

Im Auftrag der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Assistent:innen

an bibelwissenschaftlichen Instituten in Österreich

hg. v. Veronika Burz-Tropper, Antonia Krainer, Agnethe Siquans und Werner Urbanz

Peer reviewed

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**Vol. 33,1**

**2024**

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**ISSN 2412-2467**



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# SPATIAL CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THE IMAGERY OF SPACE IN THE RAHAB STORY<sup>1</sup>

## Raumkonzepte und Raumbilder in der Rahab-Erzählung

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the concepts of space within the Rahab story (Josh 2; 6). The story places great emphasis on space imagery, including spatial terms from three central categories: Rahab's house, the city space, and space references from without the city. The house space will be shown to represent inclusion and safety; the city space, society and law; and the external space, lawlessness and danger. In addition, the text mentions several liminal spaces, such as the city wall, the city gates, Rahab's doorstep, and her window. The liminality that these spaces represent plays a central role in the story as well. Aspects of physical space, perceived space, and liminal space are discussed, as well as their impact on the characterization of the characters and their actions.

**Abstract:** Dieser Artikel untersucht die Raumkonzepte in der Erzählung von Rahab (Jos 2 u. Jos 6). Die Erzählung legt großes Gewicht auf Raumbilder, einschließlich räumlicher Begriffe aus drei zentralen Kategorien: Rahabs Haus, der Raum der Stadt und Bezüge auf Räume außerhalb der Stadt. Es wird gezeigt, dass der Raum des Hauses für Inklusion und Sicherheit steht; der Raum der Stadt für die Gesellschaft und das Recht; und der externe Raum für Gesetzlosigkeit und Gefahr. Zusätzlich erwähnt der Text mehrere liminale Räume, wie die Stadtmauer, die Stadttore, Rahabs Tür und ihr Fenster. Auch die Liminalität, die durch diese Räume repräsentiert wird, spielt eine zentrale Rolle in der Erzählung. Aspekte des physischen Raumes, des wahrgenommenen Raumes und des liminalen Raumes werden ebenso besprochen wie deren Auswirkungen auf die Charakterisierung der Figuren und ihre Handlungen.

**Keywords:** Physical Space; Liminal Space; Perceived Space; Rahab; Jericho

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on sections of my doctoral dissertation, *Space and Space Imagery in the Bible*, carried out in the Bible Department of Bar Ilan University, under the guidance of Prof. Ed Greenstein. My research explores the ways in which descriptions of space and spatial imagery which arises from these descriptions shape the biblical text. The ideas discussed here were presented in a conference that took place at the University of Freiburg, Germany (2021) and dealt with "space" in the Bible.

## Introduction

Space can be viewed as a type of stage upon which physical aspects of reality are presented, where the authors' perceptions, beliefs, and ideas stand behind the way they choose to present it. Scholars have attended to the dialectic between space and place since Aristotle. Edward Casey differentiates between the abstractness of space and its experienced concreteness,<sup>2</sup> with Michel de Certeau defining space as "an experienced place."<sup>3</sup> Beyond its physical properties, scholars also attend to the emotional perception of space. Yi Fu Tuan coined the phrase "Topophilia," a mentally and emotionally mediating space, which includes all the emotional contexts that connect a person to a physical environment. This reflects the fact that our emotions and intuitions enrich our understanding and awareness of space.<sup>4</sup>

A place is a space that is defined by inner and outer borders. It encompasses several concepts: topographical, geographical, mental, religious, philosophical, and more. It is both a physical and a metaphysical entity. Marc Augé claimed that both classic (Plato, Aristotle) as well as later (Kant) perceptions of "place" relate it to basic concepts such as stability, identity, and order.<sup>5</sup> According to Kant, space is often related within the context of a personal story; it appears as a factor that is personal, social, national, mental, or imaginary; and is an explicit result of our perception and understanding.<sup>6</sup>

Space has borders that are geographical, but also political and psychological. It creates a "territory" in which personal or collective identities are formed.<sup>7</sup> The borders, according to Georg Simmel, are not a spatial fact with a sociological meaning; rather, they are a sociological fact that appears in spatial form.<sup>8</sup> Human activity, within space, redefines it: It lends meaning through customs and daily ceremonies. The symbolic organization of space creates a framework that reflects our place within society.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place. Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Studies in Continental Thought), Bloomington <sup>2</sup>2009.

<sup>3</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Los Angeles 1998, 171.

<sup>4</sup> See Fabio Lando, *Fact and Fiction. Geography and Literature*, *GeoJournal* 38/1 (1996) 3–18.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-places. Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, London 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Bikoret hatevuna hatehora* [Critique of Pure Reason], trans. Schmuel H. Bergman/Natan Rotenstreich, Jerusalem 1993 [1781], 58.

<sup>7</sup> Julian J. Edny, *Human Territoriality*, *Psychological Bulletin* 81/12 (1974) 959–975.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, in: Jan Lin/Christopher Mele (eds.), *The Urban Sociology Reader*, London <sup>2</sup>2013 [1903], 23–32.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of A Theory of Practice* (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 16), Reprint. Cambridge 1997 [1977], 16.

