurely leaves the cosmic egg and the other twin is sacrificed to ensure a better world.⁷ The motif of the sacrificed or assimilated twin recurs throughout Western myth as well.

The motif of a sacrificed twin (or sibling) preceding the founding of a city⁸ is a variation on this theme; the founding of a city becomes the image of a birth and a movement towards civilisation and conscious development. Roman twins, Romulus and Remus, conform to this mythic theme. Ennius, in the *Annales*, tells how the omens surrounding the flight of birds favoured Romulus over his twin, Remus, as the founder of the new city/empire, as prophesied to Aeneas (the original city founder) in the

⁴ Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War & Sacrifice*, p. 32.

⁵ Vedic myth assigns this name to 14 mythological progenitors of mankind. see John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, p.199.

⁶ Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythologies*, p. 286.

⁷ Bonnefoy, *Mythologies*, Volume 2: 33 ff.

⁸ Ignaz Goldziher, *Mythology Among the Hebrews and Its Historical Development*, translated by Russell Martineau. Longmans, Green & Co. (London: 1877), p.113 states ‘in the myths of all peoples the Solar heroes are regarded as the founders of city life, and that a fratricide often preceded the building of a city’. The Hebrew story of Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel, follows this theme.

underworld.⁹ However the eponymous empire is founded on the blood sacrifice of Remus, who is killed by his twin brother in the process of founding and building the city. Remus vanishes, absorbed into the city; he is the sacrifice, while his brother is the champion founding father of Rome. This archaic motif of the sacrificed twin preceding the birth of civilisation surfaced in a later culture's myth.¹⁰ Romulus, like other twin victors is also apotheosised, worshiped by the Romans as a god, while his twin Remus is the sacrificed victim. Greek myth also depicts twins as city founders, however unlike the Roman myth, a twin is not so overtly sacrificed.



Romulus and Remus

Greek twins, Amphion and Zethus, are also city founders, however rather than sacrificing or murdering a twin, they cooperate in raising the city walls of Thebes. Numerous other twin motifs are woven throughout their story: the impure or exiled mother forced to expose her twin babies, the twins are fostered by a shepherd, the mother's eventual rescue and release by the twins, the twin's divine parentage as well as their notable character dissimilarities.¹¹ All these motifs are also part of the myth of Romulus and Remus. However, unlike the Roman twins, in the myth of Amphion and Zethus the theme of sacrifice as a harbinger of civilisation or consciousness is replaced by the theme of assimilation. Greek myth does not always conform to prototype, however it is twins who herald the

⁹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by David West (Penguin, London: 1991). 6: 776-790.

¹⁰ This theme recurring in Roman myth perplexes scholars. See Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, p. 286-8.

¹¹ Other Greek twins Pelias and Neleus conform to these themes. They were exposed on a mountain after birth and when they matured they rescued their mother. They were temperamentally dissimilar and eventually Pelias forced his twin into exile.

rebirth of Thebes, destined to be a great city and dynasty. Thebes, like Rome, had been originally founded by an older heroic figure (Cadmus) and the twin founding ushers in a more developed era for the Thebans. The Theban twins build the city walls together by utilising their considerably different talents. Amphion is a gifted musician whose lyre playing coerces nature into cooperating with the construction of the city walls; Zethus has enormous strength and is able to manually lift the heavy stones into place. Each twin cooperates, centred on the task and unified by their common goal. The Greek variant on the theme merges, rather than sacrifices, the twin's oppositional natures. One aspires to the poetical, musical and cultural side while the other aligns himself with the strength and determined spirit of the wild. Here the image of the twin heralds a birth, however rather than the sacrifice of a twin, an assimilation of the twins occurs.



Zethus, Antiope and Amphion

The Latin myth of the twins Byblis and Caunus weaves the themes of sacrifice and city founding in an unusual and psychologically complex manner. Ovid, the poet who narrates the story in *Metamorphoses*, introduces us to the opposite sex twins whose incestuous struggle brings their opposition to consciousness. Caunus is so shocked at his sister's suggestion of violating the sacred

taboo of incest that he fled from her and “built himself a new city in a foreign land”.¹² Even though certain gods had married their sisters, Byblis was aware that her passionate feelings and sexual desire for her brother were taboo. Obsessed by her brother, she wrote him a letter identifying her erotic feelings for him. Caunus was so disgusted that he fled as far as possible and Byblis, engulfed by grief, died searching for him.¹³ Again a twin is the harbinger of conscious awareness which stimulates a movement towards civilisation.



