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Liminality in ancient Egypt

Liminality is a term introduced in anthropology by Arnold van Gennep to describe the in-between phase of transformative rituals. He quickly realised that the basic structure of these rituals can easily be put into parallel with spatial organization of sacred space as both have 'external', 'in-between' and 'internal' parts. This was simply because humans tend to conceptualize processes in spatial terms. Van Gennep himself described the details of the 'liminal' to a certain extent only and this research was taken up later and developed further by Victor Turner who uncovered more features of this special state.

The term 'liminal/liminality' has been gaining popularity in all branches of social sciences, psychology, archaeology and even architecture and urban studies in the recent years showing the general presence of the concept in different areas of human life. Contributing to this trend my thesis would like to present some features of liminality as it is visible in ancient Egyptian material.

The phenomenon of 'liminal' was definitely present in this ancient society and was exploited to a great degree as an essential part of 'power-talk', the self-expression of the leading elite and royalty. After setting up the basics, this presentation would like to explore a few examples for the functions of liminality in ancient Egypt.