

## ETHNOGRAPHY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH222379-390>

Research paper

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[anahitmekhtar@yahoo.com](mailto:anahitmekhtar@yahoo.com)**COMMON MANIFESTATIONS RITES  
OF PASSAGE AMONG THE ARMENIANS**

*Abstract.* This study examines the structural, symbolic, and functional parallels and contrasts among the rites of baptism, marriage, and burial within Armenian religious and folk traditions. Particular attention is paid to the ritual objects utilized in these ceremonies and their significance within the social and spiritual life of both the individual and the community. The object of research comprises the primary transitional milestones of human life – birth, marriage, and death – which symbolize an individual’s biological, social, and spiritual transitions between distinct states of being. Notably, these three pivotal life events employ a shared religious and ritual framework that clearly delineates a time-bound transition from one stage to the next, precisely aligning with the concept of a “rite of passage.” To comprehensively analyze these ceremonies within the Armenian tradition, this study employs a multidisciplinary methodology. Through historical analysis, the evolution of these rituals is traced by examining ancient texts– including the Bible and the works of Agathangelos, Grigor Tatevatsi, and Hovhannes Erznkatsi– alongside the Armenian Church’s ritual collection, the Mashtots, thereby contextualizing their development across different religious and historical eras. Ritual analysis is utilized to investigate the symbolism of these transitional rites, revealing their historical and theological contexts and examining the underlying Christian doctrines of spiritual rebirth and purification, with reference to the religious texts that illuminate their symbolic meanings. Additionally, ethnographic observation provides insight into the cultural practices and customs associated with these rites, as well as the application and commonalities of related ceremonial objects (such as the narot, belts, garments, water, and stone), which convey concepts of sanctification, fertility, continuity, and universal order across various ceremonies. Finally, a comparative analysis identifies the shared elements and distinct variations across the three rites, highlighting their interconnectedness in marking life transitions.

*Keywords:* baptism; wedding; funeral; rite of passage; Armenian tradition; ritual practices; symbolic meanings; Christian theology; ethnography

**For citation:** Mkhitarian A. Common manifestations rites of passage among the Armenians. *History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Caucasus*. 2026. Vol. 22. N. 2 P. 379-390. [doi.org/10.32653/CH222379-390](https://doi.org/10.32653/CH222379-390)

## ЭТНОГРАФИЯ

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH222379-390>

Исследовательская статья

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## ОБЩИЕ ЧЕРТЫ КРЕЩЕНИЯ И РИТУАЛОВ ПЕРЕХОДА СРЕДИ АРМЯН

*Аннотация.* В работе рассматриваются структурные, символические и функциональные параллели и различия обрядов крещения, венчания и погребения в армянской религиозной и народной традициях. Особое внимание уделяется символическим предметам, используемым в этих обрядах, и их значению в социальной и духовной жизни личности и общества. Объектом исследования являются основные переходные обряды человеческой жизни, символизирующие биологические, социальные и духовные переходы индивида из одного состояния в другое. Наше внимание привлекло явление, заключающееся в том, что во время трех важнейших событий человеческой жизни – крещения, венчания и погребения – применялся один и тот же религиозный и ритуальный принцип, который четко разграничивал временно обусловленный переход от одной фазы к другой, что именно и называется «переходным обрядом». В исследовании применена междисциплинарная методология для всестороннего анализа обрядов в армянской традиции как переходных ритуалов. Посредством исторического анализа мы проследили процесс развития этих обрядов, изучив древние источники, включая Библию, труды Агафангела, Григора Татеваци, Ованеса Ерзнкаци и других, а также ритуальный сборник армянской церкви «Маштоц» с целью размещения их в различных религиозных и исторических периодах. Посредством церковно-ритуального и источниковедческого анализа мы попытались рассмотреть символику переходных обрядов, через которую раскрылся историко-религиозный контекст ритуалов, были рассмотрены лежащие в основе этих обрядов христианские идеи, такие как духовное возрождение и очищение; ссылки на религиозные тексты освещают их символические значения. Этнографические наблюдения дали возможность изучить связанные с этими обрядами армянские народные обычаи и традиции, а также применение и общность связанных с ними ритуальных и обрядовых предметов (например, нарот, пояс, одежда, вода, камень и др.), которые в различных церемониях несут идеи освящения, плодородия, преемственности и всеобщего порядка. Посредством сравнительного анализа выявлены общности трех обрядов, подчеркивающие их взаимосвязанность в период переходов жизненных фаз.

*Ключевые слова:* крещение; свадьба; погребение; ритуалы перехода; армянская традиция; обрядовая практика; символика; христианское богословие; этнография

**Для цитирования:** Мхитарян А.Р. Общие черты крещения и ритуалов перехода среди армян // История, археология и этнография Кавказа. 2026. 22. No 2. С. 379-390. doi.org/10.32653/CH222379-390

## Introduction

The concept of the “rite of passage” has been extensively addressed by numerous scholars from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The purpose of this study is to identify and compare the rites of passage within traditional Armenian culture that accompany the fundamental phases of human existence – birth, maturity, marriage, and death – thereby confirming an individual’s transition to a new status. These rites not only shape the individual’s spiritual and social identity but also reaffirm the continuity of society, the cosmos, and the divine order.

