History of Architecture in Kuwait:

The Evolution of Kuwaiti Traditional Architecture Prior to the Discovery of Oil

by

Mohammed Alajmi

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies

(Architecture Education)

Under the Supervision of Professors Miles Bryant and Mark Hinchman

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2009

UMI Number: 3378533

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®
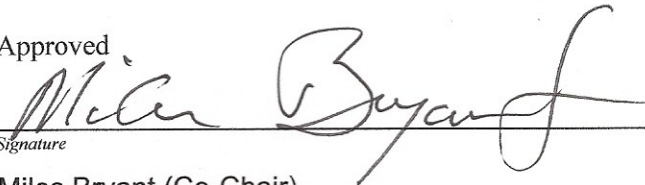
DISSERTATION TITLE

History of Architecture in Kuwait

BY

Mohammed Naser Alajmi

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Approved	Date
Signature	Aug 21, 2009
Miles Bryant (Co-Chair)	
Typed Name	
Signature	Aug 21, 2009
Mark Hinchman (Co-Chair)	
Typed Name	
Signature	8/21/09
Ted Ertl	
Typed Name	
Signature	August 21, 2009
Marilyn Grady	
Typed Name	
Signature	Aug. 21, 2009
Delwyn Harnisch	
Typed Name	
Signature	
Typed Name	
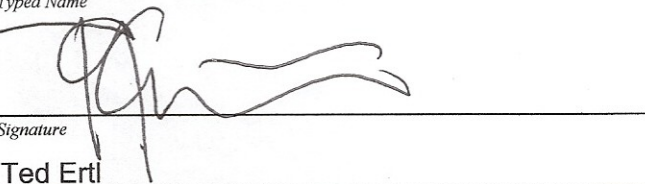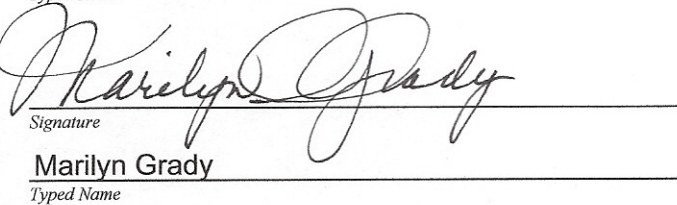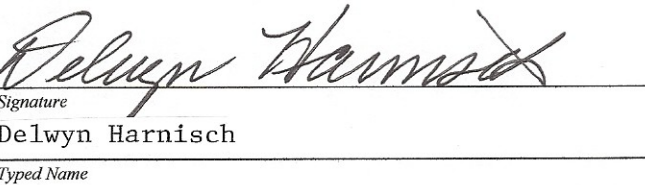
Nebraska
UNIVERSITY OF
Lincoln

II

History of Architecture in Kuwait:

The Evolution of Kuwaiti Traditional Architecture Prior to the Discovery of Oil

Mohammed Alajmi, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2009

Advisors: Miles Bryant & Mark Hinchman

This research examines the evolution of Kuwait's architecture since its creation in the eighteenth century up to the discovery of oil in 1936. Using a chronological approach, this study discusses the spatial architectural and urban strategies, building materials and construction techniques, and styles over time. Chapters of this study examine how Kuwaiti architectural meanings changed in response to different social and cultural factors.

This historical study intends to fill the gap that exists in the documentation of Kuwait's history as it relates to architecture and urbanization prior to the discovery of oil. The existing literature on the subject of traditional architecture of Kuwait is fragmented and incomplete. While some studies focus on stylistic and technological accounts, existing literature is unsupported by sufficient data and conducted with little or no in depth examination of the relationship between built form and socio-cultural developments.

This study clarified the complex and multi-faceted relationship between Kuwait's built forms on the one hand, and its socio-cultural forces on the other. Besides giving an extensive description of Kuwaiti architecture, this study investigated the mechanisms that produced a specific and distinctive architecture in Old Kuwait.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Munirah and Naser, who are always present in my mind

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I came to UNL in the fall of 2005, I had the food fortune to work with two extraordinary professors. I could not possibly list all the help and understanding I have received from them in the course of completing my degree. Their meticulous care in sharpening my thoughts continued throughout the years of my study and was by no means limited to academics. I would like to express my deepest thanks to them for their invaluable insights, intellectual contributions, and interest in my work. These great teachers are Professor Miles Bryant and Professor Mark Hinchman.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Dean and Professor of the School of Architecture at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Wayne Drummond, for his interest and continence encouragement.

There are friends who dedicated much of their time to sharpening my ideas, especially while I was writing this dissertation. These friends and colleagues are Bruce Anderson and Xiao Hu. I am deeply indebted to them both.

In Kuwait, generous individuals and institutions have offered invaluable support. My studies would not have been possible without a full scholarship from Kuwait University. To Kuwait University, I convey my sincere thanks. Special thanks to Dr. Abdullah al-Gheniem, president of the Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, for his encouragement and help, which facilitated my access to materials related to my research.

Finally, and most importantly, my special gratitude is to my wife Nora. With kindness and patience, she stood beside me and provided unending emotional and personal reinforcement during

the long years of the Master and Doctoral studies. No words could express her importance to me. Without her, I could not have accomplished my goal of completing this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Questions

In contemporary Kuwait, "traditional architecture" is a heavily loaded term. There is a growing interest in the subject of traditional architecture, and this is clearly reflected in many contemporary buildings designed by Kuwaiti architects. Fragmented formal features gleaned from Kuwaiti traditional architecture appear on the facades and surfaces of these buildings. On the other hand, some Kuwaiti academics have engaged in long and intense debates of whether such features represent a genuine Kuwaiti traditional architecture.

The lack of scholarly literature about Kuwaiti architecture significantly contributes to this dispute. The existing literature on the subject of traditional architecture of Kuwait is quite fragmented. While some researchers focus on stylistic and technological accounts, others investigate the subjective architectural speculations, unsupported by sufficient data and conducted with little or no in depth examination into the relationship between built form and socio-cultural developments.

Throughout this study, the emphasis will be to clarify the complex and multi-faceted relationship between Kuwait's built forms on the one hand, and socio-cultural forces on the other. The study examines Kuwait's socio-cultural and architectural evolution in parallel. It looks at the process of Kuwaiti cultural changes that stimulated and influenced all aspects of Kuwaiti life, including urban living and architecture. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are best reflected in the following fundamental questions:

- Is there a traditional Kuwaiti architecture?
- What is the origin of Kuwaiti architecture?

- What are the main architectural features of traditional Kuwait architecture?

- What are the significant pre-modern history-shaping events and who are the significant figures who played a defining role in Kuwaiti architecture?

- What were the historic, spatial, urban, and architectural landmarks in Old Kuwait?

- What were the foreign influences on the development of Kuwaiti traditional architecture?

- Are there particular seminal buildings that significantly influenced the formal characteristics of architecture in Kuwait?

1.2   Significance of the Study

The examination of Kuwaiti traditional architecture t is a new area that has yet to be explored. A survey of the major studies in the twentieth-century architecture published in English and Arabic might suggest that there is not really enough information to warrant a book on architecture in the Gulf region, much less in Kuwait. Among the few studies that have examined Kuwait's history, none have explored it from the perspective of architectural development.

The lack of historical information about Kuwaiti architecture may explain why there is little interest in the subject in many of the world's universities. Naturally, Kuwaiti architects and scholars would wish to research their own architectural history, but it would be hard to find an architectural history course in a university outside Kuwait where the study of the Gulf's architecture (let alone that of Kuwaiti architecture) is on equal footing with European or Japanese architecture.

On the other hand, almost all of the few published books and articles about Kuwait's architecture focus on modern architecture in Kuwait (created by the building boom that resulted from the discovery of oil in 1936), and neglect the traditional Kuwaiti architecture that has existed for more than two centuries and predates oil discovery

This study deals with the architectural history of Kuwait, a previously ignored subject. Very few traditional buildings still exist, raising an important question: Why is it important to consider Kuwait's traditional architecture and its history at this time?

The recent renewed interest in traditional forms of medicine, technology, architecture, and agriculture all "have led to a revived interest in preindustrial knowledge."[1] The United Nations, in recognizing the value of traditional knowledge, has established a new project called the Archive of Traditional Knowledge, with the goal of preserving this human heritage. In architectural practice, many Kuwaiti architects revive various features of traditional architecture in their contemporary buildings. As in other historical research, the assumption behind this study is to learn from the past. We cannot simply assume a sudden break with all that happened before, or assume that the past bears no lessons for us. Moreover, studying architectural history is of "value philosophically as well as in making us aware of the complexity and overlapping of things, it can also clarify those elements that are constant and those which change."[2]

This study will fill the long-term gap in the literature of Kuwait history as far as its traditional architecture is concerned, and it will contribute to the understanding of traditional architectural evolution. Finally, this study will also contribute to the critical and analytical manner by which such an understanding could be achieved.

---

[1] Hassan Fathy and Walter Shearer, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture : Principles and Examples with Reference to Hot Arid Climates* (Chicago: Published for United Nations University by the University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[2] Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 11.

1.3 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine Kuwaiti traditional architecture and to explore how architectural meaning changed under different social and cultural settings prior to the discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1936. This study employs a chronological approach, discussing spatial architectural and urban strategies, building materials and construction techniques, and styles over the course of time.

This historical research study, therefore, intends to fill the gap in the documentation of Kuwait's history as it relates to architecture and urbanization before the discovery of oil in the region. Besides giving an extensive description of Kuwaiti architecture, this study also investigates the mechanisms that produced a specific and distinctive architecture in Old Kuwait. An analysis of the few, surviving traditional buildings in Kuwait is significant, because these buildings represent a highly developed understanding of the local culture and demonstrate patterns of particular Kuwaiti lifestyles. Another goal of this study is to classify, describe, and highlight Kuwaiti traditional buildings and their features, and to link these traditional buildings to their cultural contexts, which in turn represent the occupants' beliefs, habits, and living patterns.

1.4 Definition of Terms

Architectural and local Kuwaiti terms are explained in footnotes as they appear in the text, but some important issues of terminology and sources, particular to Kuwait and its traditional architecture, need introduction.

In this study, the term "architect" in its general sense has a broader meaning, covering many professions and disciplines, including architect, engineering architect, landscape architect, planning architect, and preservation and conservation architect. The term "architect" in the Kuwaiti cultural setting is used to describe most of disciplines that relate to building construction. Historically, an "architect" referred to the master masons and master builders who worked as designers, planners, and engineers.

The discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1936 was the most significant event in its entire history. This event accelerated the process of economic, social, and architectural change in Kuwait. In this context, the use of the word "traditional" in this study is synonymous with "pre-oil." Similarly, the use of the word "modern" connotes to "post-oil".

In this study, the terms "Kuwait Town," the "Town," the "Old Town", and the "Old City," all refer to the Kuwait town that was walled during the 1920s. These terms also reference the prevalent social and cultural practices before the discovery of oil in Kuwait. The term "tribe" in this study is an equivalent for the Arabic term *qabila*, referring to a socio-political system formed through common lineal descent.

The terms "Gulf" and "Arabian Gulf" are used to refer to the inland sea separating Arabia from Iran. Among the inhabitants of the Arabian shore and in the Arab world as a whole, the term "Arabian Gulf"—*al-Khali al-Arabi* in Arabic— is commonly used.

1.5 Organization of the Chapters

This thesis examines the traditional architecture of Kuwait within the cultural context of Kuwait and its people. The introductory section introduces the research questions, the significance of the study, and its purpose.

Chapter 1 briefly examines the general political, commercial, and social history of Kuwait and their impact on the development of urbanization and Kuwaiti architecture. Chapter 2 describes the methodology used in conducting this research, beginning with an explanation of the nature of historical inquiry and how it has been utilized in this study. Chapter 2 also describes in detail data collection procedures and data analysis.

Chapter 3 depicts the growth of the early settlement of Kuwait in the early eighteenth century and the factors that influenced Kuwaiti urban development. Chapter 4 examines the mechanisms under which Old Kuwait grew. Chapter 4 also examines early texts that describe Kuwait in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Chapter 5 looks at the main elements of Old Kuwait. This chapter examines the streets and features of the residential areas. This chapter argues that the path of urbanization followed Kuwaiti social organization.

Chapter 6 examines Kuwait's traditional souks, or marketplaces, and describes major features such as Sief Street, Safat Square, and the Central Souk. Chapter 7 investigates traditional mosques and examines the setting of mosques and their formal and spatial features in the context of the Kuwaiti way of life.

Chapter 8 studies three significant Kuwaiti architectural features: *diwaniyah*, *diwan*, and harem. Various examples are examined to distinguish usual and unusual features of each type. Chapter 9 focuses on Kuwaiti traditional houses. This chapter examines the formal and spatial features of traditional houses in relation to Kuwaiti mores, climate, and economical and technical realities at the time.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction:

Few studies exist that examine architecture in Kuwait in general, and fewer still that consider Kuwait's traditional architecture. Furthermore, research that does explore Kuwait's architecture is not scholarly in nature. In the *World Bibliographical Series, Volume 56,* for instance, only 34 written works are listed under the rubric of urbanization and architecture in Kuwait. None of these can be considered primary sources for this study. In fact, only three listings from the *World Bibliographical Series, Volume 56* have any relevance to this study. This source covers more than four decades, beginning in the 1950s. None, however, explore the integration of Kuwait's architectural and urban history as a central theme. Moreover, most of these studies are mainly descriptive, focusing on the latest architectural issues in Kuwait, while disregarding the social, economic, and cultural relationships that contribute to the creation of buildings.

There are some non-architectural studies on Kuwait written before the impact of oil and the arrival of modernity, but they are limited to general social and political history. H. Dickson's report, first published in 1949, is the most significant of these.[3] A one-time British political agent in Kuwait during the 1930s, Dickson and his wife Violet were interested in the desert aspect of Kuwait and the behavior of nomadic Arabs. This description provides a valuable recording of all the facets of the nomad's way of life. More importantly, the Dicksons conducted their study before the oil industry transformed the traditional movements of the Badu nomads and significantly reduced the number of true pastoralists.

---

[3] Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours. Edited for Publication by Clifford Witting* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956).

Another valuable non-architectural study was done by John Gordon Lorimer, whose name has became inextricably associated with the *Gazetteer Of The Persian Gulf, Oman And Central Arabia,* a monumental work that became the most important single source of historical material on the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia.[4] Lorimer synthesized all available British records of the area in his book. His initial intention was to provide British agents and policymakers in the Gulf, India, and London with a convenient and portable handbook to use as a guide to the region and its people. The *Gazetteer's* extensive volumes covered various aspects of the Gulf's history, politics, and commerce. First issued in 1908 for official use only, The Gazetteer was finally released to the public in the early fifties.

Moving from general cultural and historical work, early professional architectural publications did not pay any attention to Old Kuwait and its traditional architecture, even after the discovery of oil. In 1953, the first published article dealing with the urbanization and architectural development of Kuwait City appeared in *Architectural Review*, a famous British journal. This article, "Naif Avenue, Kuwait" is about Farmer and Dark, a British architectural firm, and its selection as the initial consultant commissioned to prepare and develop Kuwait's first master plan. Farmer and Dark's proposal was to create a "new construction [that] loosely follows the local courtyard tradition, with more shaded circulation space formed by open ground floors and covered connecting ways" along Naif Avenue, the main street in Old Kuwait. [5] Another article concerning urban planning and architecture in Kuwait was published in 1954 by *Town Planning Institute Journal*.[6] This article discussed some of the "exciting" architectural developments taking place in Kuwait, such as the construction of a state guesthouse, a hotel, schools, a water distillation plant,

---

[4] John Gordon Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (Farnsborough: Gregg, 1970).
[5] "Naif Avenue, Kuwait," *Architectural Review* 113 (1953): 126.
[6] P. W. MacFarlane, "Planning an Arab Town : Kuwait on the Persian Gulf," *Town Planning Institute Journal* 40 (1954).

and a state factory that made unit parts for small houses. More articles appeared, usually timed with the awarding— mostly to British firms—of major building commissions in Kuwait, such as for the first power station and the first modern hotel.[7] None of these studies and articles, however, made any effort to record and document Kuwaiti traditional buildings, which were rapidly disappearing.

