

Biblical espionage

רגול בתנך

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Aerial view of the CIA Headquarters.

Decision makers of any group of people or organization, in particular when facing opponents, require intelligence about their operational or potential adversaries. One of the primary ways to obtain it is by espionage. Until quite recently the efforts to obtain publicly undisclosed information were carried out largely through human agents operating undercover, sometimes helped by friendly presence in the target area. Spies were sent for reconnaissance missions of limited duration, and after collecting the specific data requested, would return and personally report about their findings. Not always there were reliable verification methods for the information obtained, or strict rules about who should analyze the intelligence collected. It was sometimes carried out by the spies themselves and sometimes by those who sent them.

In Moses' historic survey presented in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people that when they were in **קדש ברנע** - "Kadesh-barnea" (Deu 1:19), they approached him about sending spies to the mountain of the Amorites:

ותקרבוני אלי כלכם ותאמרו נשלחה אנשים לפנינו, ויחפרו-לנו את-הארץ; וישבו אתנו דבר-את-הדרך אשר נעלה-בה, ואת הערים אשר נבא אליהן.

“And you came near to me every one of you, and said: Let us send men before us, that they may search the land for us, and bring us back word of the way by which we must go up, and the cities to which we shall come” (Deu 1:22).

Some of the goals of this mission appear well defined, although we do not hear about the boundaries of the area to be surveyed, or about the duration of the operation. In addition, we are not told about the preparation of the people for this reconnaissance patrol, or the instructions given to them on how to achieve its goals. We also are not told about the means and supplies allocated for this operation.



James Tissot, *The Grapes of Canaan*.

Now we hear:

ויפנו ויעלו ההרה ויבאו עד-נחל אשכל; וירגלו אתה.
 ויקחו בידם מפרי הארץ ויורדו אלינו; וישבו אתנו דבר, ויאמרו טובה הארץ אשר-יהוה
 אלהינו נתן לנו.

“And they turned and went up into the mountains, and came to the valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.

And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down to us, and brought us back word, and said: Good is the land which *YHWH* our God gives to us” (Deu 1:24-25).

After such a poor preparation for their mission, it is no wonder that the spies’ briefings do not contain the information requested, and their report is actually an opinion and not a delivery of intelligence.

This event is also described in the Book of Numbers. Yet here it is God (and not the people) who instructs Moses to send spies. The spies are sent from: **מדבר פארן-קדשה** - “**Kadesh of the wilderness of Paran**” (Num 13:26). Yet as **פארן** (*paran*) could be a variant spelling of **ברנע** (*barnea*), there is no apparent contradiction here with the information given in the Book of Deuteronomy about the point of departure of the reconnaissance patrol (or the number of its participants).

Yet according to the Book of Numbers the spies were requested by Moses to gather information on different issues than those mentioned in the Book of Deuteronomy:

וישלח אתם משה לתור את-ארץ כנען; ויאמר אלהם, עלו זה בנגב ועליתם את-ההר

וראיתם את-הארץ מה-הוא; ואת-העם הישב עליה-החזק הוא הרפה, המעט הוא אם-רב. ומה הארץ אשר-הוא ישב בה-הטובה הוא אם-רעה; ומה הערים אשר-הוא יושב בהנה-הבמחנים אם במבצרים.

ומה הארץ השמנה הוא אם-רזה, היש-בה עץ אם-אין, והתחזקתם ולקחתם מפרי הארץ;
“And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them: Get you up here into the South, and go up into the mountains;
And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwell therein, whether they are strong or weak, whether they are few or many;
And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad; and what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps, or in strongholds;
And what the land is, whether it is fat or lean, whether there is wood therein, or not. And be you of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land” (Num 13:17-20).

However, as the target of the reconnaissance patrol was God’s Promised Land, it seems that the information requested by Moses had very little practicality for the planning of the conquest of this land. On the other hand the requested information had the inherent potential of dissuading the Israelites from striving to reach and acquire this land (as in fact happened).