Michel Foucault focused on space from the viewpoint of humanistic geography.<sup>10</sup> This outlook views space as a place that is open to several interpretations. It can be perceived as absolute, as relative, as a space that is encompassing or as a framework, as a physical entity or as a system of organizing relationships between objects. According to Yuval Portugali, the personal, subjective, unique space is what lends meaning to the relationships between man and his environment.<sup>11</sup>

Scholarship on the concept of space developed according to two major trends. The first, led by Martin Heidegger, focused on the individual's perception of space, whereas the anthropological trend, led by Ernst Cassirer, focuses on the awareness of the collective and the history of culture.<sup>12</sup> Recently, biblical scholars have started applying theories of spatiality to their research as well. Definitions of terms such as "country," "city," "village," "desert," "road," etc., may teach us of the categories that the biblical writers deemed important. These biblical scholars employ the theories and terms taken from social studies and cultural critique, on the assumption that terms used by the culture under study may reflect their perceived world more than a study of the realia during those periods.<sup>13</sup>

Among all the studies on space in the Bible, the online project of scholars from Humboldt University (Berlin) is worthy of note. This project gathers a lexical and semantic collection of all terms related to time and space, from the Bible and its translations until modern times. An etymological study of these temporal and spatial terms enables a better understanding of the cultural framework and perceptions of space in the Bible. One of the most extensive surveys of spatial theory is found under the entry for "space" (Raum), edited by Michaela Geiger, in the online encyclopedia published by the German Bible Society.<sup>14</sup> At first the definitions of "space" and "place" are surveyed, placing great importance on spatial terms in the Bible. Then Geiger presents important studies of space in the

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault/Jay Miskowiec, *Of Other Spaces*, *Diacritics* 16/1 (1986) 22–27.

<sup>11</sup> Yuval Portugali, *1500 milim veyoter as hageografia shel ha-adam: Masa el tokh hadisciplina* [1500 Words and More on Man's Geography. A Journey into the Discipline] (Heb.), *Teoria Ubikoret* 16 (2000) 213–222.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 1, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven 1955.

<sup>13</sup> See Jonathan Ben Dov, *Mehkarim al ha-ir bamiqra: Tfisot ha-ir benevuot Amos, ideologiya ironit be-Amos perek bet* [Urban Ideology and the Construction of Space in Amos Chapter 3] (Heb.), in Michael Avioz/Elie Assis/Yael Shemesh (eds.), *Zer Rimonim: Mehkarim bamiqra uveparshanuto muqdashim leprofesor Rimon Kasher* [Zer Rimonim: Studies in Biblical Literature and Jewish Exegesis Presented to Professor Rimon Kasher], Atlanta 2013, 225–239.

<sup>14</sup> Michaela Geiger, *Raum*, WiBiLex, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/65517/> (30.07.2023).

Bible, most of which apply the theories of Lefebvre<sup>15</sup> and Soja,<sup>16</sup> as well as those of sociologist Martina Löw.<sup>17</sup>

In this paper I discuss Rahab's story from a spatial point of view, analyzing several of the spaces mentioned in the story. Two marginal occurrences within the story of the capture of Jericho are central to the story of Rahab (Josh 2; 6). Terms within the semantic field of "space" are very prominent in this story: the exterior space includes the land (*eretz*), Shittim, the way (*ha-derekh*), the fords of the Jordan river (*ma'aberot ha-Yarden*), and the mountain (*ha-har*). The city space of Jericho includes the gate (*sha'ar*), the wall (*homah*), and the house of Rahab, which is a part of the city, situated within the city wall. The house space includes several components as well: the door, the roof, and the window. I will explain how the presence of these spatial terms underscores their relevance within the story.

Space references within the text can be divided into three spatial categories: The house space, the city space, and the exterior space, with liminal spaces existing between them. These points of meeting include the characteristics of the spaces they border, as well as the qualities inherent in both. The exterior space comprises the natural space that encircles the city, from which the spies enter the city and to which they later return as they exit the city. The liminal external space is the space that surrounds the city, including the road that connects the city to Shittim, used by the spies to enter and exit the city. The spies flee to the exterior space, the mountain and the Jordan fords, returning from there to Israel's camp in Shittim. The exterior space stands in opposition to the city of Jericho: It represents the tension between the city and its surroundings, between a structure that is identified with the city and the anti-structure that is identified with the exterior space. It is an ownerless space beyond the society settled within the walls of the city of Jericho, a space from which the forces of chaos threaten the inhabitants of the city.

Rahab's house is situated within Jericho's city wall, itself a space liminal to the city (Josh 2:15). The text repeats the location of her house, as situated within the city wall, perhaps pointing to its unique status: It is the house of a prostitute woman, uniquely placed within the city wall. She is flanked on one side by the wall within the city, but on the other, external side, she belongs to the exterior space. This makes the wall a liminal space. Rahab is a liminal character as well,

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<sup>15</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford 1991.

<sup>16</sup> See Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Oxford 1996.

<sup>17</sup> These theories, and others, can be found in a 5-part series: Jon L. Berquist/Claudia V. Camp/Andrew Mein (eds.), *Constructions of Space* vol. 1–5, New York 2007–2013.

being both accepted and rejected by the city and its norms. Her house plays a role in the relationship formed between Rahab, the spies, and the people of Israel. It is built within the wall that forms the outer enclosure of both the house and the city. It has a window that is used to lower the spies to the outside perimeter of the city. Rahab's house space is a meeting point that allows the opposing spaces of the exterior and the city, the city and the private home, Israel and Canaan, to interrelate.

In Part 1 of this paper, I focus on Rahab's home space and its components, both as a living space and a liminal space. In Part 2 I briefly discuss the city space of Jericho and its components, as a cultural space that contrasts with the wild space that surrounds it, and as an identity space that includes the practicalities of inclusion and exclusion, illustrating the sharp clash between spaces. In Part 3 I discuss the exterior space from which the spies arrive, where they hide after the guards chase them, and from whence the Israelites approach the city. Beyond an exploration of the spaces themselves, I discuss the relationship between the spaces as reflected in the liminal spaces: the window, the gate, and the city wall.

