

**Miri Fenton**

Hebrew University, Israel

## **Moving Bodies: Corpses and Communal Space in Medieval Ashkenaz\***

**Abstract:** Analysis of the impact of death in high medieval Ashkenaz has focused on practices of mourning and rituals of remembrance. The current article builds on this work by attending to the time immediately following death and before burial. It follows the corpse on its journey from the house to the cemetery through the streets. Focusing on the corpse itself rather than the surrounding mourners, it explores how the presence of the corpse impacted the social interactions and practices undertaken in the house and the street, endowing those spaces with a communal dimension that they did not usually possess. By creating these temporary communal spaces, Jews in high medieval Ashkenaz reordered the spaces the corpse inhabited. Moreover, focus on practices in space illustrates that interactions between Jews and Christians in high medieval Ashkenaz were not only prevalent in secular affairs, but also permeated lifecycle rituals.

**Key words:** Jewish burial, death, water-pouring, space, funeral procession, urban transport, corpse.

### **Introduction**

This article examines the journey of the corpse from the moment of death until interment in high medieval Ashkenaz. Primarily using rabbinic sources, it demonstrates how the power of the corpse impacted the social interactions surrounding it and thereby contributed to the constitution of temporary communal spaces on the corpse's journey. These observations offer new possibilities for understanding how communal space was constituted through ritualized practice in high medieval Ashkenaz. Analysis of these communal spaces in practice, rather than in theory, illustrates the ways in which interactions in space shaped the functions of the house and the street. Moreover, investigation of practices and rituals surrounding death demonstrates that interactions between urban Jews and Christians were not only frequent in 'secular' affairs, but also permeated life-cycle rituals and practices.

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