According to the Book of Numbers, the report of the returning spies includes answers to at least some of the questions asked:

וילכו ויבאו אל-משה ואל-אהרן ואל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל, אל-מדבר פארן-קדשה; וישבו אתם דבר ואת-כל-העדה, ויראום את-פרי הארץ.
ויספרו-לו ויאמרו, באנו אל-הארץ אשר שלחתנו; וגם זבת חלב ודבש, הוא-וזה-פריה.
אפס כי-עז העם הישב בארץ; והערים בצרות גדלת מאד, וגם-ילדי הענק ראינו שם.
עמלק יושב בארץ הנגב; והחתי והיבوسی והאמרי יושב בהר, והכנעני יושב על-הים ועל יד הירדן.

“And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word to them, and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.
And they told him, and said: We came to the land whither you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.
Howbeit the people that dwell in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified, and very great; and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.
Amalek dwells in the land of the South; and the Hittite, and the Jebusite, and the Amorite, dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanite dwell by the sea, and along by the side of the Jordan” (Num 13:26-29).

It seems that there were no arguments among the spies in regard to the information gathered, yet they drew vastly different conclusions from these findings.

This is by far the most elaborate biblical description of an act of espionage, yet in comparison to the modern standing of the profession, it appears somewhat amateurish.

We hear that after the victory of Moses’ people against the Amorites and their king Sihon:
וישלח משה לרגל את-יעזר, וילכדו בנתיה; ויירש (ויורש), את-האמרי אשר-שם.

“And Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they took the towns thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there” (Num 21:32).

We do not hear that prior to the battle with Sihon Moses sent spies to survey his land, and we have to wonder why it was now necessary to send spies to Jazer. There is no information about the spies' mission, or whether they achieved its goals, or whether this information was helpful in the ensuing war against Jazer.

We read about Moses' successor:

וישלח יהושע-בן-נון מן-השטים שנים-אנשים מרגלים חרש לאמר, לכו ראו את-הארץ ואת-יריחו;

“And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two spies secretly, saying: Go view the land, and Jericho” (Jos 2:1).

Although, we are told that these spies were sent “secretly” we read:

ויאמר למלך יריחו לאמר: הנה אנשים באו הנה הלילה, מבני ישראל-לחפר את-הארץ. וישלח מלך יריחו אל-רחב לאמר: הוציאי האנשים הבאים אליך אשר-באו לביתך-כי לחפר את-כל-הארץ באו.

“And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying: Bring forth the men that are come to you, that are entered into your house; for they are come to search out all the land” (Jos 2:3).

It appears that for one reason or another the “secrecy” measures failed, and the ruler of Jericho was immediately informed that Israelite spies came to Jericho, and were staying at Rahab's house. It is also interesting that the king's knowledge about Joshua's instructions to the spies, was not inferior to that of the biblical writer.

We read that as the spies came to Jericho:

“And they went, and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lay there” (Jos 2:1).

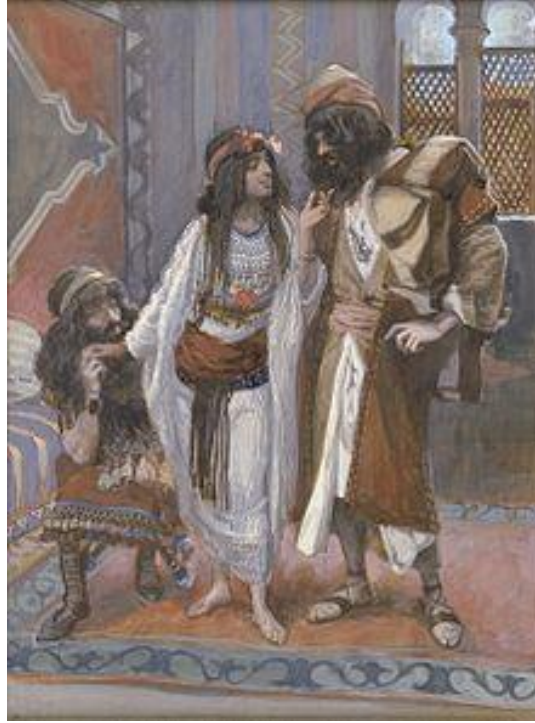
ותקח האשה את-שני האנשים ותצפנו;

“And the woman took the two men, and hid them” (Jos 2:4).