The study examines a comparative analysis of the religious ceremonies and rite of passage of the Armenian Apostolic Church (baptism, wedding, and funeral) and their spatial and temporal patterns. Rites of passage, which are important sacraments of the Christian church, are considered major events not only for the family and society but for the entire cosmos. After the corresponding rites, when entering a new world and passing through a path of trials and preparations, both the baptized, the married, and the deceased acquire a new status.

These rites, consisting of preparatory and primary ceremonies, are performed in consecrated spaces and require the active participation of the clergy, relatives, and community members. Characterized by a “home-church-home” movement structure, these rites of passage embody the cyclical nature of return and transformation.

Following the ceremonies of baptism, marriage, and burial, a distinct transitional period was required to complete the passage from one state of being to another. Following these primary transitional rites, related ceremonies continued for an additional three or seven days, and subsequently for forty days. This transition was realized through specialized ritual procedures and customs developed over time, such as symbolic changes of clothing performed before, during, and after the ceremony – a practice that also extended to the relatives of the central initiate.

The article examines ritual songs, dances, toasts, blessings, and forms of mutual assistance that strengthen the collective nature of the rite of passage. The role of the most respected individuals in traditional Armenian families – the *knqahayr* (godfather) and *kavor* (sponsor) – has also been emphasized.

The research has been conducted through comprehensive analysis of professional literature as well as manuscript sources (manuscript materials are being introduced into circulation for the first time) with the aim of comparing and supplementing existing scholarly works, which has made it possible to deepen understanding of the theological, historical, ethnographic, and cultural contexts of these rites. This comprehensive approach has enabled demonstration of Christian influence on the aforementioned rituals, emphasising their enduring significance in Armenian society.

The relevance of the article lies in its revelation of the viability of these ceremonies in our times: they continue to serve as value systems that connect the individual to society, the church, and cosmic order.

Human life encompasses a sequence of successive transitions from one age-related stage to another (birth, maturity, marriage, and death), which are accompanied by spiritual and secular ceremonial practices. Both birth (baptism), marriage (wedding), and death (funeral) are transitional rites<sup>1</sup> [1, p. 151; see also 2, p. 123–236], between which ritual actions demonstrate notable similarities. Rites of passage are ceremonies that accompany an individual’s social, spiritual, and age-related transition from one status to another. This is particularly evident in birth, marriage, and death, which represent significant events not only in the individual’s life but also for the entire society and the cosmos. To establish and confirm these transitions, specific customs of social recognition emerge – such as *achkalusank* (congratulatory visits for good news) and *seghanberel* (bringing celebratory food) – which, while bearing a socio-domestic character, are intrinsically related to transitional periods. Furthermore, a new designation is assigned to the initiate during these milestones: a new Christian name is bestowed upon the one being baptized by the priest, distinct titles are given to the couple getting married (bride and groom, newlyweds, or “king and queen”), and specific terms are used to refer to the deceased (the late or the departed).

<sup>1</sup> Van Gennep classifies rites of passage into the following types: *separation*, when the individual is detached from their former status; *liminal* or *intermediate*, when the individual has not yet acquired a new status but no longer possesses the old one, and this is often accompanied by trials, prohibitions, and symbolic actions; and the third type – *incorporation* or *integration*, by which the individual’s new status is established, marking the individual’s return to the community as a bearer of a new role.

These rites consisted of preparatory and primary ceremonies, which were performed in specially prepared locations with the mandatory presence of clergy, relatives, friends, and specific groups of people.

Baptism, wedding, and funeral are important sacraments of the Christian Church, performed both in church and at home usually before sunset, and their spatial transitions occur almost identically:

- a) During baptism: home – church – home
- b) During wedding: home – church – home (groom's home)
- c) During funeral: home – church – home (cemetery).

After the corresponding rites, when entering a new world, the baptized, the married, and the deceased receive a new status, similar to the rite of consecration (initiation).

