

The Modern Middle East

A HISTORY

Second Edition

James L. Gelvin
University of California, Los Angeles

New York Oxford
Oxford University Press

Wasif Jawhariyyeh and the Great Nineteenth-Century Transformation

By the late nineteenth century, integration and peripheralization, defensive developmentalism, and imperialism had established the ground rules for the subsequent economic, social, and political development of the Middle East. These processes did not operate in a vacuum, however, and when they intruded upon the social, economic, and cultural life of the region the effects were dramatic. New social classes were created while others were destroyed. Urban centers were demolished and reconstructed. The introduction of new agricultural methods, crops, property rights, and markets transformed rural life. The emergence of new groups of cultural producers and consumers and experimentation with novel forms of cultural expression reshaped cultural and political life. Governments and citizens renegotiated their mutual responsibilities.

This chapter looks at these changes through the eyes of a Jerusalem musician by the name of Wasif Jawhariyyeh. Jawhariyyeh left behind voluminous diaries that begin in 1904 and end in 1968. They describe in detail not only his life, but the social and cultural life of Jerusalem. These diaries were recently brought to light and edited by the Palestinian scholar Salim Tamari. This chapter is based on Tamari's work.

Wasif Jawhariyyeh's diaries provide an ideal jumping-off point for understanding life in the Middle East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for other reasons as well. Jawhariyyeh was not a particularly important individual. This makes his diaries all the more interesting. We have many memoirs from political and cultural elites. These memoirs were written mostly to justify the political activities or to glorify the cultural achievements of their authors for posterity. Jawhariyyeh did not write for either purpose. And while Jawhariyyeh came from a fairly privileged background, his family was hardly at the pinnacle of Jerusalem life. Furthermore, Jawhariyyeh's diaries record daily life at a critical juncture in Jerusalem's history. When Jawhariyyeh began writing his diaries in 1904, Jerusalem was a relative backwater of the Ottoman Empire. As such, the city was a rather

late entrant into what might be called the "great nineteenth-century transformation," and Jawhariyyeh was a witness to that transformation.

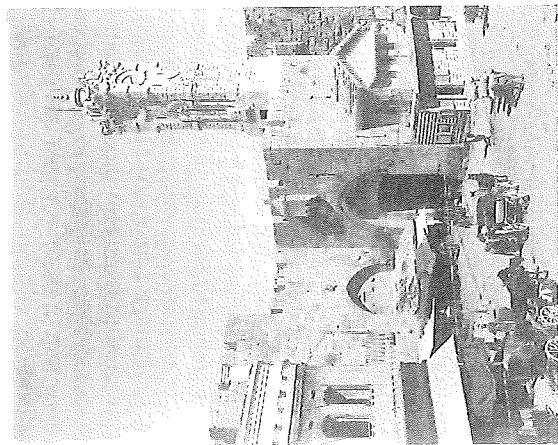
To understand the position of Jerusalem among cities of the Ottoman Empire, it is worth comparing it with two other important cities in Palestine at the time: Jaffa and Nablus. Jaffa was a port city that grew in response to increased trade with Europe and the introduction of steamships into the Mediterranean. Between 1856 and 1880, the cultivation of citrus fruit shipped through Jaffa quadrupled and the value of Jaffa's exports increased 1,400 percent. The Jaffa orange—an orange that could survive long-distance shipment unscathed because of its thick skin—became a major export crop at that time. As Jaffa's importance as an export hub increased, so did the population of the city. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the population of Jaffa ranged from five hundred to five thousand, depending on the state of the agricultural economy, security in the countryside, and the availability of urban employment for farmers immigrating into the city. By 1912, population had reached fifty thousand. At that time, only about ten thousand inhabitants of the city were Jews recently arrived from Europe.

Nablus, on the other hand, was an inland commercial center under the sway of a few merchant families. Because it was dominated by merchants, the city of Nablus was more outward-looking than Jerusalem—it had industries such as soap manufacture and weaving, as well as a greater integration with both the outside world (Greater Syria, Egypt, and Europe) and its immediate hinterland, from which it derived raw materials for its manufactures.