והיא העלתם הגגה; ותטמנם בפשתי העץ, הערכות לה על-הגג.

“And she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had spread out upon the roof” (Jos 2:6).

Although we are not told why the spies went to Rahab's house, and why she hid them, it is possible that Joshua had prior information about Rahab's readiness to betray her town's people and strike a deal with the Israelites, and he may have instructed the spies accordingly.



James Tissot, *The Harlot of Jericho and the Two Spies*.

Now Rahab tells the spies:

ותאמר אל-האנשים-ידעתי כי-נתן יהוה לכם את-הארץ; וכי-נפלה אימתכם עלינו, וכי נמגו כל-ישבי הארץ מפניכם.
שמענו את אשר-הוביש יהוה את-מי ים-סוף מפניכם בצאתכם ממצרים; ואשר עשיתם לשני מלכי האמרי אשר בעבר הירדן, לסיחן ולעוג-אשר החרמתם אותם.
ונשמע וימס לבבנו, ולא-קמה עוד רוח באיש מפניכם: כי יהוה אלהיכם-הוא אלהים בשמים ממעל ועל-הארץ מתחת.

“And she said to the men: I know that *YHWH* had given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how *YHWH* dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, when you came out of Egypt; and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard it, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man, because of you; for *YHWH* your God, He is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath” (Jos 2:9-11).

Similar words appear in Moses’ ode after the crossing of the sea (Ex 15:14-16), which suggests that both accounts came from the pen of the same writer.

Although information about the psychological state of the adversary is sometimes considered a legitimate espionage goal (e.g. Jud 7:10-11), it is not certain whether this was the information thought after by Joshua.

After promising Rahab to spare her family, she helped the spies to depart from Jericho and advised them to hide in the mountains for three days as she knew that at that time, their pursuers will call off the search.

Now we read:

וישבו שני האנשים וירדו מההר, ויעברו ויבאו אל-יהושע בן-נון; ויספרו-לו את כל-המצאות, אותם.

ויאמרו אל-יהושע כי-נתן יהוה בידנו את-כל-הארץ; וגם-נמגו כל-ישבי הארץ מפנינו.
“And the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun; and they told him all that had befallen them.

And they said to Joshua: Truly YHWH had delivered into our hands all the land; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us” (Jos 2:23-24).

Again, we do not know whether Joshua received the intelligence that he requested from these spies. Furthermore, we are not told much about the spies’ findings. On the other hand we hear mostly about their confidence in the success of the coming military campaigns of the Israelites.

Yet it seems that Joshua believed that the intelligence brought by the spies from Jericho was helpful and therefore now we read:

וישלח יהושע אנשים מיריחו, העי אשר עם-בית און מקדם לבית-אל, ויאמר אליהם לאמר, עלו ורגלו את-הארץ

“And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spoke to them, saying: Go up and spy out the land” (Jos 7:2).

ויעלו האנשים, וירגלו את-העי.

וישבו אל-יהושע, ויאמרו אליו אל-יעל כל-העם-כאלפים איש או כשלשת אלפים איש יעלו ויכו את-העי; אל-תיגע-שמה את-כל-העם, כי מעט המה.

“And the men went up and spied out Ai.

And they returned to Joshua, and said to him: Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; make not all the people to toil thither; for they are but few” (Jos 7:2-3).

As in the case of Jericho, there is no word here about the information requested, or how (or if) it was obtained. We only hear about the spies’ opinion as to the number of fighting men that are necessary for defeating the people of Ai.

The apparent reliance of Joshua on the analysis of these spies resulted in the failure of the Israelites to win the battle against Ai (Jos 7:4-5). Joshua’s disappointment after this failure may be responsible for the fact that we never again hear that he send spies prior to his many following military campaigns.