During baptism, a transition occurs from one world to another. Baptism carries the mystery of funeral and resurrection: the threefold immersion in the baptismal font symbolizes Christ's burial, while lifting from the font represents the resurrection: "And our baptism holds the mystery of burial and resurrection; the threefold immersion signifies the three-day burial, while emerging from the font signifies the resurrection" [Եւ մկրտութիւնս մեր՝ թաղման եւ զյարութեան ունի խորհուրդ. Երեք անգամ ընկղմելն՝ զերեքօրեայ թաղումն նշանակել, եւ հանելն յաւազանէն՝ զյարութիւն] [3, p. 145]. Through this ceremony, the old self, born with Adam's sin and not yet baptized, is symbolically buried, and a new person is reborn. This signifies that through Baptism, an individual receives a spiritual birth, becoming a "new person" born from the baptismal font, while the font itself is perceived as the "womb of the church"<sup>2</sup>: "I placed my hope in You from my mother's womb, You are my God... Just as through birth we come from the darkness of the womb to the light of life, so through baptism we come from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge" [Ի Քեզ անկայ ես յարգանդէ յորովայնէ մօր իմոյ, դու ես Աստուած իմ: ... Որպէս ծննդեամբ ի խաւարէ արգանդի ի լոյս կենցաղոյս գամբ, այսպէս մկրտութեամբն՝ ի խաւարէ անգիտութեան՝ ի լոյս զհտութեան գամբ] [4, p. 149]. According to the Christian worldview, baptism represents the cleansing of humanity from original Adamic sin (cf. Acts 2:38, 22:16, Col. 2:12–14) and the mystery of spiritual rebirth [see 3, p. 308].

According to the medieval Armenian theologian and scholar Hovhannes Erznkatsi (c. 1230–1293) anyone who wished to be baptized had to undergo a long path of preparation and trials: becoming familiar with the principles of Christian life, Christ's doctrine, and all the details of living a Christian life.<sup>3</sup> Becoming a member of the Christian Church required two fundamental stages: preparation and baptism.

Before marriage, both girls and boys had to undergo the same path of trials and preparation, spending considerable time in a specially designated space [1, p. 198; 5, p. 38; 6, pp. 48, 98; 7, pp. 291–296; 8, pp. 86–142], after which they were considered ready for matrimony. During the wedding, through a series of consecutive ritual ceremonies, the bride and groom were integrated into the marital order, thereby entering a "new world",<sup>4</sup> – that of married life.

It is evident that the deceased also undergoes this trial, which can be regarded as the struggle of the soul and body prior to death. After the funeral rite, the deceased is reborn as a new person through resurrection, as death is perceived as a transition from one world to another. It is a ritual boundary between two worlds – the living and the dead – where the boundaries of death and life, of birth, become intertwined. Generally, ritual systems are connected to mythical pasts, as ritual contains mythical thinking and carry a symbolic meaning [9, p. 32].

Baptism, wedding, and funeral rites required a specific transitional period for moving from one state to another. Baptism was primarily performed on the eighth day after the child's birth. This practice was related to the tradition of the Old Testament. In this tradition, the children of the chosen Hebrew people underwent circumcision on the eighth day, which was a sign of the covenant (see Exodus 4:24–26). Christians also linked their "covenant" to the eighth day after Christ's birth<sup>5</sup> [10, p. 27; 11, p. 400], and they would remove the myrrh three (sometimes seven or eight) days after Baptism [12, p. 271; 13, p. 181].

In ancient times, the duration of the nuptial repast was seven days (in later periods, it was reduced to three days). The *narot* (traditional wedding binding cord), which the priest would tie around the bride and groom's

2 According to medieval Christian interpretation, Christ is allegorically perceived as the "bridegroom," the church as the "bride," and the baptismal font as the "womb" from which a person is born anew.

3 Ibid., p. 237.

4 This is precisely the transitional rite of consecration.

5 According to certain primary sources, in early centuries, baptism was also performed at adult age. See: Venice Mekhitarist Library, manuscript no. 457, *Mashtots* (Ritual Book), 9th or 10th century, «Կանոն Մկրտութեան [եւ Կնունք տալոյ] յորժամ քրիստոնէս(ո) անկնն» ["Canon of Baptism [and Chrismation] when they make someone Christian,"], folio 76a.

baptisms during the wedding ceremony (and could be tied around the neck or right hand), was required to remain in place for seven days. It was only on the eighth day that the binding was removed through the “Պսակ վերացուցանելոյ – The removal of the wedding crown from the baptism” ceremony<sup>6</sup> [14, p. 81]. During this period, the spouses were considered to be in marital seclusion and were not permitted to enter the marital bed, reverently preserving the bride’s sacred virginal innocence, for it is said: “After eight days, the priest commands them to unite physically – for the seven gifts of the Spirit and the seven sacraments of the church, they must maintain the marriage bed with immaculate purity. And again: seven are the days of creation; the number seven must be kept immaculate” [...Յետ ութն ատուրն հրամայէ քահանայն զուգաւորիլ նոցա մարմնով՝ վասն եօթն շնորհաց հոգւոյն՝ եւ եօթն խորհրդոյ եկեղեցւոյ պարտ է անարատ սրբութեամբ պահել զանկողինն: Եւ դարձեալ՝ եօթն են ատուրք արարչութեանն. պարտ է պահել եօթն թիւն անարատ] [3, p. 203].

The sequence of funeral ceremonies lasted three days (until the deceased was consigned to the earth), followed by the seventh and fortieth days. After these transitional rites, the ceremonies continued for an additional three or seven days, and subsequently for forty days.