## 1. The House Space

### 1.1 *The Physical Space of the House*

Rahab's house was situated within the physical border that encircled the city. The reader is taken into the house, a space within which dramatic occurrences take place following the arrival of the king's men (Josh 2:3). The text describes the house as a secret space in which Rahab hid the spies: "Then the woman took the two men and hid them" (Josh 2:4); "But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them" (Josh 2:6). Do these verses indicate one act of concealment, or two? Zakovitch thinks one: In v. 4 the narrator gives a brief report of Rahab's actions while she stands before the king's men, but after they leave and the suspense abates, the narrator is then able to elaborate on the description of her concealing the spies.<sup>18</sup> Others view the double mention of the spies' concealment in

<sup>18</sup> In v. 6 the concealment is described in the past tense: "But she had brought them[...]". It seems as if this was the product of a haplography *va-titzpe[no]/va-titzpe[nem]*, and she hid him/them, and therefore the form *va-titzpeno* is corrupt, and the correct form is *va-titzpenem*. This accords with the BHS, as opposed to the Pshitta, the Septuagint, and the Jewish Aramaic Targum. Wilhelm Rudolph/Karl Elliger (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart 1984. See Zakovitch and Galil, whose interpretation is based on the affinity between the shapes of the letters "נ" and "ם": Yair Zakovitch/Gershon Galil, *Yehoshua* [Joshua], *Olam ha-Tanakh* (1994), 40. See also Shmuel Ahituv, *Yehoshua* [Joshua] (Miqra le-Yisrael 6), Tel Aviv 1995, 83–85; and Yehuda Kiel, *Yehoshua* [Joshua] (Daat Miqra), Jerusalem 1981, 12.

the house as merely a literary issue, where the narrator wished to tell the story, and in order to not disrupt the sequence, he merely noted the concealment in v. 4 and later on detailed where and how she had concealed them.

I believe that we can detect two separate acts of concealment. At first, Rahab hid the spies in one of the inner rooms of the house, a place that strangers would not enter. There is a distinction between a *bayit* (house), which refers to the public sections of the house where people from the outside may enter, and *heder* (room), the private, intimate space. After the king's men left, Rahab brings the spies to a higher space, even more concealed from the eyes of strangers who may enter the house, to the roof (Josh 2:6, 8).<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2 The Perceived Space of the House

### 1.2.1 A Semantic Discussion of the Term *bayit* (House)

The nature of Rahab's house is given by the description *beit ishah zonah*, the house of a harlot. The term *bayit*, house, is present in several senses: it is the dwelling of a woman named Rahab, and in addition, it is a house that serves a particular function, being the house of a harlot.

The term *bayit* in this chapter indicates a physical structure that functions as a private dwelling space: "the house of a harlot" (Josh 2:1), "your house" (2:3), "her house was in the city wall" (2:15), "to your own house" (2:18), "the doors of your house... in your house" (2:19). The text refers to the term "house" as opposed to the exterior space, as seen in *ha-baytah* ("to the house"). The house in Rahab's story also represents a contrast to the outside: Whereas the outside represents chaos, the anti-structure, the house represents structure (Josh 2:18).

### 1.2.2 A Semantic Discussion of the Verb "to dwell" (*yashav*)

The verb *yashav*, here used to describe Rahab's home in the wall, like the word *gur*, is a verb common in biblical Hebrew as well as in other Semitic and Canaanite languages that distinctly expresses the act or state of dwelling. According to the context, we can distinguish between semantic nuances such as:

- (a) The verb *yashav* in the sense of living in a house: "Build houses and dwell (*shevu*) in them" (Jer 29:5) expresses both permanent dwelling and temporary dwelling. When Rebecca sends her son Jacob to her brother's house, she tells him: "And stay with him (*ve-yashavta*) a few days, until your brother's fury turns away" (Gen 27:44), meaning that the stay is to

<sup>19</sup> Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, traditional Jewish exegete, 11<sup>th</sup> c. France), and Kiel after him, explain that Rahab had concealed each of the spies separately, based on the form *va-titzpeno*, in the singular. According to Kiel, Rahab hid them when she perceived the king's men approaching. Kiel, *Yehoshua* (fn. 18).

be temporary, for a finite time, until his brother calms down. “*Yashav*” here means “to stay.”

- (b) “*Yashav*” in a wider sense means to live in a city, or to live in a country, such as: “He should remain (*yeishev*) in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest” (Num 35:28); “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell (*ve-yashavta*) there” (1 Kgs 17:9).
- (c) “*Yashav*” in the sense of setting one’s place of dwelling, without defining the length of the stay: “Then Cain went [...] and dwelt (*ve-yashav*) in the land of Nod on the east of Eden” (Gen 4:16), as well as Gen 19:30 and Josh 20:4. There are times when it describes a lengthy period, or what happened before a lengthy period, such as: “Your fathers [...] dwelt (*yashvu*) on the other side of the River in old times” (Josh 24:2), and “remain there (*ve-yashav*) forever” (1 Sam 1:22). Usually, the semantic sense of lengthy dwelling is underscored by descriptions of time: before, since, forever, for generations, etc. For example: “Judah shall be inhabited (*teishev*) forever” (Joel 4:20), and in the Rahab story, where it says, “So she dwells (*va-teishev*) in Israel to this day” (Josh 6:25).

In the Mesha Stele, the verb *yashav* means to live in the country, to live in the city, or to establish a settlement. Thus, in Mesha 7–8: “And the Emorite inherited the country of Medva and settled (*va-yeishev*) there.” In biblical Aramaic, we find the verb *yataḇ* (the consonants *t* and *sh* are interchangeable): “[T]o the rest of their companions who dwell (*yatvin*) in Samaria” (Ezra 4:17). In the Targum, “*yataḇ*” always appears in the sense of “dwell.” In Ugaritic the verb *yṯb* is manifest in only one sense – the physical sense of a person sitting down. Sitting before the gate: *yṯb/ bap/ tḡr*, in Accadian *wašābu*, *ašābu*, is used in two senses: (1) sitting, and (2) dwelling in a country, a city, or a house.