In the Book of Judges we read that on the night prior to the attack on the camp of Midian, God advised Gideon:

רד אתה ופורה נערך אל-המחנה. ושמעת מה-ידברו,

"Go you with Purah your servant down to the camp.

And you shall hear what they say” (Jud 7:10-11).

Although the knowledge that Midianites were scared of him encouraged Gideon, this narrative is probably the only known one where the supreme commanding officer of a fighting force takes on himself a reconnaissance mission.

In the Book of Judges we also read:

ובימים ההם שבט הדני מבקש-לו נחלה לשבת-כי לא-נפלה לו עד-היום ההוא בתוך-שבטי ישראל בנחלה.

וישלחו בני-דן ממשפחתם חמשה אנשים מקצותם אנשים בני-חיל מצרעה ומאשתאל לרגל את-הארץ ולחקרה, ויאמרו אלהם, לנו חקרו את-הארץ ;

“And in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for to that day there had nothing been allotted to them among the tribes of Israel for an inheritance.

And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their whole number, men of valor, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said to them: Go, search the land” (Jud 18:1-2).

While the content of verse Jud 18:1 contradicts the information given in the Book of Joshua (Jos 19:40-48; 21:23-24), we also find in the Book of Judges the following remark:

וילחצו האמרי את-בני-דן ההרה: כי-לא נתנו לרדת לעמק.

“And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill-country; for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley” (Jud 1:34).

It appears that in spite of the heroic deeds of their tribesman Samson, the continuing hostility of the Philistines, finally convinces the Danaites that they should better relocate to a quitter neighborhood.

We read that the Danaites sent men from Zorah and Eshtaol:

וילכו חמשת האנשים ויבאו לישה; ויראו את-העם אשר-בקרבה יושבת-לבטח כמשפט צדנים שקט ובטח, ואין-מכלים דבר בארץ יורש עצר, ורחוקים המה מצידנים, ודבר אין-להם עם-אדם.

“And the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt in security, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; for there was none in the land, possessing authority, that might put them to shame in anything, and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no dealings with any man” (Jud 18:7).

When the scouts returned, they informed their brothers:

ויאמרו, קומה ונעלה עליהם, כי ראינו את-הארץ והנה טובה מאד;

“And they said: Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good” (Jud 18:9).

כבאכם תבאו אל-עם בטח, והארץ רחבת ידים-כי-נתנה אלהים ביזכם: מקום אשר אין-שם מחסור כל-דבר אשר בארץ.

“When you go, you shall come to a people secure, and the land is large; for God had given it into your hand; a place where there is no want; it has everything that is in the earth” (Jud 18:10).

Now we hear that six-hundred Danaites “girted with weapons of war”:

ויבאו על-ליש על-עם שקט ובטח, ויכו אותם לפי-חרב; ואת-העיר שרפו באש. ואין מציל כי רחוקה-היא מצידון, ודבר אין-להם עם-אדם, והיא בעמק אשר לבית-רחוב; ויבנו את-העיר, וישבו בה.

ויקראו שם-העיר דן, בשם דן אביהם אשר יולד לישראל; ואולם ליש שם-העיר לראשנה.

“And (they) came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and smote them with the edge of the sword; and they burnt the city with fire.

And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no dealings with any man; and it was in the valley that lies by Beth-rehob. And they built the city, and dwelt therein.

And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel; howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first” (Jud 27-29).

Yet a similar event occurred to the Danaites already in the days of Joshua:

ויעלו בני-דן וילחמו עם-לשם וילכדו אותה ויכו אותה לפי-חרב, וירשו אותה וישבו בה, ויקראו ללשם דן, כשם דן אביהם.

“And the children of Dan went up and fought against Leshem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and dwelt therein, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father” (Jos 19:47).

As even the name לשם (*leshem*) - “Leshem” appears as a spelling variant of the name ליש (*Laish*) - “Laish”, it is most likely that both accounts refer to the same affair.

