



The Ottoman Childhood of Wasif Jawhariyyeh

Wasif Jawhariyyeh

1903-04. Wasif with his father and his wooden horse. *Source: 'Aya Shakair.*

My Boyhood 1904-1914

I obviously do not recall any memories from the second phase of my childhood, except for me standing by the dinner table, unable to catch sight of anything but some of the fruits which my father used to buy and lay on the table in a heap. I remember more, however, of the following phase, during which I learned that I had been born in the house known as Dar al-Jawhariyyeh in the Saadiah neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

Having consulted the family record which my father had written, and which is now in my safe keeping, I learned that my father married Helena, daughter of Andoni Barakat, in 1884. Together they had three girls, Afifa, Shafiqah and Julia, and four boys, Khalil, Tawfiq and finally Fakhri.

I was born on 14 January 1897 by the Gregorian calendar (1st January Julian) which is the Christian Orthodox New Year's

day, while my father was preparing the tray of *kunafa*, a tradition which the Greek Orthodox continue to follow to this day. My father named me Wasif after his dear friend Wasef Bey al-Azem from Damascus in Syria, who was president of the criminal court of Jerusalem at the time. I still keep a nice photograph of him which he gave to my father as a present.

At my christening, the Consul of the British government, William Assad al-Khayyat from Jaffa, acted as my godfather, while Miss Nastas Semaan Abdu was my godmother they were both godparents to all my siblings, too. God bless their souls.

My father told me that all he was ever able to find out about his grandfather, Suleiman Jawhariyah, was his name. He was an only son and lived in the Damascus Gate home, on the Eastern side of the Valley Road, below al-Qantara and in front of the stairs of the Jewish religious endowments' building and Mount Zion's Greek Orthodox cemetery. His father, Khalil Jawhariyyeh, was also an only son, and lived in the house situated near the Mawlawiyah complex, in which my father, Jirgis, was born. He, too, was buried at the Mt. Zion cemetery. When he died, my father Jirgis was still a minor. He said that he was playing marbles with the children when his father's funeral cortege passed him. His sisters were already married at the time.

My Father Studies the Quran

At the time of the death of grandfather Khalil Jawhariyah, my father, Girgis, was only a minor. He taught himself Arabic, Turkish, and Greek, before studying law and becoming a well-known lawyer at the civil courts that were established in Jerusalem after the arrival from Damascus of Wasif Bey al-Azem, the president of the criminal court. He travelled to Istanbul twice. His first visit was for trade. On his second visit, he was on a special mission for Patriarch Damianos, and was accompanied by the late Yaacoub Said and his sister, Umm George Adranli.

My father had memorized the Quran by heart, and could recite it very well. When I was a student at the constitutional school, he used to correct me when I practised my Quran lessons at home. Whenever I misread a *Sura*, he would shout to me the correction from the parlour. He was a partner of Daoud Effendi al-Ragheb, then to Francis Albina and then to Beshara Taso from Jaffa. The latter used to stay with us whenever he visited Jerusalem. I have kept some of his letters of attorney, including one from the Lebanese Sursok family, as well as some of his handwritten legal documents. I can assure you that his handwriting was better than my own and that he was listed as a well-known Jerusalem-based lawyer in a special official monthly gazette published in Istanbul.

Our Family Life

My father liked order and tidiness. He had an uncommon interest in art, was a great socialiser, and taught us and encouraged us to be morally upright. For instance, when my sisters Afifa, Shafiqah and Julia were married, he decreed that my brothers Khalil, Tawfiq, Fakhri and I must help mother with all the house work including tidying up, cleaning, sweeping and mopping the floor, laying out mattresses and bedding and storing them away, polishing copper (and transporting water from the ground floor to the first floor by climbing forty-five steps). We even helped with all the meal preparations, to the great surprise of the neighbours who envied us for our housekeeping skills which were, indeed, on a par with the ladies'. And so, the Jawhariyyeh boys became an example of accomplishment in all housekeeping chores. As I mentioned before, in summer, we used to sit at the table to eat. We would take our seats, and each would eat off their own zinc plate, as the custom is nowadays. We had given up the widely used wooden spoons that were imported from Anatolia and Greece in favour of copper spoons which were bleached from time to time. We also gave up the habit of drinking from a common metal bowl that was tied to the water jar, since each of us had acquired his own glass. To improve our living conditions, my father also bought for each of us an iron bed, and so after 1906, we no longer had to sleep on the floor, thank God, and were able to make the beds in no time at all, as we no longer had to store away the mattresses.