Byblis by Bouguereau

Opposite-sex twin myths are not as common as the archetypal twin brother myth yet, themes of identification and opposition are apparent. In the previous myth we saw opposite sex twins whose identification was so strong, one was sacrificed. The violated taboo stimulated consciousness as well as demanding the sacrifice of one twin conforming to the prototypal Indo European mythic motif. Greek myth deified the opposite sex twins Apollo and Artemis. As Olympians these twins constellated an image of ‘divine twins’. Apollo and Artemis were also strongly identified with each other. Neither twin was sacrificed, however rivals for their twin partners often were.¹⁴

In later myth these twins became associated with the luminaries; Apollo, the Sun and Artemis, the Moon.¹⁵ Similar to Amphion and Zethus they naturally reflect the opposites of culture and instinct.

¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Mary M. Innes. Penguin (London: 1955). 9: 635-6.

¹³ Pausanias in *Guide to Greece Volume 1* translated by Peter Levi, Penguin Books (London: 1979) page 376 tells an interesting twist to the Narcissus myth. Narcissus had a twin sister who he loved. She looked exactly like him however had died. His grief abated when he was able to believe that the reflection in the spring was his sisters’. This version of the myth contains similar symbols to the Byblis/Caunus story.

¹⁴ Artemis swiftly executed Coronis, one of Apollo’s lovers. One version of the myth suggests Apollo tricked Artemis into killing Orion, a friend and hunting companion of his sister. Interestingly Apollo’s love interests like Cyrene and Daphne were replicas of his twin sister: huntresses, wild etc.

¹⁵ By the 5th century BC, Apollo had become the Sun god while in the 2nd century BC Artemis became associated with the Moon. See Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira, A Study of Hekate’s Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature*, Scholar’s Press (Atlanta, GA: 1990). p. 31 footnote 8.

Apollo's sphere is the arts, divination, and healing while Artemis' domain is the forest, the mountains and the wild. Their close relationship allows them to cross over into each other's territory. The *Second Homeric Hymn to Artemis* tells of Artemis joining her brother and the Muses in song and dance. Like his twin sister, Apollo can use his bow and arrow to be a swift and cruel executioner. Similar to other twin motifs, Apollo and Artemis are children of a sky god (Zeus) and an exiled mother (Leto) who they fiercely protect. The twins also herald the creation of Delos, a major centre and sanctuary in antiquity which is famous as the birthplace of Apollo as well as giving its name to the union of independent Greek states.¹⁶ One version of the myth suggests that Artemis was firstborn and then helped to deliver her brother, a variant on the theme of one twin leading the other into consciousness. Again the Greek myths have utilised the twin image to precede the birth of an important centre however have replaced the sacrificed twin with twins who are symmetrical and able to be assimilated. Their close attachment is a theme that is also evident in the Greek myth of the Dioscuri.

One of the most endearing twin myths is the Greek myth of Castor and Polydeuces, who were also honoured by the Romans as Castor and Pollux. Castor and Polydeuces, beloved by both Gods and mortals, were known as the Dioscuri (the sons of Zeus) referring to an early version of the myth where both were divine heroic sons of the sky god, Zeus, as suggested in the *Homeric Hymn to the Dioscuri*.¹⁷ In later myth, the twins Castor and Pollux originated from a much more complex family atmosphere where the notion of twinship was stretched to include multiple pairs of opposites: male-female, divine-mortal.¹⁸ The version of the twin's double paternity (Zeus fathers Polydeuces while the Spartan king, Tyndareus, fathers Castor) was not the oldest account but it became the popular version, originating from the epic poem *Cypria*¹⁹. Like many twin myths, one was sired by a god²⁰ and the other by a

¹⁶ *The Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo* tells how the insignificant island of Delos became immortalised as the birthplace of the great god Apollo. see *The Homeric Hymns* translated by Charles Boer, Spring (Dallas, TX: 1970). 149 ff. The Delian league was a collaboration of independent Greek states formed to defend against the Persians. At the beginning of the confederation, the treasury and council were at Delos.

¹⁷ Both Homeric Hymns to the Dioscuri claim Zeus as father to both twins. *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Charles Boer. Spring (Dallas, TX: 1970). p 146-8.

¹⁸ In the second century BC, Apollodorus in *The Library* 3.10.7 tells the version of Zeus fathering Pollux and Helen while Tyndareus fathered Clytemnestra and Castor on Leda. See Apollodorus, *The Library Volume 2*, translated by James Frazer, William Heinemann (London: 1921). p. 23.

¹⁹ The different versions of the twins' birth suggest both are sons of Zeus, or both are sons of Tyndareus. The *Cypria* suggests Castor is mortal and Polydeuces immortal, suggesting the dual parentage. No version ever suggested the reverse.

