To lock up Eleusis. A question of liminal space

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HAVING TRAVELLED to the land of the dead, Heracles, the archetypal hero, made a novel suggestion: 'Lock up Eleusis and the sacred fire,' he said.[1] Thus he proposed to put an end to what Cicero called the best of all 'excellent and indeed divine institutions that Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life' (Cic. *Leg.* 2.36). It is not, however, that Heracles did not acknowledge the intrinsic value of the mysteries, but through his ultimate experience it seems that the hero had found the very pattern upon which the Eleusinian mysteries were based: 'I have experienced far truer mysteries ... I have seen Korê' (Vogliano 1937:177).

That death is a central element in Heracles' ultimate experience is obvious. Just as important, however, is how the hero reached this point geographically. Heracles' story is not one of dying and subsequent resurrection, it is one of going to Hades while still alive. As this journey to the land of the dead would entail extensive travelling through vast and—from a Greek point of view—uncivilised landscapes, I wish to argue that it is not only the contemplating of Korê that reflects the experience of the Eleusinian mysteries. The encounter with the queen of Hades represents only the climax of the long ordeal of this ultimate, spatial passage.[2] Also the Argonauts prepared for their perilous journey to the ends of the earth through being initiated. Going through the mysteries of the Cabeiri on the island of Samothrace ensured that the heroes with 'greater safety could sail over the chilling sea.'[3]

The novel suggestion of Heracles as recorded on a second century AD papyrus found in Egyptian Tebtunis (*cf.* Vogliano 1937:175-76), is also reflected in Euripides' fifth century BC tragedy *Heracles*. Here, too, the hero succeeded in his journey to the land of the dead, this time, however, only because he had *previously* gone

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1 Vogliano 1937, 176-77. '[ ]λόγοι Ἡρ]ακλέους μὴ ἐωμέ[νου τελ]εῖσθαι τὰ ' Ελευσίνια. [πάλαι μ]εμ<ύ>ημαι. ἀπόκλει[σον τὴν ' Ε]λευσεῖνα καὶ τὸ πῦρ [τὸ ἱερόν,] δᾳδοῦχε, καὶ φθό[νει νυκ]τὸς ἱερᾶς· μυστήρια [πολλῷ ἀ]ληθέστερα μεμύημαι ... τὴν Κόρην εῖδον.' 'Heracles said: To go through that of Eleusis do not satiate me. I have [just] been initiated. Lock up Eleusis and the sacred [fire], torch-bearer (an officer at the Eleusinian mysteries), envy the sacred night. I have been initiated into [far] truer mysteries ... I have seen Korê.' I owe it to Walter Burkert for being aware of this text.

through the rites of Eleusis (Eur. *HF* 610-13). Thus, also Euripides implied that there was a close relation between the experience of the mysteries and that of travelling in the uncivilised landscapes.

All of these examples indicate a certain cultural pattern, a pattern so central and enduring within the ancient Greek world view that it could be reflected in the classical plays of Euripides, just as much as in late Hellenistic papyri six centuries later. Going through the mysteries would in some way prepare the traveller for the extreme journey not only to the land of the dead, but also to the uncultivated landscapes of the periphery in general. It seems that what we are presented with is a landscape somehow linked with the Greek rites of passage, a certain geography of initiation. It is at least obvious that the more distant areas of the Greek world view played a very distinct part in this ritual universe. The main question thus becomes, how and to what degree the Greek understanding of space may be understood as being analogous to the highly ritually manipulated moments of time in the rites of passage. Is there such a thing as an ancient Greek space of passage? Can one operate with a notion of *liminal space* within the ancient Greek world view?

The theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner

The *rites of passage* as first defined by Arnold van Gennep in his influential book of the same name (van Gennep [1960, orig.1909]), include the sequence of three phases: first the subject has to go through a rite of segregation from his or her previous role in society. Then he or she goes through an intermediate phase, before finally being reaggregated into his or her new role.

Victor Turner is the scholar who with the greatest success has elaborated van Gennep's theories, most importantly by coining the term *liminality*. This term referred to van Gennep's 'liminal state' or 'interstructural situation' that Turner found typical for that intermediate phase between the ritual separation and aggre-

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2   Indeed, most versions will render how Heracles descended into Hades through some crevice in the earth's surface usually in Greece proper. When Odysseus met Heracles at the border of Hades, the implication is nevertheless that Heracles, when alive, had travelled the same route as Odysseus, that is, sailing across Oceanus to the uttermost end of the world and there entering Hades (*Hom. Od.* 11.620-26; *cf. ibid.* 10.508-12). Also the late fifth century BC tragedian Euripides writes of Heracles' sailing to Hades (... τὸν πολυδάκρυον ἔπλευσ' ἐς "Αιδαν ... Eur. *HF* 426-27), though he also at the same time operates with the more traditional descent. A passage by the first or second century AD mythographer Pseudo-Apollodorus seems pretty much to reflect the story of Heracles in the *Odyssey*, rendering how the hero crossed Oceanus and then encountered the cattle of Hades and their herdsman Menoetes (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.10). Even though this story actually refers to Heracles' getting the herd of the giant Geryon, Hades' cattle and the herdsman are the same the ultimate hero meets when he is about to enter the dank abode to fetch Cerberus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.12). This suggests again that the crossing the Oceanus to the literal end of the world could have been Heracles' original way of reaching Hades.

3   Aesch. according to Ath. 428f; *cf.* also Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.915-18. and Bremmer 1998:99-100.

gation from and to proper social roles: This is 'a realm ... *betwixt and between* ... any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised' (Turner 1967:93, 94). Having to be bordered by one opposite at either side between which it may represent a state of transition, the interstructural or liminal state is consequently defined by what it *is not.*

Turner also pointed to a general sense of confusion and ambiguity that he found typical of this initiatory mid state. Normally incompatible elements of the conditions, in between which the interstructural state is found, will be paradoxically juxtaposed and recombined. It 'may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (Turner 1967:97). Every element of existence may be found severed from its usual context, juxtaposed by its usually mutually exclusive opposite, and assembled into new, totally nonsensical combinations. Thus, all the usual social states of gender, age, hierarchy, as well as even more basic opposites as human versus divine, human versus animal, dead versus alive, may be negated and reverted in the liminal state.

Regardless of whether one considers van Gennep's rites of passage a universal phenomenon or not, his liminal state, as has been emphasised in a large number of studies, offers a pattern that fits well with the structure of the various ancient Greek mysteries and other transitional rites leading the subject from one culturally recognised state to another.[4] Van Gennep himself, in fact, based his theories to a large degree on the structures of the ancient mysteries and other Greek transitional rites.[5] Examples such as the reversal of gender roles, outright cross-dressing, the dressing up as animals, the symbolical intermingling with gods, apparent sacrilege and even pseudo-cannibalism, all fit well within this ambiguous pattern.

I am, however, using the term *liminality* with caution. This is partly because the term has almost acquired a status of being a universal phenomenon, apparently independent from the various cultural contexts. Moreover, there is an increasing tendency, initiated by the late Turner himself, of applying the term to the most various phenomena, often quite unrelated to actual transitional rites. In my use of the term liminality I will therefore ask the reader to be aware that I always keep to its initial meaning, as an analytical tool intimately connected to the intermediate phase of the ritual transition. When I turn to the Greek material, I will, therefore, use the term 'liminal' only for phenomena which the Greeks themselves considered connected to the intermediate phase of their rites of passage. It is subsequent-

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4 See *e.g.* Burkert (1987), Marinatos 1995, Nelis 1991, Redfield 1990, Scully 1990, Versnel 1990, and Vidal-Naquet 1986.

5 *Cf.* van Gennep 1960:18, 37, 89-91.

ly also important to keep in mind that liminality, of course, was not a term of the ancient Greeks.