Unlike Nablus, the major industries of Jerusalem were associated with its function as a religious center. Jerusalem catered to pilgrims and the European tourist trade that had emerged in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. The city did not have a modern municipal water system until 1901, nor did it have a modern sewage system until about a decade later. The famous Jerusalem clock tower was constructed at the same time as the water system. The clock tower was an important symbol for the inhabitants of the city in the early twentieth century and an important signpost for historians. For the former, it represented an expanded imperial presence in the city as well as the Ottoman impulse for "modernization." For the latter, it represents what historian E. P. Thompson has called the intersection between "time and work discipline"; that is, for historians the clock tower exemplifies the attempt to regulate Jerusalem's labor force and make it submissive to a daily, nine-to-five type of schedule. In 1909, Jerusalem's wagon drivers went on strike to protest increased taxes. The strike shut the city down. Think of it: a modern form of social protest made effective because of the central economic role played by an antiquated technology.

Wasif Jawhariyyeh begins his diaries as follows:

I was born on Wednesday morning the fourteenth of January 1897, according to the Western calendar, which happened to be the eve of the Orthodox New Year. At the moment my father was preparing a tray of knafeh [a sweet] for the occasion as was customary then in Eastern Orthodox households. I was



The Jerusalem clock tower. (From: *Fondation Arabe pour l'image, Beirut.*)

named Wasif after the Damascene Wasif Bey al-Adhem, who was then my father's close friend and the sitting judge in Jerusalem's Criminal Court.

Wasif Jawhariyyeh's father was a prominent member of the Eastern Orthodox community, a member of Jerusalem's municipal council, and a lawyer. He spoke Greek, Turkish, and Arabic: Greek because of his membership in the Orthodox church, Turkish because that was the second language of upwardly mobile elites and aspiring elites throughout the Ottoman Empire who sought advancement in late Ottoman society. Neither Wasif nor his father lived in a monoglot society.

Wasif's father took up silk farming later in his life. Silk farming took off in Palestine during the 1850s, again as a result of expanded trade with Europe. The marriage between urban and rural life was typical in Ottoman/Arab society of the time. As discussed earlier, the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 enabled notable families and ambitious individuals with money to invest to gain access to rural property. The land code was one reason for the appearance of large landed estates in the Arab provinces of the empire. Such landed estates would remain part of the Arab Middle Eastern scene until the mid-twentieth century.

The consolidation of large landed estates had important social implications as well. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a new class of absentee urban landowners began to dominate local politics in Greater Syria. These urban landowners not only took advantage of the 1858 land code, they also took advantage of new forms of governance introduced into the empire to make themselves indispensable both to the renovated Ottoman

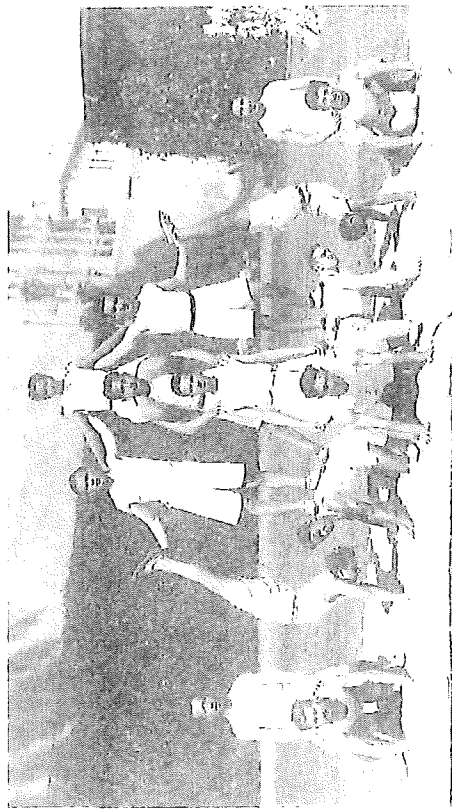
imperial system and local society. For example, by the close of the nineteenth century the imperial government had ordered the establishment of municipal councils in cities throughout the empire. The Jerusalem municipal council, of which Wasif's father was a member, was established in 1863. Before then, cities had no independent existence: They could not tax, nor could they commission the construction of municipal infrastructure. The establishment of municipal councils opened the way for the absentee landowners to gain access to positions of power and opportunities to enrich themselves further. Members of municipal councils were able to skim off taxes, register lands in their own names, and direct municipal resources to themselves and their friends. Like their contemporaries in the Tammany Hall political machine of New York, they "seen their opportunities and they took'em." And like their contemporaries they attracted a devoted following of people who sought to take advantage of their social betters' access to power and their ability to bestow bounty on their followers. Wasif Jawhariyyeh's father thus attached himself to the Husseini family, the most prominent family in Jerusalem. He began his career looking after the extensive Husseini family estates in the villages to the west of Jerusalem.