²⁰ The father of twins was generally a sky-god or sun-god; a god associated with consciousness. G. S. Kirk in examining themes throughout comparative myth, lists the birth of twins under his category of 'Unusual births'. He suggests the mythic image "that twins are a prodigy- normally a father sires one child at a time, so that when two children emerge there must be two fathers, of whom one must be divine." see Kirk, *Myth Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1986). 200. The North American Iroquois acknowledged twin culture heroes, brothers with different fathers. "One is the son of the Sun

mortal. Even though their paternity assigned each a different destiny of mortality and immortality, the twins were inseparable. This unique theme of union is also apparent in Indian mythology.



Poussin's 1628 sketch of Castor and Pollux

The Vedic myth of the twin Asvins is similar to the Greek myth of the Dioscuri.²¹ The comparison between these two sets of twins is made by Georges Dumezil and even earlier by Max Muller in 1872.²² Like the Dioscuri, the Asvins are twin sons of a sun or sky god who are youthful, bright soldiers. Their name is derived from Asva, 'horse', since their mother concealed herself as a mare (Asvini) when she was impregnated by the Sun god. While the horse is symbolic of war it is also a luminous and divine symbol. The Asvins were masters of horses riding their golden chariot, drawn by

and represents the powers of goodness; his brother is the son of the waters and is associated with evil." see *An Encyclopaedia of Archetypal Symbolism*, edited by Beverly Moon. Shambhala (London: 1991) 24.

²¹ Jaan Puhvel in *Comparative Mythology*, p. 140 suggest both these myths come from "inherited Indo-European structures".

²² C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, 3rd Edition, p.14.

horses, across the heavens to bring the dawn.²³ The Dioscuri too were connected with horses through their association with the cavalry, riding their white steeds; one of the twins, Castor was known as a ‘breaker of horses’.²⁴ Like the Dioscuri, ‘Zeus’ boys’, the Asvins had a similar epithet: *Asvinikumara*, ‘the mare’s boys’.

One aspect of their relationships is noteworthy: their mutual devotion and love, counteracting many myths which portray twins as antagonistic or at least ambivalent. Their relationship could be assessed psychologically as symbiotic. The Dioscuri have such a strong attachment that they are unable to separate, even in death. When the mortal twin Castor is fatally wounded by his cousin²⁵, his brother’s grief is so great that Polydeuces petitions Zeus to allow him to relinquish his immortality so he may be with his brother. Pindar’s lyrics tell of Polydeuces’ grief:

He let hot tears fall and lifted his voice in lament:
‘Father Kronion, what release shall there be from sorrows?
Give death to me also, Master, with him.
Honour goes from one who has lost his friends,
And in trouble few among men may be trusted
To share in suffering.’²⁶

Polydeuces’ relinquishment of his immortality to be joined with his brother is a unique image of twins who merge.²⁷ One of the epithets for the Asvins is *Nasatyas* which means inseparable.²⁸ Other images of their inability to psychologically separate is also seen in their enmeshed relationships. The Dioscuri marry a twin pair of cousins, Phoebe and Hilaira, who they have abducted from their twin cousins, Idas

²³ John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature*, p.29

²⁴ Homer, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* uses the same line “Kastor, breaker of horses, and the strong boxer, Polydeukes”, a reference to their early association with horses. See Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, 3: 237-8 and *The Odyssey*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, 11: 298-300. *The Second Hymn to the Dioscuri* greets them “riding on your fast horses”. In Celtic mythology there is an interesting twist on the theme of horses and twins. Macca must race the king’s horses and as she collapses at the race’s finish, she gives birth to the “twins of Macca”.

²⁵ In later myth Castor is wounded by his cousin, Idas, who is twin to Lynceus. They had also abducted their twin’s prospective brides, Phoebe and Hilaira, also twins. In later myth the Dioscuri were also twinned with sisters, Helen and Clytemnestra, also twins.

²⁶ Pindar, *The Odes*, translated by C.M. Bowra. Penguin (London: 1969). Nemean Ode X: 75-79

²⁷ The Dioscuri’s afterlife has many mythic interpretations depending on the interpretation of ‘alternate days’. Homer in the *Odyssey* Book 11: 304-5 says “they live still every other day; on the next day they are dead, but they are given honour even as gods are.” Other myths suggest they exchange days between Olympus and Erebus.