Even though the theories of van Gennep and Turner have proven helpful for the understanding of ancient transitional rituals, they can only bring us part of the way towards a theory of how the Greek could operate with such an intimate connection between their rites of passage and the geographical periphery, as how they perceived that area. When developing his definition of the temporal phase of the rite of passage, Arnold van Gennep saw the territorial border zones between the more clearly defined areas as not only structurally identical with the intermediate period of transitional rituals, but considered the physical passage as the very *origin* of the rites of spiritual passage (Gennep 1960:22). If we look to the structural implication of this idea of a transitional area, we realise that this is an area that is defined by what it is not—just as the liminal state in the rites of passage. It is something like a spatial remain, a non-structuralised border area that appears only as other, culturally recognised areas are defined away from it.

In this way, van Gennep opened up for the idea that there are certain border areas that represent a mental and social transition for the person who traverses it. It seems that van Gennep's theories also include a notion of *liminal space*, even though he did not use that exact term. Was, however, van Gennep right in thinking that space, just as well as the manipulated time of the rites of passage, could be the medium for the interstructural state of liminality? And if he was correct, how is the term *liminal space* going to help us understand the intimate relation between the geographical periphery and the Greek initiatory rites? As van Gennep refrained from any further theoretical elaboration of these spatial theories, he does not provide us with any more means for seeing how the ancient Greeks constructed their world in such a way that there existed an interrelation between the intermediate state of their rites of passage and the most distant parts of their world.

Victor Turner was in no way unaware of that space could play an important part within a given cultural context. His understanding of any possible connection between space and liminality was, however, in no way straightforward. In his studies on pilgrimage, he would use a spatial understanding of van Gennep's threshold analogy, referring to how a 'pilgrimage center, from the standpoint of the believing actor, also represents a threshold, a place and moment "in and out of time"' (Turner 1974:197). For Turner certain places, like Rome and Mecca, remain 'fundamentally liminal to the entire world of political organisation' (Turner & Turner 1978:168). This pattern of single places of liminality may be summed in how he considered a 'spatial location of liminality' as an area 'clearly set apart' (Turner & Turner 1978:4). This understanding of spatial liminality, however, is contradictory not only to van Gennep's idea of liminal space as representing an essentially unstructured area, but also to Turner's own notion of liminality generally being 'a

realm ... *betwixt and between* ... any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised' (Turner 1967:93, 94). By describing it as an area 'clearly set apart' Turner made his understanding of spatial liminality into an example of a 'stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised'—the very notion in absolute contradiction to his own idea of ritual liminality.

While van Gennep saw the undefined, transitional areas as loaded with meaning projected onto it by the culture that contemplated it, Turner considered the culturally undefined space as a neutral ground that could only acquire a quality of liminality through some liminal ritual taking place there. His notion that space only acquires meaning through ritual performance, is evident both in his analyses of Ndembu ritual and in his study of different pilgrimages. Writing on pilgrimage and initiation, he summed up: 'The former liminalizes time; the latter, space' (Turner 1992:39).

As culturally recognised places are carved out of an originally undefined territory, huge areas will also remain outside of these culturally recognised frames. Turner, however, did not recognise how these spatial 'remains,' also represent cultural constructions (*cf.* Endsjø 1997). He thus failed to appreciate how spatial entities were perceived to possess an *autonomous* liminal status within a given world view.

This autonomy of the geographical, liminal space is the notion that must be considered to lie behind Heracles' claim that he no longer had any need for the Eleusinian mysteries after his extensive travelling in the distant geography. In this case the periphery seems to possess a certain liminal aspect—the same phenomenological essence as the intermediate phase of the transitional rites.

In spite of his own not very helpful geographical elaborations, Turner's original definition of liminality does nevertheless not have to be restricted to temporal categories. His understanding of liminality as 'a realm ... *betwixt and between* ... any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised,' may easily be applied to aspects of space, in accordance with van Gennep's original insight.

The intermingling of life and death

Parallel to how the uttermost periphery was considered rather like a spatial image of the rites of passage, the uncultivated areas right outside of the city walls were used as the venue for a number of Greek initiatory rites: here young boys would attain maturity and the right to citizenship. The Athenian *ephebes*, for example, would be sent out to the wild mountainsides and there have their civic status forever altered, while Cretan youths on the brink of manhood would be abducted into the wilderness by older lovers (Strabo 10.4.21). Bringing somebody to these areas just outside the *polis* meant that he or she was removed from civil society more than just spatially. The myths of many of the great heroes reflect a similar

mechanism. While Achilles, Actaeon, Aristaeüs, Asclepius, Jason and later also his son, Medus, all reached their manhood in the wild landscapes of the centaur Chiron, the adolescent Odysseus was sent to the mountain slopes of Parnassus where he experienced an initiatory ordeal through the instructions of his maternal grandfather, Autolycus.[6]

As indicated by these various examples of apparently liminal incidents, the most distant geography and the wasteland just outside of the cultivated areas did not represent regions that were essentially different from each other. In the *Bacchae* Euripides clearly demonstrated that this was the case, as he had the mountainsides just outside of Thebes filled with native women celebrating the mythical prototype of the Dionysian mysteries together with the god himself and his entourage of foreign women. All the areas not under the cultivation of the Greek *polis* may, in fact, be summed up by the term the *eschatia*, the furthest part. This term not only applied to the most distant periphery, but was also generally used for the uncultivated areas bordering immediately on the civilised geography (Hartog 1988:13).

Thus, if we shall operate with a notion of *liminal space* within the Greek world view, this would be the *eschatia*, which covered everything that was considered uncivilised geography: the mountains, the forests, the barbarian lands, and the seas. The only trait common to all of these areas, was that they all lay *outside of the Greek city walls*, which were symbolically representing the limits of civilised society. The *eschatia*, the landscapes that the ancient Greeks repeatedly related to the experience of the rites of passage, stretched accordingly from the hinterland just outside the *polis* to the uttermost periphery at the ends of the earth.

Having proposed that the Greek *eschatia* represented a *liminal space* by pointing to a number of examples where this area apparently reflected the intermediate state of various Greek rites of passage, our next task will be to see how the ancient Greeks constructed their world view in such a way that they logically could perceive this interrelation. As Victor Turner emphasised, it is the placement betwixt and between two culturally recognised stable conditions that creates the intermediate state of the rites of passage. If the *eschatia* was a *geographical* area that was situated between different sets of stable culturally recognised *geographical* conditions, we shall therefore have a structural parallel to the middle phase of the ancient Greek rites of passage.

Looking for stable geographical conditions, we will, of course, find the Greek *polis* as a natural point of departure. Through its mere presence, the *polis* not only

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6   Achilles in *Il.* 11.831-32; Actaeon in Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.4; Aristaeüs in Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.509-10; Asclepius in *Il.* 4.218-19, and in Pind. *Pyth.* 3.5-7; Jason in Pind. *Pyth.* 4.102; Jason's son Medus in Hes. *Theog.* 1001-2; and Odysseus in Hom. *Od.* 19.392-96.

defined the *eschatia* as its geographical periphery, but was also the area that represented the only place of true humanity. *Without polis*, man was 'either a beast or a god,' as Aristotle pointed out (Arist. *Pol.* 1253a). The city defined a space which in itself was humanising. The space of the *polis* constituted a stable and culturally recognised geographical condition representing a certain cultural pattern that pertained to all aspects of the proper human existence.

It is important, however, also to include the cultivated land, the *chora*, within the notion of the human *polis*. With the exception of Sparta,[7] there was no city state, as far as I know, whose *chora* in any way represented an entity radically different from the more urbanised space of the *polis*: the city area and the cultivated land together constituted the land of human civilisation.