Saba George Shiber's two books, funded and printed by the Kuwaiti government in 1964 and 1969, are among the first broad studies that provide a comparative analysis between traditional and modern architecture in Kuwait.[8] Shiber seems to have greatly enjoyed his short stays in Kuwait. He wrote in his diary:

> Yes, no place in the world possesses so many interesting aspects to its overall anatomy. Archaeologists and architects, photographers and pilots, experts and laborers, doctors and nurses, students and teachers, merchants and employees, contractors and their competitors, all live a very interesting, harmonious, and agitated life on the most unique spot in the world.[9]

During his work at the Ministry of General Affairs, Shiber tried to limit the massive demolitions that almost obliterated the traditional Old Town. Stephen Gardiner, in his book, *Kuwait: The Making of a City*, wrote eloquently about Shiber's experience in Kuwait:

> If the Kuwaitis were dissatisfied with the way things were going, Shiber was horrified at what had been done. Recording his comments, criticisms, and plans in a series of articles that were later collected as a book, he set about putting an end to the indiscriminate and random building of five- and six-storey blocks of apartments and shops. He saved the Souk from demolition, froze the 1952 Plan until another could be developed, and,

---

[7] Ibid.: 113.; "Power Station at Kuwait," *Architectural Review* 120 (1956): 9-12.; "Hotel in Kuwait," *Architectural Design* 28 (1958): 460.

[8] Shiber earned his master's degree from MIT in architecture and planning in 1946 and his PhD from Cornell University in 1956. Shiber's expertise came from his work in Kuwait from 1960 to 1964, the heyday of the modernization process. He worked at the Ministry of General Affairs as a high-ranking consultant on most of the government's major projects and master plans. Two problems, however, make his two books (written in 1964 and 1967) less effective for my historical research purposes: 1) most of his writings are of a subjective and biased nature: for example, he argued that social mores and physical compulsions were easily understood, but the "spiritual-psychological compulsions"(p. 367) were more difficult to comprehend; and 2) more importantly, these writings covered only the first period of the modernization era, up to the mid-1960s, ignoring the architectural history of Kuwait before the oil era. Shiber died suddenly in 1968, when he was 45 years old.

[9] Saba George Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanization; Documentation, Analysis, Critique. Al-Madianah Al-Kuwaitiyyah* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government, 1964), 10.

moving on to the Ministry of Planning, laid out proposals for the heart of the city around the Sief Palace that included commercial and residential development.[10]

Shiber briefly acknowledged Kuwait Old Town's significant urban patterns as "organic symbioses between men and nature . . . and man-made features were arrived at as a result of the convergence of many factors on this spot of the Arabian desert."[11] His conclusion, about the image of Kuwait, is telling. "I saw in Kuwait, more than I saw in nearly every Arab country I knew, the germs, the beginnings, of something great and significant."[12] Shiber had limited success in curtailing the government's intention to demolish Old Town; however, his writings enhanced awareness of Kuwaiti history and heritage.

Another significant study was done by Muhammed Abdo about the urbanization of Kuwait, covered major urban projects since 1950.[13] Abdo's study investigates the urbanization process itself, and the relationship between urban planning and the demographic and economic factors that influence urban decision-making. In Chapter 4 of his study—the only chapter that focuses on traditional architecture—Abdo erroneously argues that Old Town experienced no dramatic changes or growth throughout its development, beginning with the urban settlement of the mid-eighteenth century. He affirms that Kuwaiti urban patterns and morphology reflected a number of features known to the traditional Islamic/Arab city. Abdo concludes that Old Town was functional, and its expansion remained organic and measured. In summary, Abdo's study yields little about Kuwaiti traditional architecture. Abdo's study can be best described as "a

---

[10] Stephen Gardiner and Ian Cook, *Kuwait, the Making of a City* (Harlow, Essex ; New York: Longman, 1983), 54-55.
[11] Shiber, 171.
[12] Ibid., 11.
[13] Muhammad Fawzi Abdo, "The Urbanisation of Kuwait since 1950: Planning, Progress and Issues" (University of Durham (United Kingdom), 1988).

documentation of the making of urban Kuwait during its post-oil modern era,"[14] and would be of more use for researchers looking at the development of Kuwait's post-oil period.

By contrast, a study by al-Bahar is very useful. She attempts to integrate both the empirical and theoretical frameworks in her study of the evolution of Kuwaiti domestic architecture (houses). She argues that "any attempt to study Kuwait's built environment must, at the very basic level, seek to comprehend the multi-faceted process of cultural change."[15] Al-Bahar utilizes the space syntax theory that originated through the work of Hillier and Hanson in an attempt to understand the relationship between space and social life.[16] The syntax theory concerns the study of space within the built form, arguing that a building would potentially achieve its function mostly within its spaces and not through its built form. Syntax theory also posits that the ordering of space in a building is about the ordering of relationships among the users of that space. Al-Bahar's analysis includes essential information that partly supports my research topic; however, her study analyzes only the domestic side of Kuwaiti traditional architecture, without specific reference to the occupants' usage and lives.

Turning to a more recent work about Kuwaiti architecture from 2006, *Kuwait Early Architecture: The Arcade-Liwan House,* an evolution in the literature is evident.[17] True to its title, the book focuses on the arcade-liwan house (courtyard house with colonnade surrounding the court) of the prominent merchant al-Bader family. Discussion of the al-Bader family and the Bayt al-Badr, the most famous and best preserved example of Kuwaiti traditional houses, consumes

---

[14] Ibid., II.

[15] Huda H. Al-Bahar, "The Evolution of Kuwait's Domestic Architecture: An Empirical and a Theoretical Study" (London University 1990), 27.

[16] Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[17] Michel Lautrette, *Kuwait Early Architecture* (Kuwait: Al-Khat Printing Press, 2006).

more than half the book, leaving related subjects briefly or insufficiently examined. For instance, the small Kuwaiti traditional houses, which were the majority of traditional buildings, were completely neglected. Although it delves into some parts of Kuwaiti economic activity during the nineteenth century (the Arabian horse trade in particular), the relationship between such activity and Kuwaiti architecture is ignored.[18] Nicely illustrated, the book is best seen as a coffee-table book about one aspect of Kuwaiti traditional architecture, the arcade-liwan house, and is meant more for casual enjoyment than scholarly research.

1.2   Traditional Kuwait Town before 1936: A General History

Many researchers agree that the discovery of oil was the most significant episode in Kuwait's overall history.[19] P. MacFarlane acknowledged that Kuwait had "almost overnight, become the richest country in the world for its size."[20] Ahmad Abu-Hakima described this "overnight" moment as the "era of change and development."[21] Ronald Lowcock and Zahra Freeth assert that the Old Town of Kuwait was almost immediately transformed due to the oil revenues that began to flow. The "city walls were demolished, leaving only the most important gates; the markets were remodeled; new, high minarets of Indian design replaced the earlier low ones of the old mosques; and several main shopping streets of a Western pattern were opened up."[22] Jamal Karim noted that Kuwait went through an unprecedented construction boom as a result of the oil wealth. Since the "early 1950s the city-state has grown fivefold in area, while its population has

---

[18] Kuwait's economic activities before the oil discovery and their influence on architecture are discussed in Chapter 2
[19] Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, [1st ed. (Beirut,: Khayats, 1965).; Al-Bahar. ; MacFarlane.
[20] MacFarlane: 110.
[21] Abu-Hakima, 157.
[22] Ronald B. Lewcock and Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Northern Gulf* (London: United Bank of Kuwait, 1978).

more than quadrupled in number."[23] Al-Bahar showed that Kuwait's oil revenues during the 1940s and 1950s had dramatic effects on the existing historic urban fabric. She argued that the rapid urban growth of Kuwait City has been almost unparalleled in the history of urbanism.[24] "What has been the impact of the sudden explosion of wealth upon this primitive society?" asked Fakhri Shehab, an economic consultant sent by the World Bank to Kuwait. In his article, Shehab wondered how in "less than two decades the whole face of Kuwait has changed beyond recognition."[25] Shehab argued that behind the spectacular physical changes lie fundamental problems, such as the near-total loss of the traditional town and its architecture. Geoffrey Ffrench and Allan Hill described how steeply increasing oil revenues increased the immigrant population and resulted in a sudden and rapid expansion of Kuwait City, both vertically and horizontally. That "[e]xpansion was not haphazard, as the degree of financial and legislative power which the government was able to exercise was impressive by any standards. These powers were freely used to transform the city physically,"[26] demolishing almost all the traditional town buildings.

The dividing line between the pre-oil era and post-oil era is not the date of oil discovery, which was1936. Rather, the dividing line is the moment when the impact of this oil discovery became apparent in the lives of the Kuwaiti people. By 1946, the surplus of government revenue due to oil had begun to affect Kuwait's socio-cultural life, urbanization, and architectural forms.

In order to see the full picture of Kuwait's traditional architecture, it is crucial to understand Old Town and the circumstances that contributed to its existence. The physical setting and environment of the Arabian Peninsula have a considerable impact on countries in the region, its

---

[23] Karim Jamal, "Immigrant Workers' Settlements in Kuwait : Ishish," *Architectural Design* 44, no. 7 (1974): 410.
[24] Huda Al-Bahar, " Contemporary Kuwaiti Houses," *Mimar* no. 13 (1984): 71.
[25] Fakhri Shehab, "Kuwait: A Super-Affluent Society," *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 3 (1964): 464.
[26] Geoffrey E. Ffrench and Allan G. Hill, *Kuwait, Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, Medizinische Länderkunde. Geomedical Monograph Series (Berlin, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1971).

inhabitants, and urban development. Certain characteristics, such as aridity and water scarcity, the morphology of the coast and hinterland, natural resources, and Kuwait's location at the intersection of world trade routes connecting east and west, are all significant to the Arabian Gulf region. American urban historian Lewis Mumford made an insightful attempt to define a city, which might easily describe Kuwait's Old Town. Mumford writes that a "city in its complete sense . . . is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity."[27] This section seeks to shed light on the geographic, environmental, political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of Kuwait, which promoted the growth of Old Town.

1.2.1 Location and Topography

The location of Kuwait is the most important factor in shaping its destiny. Kuwait lies between 28° and 30° north of the equator and between 46° and 48° east of the Greenwich meridian, precisely in the heart of the Middle East. Iraq borders Kuwait to the north, while the eastern province of Saudi Arabia is at the border to the west and south of Kuwait. Kuwait is a small state; it covers an area of only 17,820 square kilometers, of which 1,000 square kilometers represent offshore islands.

The strategic importance of Kuwait comes from two major natural factors: the Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula (Fig. 1). The Arabian Gulf is located in a vital geographic spot in the world. Control of the Gulf has been the focus of competition between great powers since ancient times due to its easy connection between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean via Kuwait, Iraq, and Syria. Moreover, the Gulf naturally provided many bays and inlets for commercial dhows and warships. The finest among these bays was Kuwait Bay. European powers competed

---

[27] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1946), 480.

fiercely to dominate the Gulf, beginning with Portugal during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and later France, Holland, and Britain.[28]

The Arabian Peninsula is located at the heart of the Great Arid Zone, a large desert region that stretches from North Africa to Central Asia. The desert trade routes were critical factors in the development of many of the Gulf's towns such as ancient Mecca, and Riyadh and Kuwait in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kuwaiti merchants made strong commercial connections with northern and central Arabian tribes by participating and organizing desert caravan routes that began in Kuwait and ended in Aleppo.

Figure 1 Kuwait geographical location in Arabian Gulf. Source: The author, Mohammed Alajmi, 2009.

1.2.1.1 Kuwait Bay

Kuwait Bay, which extends 45 kilometers westward inland, "is one of the finest natural harbors in the entire Arabian Gulf."[29] In amazement, Shiber writes of Kuwait Bay that one "is never sure of his compass bearings in Kuwait, often mistaking East for West and North for South.

---

[28] Abu-Hakima.

[29] Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2007), 3.

The sun sets in the West; yet it has a foreground of sea, baffling one for long before gaining proper orientation."[30] Until the discovery of oil, the bay was Kuwait's principal natural asset. On the entire western coast of the Arabian Gulf, between Basra in Iraq and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, there is no better natural harbor than Kuwait Bay. Despite its shallowness and tendency to accumulate silt from the estuary of the Tigris and Euphrates river and the fact that the Gulf has a mean depth of only 25 meters, Kuwait Bay provides a sufficient depth for the small and large boats carrying the bulk of Kuwait's coastal traffic.[31]

Apart from the Bay of Kuwait and the Gulf shores, there are three other notable physical features of the Kuwaiti terrain. First, the Jal al-Zor escarpment runs along the northwest shore of the Bay of Kuwait for about 80 kilometers and reaches an elevation of 148 meters above sea level. The second notable feature is the Ahmadi ridge, on which the company town of Ahmadi is located, which was founded when the oil industry began to develop in the late 1940s. The Ahmadi ridge, which runs parallel to the east coast, is about 8 kilometers inland, and rises to over 100 meters above sea level. The ridge gives the town of Ahmadi a pleasant atmosphere and has a slight cooling effect on the town. The third feature of note, a grouping of relatively large hills in Wara and Burgan in the southern part of the state, break the otherwise monotonously level terrain.

---

[30] Shiber, 75.

[31] National Geographic Society, *Atlas of the World*, 8th ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2007), 73.

Figure 2 Kuwait map. Source: University of Texas at Austin, map collection[32]

Kuwaiti topography is uniform, sloping gently from southwest to northeast, lacking relief in general. The terrain is occasionally broken by low hills and shallow depressions. The land reaches elevations of 300 meters above sea level, as in the southwest corner of the state. As the terrain gradually descends eastward, the eastern third of Kuwait (which includes most of the settled areas) has elevations of less than 160 meters. The western lands are gently undulating gravel plains with occasional sandy knolls collected around desert brushwood and salty marshes known as *hamdh*. Although evidence of fluvial erosion is common in this area, the most striking feature of these gravel plains is the al-Batin Valley. Along Kuwait's western frontier, this valley is about 10

---

[32] Retrieved in April 10th from the website http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/kuwait_rel96.jpg

kilometers wide and has a relief of up to 63 meters. Throughout the northern, western, and central parts of the state, desert basins fill with rainwater frequented by the Bedouins and their herds of camel and sheep.

Floristically, Kuwait is situated in a region known as Saharo-Sindian, which means it has similar vegetation and wildlife as the natural conditions of the area extending from Libya to Pakistan. Only certain types of plants and animals can withstand Kuwaiti's harsh conditions. Kuwait has "three ecosystems: desert, dune, and salt marshes."[33] The desert soil, by far the largest part of the Kuwaiti ecosystem, consists mainly of alluvial sand rich in minerals such as sodium, alkali, calcium, and to some extent, gypsum. However, this high degree of mineral concentration is detrimental to agriculture.

1.2.2 Climate

The Kuwaiti climate is arid and generally divided into two major seasons—summer and winter—with small climatic transitions between them. Kuwait has a semitropical climate, tempered slightly along the coastal areas. This climate permits only limited vegetation and is one of the main factors—especially before the modern era—strongly affecting lifestyles and activities in Kuwait and other Gulf urban settlements. The arid northern Gulf, which is also present throughout much of North Africa, Arabia and Iran, is much harsher than the semi-arid climates of the Levant.