The forms *yoshev*, *yoshvei*, and *yoshevet* are common in biblical Hebrew and are repeated in the biblical text four hundred and eighty times, only one hundred of those indicating physical sitting. Most instances indicate a form of dwelling, such as: (1) *yoshev* in the sense of living in a place: “and Jacob was a mild man, dwelling (*yoshev*) in tents” (Gen 25:27); “And Mephibosheth dwelt (*yoshev*) in Jerusalem” (2 Sam 9:13). (2) The form *yoshev*, indicating the population, is used in a construct state together with the name of a place, such as *yoshev ha-aretz* (the dwellers of the land, Josh 2:9, Gen 50:11, and many others), or *yoshvei he-‘arim* (the dwellers of the city, Gen 19:25).

In the Rahab story, the verb *yashav* appears as a *leitwort* and refers to the residents of the land. Rahab speaks of the people of Canaan, calling them *yoshvei ha-aretz*: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land (*yoshvei ha-aretz*) are faint-hearted because of you” (Josh 2:9). A second mention of the Canaanite people,



*yoshvei ha-aretz*, appears in the spies' report to Joshua: "Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country (*yoshvei ha-aretz*) are fainthearted because of us" (Josh 2:24). The verb *yashav* also refers to the spies who tarry in the mountain space until their pursuers stop looking for them: "They departed and went to the mountain and stayed (*va-ye-shvu*) there three days until the pursuers returned" (Josh 2:22).

The verb *yashav* is used as *inclusio* in the description of Rahab "dwelling" in the midst of the Israelites after she was rescued: "So she dwells (*va-teishev*) in Israel to this day" (Josh 6:25). The verse sums up Rahab's story with this verb, reflecting the process she underwent from status to status, from being a Canaanite woman who lives in the city wall of Jericho to one who joins the Israelites after the conquest of the land.

In sum, Rahab's story includes the verb *yashav* in all its semantic senses and refers to different spaces. This verb is used to describe those who dwell in Rahab's home space (Rahab and her family), in the city space (such as the king and his men), in the land space (the Canaanite residents), in the camp space (the Israelites), as well as those who spend time in the exterior space (the spies, in the mountains). Beyond indicating a special association, the verb also reflects a temporal aspect: Rahab "sits" (*yoshevet* / *va-teishev*) among the Israelites, both physically and also over time.

### 1.3 The House as a Liminal Space

Rahab's house reflects her place in society. The spies enter the city and go straight to a prostitute's house, which is adjacent to the exterior space, in a liminal space between the interior and exterior spaces. This space protects those who come there under a cloak of secrecy, appropriate for the services offered by the proprietress to those who enter her home. The house is built within the wall, in a space between the private house space and the city space, between the city space and the exterior space, between culture and wilderness, between "structure" and "anti-structure."<sup>20</sup>

According to Nachum Avraham's definitions, the prostitute is a liminal element, a definition based on those of van Gennep and Turner.<sup>21</sup> Rahab is a liminal

<sup>20</sup> Nachum Avraham, *Anshe shulayim bitequfat hamikra: Re'im upohazim, metsoraim, homoseqshalim, zonot ugedeshot* [Liminal Characters in Biblical Times] (Heb.), Jerusalem 2011, 138.

<sup>21</sup> In order to understand the meaning of the liminal element and liminal space, we turn to Arnold van Gennep's Transition Theory and Victor Turner's perception of liminality. Turner defined the structured society as a society which classifies its people according to hierarchical categories: Each person has a different societal ascription. There is no equality in society; social status is determined by social pedigree and financial power. Turner defines a different, equal group of those who are not part of the structured society; quite the opposite, they are a social group who are

character within her society, whose character encompasses many tensions, as she lives in the city, but her house borders on the exterior space. In his study of liminal characters in the Bible, Avraham explains that “liminal people” are thus termed because they live within society, on the one hand, such as the prostitute and the harlot, the stranger, the reckless and the faithless, the ritually impure and the lepers; while on the other hand, they live in its periphery, in the city wall and gate, a space found between spaces. Rahab, of the city, remains in the gray area where she lives as one who is not an integral part of the structured society, a prostitute whose socio-legal status is liminal.<sup>22</sup>

Rahab’s house is a liminal autonomic space situated between conflicting spaces, the city space and the house space, both of which conflict with the exterior space. Therefore, her house can be viewed as a transitional space. Approaching the house represents a kind of transition rite, as in Turner’s study of patterns of behavior connected to liminal situations.<sup>23</sup>

#### *1.4 The House as an Identity Space*

The house is named for its owner, the House of Rahab the Canaanite prostitute. She tells the king’s messengers “the men came to me” (2:4), meaning, to her house. Her words reflect an identity between herself and her home. Rahab represents Israel’s first encounter with the Canaanites, and she is identified with her house, in which she remains until the moment she is rescued (2:18–19).

Rahab, like her house, forms a connection between the exterior and the interior. She is situated between her relationships with the Canaanites of the land and those found beyond the city walls who come to the city to use her services – in this case, two Israelites. Her words support the Israelites and the spies, as she reveals the Canaanites’ fear and the Israelites’ strength.

At the onset of the story of the spies’ arrival at Rahab’s house, we are told that “her house was in the city wall; she dwelt in the wall” (2:15), whereas at the

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opposed, in their principles, to the structured society. The two societies maintain opposing relationships. Turner also used the term “liminal,” inspired by van Gennep’s theories, which spoke of transitions in a person’s life that are connected to changes in their status: birth, adolescence, marriage, pregnancy, parenting, adoption, and death. These transitions are defined by transitional rites or ceremonies, which van Gennep termed transitional rituals, and divided into three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. Inspired by Transition Theory, van Gennep broadened his use of the terms “liminal” and “threshold,” and had them include also ownerless spaces used in the past as borders between states. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New Jersey 1995, 96; Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* [*Les rites de passage*, 1908], translated by Monika B. Vizedon/Gabrielle L. Caffee, London 1960, 11.

<sup>22</sup> She lacks a legal classification – she is not a man’s wife, yet not under the guardianship of her father. Avraham, *Anshe shulayim* (fn. 20) 137.