The *polis* was nevertheless not an eternal entity. For its continued existence, the city depended upon its denisens living according to a number of cultural rules that defined them as humans. A serious negligence or reversal of any of these crucial practices would be tantamount to dehumanising the space of the *polis*. Among these essential activities were the practice of sacrifice and agriculture, the eating of bread, the necessity of working for survival, and, most importantly, a number of clear lines set up for keeping death on the outside (*cf.* Endsjø 2000). Defining the space of human life, the *polis* would not tolerate death in its midst and demanded that ritual precautions should be made to keep the city safe from pollution caused by any occurrence of death. Within a prescribed time, anyone who died within the parameters of the city walls was literally carried out of the space of the *polis* through the ritual of the *ekphora*.[8]

The fact that *polis* represented the only space where proper human life might be fulfilled, suggests that the *polis* may be considered to reflect a perceived *space of life*. The great precautions for keeping death outside the city walls further indicate that the realm diametrically *opposite* to the existence of *polis* was that of human death. However, if the definition of the *polis* as the *space of life* may appear somewhat original, the quest for a *space of death* will not lead us into uncharted territories: *Hades*, or the land of the dead, was a well known entity within the Greek world view.

Mirroring how *polis* represented a territory where everything reflected the notions of human life, Hades represented a space where everything was death. The

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7   The Spartan *krypteiai*, young men in their transitional period, would roam their own countryside as well as the *eschatia*, harassing and even killing unfortunate Helots, public slaves not belonging to the city space proper (*cf.* Osborne 1987:150). It is because the very existence of these Spartan citizens-to-be in all manners was removed from the agricultural sphere of their society, that the cultivated land, the *chora*, for the Spartans also could represent an area of transition along with the uncultivated mountainsides and other wastelands.

8   Solon according to Dem. 43.62, Pl. *Leg.* 960a, Antiph. 6.34.

most important aspect of Hades in this context, however, will be its location. Just as death was man's ultimate temporal limit, the space in which humans might venture was also ultimately bounded by death. There was subsequently (as indicated at the start of this article) an explicit notion that death *could* be reached geographically. Odysseus' journey to the land of the dead was definitely a geographical adventure, as the hero went by the river Oceanus, beyond the island of Circe at the end of the earth, to the borders of the land of the dead (Hom. *Od.* 10.508-12). Accordingly, the peoples of the absolute geographical periphery, such as Homer's Cimmerians, were said to live closer to the dead (Hom. *Od.* 11.12-15).

The utmost boundaries of the world represented a spatial reflection of how man ceased to exist beyond his own human limits. The term used was *to peras* or *to peirar*—that is an end, limit, boundary—regardless whether the matter in question was that of the end of the world, the temporal borders of the human life (*cf.* Soph. *OT* 1530), or even the limit of man's physical performance. As man's limitations thus were reflected in both a temporal, a physical, as well as in a geographical manner, common to all three dimensions was that there was a limit of human potential beyond which one touched upon the realm where man was not.[9] These borders were equal to the Homeric and Hesiodic *peirata gaiês*[10]—the very end of the world beyond which the world no longer existed.

The different spaces of the *eschatia*, the *polis*, and Hades all represented different patterns that made certain ways of existence either possible or impossible. In the way it was culturally constructed, space seems in this way to have represented a rather uncompromising factor within the world view of ancient Greece (*cf.* Endsjø 2000). A certain spatial entity would embrace all aspects of the reality it was considered to reflect. Thus, there would always appear an intimate connection between any given area and that which belonged within it.

When the existential dichotomy of human *life* and *death* in this way was transferred onto the externalised reality of space, we find that this duality was expanded into the more comprehensive dichotomy of *being* and *non-being*. The notion of the nothingness of Hades was subsequently also repeatedly emphasised: the dead encountered by Odysseus were completely powerless, immaterial shadows without a

9   Building on this understanding of these as related phenomena, the fifth century BC poet Pindar used the Pillars of Heracles as a metaphor to hail the highest achievements of the athletes in the Panhellenic games (*Nem.* 3.20-23; *cf. Isthm.* 4.11-12). 'Pindar measures the prowess of his athlete-patrons in geographic terms, seeing their victories as journeys into distant space' (Romm 1992:18). One could only reach as far as the Pillars, 'further is impassable (ἄβατον) for both wise and unwise' (*Ol.* 3.44-45). In his Pythian odes (*Pyth.* 10.27-30) Pindar wrote of the land of the Hyperboreans as a similar metaphor for the utmost limit (περαίνει πρὸς ἔσχατον) of the athlete.

10   *Il.* 8.478-79, 14.200, 14.301; Hom. *Od.* 4.563, 9.284; *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 227; Hes. *Theog.* 334-35, 518, 622, 731; *peirata pontoio* in *Il.* 8.478-79; *peirath' Okeanos* in *Od.* 11.13.

speck of wisdom (*Od.* 10.494-95), while the cap of Hades donned its wearer the guise of invisibility (*Il.* 5.844-45). This consistent immateriality of Hades indicates an actual notion of inspatiality in the land of the dead. This quality of non-being was also reflected in an actual timelessness in Hades, as indicated by the way 'the *psychê* of the dead' was thought to be 'frozen in time at the moment of death' (Keuls 1974:14)—or more precisely: the immaterial form of the dead remained forever in the state that it was at the moment of the final transposal to Hades. Men who had been slain in battle continued to wear their bloodstained armour (*Il.* 11.40f.), while the ghost of Clytemnestra could still display the fatal wounds that her son had given her (Aesch. *Eum.* 103). Jan N. Bremmer emphasises how the same kind of situation is depicted on vases, 'where the dead [in Hades] are regularly shown with their wounds, sometimes still bandaged' (Bremmer 1983:84). Someone who died or otherwise ended up in the land of the dead as an infant would subsequently also forever remain this way (*cf. Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 256-59). This timelessness of death relates also to the notion of a 'beautiful death': the good fortune of dying while still young and the absolute importance of keeping the body intact for the obsequies.[11]

Having found how the two existential human opposites of life and death were projected onto the ancient Greek world map, we see that the Greek *eschatia* becomes the spatial reflection of the interstructural or liminal period a person goes through at the point of dying. This was also recognised by both Homer and Apollonius of Rhodes as they let respectively the Odyssean and the Argonautic crew, at the moment when they considered themselves to be forever lost in the liminal space of the *eschatia*, imitate the ritual drawing of a veil over one's head. This was an act performed at the moment of death, for example by Hippolytus and Socrates.[12] Also Alcestis, as she returned from death, would keep herself covered with a veil (Eur. *Alc.* 1006-125). This custom was, moreover, intimately connected to initiatory rites, such as those at the Eleusinian mysteries: the neophytes would imitate how Demeter sat on a fleece with a veil over her face.[13] Probably not unrelated either is how the Greek bride at her point of transition into womanhood would be sporting a veil.

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11   *Cf.* Vernant 1991:50-74. Even the gods recognised this and would sometimes see to it that the corpse of someone who was especially dear to them would not in any way suffer harm (*e.g.* Hector's body in *Il.* 23.184-91).

12   *Od.* 10.179; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1294-96; Eur. *Hipp.* 1457-58; Pl. *Phd.* 118a; *cf.* Eur. *HF* 1159-1231. The crew of Odysseus drew their cloaks over their heads as they arrived at Circe's island, the same reaction as that of the Argonauts to their ending up in the formless landscapes of Libya.

13   Neophytes as, for example, depicted on a Neapolitan freeze. *Cf.* Bianchi 1976:fig. 49. Demeter in *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 196f.