Kuwait's long summers start in early May and last until late September. Mostly clear skies with strong sunshine are responsible for high summer temperatures. During summer, the mean temperature easily exceeds 30°C (86°F), with temperatures of 45°C not unusual (50°C was

---

[33] Casey, 4.

recorded in the summer of 1909).[34] Kuwait's relative humidity often drops below 50 percent throughout the summer; thus, while ambient air temperatures are extremely high, the dryness of the air helps Kuwaitis stay cool. Although the Kuwaiti climate is harsh, it is, however, more tolerable than that of other locations in the Gulf, such as Muscat and Bahrain, both of which suffer both high temperatures and high humidity during summer.[35] Kuwaiti historian al-Qenaei affirmed that Kuwait's weather during summer nights is more pleasant than in *Sham* (meaning Syria, Israel, Palestine and Jordan and Lebanon). According to al-Qenaei, Kuwaitis can enjoy sleeping outdoors in summer because mosquitoes and other bothersome insects are absent in Kuwait.[36] Unlike these countries, he argued, the people can enjoy sleeping outdoors because the mosquitoes and bugs are absent in Kuwait.[37]

Kuwait averages twenty-six days of rain annually, but no rain falls in summer. The prevailing winds are mostly northwest in all seasons. Strong southeasterly winds, or *al-kos*, as they are called in Kuwait, are occasionally recorded in the summer, and bring with them the humidity experienced in coastal areas farther down the Gulf.

Since the Gulf is shallow, water temperatures reach 30°C by the middle of summer. Therefore, the Gulf exerts only a small moderating influence on summer temperatures, resulting in little temperature difference between the coast and the interior.[38]

Two very short climatic transitions of pleasantly warm weather separate summer from winter in Kuwait—which "hardly warrant the title of spring and autumn"[39]. During these

---

[34] Richard Trench, *Arab Gulf Cities*, 4 vols. ([Slough]: Archive Editions, 1994), v. 2, 7.
[35] Ffrench and Hill.
[36] Yousif al-Qenaei, *Pages from the History of Kuwait* (Kuwait Kuwait Government Press, 1968).
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ffrench and Hill, 7.
[39] Ibid.

comfortable transitions, the annual bird migrations along the Caspian-East African route take place.

Kuwait's winter is unpredictable and variable. The movement of frontal disturbances through the Gulf accounts for much of the day-to-day variation in temperature, visibility, and cloud cover. The average annual rainfall ranges from less than 30 millimeters to about 300 millimeters, falling mostly between October and April. Occasional sudden clouds can unload more than 50 millimeters of rain in a single day, and heavy downpours produce traffic chaos and wide-spread flooding. In midwinter, extremely cold winds cause temperatures to drop sharply. The *shamale,* or northerly cold wind, can blow for several days at a time, causing great discomfort indoors and out. The *shamale* carries fine, sandy dust that penetrates into buildings and homes, obscuring visibility, contaminating the air, and affecting breathing.[40] To overcome sandstorms, Kuwaitis walled their towns as early as the 1750s. More tectonic strategies have been implemented to deal with this winter phenomenon during the development of Kuwait Town to try to reduce exposure to the outdoor environment.[41]

1.2.3 Water resources

Perhaps not surprisingly, Kuwait is the only nation in the world without a lake. Water resources have always been Kuwait's major problem. The lack of rain, the sandy soil, and the small number of underground aquifers, coupled with high evaporation rates (up to 18 millimeters per day during summer) severely restrict agricultural activities in Kuwait. Other than the 2,000

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Chapter 9 includes an in depth discussion of the traditional domestic buildings' responses to such environmental forces.

palm trees that Lorimer estimated seeing during his visit to Kuwait in 1912, Kuwait was considered barren, except for the ruler's small garden inside the Sief Palace. [42]

Up to 1907, there were only two sources of water in Old Kuwait: from wells and from collecting and storing rain water. Almost all traditional Kuwaiti houses had wells in their courtyards, but the water was brackish and mainly used for kitchen and washing purposes. Drinking water was brought to Kuwait Town by donkey from sweet wells known as *shamiya* and *Hawalli* on the outskirts of Kuwait.

About thirty kilometers west and south from Kuwait Town several shallow wells were the water sources for Bedouins in Kuwait's nearby desert locations, such as *Sabahiyah*. The problems with these wells, however, were that their water was increasingly becoming brackish by the middle of the summer season. Furthermore, if rainfall was scarce—as it is in summer—the number of these wells decreased and the water became even more saline.

The second source was rain water. Although the rainy season was very short, Kuwaitis efficiently utilized this source of water. The roofs of the houses were almost flat with a little degree of slope that gently pushed rain to accumulate and got into reservoirs called *al-berkah* through the *marazeem* or gutters. The traditional gutter was one of the salient features of traditional buildings; many contemporary Kuwaiti architects utilize the traditional gutter in an attempt to reflect traditional appeal in their buildings (Fig. 3). Traditional gutters were made of engraved timber logs, and in the early 20th century changed to metal sheets for durability. The rain was collected into the house reservoir that was often three to four meters deep in the courtyard area and was round or rectangular at the bottom, used for preserving drinking water. It was

---

[42] Lorimer.

traditionally made with a rocky floor, rock mixture walls and covered with wood or metal. *Al-berkah* water was mainly used as a fresh sweet drinking water and for cooking purposes.

By the early twentieth century a third source of water was developed. The drought of 1907-08 and the bad pearl season led Kuwaiti *dhow* owners and pearl fishermen to launch the importation of "sweet water" from Shatt-al-Arab. [43] They employed their vessels in the pearling off-season by carrying water and, within a year, there were at least "20 native craft engaged solely in this trade."[44]
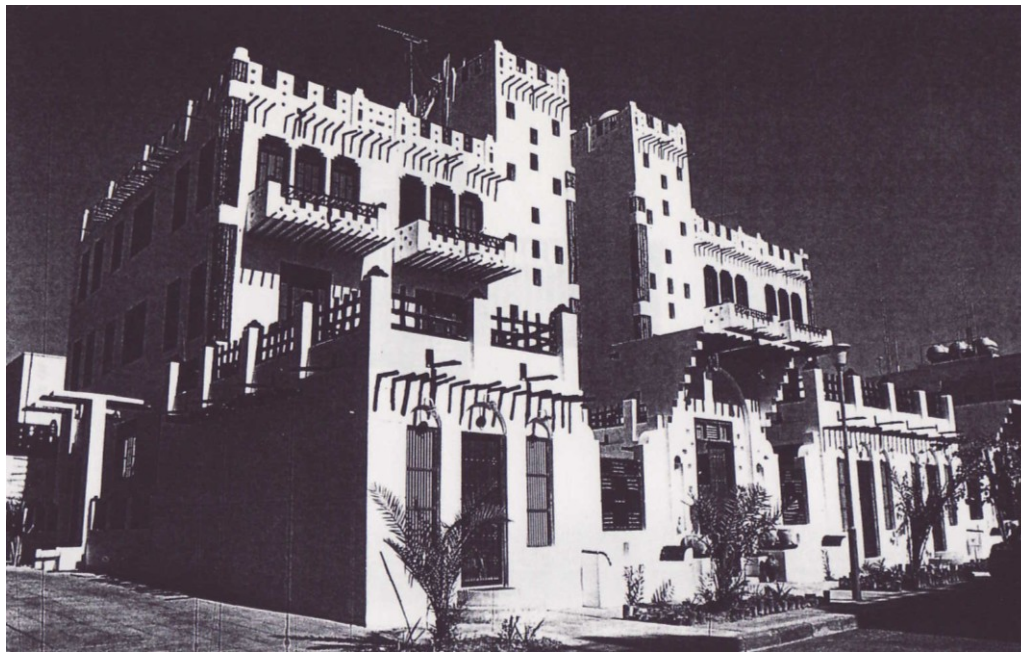
Figure 3 A villa designed by Kuwaiti architect Saleh Al-Mutawa. Source: Al-Mutawa, 1994.

The need for "sweet water" from Shatt-al-Arab grew and the water importation trade increased accordingly. In 1910, there were more than 50 large boats specially equipped with tanks

---

[43] Shatt-al-Arab is a river in Southwest Asia of some 200 kilometers (120 miles) in length, formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers in the town of al-Qurnah in the Basra Governorate of southern Iraq. The southern end of the river constitutes the border between Iraq and Iran down to the mouth of the river as it discharges into the Persian Gulf. Retrieved on May 10, 2009 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shatt_al-Arab
[44] Trench, v.2, 80.

that could carry 3,000 to 5,000 gallons per trip; each boat would make at least one trip every four to six days.[45]

Distillation became an option to supply water in 1914 and Kuwait became one of the earliest countries to use a distillation machine. Sheikh Mubarak the Great purchased the first distillation machine (Fig. 4) from Britain. The installation of the machine was a great event for Kuwaitis and water was distributed free of charge for one month. As relations cooled so did the operation of the machine. The Kuwaiti-British relations underwent a period of stagnation after the death of Sheikh Mubarak the Great that led to ignoring maintenance of the machine, which was the British responsibility. Eventually, the machine was sold back to Britain.[46] Due to Kuwait's rapid urban and industrial growth in the modern era, seawater distillation began in 1950 and is today the major source of water.

The impact of the shortage of sweet water on traditional Kuwaiti architecture was crucial. Collecting rainwater, for example, required flat roofs with a slight slope. It also required an adequate number of gutters with a certain shape. All the traditional houses needed a well, a cistern, and other water cooling elements.

---

[45] Ibid.

[46] Yousef Al-Shehab, *Kuwait through History* (Kuwait: 1992), 312.
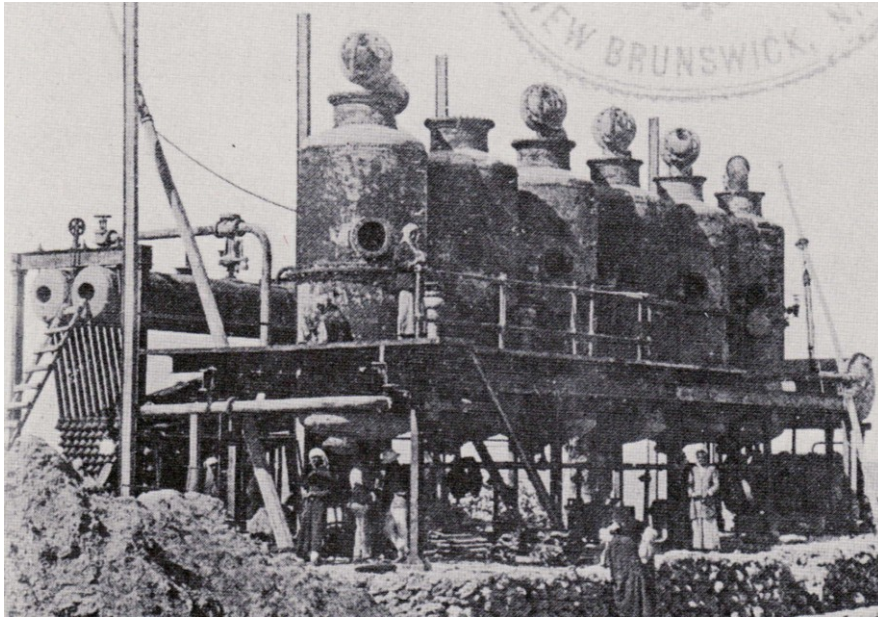
Figure 4 British water distillery in Kuwait in 1914

1.2.4 Political pre-oil system

Bani Khalid, a powerful ethnic group that controlled eastern Arabia during the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, also controlled Kuwait. In approximately 1752, the al-Sabah family ruled Kuwait. Al-Sabah was a clan of the larger *Utub* tribe who left Najd, the center of Arabian Peninsula, in the late seventeenth century due to several factors including the frequent conflicts within the tribe and the scarcity of grazing lands. After circulating around the eastern part of Arabia, the *Utub* arrived in *al-Kut*, one of the earlier names of Kuwait, which provided them with an excellent fishing harbor surrounded by land from three sides.[47] After they settled in Kuwait, the *Utub*'s lifestyle changed from a nomadic and pastoral mode to a sedentary one that relied on maritime and trade. In 1765, the Danish explorer Carsten Niebuhr estimated the population of Kuwait to be about 10,000 who worked as fishermen and pearl-divers, and had about

---

[47] . In Chapter 3, the early settlement in Kuwait is discussed.

800 dhows. Kuwait continued to grow for the rest of the eighteenth century and had no major political threat until the rise of the Wahhabis in Central Arabia at the end of the century.

The threat of the Wahhabis from Central Arabia began at the end of eighteenth century.[48] Several Wahhabis attacks carried on between 1793-95; a major battle in 1793 in which Kuwaiti forces faced the Wahhabis outside Kuwait town, was won, barely, by the Wahhabis after killing thirty Kuwaiti men. Another major battle was in 1797, in which the Wahhabis eventually retreated from the battlefield after Sheikh Abdallah al-Sabah, the second ruler of *Utub*, "and his brave townsmen repelled that attack."[49] Two main reasons led to the Wahhabis attacks on Kuwait: the first was that many of the Bani Khalid's sheikhs fled to Kuwait seeking refuge from the Wahhabis yoke. The Wahhabis, in response indicated to the *Utub* "that those who helped enemies of the Wahhabis were open to Wahhabis attack."[50] Wahhabis' dominance was not welcome among al-Hasawis, the people of al-Hasa, therefore, many of them migrated to towns away from Wahhabis dominance, such as Kuwait Town. The architectural influence of al-Hasawis in Kuwait was apparent in the traditional Kuwaiti architecture. The second reason for Wahhabis attacks is more important that the first because it was based on a fundamental religious Wahhabis belief in which they were pledged "to carry war to wherever *shirk* (pluralism) and *bida* (innovation) existed." The *Utub* territory hence, could not be excluded because the "*Utub*, like other non-Wahhabi Moslems, practiced Islam in a manner unacceptable to the Wahhabis."[51]

None of the Wahhabis' regular attempts on Kuwait to seize the town succeeded, as it was well fortified by the first wall. Fortified walls of Kuwait were significant features of Old Kuwait.

---

[48] Wahhabis or Wahhabism was a religious and political movement named after its founder, Muhammad b. Abd. Al-Wahhab in 1740s who sought reviving the concept of unimpaired and inviolate Oneness of God. Whahhabis used to refer to themselves as *Muwahhidin* or Unitarians. See Abu-Hakima, 127.
[49] Ibid., 156.
[50] Ibid., 157.
[51] Ibid., 155.

Fortifying Kuwait with walls repeated in 1811 and again in 1920, with a massive third wall made of rammed earth that extended to more than six kilometers with massive gates (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 Kuwait third wall built in 1920. Source: Facey, 1998.

Another important reason that helped Kuwaitis to repel these attacks was that Kuwaitis at the time had the most advanced weapons, superior to those of the Wahhabis, thanks to Kuwaitis' trading with India, which was well established by that time. The presence of the "British Factory at Kuwaiti from 1793-1795 may have been anther strong reason for the safety of Kuwait and its escape from the Wahhabi yoke."[52] In one of the Wahhabis attacks on Kuwait in which 2000 camels each carrying two men, the British Factory participated in defending Kuwait Town by landing two guns from the British cruiser that were used to guard the Factory.[53] With the growing influence of Wahhabis, and to further maintain its integrity, Kuwait made political alliances first with Ottomans in the mid-nineteenth century as a quasi-independent state and later with the British in 1899 as a protectorate.

---

[52] Ibid., 162.
[53] Ibid., 163.

The first political relations between Kuwait and British Empire were in 1775 when the British East India Company established several factories and trading posts along the Arabian Gulf. A reliable flow of the British mail was imperative to its success in and around India. Basra was one of the important points in British dispatch processes. When Basra was struck by plague and besieged by Persians in 1775, British mail was routed through the port of Kuwait until 1779.[54] Since then Kuwait became a significant town in British relations in the Gulf. Whenever disputes became sharp between the Basra Factory and the Pasha of Baghdad, Kuwait was mentioned by the both parties as a substitute for Basra, and in 1773 the Factory was moved to Kuwait for two years and four months before it relocated again in Basra. The relocating of the Factory in Kuwait had the desired results the British wanted in bringing the Pasha or the governor of Ottoman in Bagdad to the British terms. On the other hand, for Kuwait the stay with the British Factory in Kuwait was "of great importance to the prestige and finance of Kuwaiti."[55] Kuwait benefited from the ships' cargoes unloaded in its harbor and from transportation of the British company's dispatches by desert express and desert caravans that both Kuwaiti sheikhs and merchants often organized.

