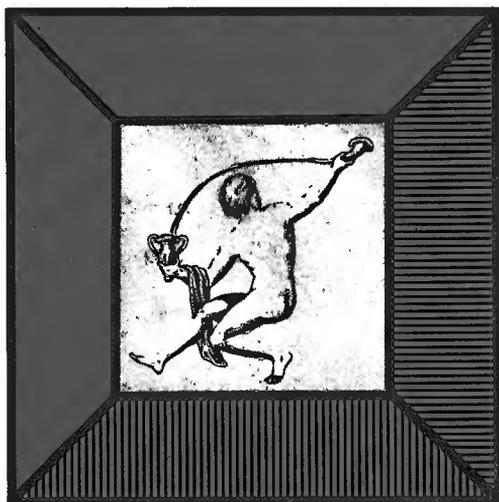


Transition Rites Cosmic, Social and Individual Order

edited by Ugo Bianchi



Storia delle religioni

STORIA DELLE RELIGIONI

2

Collana diretta da Ugo Bianchi e Giulia Piccaluga

TRANSITION RITES

COSMIC, SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL ORDER

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE FINNISH-SWEDISH-ITALIAN SEMINAR
HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ROME "LA SAPIENZA"*

24th-28th March 1984

edited by UGO BIANCHI

I RITI DI PASSAGGIO

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TENUTO ALL'UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA "LA SAPIENZA"*

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a cura di UGO BIANCHI

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The papers are printed in the same order in which they were listed in the Program, with the exception of Doz. Bäckman's paper, which reached later the present Editor. Prof. Bergman and Dr. Drobin were not able to submit the final manuscript of their papers in time for publication in this volume. Prof. Piccaluga's paper will constitute a part of a more extended publication by the same Author. Dr. Monaco's paper was presented *in absentia*.

FOREWORD

In September 1979 an International Colloquium on «The Soteriology of the Oriental Cults in the Roman Empire» was held at Rome University. A group of Finnish students, guided by Prof. Juha Y. Pentikäinen with other Finnish scholars, took part in the works of the Colloquium and in the visits to archaeological sites. Immediately after the Colloquium a Finno-Italian meeting was organized in Rome (in the «Palazetto Venezia») on the Methodology and the Epistemology of the History of Religions (29 September 1979), – a subject-matter which had been treated in a big International Colloquium in Turku six years before. Four Finnish Colleagues (Prof. Pentikäinen, Prof. Anna-Leena Siikala, Doc. Dr. Päivikki Suojanen, Dr. Tapani Ojasti) read papers at the Rome meeting; among the Italians, Prof. Giulia Piccaluga. After the meeting Prof. Pentikäinen and myself remained in close contact, looking forward to future academic cooperation. In October 1978 I had already paid a visit to the Department of Comparative Religion of the University of Helsinki, where I had had the pleasure of discussing matters concerning our discipline and the study of religious dualism (see «Temenos» 16,1980, pp. 10-25). After the meeting in Rome, Prof. Pentikäinen visited again our University, where he spoke about Finnish religious history and traditions. During this visit we took, with the cooperation of Prof. Piccaluga, the final measures for the organization of a Seminar on the «rites of passage», and decided to extend the invitation to some Swedish scholars particularly interested in the field. There is no need to underline the degree of interest research into the mystery, mysteriosophic and gnostic religions of Antiquity may have in a religio-historical and religio-anthropological approach to the comparative study of the rites of passage. One common characteristic of the Rome Seminar on the rites of passage and the Rome Colloquia on Mithraism (see U. Bianchi (Ed.), *Mysteria Mithrae*, Leiden-Rome 1979 [Series E.P.R.O. vol. 80]) and on the Soteriology of the Oriental Cults in the Roman Empire (see U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (Edd.), *The Soteriology...*, Leiden 1982 [Series E.P.R.O. vol. 92]) was that they were concluded by «statements» agreed upon by the partici-

pants, concerning the results of the respective meetings and the *status quaestionis*. It is our hope that this cooperation may continue to our common benefit. Thanks are due to Dr. Ida Paladino and Dr. Paola Pisi for assembling and checking the manuscript of the volume.

U.B.

AIMS OF THE SEMINAR

The aims of the Seminar were tentatively indicated as follows in the first circular (clearly not with the purpose of exhausting – not even of touching upon – each one of the listed items, but only of illustrating the vast, articulated scope of the rites of passage and, already, of the formalized notions of «transition» and «cycle»).