Jawhariyyeh describes his youth with a great deal of nostalgia for the "good old days." While a bit idealistic, this description gives us a view of day-to-day life among people of his class in Jerusalem. Take, for example, the following entry into his diaries:

During the summer months of 1904 [when Jawhariyyeh was nine years old] we would sit around the lowered table for the main meal. Food was served in enameled zinc plates. That year we stopped eating with wooden spoons imported from Anatolia and Greece and replaced them with brass ones. We replaced the common drinking bowl tied to the pottery jar with individualized crystal glasses. In 1906 my father acquired single iron beds for each of my siblings, thus ending the habit of sleeping on the floor. What a delight it was to get rid of the burden of having to place our mattresses into the wall enclaves every night.

As a youth, Jawhariyyeh received a rather eclectic education. Although Orthodox, his father had him memorize the Qur'an. At the age of nine, he entered a Lutheran school. There, he learned basic Arabic grammar, dictation, reading, arithmetic, German, and Bible recitation. After being beaten by an instructor whom he allegedly mocked, Wasif went to the "progressive" Dusturiyyeh (constitutional) National School, where corporal punishment was forbidden. At the Dusturiyyeh, he learned grammar, literature, mathematics, English, French, Turkish, physical education, and Qur'anic studies for Christians.

Two of these subjects are particularly noteworthy. First, physical education was associated with the cult of the body popular in Europe at the time and spreading into the Middle East. Physical education had become an important part of "Christian renewal"—what is known as muscular Christianity—and was, of course, of vital concern to nationalist movements throughout Europe. Educators, clerics, and politicians promoted physical



The cult of the body: student athletes at the American University of Cairo, 1924. (From: Fondation Arabe pour l'image, Beirut.)

education to prevent physical and moral weakness that were seen as detrimental to the "body politic." This tendency was later taken up in Egypt with the establishment of the Young Men's Muslim Association, modeled on the Young Men's Christian Association that had been founded in England in 1844. Its spread to the Middle East demonstrates in a different form the impulse toward "renewal" that will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second item on the curriculum that bears scrutiny is Qur'anic studies for Christians. Christians studied the Qur'an because it was believed that the text was an important part of the literary and cultural tradition of the Middle East—their literary and cultural tradition. In other words, by the beginning of the twentieth century the Qur'an did not only have a religious function, it took on another function as well. For many in the region, the Qur'an became part of a shared cultural heritage that distinguished the culture of the region from the culture of the West. One prominent scholar writing from Istanbul at the time explicitly linked the creation of a shared culture and efforts to revitalize the Middle East as follows:

The Germans differed in religion in a manner similar to the way Persians and Afghans differ in religion. When this difference was manifested in politics, the Germans were weak. But when they returned to their authentic culture, when they heeded the call of national unity and the general interest, God returned their power and they became the rulers of Europe and dominated its politics.

Like this particular scholar, many Ottoman cultural elites of the time thought that the creation of a common culture that superseded sectarian, regional, or linguistic divisions was necessary for imperial revitalization.