Located betwixt and between the land of the dead as the realm of absolute non-being and the *polis* as the place of ideal being, the Greek *eschatia* was sandwiched between two stable geographical conditions. As can be seen in the ritual carrying out of the deceased, the *eschatia* was the area where the dead and the living could go together in a way impossible not only in the city, but also in Hades. Only the superhuman heroes Heracles and Orpheus could successfully return from the land of the dead, while the more human Odysseus never actually entered Hades but stayed on its borders. If he had gone further he would most probably, like Theseus and Peirithoüs, not have been able to return: his entrance would have been the geographical equivalent to his physical death.

As most versions of Heracles' journey to Hades indicate, this horizontal view of a geographical land of the dead was often complemented by a concept of Hades as a lower realm: Homer artfully combined the two notions as he had the slaughtered suitors of Penelope led by Hermes '*down* the dark ways,' and then, '*past* the streams of Oceanus ..., *past* the gates of the sun and the land of dreams.'[14]

If we look closer at the idea of how Hades was found both under the earth as well at the end of the earth, we find that the *eschatia* was not only placed betwixt and between two stable geographical conditions horizontally, but also vertically. Opposite Hades as a place of chthonic deities, there was, of course, also the Olympian heaven as the place of the celestial gods. The *eschatia*, the area that we originally saw as being mythically and ritually correlating with the interstructural phase of the Greek rites of passage, was thus found to exist not only betwixt and between the notion of human being and non-being, but also betwixt and between the two different divine spheres of the Olympians and of Hades.

Other examples of defining spatial liminality

Even though neither van Gennep nor Turner offered an elaborated definition of a liminal space that may be applied directly to the ancient Greek context, the term is nevertheless not totally unfamiliar in ancient Greek studies. I shall here discuss three uses of the term. However, even though all these examples offer interesting definitions, I do not consider any of them to offer a viable explanation of the intimate relation between the ancient Greek rites of passage and the geographical periphery. Stephen Scully, for example, describes a 'liminal, suburban space' existing between 'polis and *apolis*, city and mountain ..., human and natural order' (Scully 1990:10, 13). Regardless of the fact that this ignores the initiatory connotations of *all 'apolis*,' Scully never supports his use of the term by trying to link the area that he has in mind, directly or allegorically, with specific rites of passage. We are left

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14   *Od.* 24.10-13; *cf.* Eur. *HF* 23-25, 426-28.

only with an expression 'liminal space' meaning nothing but a 'point of transition' which refers to going in or out of town (Scully 1990:13).

Damien P. Nelis writes about a similarly placed 'liminal stage between the city and' a not very precise 'land outside it' (Nelis 1991:99). Nelis, however, identifies this area as 'the realm of Artemis' (1991:99), and it is because of the goddess' close association with Greek transitional rites from childhood to maturity that he labels this area as liminal. This is an interesting perspective, but Nelis does not pursue this idea, either by pointing to further relations between the area in question and different rites of passage, or by looking for liminal qualities in the landscape itself. His 'liminal stage' placed 'between the city and the land outside it' also appears as a somewhat limited circle around the *polis*, and is actually severed from what he himself refers to as the 'unknown territories' where any 'long and dangerous journey' would take place (Nelis 1991:99).

The most interesting approach I have come across so far comes from Nannó Marinatos in her analysis of Circe as a liminal figure and her island as 'a liminal place' (Marinatos 1995:134). She refers to several incidents where the experiences of Odysseus and his crew mirror Greek transitional rites, especially funerary rituals. Among her examples are the guidance of Hermes, the funerary meal of honey, barley and dairy products offered to the unfortunate comrades of Odysseus, and how the crew are made into pigs, animals 'appropriate to chthonic goddesses: the transformation of the men can thus be seen as a kind of symbolic death or sacrifice.'[15] She also suggests that certain natural phenomena indicate that the area itself possessed a certain liminal quality and moreover supports her interpretation by pointing to that Circe's island for Odysseus appears to be a necessary geographical stopover on the journey to and from the land of the dead. Thus, Marinatos argues, Circe functions as 'the gate-keeper of the underworld' (1995:137, 133).

However, Marinatos apparently seems to regard Circe's Aeaea as a rather singular place in the Greek world view. Through giving Circe's island this uniquely liminal position as 'a bridge between two worlds' (Marinatos 1995:133), Marinatos puts everything that belongs on the other side of this enchanted island—from the human cities to the wondrous landscapes of the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians—into one and the same territorial category. In this way she, in fact, makes several nonsensical and fantastic parts of the *eschatia* the spatial equivalent to the *polis*—defining them all as the land of the living. She disregards the many liminal references in all other places in the Greek periphery.

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15 Marinatos 1995:134; for the funerary meal see *Od.* 10.234-35; *cf. ibid.* 10.516-21 and 11.26-28.

The intermingling of humans, gods, and the dead

As I have argued, the way Victor Turner defined the liminal state of the rites of passage as one 'of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories' (Turner 1967:97), is a good way of describing both the intermediate state of the ancient Greek rites of passage. This confusion was often described with terms of the ultimate paradox of life and death as these two states represented the starting and the ending points of the most radical of all human transitions. Apuleius even called the ritual initiation a 'voluntary death' (Apul. *Met.* 11.21).

The liminal experience was, however, not comparable to the *state* of death, but to the moment of *dying*: death in its ultimate form was the realm one reached at the very other end of this interstructural experience, just as Heracles' encounter with Persephone was only the climax of his ordeal. Also Plutarch or Porphyry drew an intimate parallel between dying and the experience of the great mysteries: the two phenomena 'correspond word for word and thing for thing' (Stob. 4.52.49). Thus, according to Walter Burkert, for the initiated Greek 'real death' seemed 'no more than a repetition' of a passage already ritually performed (Burkert 1983:296).

Returning to the interstructurally placed *eschatia*, we find the same sense of ambiguity and confusion as in that which I argue was its ritual counterpart. The many different ways the *eschatia* and the intermediate period of the rites of passage seem to have been interrelated, indicate that within the ancient Greek world view there existed a structural parallel between the two phenomena. They were both representing states lacking structural stability and placed betwixt and between culturally recognised stable conditions.

The experience of the *eschatia* mirrored that of the transitional ritual. Following in the footsteps of the ancient heroes, one would discover that various aspects of death again and again appeared long *before* one reached the ultimate limit of humanity and the border of the land of the dead: elements of non-being seem somehow to be omnipresent in the *eschatia*. The vast area betwixt and between the two defined boundaries of the city walls and the end of the world, was, in fact, a broad border zone where neither of the two existential opposites of being and non-being dominated, and where they therefore paradoxically coexisted (if one may use such a term also with the notion of non-being). Immediately as he left the *polis* and its defined order of civilisation, the prototypal Greek traveller would therefore enter an area where life symbolically mingled with death, being with non-being. In an ancient ship the passengers would in this way be no further from death than the thickness of the side of the vessel.[16]

The mythical examples of how the *eschatia* was perceived as an area where life was paradoxically juxtaposed with death are manifold. Those who left for the *es-*

16   Anacharsis according to Diog. Laërt. 1.103.

chatia were repeatedly considered dead though they were still alive. This was the case with, for example, Pindar's Jason as he grew up in the cave of Chiron.[17] Apollonius of Rhodes similarly let Jason's mother moan the second departure of her son—now as a young man—as if all hope of her being buried by him now was gone (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.268-91). Abandoned in the desert landscapes of Lemnos, Philoctetes was consequently both '*apolis*' and 'a corpse among the living' (Soph. *Phil.* 1018). The ancient seer, Phineus, was apparently also veering somewhere between life and death, as he in his isolation was not able neither to live nor to die (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.446-48). The geographical margins could in this way offer a possible existence removed from both life and death.

