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## Without Bounds

Yoram Bilu

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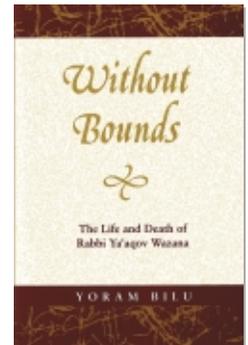
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## Wazana of the Heart



Where has our journey in Wazana's footsteps taken us? Here, at the end of the line, it seems appropriate to restate the cautionary remarks that prefaced this expedition. We have traveled to the heart of the High Atlas Mountains via the inner space of the minds of the informants whose image of Wazana has been formed by their personal desires and cultural cognitions. Our quest has taken us not on a time voyage back forty, fifty, and sixty years, to Wazana's youth and adulthood, but into the mists of human memories in which the past is evaluated from the perspective of life in the present. Wazana, whose death sealed the Moroccan chapter of the informants' lives, has become an integral part of that past life, his figure subjected to the informants' retrospective evaluations of the past.

Once we accept that the Wazana who lived and operated in the Atlas Mountains during the first half of this century does not await us at the end of the road, and that the stories we have gathered about him do not stand for snapshots of objective facts from which an accurate historical biography can be reconstructed, then it is clear that all that can be offered is a set of interpretations, suggesting possible (though not exhaustive) meanings for the memories and impressions of those who knew him in another place and time. This we have tried to do in the two preceding chapters. However, we cannot ignore the basic premise underlying this search, namely, that the informants' memories entail the fragments of a mosaic picture that when reconstructed offers a generalized, well-integrated portrait of Wazana. How does this reconcile with the notion that these are memories saturated with personal and subjective evaluations and impressions, or with the fact that the portrayals

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traced by the informants do not necessarily overlap, and sometimes even controvert each other?

The answer lies in the complexity and wealth of data embedded in the stories and in the multiple options for deciphering them. The informants' recollections are varied. Embedded in them are shared subjects, familiar to everyone, which keep recurring with minor changes, side by side with unique personal experiences and individual recollections, lending the impression that deep in the heart of each informant lives another Wazana. As noted, our starting premise was that a generalized picture might be constructed from the stories and therefore we have focused on the commonalities. Nevertheless, it is still appropriate to investigate the discrepancies, even though these may rattle the framework and crack the portrait here and there.

Let us return and reexamine the portrait while listening to *all* of the informants' voices together, including those that clash with the dominant note within the stories. Wazana is generally depicted as an unprecedentedly courageous person, with contempt for danger and delight in challenge; however, there are some who maintain that his behavior on critical occasions in his life was that of a coward who showed his back to intimidating opponents. His cowardice is clearest in the conflict with the Muslims who sought to harm him—his flight from Casablanca and move from Assarag because of the threats—and in abandoning his dying mother when pressured by a local sheikh to heal his dying son. At the moment of truth, as he confronted the actuality of his own death, he crumpled with fear and dread.

Many people dwelt on Wazana's sociability and his universal friendliness; however, there were those who described him as a lone wolf, a free spirit, someone who worshipped in the synagogue alone, an unusual practice among Jews. Some regarded him as a proud and avaricious man—we recall the "bribes" offered him by the sheikhs of Assarag and Agouim—while others portray him as a frivolous clown, a man who exhibited little concern for self-respect, for whom money and material possessions were low priorities. With hindsight, some of these contradictions demonstrate no more than behavioral divergences stemming from the circumstances of the informants' various encounters with Wazana; however, they also appear to reflect the individual informants' divergent personal perspectives.

Indeed, besides the differences of opinion with respect to his personality traits, it seems that the general portrait of Wazana undergoes significant transformations among different groupings of informants. At the "positive" end of the spectrum of images and evaluations, he emerges as an authentic family *tsaddiq*, no different from the others venerated by Moroccan Jewry except in level of popularity. Within this band of admirers, comprised mainly of family members and close friends from Agouim,

we found narratives that seemed to whitewash certain problematic facets of his identity and lifestyle. Thus, for example, some categorically denied his Muslim side, or asserted hastily that he at least experienced a complete change of heart prior to his death. Some insisted that he gradually abandoned his association with the demons when his fame as a healer spread, and rejected the popular version of his death as a result of demonic revenge. The great efforts on the part of some in this group to ensure that Wazana's life fell more in line with typical saint legends suppress the intriguing qualities in whose absence close examination of his figure would be pointless. The Tubul couple, for example, among the extremists in the "whitewashing" group, maintained that Wazana did not miss his father's funeral at all. They are satisfied that angels carried him with great speed to Tamzersht, enabling him to attend the funeral. This minority version obviously undermines our argument regarding the motivation behind Wazana's desire to become a healer. The old couple even disputed the popular narrative regarding the time of Rabbi Ya'aqov's death, maintaining—to bring it in line with the orthodox format—that he was privileged to be buried on Friday, in time for the Sabbath.

At another extreme are the informants who treat Rabbi Ya'aqov with more than a pinch of disapprobation. Interestingly, the most critical of these were members of Wazana's own clan, who regard him as the black sheep of the family, a profligate son whose peculiar behavior bespoke an abuse of the privileges bequeathed by his forebears. Shaul and Ya'aqov Wazana, Rabbi Ya'aqov's blind cousins, carefully distinguished between Wazana and the earlier family *tsaddiqim*, and tended to minimize his stature. The adoring attitude of Masouda Buskila, married to Rabbi Ya'aqov's nephew, who refers to the healer as the "sainted Rabbi Wazana *el-Aziz* [the Beloved], the kindest person in the world," upon whom the divine presence rested, is very far removed from the reservations implicit in the speech of Wazana's blind cousin from Pardes Hana, who referred to the healer with more than a modicum of scorn as "that Ya'aqov."