Jawhariyyeh describes his education in the Qur'an in the following manner:

I received my copy of the Qur'an from al-Hajjah Um Musa Kadhém Pasha al-Husseini . . . who taught me how to treat it with respect and maintain its clearliness. [Um Musa was, of course, a woman.] My Qur'anic teacher was Sheikh Amin al-Ansari, a well-known *faqih* [legal scholar qualified to rule on matters pertaining to shari'a] in Jerusalem. The headmaster's idea was that the essence of learning Arabic lies in mastering the Qur'an, both reading and incantation. My Muslim classmates and I would start with Surat al-Baqara and continue . . . I can say in all frankness that my mastery of Arabic music and singing is attributable to these lessons—especially my ability to render classical poetry and *muwashshahat* to musical form.

Jawhariyyeh was compelled to leave the school and enroll in another "in order to gain knowledge of the English language and build a solid base for my future." He remained in this school for another two years until it was closed at the beginning of World War I.

The story of Jawhariyyeh's education demonstrates the fluidity of boundaries in Ottoman Jerusalem during Jawhariyyeh's youth. In the contemporary world, peoples' identities and social and political roles are relatively fixed. In the world of Jawhariyyeh's youth, boundaries separating the lives of Christians or Jews from Muslims were more fluid, as were urban social boundaries and the boundaries separating so-called traditional and modern ways of life. The ceremonies and rituals of each religious group borrowed elements from the others, and the festivals celebrated by one group often marked the occasion for citywide revelry. Looking back from contemporary Jerusalem, it is hard to imagine a time when Muslim children would dress up in costumes alongside Jewish children to celebrate the Jewish feast of Purim (Jewish children joined their Muslim contemporaries as well in celebrating the festival of the prophet Muhammad), or when an Orthodox Christian musician like Jawhariyyeh would play at Jewish weddings, or when a native Palestinian would accompany an Ashkenazi (European Jewish) choral group on his oud (a popular Middle Eastern stringed instrument). Even gender roles and gender relations were less rigid during Jawhariyyeh's youth than they are today: The role of women in society varied from place to place, from city to countryside, and from social class to social class. Although women, like men, faced social pressures to conform, no state or political movement forced women to dress in a manner that would make them walking billboards for either the "new nationalist woman" or the "devout Islamic woman." It seems that for every set of boundaries the modern world has broken down, it has created others.

One should not, of course, paint a picture of Jawhariyyeh's youthful world that is too rosy. Nevertheless, if one looks closely enough, over the course of the diaries one can detect a dramatic shift away from a world that appears remote to one that appears all too familiar. Take, for example, the spatial and cultural boundaries separating rich from poor. Although Jerusalem's rich and poor certainly enjoyed different levels of creature comforts, before

the mid-nineteenth century they lived side by side in urban quarters. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notable families began to move out of densely packed urban areas and into suburban areas outside the city walls where life was cleaner and more spacious. The spatial separation of rich and poor was reflected in an emerging cultural separation as well. During Jawhariyyeh's youth what might be termed a genteel, bourgeois culture began to emerge among the wealthier families of Jerusalem. This genteel, cosmopolitan, bourgeois culture in many ways mimicked the dominant culture of Europe, not just in terms of the physical trappings of refinement—overstuffed couches and gaudy chandeliers—but in cultural terms as well.

In turn-of-the-century Jerusalem, both gentility and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and its bohemian opposition, on the other, were maintained and reproduced through a thriving salon culture. Wealthier Jerusalemites as well as their more fancy-free neighbors gathered nightly in homes and apartments to enjoy each other's company. Throughout his diaries, Wasif Jawhariyyeh describes nightly episodes of drinking, dancing, card playing, music, and hashish smoking in bachelor apartments kept by single men from notable families. Muslims, Christians, and Jews all participated in these entertainments, and Jawhariyyeh earned his living as a musician playing at such gatherings.

The music played by Jawhariyyeh reflected a mixture of conventional and Western styles and themes and typifies the culture of the educated urban elites of his time. Like many other children of relative privilege, Jawhariyyeh received a rigorous training in both classical Arabic poetry and contemporary writers associated with the *nahda*—the Arabic literary renaissance of the nineteenth century. The writers, playwrights, and poets of the *nahda* attempted to fuse Arabic and European forms of expression. Jawhariyyeh even tried his hand at creating a system of musical notation that would convert Ottoman/Arab music to a Western system of notation, much as *nahda* writers attempted to simplify the Arabic language and script so that it might be accessible to a wider audience.

