



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Without Bounds

Yoram Bilu

Published by Wayne State University Press

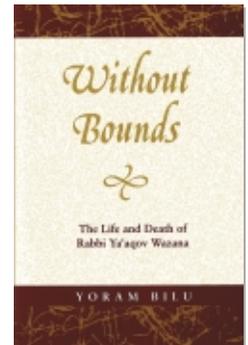
Bilu, Yoram.

Without Bounds: The Life and Death of Rabbi Ya'aqov Wazana.

Wayne State University Press, 2017.

Project MUSE., <a href="

<https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/56561>



## 6

### A Robe, a *Bordo*, and Other Objects



**A**n interval of many years separated the deaths of Wazana's parents. Even though his father died when he was still young, and his mother when he was middle-aged, the death legends nevertheless contain similar messages. In both cases, Rabbi Ya'aqov's pain and sense of loss were exacerbated by his untimely absence from home. It seems that he found the torment of these abrupt bereavements both intolerable and unacceptable—his non-acceptance being reflected in the bizarre disinterment stories. In both cases the longing, despondency, and melancholy transcended the serious Jewish legal injunctions against interference with the dead. Given the emotional attachment to his parents the question arises to what degree he remained bound to them when they died. Even if the move from Assarag to Agouim was driven by the pain of separation from his mother, in hindsight it appears to represent a desire to disengage from her home and her grave and their associations. In the case of his father, Wazana was already at a physical distance due to the fact that Rabbi Avraham was buried not in Assarag, but in Tamzersht, and he had a terror of visiting Amassine, where the death occurred. However, it is unlikely that this distancing could dull the memory of the figures to whom he was so inextricably tied. We have no way of knowing how much his thoughts turned to them after their deaths, though from the scant information available it seems he invested considerable effort in preserving their memory.

The persistent bond that Wazana maintained with his late father was a natural outcome of the latter's bequest of a career as a healer. Although Rabbi Ya'aqov's healing style was worlds apart from the traditional family approach used by his father, it seems he often turned to his father for help

## Chapter 6

in difficult situations. According to Rabbi Shalom, another healer from Agouim who deems himself Rabbi Ya'aqov's disciple, Rabbi Ya'aqov once declared that "he was not afraid of anyone: he just called on his father, the great kabbalist, and everything would work out." Nonetheless, the continued connection with his father after death failed to assuage his need for a benevolent father figure. Makhluḥ Ben-Hayim, with whom Wazana lived in Agouim, recalled that upon arriving at his house, Rabbi Ya'aqov addressed him thus: "I would like you to think of me as your son, I just need a corner for myself." We should remember that, when he left Assarag and took up residence in Agouim, Wazana was in his prime, a renowned healer and much older than Makhluḥ.

Did Wazana own any keepsake to remind him of his father? According to a number of informants he did—and they all took care to emphasize the tremendous importance of this object. "He carried his father's *bordo* [walking stick] everywhere, he never let it go, never put it down," recalled one of his friends. An acquaintance from the village of Timjduṭ rejoined: "He had a *bordo* that never left his sight." Given this attachment, we can imagine Wazana's distress when one day the cane was stolen by Arabs in Timjduṭ. "He was truly wretched and couldn't stop searching for it, he just kept looking and looking." When friends offered him two new canes to replace the one he had lost, he naturally refused. The story ends on a bright note however. As Wazana and his friends made their way to the home of an acquaintance in the village of Timjduṭ, an amazing sight met their eyes: the *bordo* came gliding toward them through the air, "like a plane over the roof tops," went straight to Wazana, and landed in his hand. On regaining his composure, Wazana gave his usual broad grin, completely recovered from his previous air of dejection and quipped: "I must have forgotten it here." His stunned companions laughed at this casual explanation. "You probably forgot it in heaven," one joked back. Obviously Wazana's friends believed they were witnessing another of those special trademark miracles that lay at the foundation of his fame, and ascribed the incident to his alliance with the demons.

Wazana's inability to part with his father's cane, the plain symbol of masculinity, paternal potency, and authority, is indication of a profound emotional bond which even death could not sever. It is interesting that Wazana, who on the whole was disinterested in material effects, showed similar fanatical possessiveness toward other objects, including a large, bulky copper ring he allegedly used for controlling the demons; a magic mirror for locating missing persons; and a set of amber beads he twisted between his fingers in the Muslim fashion. He also had a red hat (*tarboosh*), lined with amulets, which he guarded closely, never allowing others so much as to touch it. None of these items belonged to Rabbi Avraham. Though, in one way or another, all of them were associated

## A Robe, a *Bordo*, and Other Objects

with the profession of healing that Wazana had inherited through his father's blessing, these articles in fact represent Muslim healing traditions far removed from the path of Rabbi Avraham.

Was there anything to remind Wazana of his mother? According to Rabbi Yitzhak Peḥima from Agouim, toward the end of his life Wazana spoke of her often. Peḥima related that, after the healer's death his neighbors raided the room where he died, and removed all of his belongings. Only one item was restored to his family, a robe hidden beneath his bed, which one of the female looters presented to Wazana's nephew in Agouim. There is a story that Rabbi Ya'aqov appeared in this woman's dream, threatening to harm her if she failed to deliver the robe back to the family. According to Rabbi Yitzhak, the dress belonged to Wazana's mother and routinely accompanied him on his travels. Rabbi Ya'aqov had a daily ritual by which he remembered his beloved mother: "Each morning, when he was alone, he would unfold the robe, stare at it, and cry for a long time. Then he would dry his eyes with it, fold it up and put it back [under the bed where he kept it]." There can be no more touching statement of longing and sorrow than this solitary and poignant ritual performed by a heartbroken son.