Aims of the Seminar

The Seminar will concentrate on the religious dynamism of the notion and the ritual practice of «transition». It will be religio-historical and religio-anthropological in character. The suggested topics fall within the scope of:

- I.
 - a) the sources (traditional lore and historical foundation)
 - b) the context (structure, use, meaning, function)
 - c) the dynamism (origins, development, survival, reshaping)

- II. General topics:
 - a) collective or cosmic transition: inaugural-repetitive (seasonal crisis and annual renewal; the prorogation of life; the waves of the generations; *magnus annus* and the *saeculum*; eternal return; the role of the king; dying and seasonal gods; the «demiurge of becoming»)
 - b) individual transition:
 1. not esoterical (life's cycle; initiation without secrecy, not esoterical admission into religious and other bodies or classes)

2. esoterical initiation:
 2. 1 pubertal initiation among illiterate societies (masculine and feminine)
 2. 2 classes of age (with esoterical admission rites)
 2. 3 initiatory societies in a pyramidal structure of successive initiations to wisdom and power
 2. 4 secret societies (as distinct from the former)
 2. 5 the vocational initiation of the shaman and other 'specialists'
 2. 6 mystery-like rituals in illiterate cultures and proto-historical societies
 2. 7 mystery cults in ancient Greece and the Mediterranean area; their conceptual and religio-historical implications and presuppositions; the guarantee of life and the 'good hopes'.
 2. 8 the mysteriosophical revolution: life which is death, death which is life; fall and instauration of the soul, divine/celestial; soul's descensus et ascensus through the heavenly spheres; the lover of wisdom, true initiate; Lese-Mysterien.
 2. 9 the continuation in gnosticism: gnosis, the secrets of the holy way; horos 'limit' and the liminality of the lower aeon
 - 2.10 cosmosophy, and optimistic view of the cosmos and its eternity, not without the 'mysteriosophic' notion of the wandering soul; staircase and gates in the heavens; the case of Mithraism.
 - 2.11 secret societies in pre-modern and modern times: ideology and lore.

III Special topics and alternative typologies:

- a) myths, symbols and metaphors of transition: labyrinth, Symplegades, Acheront, Inanna's descent to the nether world, Himmelsreise der Seele: history vs phenomenological and psychological reduction

- b) transition in time (linear, cyclical)
transition in space (horizontal, vertical; rupture de niveau)
- c) connections between individual and collective or cosmic transition
- d) generalizing vs selective
- e) protology and eschatology vs man's present constitution and state
- f) integration into vs liberation from
- g) transition and the absolute; transition and mutability; transition and fall; transition and re-integration.

Needless to say, it is far from the organizers' intention to have all of these topics treated separately or synthetically during the Seminar. The purpose of the scheme is threefold: 1) to let the vast scope of the transition rites and notions be present in the minds of the participants; 2) to invite them to choose freely one particular topic or set of topics, treating them as a concrete basis for case study, allowing constructive discussion; 3) to invite the speakers to consider the setting of their particular topic(s) within the general scope of the transition rites and conceptions.

THE PROGRAM

The morning sessions took place in the Sala del Consiglio dei Professori (Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia); the afternoon sessions, in the Aula del Museo dei Gessi.

Saturday, 24 March 1984, 9h.

Inauguration

Juha Y. Pentikäinen, Transition Rites: An Anthropological Point of View.

Åke Hultkrantz, The American Indian Vision Quest: A Transition Ritual or a Device for Spiritual Aid?

Ugo Bianchi, Per una tipologia storica del 'passaggio'.

Monday, 26 March, 9h.

Jan Bergman, Nile and Jordan as Places and Symbols of Transition.
Dario Sabbatucci, Miti di passaggio e riti delle origini.
Ulf Drobin, The Myth of Loki and its Ritual Context.
Gilberto Mazzoleni, Il tempo ciclico riconsiderato.

Monday, 26 March, 15h.

Bernardo Bernardi, Riti di iniziazione e transizione post-puberale.
Arvi Hurskainen, The Ritual Structure of the Parakuyo Initiation.
Eila Helander, On the Rituals of Transitional Societies.
Maria Vittoria Cerutti, Sonno e iniziazione.

Tuesday, 27 March, 9h.

Nils G. Holm, Glossolalia as a Transition Rite.
Giulia Piccaluga, Un 'passaggio nella morte' nella religione romana.
Eira Saario, The world view of a Russian Orthodox writer, Tito Colliander.
René Gothóni, Entering Buddhist Monkhood.

Thursday, 27 March, 15h.