This connection between death and the *eschatia* is also seen in how mythical figures on the very point of death were literally removed to the geographical margins: Menelaus was promised an eternal existence after his normal life span, in the Elysian plain at the end of the world (*Od.* 4.561-65), while many of the heroes fighting around Thebes and Troy were offered an existence at the equally peripheral islands of the blessed, away from both Hades and the normal human realm (Hes. *Op.* 161-69). In the fifth century BC manner of making the barbarian geography the equivalent of mythical places, Pindar and Euripides transformed this most otherworldly place to an island in the Euxine Sea, where they conveyed both Achilles and his father, Peleus, in their afterlives.[18] It was to similar marginal areas that Iphigenia and Phrixus were transported at the very point of their death. Just as they were being sacrificed, they were both miraculously translated—Iphigenia by Artemis to the land of the Taurians (Eur. *IT* 26-31), Phrixus by an immortal ram to the land of Aeëtes (Eratosth. [*Cat.*] 19). Also the awful sphinx apparently brought her victims to some bright, distant place (Eur. *Phoen.* 807-11). None of these figures who were removed to the world's periphery, were, however, really dead. Not having entered Hades, they would remain in an ambiguous state betwixt and between life and death, a state equivalent to the geography to which they had been transported. The geographical margins in this way offered a possible existence beyond both life and death (*cf.* Endsjø 2001:56-59).

One may argue that these mythical examples have little to do with the real life of the ancient Greeks, but then one forgets how these stories represent the very foundation upon which the various rites of passage were based. The *eschatia* was, for example, the space that offered the adolescents access to adulthood through initiatory ordeals '*onto death*' or '*of which the end may be death.*'[19] Richard Buxton accurately expresses this connection between the prototypal *eschatia* reflected in the

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17 Pind. *Pyth.* 4.111-15; *cf.* also Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.247-91.

18 Pind. *Nem.* 4.49-50; Eur. *Andr.* 1259-62.

19 ἐπὶ καὶ θανάτῳ, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.186.

myths and in the ritual context of 'real life': 'Myth translates ritual: to leave one's city is—if you spell it out—to die' (Buxton 1994:153). When asked who were the more numerous, the living or the dead, the legendary sixth century BC Greco-Scythian sage Anacharsis was said to have retorted, 'where do you place those who are sailing the seas?' (Diog. Laërt. 1.104). The tales of actual, historical events could also follow the mythical pattern very closely, as was seen in the case of the fifth century BC Lydian king Croesus. Just as he had climbed upon his own funeral pyre, the king and his daughters were believed to have been snatched away by Apollo and brought to the distant lands of the Hyperboreans (Bacchyl. 3.48-62).

The way the traveller of the *eschatia* was thought to suffer death while still alive, emphasises how the *polis* represented the only space where proper human life was possible. However, by stating that *proper* man was found only in the context of the *polis*, one must at the same time also allow that the *eschatia* reflected a human *potential*. Even though Aristotle may be seen to have exaggerated when he claimed that man without the *polis* was 'either a beast or a god' (Arist. *Pol.* 1253a), the ancient Greeks' view of the peoples surrounding them was that these represented a humanity that had not come to its fruition. This attitude can be seen in the way these peoples often were considered not to have achieved the proper separation from either the sphere of the animals, the gods, or the dead. Accordingly, the inhabitants of the *eschatia* did few or none of the things that were deemed as essential for defining anyone as human—or at least they did not do them properly.

As we recall how life and death were placed on the ancient Greek world map, it is important not to forget the other two stable geographical states on either side of the *eschatia*—the chthonic and the Olympian spheres of the gods. The intermediate state of the ancient rites of passage reflected also a confusion of these two spheres, as can be seen in how, for example, Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* during his initiation met both chthonic and Olympian divinities (Apul. *Met.* 11.23). The Roman depictions of the Greek Dionysian rites in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii suggest the same idea, mixing initiates both with Olympian deities and with figures clearly belonging to Hades. The uncitylike madness of the Dionysian mysteries could accordingly be caused just as much by a number of different Olympian gods, as by the dead or some chthonic deity (*cf.* Schlesier 1993:100).

Just as in ritual liminality, it was not only the mixed elements of human being and non-being that faced those travelling in the *eschatia*. There were repeated encounters with divinities belonging to either of those two stable conditions bordering the intermediate territory. This was recognised by Creusa—one of Apollo's many human lovers. Having exposed her infant son in a mountain cave, Creusa spoke of this cave as being both synonymous with Hades as well as a place where Apollo could reach the boy child (Eur. *Ion* 1494-96, 965). The *eschatia* was also the

region where Odysseus spent his time with both Circe and Calypso, and where Hermes and Athena advised him along the way. The heroes at the battlefields just outside the walls of Troy were similarly interrupted repeatedly by the Olympian divinities, while both Hermes and Athena assisted Heracles on his trip to Hades (*Od.* 11.620-26). Apollonius in his Argonautic epic had Jason meet the chthonic goddess Hecate in a field in Colchis (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.1212-20).

Even more numerous were the many encounters between mortals and immortals taking place in the mountainsides right outside the *polis*. Anchises made love to Aphrodite amid the pines of Mount Ida,[20] while Peleus married Thetis on Mount Pelion.[21] Again, the mythical themes are also reflected in events taking place in historical times. The divine Muses, for example, taught Hesiod on the slopes of Mount Helicon (Hes. *Theog.* 22-23), while in the fifth century BC an Athenian messenger encountered Pan by Mount Parthenium (Hdt. 6.105). Pausanias reported that even in the second century AD people could still hear Pan piping on a mountain in Arcadia (Paus. 8.36.8).

Living in all respects on the very margins of the human world the peoples of the periphery were again and again said to be closer to the gods. The Ethiopians and the Phaeacians, for example, would both have the gods participate directly at their feasts (*Od.* 1.25-26, 7.200-6), while the Hyperboreans were frequently visited by Apollo (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.34-36).

We must be aware that the gods repeatedly appeared also inside the *polis*, even within the very homes of its citizens. These appearances, however, were restricted either to the context of rites of passage or to times when the structures of the city had been so completely obliterated that the city, in fact, had ceased to exist.[22] Otherwise, since the *polis* was the proper realm of the mortals, the gods could come only in the guise of ordinary humans.[23] This differed sharply from how, in the nonsensical and essentially uncitylike *polis* of the distant Phaeacians, the gods always showed themselves in their manifest form (*Od.* 7.200-6).

Reflecting the nature of this confused space, the endless number of nonsensical, reversed or negated situations exemplify how in this realm the elements of non-being encroached upon, intermingled and even merged with the elements of being. This is a precise expression of the liminal condition 'of ambiguity of paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories' (Turner 1967:97). This general

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20 *Il.* 2.820-21; *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 53-291.

21 *Cypria* according to *Schol. Hom. Il.* 17.140.

22 In a number of Euripides' tragedies different gods appeared in their true form as the civic order had been annihilated. *Cf.* Thetis in Eur. *Andr.* 1231ff, Dionysus in Eur. *Bacch.* 1330ff, the Dioscuri in Eur. *El.* 1224ff, and Apollo in *Or.* 1625ff.

23 *Cf. e.g. Il.* 3.121-22, 3.385-88.

confusion between aspects of being and non-being, chthonic and divine elements experienced by travellers of the liminal space of the *eschatia* accurately reflected the experience of those who ventured into ritual liminality.