Concepts concerning life and death have played a profound role in the ritual and mythical traditions of diverse cultural societies throughout history [15, p. 101]. Over centuries, certain perceptions and beliefs have formed in human worldviews regarding death, funeral rites, and ancestral remembrance, according to which another, new world exists after death. This transition was performed through a specific ritual procedure and customs developed over time, such as a special manner of removing the deceased from the house, placing weapons, horses, servants, household and work tools, provisions, clothing, and other items with them [16, p. 442–443; 17, p. 94]. Specific ritual ceremonies were performed for the deceased’s soul’s peace – memorial services, commemorative meals, seventh-day, fortieth-day, annual, and other remembrances.

### *The Symbolism of Ritual Objects*

Objects used during transitional rites even share commonalities: new clothing, shoes, belt, cross, and narot. “The narot is a cord of green, red, and white silk threads twisted together, which is tied around the child’s neck during baptism, and around the bride and groom’s necks during the wedding ceremony” [18, p. 501; 19, p. 405; 14, p. 32; 20, p.25].<sup>7</sup> Drawing from Christian perceptions, Grigor Tatevatsi explains: “The colors of the narot, red and white, symbolize the blood and water that flowed from Christ’s life-giving side, through which the holy Church was united and crowned” [Նարօտին գոյնք որակացն կարմիր և սպիտակ՝ արեանն և ջրոյն ունին զխորհուրդ բոխեալ՝ ի կենարար կողէն Զրիստոսի, որով միացեալ պատկեցաւ եկեղեցի սուրբ] [3, p.203].

And as during the wedding, so too during baptism, the ceremony of the “crown-lifting ritual” (“Պսակ վերացուցանելոյ”) was performed: “And eight days later, the priest removes the narot from the baptized person and reads a prayer for the baptized” [14, p. 37].

The presence of the *narot* is also seen in the Armenian epic *Daredevils of Sassoun*, during a funeral ritual: “David woke his uncle and asked:

– What is that green-red flame descending from the top of the mountain?

*Hovan knew that Mher’s grave was there,*

*And light was radiating from the grave”*

[Դավիթ հրողբոյր վե՛ր հանեց, սասաց.

– Էնա լեռի գլխիս ի՞նչ կանաչ-կարմիր բոց կ’իջնի:

Հովան գիտն, որ Մհերի գերեզմանն է,

Ու լուս կ’էլնի գերեզմանից] [21, p. 191].

The narot was particularly employed in the context of a young deceased individual. As noted, “For a young deceased person, a belt and shoulder strap were fashioned from the same fabric during the

6 This is the *Tagveratsor* Crown Removal ceremony. Both the crown and the *narot* (ribbon) should remain on the groom and bride’s heads for several days (up to three days, or seven–eight days) according to the custom of the particular ethnographic region. After one or several days, the priest would remove the crown from the newlyweds’ heads, only after which they would have the right to enter the bridal chamber. This ceremony was performed both in church and at home. As a church ritual, it is called “Canon of Removing the Crown (*Կանոն Պսակ վերացուցանելոյ*).”

7 In earlier periods, the *narot* was red and green: “Then [the priest] dresses the newly-baptized in new garments, and crowns [them] with a cross-marked *narot*, and covers over everything with white garment, and gives red and green candles into [their] hand” (here the reference is to the baptized child).

shrouding process. In the case of a wealthy deceased person, the coffin would be draped with a red or green cloth” [22, p. 244].

According to Agathangelos’ testimony, for the burial of the Hripsimian virgins, colorful narots were brought for shrouding: “And the king, along with the princes, brought fragrant oils, precious incense, and multicolored fabrics (narots) for the shrouds...” [Էսկ թագաւորն եւ արքայազունքն ամենայն... բերէին իւրս անուշունս եւ խունկս ազնիւս, եւ զգունագոյն նարաւոսս պատանաց...] [23, p. 1666].

In folk beliefs, the narot was imbued with magical potency [24, p. 1264], a significance evident in the rituals of baptism, marriage, and funeral alike. “Undoubtedly, the narot is believed to possess the magical power of binding and unlocking fortune (untying knots), which, on a societal level, is associated with generational succession, the continuity and sanctification of human social functions, and, on a physical-physiological level, with the fertility and reproduction of the human sexes” [25, p. 39].

In the ritual collection *Mashtots*,<sup>8</sup> as well as in other literary sources, mention is also made of the belt, which was utilized during both baptism and crowning ceremonies. The belt held ritual significance in the pre-Christian era, with the bride’s belt being linked to fertility. However, the belt was tied not only around the bride’s waist but also the groom’s. During the medieval period (XIII–IX cc.), each belt carried its own symbolism, meaning, and purpose. Belts were further endowed with diverse interpretations and functions [26, p. 177; 27, p. 47; 28, p. 194; 29, p. 159; 30, p. 126; 31, p. 210–219; 32, p. 16–21]: “This is the first belt of Christianity, which the priest ties around the baptized person’s waist over white clothing after baptism. As a rule, it was woven with red and white colors” [Առաջին գաւտի քրիստոնէականն է, որ յետ կնքոյն յաւազանն զգեցուցանէ քահանայն սպիտակ հանդերձ եւ ածէ գաւտի ընդ մէջն, զնարաւտն՝ մանեալ կարմիր եւ սպիտակ] [33, p. 410].