My father used to ride a white donkey for which there were two stables: one that was outside the house and had a street door, and another one inside, in the corridor entrance, by the corner of which we used to keep charcoal and wood for winter days. My brothers and I looked after the donkey on a daily basis, making sure he was fed, given water and kept clean. We loosened the saddle when father wanted to ride it, sifted the barley and mixed it with hay, and did all the relevant chores according to father's instructions. Indeed, the stable looked as though it was meant to house a genuine Arabian horse, for everything was tidy and well kept because father was angered by the slightest negligence and sometimes would even beat us. In winter, father liked to sit on his Persian mat in one of the corners of our sleeping area, wrapped in his abaya or sheepskin coat, smoking a water pipe and drinking coffee. In the evening he enjoyed sipping arak with delicious mezze dishes laid around him. For his comfort and pleasure, we prepared the 'feast' by placing a round table that was about thirty-centimetres high in front of him, and laying on it the spoons, plates and food that my mother handed to us in the kitchen. We would then all sit around it to have lunch or dinner, and after dessert, we would put everything back in its place, all four of us, under his watchful eye and mother's supervision.

Whenever any of us had been naughty or disobedient to mother, or had behaved badly, whether towards his brothers or towards neighbours or friends, all she had to say to us was: "I'll have your father deal with this." These words were enough to discipline us and make us obey her, fearing that she might indeed complain to father who was ruthless and could punish us harshly, but fairly and justly, often

accompanying his chastisement with a relevant story, the moral of which would deter the culprit in the future and preclude the need for physical punishment. For instance, my brother Tawfiq was insolent and good at witty replies. He was very intelligent and skilled at manual work, and was able to repair all sort of clocks and machines, but as the saying goes, he was a Jack of all trades and master of none. He did not succeed at a single job, and his skills, frankly, did not yield any benefit throughout his entire life. Once, he made a cardboard model of a building which the Jews had built outside Jaffa Gate as an outlet for their products at the Alliance Girl's School, and put it on display in the hall. Just as he had finished it, my father happened to be coming back home from Government House. He looked at the model thoughtfully and asked: "Who made this?" "I did, father," answered Tawfiq. So my father said: "What am I to do with you, son? The only mistake I made in my life was to have named you 'Tawfiq'" [*'success'* in Arabic]. "And what should you have named me instead?" asked Tawfiq. My father answered: "Talfiq" [*'contrivance'*].

The Schneller School

My brother Tawfiq and I received our primary education at the German Schneller School, known as the Dabbagha school, which was located near the German church, inside the old city wall. The school was mainly attended by Arab Greek Orthodox pupils and had two schoolmasters and two school mistresses: Girgis Mansur Tishto, an old man from Birzeit; Beshara Costandi from the village of Taiba; Miss Tharwat who taught the older pupils (the students had noticed the romance between Mr. Beshara and Miss Tharwat, and it was later revealed that they got married and left Jerusalem for Jaffa); and finally Miss Julia Abu Raqaba, a Greek Orthodox who taught the younger schoolchildren and was in charge of cleanliness and hygiene in the school. We learned Arabic and some German, but the most important lessons were to learn and memorize the verses of the Holy Bible. We started with "The Lord our God, the Lord is One" and went on to learn hundreds of verses. We also had to learn the well-known hymns of the Protestant Church. The teacher would play a small organ, or sometimes the violin, while we sang "A voice was heard from Heaven, what could the news be?", "We spread, in the morning, the good words" and "O happy day." I was the best student and the teacher's favourite pupil in this domain. At the time, only teachers wore trousers, while we still wore the qombaz and Syrian-made red shoes, which we used to buy at the spice market for seven piasters. I remained in the school until 1909.