In the Book of Samuel we read about David’s men: “And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves to him; and he became captain over them” (1 Sam 22:2). Later we are told that David relocated to מדבר-זיף - “the wilderness of Ziph” (1 Sam 23:14). It seems that the presence of this rough crowd among the Ziphites was not to their liking, and they report to King Saul that David was hiding “with them” in the “hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon” (1 Sam 26:1; see also: 1 Sam 23:19). We do not know if they delivered this intelligence only because of their discontent with the presence of David and his men among them, or due to their loyalty to King Saul, or because they were expecting a reward.

Now we are told:

ויקם שאול וירד אל-מדבר-זיף, ואתו שלשת-אלפים איש בחורי ישראל-לבקש את-דוד, במדבר-זיף.

ויחן שאול בגבעת החכילה אשר על-פני הישימן-על-הדרך; ודוד ישב במדבר, וירא כי בא שאול אחריו המדברה.

וישלח דוד מרגלים; וידע כי-בא שאול אל-נכון.

“Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.

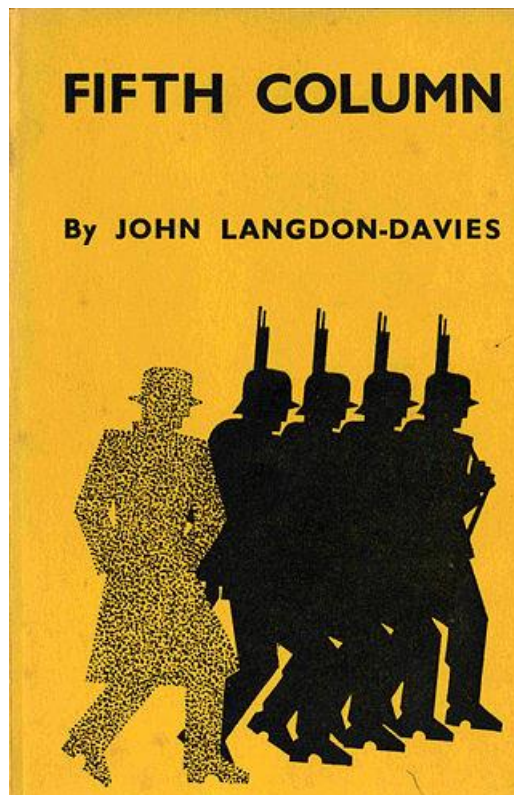
And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul was come of a certainty” (1 Sam 26:2-4).

Unlike Gideon, David sent others to obtain the information about the exact location of King Saul in the wilderness. This was apparently done for saving his strength and not due to lack of courage, as we will soon hear that in the following night David accompanied by one man went to King Saul’s encampment and **“took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's head”** (1 Sam 26:12).

In the Book of Samuel we also read about Absalom’s extended efforts to transfer the loyalty of Israelites from King David to himself (2 Sam 15:1-7). After forty years, Absalom asked for, and received the king’s permission to go to Hebron. Now we hear that from there:

וישלח אבשלום מרגלים בכל-שבטי ישראל לאמר : כשמעכם את-קול השפר, ואמרתם מלך אבשלום בחברון.

“And Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, then you shall say: Absalom is king in Hebron” (2 Sam 15:10).



Although we find here the word **מרגלים** which usually mean “spies”, they are not charged with any task of information gathering. A more accurate definition of these **מרגלים** is a “Fifth Column”, a phrase coined by the Spanish Nationalist General Amillio Mola in 1936 describing the Nationalist supporters inside Madrid that would help his four columns of troops that were approaching the city.

Throughout history, leaders were also concerned about enemy espionage, in particular in regards to foreigners. The crucial question was always the one defined by Joshua's words when he encountered an unknown man near Jericho: **וילך יהושע אליו ויאמר לו, הלנו אתה אם-לצרינו** - **“And Joshua went to him, and said to him: Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”** (Jos 5:13).