There were certain other objects of ritual worship that also had significant importance in these rituals, such as stone, water, and soil [34, p. 310; 35, p. 88].

In Armenian reality, the worship of stones has existed since ancient times. During ritual ceremonies (wedding and baptism), foundation stones were used, which were previously consecrated small altar stones or cornerstone foundations of the sanctuary [36, p. 379]. Rectangular foundation stones, considered sacred, were placed in special locations where people would make pilgrimages to worship, and ritual ceremonies were performed around them [37, p. 189]. In places where there were no churches, monasteries, or chapels, or where they were not consecrated and functioning, wedding and baptism ceremonies were performed – and continue to be performed to this day – near the foundation stone [38, p. 155]. In the funeral ritual, stone manifestations include the gravestone, tombstone, and *khachkar* (cross-stone).

Water, as an element of purification, has important ritual significance in three different phases of human life: at birth – baptism, at maturation – wedding, and at death – funeral rituals.

In the Armenian church, baptism is performed with triple immersion in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [39, p. 11]. A similar ceremony was also performed during wedding rites. The newlyweds were bathed, meaning they were fully immersed in water to be purified from sins, so they could enter a new life and "Groom-Bath" ceremony the priest poured three bowls of water over the groom, saying:

*"...To renew the old self, the Savior comes today to baptize,  
To renew our corrupted nature with water,  
And in return grant us an incorruptible garment"  
[... Չիին մարդն նորոգելով՝ Փրկիչն ի մկրտութիւն գայ այսօր,  
Չի գապականեալ զբնութիւն զջրով, նորս գործեսցէ՝  
Անսպակաս զգեաւ փոխարէն տարով մեզ]՞.*

That is, through ritual, divine law symbolizes the creation of the world, which has existed from the beginning and is meant to continue.

This symbolic concept of consecration is manifested both in religious literature and in miniature paintings, where we often see Christ killing the dragon serpent, primarily in rivers and waters: this is a manifestation of dragon-fighting, the prototype of which dates back to the mythical past. This idea has been expressed in epics, fairy tales and myths, as well as in wedding [40, p. 226–231] and baptism rituals: “The concept of baptism –

8 "... And then ties the cloth (piece) around their neck: Put, O Lord, strength upon this one's neck and cleanse from the pollution of all kinds of sins, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the waist: May the arch of faith gird the waist of this one's heart and mind and extinguish impure thoughts in them, and may the power of your grace grant..." See: Վենետիկի Մխիթարեան մատենադարան [Venice Mekhitarist Library], manuscript 711, Mashtots, 14th or 15th century, folio 16a. (In Arm)

9 Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (henceforth MM), manuscript 8406, Mashtots manuscript, written in *Kafa* and later copied in *Nakhijevan*, 17th–18th centuries, fol. 4a. (In Arm)

Christ's descent into the waters of death to purify them from corruption and to anoint the waters – is apparently the Christian interpretation of the general symbolism of consecration: descending into the kingdom of death for the purpose of subsequent rebirth" [41, p. 363].

Through the ritual of consecration, a person is purified by water first through baptism, then through wedding, and finally after death during funeral [42, p. 415].<sup>10</sup> One dies and is resurrected as a new person in Christ: "Just as the body of the deceased is buried in the soil and the soul becomes invisible, so too the baptized person is immersed in the pool of water, that is, the entire body is submerged and covered... The baptized dies with Christ, and by being immersed in water three times, emerges from the water in an immortal manner through the mystery of Christ's resurrection" [Որպես մարմին մեռելոյն ծածկի հողովն եւ հոգին աներեւոյթանայ: Այսպէս եւ մկրտեալն ծածկի ջրով. ա՛յն է, որ գրորդ մարմինն թանայ եւ ծածկէ... Մկրտեալն մեռանի ընդ Քրիստոսի, եւ երիցս ընկղմեալ ի ջուրն՝ ելանէ ի ջրոյն անմահապէս յարութեամբն Քրիստոսի] [3, p. 146–147].

Purification is realized first through water, and subsequently through the anointing of oils (fragrant resin, myrrh). After baptism, the priest anoints the forehead, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands (palms), heart, back, and feet of the baptized person with myrrh, and while applying it to each part, recites the corresponding formula [20, p. 16].