Why We Left the Schneller School

At the time my brother Tawfiq and I were attending the Schneller [vocational] school, my brother Khalil was working as a carriage carpenter at the workshop of Mitri Abu Shanab and his brothers, which was located on Jaffa Street, outside the wall. My

father was managing the cage at the municipal park (*Manshiah*). Every night, the events of our school day were the only topic of conversation my brother Tawfiq and I could think of while chatting to our parents. Like all the other schoolchildren, we hated Mr. Beshara who was harsh and despotic, and used to beat the children harshly for no good reason. And so, my brother Khalil, who was known for his boldness amongst his friends, had a good idea about the harshness of Mr. Beshara. Once when Mr. Beshara was walking down Jaffa Street, he passed Mitri Abu Shanab's workshop while Tawfiq and I were playing there. Since we were keen for Khalil to see what Mr. Beshara looked like, we said to him: "Khalil, this is Mr. Beshara, look, look." And what happened then? Khalil left his work and went after Mr. Beshara, clapping his hands and shouting as loud as he could: "Mr. Beshara, Mr. Beshara!" Mr. Beshara turned around, and naturally only recognised Wasif and Tawfiq. After all, he did not know Khalil. When we realised that Mr. Beshara had taken notice of us, we said: "We are dead! God knows what he will do to us tomorrow. What do you think you are doing, Khalil?" We left Khalil and headed for the Manshiah park where my father was smoking a water pipe with his friends. Since he was a lawyer, we brought our complaint to him, and his reply was: "Do not be afraid. When he asks you about it, tell him it was your brother calling *Uncle* Beshara, and not *Mr.* Beshara!" We said: "But father, he would never give us a chance to explain what happened. You don't know what this teacher is like." "Don't worry," he insisted, and so the next day we went to school against our will.

At 3 pm, Mr. Beshara entered the classroom for his one-hour mathematics class, but knocked on the door so hard and with so much anger that I thought: "God help us!" He stood there with the evil glowing in his eyes, pointed at me with his right index finger and shouted: "the young Jawhariyyeh." I went to him, and he slapped me so hard I fell over, hitting the organ, then the first row of benches, and finally landed on the floor. I wet myself and held my head in my hands, screaming as loud as I could: "Oh Lord, Oh Lord," so he left me and turned his attention to my brother Tawfiq. For about what seemed like an hour, the blasted teacher chased him from one bench to another, beating him with his cane stick, first between the benches, then between the students, as Tawfiq quickly gave in to him, and so on until Mr. Girgis and the schoolmistress arrived at the end of the session. As for me, I kept looking at the door, thinking: "Could I manage to open the latch and run away?"

My Innate Inclination to Sing as a Child

Singing had been my hobby since I was a youth. I used to sing whatever music I heard at home or from the neighbours. This, I owe to my father, God bless his soul, for he was an art lover. Whenever a musician was visiting Jerusalem from any Arab country, my father would make his acquaintance and spend some nights in his company. He was also the first Jerusalemite ever to own an oud at his home, and the famous oud player known as the Egyptian al-Koftanji had stayed at his home as a guest for a

period of time. I used to sing songs like *Rozana* and '*al-hani* while on the rooftop, and often in the bathroom, or with the neighbours' children.

'Al-hani al-hani al-hani.

I beg you to have pity on me.

Our neighbours and acquaintances liked my performance of this song. They all acknowledged that I had a soft sensuous voice, and listened to me attentively whenever I sang at an evening gathering at any of the neighbours'. I remember a celebration of St. George's (al Khader), my father's saint's day, on the 3d of November. I was about six years old at the time, and the Sons of Abu al-Sibaa' music band, which was famous in Jerusalem at the time, came to our home bringing along with them the famous oud player Abu Khalil (he used to live opposite Dar al-Jawhariyyeh, and my siblings and I used to listen to him play through the window). Abu Khalil played the oud, accompanied on the qanun by Abdullah Abu al-Sibaa', who lives in Jaffa. The percussionist was Omar al-Sibaa' (who wore over his qombaz a redingote which he had probably been given as a present by a Jerusalem notable). On that night, I longed to play an instrument, and as it happened, my father had made a cover for the cupboard where we kept the charcoal, and shaped it like a qanun so it would fit in the staircase that led to the storage room. I fetched the cover immediately and placed it on my knees, drawing the attention of the band members. After they had a few words with father, he asked me to sing, so I sang *Rozana* while the band musicians accompanied me on their instruments. They complimented me on my voice and handed me the qanun, so I plucked its strings a little, unable to contain my joy!! I was now longing to sing even more, and wondered when I was going to be able to play an instrument like those people.

My father acquired a "His Master's Voice" phonograph at the time when the phonograph was still a new invention: a tall wooden neck held up the trumpet, which had complicated hinges, and the discs were only playable on one side. The phonograph had been given to my brother Khalil by monk Hanania as a present. We used to play the disc recordings of Sheikh Salama Hijazi (the story of Romeo and Juliet). I learned the songs on this recording by heart and was able to sing them to perfection. Whenever I sang the wrong note, my father would twist my ear and play the song again and again until I had totally mastered the relevant phrase. His love of music and singing were such that he forbade me to learn cheap songs played on the phonograph. He tried to bring songs of poems such as the one by Sheikh al-Manyalawi (*Dayya 'ta 'ahda fatan li 'ahdika hafizun*) [*you forsaked a young man who would never forsake you*], and similar recordings by fine, established musicians. He also kept an eye on the language and content of what I sang. I recall once singing *jaddidi ya nafsu hazzaki* [*Renew yourself, my soul!*] which I had once heard Costandi al-Muna sing. The song contained the following verse which I sang exactly as I had heard it:

He who blames me for being love-sick knows not what love is
Oh God, what makes me love-sick is this beauty [this gazelle]

My father had been in the reception with Sheikh Salim Mamluk, writing governmental documents. When he heard me sing those verses, he stopped and came out to the parlour shouting at me: "I do not want you to sing such vulgar things and will never allow you to. You are an educated schoolboy, not a handyman". When I asked what had angered him, he replied: "What is that you were singing about gazelles and rabbits? You are supposed to end the verse with the word 'blaming' [not gazelle] to make the two verses rhyme." I never forgot that advice and did my best, from then on, to avoid incorrect language, even when singing taqtouqas.

My First Musical Instrument

I had learned a considerable number of songs, but I always longed to be able to play some musical instrument to accompany my singing. As it happened, my father once bought a can of Easter egg dye powder. Once the powder had been used, I took the rectangular can and inserted a wooden stick through its square opening which measured about 11x18 cm, and out of another which I had made on the opposite side of the can. I then hammered three nails into each end of the stick and tied to them some strings which were, of course, untuned, and which I plucked with a pigeon feather, imitating oud players. I played alone, or with the neighbours' children. Since I could not play the music I was singing on my instrument, I would sing first, without playing, and after I had finished singing, I would strike the untuned strings in a self-congratulatory manner. I was (between six and eight years of age) at the time, if I remember well.

I loved music so much that I used to deprive myself of candy, sugared almonds and chocolate, and save the piasters father gave me as pocket money to buy a string from a Jew who ran a shop in Bab al-Bazar, near the Dabbagha School. Whenever the teacher was away, I would tie the string to a student desk and pluck it, producing a beautiful sound that greatly amused my classmates. Back at home, I would tie it to a nail which I would hammer into the corner of the dinner table in the parlour, making my mother angry. And so, music and singing occupied the majority of my time.

Acquiring My First Decent Musical Instrument, 'the Tanboor'

Since I was extremely fond of music and singing, I invented the a for ementioned instrument out of a can of dye powder, and took it along to the village of Beit Suseen where I used to pluck its untuned strings, having no technical knowledge of how to play.