In general, the political pre-oil system in Kuwait and up to 1896 when Murabak the Great seized power was best described as an "advanced medieval sheikdom."[56] The sheikh of Kuwait had autocratic authority over all of Kuwait's residents, whether permanent or transient Bedouin inhabitants. This power, however, was not ultimate and was dependent oh his ability to lead and maintain the confidence of tribal elders. In a Kuwaiti tribal poem, such egalitarian political structure was clearly reflected:

> We are fiends of his highness the sheikh,
> But we shall reject him if we see evil intentions.

---

[54] Casey, 36.
[55] Abu-Hakima, 148.
[56] Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima, *Eastern Arabia Historic Photographs* (London: Hurtwood Press, 1984).

If you accept advice, we will advise you.
And if you do not accept advice,
We will banish you to hell.[57]

From Sabah I who died in 1762, the transition of power was done in the traditional tribal manner, therefore, five sheikhs were in a direct line of descent from him, there were: Abdullah 1762-1812, Jabir 1812-1859, Sabah II 1859-1866, Abdullah 1866-1892, and Mohammad 1892-1896. These sheikhs "were similar to the sheikh of a tribe. There was no distinction between the sheikh and members of his tribe. The power of the ruler was limited, and there were some Kuwaiti leaders who had more authority than the ruler himself."[58] In 1896 Mubarak the Great assassinated his half brother Mohammad and seized power, introducing the title of Amir for himself. The era of Mubarak was recognized as the beginning of new development in Kuwaiti life and its modern history.[59]

1.2.5 Pre-oil socio-cultural system

The people of Kuwait were Muslims mostly belonging to the Sunni or Orthodox schism of Islam. Shia' was the minority and most of them were of Persian origins. Wahhabism was a Sunni puritanical movement particularly associated with the rise to power of the House of Saud at the end of eighteenth century; its influence is still felt in present day Kuwait. Basing their philosophy on the literal teaching of the Quran, many of the Muslims of Kuwait are Badu who converted to Wahhabism during Ibu Saud's recruiting drives amongst the nomads of eastern Arabia.[60]

---

[57] Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait, Social Change in Historical Perspective*, 1st ed., Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 19.
[58] Sayf Marzouk Al-Shamlan, *Min Tarikh Al-Kuwayt (from the History of Kuwait)* (Cairo Maktbat Nahdat Misr, 1959), 117.
[59] Ismael, 36.
[60] Geoffrey E. Ffrench and Hill Allan G., *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, Geomedical Monograph Series,; 4; (Berlin: New York Springer-Verlag, 1971), 33.

The social distinctions in pre-oil Kuwait society were based on status differentiations rather than class differences. Kuwaitis were ranked hierarchically according to a tribal system of stratification in which tribesmen are genealogically divided into members of noble tribes with a high social status, and members of non-noble tribes with a lower social position.[61] In other words, social status was based on the concept of descent.

The al-Sabah ruling family and most of the Kuwaiti prominent families descend from one of the many Arabian noble tribes such as Anizah, Shamar, Mitair, Banu Khalid, and Ajman. Although the majority of these tribesmen were nomads at the time when al-Sabah ruled in Kuwait, some of the tribes' members were also town settlers. The assumption that nomadic and settled people "are wholly distinct does not bear close scrutinizing, for in many cases tribes have both nomadic and settled members."[62] The tribes exercised a great degree of autonomy in terms of economy, politics, and social affairs, however, they also had always engaged in relationships with sedentary people. The relation between the nomadic and sedentary groups of Kuwait was based on mutual interest such as political domination and economic trade. Badu, a traditional name of the nomadic members of Kuwaiti tribes, played an essential role in Kuwait's economic growth as Kuwait was the major port to most of Arabian tribes in the central and northeastern parts of Arabian Peninsula. They always brought sheep and camels to Kuwait, as well as skins, wool, and dairy products for trading with the sedentary people in Kuwait town. They also provided security for Kuwait City when it was subjected to tribal invasions. The relationship between the Bedouin and the sedentary people of Kuwait was a complementary one. Between the two groups another group did exist, the semi-nomadic. They were members of tribes who traded their products with Kuwait for supplies while they settled in and around Kuwait during the summer season and

---

[61] Ali Z. Al-Zubi, "Urbanization, Tribalism, and Tribal Marriage in Contemporary Kuwait" (Wayne State University, 1999), 5.
[62] Ibid., 13.

worked in fishing and pearl-diving. The major difference between nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, however, is that nomadic tribes "still represented independent producers exchanging their surplus products as autonomous producers."[63]

Al-Bahar argued that the social distinctions were recognized, but they were not formally defined or categorized in any definitive form. Except for slaves, "the elite and the masses, the rich and the poor, the Kuwaitis and the non-Kuwaitis, lived and worked together in the traditional city with some social 'status' differences or 'prestige' hierarchies amongst them."[64] The classlessness of traditional Kuwait society could be attributed to several factors: first, Kuwait was a small town and almost all the population lived one place. Second, the absence of agriculture resulted in devalued land ownership. Third and more importantly, because of tribal connections coupled with tribal pride, "even the poor elements of society refused to allow money and property to be a dividing factor."[65] This situation, however, was completely changed when the Citizenship Law was introduced in 1959, creating two completely different social classes, Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis.

Ismeal affirmed that the *Utub*, who used to be camel herders before they settled in Kuwait and were the aristocrats of the desert, transformed into the ruling class of Kuwait town. From its beginning, Kuwait society was influenced by the heritage of power that differentiated camel pastoralists from other classes of producers in the desert. Such differentiation became the basis of a social system. The productive groups, therefore, "maintained the tribal character of the desert, providing a tribal pattern to the organization of labor and politics."[66]

Generally, Pre-oil Kuwait's socioeconomic hierarchy can be classified into three groups: "aristocratic group at the top which included the sheikhs or the rulers, members of the ruling

---

[63] Ismael, 25.
[64] Al-Bahar, "The Evolution of Kuwait's Domestic Architecture: An Empirical and a Theoretical Study".
[65] Shiber, 76.
[66] Ismael, 23-24.

family and the relatively rich oligarchy of merchants; a working group of people in the middle which included Bedouins, fishermen, pearl-divers, and craftsmen; and a lower social category of slaves at the bottom."[67] Of all these categories, the oligarchy of merchants was by far the most powerful and dynamic social force during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was "the merchants' enterprising spirit and attitude that provided the ruling family with their meager income in the shape of customs duties and provided employment for the rest of the community." [68]

The merchant families were "the substructure of productive forces in Kuwait [that] had over the period developed well beyond the political superstructure of a tribal sheikdom, and the [ruling] Sabah house had only a very peripheral relationship to this development."[69] The real power in the community resided in the financial commercial class that effectively controlled the economy. The Sabah family gradually became financially dependent upon this class. Costello argued that the concept of social "class" order in the Gulf States and especially in Kuwait did not exist; he pointed that Kuwait was a classless society because it was:

> largely isolated from direct contact with non-Arabs and even fellow Arabs to the north and west. Absence of class divisions was due to the small size of the city and intimacy of social contact. The absence of agriculture and, therefore, of land ownership, and the overriding importance of tribal tradition and family pride which prevented money from entering much, even into marriage settlements. Apart from the presence of the ruler's palace, there was no spatial differentiation of society in the city.[70]

But the difference between merchants' houses and others' houses was obviously distinguished. The merchant families' role in the development of Kuwait was easily recognized in their prominent houses, their harbors, and *amarat* or warehouses on the main coastal road, Sief Street. The palaces of the ruling family, although not many were important focal building in old

---

[67] Al-Bahar, "The Evolution of Kuwait's Domestic Architecture: An Empirical and a Theoretical Study".
[68] Jack Howell Thompson and Robert D. Reischauer, *Modernization of the Arab World* (Princeton, N.J.,: Van Nostrand, 1966), 127.
[69] Ismael, 36.
[70] V. F. Costello, *Urbanization in the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 98.

Kuwait, especially Sief Palace, which during Mubarak the Great reign largely expanded, adorned, and gained central importance in the overall scene of Kuwaitis' life.

The demographic structure of pre-oil Kuwait also differs from that of post-oil Kuwait. In the old Kuwait, the population consisted primarily of Arabs from the Gulf area, with a few Muslim non-Arabs from south Asia (especially India) and a black slave-descended population from East Africa (slaves worked for the royal family until the introduction of the Citizenship Law).

1.2.6 Pre-oil economic system

Kuwait from its early inception not only lacked agricultural production but also lacked most of the necessities of life such as water resources. Nevertheless, Kuwaitis were able to develop trading activities that ensured their subsistence and development.

The geographical location of Kuwait placed it on the two important old trade routes: "the Gulf sea-route and the caravan tracks."[71] From its early days, therefore, Kuwait economic activities were closely related to two aspects: sea and desert. The sea side was the main source of living such as fishing, diving for pearls, trading and the connected light industries and handcraft, which included ship building and maintenance, diving equipment manufacture and maintenance, and other simple products which met the needs of people at that time. On the other hand, desert trade was dynamic dealing with the nomadic tribes coming through the desert from North and South.[72] The both trades were integrated in that boats imported most of the sought after goods from areas as far as India and east Africa; it was left to the desert caravans to carry the merchandise from Kuwait to places in the heart of Arabia and as far as Aleppo in Syria.

---

[71] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 165.
[72] Kuwait Municipality, *Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait* (Kuwait Municipality, 1980), 8.

1.2.6.1 Sea side

Within a short time and by the end of 1790, *Utub* mastered sailing and their fleet had a large share in the sea-trade of the Gulf "second only to that of Masqat."[73] Several factors contributed to the rapid economic growth of Kuwait within this short period of time (from 1756 to the 1790). First and foremost was that the Kuwaiti individual was "tough, imaginative, enterprising and excellent in team-work. These qualities have, for over two centuries, distinguished the Kuwaitis as the Gulf's most successful businessmen, sailors and sea-farers."[74]

The Persian siege of Basra in 1775 had a major impact not only on Kuwait's economy but also its social demography. While the Ottomans were primarily busy pushing westward, they neglected their empire's relation at the east particularly in Turkish Iraq where the Persians took the chance to control one of the world's busiest ports. Basra was the major port in the Gulf for the land and sea trade transfer of good in east-west and north-south routes through the Middle East. Being proximate to Basra by itself gave Kuwait "the benefits of siphoning off the fringe of this commerce."[75] The fall of Basra at the hand of Persians in 1776, gave Kuwait the first trading boom in its history. The British historian Lorimer observed that:

> Kuwait, of which the prosperity was at this time considered to stand necessarily in an inverse ratio to that of Basra, **benefited greatly through the occupation of the latter town by the Persians, in consequence of which the whole Indian trade with Baghdad, Aleppo, Smyrna and Constantinople was between 1775 and 1779 diverted to it. Even after this, until 1781, merchandise for Aleppo was sometimes forwarded by direct caravan from Kuwait, thus escaping the duties levied by the Pasha of Baghdad on goods forwarded through Basra.** By 1790 Kuwait had begun to share in the commercial prosperity which the seizure of Bahrain had brought to the whole Utub tribe by drawing them into the carrying trade; and goods were imported from Masqat, Zubarah, Bahrain and Qatif. **Merchants were efficiently protected at Kuwait, and the duty on imported goods was levied at the low rate of 1 per cent, *ad valorem*.**[76] (My emphasis).

---

[73] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 166.
[74] Shehab: 461.
[75] Ismael, 30.
[76] Lorimer, 1003-4.

Another consequence of the event was that Britain significantly developed official contacts with Kuwait for the first time. During the Basra siege, the East India Company redirected trade through Kuwait, a pattern that was to be repeated 20 years later when the company temporarily moved its factory to Kuwait.[77]

More important was that many merchants of Basra shifted their trade to Kuwait and they themselves migrated to Kuwait seeking a safer and prosperous place that was also close to their homeland. Abdullah Thabit, researcher from Georgetown University, affirmed that most Basra' merchants "preferred to relocate to other, newly established, ports like Kuwait."[78] Their immigration was not surprising to people of both cities (Kuwait and Basra) since the British Trading Agent in Basra by the second half of the century "could put the city (Basra) in a panic by threatening to move his operations to Kuwait.[79] Even after the Persians withdrew from Basra, Kuwait continued to attract trade away from Basra for several reasons including its relative security and autonomy. The Abdul-Razaq family, one of the leading merchant families in Basra and later in Kuwait, "fled primarily to the security of Kuwait."[80] Further more, Kuwait has an excellent natural harbor and very low or no taxation at the time.

These factors raise an important question for this study: did this trading shift and consequent immigration patterns affect architecture in Kuwait? For example, what was the architectural impact of the six of "Basra's most notable families…[who] had left for Kuwait"? What features can be traced to this event? These questions are addressed in the following chapters.

---

[77] Richard N. Schofield, *Kuwait and Iraq : Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes : A Report Compiled for the Middle East Programme of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* (London: The Institute, 1991), 3.
[78] Thabit A. J. Abdullah, "The Political Economy of Merchants and Trade in Basra, 1722-1795" (Ph.D., Georgetown University 1992), v, Ismael, 30.
[79] Abdullah, 61.
[80] Ibid.

By the 1780s, Kuwait already owned a large number of different ships, some of which were able to sail to India. This development gave Kuwaiti merchants direct access to Indian goods and the timber necessary for ship construction.[81] By the end of eighteenth century, "an official report to the British Government in India on the commerce of Arabia and Persia noted that the tribes of Buni *Utub* had become the most powerful tribes navigating the Gulf."[82] The regular routes were from the Arabian Gulf to India and the east cost of Africa in the Swahili Coast establishing a three cornered system of trade on which Old Kuwait's economy was depended (Fig. 7). Among the goods Kuwaitis imported from India was the teakwood used in many Kuwaiti doors. From Africa they imported the famous Kuwaiti *jandal* or the wooden trunk, and the *basajeel* or the bamboo; these were important structural materials that had been used in many traditional buildings.

Kuwaitis developed boat construction further in the nineteenth century to be one of Kuwait's major industries and by the beginning of twentieth century possessed more than 1,500 boats, "Kuwait appear[ed] to be the principal place where native craft are built," turning out 20 to 25 annually. They built different types of boats each specialized for different type of sea navigation. *Bom*, the most famous Kuwaiti ship, for instance was well known as the best navigating ship in passing the oceans to India and the eastern coast of Africa (Fig 6). *Baghlah*, a sea-going vessel, was one of the famous Kuwait-made large ships capable of carrying up to 450 tons.[83]

---

[81] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 175.
[82] Ismael, 31.
[83] Lorimer, 1054.
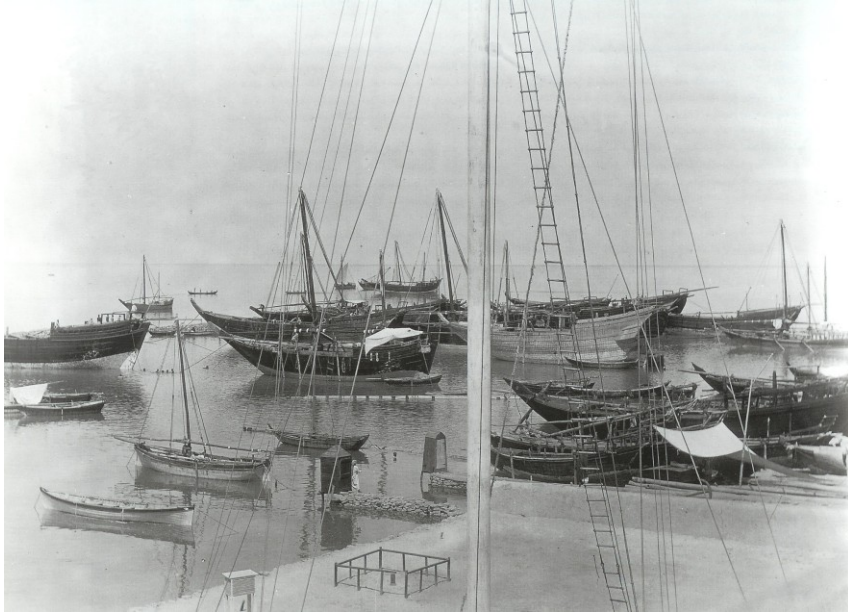
Figure 6 Kuwait harbor in 1911, showing different types of Kuwaiti boats. Source: Facey, 1998.