²⁸ Stutley, Margaret and James, *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, p. 28.

and Lynceus. Similarly, the Asvins marry the same woman; both sets of twins displaying a high degree of enmeshment.²⁹

This attachment served as a conscious reminder of a collective fraternal love that was admired and revered in the ancient world. The Asvins were “a focus of the supreme belief in divine goodwill towards mankind”³⁰ while the Dioscuri were a revered model for both sibship and friendship. L.R. Farnell diachronically explores the myth of the Dioscuri in great detail however ends his examination of the twins exalting the theme of brotherly love and sacrifice:

the myth of Kastor and Poludeukes expresses and ennobles the sentiment of friendship, an emotional moral ideal that was passionately cherished by the Hellene and that entered as a unique element into the highest ethical system of Greece. The myth of self-surrender of Poludeukes, his abandonment of the crown of perfect immortality for the sake of his brother’s fellowship shines out in the mythology of the world.³¹

Hesiod, nearly three millennia earlier, too utilised the Dioscuri’s bond as a standard for honest and devoted friendship:

Castor and Pollux, you who live in divine
Laecedaemon, by the lovely flowing stream
Eurotas, if ever I give a friend
Bad counsel, let me suffer his results.³²

While the Asvins and the Dioscuri embody similar prototypal Indo-European twin motifs, they are unique in their intense mutual devotion, which became an emblem for *philia*. Here the twin image is employed as a conscious example of brotherly love and devotion which could also be broadened to a prototype of brotherhood and sisterhood. As well, each pair of twins was associated with healing; an attempt to address the split between the body and the soul. Another epithet for the Asvins was *Darias*, ‘wonder workers’³³, a reference to their association with medicinal plants and healing. They were

²⁹ The Asvins enmeshment with their shared wife is similar in theme to the myths of the Dioscuri’s simultaneous birth with Helen. The triangularly now is not with wife, but sister. see Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, pp 140-3. On page 143 he states ‘there is nothing to preclude the idea that the Indo-European background of Helen was as the sexual partner of the Dioskouroi.’

³⁰ Ibid, p.29.

³¹ Lewis Richard Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, Oxford University Press (London: 1921). p.228

³² Hesiod. *Theognis, Elegies*, translated by Dorothea Wender. Penguin Books (London: 1973). 1087-90.

³³ Stutley, Margaret and James, *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, p. 28.

physicians of mankind, especially to those wounded in battle.³⁴ Machaon and Podalirius, healer brothers paired in the *Iliad*³⁵ and at other times twinned, also attend to those wounded on the battlefield.³⁶ In Roman myth, Castor and Pollux were worshipped as healing gods. In these twin myths their jurisdiction over the sphere of ‘healing’³⁷ may be suggestive of emergent consciousness which integrates two opposing, yet symmetrical forces (like body and soul):

Experience in analytical psychology shows that the appearance of a pair of identical figures, which we call a “doublet”, is as a rule associated with the emergence of material into consciousness. Emergence into consciousness, however, is closely related to healing.³⁸

Twins again are heralds of consciousness.

The image of a twin as a impetus to consciousness is also part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Edward Edinger, a Jungian analytical psychologist, in his study of Old Testament twins, Jacob and Esau, suggested that “the individuated ego is destined to be born a twin”.³⁹ Hebrew myth tells of the struggle of twins, Jacob and Esau, in the womb before birth and the unique destinies granted each twin. Individuation or the task of conscious development constellates the image of a twin or equal other. In Jungian thinking the twin serves as a shadow image allowing the possibility to be conscious of differences, which precedes the integration of opposites.

Eliade, in exploring the myths of emergence, tells of the Zuni myth where “solar Twins lead embryonic humanity up to the threshold of consciousness”⁴⁰, away from embryonic unconsciousness to the light. The theme of the twin as a guide to consciousness is a continuous thread which weaves itself throughout myth. Twinning is a potent image of light and dark, heaven and earth, and through the union of opposites a sense of integration and fluidity between opposites is possible.

In the myths of the Dioscuri and the Asvins, the twins are fused; opposites appear to be reconciled, perhaps integrated, allowing a conscious relationship between the two. In the Dioscuri’s myth, a

³⁴ Ibid, p.28.

³⁵ Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 11: 832

³⁶ C.A. Meier in *Healing Dream and Ritual* p. 57 states “The motif of healing twins has already come up in connection with Asclepius’ sons, Machaon and Podalirius, one of whom is as usual mortal, while the other is immortal.”

³⁷ Apollo, a twin, is the patron of healers and the father of Asclepius, the god of healing.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 57

³⁹ Edward F. Edinger, *The Bible and the Psyche: Individuation Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Inner City Books, Toronto: 1986), p. 36.