Juha Y. Pentikäinen, 'Life is a Heavy Rite'. Studying a Woman's Religiosity.
Louise Bäckman, The Initiation of the Shaman.
Emanuela Monaco, Considerazioni sulla visione puberale tra gli Ojibwa.
Nicola Gasbarro, La grammatica dei riti di passaggio.

Wednesday, 28 March, 9h.

Helena Helve, Youth Culture.
Ida Paladino, Il gallo e i riti di passaggio in Grecia.
Anna M.G. Capomacchia, Il 'passaggio ad est' dei mitici re orientali.

Wednesday, 28 March, 15h.

Concluding session: Final Discussion, *status quaestionis*.

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- Prof. Dr. Fabio Scialpi, Dipartimento di studi orientali, Università di Roma 'La Sapienza'
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- Prof. Dr. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, Università di Messina, Istituto di studi storico-religiosi
- Prof. Dr. Italo Signorini, Dipartimento di studi glotto-antropologici, Università di Roma 'La Sapienza'

STATEMENT OF THE SEMINAR - DOCUMENTO FINALE DEL SEMINARIO

As a conclusion of a prolonged and articulated discussion, the following statement was unanimously agreed upon at the end of the last session of the Seminar:

The aim of the Seminar was to examine the religious dynamisms of the ideological and the ritual pattern of 'passage' (or 'transition') from the point of view of both History of Religions and Anthropology of Religion, in order to reach a common evaluation of such a pattern, the historical existence of which is testified and qualified in its different and often diverging forms by comparative research.

An opinion was expressed that there is a need for a more specific use of the concept of transition rites in relation to the other ritual categories. According to this opinion, in order to speak about transition rites there should be a ritualized transitus, such as geographical, physical, social, cultural and individual transition.

The most general issue which confronted the participants of the Seminar was not merely terminological or «a matter of definition». It was also phenomenological and mostly comparative-historical.

Out of the experiences from many particular contributions and the general discussion, the parallel and comparative studies and researches of the *individual* «rites of passage» (life cycle rites, initiation, etc.) on one hand, and, on the other hand, *collective* (cyclical, seasonal, cosmological) «passages» or «transitions» (New Year festival, etc.), are strongly recommended. These researches may have as a consequence the presentation of a new typology stressing the common aspects of these two categories of rituals.

The main distinction between them (i.e. between the individual and the collective passages) is that the former are pre-eminently linear, the latter are cyclical. The former are oriented to the attainment of something «new» (a new status etc.), the latter are oriented to the renovation and cyclical *prorogatio* of life. Of course, there are overlappings and mutual participation between them. The individual passages (including the initiations) are perfectly «social» in their context and in their aim, concerning also (and often pre-eminently) the socialization of the individual and the renewal of the group through and beyond the access of new generations (as e.g. age class systems). On the other hand, in some mysteriosophic and gnostic initiatory ideologies and rituals of Late Antiquity, the model of the collective and cosmic passages may be summarized in the vicissitude of a hypostasis (the Soul, the «Great Man» [Anthropos]).

Taking into account the existence of some partial, common «aspects» of both series of ideologies and rituals, it seemed advisable to insist also on some «provisos», the first of which concerns the risk of a superficially analytical procedure, which takes no account of the conventional character of the van Gennep's phrase «rites de passage».

One of the major tasks of the Seminar was to find common «aspects» of the [already] mentioned ideologies and ritual patterns culminating formally in a tripartite scheme of «passage».

According to the position of some of the Italian participants, a mythical-ritual pattern, where there exist some dialectics between sacred and profane, and between myth and ritual, with different implications, is

to be especially observed. More generally speaking, we must distinguish between a religion pre-eminently concerned with the ritually repeated foundation of life in the present time, and a religion which is pre-eminently oriented to a perspective which is at the same time historical and eschatological. Moreover, it was remarked that shortcomings should be avoided in this field, shortcomings based on an insufficiently articulated and insufficiently exemplified typology of religion.