The type of goods carried through the Arabian Gulf at the time was descried by Lorimer as follows:

Bengal piece-goods, Coromandel chintzes, Madras long-cloth, cotton yarn, and various cotton manufactures of Malabar, Broach, Bambay, Surat and Gujarat; English woolen goods; silks, Arabian coffee; sugar and sugar candy; spices, condiments and perfumes; indigo; drugs; chinaware; and metals.[84]

---

[84] Ibid., v.1, pt.1A, 165.
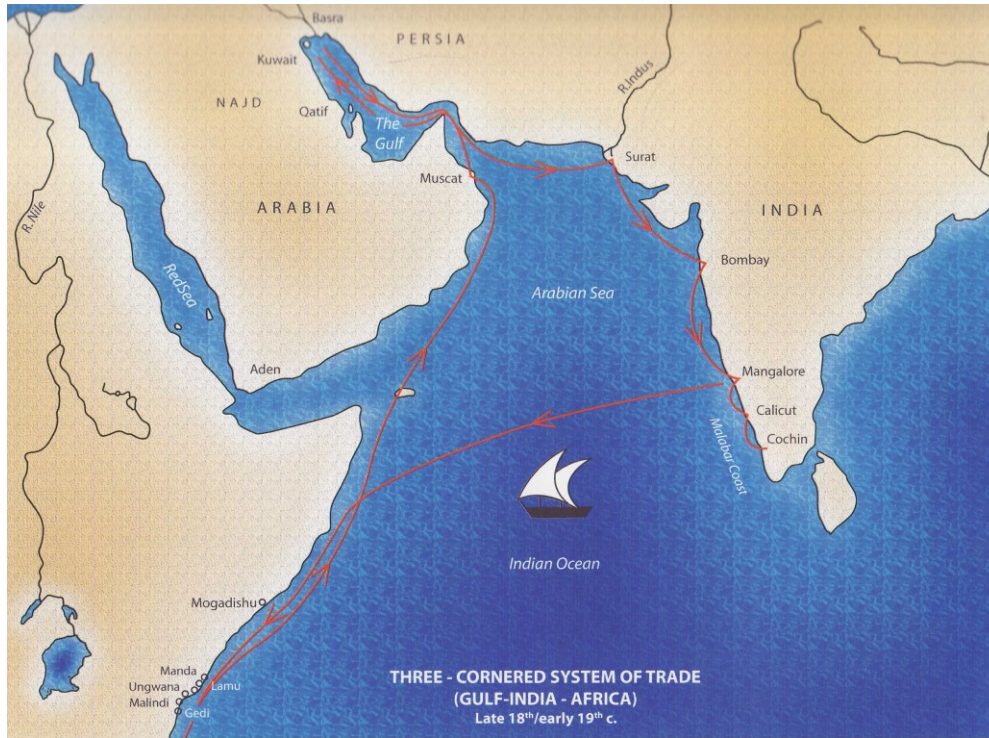
Figure 7 Kuwaiti sea trading routes in 18th and 19th centuries. Source: Lautrette, 2006.

Desert side:

Located in the middle of the ancient Silk Road that connected the west with the east, Kuwait benefited from this rich route since its early days in the eighteenth century by participating and supplying the 'Great Desert Caravans.' Abu-Hakima argued that the importance of desert caravans between Asia and Europe in general and Kuwait's desert caravan to Aleppo and Baghdad in particular during "the eighteenth century has thus far gone unnoticed. No serious study has been made of the subject."[85] Most of the information of Kuwait's desert caravans in the second half of the eighteenth century came from the journals of European travelers who would join these caravans from Aleppo to the Arabian Gulf, or vice versa. A typical desert caravan usually composed of "merchants who hired camels, mules and donkeys from sheikhs who made this their business, and who

---

[85] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 168.

accompanied the caravans from starting point to destination."[86] The *Utub* of Kuwait, as a tribe interested in commercial activity, continued to use the usual caravan routes that passed through their territories. Before Kuwait, goods that were unloaded at the ports of Eastern Arabia found their way into the inner parts of the peninsula through the traditional caravan routes from al-Uqair, Zubara and al-Qatif. The earliest reference of desert caravan from Kuwait to Aleppo was in 1758 by Ives, in which there were about 5,000 camels accompanied by 1,000 men. [87]

Another major source of income from the desert, especially for the rulers of Kuwait, was duty collected from the tribes who lived near Kuwait. Kuwait rulers used to tax tribesmen once every year in the form of *Zakat*, the third pillar of Islam. Because it was difficult to tax nomadic tribesmen who used to follow meadows for their camels, sheep, and goat herders, the summer was the best time to levy a tax because they returned to Kuwait for water and various marine jobs. From June to early October, the tribes camped around the shallow wells just outside the walls of Kuwait town enduring the intense heat in their black tents made from goat hair. More than a dozen tribes made use of the good grazing land southwest of Kuwait and each tribe had its territory delineated. During this time Kuwaiti rulers gathered two taxes: one for the use of these wells and the other for *Zakat*.[88] Again, the question reinstates itself here, what was the impact from the desert side upon Kuwait town and its architecture?

1.2.7 Life in Old Kuwait

In old Kuwait, the household of a large, extended family was the basic social unit. It typically consisted of parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers of the husband, and sometimes,

---

[86] Ibid., 169.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ffrench and G., *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, 32.

aunts. The husband, as the male head of the family, exercised control over the younger males in the household: they were dependent on him, and worked with or for him. The family, as a collective unit, was far more important and sacred than any single person's identity.

An affluent household might include servants of both sexes. Usually, those servants were black slaves from Africa and were treated well; sometimes a male slave would marry one of the female servants and they were given a room within the household.[89] In some families, there was more than one mother: polygamy is permitted in the Muslim religion, and a man could have up to four wives and the tradition was that he had to treat them all equally. A wealthy husband would provide each wife with an independent house. Polygamy was socially accepted and quite common until recently.

The segregation of men and women was the fundamental social and cultural principle in Kuwait as it was in many Arab countries. Women were absent from most of public spaces such mosques and main streets. Furthermore, segregation was implemented with other means such as strict and limited behavior and stipulations about dress; failure to follow these rules resulted in her being looked at as disgraceful woman.

In architecture, the social segregation between men and women was projected in the organization of residential space. It was expressed clearly in the homes of the rich which featured multiple and separate courtyards. Usually, the women spent most their time, and their lives, in the *harim,* or family's courtyard. Some females of the families of elevated social position never went to the market. The only outings considered proper for them were infrequent visits to female relations, and in spring time when women would enjoy going in organized parties to have a day picnicking in the fresh green pastures of the desert. Women of lower or poorer social position were

---

[89] Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert : A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sau'di Arabia,* 2d ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), 119.

heavily veiled in black cloaks and they frequently went to the market and did shopping on their own. They also had to take on the harder physical task of supplying their houses with drinking water since they could not afford hiring servants. The separation of men and women existed in almost every aspect of traditional life in Kuwait, the exceptions being in the streets and market areas.

Men used to congregate in *diwaniya* (the men's reception room), where they discussed daily events, business, or socialized with friends and visitors. A typical day in traditional Kuwaiti life started with the husband taking his

> breakfast in the *harim* with his wife, and once he had left for the day's business the mistress would supervise the sweeping of the brick-paved court and verandas. (In poorer houses the yard was not paved, and often the floors of rooms were also of bare earth.) The all- pervasive Kuwaiti dust made it necessary to shake out floor coverings daily, and keeping furnishings to a minimum was a practical and labor-saving policy. A better-off woman would order the day's food, and servants would be sent to do the shopping. By mid-morning it would be time to relax in some cool place, sitting on a mat on the veranda, perhaps, and drinking small glasses of sweet tea. In the corner of the yard by the kitchen a maidservant would work at the never-ending task of picking over the rice to remove the tiny stones which were always present. In homes without servants this was often done by several female members of a family sitting round the tray together, when it would become a sociable pastime.[90]

During the day the master of the house would usually come to the women's quarters for lunch after the mid-day prayer, and then the whole family would take *qailola* or siesta till 3 p.m. or so. During this time quiet fell over the whole town.

Neighbors in old Kuwait were much respected. His privacy, for example, was recognized and maintained. One could not open a new door facing his neighbor's main door because doing so diminishes the neighbor's privacy. Another example was if a male wanted to go up stair to the roof, he had to loudly announce himself by say *Dar* (give way). This was to let know the neighbor's females on the roof, if any, know that he is coming up. Females used to regularly visit their neighbors during the midday for socializing and drinking tea, while children played together

---

[90] Lewcock and Freeth, 6.

and moved freely from one house to another as if the whole neighborhood was one large family. For this reason, two or more houses would have a mutual door, locally called *fieryah*, that lead to each others as a shortcut between the houses so that females would not have to go to the street to get to the neighbor's house. Men used to help their neighbors in the decisions making process for building new house or making addition to the house and many neighbors participate in the construction of their neighbor's house.[91]

The Bedouins of Kuwait, on the other hand, used to move their tents every two weeks or so for sanitary reasons and because of the depletion of the pasturage. It is estimated that tribes "moved up to 200 miles across the *Dhana* desert's sands into eastern Saudi Arabia."[92] Mutair, one of the large tribes, moved around an oval path due south from Kuwait and then swung westwards across the *Dahna* desert to the wells at Anaiza, another large tribe, territory. The sharp rise in temperatures in May indicates the time when the tribes should come together on the town of Kuwait to settle in during the long harsh summer.

---

[91] عادل محمد العبدالمغني, مدينة الكويت القديمة, سور الديرة (الكويت: 2001), 10.
[92] Ffrench and Hill, *Kuwait, Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, 32.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study formulates its analytical framework by drawing from a mixture of historical, cultural, and architectural sources about Kuwait. The reason for this interdisciplinary strategy is to avoid reducing Kuwait's architectural history to a simple rendering.

Borg & Gall describe primary sources "as those documents in which the individual describing the event was present when it occurred."[93]For example, a picture of the Old City taken in 1919 is considered a primary source, as is a journal article dated in 1955 describing Kuwaiti architecture and the early master plans for Kuwait City.[94]

Finding information about Kuwait's architectural history was a most difficult task. A great deal of time was spent literally piecing together sentences, paragraphs, photos, and maps in order to reconstruct a comprehensive representation of Kuwaiti architecture. The study utilized sources in Arabic and English.

Secondary sources "are documents in which the individual describing the event was not present but obtained the event."[95] For example, books, articles, paintings, sketches, and reproduced images would be considered secondary sources.

There is no established framework for dating traditional Kuwaiti architecture and its styles. The comprehension of the evolutionary process of Kuwaiti architecture could not be accomplished without such a historical framework according to which one could relate prevailing styles and unusual features. The disappearance of the entire Kuwait town at once (except for a handful buildings that survived) as a result of the 'tear-it-down' process during the 1950s makes it even

---

[93] Walter R. Borg and Meredith D. Gall, *Educational Research : An Introduction*, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 1989), 807.
[94] R. L. Banks, "Notes on a Visit to Kuwait," *Town Planning Review* 26 (1955).
[95] Borg and Gall, 807.

more difficult to trace the old town and its buildings. Moreover, the lack of documentary sources make it difficult to construct a stylistic framework.

Nevertheless, this study proposes a framework utilizing all the available information that helps to establish dating outlines such as the few inscriptions that are mostly found in some mosques. The precisely identified and dated buildings are grouped into clusters that have common architectural features. a particular style and its period could then be described and it would be probable to infer the date of the other buildings by comparing them with the identified buildings.

2.1.1 Fieldwork

The investigation of Kuwait traditional urban and architecture took place in multiple stages. The first one was the primary exploration of Kuwaiti traditional buildings, aimed at identifying the significant buildings that might help in categorizing the archival research. This step focused on the major building types that were constructed during the early periods of Kuwait's urban development. These buildings housed public as well as private functions.

Different strategies were used for survey of the city's major streets, such as investigating development plans, photographic documents, journal publications, and archives about Kuwaiti City. Visits to the significant traditional surviving buildings were an essential part of this study.

2.1.2 Archival Research

Journal articles and Kuwaiti archival materials supplied information that was examined and verified in conjunction with the buildings. In other words, these documents were triangulated with

other sources such as photos and related historical events. In this way, a sizable amount of documentation—comprising building and lot plans, contemporary slides, and period photographs—was developed. Many of the records that went into the documentation were from Kuwaiti institutions including the photographic archive of the Kuwait Oil Company, the Kuwaiti Municipality's archival collections, and reprinted documents by the Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait. A significant portion of the research is devoted to the review of archival collections documenting the activities of major decision-makers and architects during the period of oil discovery in Kuwait.

2.1.3 Bibliographic Research

The review of related publications took several stages: it first examined the principal historical works about Kuwait and its history that cover political, geographic, sociological, and economic issues during the periods before and during the discovery of oil. It then examined urban and architectural sources including early master plans, collection of photographs, Kuwaiti periodicals, and architectural and technical journals. For the political and historical essays, books, novels, and guidebooks, I have applied the content method (the study of human communication) in analyzing them.

2.1.4 Study of Building Plans

Besides some of buildings that have been frequently published in periodicals, several building plans were selected from the Kuwaiti Municipality's archives that include hundreds of building plans. These chosen buildings are distinctive. The analysis of residential plans is drawn upon the methodology used by Amos Rapoport on houses and their relation to their inhabitants'

culture.[96] A wide range of references about Kuwait and its inhabitants were used to study Kuwaiti values, culture, mores, and use of space.

2.1.5 Analysis of Urban Plans and Documents

Alongside the study of buildings, Kuwait's earliest master plans and details of seminal buildings helped to assemble a comprehensive scheme for the city's urban history. Therefore, early sketches or pictures by the first European explorers, measured drawings, postcards, oblique and vertical aerial views, and topographical surveys were all crucial in bringing together an enhanced architectural and urban perception.

2.1.6 Artifacts

Artifact "analyses and many historical studies rely on data that can be gathered unobtrusively in a variety of contexts."[97] Although artifacts are significant to this research because they include buildings (e.g., houses, mosques, palaces, etc.) and objects used inside Kuwait traditional houses, they are secondary elements of this study for two reasons: 1) only a few traditional buildings survive today, and 2) photos of these artifacts can replace artifacts and are more convenient to use due to their availability and ease of handling and analyzing.

2.1.7 Documents

Documents, including official written communications and unofficial records can "provide a behind-the-scenes look at institutional processes and how they came into being . . . ," and they

---

[96] Amos Rapoport, *Culture, Architecture, and Design* (Chicago: Locke Science Pub. Co., 2005).

[97] J. Amos Hatch, *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 44.

can give researchers "a sense of history related to the contexts being studied."[98] Examples of the type of documents used in this research include governmental reports, reports by American Hospital employees in Kuwait, endowment documents (called locally *adsaniyyat*), and *Waqf*[99] documents, which are "considered the oldest local materials [in Kuwait] and are primary sources not yet studied by scholars."[100]

2.1.8 Photographs

Photographs are crucial forms of evidence for this study. Each picture "is a legitimate abstracting process in observation. It is one of the first steps in evidence refinement that turns raw circumstances into data that is manageable in research analysis."[101] The significance of photos stems from the fact that they "are precise records of material reality. They are also documents that can be filed and cross-filed as can verbal statements."[102]

Photos "provide data in historical studies or in life history studies, or they may provide background as a part of the ongoing data collection scene."[103] Photos are classified into two types, according to who took the photo. The first type is photos that the author has taken. The second type reflects the majority of the photographs I have studied. These are photos "that count as unobtrusive data . . . [that are] taken by individuals other than the researcher and for purposes

---

[98] Ibid., 117.