Most informants fall somewhere between these two extremes. Their personal memories express admiration for a man able to relieve all kinds of trials and tribulations; however, their shared stories, especially those concerning Wazana's death, unwittingly convey a palpable sense of tension and unease at the memory of his irregularities and unorthodoxy.

The fact that divergent images of Wazana are discernible among the informants' narratives is not difficult to explain given the informants' differing degrees of closeness to him, and the circumstances of their encounters with him. However, it also seems that the informants' present-day circumstances influence their perceptions. In our nationwide journey in search of Wazana, we found that the diverse groups of "Wazana's people" had localized versions of his exploits which shared details either missing or different from stories in other localities. In a sense, this means

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that we may speak of a Wazana belonging to the people of *moshav* Makor, and another who lives on with his friends in Be'er Sheva.

To what extent does the informants' past and present personal lives affect their configuration of Wazana's image? Careful examination reveals that some of their memories involve a hybridization of past events, including their encounters with Wazana, with personal experiences in the present apparently unrelated to him. Our first example of this concerns the way Rabbi Shalom Ben-Ḥamo from Atseret and Rabbi Yitzḥak Peḥima of Kiryat Gat perceive Wazana's books, which are believed to be in their possession (both men grudgingly admit this to be the case). Both claimed that the books could not possibly be used now, but for different reasons: the urban healer, Peḥima, was inclined to undervalue the importance of the book on the grounds that its contents were illegible ("the writing is smudged"), whereas Ben-Ḥamo, the healer from the *moshav*, insisted that on the contrary, he could not use the book because of the terrifying powers it held ("names that might destroy the world"). Peḥima's reaction stems perhaps from the fact that he is cut off from his former community, that he lives among people who did not know Wazana, whereas Ben-Ḥamo, who lives among those who knew Wazana and admired his powers, and who is presently struggling to maintain his position in the *moshav*, feels it important to underscore the powers he allegedly can access. The evaluation of the efficacy of Wazana's instrument of healing is, in this case, colored by the informant's current circumstances.

At least in part, a fair number of informants have forged their portrait of Wazana on the anvil of their own predicaments. It is no coincidence perhaps that Yosef Abutbul, who is childless, chose to open his account of Wazana's exploits with the story of how Wazana cured his mother's childlessness which had been caused by a spell. He enthused excitedly over the way the great healer had shaken a lock over his mother's abdomen, unlocking and relocking it. "When you hear the sound of gunfire, she will give birth," Wazana had promised, and indeed this promise was soon realized. Judging by his enthusiastic tone of voice, it seemed that Yosef, who had fruitlessly consulted healers—Jewish, Arab, folk, and medical—up and down the country, yearns for the lock and gunfire that would give his wife the child of her dreams.

Rabbi Moshe Tubul was the only informant to claim that the sheikh's daughter in Wazana's death story had been barren. It seems that his version stems directly from the fact that it was for childlessness that he turned to Wazana. On the other hand, Ḥana Buskila, Rabbi Ya'aqov's kinswoman, reported that Wazana's last treatment was to an Arab girl, seven months pregnant, who eventually miscarried. It emerged that she herself had consulted Wazana many times regarding miscarriages and problematic pregnancies. Another kinsman, Rabbi Shmuel Suissa, who is handicapped in one leg, started his account of Wazana's life with the

story of how the healer had cured his younger sister who was stricken with paralysis. In another example, blind, old Rabbi Ya'aqov Wazana claimed that his cousin had also been blind toward the end of his life.

Thus the informants seemed to connect Wazana with events and experiences in their own lives. Perhaps the most dramatic example of such transference concerns Rabbi Shalom Ben-Hamo of Agouim, now residing in Atseret. He provided the best description of the confrontation between Wazana and Rabbi Yosef Abu-Hatsera some forty years ago near the shrine of Rabbi David u-Moshe. With great relish he recalled that Wazana had made the roast beef prepared for Rabbi Yosef and his retinue disappear when the latter insulted him, ordering his seat to be placed away from the rest of the celebrants. It seems that not only Wazana, but Rabbi Shalom himself had experienced the wrath of that esteemed member of the Abu-Hatsera family. Rabbi Yosef Abu-Hatsera, who lived in France, had the custom of visiting his supporters in Israel, including those in Atseret. During one visit, he knocked at Rabbi Shalom's door, only to find that one of his kinsmen—a longtime enemy—was present in the house. At this discovery Rabbi Yosef stormed away in a fury, cursing host and guest vociferously. Some time later Rabbi Shalom's daughter died of pesticide poisoning, leaving the latter in no doubt whatsoever that her death resulted from Rabbi Yosef's curse. Rabbi Shalom made this grave accusation with total equanimity, commenting that ordinary mortals ought not to question the acts of *tsaddiqim*. Could it be that a thirst for revenge curdling inside him provided the raw material for his description of the confrontation between Wazana and Rabbi Yosef?

These examples support the assumption with which our quest began, and with which we will now conclude: that the figure of Wazana carried in the hearts and minds of his friends and acquaintances is to a substantial degree a private, personal, and subjective memory carved by the shifting sands of their current lives. The elusive character of this memory serves to magnify the enigma of Wazana's life, making it complicated to unravel. At the same time it imparts his image with sufficient mystery to justify the fascination he arouses in the informants, his friends, and not least, in this narrator, who has had the pleasure of recording their voices.