JUHA Y. PENTIKÄINEN

Transition rites

1. *The Rites of the Threshold: van Gennep's Prestructuralism* *

Arnold van Gennep belongs to such a group of scholars as were not particularly appreciated by his own generation. His work *Les rites de passage* was published as early as in 1909, but his theory had no greater influence on anthropological studies of religion before than at mid-century. The English edition was published as late as in 1960. Durkheim had more readers and followers than can Gennep at his time. Later on, van Gennep's ideas seem to have been forgotten under the influence of functional theories of the 1920's. The British social anthropology criticizes him for generalizing too much and for neglecting thorough analysis of any particular society. It is typical what Max Gluckman writes when introducing van Gennep's theory in the book *Essays on the ritual of social relations*¹. Referring to Junod's classic monograph on the Tsonga, Gluckman makes the following statement: «Nevertheless I would myself still advise a student, wishing to study *rites de passage*, to go to the persisting excitement of Junod rather than to van Gennep himself. Van Gennep is dull to me in the same way as Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is dull. [---]Van Gennep for me illustrates strikingly how a man can make an important discovery, and sense that he is on the way to further problems, yet be prevented from going on to exploit his discovery because he tries to prove his initial point beyond doubt in a form which his contemporaries and probably he himself, thought convincing»².

* Nos. 1-6 of this paper are reprinted with additions, with permission of the Donner Institute (Åbo).

¹ Cf. Gluckman 1962, particularly 1 ff.

² *Ib.* 9 ff.

It is, of course, clear that many of van Gennep's thoughts do not hold in the light of current research. Consequently, his concepts have got redefinitions and his classifications reformulations³. It can be mentioned, for example, that he did not make any difference between the three main categories⁴ of rites, i.e. rites of passage, calendar rites and rites of crisis. He did not pay particular attention to the analysis of social structure and social relations in any society either⁵. He was also too eager to show that his model was universal and concerned every ritual context and every society. But is this not true what comes to scientific and theoretical development in general? Some people prefer to generalize, some others to analyze. The progress of science needs both analysts and universalists.

One dilemma in the criticism concerning van Gennep's ideas might have been in putting his theory violently into too functional categories. Van Gennep has in general been regarded as a prefunctionalist⁶ whose categories would have been better understood when using the concepts of social structure and functional relationships à la Malinowski or Radcliffe-Brown. I would prefer to consider him as a *prestructuralist*. He clearly strived after a structural pattern which should be universal and concern every ritual complex as well as every society. Because the contemporary formalistic schools⁷ had not yet come far enough in their definitions, his concepts could not be very precise as far as structural analysis is concerned.

³ E. g. Chapple 484 ff.; Beals 55; Gluckman 1962, particularly 1 ff.; Honko 1964, 129 ff.; Glaser 1971, 1 ff., 157 ff.

⁴ Cf. Honko 1976, 71 ff. Honko summarizes his distinction in the following way (ib. 84):

Rite Category	Definition criteria		
	Social orientation	Repeatable	Predictable
Rite of passage	Individual	-	+
Calendar rite	Group	+	+
Crisis rite	Individual/Group	-	-

⁵ Cf. Gluckman 13 ff.

⁶ Cf. Gluckman 1962, particularly 1 ff.; Honko 1964, 129 ff.

⁷ E. g. Propp 20 f., 60 ff., 95; Dundes 1964, 58 ff.; Greimas 203 ff.; Pentikäinen 1978 a, 23 ff.

Van Gennep's basic idea is structural. According to his definition, *rites de passage* are rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. In primitive communities these changes are generally made public and their importance is hallowed by rites which follow a pattern. First comes the *séparation* in which the individual is removed from his previous social position. This is followed by an interim period, *marge*, during which the individual is poised on the borderline between the two positions. The third and last phase is the full entry into the position (*agrégation*). Hence, *rites de passage* are divided into three groups: 1. rites of separation, 2. rites of transition, 3. rites of incorporation⁸.

The structural emphasis becomes very clear in the last chapters of the introduction where van Gennep describes the phenomenon of crossing frontiers and other territorial passages. This part of the book has particularly been criticized by functionalists because it seems to confuse the universal borderline between «this world» and «the other-worldly». Van Gennep describes regional moves as follows: «Precisely: the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies. [---] Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal* (or threshold) *rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*»⁹

He closes the chapter on «The Territorial Passage» with the following statement: «In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting, and of departure – that is, as rites of passage.»¹⁰

Transition rites are sometimes used as a synonymous concept to rites of passage. This kind of usage has, however, too much widened the scope of the terminology suggested by van Gennep. For him, transition rites were a subcategory of *rites de passage*. The *transitus* over a threshold is a necessary criterion for the minimal definition of the concept of «transition rites».

⁸ Cf. Van Gennep 8 f.