[99] *Waqf*, in Arabic language, means hold, confinement or prohibition. The word *waqf* is used in Islam in the meaning of holding certain property and preserving it for the confined benefit of certain philanthropy and prohibiting any use or disposition of it outside that specific objective.

[100] Faisal A Alkanderi, "Jews in Kuwait," *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations* 17, no. 4 (2006): 445.

[101] M. S. Ball and Gregory W. H. Smith, *Analyzing Visual Data*, Qualitative Research Methods ; V. 24. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 5.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Lyn Richards and Janice Morse, *User's Guide to Qualitative Methods* (London Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 117.

other than the research at hand."[104] The sources for these photos are numerous and include newspapers, journals, government documents, archives, and books.

Photos that dated before 1970 are particularly useful. The older the photo, the more crucial to this study, due to the scarcity of old buildings and photos of them in contemporary Kuwait. The study focuses on photos that show Old Kuwait's city, streets, buildings, *souqs* (markets), and people.

The Kuwait Oil Company was the first institution to take and keep records and photos of Old Kuwait buildings. Access was granted to the KOC archive. Another important institution in Kuwait is the Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait (CRSK). Recently, it has collected many historic government and public records about Kuwait from all over the country and consolidated them in one location, digitized them, and made them accessible to the public.[105]

2.2   Data Analysis Procedures: Interpretive Approach

Interpretive analysis is a model that "provides a process for constructing meaning from data that goes beyond the analytic emphasis of the models . . . ."[106] The first reading of the data was for the purpose of constructing an overview picture about my topic. During the subsequent readings and fieldworks, impressions were recorded with notes in a research journal. A Microsoft Word file was created for each source examined and was recorded along with quotations combined with impressions and notes. In the research journal, elaborations and memos were also recorded. Memos were marked in red color and used special effects to recognize the importance of other thoughts that were recorded during readings and analysis. The open coding was used aiming to "open-up the data, identifying concepts that seem to fit the data."[107] The coding was

---

[104] Ibid.
[105] The Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait website at www.crsk.edu.kw/Home.asp Retrieved in July 3rd 2007.
[106] Hatch, 180.
[107] Richards and Morse, 124.

47

x

then categorized and the research themes and concepts were developed.

Software called Nvivo8 has been designed for qualitative research data and analysis. This specific software works best with this data, as most are photos, figures, plans, and Arabic words and symbols. The choice of Nvivo8 software was based on its capability to work on both text and illustrations. Although it is not the best software for photos, it has the ability to import them as documents. Nvivo8 is user-friendly software that can store, code, and illustrate data. A Word file was created for every reference which was I quoted and then summarized. These Word files were then imported to Nvivo8. The next step was to create a 'free node' or key word or phrase for paragraphs that related to the research topics. These "free nodes" then combined to create a "tree node" in which all the nodes share a common subject, categorizing thoughts and linking them as shown in Figure 8.
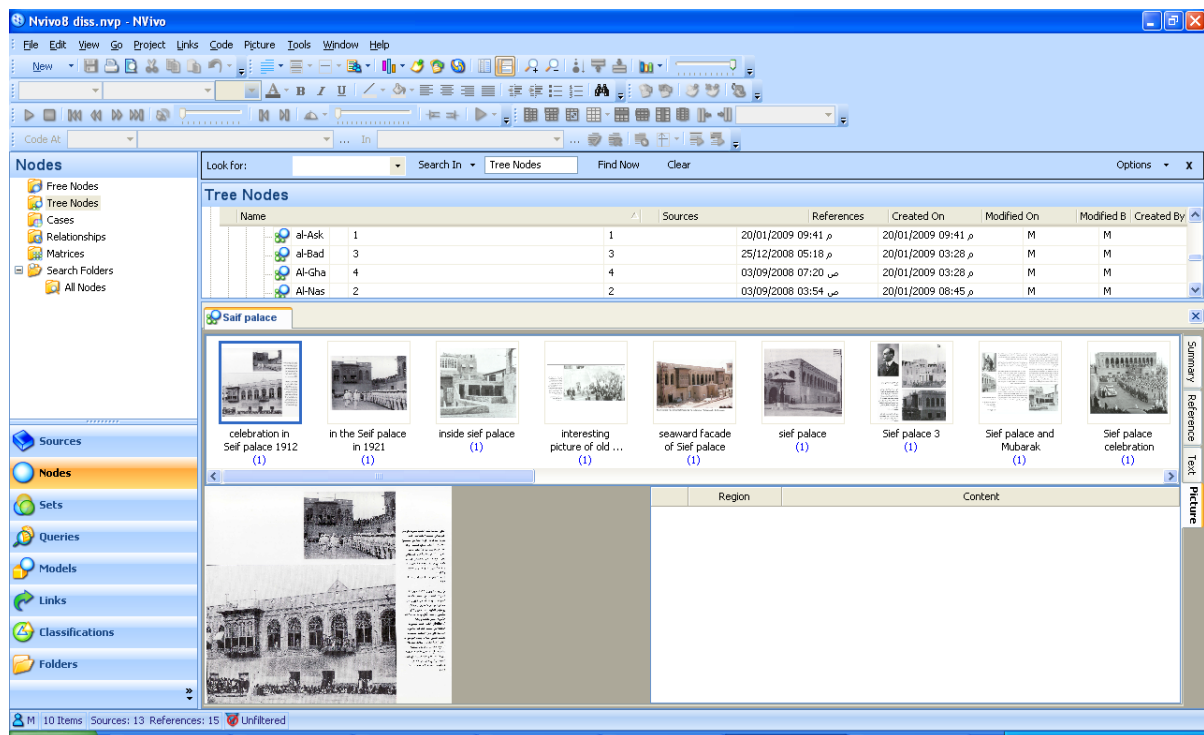
Figure 8 data collection, categorization, and analysis using Nvivo8 software. Source: Author, 2009.

As described by Richards and Morse, the processes of categorizing "involve[s] discovering a new datum and naming it, storing thoughts about it, managing its relation to other categories, holding it in mind, and linking it in the growing understanding of your work."[108] Theorizing and schematizing processes involved reexamining and re-categorizing the codes and concepts. These processes generated and supported the emerging main themes. The themes and codes were then validated by making interpretive analysis which made "sense of social situation by generating explanations for what's going on within them, making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons."[109] Some emerging themes of this study came from coding specific architectural characteristics based on their geographical origins. An emerging theme (external influence) developed sub-themes such as Arabian architectural elements and Persian elements. Arabian elements have also sub-categories based on more specific geographical and cultural origins such as Najdi, Bahraini, etc…

2.2.1 Analysis of the Historical Data

The analysis of the historical data was as follows:

Photos: Hatch (2002) makes it clear that "it is fully possible to do high-quality studies based only on video or other image-based data,"[110] and he acknowledges that the researcher needs to be trained in visual interpretation. As an architect, the author's undergraduate and master studies fostered the ability to read, contrive, elicit, and formulate data from images and to look beyond the obvious scene visible to the untrained eye. Prosser suggests "that the research photograph is a

---

[108] Ibid., 157.
[109] Hatch.
[110] Ibid., 126.

method seeking discovery, rather than a technique of documenting life instances and object relationships."[111] For example, in analyzing photo, the author probed "…how context that yield meanings inferred about photographs. One is the context in which photographs are made; the other is the context in which they are viewed."[112]

Storing the photos in the Nvivo8 and using its tools to select the part of the photo that was to be analyzed and paying attention to were all important steps in this study. Each section chosen was given a name (or code); for example, 'traditional windows' for pictures that contain traditional house's windows. Every feature of such photos was coded and several windows were compared to the others, drawing thoughts according to each one's time and type of buildings.

The study combined the chronological and the thematic approaches in organizing and maintaining thematic continuity throughout the entire research. In doing so, the study started with the establishment of Kuwait from the late seventeenth century up to the 1920. The general timeframe was divided according to two major periods: 1) the creation of Kuwait in the late seventeenth century up to 1896 when Sheikh Mubarak became ruler of Kuwait, and 2) the expansion period from 1896 to 1920 with the building of Kuwait third wall. The internal organization of the chapters was thematic. [113]

---

[111] Jon Prosser, *Image-Based Research : A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers* (London ; Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, 1998), 150.

[112] Thomas J. Templin and Janice K. Olson, *Teaching in Physical Education*, Big Ten Body of Knowledge Symposium Series ; V. 14. (Champaign, Illinois Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983), 138.

[113] Many Kuwaiti historians such as abu-Hakima and al-Qina'e agree that Shiekh Mubarak was the founder of Modern Kuwait. This notion will be discussed in details later.

3 EARLY KUWAIT TOWN

3.1 Introduction

Kuwait is part of the world—Mesopotamia—that is referred to as the "cradle of civilization." It has had a rich and diverse history that can be dated back 10,000 years. Archeologists have discovered chipped flint tools indicating that Stone Age people ranged through the area. In Sabbiya, an area on the north shore of Kuwait Bay, evidences of the oldest proper settlement in the region were found dating to 4500 B.C.E. The site included pottery fragments and knives, which indicates that the site was also used by *Ubaid* settlers, the same Sumerian people who established ancient Mesopotamia and developed the first recorded human civilization.

On Fiylakah Island, about 20 kilometers offshore from Kuwait, numerous archaeological artifacts were found that date as far back as the third millennium B.C.E. Some of these artifacts belong to the Delmon civilization that was centered in Bahrain and spread around the periphery of the Arabian Gulf between 2300 and 1100 B.C.E. Archeological projects carried out in the 1960s uncovered a complete Delmon town in Fiylakah, including dwellings, public buildings, granaries, and a temple. These are some of the best structural remains on Earth from the Bronze Age (Fig.9).

But the vast majority of the objects date back to the time of Alexander the Great; Greek sailors, who settled there from that time, left engraved stone tablets that have helped archaeologists study the history of Fiylakah Island and of Kuwait itself.
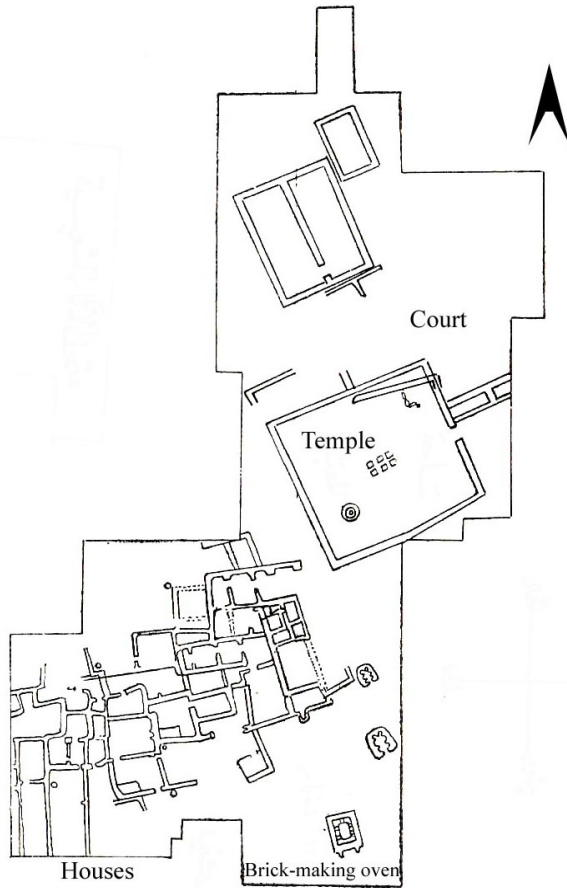
Figure 9 Plan of a Delmon village from the Bronze age on Fiylakah. Source: Kuwait Government, 1964.

Before the arrival of Islam, the location of Kuwait held a strategic position along the straight line connecting Central Arabia with Mesopotamia and Persia. Armies of the two biggest Arab tribes moved and battled in the Kuwait area of Wara in 529 C.E. During the early Islamic period, in 636 C.E., *Kazima* became a of strategic military importance, for it was in this area that Arab cavalry forces were stationed before they defeated the Persian army in the major battle that was named after *Kazima,* near the present town of *Jahra,* within a few miles west of Kuwait City. *Kazima* was often mentioned by Arab historians and praised in poems and songs as a fertile territory, where water and grazing lands were available.

When Islam swept the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, what is now Kuwait also became important because it was a resting stop for the east-west caravans on the pilgrimage route to

52

Mecca. In the ninth century C.E., the famous Islamic historian al-Asfahani reported the existence of a small citadel in *Kazima*.[114] Since that recounting by al-Asfahani, there were no further historical records about the land of Kuwait until members of the Bani Khalid tribe arrived there in the 17th century.

To discuss ancient relics and architecture in Kuwait is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to stress that the Kuwait area was an important geographic location during ancient times. For the purpose of this chapter, the focus is on the early settlement of *Utub*, the people who lived and ruled Kuwait since the early 18th century.

3.2   Tracing the Growth of Old Kuwait Town from Travelogues and Maps

European explorers who sailed into the Arabian Gulf in the middle of the 17th century were aware of a small village called *Grane*, the Arabic diminutive of *qarn*, meaning "hill." European cartographers of that era incorporated *Grane* into their maps of the region, the first of which was drawn in 1652 by the French geographer Nicolas Sanson. In his map, a small location called *Kadhima* (also pronounced *Kazimah*), a name still used for the area around the northern coast of Kuwait Bay, was placed on the site of what is today Kuwait.

In the early 18th century European maps continued to document the emerging town of Kuwait. These maps situated *Kazima* on the Gulf coast and, more interestingly, "Kazima is shown as a relatively important place."[115] Another important aspect of these maps, from a political point of view, is that they placed Kuwait outside the borders of Ottoman Iraq. One of these maps was by the Amsterdam mapmaker Issac Tirion, first published in 1732 (Fig. 10).

---

[114] الحسن بن عبدالله الأصفهاني *بلاد العرب* (الرياض, تحقيق الشيخ حمد الجاسر. 1968), 321
[115] Schofield, 43.

The Ottens Brothers' map of 1737 showed greater detail of "Cathema": they drew Fiylakah Island, showed "Cathema'" as an important place by placing a building site on it, and rather importantly, they labeled it, "Portus Cathema" meaning, "harbor of Cathema" (Fig. 11).

Figure 10 Amsterdam map maker Issac Tirion published first in 1732, it showed Kahzima as an important place. Source: Slot, 1991.

Figure 11 Ottens Brothers' map of 1737. Source: Slot, 1991.

3.3 The Bani Khalid and the Creation of Kuwait

Many Kuwaiti historians, for the most part, depend on local Kuwaiti tradition for their version of the area's history.[116] Their arguments, however, are consistent with Ottoman documents that called the territory in which the present State of Kuwait is situated as the "Land of Tribes,"[117] the wilderness outside the jurisdictional limits of the Ottomans. The Ottomans ended up ceding a great deal of territory to the various Arabian tribes. The inhabitants at that time were members of the Bani Khalid tribe, the strongest power in Eastern Arabia in the 17th century. The Bani Khalid controlled all territories from Basra to Qatar. Their status would not be seriously challenged until the rise of the Wahhabis in Central Arabia in the 1750s.[118] The Banu Khalid tribe acquired Qatif, a major city in eastern Arabia, around the year 1660.[119] Thus, Kuwait became a part of a large desert area in which the Ottoman Empire would not dare to intervene, allowing the Banu Khalid total control of the area. The Banu Khalid finally expelled the Ottomans from al-Hasa in 1670 and later Sheikh Barrak of the Banu Khalid declared the town to be his capital city.[120] The center of al-Hasa city is called al-Kut (not to be confused with that of *kut* of Kuwait), a name derived from the fortress the Ottomans built in the town in 1566 and now known as the Ibrahim fortress. The fortress occupied a site with an area of around sixteen thousand square meters, enclosed by its massive boundary walls and towers. It contained housing, a mosque, bathrooms, wells, and storage rooms. All these functions were ordered along its massive walls, creating a huge central courtyard.