According to Christian ideology, if through baptism we become members of the Church, then through chrismation we become "soldiers of Christ" who must fight against evil; that is, this mission is bestowed upon the baptized person through chrismation: "Through baptism we are born into the church as children of God, and through being sealed, we become soldiers of Christ against the enemy – Satan. First we seal the forehead, so that we may arm ourselves without fear, and then we arm all members." [Մկրտութեամբն ծնանիմք ի յեկեղեցիս որպէս որդիս Աստուծոյ, եւ դրոշմելովն՝ լինիմք զինուոր Քրիստոսի ընդդէմ թշնամւոյն սատանայի: Եւ նախ ճակատն դրոշմեմք, զի առանց երկիւղի զինեցին, եւ ապա գրորդ անդամսն սպառազինեցուք] [3, p. 151].

During the wedding ceremony in church, the priest blesses<sup>11</sup> [19, p. 862] the bride and groom with a cross in a special ceremony, and then blesses their garments [38, p. 84–94]. In the wedding, the ring serves as a seal – a pledge and symbol of love that "shows one and the whole (crown-shaped, spherical) and the perfect love of the bride and groom..." [ցուցանէ զմին եւ գրորդ (պսակաձեւ, գնդաձեւ) եւ զկատարեալ սէրն հարսին եւ փեսային...] [3, p. 198]. That is, love should be perfect and complete, like the universe.

During funeral, the grave is also sealed: "And the priest makes the sign of the cross over (blesses) the grave" [Եւ տեանազրէ քահանայն զգերեզմանն] [17, p. 232]. Thus, the baptized, the wedded, and the deceased are all sealed and marked with various sacraments.

### *Changing of Clothes in Ceremonies*

During these ritual ceremonies, not only are people bathed and cleansed with water, but also, after removing the old garments, they are dressed in new ones.

During baptism, the child is undressed, and the priest through prayer attempts to remove the oldness of sins from the baptized and renew them with new life: "Lord, make this one worthy of great grace. Strip away the oldness of sins from this one and renew with new life, and fill with the power of the Holy Spirit to be adopted into the life of Your Christ..." [Տէր, արա՛ զսայ արժանի մեծի շնորհաց: Մերկեա՛ ի սմանէ զինութիւն մեղաց եւ նորոգեա՛ ի կեանս նորս, եւ լցո՛՛ զարութեամբ հոգոյ սրբոյ որդեգրութիւն կենաց Քրիստոսի քոյ...] [20, p. 15].<sup>12</sup>

We see a similar ceremony in the wedding rite, when the bride and groom, removing their old clothes and putting on new ones, become new people (king and queen) and enter a new world – the state of marriage [6, p. 48, 98]: "May the Lord God remove from you the old person with their deeds... God dresses the new person, which is created by God in righteousness, truth and holiness" [Հանցէ՛ ի քէն Տէր Աստուած մեր զհին

<sup>10</sup> During burial as well, they bathe the deceased, cleanse the body, and then cover it with soil – bury it. "Թաղել" means: 1. to immerse in soil, 2. to submerge, to immerse deeply.

<sup>11</sup> In Mashtots manuscripts, it also appears as «*տէւանազրէ*» – ["tearnagre"]. «*Տեսնազրէ*» – ["Tearnagrel"] means "to seal, to mark with a cross".

<sup>12</sup> See also Venice Mekhitarist Library, manuscript No. 457, Mashtots I, 9th or 10th century, «*Կանոն Մկրտութեան [եւ Կնունք տալոյ] յորժամ քրիստոնէա(յ) անեն*» ["Canon of Baptism [and Chrismation] when they make someone Christian"], p. 73b. «...Մերկացուցանելն ի զգեստէն՝ զմերկութիւնն Ադամայ ցուցանէ. եւ սա մերկանայ զհին մարդն Ադամ եւ զգենու զնորն Ադամ՝ զՔրիստոս»:

մարդն գործովք իւրովք: ...Աստուած զգեցուցանէ նոր մարդն, որ ըստ Աստուծոյ հաստատեալ է արդարութեամբ եւ նշմարտութեամբ եւ սրբութեամբ]<sup>13</sup>.

Both the baptized and the wedded wear new and white garments: “The use of white in the three most important phases of human life (baptism-christening, marriage, death), when the idea of spiritual purity and innocence becomes primary, is related to the necessity of emphasizing this circumstance, which conditions the perception of white as a ritually pure color” [32, p. 36].

Ghevond Alishan mentions that in ancient times (11th-12th centuries) people also wore white during mourning;<sup>14</sup> wearing black was characteristic of common people, while white was for kings and nobles: “Among signs of mourning, blackness is common to almost all nations, but whiteness is notable in our nation, though not for everyone, but for the great ones or kings and priests, for whom wearing white was also distinctive... It seems that their royal and sacred rank was considered exempt from the black of mourning; for this reason, coffins and funeral accessories and attendants were dressed in white. This custom was preserved in the Armenian royal court even during the times of the last dynasty (the Rubenians)” [16, p. 442–443; 17, p. 94].