<sup>23</sup> Turner, *Ritual Process* (fn. 21) 96.

end of the story of Jericho's conquest, she is said to "dwell[s] in Israel to this day" (6:25). Her status identity was transformed. She changed from being a Canaanite woman from Jericho to a foreigner who recognizes the superiority of Israel's God and joins the nation of Israel: "I know that the Lord has given you the land" (2:9). Rahab's attachment to the entity of "Israel" entails a new societal affiliation. The autonomy of Rahab's house exposes the other order, a space that is marked for rescue, within the city space that is destined for destruction. The scarlet cord tied to the window expresses this particular use of the house.

### *1.5 The House as a Space of Gender Identity*

Rahab's house is owned by a woman. Let us return to the places where the text refers to the house: "The house of a woman" (2:1), "the house of the woman" (6:22), whose name is Rahab: "And they came to the house of a woman prostitute named Rahab" (2:1); "so the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying" (2:3). I will discuss the relationship between the house and its proprietress, the connection between the house and the woman who resides in it, the relationship between the woman and her home, through the transitions between the house and the world beyond it, the city and the exterior space. Entry into the house space plays an important role in the demarcation of the passage into the inner space of the woman's home. The woman's control over her home space, and the regulation of those who enter and exit her home, bolster its image as a feminine space under feminine control and female ownership.

#### *1.5.1 Crossing Spaces as a Transition Between Identities*

When Rahab leaves her house and the city and enters a new space, she completes the process of shedding one identity and adopting a new one. Crossing a space attests to control over it. The space termed "in Israel" (6:25) is a metaphor for Rahab's unquestioned acceptance into Israel.

Rahab's dwelling in the city wall attests to her control over the spies, who come to her from without the city, and over the king's men, who come to her from within the city. She enabled the spies, the future rulers of the land, to remain undisturbed within her house space – that served them as a safe space, a haven. The meeting between the Canaanite element and the Israelite element was made possible by a transition between the opposing spaces, from the exterior wild space that threatens the city space, in which the tension between the interior and the exterior is expressed, to the safety of Rahab's home.

Rahab's assimilation within the Israelite camp occurred over two stages. First, as the text describes, the Israelites removed Rahab and her family from the marked house and placed them at the outskirts of the Israelite camp. Temporarily waiting in a liminal space, outside the home, outside of Jericho, and outside the

Israelite camp, attests to their liminal state. In the second stage, Rahab becomes assimilated within Israel: “And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (6:25).

The spaces in Rahab’s house have other aspects that touch upon her identity, her independence, and her choices regarding her identity and loyalty. The house is a confrontational space by virtue of being both a private and public space, such as when the king’s men come to search the house looking for the spies. Beyond her willingness to help the spies, she also supplies information and the help necessary for Israel’s victory. The house space is identified with Rahab’s values, interests, and emotions. The narrator emphasizes the house as a space that expresses the conflict between Israel and Canaan.

The house is presented in the text as a space of protection and rescue, both in the concealment of the spies and in the rescue of Rahab and her family during the destruction of the city: “And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel” (6:23). The spies instruct her to gather her family within the space designated for rescue through the scarlet cord and warn her that whoever will leave her house will be endangered. From this, we see that the doorway of her house represents an interim space, a border space, one that expresses liminal states of dismantling, detachment, undermining the structure, and standing between two physical spaces that are also both spaces of control and opposition, that pose the dangers of harm and destruction.

Rahab’s house functions in the story as a space for collecting information. According to the Sages, “there was neither minister nor governor who did not sleep with Rahab the prostitute” (BT *Zevahim* 116b). Rahab had connections with the local elite, allowing her access to information. The king sent messengers to her to inquire about the people who came to her in the night, and he trusted her, as attested by his men not entering the house to search it. Rahab negotiates with the king’s men with complete confidence; in this situation, the house is presented as a space of power. The dialogue with the king’s men seems to take place at the entrance to her house, as can be deduced from their command to Rahab: “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house” (2:3). It seems that they were speaking to her whilst standing outside of her house.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Kiel, *Yehoshua* (fn. 18) 12.

## *1.6 The Entrance and Door of the House*

### *1.6.1 The Entrance as a Physical Space*

The entrance to the house is an architectural necessity; a framed space that comprises the threshold, the lintel, the doorposts, and a door that seals the entrance. The spies mention the doors of the house as a border. The door of the house protects both the house and its inhabitants from the outside. It also defines the house boundaries – the personal space, the physical border between the house and the exterior, such as the city street. The public space is marked as one that may threaten the inhabitants of the house: “So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head” (2:19).

### *1.6.2 The Entrance as a Perceived Space*

The entrance and door space form a threshold space situated between spaces, where the transition between the two spaces takes place. This space potentially separates, but also connects, the interior and exterior of the house, and has the characteristics of both. It is a space of danger, and therefore a space in need of protection. The entrance and the door are distinguished in the story as representing a border, an exclusion, serving as a filter and protection that distinguishes between the private and the public, between life and death. In this story, the entrance of the house and the door express the struggle between the two groups, Israelites and Canaanites, over control of the space. The spies make Rahab swear: “So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him” (2:19). According to the filters “door” // “house,” it seems that the door of the house represents both the house and the border, the threshold, but at the same time it also represents a space which serves as a sort of barrier, separating between the inhabitants within, who are safe, and the menacing and dangerous exterior. The interior-exterior confrontation that takes place in the door space recalls Jephthah’s daughter whose exit from the house seals her fate, as per her father’s oath: “When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him” (Judg 11:34).

## *1.7 The Roof*

### *1.7.1 The Physical Space of the Roof*

The roof of Rahab’s house is mentioned in the description of her concealing the spies in her house. The roof serves as a place for laying out and drying grain and fruit (2:6), and also as storage space. This enabled Rahab to hide the men among

all the items that she stored on the roof, and she perhaps also assumed that no one would search this storage space, even though the roof was an active part of the living space and, as noted above, was used for several purposes. Competent detectives would go search there. Why did they not? Perhaps to teach us the extent to which the king's men trusted Rahab.