A more sophisticated approach to this problem was that of Achish the king of Gath. At one point David asked Achish's permission to reside in his land. Although not relying on David words about his trustworthiness, Achish indeed gave him permission to do that after reasoning:

ויאמן אכיש בדוד לאמר: הבאש הבאיש בעמו בישראל, והיה לי לעבד עולם.
“And Achish believed David, saying: He had made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant forever” (1 Sam 27:12).

Yet it appears that Achish's reasoning were not sufficient to convince the other rulers of the Philistines about David's fidelity (1 Sam 29:1-4).

In the Book of Kings we read that after several times that the men of the king of Israel managed to avoid the ambush set by Aramean king, the king turned to his men and said:

הלוא תגידו לי, מי משלנו אל-מלך ישראל.
“Will you not tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?” (2 Ki 6:11).

Allen W. Dulles the first director of the CIA defined the role of counterintelligence as vigorous exposing and dismantling the structure and personnel of hostile intelligence services.

It is rather remarkable that the first biblical account about espionage is actually about counterintelligence.



Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria (1899 - 1953). Chief of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus (NKVD), under Joseph Stalin during WWII.

We read about the appointment of Joseph by the king of Egypt:

**אתה תהיה על-ביתי, ועל-פיך ישק כל-עמי; רק הכסא אגדל ממך.
ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף: ראה נתתי אתך על כל-ארץ מצרים.**

“You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than you.

And Pharaoh said to Joseph: See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” (Gen 41:40-41).

ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף, אני פרעה; ובלעדיך לא-ירים איש את-ידו ואת-רגלו-בכל-ארץ מצרים.

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph: I am Pharaoh, and without you shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt” (Gen 41:44).

Although it is not detailed here, yet we will soon find out that one of Joseph’s main responsibilities was the security of Egypt and its King. On one hand he takes charge of Egypt’s food supply apparently to prevent the possibility that a hungry mob would rise up and attempt to depose the king, and it appears that he was also responsible for preventing hostile foreign intelligence services from gathering information about potential areas of Egypt’s military vulnerability.

We read that as Jacob’s sons came to Egypt to acquire food, Joseph met them:

**ויאמר אלהם מרגלים אתם, לראות את-ערות הארץ באתם.
ויאמרו אליו, לא אדני; ועבדיך באו לשבר-אכל.
כלנו בני איש-אחד נחנו; כנים אנחנו, לא-היו עבדיך מרגלים.
ויאמר אלהם: לא, כי-ערות הארץ באתם לראות.**

“And (he) said to them: You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you are come.

And they said to him: Nay, my lord, but to buy food are your servants come.

We are all one man's sons; we are upright men, your servants are no spies.

And he said to them: Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land you are come” (Gen 42:9-12).

ויאסף אתם אל-משמר, שלשת ימים.

“And he put them all together into ward three days” (Gen 42:17).

We are told that Joseph even designed a technique to test whether Jacob’s sons were telling the truth:

שלחו מכם אחד ויקח את-אחיכם, ואתם האסרו, ויבחנו דבריכם האמת אתכם; ואם-לא-חי פרעה כי מרגלים אתם.

“Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and you shall be bound, that your words may be proved, whether there be truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies” (Gen 42:16).

It appears that already one of the late scribes of the Book of Genesis believed that the responsibility for the security of the Egyptian king was Joseph’s real employment, and therefore that scribe replaced one letter in the word: **חלום** (*khalom*) - “dream” in verse Gen 41:16. It now appears as:

ויען יוסף את-פרעה לאמר, בלעדי: אלהים יענה את-שלום פרעה.

“And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Gen 41:16).

The Greek translator wrote here: “Without God the safety of Pharaoh will not be answered”, yet it is also possible that here **בלעדי** (*bilā 'dai*) is a letter-insertion error of **בעדי** (*baa 'dai*) - “through me.” If this interpretation is correct then Joseph was telling Pharaoh: “Through me God will promote the security of Pharaoh.”

It is also possible that even an earlier counterintelligence-involved event is described in the Book of Genesis. We read that after two messengers came to Lot in Sodom:

טרם ישכבו, ואנשי העיר אנשי סדם נסבו על-הבית, מנער ועד-זקן: כל-העם מקצה. ויקראו אל-לוט ויאמרו לו, איה האנשים אשר-באו אליך הלילה; הוציאם אלינו ונדעה אתם.
“And before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. And they called to Lot, and said to him: Where are the men that came in to you this night? Bring them out to us, that we may know them” (Gen 19:4-5).

As the language here is similar to that of the king of Jericho when he spoke to Rahab about Joshua’s spies (Jos 2:2-3), it seems that the men of Sodom might have been concerned that Lot’s guests were in fact spies. A somewhat similar event is described in the Book of Judges (Jud 19:22).

In the Book of Samuel we read:

ויהי אחרי-כן, וימת מלך בני עמון; וימלך חנון בנו תחתיו. ויאמר דוד אעשה-חסד עם-חנון בן-נחש, כאשר עשה אביו עמדי חסד, וישלח דוד לנחמו ביד-עבדיו אל-אביו; ויבאו עבדי דוד ארץ בני עמון. ויאמרו שרי בני-עמון אל-חנון אדניהם, המכבד דוד את-אביך בעיניך-כי-שלח לך מנחמים; הלוא בעבור חקר את-העיר ולרגלה ולהפכה, שלח דוד את-עבדיו אליך.
“And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead.

And David said: I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me. So David sent by the hand of his servants to comfort him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon.

And the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun their lord: Think you that David doth honor your father, that he have sent comforters to you? Have not David sent his servants to you to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?” (2 Sam 10:1-3; see also: 1 Ch 19:1-3).

As in the next chapter we are told that David sent Joab with an army against the Ammonites, we may wonder whether this was indeed the response to the humiliation of David’s messengers that came to comfort King Hanun, or whether Hanun’s counterintelligence correctly identified these men as David’s spies.

In the Book of Deuteronomy we read:

כי יביאך יהוה אלהיך אל-הארץ אשר-אתה בא-שמה לרשתה; ונשל גוים-רבים מפניך החתי והגרגשי והאמרי והכנעני והפרזי, והחוי והיבוסים-שבעה גוים רבים ועצומים ממך.

ונתנם יהוה אלהיך, לפניך-והכיתם: החרם תחרים אתם, לא-תכרת להם ברית ולא תחנם.
ולא תתחתן בם: בתך לא-תתן לבנו, ובתו לא-תקח לבנד.

“When *YHWH* your God shall bring you into the land whither you goes to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before you, the Hittite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, seven nations greater and mightier than you;

And when *YHWH* your God shall deliver them up before thee, and you shall smite them; then you shall utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them;

Neither shall you make marriages with them: your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor his daughter shall you take to your son” (Deu 7:1-3; see also: Ex 23:31-33; 34:11-16; Num 33:50-56; Deu 7:16-18, 21-26; 20:16-18; Jos 23:2-13; Jud 2:1-5).

In none of these many entrees, do we hear that those among the Gentiles that will betray their people and help the Israelites will be exempted and treated differently. Yet we do not even hear Joshua reprimanding the spies who swore in the name of *YHWH* to save Rahab and her family.

Furthermore we read:

ואת-רחב הזונה ואת-בית אביה ואת-כל-אשר-לה החיה יהושע, ותשב בקרב ישראל עד היום
הזה: כי החביאה את-המלאכים אשר-שלח יהושע לרגל את-יריחו.

“And Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all that she had, did Joshua save alive; and she dwelt in the midst of Israel, to this day; because she hid the messengers, whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (Jos 6:25).

In the rabbinical literature Rahab is said to have converted and then married Joshua. Their descendants included the Prophets Jeremiah, Hilkiyah, Seraiah, Mahseiah, and Baruch, and the Prophetess Hulda.

Obviously the subjective evaluation of a person as a despicable mole (or traitor), or considering him as valiant agent, depends on whether he is operating for us or against us.

Furthermore, while in theory the “Law of the land” is applicable equally to all the inhabitants of the land, yet it appears that in practice those involved in espionage are subjugated to a significantly different code of Law.