Hajj Salim al-Husseini had appointed a Moroccan man called Hajj Mohammad Mueen as keeper of the grain produce of the village, and of Hajj Salim's share in particular, so that the farmers had no chance to cheat. Hajj Mohammad always slept by the wall of the house known as the residence of Hajj Salim Effendi, in which we were staying.

When Hajj Mohammad saw my 'tin instrument', he said to me enthusiastically: "(this one is no good, Wasif." I was about nine years old at the time). "Go to the orange grove and ask Abu Salem to give you a dry (pumpkin), and I will make you a beautiful tanboor like those we make in Morocco." I was overjoyed to hear that, so I thanked him and rushed to the orange grove where I fetched a dry rectangular pumpkin that was about 18 cm long. Using the knife he carried by his waist, Hajj Mohammad halved the pumpkin, and then cleaned one of the two halves and wiped it thoroughly. He then carved a piece of hard wood and split off a stick that was curved on its higher end in order for it to look artistic as it held the pegheads, and flat on the lower end which was meant to be attached to the pumpkin. Next, he inserted the pegheads, while I stayed there, watching. I was then asked to fetch a piece of goatskin or sheepskin, so I did. Incidentally, a sheep had been slaughtered on that day. Hajj Mohammad cut out a piece of the skin, scraped the wool away, covered the hollow side of the pumpkin with it and started stitching it around the edges artistically, completely covering that side of the pumpkin and turning it into a decent soundboard. He then made the bridge of the tanboor out of a solid piece of wood and, when the skin was dry, he tied one end of a pair of strings to the pegheads he had carved with his knife, stretched the other end over the bridge and tied it onto a piece of wood. The process must have lasted over a week, during which I watched impatiently, waiting for this extraordinary instrument to be ready. The first time Hajj Mohammad played it, I was overwhelmed with joy. He was a capable musician who played exceptionally well, although the Moroccan airs of his musical pieces were too foreign for my Jerusalemite taste.

He handed me the instrument and started explaining to me how to place my fingers on the strings. For example, if I placed my second finger on a string, the tone would go up by one degree. He also taught me how to pluck the strings, and made me grow the nail of my index finger and play with my nails, rather than with a feather or anything else.

I treasured this instrument with great pride!! Hajj Mohammad taught me to play it, and more importantly, he taught me how to tune the first and second strings. I started playing the Jerusalemite music which I already knew, like the *Rozana*, *Akh Mash 'aal* and other songs, and was soon able to play these taqtouqas with a remarkable skill that impressed Hajj Mohammad al-Maghribi. In return for his favour, I used to bring him whatever food, fruit and sweets I was able to obtain, and always remained generous to him, thanks to my late father who always encouraged me to do so.

The summer season went by, and I returned with my tanboor to Jerusalem (having abandoned my first tin musical instrument in Beit Suseen) where I showed it to the neighbours' children. I would walk around playing and singing, while they

followed me singing the chorus in the parlour, corridor and open air spaces of Dar al-Jawhariyyeh. In the evening, I would give a repeat performance for the neighbours and guests who visited us. My mother and sisters often took me along on their Ramadan evening visits to Muslim neighbours, like the al-Daoudi, al-Salihani, Qutaynah and other families. I thanked God that my dream had come true. At last, I owned an instrument which was an excellent one for a young boy, and I had also acquired a good understanding of music. When, the following summer, we went back to Beit Suseen, I presented Hajj Mohammad with a tobacco case which I had bought for him from some Indians in order to show my appreciation.