As one left the *polis*, the centre of the Greek world, one consequently encountered a complete blur of the distinctions between gods, living men, and the dead. This confusion with its ultimate paradox of simultaneous being and non-being, was also reflected in instances of paradoxical recombinations of human, divine and animal elements, in the context of both spatial and ritual liminality. Parallel to how the space of *polis* represented such an all-encompassing framework that no aspect of civilised society was left unaffected, the *eschatia* was an area with a paradoxical essence that was reflected in the existence of those peoples who permanently inhabited the area. The humanoid Phaeacians and the Cyclopes were, for example, all 'near kin to the gods' (*Od.* 5.35-36, 7.205-6) and even the not so distant Egyptians were to some extent seen as a people directly descended from the gods (*Od.* 4.232). The blameless Ethiopians were also definitively superhuman: after having reached an age of 120 years or more, their dead bodies were free from decay and were kept in transparent coffins among the living (Hdt. 3.24). Not properly human, these peoples were free from the mortal restraints of the normal existence of man in the *polis*.

According to both mythical and historical accounts, the *eschatia* was also teaming with all kinds of zoomorphic hybrids like centaurs, satyrs, sirens, and sphinxes. In distant Libya and India men with dog-heads were not uncommon—at least not according to the fifth century BC geographies of Herodotus and Aeschylus.[24] All structural restrictions were disregarded in these accounts, just as with the descriptions of the ecstatic maenads who had followed Dionysus out to the mountainsides outside of Thebes, where Euripides described them as suckling fawns and wolf-cubs (Eur. *Bacch.* 699-700). Similar intimate scenes between humans and beasts can be found in the frescos in the Pompeiian Villa of the Mysteries.

Whoever entered the liminal state could never be sure within which category he or she would end up. Accordingly the nuptial rites of passage could not only be characterised by the participators sometimes donning the guise of satyrs, but also by a temporary negation of the categories of gender.[25] In the mysteries at the shrine of Lycaean Zeus taking place in an Arcadian cave, the participators risked being turned into wolves (Pl. *Resp.* 565d), not unlike some of the more unfortunate travellers of the *eschatia*. Both Actaeon, Callisto, the hapless comrades of Odysseus, and the Tyrsenian pirates who kidnapped Dionysus, ended up as animals.[26] The

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24   Hdt. 4.191; Aesch. according to Strabo 1.2.35.

25   *Cf.* Burkert 1985:259; Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 304cd; Plut. *De mul. vir.* 245ef.

26   Aesch. *PV* 663-76; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.4, 3.8.2; *Od.* 10.234-40; *Hymn. Hom. Dion.* 7.52-53.

Neurian inhabitants of Scythia regularly shifted between being humans and wolves (Hdt. 4.105). The connection between ritual and liminality and the *eschatia* is also still there in these examples of people having their identity altered. Having been transformed into a heifer roaming the periphery, Io was accordingly called a 'maenad of Hera' (Aesch. *Supp.* 562-64). The occasional mortal could on the other hand also be turned into a god in the periphery, as happened to Heracles, Iphigenia, Ino and her son Melicertes, and as was offered as a possibility to Odysseus by Calypso (*cf.* Endsjø 2001:51-56).[27]

The ultimate confusion

The confusion found in both the intermediate period of the rites of passage and in the intermediate geography was nevertheless not restricted to a confusion of the characteristics of those who normally inhabited the culturally recognised conditions that limited the *eschatia*. It also implied a confusion of the absolute opposites of being and non-being, which entailed that all aspects of the understood reality were negated, even those of time and space. This, however, is not the same as saying that notions of time and space were not at all present in the ambiguous, liminal sphere, as seems to have been the case in the land of the dead. The years Odysseus spent on Calypso's island were real years, long and enduring, just as ordeals like the straits of Scylla and Charybdis and the Clashing Rocks were nothing but extremely physically tangible. Also the mysteries had defined geographical settings, like Eleusis or Samothrace, and strict timetables as well.

Hades, as the absolute antithesis of *polis* and its proper time and space, was perceived as an area void of both time and space. The liminal state placed betwixt and between those two culturally recognised states would therefore represent that ultimate paradox of simultaneous space *and* non-space, time *and* non-time. Such interstructural confusion with regard to time was manifested in phenomena such as evening touching dawn—as in the land of the Laestrygonians (*Od.* 10.86)—a negation of the very structure that formed time through the division of night and day. On the island of the Phaeacians the cycles that defined the seasonal changes of the year had been eliminated accordingly—a mere look at the gardens of the island would demonstrate this. Different fruits were found to be simultaneously in all stages of ripeness, from merely sprouting to being ready to pick (*Od.* 7.116-26). That Herodotus reported that in Libya summer was eternal was an accurate obser-

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27 Heracles became immortal after his body had been burnt on the pyre at the Thracian Mount Oeta (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.7). According to Hesiod (Paus. 1.43.1) and the author of the *Cypria* (Procl. *Chrestomathia* i), Iphigenia was made immortal by Artemis on her transferral to the geographical margins. Ino and her son Melicertes were transformed into the sea deities Leucothea and Palaemon upon throwing themselves into the ocean (*Od.* 5.333-35; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.3). For Calypso's offer to Odysseus see *Od.* 7.256-57.

vation, but it nevertheless fitted perfectly with the Greeks' perception of the periphery (Hdt. 2.26). The normal concept of time was similarly confused in the mysteries: Apuleius' Lucius could describe how 'the sun shines brightly about midnight' (Apul. Met. 11.23), while Plutarch or Porphyry experienced swift shifts between utter darkness and the brightest of lights during initiation (Stob. 4.52.49).

The sense of space within the liminal state was accordingly just as confused. The huge rocks, which represented an initiatory ordeal for the heroic Argonauts, were, for example said to be 'moving' or 'bewildering.'[28] It is also obvious that the original routes of both Argo and Odysseus went far outside any of the Mediterranean itineraries ancient and modern rationalists later have tried to straitjacket them into, far off into nonsensical landscapes that never can be put on any map (cf. Endsjø 1997). As Nanno Marinatos points out, on Circe's island Odysseus and his crew were unable to tell west from east, 'nor where the Sun ... goes under the earth nor where he rises.'[29] It was no straightforward landscape either, which the Eleusinian initiate of Plutarch or Porphyry had to navigate through: 'In the beginning there is straying and wandering, the weariness of running this way and that, and nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement' (Stob. 4.52.49). Apuleius, in his rendering of later Hellenistic rites could tell about similar experiences, as the initiate was 'ravished through the elements' (Apul. Met. 11.23).

The most radical implication of this absence of proper spatial and temporal structures would be that nothing could be distinguished from anything else. The *eschatia* offered accordingly several examples of how everything thus ceaselessly floated together. The *Odyssey*, for example, describes the dramatic land of the Cimmerians at the end of the earth, as a place where darkness was never-ending and everything was eternally 'wrapped in mist and cloud' (*Od.* 11.15-16). This seems to relate to how Hesiod talked of the furthest land beyond Oceanus as either 'dark and concealed,' 'towards Night,' or simply 'cloudy' or 'dim.'[30] Aristophanes operated with a landscape of 'darkness and mire' close to the gates of Hades (Ar. *Ran.* 273), while Herodotus, on his part, believed that there were areas in the ultimate north where the air was so full of either snow or feathers that one could neither see nor travel any further (Hdt. 4.31). Similar to these confusing geographies was the realm beyond Heracles' pillars where a dark fog forever cloaked the air and the water. This is, at least, how the fifth century BC Carthaginian explorer Himilco described this region according to the fourth century AD Latin writer Festus Rufus Avienus.[31] If one travelled far enough, even the water would be so viscous that the

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28 *Planktai* in *Od.* 12.59-72.

29 *Od.* 10.190-92; Marinatos 1995:133.