During these ceremonies (both prior to and following the ceremony), especially during weddings and funerals, a change of clothing took place (relatives also changed their clothes).

### *The Role of the Godfather and the Kavor in the Ceremonies*

In traditional Armenian families, the godfather (*kavor*) has played (and continues to play) a very important role: he was considered the most respected individual and was invited with a special invitation (accompanied by gifts and *dhol-zurna* music) to participate in and perform the ceremony. If the child was a newborn, the godfather was responsible for the child’s religious upbringing and was accountable to society on the child’s behalf: “...The godfather instructs and nourishes him [the baptized] with words and dresses him [in clothes]. ... And whether the baptized is a child or an elderly, a godfather is needed, as he is the tongue and mediator to the priest” [...Կնքահայրն խրատէ եւ կերակրէ զնա բանիւ եւ զգեցուցանէ զնա: ...Եւ թէ մկրտեալն փոքր լիցի եւ թէ մեծ՝ պիտոյ է կնքահայր, զի լեզու եւ միջնորդ է նա առ քահանայն] [3, p. 145].

As evidenced by facts and analyses, the best man (*kavor*), while performing the most important religious role during marriage, also fulfills the function of a priest [43, p. 105; 44, p. 151]. The best man’s full rights regarding the bride have also left traces in the baptism ritual [29, p. 245], and he subsequently became the “spiritual” father of the baptized child – the godfather. That is, the best man participates in both the marriage and the child’s baptism (as godfather), and this has led to confusion, since according to studies, in some ethnographic regions, the functions of the best man and the godfather have even been identified as the same, although they are different [45, p. 222; 46, p. 332; 47, p. 421].

### *The Symbolism of Songs and Dances in Ceremonies*

These transitional consecration rituals were accompanied by ritual songs and dances, which were performed to mark the passage from one age phase to another, to establish ties between two families, to protect the bride and groom from evil forces, and to ensure their fertility, offspring, life, and prosperity. There were also farewell, commemoration, death, and grave dirges and dances.

During baptism, of course, relatively fewer ritual songs were performed. In early times, after completing the sacrament of baptism in church, the priest would sing hymns and ring bells on the way from the church to the baptized person’s home [48, p. 141], which had the meaning of repelling evil.

Meanwhile, the entire wedding ceremony was accompanied by songs<sup>15</sup> (in church, the priest conducts the ceremony accompanied by hymns) and dances. When applying henna to the bride’s hands, dressing her, and braiding her hair, songs praising the bride were sung, and similarly in all ceremonies (when praising the

13 MM, manuscript 841, Collection, 18th century, p. 1a. Also: MM, manuscript 5087, Collection, *Ktuts* Monastery, 1694, p. 310b. (In Arm)

14 White color was also considered a sign of mourning among the Eastern Slavs. See: Zelenin D. K., *East Slavic ethnography*, Moscow, 1991, pp. 345–354.

15 In the church, the priest leads the ceremony by singing hymns.

“king” (groom), decorating the “king’s” tree, and so on). Farewell and separation songs were also sung (“House threshold, don’t tremble,” “Farewell to the bride” (“Շեմքի՛կ, մի՛ ժաժա”, “Հրաժեշտ հայրսի”)). The girl bid farewell to her paternal home’s hearth with a special ceremony [49, p. 255–256; 12, p. 253]: she would kneel and kiss the *tonir* (oven) of her father’s house. When the girl left her paternal home, clothing, necessary household items, and other belongings were sent with her.<sup>16</sup>

The deceased was also accompanied to the other world with ritual farewell songs – dirges and dances – with ritual-magical thought, word, and action. The comprehensive archaic trinity of thought-word-deed is present both in the these ancient rituals [50, p. 27], as well as in spiritual and secular songs.

During the wedding ceremony, they praised the bride and groom, while during burial, they praised the deceased with laments, describing their lived life and glorifying their completed journey:

“Alas!, a thousand times alas for our falcon David,

Ah, still our falcon David.

Alas, a thousand times alas for the young deer,

Who has gone from our house of Sassoun”

[Ափսո՛ւ, հազա՛ր ափսսս մեր թառլան Դաւիթ,

Ա՛խ, հալա մեր թառլա՛ն Դաւիթ.

Ափսո՛ւ, հազա՛ր ափսսս եղնիկն ջահեկ,

Որ գնաց մեր Սասնայ տնէն] [51, p. 262].

Ritual ceremonies were also expressed through dances characterized by specific gestures and movements. Death, funeral, mourning, and commemorative dances simultaneously ensured the processes of ritual purification of the world [52, p. 64]: “...After Nerses’s death, when they were weeping for the dead, with trumpet and pandyr [string instrument] and lamentations, performing mourning dances with hopping movements, men and women facing each other and clapping with profane and unworthy dances, they would send off the deceased” [...Յետ մահուան Ներսեսի յորժամ գնեռեալան լային, փողով ու փանդոք եւ վնօք զկօծան պարուցն կաքաւելով, արք եւ կանայք պղծութեամբ ճիւղաղութեամբ պարուք դէմ ընդ դէմ հարկանելով եւ կամ ծափս հարկանելով, գնեռեալան յուղարկէին] [53, p.24].