⁴⁰ Marcea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p.161.

sacrifice also occurs. Unlike the primal sacrifice of Yemo, Polydeuces chooses his own sacrifice in order to be united with his twin brother-partner. Polydeuces' grief at the loss of his twin brother is so great he petitions Zeus to relinquish his immortality so he may join his brother in death. In this myth, the sacrifice is consciously chosen.

Another variation on the theme of conscious striving or 'individuation' embraces heroic twins. Mesoamerican myth tells the tripartite tale of the hero twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, whose adventures "culminate in their apotheosis as the sun and the moon".⁴¹ These twins' heroic struggle also required a sacrifice of each other as well as an underworld journey before their resurrection and apotheosis. Throughout North America the heroic figure whose feats benefit civilisation "often has a younger twin brother".⁴² Amongst the Mesoamerican tribes of the Mosquito, the Sumo and the northern Tepehua when "twins are born the second of them is killed".⁴³ This theme is repeated in the myth of the greatest of the Greek heroes, Heracles, who is born a twin.

Heracles is the son of Zeus while his twin Iphicles is the son of a mortal, Amphitryon. Symbolically the heroic figure is a Jungian metaphor for the striving towards consciousness, and in this myth Iphicles, as the mortal twin, serves the function of mortality, while heroic Heracles pursues immortality. Similar to the Mesoamerican twins, Heracles undertakes the journey to Hades and is apotheosised. The Greek myth of Heracles is well known, yet there is little myth about his twin, Iphicles. It is as if Heracles has dominated or obliterated him, an interesting twist on one twin dominating or expelling the other.⁴⁴ Iphicles is the sacrificed twin to his brother's heroism. This is suggested early in the myth when Heracles courageously strangles the menacing serpents in their cradle, whereas Iphicles is cowardly. Iphicles also is killed in the war against Augeus that Heracles instigates as revenge.⁴⁵ Heracles' mortal twin is sacrificed due to his labours or individuation process. Interestingly it is Iphicles' son Iolaus who is often Heracles' faithful companion.

⁴¹ Peter and Roberta Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition*, p. 280. Apollo and Artemis were twins also associated with the luminaries.

⁴² Bonnefoy, *Mythologies*, p.1153.

⁴³ Eliade, Mircea (editor), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Volume 9: 434.

⁴⁴ One author suggests that this may actually be conscious editing. Philip E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*. Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1992) states: "the story of Heracles and his twin illustrates the process of censorship quite strikingly. What is remarkable about Iphicles is that nothing whatever is known about him.....There seem to be no reason why such a theme should be suppressed unless the relationship were originally rivalrous."

⁴⁵ *The New Century Classical Handbook*, edited by Catherine B. Avery. Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. (New York: 1962). p. 600-1.

The vanquished or sacrificed twin theme from antiquity has a contemporary counterpart. Ultrasound technology has revealed that many twin pregnancies result in a single birth and that one of the twins is either absorbed into the body of the other twin or expelled unnoticed by the mother. Latest statistics suggest one in every six conceptions are twins although only one out of every sixty births are twins. This phenomenon is commonly known as the ‘vanishing twin’ syndrome.⁴⁶ The sacrificed twin heralding birth is not only a mythic motif but a biological reality:

We are conceived as twins and, most of us, born single. We conceive of ourselves, from the start, as twins, then one disappears. Together, the First Twins struggle with forces primeval, opening a space in this world for us to tame horses, plough the land, survive the lightening; then one devours the other. The vanished twin leaves behind a body as dry and as thin as a fragment of papyrus.⁴⁷

Sacrifice is an obvious theme that is a cosmogonic precursor. When the image of twins and sacrifice appear in myth, they too seem to herald birth: the founding of cities or empires, the heroic task of individuation or birth itself. Perhaps twins represent a more differentiated symbol for the advent of consciousness since the twin is a perfect representative of duality, equality and the conscious realisation of an other outside of one’s own self: ‘twins incarnate an ideal of ontological perfection’.⁴⁸ Because the twin is such a powerful and luminous image it is not surprising that this theme, in different ways, is woven throughout the fabric of many culture’s myths.

⁴⁶ Statistical research is reported in *Psychology Today*, Volume 30, No. 4, July/August 1997 and Lawrence Wright, *Twins and What They Tell Us About Who We Are*. John Wiley and Sons (New York: 1997). Chapter 6.

⁴⁷ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*. Zone Books (New York: 1996). p.19. Schwartz also quotes statistics and examples of the ‘vanishing twin’ syndrome.

⁴⁸ Bonnefoy, *Mythologies*, Volume 2: 33.