30 Hes. *Theog.* 334-35, 275, 294, *cf.* 729-31.

progress of any ship would be impeded—shallows and masses of seaweed would eventually render impossible all movement and thus further indicate the absolute confusion of the elements.[32] Apollonius of Rhodes had the Argonauts stranded in a similar astructural landscape which he placed allegorically in 'the furthest ends of Libya' (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.81, 4.1227). This confusion is even more obvious in the travel log of the fourth century BC Greek captain Pytheas of Massalia who, on his journey to the world's edge in the ultimate north, encountered a complete negation of all separate basic entities of the physical world: he was checked by a formless mass comprised of 'neither earth, nor sea, nor air, but' at the same time 'a kind of mixture of these' (Strabo 2.4.1).

Journeying in a landscape of confusion

As the dimensions of space and time no longer existed in their usual interdependent modes, movement within these areas would accordingly not always be the object by the usual physical laws. Modes of movement that within the walls of *polis* would lead more or less nowhere were again and again the preferred way of travelling in the interstructural *eschatia*: Even though 'it is difficult even for an active man to reach the peaks of Parnassus ..., the thyiades'—that is, ecstatic women celebrating the mysteries—'run raving up there for Dionysus and Apollo' (Paus. 10.32.5). And as Pindar pointed out: 'Neither by ship nor by foot can you find the wondrous road to the meeting place of the Hyperboreans' (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.29-30). According to his own autobiographical poem, Aristeas of Proconnesus, that legendary seventh century BC figure, still managed to venture this far. But, as we may expect, the way he moves was in no way inconspicuous: inspired by Apollo (*phoibolamptos*) his spirit (*psychê*) left his body for thereupon to fly in the upper airs above all the world.[33] Regardless whether it swam or soared through the air,[34] the immortal ram with the golden fleece, which carried Phrixus safely across the seas to the halls of Aeëtes (Eratosth. [*Cat.*]19), was another example of an unlikely

31 Festus Rufus Avienus *Ora Maritima* 386-89. This may sound somewhat removed from a context of ancient Greece, but Avienus presumably based himself on a Greek version of Himilco's story that probably had more in common with Hellenic presuppositions than with the original secret Carthaginian log: 'Almost all scholars consider it unlikely that Avienus had direct access to Himilco's account of the northwestern sea' (Murphy 1977:29).

32 Festus Rufus Avienus *Ora Maritima* 120-26.

33 Hdt. 4.13; Maximus of Tyre 38.3.

34 Having examined the relevant artistic and literary material, D.S. Robertson (1940:3-4) concludes that the 'oldest surviving representations of Phrixus on the ram imply swimming. [...] First among the Fliers must be named [Pseudo-]Apollodorus' (cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.1). That Phrixus and Helle, just as Iphigenia or Croesus, were snatched away from an imminent death, and that the ram was given the siblings by their mother *Nephele* (that is *cloud;* Hesiod according to Eratosth. [*Cat.*]19) may, however, indicate otherwise than Robertson's conclusion.

means of transport that nevertheless proved to be the most convenient as one trav-
elled the realm of the *eschatia*.

Another sign typical of the liminal traveller was the nonsensical wearing of only
one sandal, as if this impediment of movement would enhance one's affinity with
the aspect of non-being. Pindar, Pherecydes, and Apollonius of Rhodes, all de-
scribed how Jason was wearing only one sandal on his return from his early exile
in the wild landscapes of his mentor Chiron the centaur.[35] This peculiar Cinderella
complex is also seen in the case of the sons of Thestius participating in the Caly-
donian boar hunt,[36] while Perseus when he set out on his heroic task to get hold of
the gorgon's head, borrowed Hermes' one sandal—something that was going to
aid his travelling to the end of the earth.[37] Having a foot in some way injured,
seems to have carried a similar symbolism to the ancient Greeks: at an initiatory
ordeal in the mountainsides of Parnassus the archetypal traveller Odysseus suf-
fered a wound on his leg that later would serve as a mark identifying him (*Od.*
19.392-96). In his second labour of slaying the Hydra, Heracles was accordingly
wounded in his foot by a crab sent by Hera (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.2). Also Oedipus
who was put out in the *eschatia* and had to return by way of the enigmatic sphinx,
was marked by his *one* pierced foot as his name indicates.[38]

As a number of mythical examples thus tied 'monosandalism' to the oscillation
between structured and unstructured spaces, this phenomenon was also connect-
ed to the ritual context of the mysteries as depicted on several portrayals of initiates
on reliefs and funeral stelae.[39] Similar to the Dionysian scenes in the Villa of the
Mysteries in Pompeii (*cf.* Ginzburg 1990, fig. 19), the neophyte at some point in
the Eleusinian mysteries placed his left foot on a fleece of Zeus.

Aspects of primordiality

Examining all these amorphous experiences of both ritual and geographical limi-
nality, we are struck by another aspect if we try to perceive this experience from the
context of the ancient Greek world view. As everything was confused, it appears as
if no separation had ever taken place. This, however, is exactly the point! With its
continuous confusion of human, divine and all other elements of the Greek cos-
mos, the space of the *eschatia* and everything that it enclosed had apparently es-
caped the primeval separation of the elements into proper categories. While

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35 Pind. *Pyth.* 4.75, 4.95-96; Pherecydes according to *Schol. Pind. Pyth.* 4.75 [4.133a]; Ap. Rhod.
    Argon. 1.4-11.

36 Euripides according to Macrob. *Sat.* 5.18.17.

37 Artem. *Onirocritica* 4.63. *Cf.* Hdt. 2.91.

38 *Cf.* Soph. *OT* 718-19; Eur. *Phoen.* 26-27.

39 *Cf.* for instance either Esdaile 1909, fig. b-c, Bianchi 1976, fig. 44, or Ginzburg 1990, figs. 16-17.

various aspects of the cosmos once had been sorted out of the original flux, the *eschatia* had remained as something like a primeval rest, forever ambiguous and paradoxical.

Describing this area of confusion as simply 'the past,' would, however, be to simplify the matter. The state of the *eschatia* was distinct both from the proper time of the *polis and* the static non-time of Hades. Therefore, to say that the time of the *eschatia* simply reflected the time 'before' the time of the proper human life of the city would be contradictory to the very nature of the *eschatia*: the term 'before' belonged itself to the temporal categories of the *polis*. In the liminal state of the ancient Greeks the past, the present and the future would all float together— the aspects of time had simply not been structured. The knowledge possessed by the half-dead, interstructurally placed figure of Phineus, was accordingly in no manner limited by the usual temporal and spatial restrictions: His 'mind' (*noos*) knew 'everything' that had happened in the past and that would take place in the future (Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 2.212).

How the geographical liminality of the ancient Greeks represented a confusion of the past, the present and the future, was also the way the state of the primordial chaos was perceived by the Greeks. As the primordial state was one of total undifferentiation, the proper categories of time had not been defined either. Depictions of the liminal state consequently often contained allusions to the primordial. This, for example, was quite literally the case with the motley ensemble of various creatures following Circe, as described by Apollonius of Rhodes. These figures consisted of limbs apparently so haphazardly assembled that they resembled neither beasts nor humans. The poet himself connected these creatures with autochthonous forms of life that appeared automatically out of the first formless substance—an idea that Apollonius seems to have taken from Empedocles' theories on the creation.[40] The amorphous landscapes of Himilco and Pytheas may similarly be associated with the primordial stew Anaximander considered to have preceded everything (Arist. *Ph.* 203a). The *apeiron*, Anaximander's 'boundless' matter, may also linguistically be tied to a term used on the geographical margins. James S. Romm points to how both Homer and Hesiod frequently use the adjective *apeirôn* to describe the 'boundless' state of both land and sea outside the *polis*.[41] Moreover, just as these *apeirôn* landscapes of Homer and Hesiod can be considered to have represented something like a primeval leftover, Anaximander thought the primordial *apeiron* lingered on in the periphery, surrounding all the worlds or se-

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40 Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 4.672-81; Aët. 5.19.5. For a more extensive survey of the fragments on Empedocles' zoogonic theories *cf.* Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983:302-5.