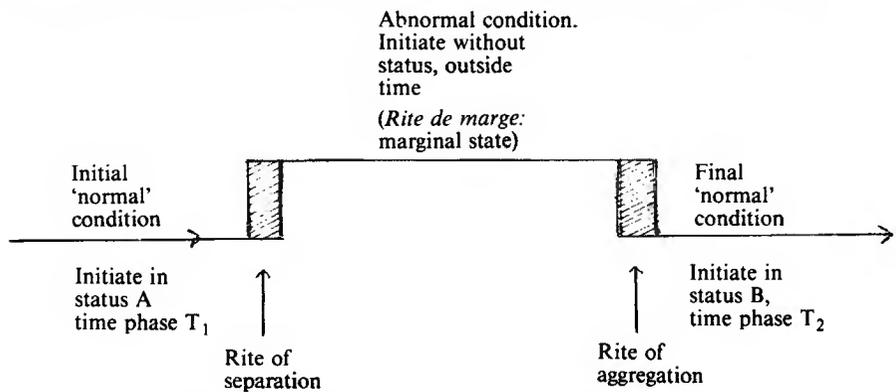
⁹ Ib. 20 f. The term *limen* is Latin, meaning "threshold". Cf. van Gennep "transition between".

¹⁰ Ib. 25.

2. *The liminal stage in the ritual performance*

In his several writings¹¹, Victor W. Turner has further developed van Gennep's idea on liminal rites. Turner's way of analysis is mainly symbolic and process oriented. He also speaks about the structural analysis of rites and symbols. In his terminology, the concept of «structure» coincides with that of «social structure», according to the usage of British social anthropology. The concept of «anti-structure» and «communitas» are used in the description of the liminal stage: «In liminality, *communitas* tends to characterize relationships between those jointly undergoing ritual tradition. The bonds of *communitas* are anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential, I-Thou relationships. *Communitas* is spontaneous, immediate, concrete – it is not shaped by norms, it is not institutionalized, it is not abstract.»¹²

Under the liminal stage, people, for example the *initiands*, are beyond the boundaries of the normal social structure, its values, norms and obligations. The marginal state which starts from the rites of separation is an abnormal condition, outside society and time. For that reason it is possible for people to behave according to the habits and norms which do not coincide with those of the «normal» social structure and its conditions. For example, sexual freedom is a common characteristic of the marginal period in the initiation rites of many peoples. The marginal abnormal condition is ended by rites of aggregation which make new status relationships public to the community. The general three-phase scheme of rites of passage can be illustrated by the following figure¹³:



¹¹ E. g. Turner 1969, 94 ff.; 1974, 1 ff.; 1974 a, 12 ff.; 231 ff.; 145 ff.; 1975a, 207 ff.; Ms 1 ff.

¹² Turner 1974 a, 272 ff.

¹³ Cf. Leach 78.

Van Gennep characterized the condition of the initiates in the following way: «The novices are outside society, and society has no power over them, especially since they are actually sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be.»¹⁴ Turner expresses the same as follows: «They are dead to the social world, but alive to the asocial world. --- In liminality, profane-social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down but by way of compensation, cosmological systems (as objects of serious study) may become of central importance for the novices, who are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth, song, instruction in a secret language, and various non-verbal symbolic genres, such as dancing, painting, clay-moulding, wood-carving, masking, etc., with symbolic patterns and structures which amount to teaching about the structure of the cosmos and their culture as a part and product of it, in so far as these are defined and comprehended, whether implicitly or explicitly. Liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic events.»¹⁵

3. *The ritual movements of the Karelian wedding drama*

From the structural point of view, the liminal stage could also be regarded as a crucial phase in the sequence of the ritual drama. When rites of passage are investigated as structured symbolic behaviour, it is also possible to find and isolate smaller units of analysis. In my study on the White Sea Karelian wedding ceremonies I used the ritual movement¹⁶ from one status to another as the basic unit of structural analysis.

Concerning the transformations of statuses, we can differentiate six basic positions¹⁷. In the case of the girl, she is moved from her 1. previous statuses as daughter (of her parents) and member of family (group and family line), youth etc., to that of 2. a wooed girl, 3. *antilas* («the girl to be given away» referring to liminality) and 4. bride in the course of the wedding ceremony. After these steps there are still two positions which are made public later on, namely that of 5. wife after having become officially registered by an Orthodox priest, and that of 6. spouse and mother having borne her first child. In the case of the boy, we can

¹⁴ Van Gennep 114.

¹⁵ Turner Ms 18ff.; Pentikäinen 1978, 182ff.

¹⁶ Cf. Lawson Ms 18 ff.; Pentikäinen 1978, 182 ff.

¹⁷ More thoroughly in Pentikäinen 1978, 199 ff.