## 1.8 The Window

### 1.8.1 The Physical Space of the Window

The physical space of the window serves several functions in the story. It is a space that connects the exterior and interior spaces. It is a transitional space, since her house is situated within the wall, facing the exterior space on one side and the city space on the other (2:15). This turns the window into a space between spaces, between the city and the exterior, between the private and the public (see also 2:18).

The window serves as an opening for rescue and escape from the city. Rahab sends the spies to hide outside the city, in the exterior space, in the mountains. The window connects the city to the exterior. The biblical author was presumably aware of the liminal characteristics of Rahab's house, as situated in the wall, and connecting between the two spaces, the exterior space and the city. The window is an architectural component whose characteristics are fully utilized in the story. The same window that the spies use to exit and escape the city, Rahab later uses to mark her house, thus enabling the Israelites to identify the house and keep their promise of saving Rahab and her family. In this manner, the house space, as a space of salvation for the spies, turns into a space of salvation for Rahab and her family, and the concept of space which repeats itself within the two rescue situations demonstrates the principle of *quid pro quo*.

### 1.8.2 The Perceived Space of the Window

The window is a space of danger and threat. Ramon views the scene in which the spies are lowered through the window as the climax of the story, as it comprises elements of suspense, danger, and inherent eroticism: "Then she let them down by a rope through the window" (2:15).<sup>25</sup> The danger comes from the exterior, from the enemies outside the city, and from the city people, perhaps the city guards, following Rahab's betrayal. Rahab's action may reflect risk-taking, or trust in the God of Israel; in either case, the danger space turns into a space of salvation. The scarlet cord that Rahab ties to her window leads to her rescue.

The window in this story serves as a lookout point as well, for the Israelites who located her window when they came to conquer the city. It also serves as a

<sup>25</sup> Lorit Ramon, *Be'ad hahalon nishqafa* [Out of a Window She Looked] (Heb.), Raanana 2012, 172.

space of communication between Rahab, the spies, and the Israelites. The road to the exterior is mentioned in relation to the window, a space that is located within the house but is open to the exterior. The window in Rahab's house may hint at the complex personality of its owner, one who lives on the border between the interior and the exterior. Rahab lived in a liminal space, and she herself was a liminal personality.

## 2. The Space of the City of Jericho

The city of Jericho presents an urban facade both in the story of the spies and in the story of the conquest (Josh 2; 6). The city is emphasized, visible, and is described by its spatial, physical, and architectural characteristics, such as the gate, the wall, and the "house in the wall," as well as by its population, including Rahab and the markers of administration, such as the king and his representatives. These elements help characterize the city and the forces acting within it: The city of Jericho, a Canaanite city, is surrounded by a wall, and is situated adjacent to the exterior space, Shittim, where the Israelites camp. The wall is both part of the city and part of Rahab's house, and the story describes how Rahab the Canaanite crosses lines and betrays her homeland to save herself and her family from annihilation. The chapter reflects the relationships that unfold in a geographical-physical architectural space between the city and its exterior, including the road, the space between the house in the wall and the city, and between the public space and private space.

### 2.1 *The Physical Space of the City of Jericho*

Why did the text specify the city of Jericho? According to Rashi, the city was situated within an important strategic space, near the border, causing it to be especially walled-up and secured, making it difficult to penetrate and defeat. Jericho was a *sefar*, a political and geographical term indicating an area adjacent to a border or beyond it, a frontier settlement.<sup>26</sup> The multiple repetitions of the term "city" emphasize the presence of the city in the story, and the description of the wall which encircles it is significant, given the city's role as the first space on the way to the conquest of the land. The urban phenomenon plays a central role in the message of conquest and emphasizes the Israelites' advantage, who, despite their foreignness, succeed in destroying the city upon entering the land,

<sup>26</sup> The name "Jericho" appears twice in ch. 2 (vv. 1, 3) and four times in ch. 6 (vv. 1, 2, 25, 26). The term *sha'ar* (gate) appears twice in ch. 2 (vv. 5, 7). The term *homah* (wall) appears twice in 2:15, and the term *'ir* (city) appears sixteen times in ch. 6 (vv. 3-twice, 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, 15-twice, 16, 17, 20-twice, 21, 24, 26).

with God's help. The narrator uses multiple repetitions of the various spatial terms to express his ideological stances toward the city and its part in the story of the conquest.

## *2.2 The Perceived Space of the City of Jericho*

### *2.2.1 The City as a Cultural Space*

The contrast between the city space of Jericho and the exterior space located beyond its wall reflects the differentiation between the delineated city and the exterior. Jericho represents culture, society, sovereignty, and defense; as opposed to the wild space beyond the city, which is a space of danger. The description of the city representations emphasizes that it is a space controlled by the king and the forces of law: the king's representatives receive information about strangers who entered the city and came to the prostitute's house (2:2–3), and the men who pursued them, the army which protected the city, are mentioned as well (2:16).

### *2.2.2 The City as a Liminal Space, as a Space of Inclusion and Exclusion*

The city is a two-way space that can be approached from without and exited from within. The spies enter it through the city gates and later leave it by way of Rahab's window. Their entrance to the city space poses a danger to the city. The city's defense system was breached, and its weakness exposed.

### *2.2.3 The City as a Space for the Stranger and the Foreigner*

Jericho was a first-rate milestone. The built city was an archetypical symbol of power that was ideationally charged, and biblical literature expresses tensions between the permanent and the temporary, between order and chaos, and between the relative security the city afforded, and the danger faced by those who remained outside. In addition, the city upheld a hierarchy that stemmed from the various sources of power, both in its center and on its fringes.

