

# Soldiering and the Rites of Passage

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## Abstract

Armed forces are kept by the states for purposes of defense. Despite various claims, armies never become redundant. The need for protection of the boundaries, even though, a seemingly ?old-fashioned? idea, is always there as a sheer reality to reckon with; for any given country. Being exposed to aggression is a sad probability, which may occur suddenly and hit the fate of any nation. A lot of philosophical sentences about the lacking of human reasoning in soldierly ways have also been uttered. Now, a soldier differs from a civilian and the transformation of the latter being into the former one is a radical social metamorphosis, including moral and physical factors. From an anthropological viewpoint, it is a full initiation ritual or passage rite. This fact alone renders all martial activities entirely rational and compatible with logic.

16

17 *Index terms—*

## 1 Introduction

19 -"To be, or not to be, that is the question!"-Hamletcharacter of Shakespeare ll along the course of history; admission into an admirable group, has always been attained through certain procedures, finalized by a relevant 21 ceremony-like ritual of some sort.

## 2 It was French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep

23 (1873-1957) who studied and defined the concept in terms of a social science approach. Rites des passages do not pertain to early human societies alone, by any means. But the most prominent and demonstrative forms did of course, occur in primitive war-waging tribes.

26 In this particular context; initiation is the passage of a child into manhood by an act of strength, bravery, skill etc. He thereby gets separated from the other children and women -both of whom constitute a vulnerable group 27 in need of protection and are considered lowly in the social status scale-socially. Instead, he is now projected 29 onto the more respected level of a warrior or a fisher or a hunter, and so forth.

30 In one of the epic stories of the Oghuz Turks, one of the lords, Dirse Khan is an unhappy man without 31 progeny. He prays to God for a son and his wish is accepted. The boy grows into splendid adolescence. But, for 32 the moment, he has no name.

33 The tradition stipulates that a great task be executed to earn a name. In the festivities of another lord, 34 Bayindir Khan, the boy engages in a fight with a fierce bull (bo?a in Turkish) ??1) and beats it with a mighty 35 fist-blow. The notables of the tribe then bestow him with the glorious name Bogach Khan. American Western 36 film starring Richard Harris. Sioux Indians (2) capture a British citizen, Morgan. He is not killed but kept alive 37 as the laughingstock of the tribe.

38 Eventually, to prove himself, he liquidates two warriors from the neighboring rival Shoshones (3) .

39 Upon insisting on a fully equal tribal membership; they let him undergo the routine painful passage rite. The 40 initiation in question consists of being hung on pins piercing the chest, in a ceremonial tent, and revolving around 41 one's own axis in those miserable conditions, overnight.

42 The survivor is now a prestigious warrior, then. (Morgan accomplishes the testing). Any dead would just be 43 a failure destined to get forgotten, soon. This mentality of such warring people is probably best expressed in a 44 couplet composed by Dadalo?lu (4) , a well-known epic poet in Turkish collection of verbal literature.

45 Numerous valiant comrades find themselves lifeless, on the soil. The dead are all bygones. But the living-rest,  
46 they belong (The defiant bard goes on: The High Edict of the Sultan is his own possession / While all this hilly  
47 landscape is our possessions).

### 48 3 II. Remnants of the Past in the Present

49 A passage rite involves passing a physical or moral ordeal of some sort ??Sillamy 1967: 261). Mankind could  
50 not and still cannot renounce the idea of initiation / passage rites, as it is a necessary process from the social  
51 point of view, in certain circumstances. The duration of the process or the ease with which it is done or the risks  
52 involved, may be of versatile character. Still; the main idea of transformation is always there, in many modern  
53 transactions just as it was in archaic or socalled primitive societies (Çaya 2016).

54 Famous actor Kirk Douglas was born in Amsterdam quartier of New York in a poor house of immigrant  
55 (Russian Jew) parents. In his memoires (1989: 28) he relates his difficult childhood days in a cosmopolitan  
56 neighborhood. The children of the neighborhood had rites of passage applied to the newcomers. They would  
57 make the new boy lean against the fountain, count until ten and shout that the church is on fire. At this point  
58 the others would rush to the boy and extinguish the imaginary fire by pissing on him.

59 Colors of belts in judo games are a form of initiation, valid in our day. Wearing the initials of one's university  
60 (i.e. H-letter of Harvard) on one's jersey as an honor-student with a high grand point average, or a champion  
61 sportsman is another modern version of the antiquated rites des passages. Certain secret societies attribute  
62 uttermost importance to the formalities of defined entry rituals. By watching certain initiation ceremonies, one  
63 can deduce which values or virtues come first in a given community or a society, for that matter.