Meanwhile, through wedding dances (bride’s dance, dance with candles, groom’s dance, path dance, etc.), they attempted to ensure the happiness, good fortune, healthy offspring, and prosperity of the married couple.

Before and after these rituals, and during the ceremonies themselves, there were certain customs (including prohibited ones). During the wedding and funeral ceremonies, neighbors and relatives supported materially (giving gifts or money, which constituted forms of mutual assistance) to cover expenses, and physically – helping with household and other domestic tasks.<sup>17</sup>

Special words of tribute and toasts were spoken during ceremonies, and at baptism and wedding ceremonies, blessings were also offered (“May God protect the newborn child, strengthen them,” “May God keep them with father and mother,” “May the Lord protect them, may the priest wed them,” “May you sprout, bloom, bear fruit, and grow old on the same pillow,” “May you sit at the table with seven sons,” “Green sun and red days to our king and queen,” etc [Նորամանուկիդ աստված պահե, զորացնե՛, «Աստված հորով-մորով պահե», «Տերը պահե, տերտերը պասկե», «Ծլէ՛ք, ծաղկէ՛ք, բա՛ր տաք, մի բարձի ձերանաք», «Եօթը որդով սեղան սասէք», «Մեր թագուորին ու թագուհուն՝ կանաչ արեւ, կարմիր օրեր»]) [54, p. 224] as well as congratulatory wishes intended to ward off evil and invite goodness and happiness. During baptism, they would offer the following blessings: “May you be with your father, may you be with your mother, may you have red (happy) days. May your life be long, may you be obedient to your father and mother” [Հօրաւ ըլես, մօրաւ ըլես, կարմիր օրաւ ըլես. ումրդ էրկան ըլի, քու հօրն ու մօրը հնազանդ ըլես] [49, p. 279]. Even the blessings were even differentiated: for a boy child, they would say: “May you be a deep reader, may fire spark from your pen, may you have the fear of God and earn your bread with ease” [Խորունկ կարդացող ըլլաս, գրչէդ կրակ ցարթ, Աստուծոյ երկիւղն ունենաս՝ եւ հացդ դիրութեամբ վաստակիս] [55, p. 254]. And if the child was a girl, they would say: “May you swim in gold and pearls, may you remain white and pure like cotton, may you know how to earn your bread” [Ոսկիներու եւ մարգարիտներու մէջ լողաս, բամբակի պէս սպիտակ ու մաքուր մնաս, հացդ մատակարարել գիտնաս].

Along with the similarities between these ceremonies, there were also differences. For example, while wearing jewelry was mandatory at weddings, at funerals the deceased’s wife would remove all her jewelry and cut

16 As already mentioned, this was also done in the Funeral ceremony.

17 During the seven-day mourning period of the funeral ceremony, it was forbidden in the deceased's home to bathe, do laundry, light a fire, prepare food, etc.

her hair. Conversely, according to Armenian custom, men would not shave until the seventh day or fortieth day after the death. During the wedding ceremony, however, there was a consecration ritual of shaving the groom – *pesa-trash* [8, p. 86–142; 56, p. 285–291], which was considered a variant of a sacrificial ritual: “It is very likely that this custom is a remnant of the ritual by which people, sacrificing their hair to the spirit of the deceased, express their love and submission to it... The ceremonial shaving of the king during marriage, which is quite common among us, Armenians, should also be considered a remnant of a sacrifice to some deity” [57, p. 33–34].

Although during the transition period between religious systems some forms of ritual ceremonies change, such as the ritual ceremonies symbolizing the transitional periods of human life (baptism, wedding, funeral), the essence and purpose of the ritual remain unchanged – to fulfill and renew the creation of the universe through ritual ceremony, which has existed from the beginning and is meant to continue [58, p. 7–60; 9, p. 32; 59, p. 115–120].

## Conclusion

Based on manuscript sources, the ecclesiastical *Mashtots* ritual book, the works of Armenian medieval theologians, and ethnographic sources, it has been concluded that baptism, wedding, and funeral rites constitute a complete symbolic system. They embody mythological thinking and possess symbolic meaning: each ceremony restores the beginning of primordial creation.

The article is also valuable in that the study of rites of passage is presented not only as a historico-ethnographic phenomenon but also as a living cultural system. It demonstrates how pre-Christian perceptions have been transformed within Christian ritual while preserving their symbolic and social functions.

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Поступила в редакцию 21.06.2025  
 Принята в печать 08.10.2025  
 Опубликована 30.06.2026

Recieved 21.06.2025  
 Accepted 08.10.2025  
 Published 30.06.2026