## *2.3 The City Gate*

### *2.3.1 The Physical Space of the Gate*

This story particularly emphasizes the gate of the city of Jericho as a transition between spaces (2:5, 7). The reader can track the spies' movements through the various mentions of the gate. The spies move from the exterior, from the road which led from the Israelite camp, through the gate, into the city of Jericho. Two units, the exterior space and the city space, meet at the gate which both divides and connects them, serving as a border.



### 2.3.2 The Perceived Space of the Gate

The city gate is a liminal space that is endowed with “middle” characteristics, a space filled with power, with the ability to distance the foreigner, the wild, the threatening and the dangerous, and to protect the close, the familiar, the local. The gate in the story stands between the different spaces and fulfills different roles. It is a border that represents the territorial division of space, fluctuating between being presented as a border and a protection space to being a dangerous breach in the interior’s security. The open gate closes at night to protect the city residents from the danger of hostile penetration. Passage through the gate also poses a danger for the spies who cross the border and risk being caught by the city guards. The gate shows those who pass through it the power of the city’s sovereign. When the spies pass through the gate, they bluntly reject the city’s sovereignty, an act that crosses a border and signals the upcoming conquest of the city and the replacement of control and sovereignty over the city space.

## 2.4 *The Wall*

### 2.4.1 The Physical Space of the Wall

The city space of Jericho is surrounded by a wall and a gate, which function as the border between the city and the exterior. Singer describes the city fortifications of Hattusa and explains that although the wall was an organic part of the city, no one was permitted to appropriate any section of it for their private residence.<sup>27</sup> This stands in contrast to what is reported of Rahab’s dwelling in the wall (2:15). The wall serves as a border that underscores the spies’ crossing as the penetration of a foreign element into the city, a penetration of the dynamic into the static. Jericho is surrounded by a fortified frame. The role of the wall is to protect the city and to create a system of security and regulation of passage to and from the city.

### 2.4.2 The Perceived Space of the Wall

The wall represents order and the city’s identity and expresses the power and sovereignty of the city.

### 2.4.3 The Liminal Space of the Wall

The wall is a liminal space, a space of danger, with characteristics similar to the space of the threshold in the house. The wild and unrestrained side of the socio-cultural order is found outside the city walls, in the exterior space. Shoving the

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<sup>27</sup> Itamar Singer, *HaHittim vetarbutam* [The Hittites and their Civilization] (Heb.), Jerusalem 2009, 115.

liminal to the outskirts of the city, to the wall, enables the liminality to remain discreet. The wall is an agent of space; it both connects and separates spaces.

Rahab's residence in the wall is a general metaphor for a liminal space, located on the outskirts of the city; it places her beyond the reach of the normative, proper society. The text emphasizes Rahab's dwelling in a liminal space, while disconnecting the living space which protects family values and the space found on the border of society, which also includes the prostitute. The wall serves as a space for anchoring the contrast between the interior and the exterior, and breaching the wall is akin to breaching spaces, allowing the interior and exterior to merge.

#### 2.4.4 The Spies as Nomads – Liminal Characters Who Pass Through the Gate

One who enters the city gates finds himself in a space of supervised passageways. The spies enter a prostitute's home, built in the city wall, since the foreigner could not enter the city center, the inner quarters, without the permission of its residents. This is also found in the story of the angels who come to the city of Sodom and intend to spend the night in the city streets, within the space of the city gates (Gen 19); so, too, the man with his concubine and servant come to the city of Gibeah and wait in the street until someone comes and invites them into his house (Judg 19).

#### 2.4.5 The City of Jericho as Breaching Spaces

The text describes the city of Jericho as fortified: "Now Jericho was securely shut up [...] none went out, and none came in" (6:1). This description enhances the impression of the city's strength and ability to withstand a siege, as well as the sense of miracle which followed its wondrous conquest. The conquest of the city was carried out under the law of *herem*, mentioned several times in Deuteronomy, which stipulates that the Israelites were to destroy the Canaanite cities (Deut 13:16–17). Jericho represents the Canaanite nation that lived within it. It represents culture, society, sovereignty, and protection, as opposed to the wild and dangerous space outside the city.

The main thrust of the conquest describes the Israelites encircling the city wall, and not the conquest of the city within it. The Israelites are commanded to walk around the city for six days, on the outside. The tension between the interior and the exterior is a fundamental principle of the story's message: while Rahab is part of the city, from the inside she testifies to its upcoming defeat by choosing the side of the upcoming victors, the Israelites. The city is defined by its wall and its gate, neither of which fulfill their role as protectors of the city. There is a breach in the wall, in the character of Rahab, whose home is in the wall, and who collaborates with the enemy. The gate does not keep out those who enter it, and

the city is endangered. One of the tensions which arise from the city as a literary symbol is the contrast between the protected city, with the wall as its clear border, and the forces of chaos that encircle it. Rahab resides within it but collaborates with the enemy, and by doing so, destroys the city from within.

### **3. The Exterior Space in the Rahab Story**

Rahab's story presents a spatial framework that centers on Rahab's home within the walls of Jericho, with the exterior space beyond it encircling the city. The spies come to the city from the exterior space and later return to it. The general perception of space comprises physical, concrete spaces, as well as the perceived and symbolic spaces which they imply. Among the spaces, there is a tension that enables the space to participate in the construction of the text's meaning. The story mentions several exterior spaces: "Shittim," "the fords of the Jordan," "the road" and "the mountain," terms that reflect the relationships and the forms of spatial organization. The spatial dimensions maintain both explicit and implicit connections between space, spatial imagery, and environments. There is a relationship between the spatial aspects of the world which are represented in the text, and a perceived, cultural, ideational presence.

Prior to entering the land, the Israelites camped in Shittim, on the eastern bank of the Jordan. Joshua sends two agents to spy on the land and on Jericho, men who go directly to Rahab's house. She hides them on the roof of her house and reports to the king's men that they had exited the city. The king's men search for them along the bank of the Jordan river, in a space called "the fords of the Jordan" (2:7). This is a natural border crossing where the river waters are low and can be traversed (2:7).