The influence of *nahda* culture on Jawhariyyeh can also be seen from the themes he selected for his compositions. For his first public performance, Jawhariyyeh chose to play a work based on Salamah Hijazi's translation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Like Farah Antun (who rendered the Oedipus cycle into Arabic), Khalil Mafran (who translated and produced the works of Sophocles, Molière, and Shakespeare), and Uthman Jalal (an actor who specialized in playing characters created by Molière), Hijazi cultivated a devoted following among educated audiences. The pinnacle of Hijazi's influence took place in June 1920, when he staged two outdoor performances of his *Romeo and Juliet* in Damascus as part of the ceremonies marking Syria's post-World War I declaration of independence. The performances were reportedly received with enthusiasm, and Hijazi's influence lasted longer than Syria's initial flirtation with independence, which was terminated by the French within a month.



Musical ensemble, Aleppo, Syria, ca. 1900. (From: The Collection of Wolf-Dieter Lemke.)

Many in the Middle East saw the aping of Western ways among society's elites as just another aspect of Western corruption and imperialism. Some chose to fight this by espousing what might be termed a new Islamic orthodoxy. The new orthodoxy attempted to standardize and enforce rules for proper Islamic conduct. In Damascus, ulama led the campaign to shut down the city's only dance hall. In Basra, a city in the south of contemporary Iraq, other ulama protested the raising of a statue of a famous reforming governor. They argued that the statue would violate Islamic proscriptions against representational art. Throughout the Middle East, the issues of the veiling of women and the mixing of men and women in public took on a new urgency. For adherents to the new orthodoxy, the concern of Westerners and Westernizers about the status of Middle Eastern women in Middle Eastern society was part of an imperialist conspiracy against Islam. What made this conspiracy so insidious was that it was launched at a segment of society that those adherents claimed was particularly vulnerable to foreign intrigue. One orthodox periodical republished an article allegedly written in a French journal in which a French missionary stated, "The education of girls in convent schools leads to our gaining our true purpose and the arrival at our goal. In fact, I believe that the education of girls in this manner is the one means for finishing off Islam." It would not be a stretch to say that the roots of contemporary Islamic movements, with their obsession over issues of gender and personal conduct, lie in the attempts made by these early twentieth-century ulama and their followers to defend Islam against foreign influences.

The disputes between the adherents to the new, cosmopolitan culture and the adherents to the equally new orthodoxy actually boiled down to a single question: Who would control the new public sphere and determine how that public sphere was to be used? The public sphere is an imaginary space where citizens contest issues of common (that is, public) concern. These issues included everything from imperial politics to the role of women in society. While it would be a mistake to associate the emergence of a modern public sphere with democratization, it would not be a mistake to say that the emergence of a modern public sphere was essential for the emergence of mass political movements. In future chapters we shall see how the emergence of a modern public sphere allowed for the spread of constitutionalism and nationalism in the region.

One factor that set the stage for the emergence of a modern public sphere was the reconstruction of cities. There were a number of reasons why cities took on new attributes at this time. New technologies such as tramways were introduced into the region. These technologies broadened the territorial reach of urban environments and literally broke down the walls separating semiautonomous urban quarters from each other. Newly empowered municipal councils directed centralized planning and policing. Sultans, shahs, and khedives imported conceptions of municipal order from abroad. The new cities of Port Said and Isma'iliyya on the Suez Canal, for example, were laid out according to a checkerboard pattern, and the Egyptian khedive, Isma'il, and the shah of Persia, Nasr ed-Din Shah, were so impressed by late nineteenth-century Paris that they rebuilt parts of their capitals in imitation, with wide boulevards, public parks, and landscaped roads. The reconstruction of cities introduced new conceptions of space into urban areas and created spaces where public ceremonies could be held and individuals could meet and talk.