64 In Roman Catholicism anointing the dying person is a rite de passage. Diving for the Cross, in Orthodox  
65 Christian church, is another example. (In Istanbul, now that the waters of the Golden Horn got cleaned, the  
66 ritual was resumed in the Golden Horn, some time ago. The Patriarch of Istanbul throws a wooden cross of  
67 substantial size into the waters and one of the young Rum swimmers fetches it). Certain juvenile gangs apply  
68 certain shapes and symbols in the form of tattoos to portions of their bodies. In Japan, a stunted pinky finger  
69 is recognized as membership in Yakuza. In ancient times slaves were marked by facial cuts for recognition, in  
70 many societies including Persia and Crete among others. Up to a century ago young Chinese females (5) were  
71 forced to wear iron shoes; allegedly and euphemistically phrased, to keep the feet small; but effectively to cripple  
72 the women and connect them to their homes irreversibly (Feet grow despite the enclosure and get crooked). It is  
73 known that the method works well with some new religions or cults, also. Leaders of some new cults also make  
74 the recruits pay highly for their belonging procedure. New members may donate all Volume XVI Issue VI Version  
75 I ( H ) their property or savings to the cult. They may have to renounce all their relatives and former friends.  
76 This abnegation only increases their new devotion, in practice, and it adds to the spiritual pleasure! Let us make  
77 the comparison that even in an amateur football game in a school or university, an easy victory can taste insipid,  
78 whereas a victory gained by sweat and energy might be more gratifying for the winning team's players! IV.

### 79 4 III.

### 80 5 The Working Mechanism

### 81 6 Military Applications

82 On some occasions; the passage rite is like a seal and stamp of having gained certain knowledge and skills and  
83 having proved one's perseverance. A compulsory military service-term and especially the basic training part,  
84 falls into this category.

85 The new recruit endures some difficulties; habituates himself to the circumstances of collective life; gains and  
86 displays athletic abilities via sports; learns how to shoot and touch the target; goes without sleep as a sentry at  
87 nights, all alone in wilderness; proves his obedience to superiors. In this manner; he gets accepted into a new  
88 category of supremacy, different from idle civilian teenagers.

89 Finally, an official collective martial oath finishes his transition, breaking him off his former unqualified years  
90 of his life, entirely. Further ahead; his honorable discharge upon completion of the specified term is another phase  
91 of the initiation. Now, the young Turkish male has paid his debt to his homeland. In the village coffee-shop, the  
92 center of social life, he shall have also his say and he shall also be regarded with respect.

93 In certain regions of Turkey like the Thrace, a young man deserves to get a wife only after completing the  
94 service and never before his departure to the barracks. This is a very rational tradition, too. Service is much  
95 more difficult for a married man.

96 In my childhood days I heard a beautiful tale full of initiation motifs from my maternal grandfather: A  
97 poverty-stricken but clever and brave young man falls in love with the daughter of the Grand Vizier. He then  
98 personally goes to demand her hand in marriage from the powerful father. The high official is outraged but  
99 curious. When the expected allusion to his lowly status is mentioned, the adolescent calmly replies that he is the  
100 son of the sultan and thus there should be no problem, in this respect. In principle, is not the sultan the father  
101 of all subjects? The Grand vizier is dumbfounded but is quick to acknowledge the intelligence and the moral  
102 courage of the youth facing him.

103 He resorts to the following formula: He orders the zealous suitor to go out and re-enter the room. "Now, you are  
104 a corporal, son" he says. The procedure is repeated a number of times, the youth getting promoted incrementally:  
105 Second lieutenant, first lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant-colonel, full colonel and finally pasha; before being  
106 accorded the girl.

107 The critical aspect of the tale lies in the initiation motif. The Vizier does not make him a general right away.  
108 He makes him wait in each step (if only in a symbolic manner) so that he actually somehow gains that particular  
109 rank. In armed forces in the real world, too, the same procedure is sometimes resorted to and the appearances  
110 are saved accordingly, in times of need.