Later, when Rahab lowers the spies through her window, she instructs them to flee from the city toward the mountain and hide there for three days (2:16). The spies follow Rahab's directions and leave the city for the exterior space. They stay in the mountain space and then return to Joshua three days later (2:22–23).

The descriptions of space are the stage and setting of the story. Their role is, first and foremost, to reflect the realia of the story; just as the time framework is important, so too is the framework of space.

#### *3.1 The Physical Space of the Exterior*

The book of Joshua deals with the conquest of the land and includes a significant presence of spatial issues. The spaces in the story offer an alternative to wandering in the wilderness, and the descriptions of space were designed to map out a new national territory. The transition between spaces clarifies the borders of the

promised land, while the confrontation with, and conquest of, the local population define the new space and lend it meaning.

In the descriptions within the book of Joshua, the conquest is represented by the conflict between the exterior space and the city space. The exterior space in this story demonstrates the gradation between the exterior liminal space – the exterior space adjacent to the wall, such as the road and the exterior space distanced from the city – the wild space – a natural space which includes “the fords of the Jordan” and “the mountain.” The Israelites are camped beyond the fords of the Jordan, in Shittim (2:1). This was their last stop, the threshold, of their journey across the wilderness before they entered the land.

### *3.2 The Perceived Exterior Space*

The first story of conquest, the conquest of Jericho (Josh 2; 6), describes space as realia that reflects the journey and intensifies the spies’ foreignness and alienation. It includes both geography and ideology. Crossing the borders of space helps the reader define both the new spaces in which the Israelites will find themselves, and the foreignness the spies experienced when they arrived at a new place. The spatial terms presented in the text include three central spaces: “Shittim,” “the mountain,” and “the fords of the Jordan.”

“Shittim”: The Israelites camp in the exterior space, in Shittim (2:1). This was the last stop in their wanderings before entering the land, a clearly liminal space.

“The mountain”: Rahab instructs the spies to flee to the mountain (2:16, 22), a space that serves as a refuge for the spies when pursued by the city guards. This is a wild space in which one can hide, situated between the space of Shittim and the space of the city. The story shows that the mountain space turns into a space of rescue: Following Rahab’s instructions, the spies flee to the mountain before returning to the Israelite camp. A reversal takes place here: The exterior space that is perceived as a space of danger turns into a space of salvation for the spies.

“The fords of the Jordan” symbolize a transitional space whose crossing indicates the entrance to the land, accompanied by ritual acts and with the cessation of the miracles which the nation experienced during their journey through the wilderness, such as the manna (5:12). At the level of the narrative, the Jordan represents the complete spatial separation between the Israelites encamped at Shittim and the Canaanite settlement west of the river.

### *3.3 A conflict Between Spaces*

The city is constructed, and surrounded, by a wall that separates it from the vast deserts that surround it. One of the tensions that arises from the city as a literary

symbol is the contrast between the protected city, with the wall as its clear delineation, and the forces of chaos beyond. The spies who come from Shittim, after the journey through the desert, constitute a contrast to the phenomenon of the city.

Rahab's description of Israel's upcoming victory includes nature and wild spaces, such as when the Reed Sea dried up to allow them passage, and also includes the city space, the culture (2:10). In her words to the spies, Rahab defines the spaces that Israel controls east of the Jordan river. She exposes their strength and the strength of their God and his control over the exterior space, including the Reed Sea, the heavens above, and the earth below. Her words reflect a mythical perception of space and the cosmic order, in which the world is constructed according to a hierarchy ruled entirely by God, a deity who is found in the heavens above and on the earth below, and is therefore invincible. Rahab utters God's name (2:11), changing her from an agent of the Canaanite culture to an agent of Israelite culture. As a liminal character, she seeks to identify with agents of the exterior, with the Israelites.

The appearances of the exterior space in the story reflect the clash between the exterior and the interior. An element from the wild space, from the chaotic wilderness which threatens the settled land, comes to conquer the city and brings with it an Israelite theological ideology. This theology is expressed in the mythical descriptions of space: the heavens and the earth, a vertical space, as opposed to the earth space. Those who transition from the exterior space to the Canaanite city space influence the belief system of the city's inhabitant, Rahab. Rahab describes her perception of Israel's God as controlling the earth space; her impression of God's ability to control the mythical spaces of heaven and earth, as representatives of the cosmos, help Israel conquer Jericho.

The physical spaces of the mountain, the Jordan, and spaces of nature and landscape are presented as opposed to the space of human reality within the city, the city wall, and the gate, borders which were constructed by people to protect the city from the wilderness outside. The contrast between the exterior space and the city space is depicted in the character of Rahab. The city space receives focus and reflection through the spies' entrance through the city gate, their escape through the window and wall, and their conversation with the city's resident, Rahab.

The transition spaces described in the story have unique characteristics: The wilderness space is depicted as a space that also encompasses characteristics of mythical space; the Jordan is a transition space between the wilderness and the land of Canaan; and Shittim is a temporary resting place on the way to entering the land. The fords of the Jordan are also presented as a transition space to the land; as transition spaces, these spaces carry with them characteristics of the gate,

being spaces of danger and threat to the land, to the city of Jericho, and to its inhabitants.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper presented the space of Rahab's house, and the difference between this interior space and the exterior spaces mentioned in the story, including the city, the road, Shittim, the mountain, and the fords of the Jordan. The above analyses demonstrate a connection between the spaces, as well as a connection between the physical and perceived aspects of each space. Special attention was given to several aspects common to these spaces, where the identity spaces are presented in the house space, the city space, and the exterior space. Transitional spaces play a central role in the relationship between spaces, either by connecting them or by presenting the conflict between them. Liminal aspects of these threshold spaces were discussed as well.