Then there were coffeehouses. Coffeehouses were not new to the Middle Eastern urban landscape. Indeed, the first coffeehouses in the region date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But in the nineteenth century coffeehouses were ubiquitous in Middle Eastern cities. Located both on main thoroughfares in the heart of cities and in market areas adjacent to semiprivate lanes, they were one of the main sites in which an expanding public sphere could be found. During Jawhariyyeh's lifetime, it was common for the more popular and centrally located coffeehouses to cater to several hundred clients a day. Coffeehouse patrons passed their time sipping coffee, playing backgammon (*tawila*), smoking water pipes (*narghiles*), trading gossip, reading aloud one or more of the seven newspapers published in Jerusalem at the time, and watching shadow plays, which were frequently remade as political and social satire. Coffeehouses also served as centers for new entertainment technologies that catered to mass audiences. For example, phonographs were initially too expensive for private ownership, and Jawhariyyeh heard his first Edison recordings in a coffeehouse:

I would take a matleek [small Ottoman coin] from my father and go to Ali Izhiman's café near the Damascus gate. A blind man by the name of Ibrahim

al-Beirutî operated the phonograph. The machine was raised on a wooden cabinet full of 78 r.p.m. records and covered by red velvet to protect it from the evil eye. I used to throw my matleek in a brass plate and cry to the blind man: "Uncle, let us hear (such-and-such)." The blind man would immediately pull the requested record from the cabinet—only God knows how—and would play it on the phonograph. Later my music teacher would say, "Listening to this music is like eating with false teeth."

Wasif Jawhariyyeh's brother opened up one such coffeehouse in Jerusalem in 1918 called the Café Jawhariyyeh. Wasif's brother had learned how to tend bar in Beirut while stationed there as a member of Turkish army, putting the time he spent in the military to good use. It was at his brother's café that Jawhariyyeh honed the craft that would make him famous.

Phonographs were not the only imported marvel that Jawhariyyeh describes in his diaries. He saw his first movie at the Russian compound in Jerusalem soon after he experienced his first phonograph record. He saw his first car (a Ford) in 1912 when it passed through the streets driven by an American driver. He saw his first airplane in the summer of 1914 when it was flown to Jerusalem by two Ottoman pilots, and when the plane crashed he composed a eulogy on their behalf. To get a sense of the speed with which these technologies entered the lives of people like Jawhariyyeh, one need only compare Wasif's experiences with those of his father, which Jawhariyyeh also records in his diaries:

When I was thirteen, in 1850 [the father states], I recall that we did all our travel on individual beasts: mules, donkeys, horses, and even camels. I did not see any animal driven carriages until a few years later when the French brought the "tambour"—a two wheel carriage driven by mules—to transport bricks for the roof of the French church in Abu Ghush. Boys of my generation used to run after this amazing new invention until we reached the approaches of Lifta.

Although Jawhariyyeh's diaries continue for a half century after the close of World War I in 1918, it is appropriate to end our discussion here. In the immediate decades following World War I, a new set of issues emerged that commanded Jawhariyyeh's attention. For example, the year 1936 lies at the exact midpoint of Jawhariyyeh's diaries. The year is significant because it was then that the first great uprising in modern Palestinian history broke out: the Great Revolt of 1936–1939, which will be discussed in a later chapter. The revolt had two underlying causes: distress caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the dramatic rise of European Jewish immigration into Palestine. The Great Depression and the accompanying collapse of international trade and the international market for agricultural products caused extreme economic hardship in an economy that was still, fundamentally, rural. Jewish immigration into Palestine sparked a resistance among non-Jewish Palestinians. The motivations that drove Palestinians to revolt ran the gamut from the desire to settle old scores to blind anger at what many considered an alien presence in their midst. But many of the rebels and their leaders were motivated by nationalist aspirations as well.

Overall, the Great Revolt of 1936–1939 was emblematic of a Palestine firmly entrenched in the modern world economic system and, as signified by the spread of nationalism in Palestine, a world political order defined by nationalism and nation-states. The Palestinian world of the 1930s was a world in which rapid demographic change and political instability had ravaged much of the genteel, bourgeois culture that had shaped Jawhariyyeh. It was a world in which hard-and-fast ideologies and exclusive loyalties would shortly become the norm. Palestine in the 1930s represented a very different world from the Palestine of Jawhariyyeh's youth.

THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION