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Tiivistelmä-Referat-Abstract			
<p>This thesis is focused on the ritual process and pattern of Wiccan Sabbats and their meaning. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the ritual process of Sabbats as a dynamic structure and a continuum of meaningful phases in the sociological context of new religious movements and the historical context of calendrical traditions. The case of Wicca in Finland forms a background for this thesis.</p> <p>Wicca, also known as neo-witchcraft, is a new religious movement created by Gerald Gardner in the 1950's that emphasizes goddess and nature worship and individualism. Wicca has eight key annual festivals – four major and four minor Sabbats: The minor Sabbats are the winter and summer solstices and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes; the major Sabbats are better known as Candlemas, May Day, Lammas and Halloween. Calendrical rites are seasonal and relate to cycles of subsistence, such as agriculture, hunting, gathering, foraging and pastoral activities, as well as monthly lunar changes and special days of the solar year.</p> <p>This thesis is based on the texts and guidebooks written by the various creators and developers of Wiccan traditions, such as Gardner's Book of Shadows and Janet and Stewart Farrar's Eight Sabbats for Witches.</p> <p>The topic of this thesis is situated in the field of ritual research, specifically the ritual process studies of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, focusing on such anthropological themes as the practice and meaning of religion. My research methods are, firstly, the theoretical reference frame of ritual process studies – specifically Turner's concept of liminality – and, secondly, the comparisons of the ritual patterns and structures of the textual sources of Wiccan creators/developers. In conclusion, I will use a term I devised called riteme – the meaningful unit of ritual – to illustrate which elements and phases are essential in Wiccan rituals and Sabbats.</p> <p>The general reason for celebrating Sabbats is twofold: To achieve contact/connection with the annual cycle of nature and the dualistic divinity within nature, appearing as a female Goddess and a male God – a binary opposition. The essential rites of Wiccan rituals are dance and cakes and wine, which express the nature of Wicca on many levels, and calling the quarters i.e. the four classical natural elements. Two of the most essential characteristics of Wiccan rituals, however, are the expression/declaration/celebration of the seasonal theme and the change in the consciousness of the ritualist that reflects and is reflected in the seasonal/natural changes within the ritual context of the Sabbats.</p> <p>This thesis is relevant in the larger discussion among both academics and laypeople about new religious movements, their official status under the law, and the process and meaning of Wiccan rituals – to both Wiccans themselves and to the populace at large. I attempt to open the Wiccan ritual process to increase knowledge and understanding and to show that a ritual-oriented new religion, like Wicca, is just as real and meaningful a religion as the old priesthood- and doctrine-centric religions of the world.</p>			
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