Learning to Play the Rebeck (*Rababeh*)

A farmer who, I believe, was from Ain Karem, happened to be working in the fields of Deir Amro, and I noticed that he played the rebeck (rababeh) rather well. He was widely known at the time by his nickname 'Abu Sanduqa'. And so, I went to Persifon and suggested to her that he should teach me to play the rebeck. Indeed, Persifon did not turn down my request and at once, she met with the man who agreed to give me private lessons. She also bought me a rebeck which was made by Abu Sanduqa himself, as far as I believe, for eighteen Ottoman piasters. Abu Sanduqa taught me how to play the rebeck, and I worked hard until I had learned to play it well. Whenever Hussein Effendi came by and heard me play, he was rather impressed. I remember that he used to bring Abu Sanduqa food or a watermelon in person, so that he would take good care of me. Thus, within three months, I was able to play all the peasant folk songs, which I knew, such as *Dakdookah*, *Isma'u ya nas* [*listen, folks, to what the wise man has said*], *Abu jdailah*, *Akh mash'al*, *Mijanah* and *Dal'unah*. When, in 1906, I went back to Jerusalem, bringing with me my tanboor and rebeck, I began to play rather frequently at evening gatherings at our neighbours', and in particular at the evening parties thrown by the famous Mitri Abdullah al-Muna's family. I would sing and play the tanboor, then the rebeck, then I would dance the dabkeh for friends and family. I must have been eight or nine years old at the time. As I said above, my father offered me a lot of encouragement. He bought me a fake beard which was skilfully made of black hair, and which I could easily wear by slipping a string behind my ears. I would then play the rebeck, dressed in Arab costume. A lot of wonderful anecdotes involving this fake beard have happened to me at homes, and in school theatres.

Ramallah's Capon

I was fortunate to meet Jumaa al-Shaair Nasser, a bright rebeck player and singer from Beit Jala. I met him through my sister Shafiqah who lived in that town for a long time in Ottoman period. He was, I believe, the godfather of one of her children, and a good neighbour, too, and owned a lot of property there, in the neighbourhood of the

Russians' Maskubiah building. Jumaa told me that the following musical piece was by famous critic and poet Elias from the county of Bethlehem. It tells the true story of an incident he witnessed when visiting the North, Ramallah, to be precise. He said on the occasion:

[I once visited Ramallah, and I arrived there at dusk
 Only to hear a rooster implore me for help
 The rooster was later served for dinner
 It was said to be a 'capon', but was no richer than lent food
 May you all be shot, people of Ramallah
 Stingy and ignoble as you are]

على رام الله وهاديتش البلاد والا هالديتس بيزعق وبيصاحي إحميني من حسد المواسي	خطر في بالي عن أدور شامة وصلت رام الله عصير الماسي بيزعق وبيقول بعرضك يا شاعر الياس
وجابوا الهنايب والبواطي وقالوا عنه مخصي من المخاصي	ورحنا يا جماعة ع المضافة وجابوا الديتس في وسط المخادم
وتاني هواي تشنن طلعت خساسي مثل الأعياد في أيام الغطاسي	مديت إيدي بلقمة تشنن طلعت ملانة وثالث هواي فت واسبح يا شاعر الياس
أكثرهم ما يموت إلا [بلقواسي] وأكبر طبزية لهم في مداسي	وأنا داعي ع أهل رام الله كلهم حريقين والدين أكالين قطين

I sang this song beautifully and repeatedly at all of Jerusalem's theatres. When I sang it at the al-Mutran (Bishop's) School, in the presence of the late author Bulus Shehada who owned the *Miraat al-Sharq* newspaper, he protested angrily, for he was from Ramallah. When I removed the beard, however, he realised that the singer was only a schoolchild and at the end of the show gave me a kiss.

Once, at the time we were still living at Dar al-Jawhariyyeh, my father came home late, bringing along some of his friends, of whom I remember Mustafa [al-Jabsha], Mustafa al-Muawqat (al-Sariya) and Ibrahim Fadi al-Alami. He woke me up and made me wear the fake beard, having told his friends that a poet-singer from the countryside who was in Jerusalem pursuing a lawsuit and was staying at his home. I came in and sang this poem to their great pleasure. In the end, my father removed my beard and our neighbour Abu Abd al-Jabsha shouted: "My word, it's Wasif!"

By luck, my father, God bless his soul, was able to buy me a rebeck of the type known as the 'Indian rebeck'. He bought it from a Kurd who used to play it in the streets in return for some change. The instrument was made with unmatched precision using a coconut, a piece of leather and (two) beautiful hair (strings). My father paid a mere six piasters for it.