41 *Cf.* Romm 1992:10. *Apeirôn gaia* in *Il.* 7.446; *Od.* 1.98, 5.46, 15.79, 17.386, 19.107; Hes. *Theog.* 187. *Apeirôn pontos* in *Il.* 1.350; Hes. *Theog.* 678. *Cf. Od.* 4.510, 10.195; Hes. *Theog.* 109.

ries of right order (*kosmoi*) (Hippol. *Haer.* 1.6.1-2). Anaximander's *apeiron* encompassed 'the known world in time as well as in space' (Kahn 1960:237). This continuous existence of *to apeiron* is also reflected in how Hesiod's mythical *chaos* 'survived' the act of creation, still existing out there somewhere in the periphery (Hes. *Theog.* 813-14).

This structural identification of the uncivilised geography with the original, primordial flux out of which no autonomous realm ever had been separated, is probably again what was hinted at by Apollonius of Rhodes when, at the moment of the Argo's departure from the *polis*, he had Orpheus singing about 'how the earth, the heaven and the sea once mingled together' (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.496-97). The idea that the inhabitants of the *eschatia*, as previously demonstrated, reflected an unfulfilled human potential, is also an aspect that may be interpreted as an allusion to an earlier stage in human evolution: such an identification was, at least, positively made by Thucydides (Thuc. 1.6). The very absence of the *polis* was in itself a feature typical of the distant past,[42] just as the lack of proper sacrifice reflected the original state (*cf.* Endsjø 2000)—not only before the schism between man and god,[43] but also before the invention of cooking—the art that distinguished man from the wild beasts.[44] The eating of raw meat was subsequently a custom found both in the rites of the Dionysian mysteries and in numerous societies of the *eschatia*, as the mythical Cyclopes and the non-Greek Eurytanians in Aetolia (Thuc. 3.94).

The ritual imitation of the eschatia

After considering the vast number of ritual, mythical and structural parallels between the two phenomena which I have defined as ritual and geographical liminality, the only major difference we initially were left with was that the intermediate state of rites of passage represented a liminal period of *time*, created ritually, while the *eschatia* constituted a liminal *space*. The many examples of how even the proper notions of time and space are negated, both in the rites of passage and in the *eschatia*, remove even this last difference between the two phenomena as they were perceived by the Greeks.

Were ritual and geographical liminality thus actually one and the same phenomenon? Here, the answer seems to be both yes and no. Regardless whether one entered this liminal state through ritual means, or spatially through going into the *eschatia*, the experience should ideally be the same. The *eschatia*, however, repre-

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42 *Il.* 20.216-18; *Hymn. Hom. Vulc.* 3-4; Pl. *Leg.* 677a-81e.

43 Hes. *Theog.* 535-57, *cf.* Vernant 1989:24. Plato wrote more generally of his ancestors living 'nearer the gods' (*Phlb.* 16c).

44 Ath. 660e-f; *cf.* Hes. *Op.* 276-78.

sented in all its flux an enduring entity reflecting an actual everlasting primordiality. The liminality of the rites of passage, on the other hand, was in spite of its primordial aspects only a passing moment when the structures of human civilisation were reversed. In this way it is not surprising that there was a clear notion of the various rites of passage actually representing an *imitation* of the geographical state outside of the city. And, as an imitation of these areas, these rites would also frequently involve encounters with the prototypal denizens of the *eschatia*, such as satyrs and sileni, nymphs and pans. One could also, within the setting of the transitional rituals, be transformed into one of these ambiguous creatures,[45] just as was always the extreme possibility in the *eschatia*.

As the *polis* represented a set of positive structures reflecting the human existence, the state of primordial liminality could be recreated by explicitly bringing in some aspect of absolute negation, symbolically representing either the non-existence of the dead, or the divine elements of either the Olympian or the chthonic gods. Such juxtaposition would automatically negate all given structures, even those of proper time and space. As the liminal state of the transitional rituals thus reflected an imitation of the *eschatia*, the myths accordingly refer to how the various rites had originated in the periphery. The founders of the rites were, for example, repeatedly thought to have journeyed through the landscapes distant from the Greek *polis*. Dionysus and his ecstatic followers travelled through the marginal landscapes of Bactria, Persia and Arabia (Eur. *Bacch.* 13-20), while Persephone, in the myth that rendered the very pattern for the Eleusinian mysteries, was transported over a variety of landscapes, all the way to the land of the dead (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 33-37). Apart from such divine origins, the Greeks could at times also consider the mysteries to have originated with the *peoples* who inhabited the distant geography.[46] Barbarian words were, for example, said to be central components of the secret sayings uttered during the rites (Iambl. *Myst.* 7.4), and non-Greek musical instruments were important elements in the Dionysian mysteries. While the actual historical origin of the Greek rites of passage will probably forever elude us, the way the ancient Greeks themselves considered these rituals to have developed agree completely with van Gennep's view that the physical passage represented the very origin of the various rites of transition (*cf.* van Gennep 1960:22).

The ancient Greek notion of the periphery represented, of course, no objective view of these distant landscapes, but was the result of an extensive cultural process. Leaving his city, the ancient Greek would bring with him a mythical map, a map that would describe the landscape with the nonsensical structures reflecting the liminal state. The subject would thus possess a detailed description of even *un-*

45 Pl. *Leg.* 815c; Strabo 10.3.10.
46 Eur. *Bacch.* 64-67; Diod. Sic. 1.22.23.

known territories long before he would enter it—a map that would present the main categories with which one organised anything one would experience. As the various mythical, historical and geographical sources indicate, there were no clear boundaries between a perceived rational understanding and a perceived mythical understanding of the *eschatia*. The myths rendered in this way the most extreme possibilities, but as the series of historical incidents would demonstrate, the periphery could still be seen as reflecting a primordial existence, and, with this in mind, one could never rule out the chance of neither a hierophantic experience nor a theranthropic transformation.

Living in small communities surrounded by such wondrous and mythical landscapes, why did the Greeks want to imitate this liminal state in their ritual? Despite the conceptions of how the prototypal hero nearly almost would endure some fantastic ordeal every time he ventured into the *eschatia*, most people would neither experience a primordial union with gods when they took a walk in the uncultivated woods, nor would they have their social status permanently altered. We must allow for a certain mythical exaggeration. Whereas the denizen of the *polis* going into the *apolis* in historical times always *could* happen to meet some deity or to be turned into a wolf, such serious consequences were always an *imminent* possibility for the ancient hero of the myths. The ritual context, however, could assure that those who were initiated in some sense would have that experience which the *eschatia* always ought to be reflecting.

Having in this way gone through the extensive parallels between the ancient Greek rites of passage and their view of their own geographical periphery, I have tried to demonstrate how the ritual theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner may help us come to terms with the logic of what at first seemed like a very odd suggestion of Heracles. Having defined the *eschatia* as a liminal space not only through its location betwixt and between all stable and culturally recognised geographical conditions of the Greek world view, but also through its intrinsic quality of general confusion, I have argued that behind the intimate ties between this area and the intermediate state of the rites of passage lay a notion of synonymy. Liminal time and liminal space were, in fact, only two facets of the same phenomenon. This is why Heracles could propose to put an end to the Eleusinian rites, recognising that the mysteries were only the human *imitation* of the ideal view of the geographical periphery found not only betwixt and between the city of human life and the land of the dead, but also betwixt and between the Olympian sphere and the chthonic Hades. Having completed that ultimate journey through the *eschatia* all the way to the realm of Persephone, and back, Heracles had indeed 'experienced far truer mysteries.'[47]

47   An earlier and somewhat shorter version of this paper was printed in *Numen* 47 (2000):351-86.

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