Although most of the Bani Khalid tribe members were nomads, some had settled in the area

---

[116] al-Qinai, 5.; B. Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait* (Leiden: New York : E.J. Brill, 1991), 73.
[117] Ibid., 10.
[118] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 38.
[119] Slot.
[120] David Long, *Culture and Customs of Saudi Arabia (Culture and Customs of the Middle East* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 8.

of Kuwait and become dependent on the sea for activities such as fishing for most of the year. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, they established a small fishing community consisting of a "modest collection of tents and huts" around an ancient *kut*, or small castle, which had been erected centuries ago.[121] Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis Pelly, the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf from 1862 to 1872, wrote that the first inhabitants of Kuwait "settled on its southern shore, and there erected a fort, or *kut,* hence the name *Khote*, or *Koweit*."[122] In Arabic "al-Kuwait" is the diminutive of *kut,* and it means small fortress. In the language of southern Iraq, neighboring countries in Arabia, and parts of Persia, the word "*kut*" is a house that is built in the shape of a fortress that lies near water, whether it is a river or a sea. Later on the term came to apply "to the village built on such a site."[123]

The first builder of that *Kut* is unknown, but it may have been rebuilt and fortified during the reign of Sheikh Barrak (d. 1682) of the Bani Khalid tribe.[124] Isa bin Yusif al-Qinai, the renowned Kuwaiti historian, affirmed that the *Kut* was recognized and used by Sheikh Barrak,[125] who might have used it for storing weapons and goods. In this regard Casey observed that, technically, "the sheikhs of the Bani Khalid were the first rulers of Kuwait, but there is little evidence that many of them ever even visited the locale, let alone lived there for any length of time."[126] Sheikh Barrak, however, claimed grazing rights over the area and chose it as his summer residence, since the area was well-known for having the mildest summer of any town on the Arabian Gulf littoral; a cool west wind blows from the desert all through the night during the

---

[121] Casey, 22.
[122] Schofield, 1.
[123] Quoted by Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 47.
[124] Bani Khalid belonged to the Rabi'a, an Adnani tribe from the Nejd, a section of central Arabia. The Bani Khalid also controlled all trade into Central Arabia as well as most of the harbors, such as they were, in Eastern Arabia. 'Banu' means "sons of" or "people of."
[125] Yusuf B. al-Qinai, Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwait (Damascus, 1954), 5.
[126] Casey.

summer months. Furthermore, another airstream, the *shamel* or northwestern wind, carries cool air over the area because it travels over the Bay of Kuwait. [127]

In present-day Kuwait, however, there are no physical remains of the *Kut,* except the name "Barrak's Kut," that has passed from one generation to another. It is widely believed, however, that the Sief Palace, the al-Sabah's oldest palace in Kuwait, occupies the same spot on which "Barrak's Kut" stood,[128] because it mimics the most ancient and simplest form a fort could take— square or rectangular with four reinforced corners that might be elongated to form watching and defensive towers. An outstanding example of a Kuwaiti fort might be the al-Qasir al-Ahmar (the Red Fort) in al-Jahra village, 30 kilometers west of Kuwait Town. It was built by the ruler of Kuwait in 1920 over the foundation of an ancient fort built to withstand Bedouin attacks. Al-Jahra village was established in ancient times as a sweet watering place by travelers between the Arabian Peninsula and Mesopotamia (Fig. 12). When visited by Raunkiaer in 1912, it contained 500 inhabitants. Al-Jahra had nineteen deep wells that ensured irrigation for agricultural activities, mainly producing dates and crops. This oasis was a natural annual location for Badu encampments during the summer season.

---

[127] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 47. Geoffrey E. Hill Allan G. Ffrench and Author Joint, *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, Geomedical Monograph Series,; 4; (Berlin: New York Springer-Verlag, 1971), 13.
[128] It will be discussed in section about the Sief Palace.

www.manaraa.com
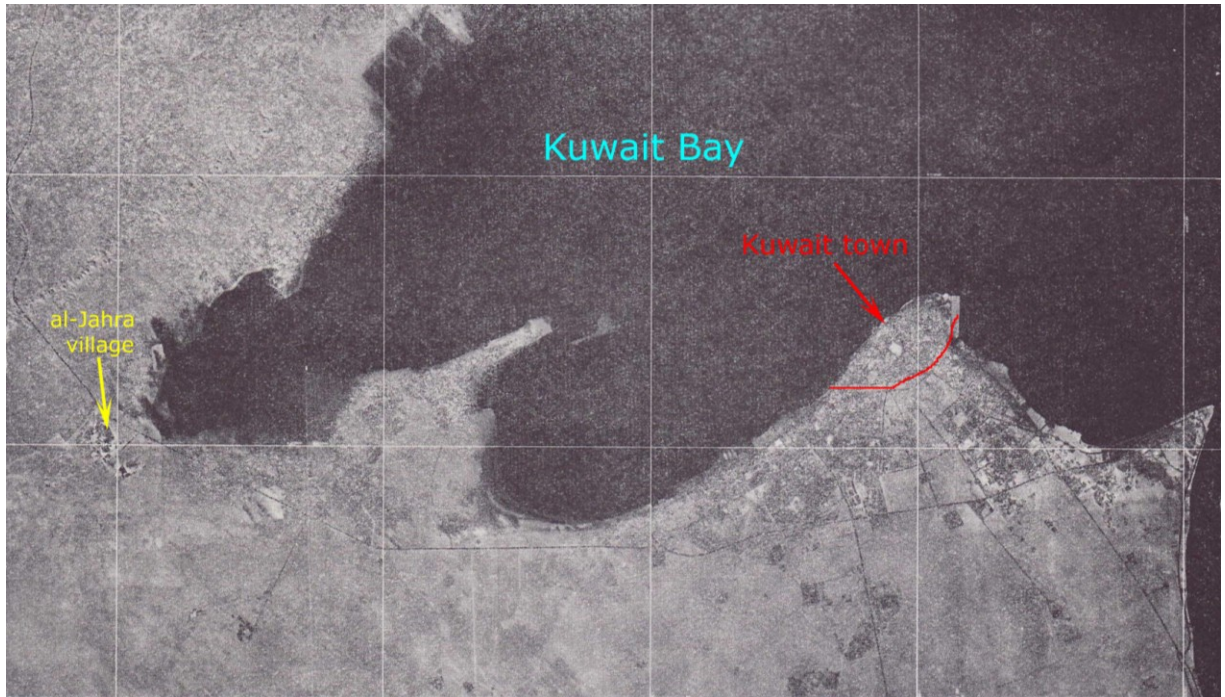
Figure 12 Kuwait Bay. Showing al-Jahra village west to Kuwait Town, 1960s. Source: Shiber, 1964.

The Red Fort is a rectangular mud-wall shape with four square corner towers (Fig. 14). From Figure 15, the horizontal lines show that the rammed earth technique was the method of construction. Its outside wall is 3.5 meters high and one meter thick with a walkway on top. As in Ibrahim Fort in al-Hasa, many of the rooms within the fort attached to the fort's walls. The small single rooms on the east, south, and west sides are either solders' sleeping rooms or horse stables. The fort has four square corner bastions that were crowned with a three-step parapet wall similar to that of Najdi and Bahraini architecture. The main gate is a rectangular entrance situated on the northwestern side of the fort and it has a projecting gate bastion similar to that of the corners. It has three machicolations on the long side, and above the entrance doors a single machicolation, properly used as a defense tactic from which to drop molten lead or boiling oil over the attackers (Fig. 13).

Figure 13 Main entrance of the Red Fort. Source: Lewcock, 1978.

On the northwest side of the Red Fort is the sheikh section, which consists of a central open court surrounded by a sleeping room, coffee room, bathroom, family living room, storage area, and stairs that lead to the sheikh's reception room on the second floor in which he could oversee the entire area. On the northeast side of the fort an open court is surrounded by a small mosque, coffee hearth, small reception and living rooms, and a large yard where sheep were kept. A large circular well is located in the middle of the central court. This well was where "brackish water for washing purposes could be drawn."[129] The shape of the Red Fort must have reflected, at least to some extent, the shape of *Kut* over which the Sief Palace was built. The Red Fort represented the simplest shape that an Arabian fort have.

---

[129] Lewcock and Freeth.
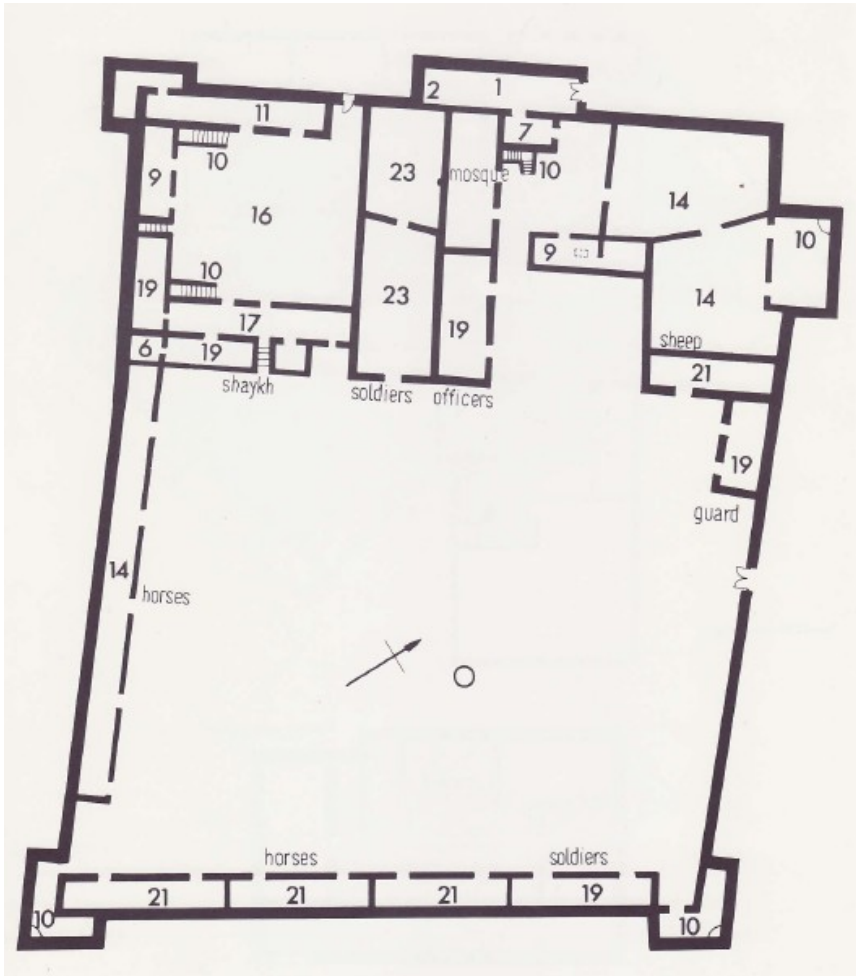
Figure 14 Red Castle Plan. Source: Lewcock and Freeth, 1978.
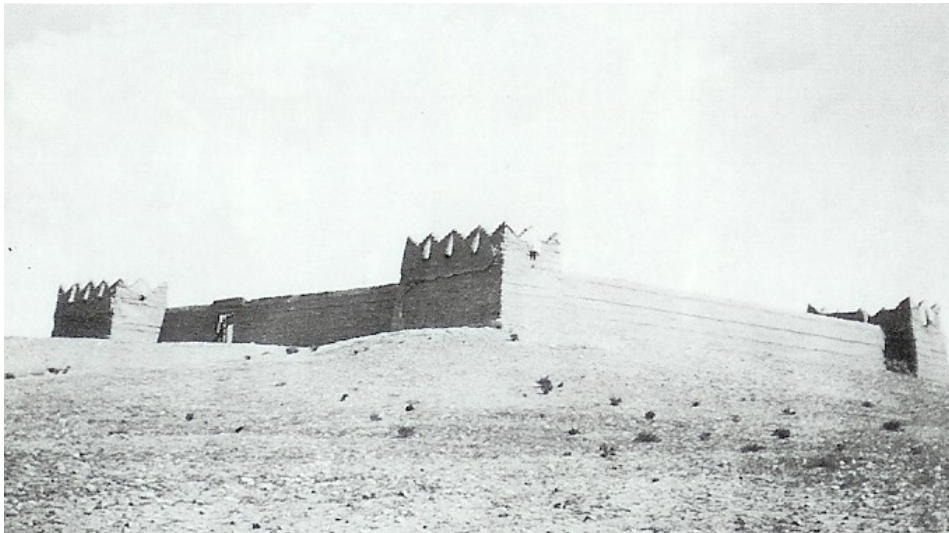
Figure 15 The Red Castle in al-Jahra town in 1928. Source: Facey, 1998.

3.4 The Arrival of the *Utub* in Kuwait

A lack of sources about the early history of the *Utub,*[130] an Arabian tribe who played an essential part in the foundation of Kuwait, has forced many historians to rely on local Kuwaiti traditions and folklore. Undoubtedly, the Old Town occupied a strategic position for trade in the northeast corner of Arabia and the Gulf; it was the last and best seaport on the western coast of the Gulf. And it is this geographical fact, along with the arrangements of power and political circumstances of the late 17th century and early 18th century, that led the *Utub* tribe to settle in Kuwait. [131]

Several reasons forced the *Utub* to leave their original homeland in Hadar in the Najd, the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, in the late 17th century, among them the frequent conflicts within the tribe and a lingering drought that resulted in a scarcity of grazing lands. *Utub* in Arabic means "sons of the trekkers," a name given to those who left their original homeland and emigrated to the northeastern part of Arabia, before eventually settling in Kuwait.[132] Among those who first decided to leave Hadar were the al-Sabah and al-Khalifa families. In searching for better grazing lands, many other tribal groups of hopeful settlers joined them, making the emigration larger in numbers and in responsibilities. In the Bedouins' manner, a *majlis*, or council, would have been held, in which the heads of the important families and elder wise men would discuss and decide where to go and what to do next. By the time they reached the eastern part of Arabia, they were already known as the *Utub*.

---

[130] The name of this tribe was written with many different English spellings: some records used Ottoobee, other used Utba, or Etoubis as in Kinphausen's report below. These variations are due to the fact that the Arabic alphabet lacks several English vowels, however, all these words derive from the Arabic root *ataba*, meaning traveling from place to place. The name *Utub* will be used throughout this study. For more detail see Casey, 19. and Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 49.

[131] Many Kuwaiti historians agreed that the *Utub* tribe was a branch of the great *Anaza* tribe.

[132] Ismael, 20.

Some local Kuwaiti traditions agree that the *Utub* first migrated to the area around Qatar, where they acquired maritime experience and became master sailors. They then moved to Basra for a short time before they "migrated to Kuwait some time later in 1716."[133] Different local traditions have somewhat different stories of how and from where the *Utub* finally came to emerge in Kuwait. Abu-Hakima and al-Jinaei[134] argue that the *Utub* was a branch of the great Anaza tribe which "started to migrate in the second half of the 17th century under the protection of the powerful Banu Khalid tribe which dominated the area between al-Hasa and Iraq."[135]

The traditional immigrations of the tribes in the central and eastern parts of the Arabian Peninsula ended up either in al-Hasa or in Basra, the largest cities on the western coast of the Arabian Gulf at the time (Fig. 16). When Kuwait was established as small fishing village, it attracted many migrated tribes and members. Kuwait before *Utub* and during the *Utub*'s early period grew away from tribal attacks. Unlike Basra and al-Hasa, Kuwait was free of political intervention and struggle. Many immigrants left Basra for Kuwait after the Persian siege in 1775 and many more came from al-Hasa, Zubara, and Bahrain escaping from the Wahhabis' expanding dominance and its strict religious rules. Indeed, in the last three decades of the 18th century, Kuwait was the haven for many immigrants and who sought safety and prosperity. Captain George Brucks of the Indian Navy in 1825 described Kuwait in his survey of the Gulf recognizing that Kuwait "enjoyed peace while all other parts of the Gulf have been embroiled, and to this [Kuwaitis] owe their maritime greatness."[136]

The examination of Ottoman documents of Basra in southern Iraq suggested that around the end of the 17th century the *Utub* migrated from the eastern part of Arabia to Basra.