111 Indeed; in 1968 Mexican Olympic games; an Ethiopian (6)

## 112 7 Conclusion

113 In our day; military ways and means are harshly criticized in certain circles. Especially the 'hot' basic training  
114 or boot camp is regarded as the culmination of illogical persecution. Some so-called philosophical sayings do  
115 claim that soldiering commences at the very point where logic comes to an end. But in reality; all martial values  
116 and virtues may also be taken into account, from the point of view of passage rites. Only then; all the negative  
117 arguments fall flat and a new perspective emerges, from where one can deduce that martial practices contain all  
118 ins and outs of the finest logic and the utmost high human reasoning! Notes 1. Besides the famous bull fighting  
119 games in Spain and Mexico, Bull-leaping is a motif of the culture in Minoan Crete. The game consists of a skilled  
120 jump over a released bull in a confined space. The leaper takes hold of the horns and when the animal jerks his  
121 head, the movement aids the leaper to land on the ground smoothly with an artistic somersault. In a historical  
122 novel of Mary Renault based on Greek mythology; Thesus gets enslaved by the Cretans and spends some time  
123 on the island as a bulldancer. He survives and taking profit of an

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125 earthquake, he organizes a revolt with the cooperation of other team members. They confiscate a ship and  
126 return home to Athens, sound and safe. 2. American Indians, especially in the North, were proud and belligerent  
127 people whose folklore contains epic motifs of all sorts. Before the arrival of the white man, they were warring  
128 among themselves. In social science literature; counting coups (recorded by the number of notches on a wooden  
129 object or the number of feathers in the head-dress) is a measure of the bravery acts of a young Indian warrior  
130 (like dashing into enemy tents and bringing an object as booty).

131 From the writings of anthropologist Wilson (1974: 163-164) we infer that the Iroquois were once at war with  
132 Cherokees. The author gives the resume of a mode-hunter from the former tribe. He respects the nature properly.  
133 He spares young animals, which are able to reproduce. He even smears some honey on the barks of trees, for the  
134 bears. One day enemies from the latter tribe kill him. When his body is discovered; all animals in the region  
135 cooperate and revive the good hunter; thanks to a collectively prepared magical potion.

136 Before leaving him, the animals engage in a sacred chant, the melody of which sticks to the hunter's memory.  
137 But the recipe of the potion is not revealed. It would only be apparent to a virgin, determined by this chant,  
138 they herald.

139 3. It appears that the Shoshoni mentioned in the passage later evolved into a peaceful tribe, in the half-arid  
140 Great Basin region. They became more of gatherers (including grass seeds, roots, berries) less of hunters, as a  
141 matter of fact.

142 Anthropologist Julian Haynes Steward (1902-1972) recites that in every autumn season the Shoshoni gathered  
143 pine nuts and stored them for the coming winter. Although in winter they formed larger population groups, they  
144 did not stick to stable social units, due to the fact that pine nuts were not available in the same places year by  
145 year. Their social structure was accordingly affected, staying more fluid than rigid and making leadership more  
146 fuzzy than conspicuous (Çaya Novelist Yashar Kemal, in a trilogy, wrote about the last landlords trying to keep  
147 the virtuous feudal norms alive. The protagonist is Dervish Bey. His grandfather had named him Dervish after  
148 the pasha on the opposite camp! The commander's nobility was appreciated even by the rebellious ringleaders.

149 6. The overwhelming majority of rites des passages pertains to males; but females are not totally exempt  
150 from the concept. Female circumcision is one dramatic example, performed in some parts of Africa, even in  
151 contemporary times. As a mild form of female-initiation, we can give the example of girls' earlobes getting  
152 pierced for earrings.

153 Moreover; here is a case story:

154 young man, years ago. One day my aunt came to pay a visit to her sister, my mother, a school teacher.  
155 The aunt complained that at her new house her daughter was being ordered by the mother-in-law to mend torn  
156 socks. "Needle and thread to repair socks in a well-to-do house?" she would complain. Mother contemplated for  
157 a moment and softly spoke: -Maybe they want the bride to be familiar with sewing cloths, anyhow.

158 Then the aunty fell into a resigned silence. Mother had explained in simple words that it was part of an  
159 initiation of some sort. Traditionally a married woman is a good tailor as well as a good cook. <sup>1 2</sup>

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Figure 1: Fig. 1 :



Figure 2: Fig. 2 :