I recall on this note that when I needed some hair [for the strings], my brother

Tawfiq and I would go and stroll by the Jerusalem-Bethlehem horse carriages which used to stand at the Jaffa Gate, driven by Asserians from Bethlehem. We would then tiptoe, unnoticed by the driver, and once behind the horse's back, we would quickly grab its tail and pull the hairs that we needed.

The “Sword and Shield” Dance

As I said before, my brother Tawfiq was about two years older than me, but since we were about the same height, foreign pilgrims could not tell which one of us was older. We used to accompany my father to the celebrations of Holy Saturday and watch some of the men perform the sword and shield dance on the rooftop of the monastery of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, after the Holy Light ceremony. Among these were Mitri Costandi al-Muna, Saba al-Harami, Khalil al-Hakim and Nakhla al-Hasha who was one of the more skilled performers. The most remarkable performers, however, were the Orthodox pilgrims who came from Aleppo to celebrate Easter in Jerusalem, and who excelled at performing this traditional knight's dance, dressed in their elegant traditional Arab dress. Sometimes, my brother Tawfiq and I would imitate these dancers in Dar al-Jawhariyyeh, drawing the attention of our art-loving father who then decided to help us and made for each of us a solid wooden sword crafted to perfection with a black hilt and a light red blade, a zinc shield which he painted black, and a pair of white shirwal trousers, complete with a special belt, a black satin waistcoat and a cap. Father taught us as much as we could learn of the rules of this knight's dance which he performed very well indeed, despite his old age. When his friends visited him, he would make us wear our costumes immediately and perform the dance for them, but although he admired our performance and enjoyed watching it, he never allowed his fascination to show, for fear that our smugness might cause the ‘natural’ style he taught us to become ‘artificial’, to put it in his own words.

Working as an Apprentice Barber

The late Matthia, a Jerusalemite Latin Christian, was a famous barber in Jerusalem, and a sort of a ‘doctor’, too. Those who wanted to have a suction cup treatment or any other traditional treatment would go to Matthia Abu Abdallah's barbershop which was located in the Latin Patriarchate's khanaqah, opposite the alley leading to the Christian quarter where Jerusalem's Latin Christians lived. His partner, Ziyadah, was also a Latin Christian. My brother Khalil, who was a friend of Abu Abdallah, arranged for me to work at his shop as an apprentice for two months during the summer of 1907. I would hold the customer's neck, while Abu Abdallah washed his head from the back so that water did not drip on his back. The customer would rest his head on a copper basin that curves around the neck, then water was poured out of a copper bucket which had a tap near the base. I was extremely delighted about this new skill. In the evening,

two of the bravest young men of Damascus Gate, namely my brother Khalil and Muhammad al-Maddah who had taught him bravery, would take me to the Bachelor's apartment (Odah) in Damascus Gate where I would play the tanboor and sing for them.

During the day, I used to leave the shop and go to listen to Mr. Hussein al-Nashashibi play the oud at Abu Manawail's barbershop, which was located near his father Sheikh Khalil al-Nashashibi's olive press. His taqasim were indeed breathtaking; he had learned them piece by piece from the finest oud master of that time, an Egyptian. As I listened, intoxicated, to his fascinating playing, I wondered when I would be able to play the oud myself.

After school, I would take a detour to listen to Muhammad al-Sibasi and Abdul-Hamid Qutaynah whenever they happened to be playing the oud at the shop of oud maker Farah al-Qaraa. The shop was situated right by the Eastern gate to the roof of the Holy Sepulchre, which leads to Khan al-Zeit. I felt overjoyed, and wished I could hold this instrument and talk to the players. Then, I would leave the shop and go home with all my thoughts infused with the sounds of the oud.

Translated by Nada al-Zeer

Wasif Jawhariyyeh (1898-1972) one of Jerusalem's most illustrious citizens: composer, oud player, poet, and chronicler. Jawhariyyeh's memoirs span a period of sixty years (1904-1968) of Jerusalem's turbulent modern history, covering four regimes and five wars.