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## Without Bounds

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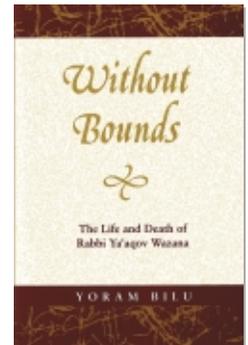
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## The Move to Agouim



**M**any of the informants who observed Wazana's powerful attachment to his mother regarded her death as the principal reason for his move away from Assarag. They maintain that Wazana was unable to tolerate his life in the empty house, close to his mother's fresh grave, and therefore left his native village, never to return. From that time until the end of his life, Rabbi Ya'aqov never had a home of his own. He roamed the villages of the Western Atlas from his new base in the village of Agouim on the Marrakech-Ouarzazate highway, some ninety kilometers east of Assarag and the Tifnoute Valley. Judging by Wazana's stricken response to his mother's death, it is indeed likely that the trauma of her death contributed to his leaving Tifnoute. However, informants also offered alternative explanations for his move, linked to other aspects of Wazana's life—particularly his multifaceted identity. Apart from those factors that prompted Wazana to uproot from Assarag, we need to understand his reasons for selecting Agouim specifically as his base.

Several informants contend that other reasons, unconnected with his anguish at the separation from his mother, drove Wazana from his village. His great intimacy with the Muslims, on the one hand, and with the demons on the other, caused complications that even this usually fearless man had difficulty handling. His problem with the Muslims involved the dark jealousy of powerful sheikhs, healers, and men of religion who could not bear that a Jewish healer had achieved such renown through arts acquired from them. They were especially infuriated by the fact that Muslim holy books had fallen into the hands of an unworthy infidel. More than once Wazana's life was threatened in forceful attempts to retrieve the books. Perhaps the combination of threats and the deterioration in

Muslim-Jewish relations in the latter half of the 1940s also encouraged Wazana to leave his birthplace.

Another explanation was offered by a few informants who saw his departure from Agouim as flight before demonic retribution. They believe that Wazana defied his allies from beneath the ground by engaging in forbidden healing. This rare interpretation is of great importance to understanding the figure of Wazana as shaped by the informants, since it once again makes allusion to the limits of his control over the demons. As we see later, Rabbi Ya'aqov's obstinacy in healing someone the demons had forbidden him to cure caused his downfall. The demon-related explanation for his departure from Assarag thus indicates that the seeds of this stubbornness were present already in Assarag.

To the various levels of explanation—the personal (mother's death), the Muslim, and the demonic—should be added a further factor, one which perhaps carries the most weight in accounting for his abandoning Assarag. During the second part of the 1940s, even before the period of mass emigration to Israel, an acceleration in a demographic trend which had started in the early part of the century occurred. The Jews of the mountain and desert regions of southern Morocco emigrated en masse to the large coastal cities (especially Casablanca), drawn by improved economic opportunities under French rule. This internal migration was particularly marked in the post-Second World War period due to episodes of drought and famine that struck the area. Even the remote Tifnoute region was affected by this trend, its Jewish communities gradually dwindling and dying out. For the gregarious Wazana, life in Assarag emptied of its Jews had little to recommend it. Even prior to his permanent move, he began staying away from the village for increasing lengths of time. The *mellah* (Jewish quarter) in Timjdut, for example, was one place he often visited. A native of Timjdut recalls, "He would come from Assarag and live with us for a month or two at a time because there was nobody to talk to in Assarag." Agouim folk had a similar explanation for Wazana's arrival in their village: "There was nobody to sit with in Tifnoute, no Jews for him. How many were left there? Two families?"

In contrast to Assarag, the Jewish community of Agouim still numbered a few score families. Wazana naturally favored this village because his sister's son, Ya'aqov Buskila, lived there. Agouim was also notably the nearest Jewish *mellah* to the tomb of Rabbi David u-Moshe. We cannot know whether the shrine also drew Wazana to Agouim, but we do know that after his move, he often visited there. Many informants recall meeting him inside the impressive shrine, participating in feasts and entertaining visitors with his magic. From that time, Wazana became a familiar figure among the villages and towns near Rabbi David u-Moshe's tomb—Timestint, Tidili, Ouarzazate, Skoura, Imini, Amassine, Sour, and Tezort.

## The Move to Agouim



Rabbi and pupils in the synagogue of Agouim, ca. 1950

Some informants stressed that Wazana's behavior underwent dramatic transformation after his move to Agouim. According to their reports, the man with the multiple identity, who prayed both "Arab prayers and Jewish prayers," shed his Muslim identity and once more became a Jew in every sense. If these descriptions indeed denote a genuine transformation, and not merely the informants' wish for Wazana to repent before his death, then his frequent visits to the tomb of the nearby *tsaddiq* might have been a contributing factor.

Even though his nephew lived in Agouim, Wazana chose to make his home with Makhluḥ Ben-Ḥayim, whose relationship with the Wazana family stretched back many years. Makhluḥ believed that his own birth was owed to the power of Rabbi Avraham Wazana's prayers. When Makhluḥ's wife repeatedly miscarried, and the couple were threatened with childlessness, Rabbi Ya'aqov made it possible for them to have children. It is no wonder that in gratitude Makhluḥ gave Rabbi Ya'aqov the use of one room and treated him with great devotion. Makhluḥ's house served as Wazana's home throughout his years in Agouim. It was from there that he set out on his travels around the Western Atlas and it was there he also died.