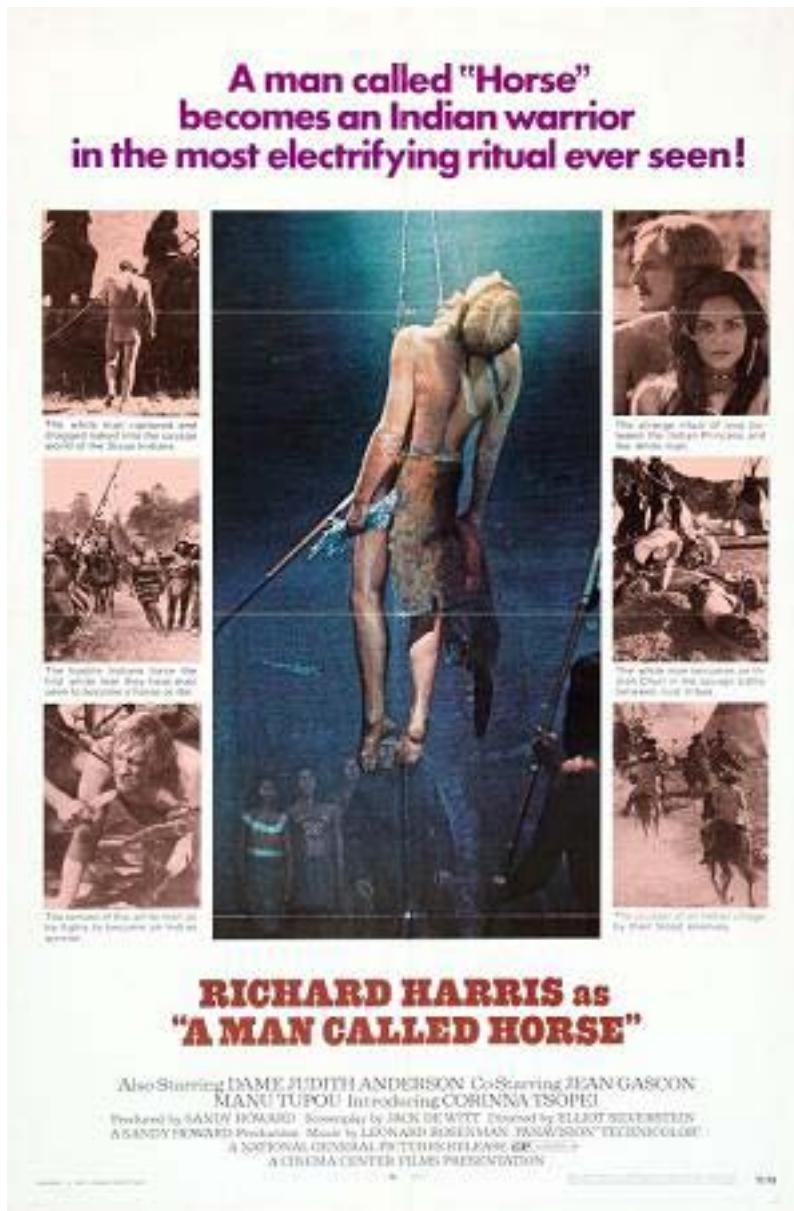
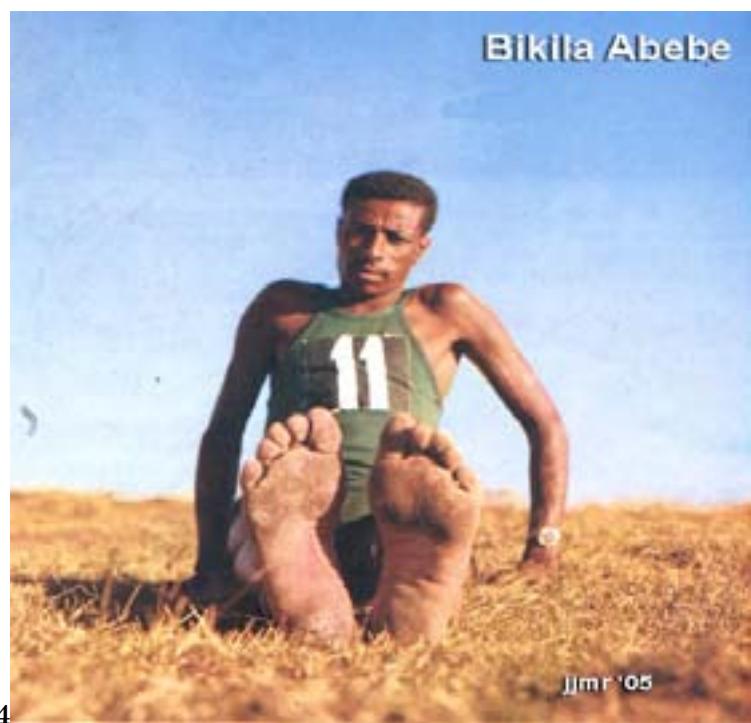


Figure 3: "



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Figure 4: Fig. 3 :



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Figure 5: 4 .



Figure 6: 7 .



Figure 7: Fig. 4 :Fig. 7 :



Figure 8:

## **7 CONCLUSION**

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160 Appendix: More Visual Material

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173 *The Story of Bogach Khan, Son of Dirse Khan" in The Book of Dede Korkut (an anonymous epopee of Oghuz*  
174 *Turks)*, (Translations are available since 1815, the date when H.F. Von Diez published a partial German  
175 translation)