---

[133] Ben J. Slot, ed., *Kuwait the Growth of a Historic Identity* (Kuwait: The Gulf Museum Consultancy Company, 2003), 17. Ffrench and G., *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, 14.
[134] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 43.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Schofield, 7.
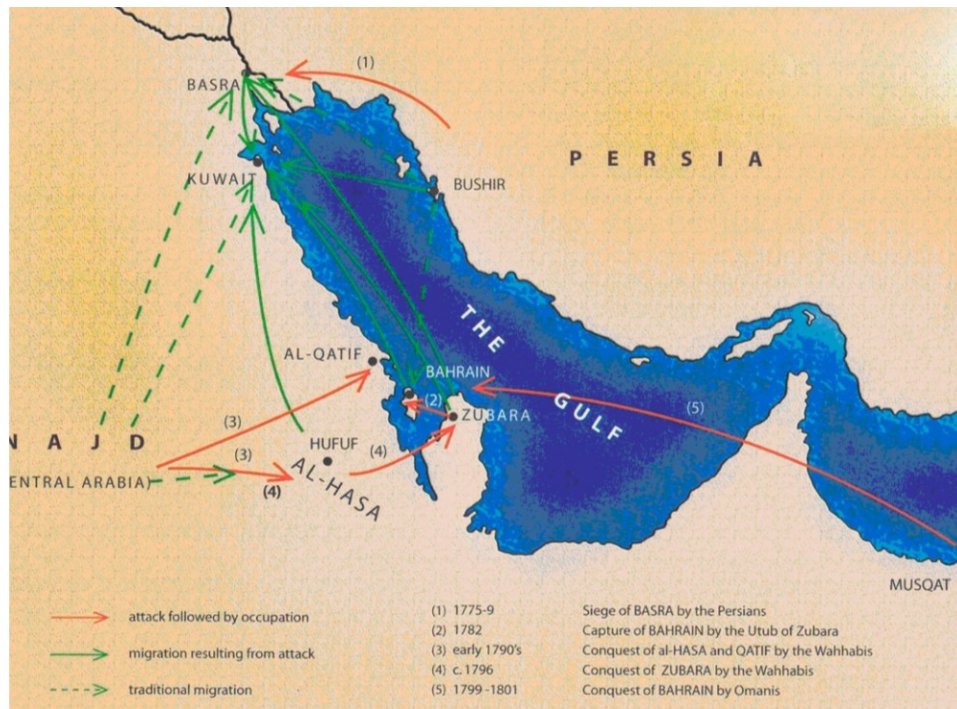
Figure 16 Places of tribes and their immigration in the 18th century. Source: Lautrette, 2006.

In Basra they were permitted by Ali Pasha, the newly appointed Ottoman governor of Basra (1701–05), to "occupy 2,000 houses."[137] The *Utub* were quite a powerful group at the time, "owning 150 ships armed with some light artillery, which they used for merchant shipping and for transporting goods for Basra merchants."[138] Not very long after that, Ali Pasha asked them to leave Basra because they interfered with the shipping in the Shatt-al-Arab River. Eventually, some of the *Utub* returned to their original lands while the remaining *Utub*, including the al-Sabah clan, moved to the land of today's Kuwait.[139] Unfortunately, the lack of information about the Utub's short stay in Basra hinders any probable speculation about the houses they occupied at the time.

The *Utub* moved to an empty desert place known as *Kazima*, about three days travel south

---

[137] Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait*, 71. This document was not known until 1982. Ibn Alwan's travelogue was also discovered recently. Both are very important documents that shaped the way researchers look at Kuwaiti history.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

of Basra. What was most important to the *Utub* was that the new area be unclaimed by any other power. *Kazima*, or Kuwait by the time they moved there, "was completely outside of the control of the Basra Government"[140] (Fig. 17 shows *Kazima*—written as *el Kadhema*—at the time.) After this early Ottoman document, there is no further known document that mentions the *Utub* for almost another 40 years.

Kuwait, for the *Utub* at the time, was the best place for settlement after their many years of travels in the Arabian Peninsula. The position of Kuwait Town at the time was unique: it was cut off from the surrounding tribal lands by gravel steppes to the south and by salt marshes on the al-Jahra

Figure 17 *El Kadhema*, one of Kuwait's early names. Source: Slot, 1991.

side to the west, which meant that in the early years of the settlement the only fortification

---

[140] Ibid.

necessary was the small fort—or *al-Kut*—from which the town took its name.[141] In addition, Kuwait is located in a convenient place for trade for both the Gulf and the desert routes. Furthermore, the absence of a central power in the Gulf area at the time "allowed small communities to live relatively free from external interference."[142] The two major neighboring powers at the time, the Ottoman Empire and Persia, were unconcerned with Arabia. Furthermore, after they were forced to leave Qatar and Basra, where they had gained maritime experience, the *Utub* were looking for a good natural harbor not far from Basra. In *Khazima* they discovered what was to become known as Kuwait Bay, which is "one of the finest natural harbors in the entire Arabian Gulf."[143] Another major reason for the *Utub* to chose Kuwait for their final settlement was that Kuwait was situated in Bani Khalid territory, whose "reign was favorable to trade,"[144] and which became the greatest engine for the prosperity of the *Utub* in Kuwait.

The *Utub* arrived in Kuwait incrementally and so did many other tribes who eventually decided to settle in Kuwait; among the first arrivals were the al-Sabah and the al-Khalifa families, who later immigrated to and ruled Bahrain, and the al-Jalahmeh families (Fig. 16). In fact, the *Utub* were a minority at the time they ruled Kuwait. At the beginning, they "did not constitute more than 10-15 percent of the subsequently settled population of Kuwait."[145] Almost a century after their arrival in Kuwait, Lorimer reported that in 1820 Kuwait "was represented as containing an armed population of 5,000 to 7,000 men, of whom only a few hundred were *Utub* by race."[146]

The *Utub*'s journey in the Arabian Desert, their time in Qatar, and eventually their brief residence in Basra, all must have significantly impacted their decision to transfer from a nomadic

---

[141] Lewcock and Freeth, 12.
[142] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*, 43.
[143] Casey, 3.
[144] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*.
[145] Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait, Social Change in Historical Perspective / J.S. Ismael*, 1st ed ed. (Syracuse, N.Y. :: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 22.
[146] Lorimer, 1006.

and semi-nomadic life to stable groups who settled in permanent houses. By the time they decided to settle in Kuwait, they had moved away from itinerant camel herding and gained new productive means of survival, such as the maritime and merchant trades, and pearl diving. Certainly, the *Utub*'s way of life was rapidly evolving, and with it came the transformation of their living environments, from temporary shelter to fixed housing.

The first and most important aspect of the change in their way of life was the form of their housing. As nomadic people, the *Utub* household or dwelling was a typical Arab tent called *bait es-shaar,* meaning 'the booth or house of hair made from a wool combination of sheep, camel and goat hair, making it blackish in color. It was supported by round wooden poles (Fig. 18). The back-strip, functioning as a wall, was flexible and movable according to the wind direction and the users' needs. Sometimes they moved it several times in one day to block the harsh, cold, or sandy winds. The size of the tent varied according to the family's social status and wealth; a typical small family lived in a tent of one pole. As the family increased in size, status, or wealth, the number of supporting poles increased accordingly. A tent with four poles or more was reserved for sheikhs or wealthy figures. The nomad's tent was easily divided into two major spaces: one for the family and the other for the *majlis,* or reception area reserved for the male members of the family and their male guests (Fig. 19).
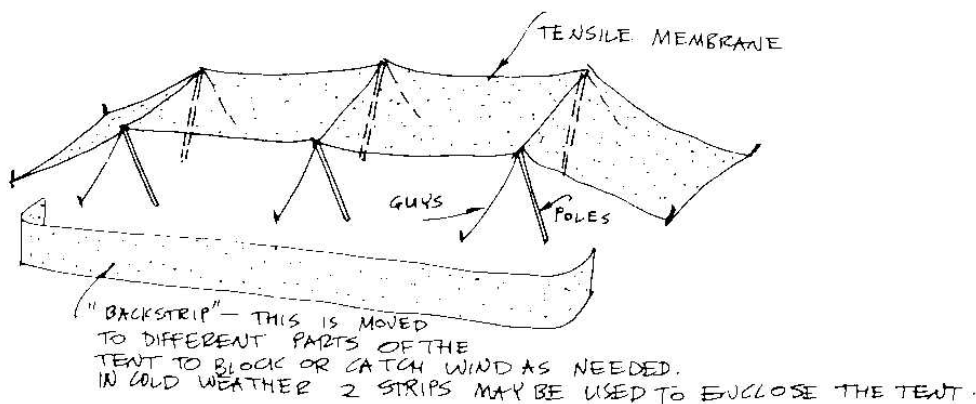
Figure 18 Bedouins' tent. Source: Rapoport, 1969.

Charles Doughty, who visited and lived in these houses during the 1880s, described how they were built saying:

> When the tent-cloth is stretched upon the stakes, to this roof they hang the tent-curtains, often one long skirt-cloth which becomes the walling of the nomad booth: the selvedges are broached together with wooden skewers. The booth front is commonly left open, to the half at least we have seen, for the mukaad or men's sitting-room: the other which is the women's and household side, is sometimes seen closed (when they would not be espied, whether sleeping or cooking,) with a fore-cloth; the woman's part is always separated from the men's apartment by a hanging, commonly not much more than breast or neck high, at the waist-poles of the tent. The mukkad is never fenced in front with a tent-cloth, only in rain they incline the am'dan [columns of wooden poles] and draw down the tent eaves lower.[147]

Doughty then shifted from describing their tent to describing their 'clay house. He said that "their clay house is built in like manner: a public hall for the men and guests, and an inner woman's and household apartment."[148]

Figure 19 Bedouins encampment in Kuwait, 1920. Source: Abu Hakima, 1984.

3.5 The Rudimentary Mode of Settlement in Old Kuwait Town

---

[147] Charles Montagu Doughty and T. E. Lawrence, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (London, Boston,: P. L. Warner, publisher to the Medici society, ltd. J. Cape, 1921).
[148] Ibid.

Looking to recent Gulf Bedouin migration to cities, the question arises whether modern examples of sedentarization illuminate historical *Utub*'s sedentary habitation in the early 18th century?

Utub's early arrival in Kuwait was similar to that of the Bedouin encampments in Kuwait in the early years of the 20th century. They built their black tents around the already established village of Kuwait by Bani Khalid and perhaps near the sweet water wells of *Shamia,* less than two miles to the south.

Figures 20 and 21 show the early Bedouin settlements around Kuwait Town during the 1940s. The Badu of Kuwait chose to change their lifestyle and settle in Kuwait during the 1940s for economic and political reasons. This research concerns in the Badu settlement processes. Theoretically, these processes are similar to that of *Utub* settlements in Kuwait two centuries earlier because they both shared similar circumstances, way of life, and culture e.g. a nomadic and semi-sedentary. Furthermore, the Kuwait historian al-Qenaei argued that the building of Kuwaiti houses has not changed much since its early establishment.[149] The major difference between the Badu settlement processes in the 1940s and that of *Utub* in the early 18th century is that while the latter took more than a century to completely be sedentary, the former was so rapid that the entire process happened within less than two decades. Of course, each of the two movements has its social and political consequences.

Importantly, *Utub's* shift from the pastoral economy to the urban economy played a major role in destroying the earlier tribesmen socio-economic class. In the pastoral economy some tribal lineages and some individual households possessed great economic power (mainly, in terms of the number of herds) as well as held a superior political influence over other lineages and individuals.

---

[149] al-Qenaei.

With the *Utub* transformation to an urban society (in which the socio-economic class is based on land ownership, commercial business, and job status, etc.), the majority of *Utub* have become economically equal. All of these social and economic changes made a significant impact on early Kuwaiti urbanization.
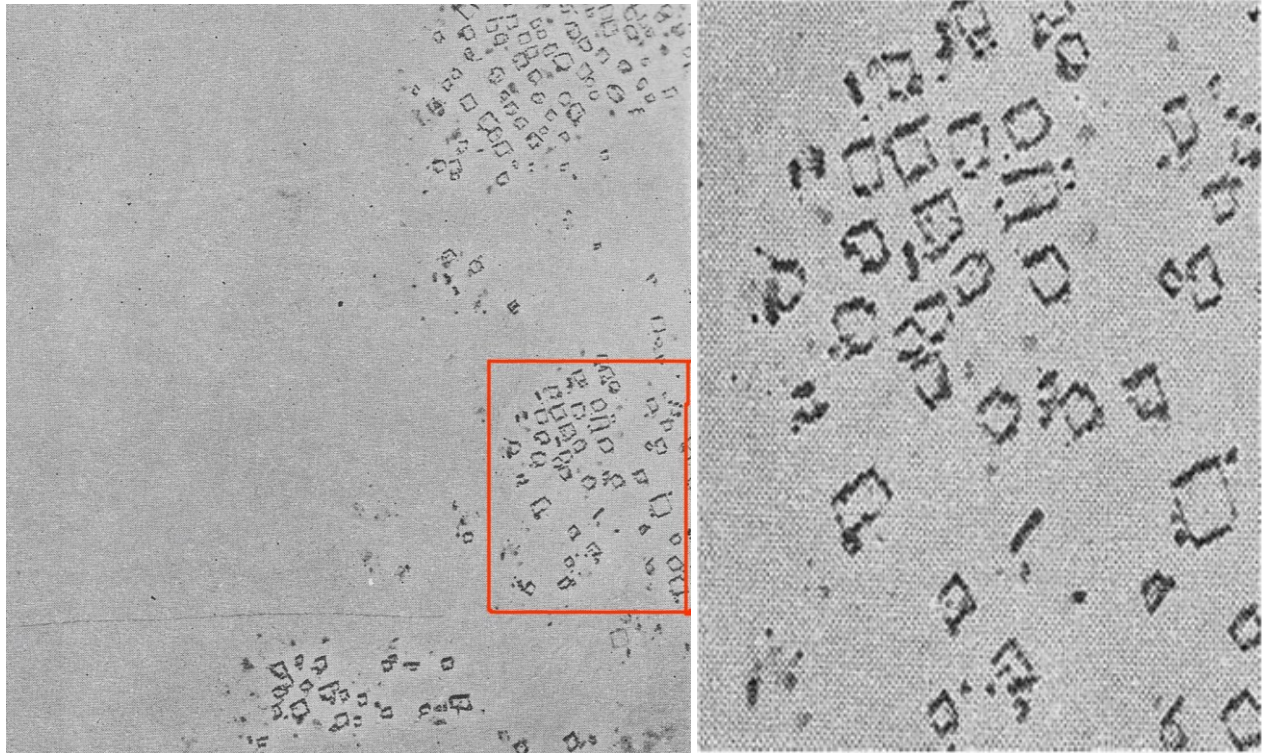
Figure 20 Process of settlement in Kuwait in first half of 20th century. Source: Shiber, 1964.
Figure 21 Close up of Figure 18.

It is very important to understand the process of change that occurred during the *Utub* transformation from pastoral lifestyle—and a tent as a housing unit—to sedentary people who built their courtyard houses. The life in the tent was completely open to nature and the surroundings (Fig. 19). There were no fixed walls or private fences around the tent and as Dougthy reported, the front side was always open. Even the back strip of the tent was always moved to different sides according to the wind directions. All these advantages were gone once the Badu had built their 'new' type of settlement, which is the courtyard house. It is interesting to examine how

the Badu felt once they stayed inside the houses of their sedentary relatives in towns. Poetry is universally considered the greatest art of the Arabs and is an important indicator because it is evidence of special reverence. Poetry from the 19th century by one of the Badu' princesses who was married a sheikh of an eastern Arabian town called Darin is relative here. Although she lived in a palace where she had servants, she could not tolerate the enclosure of the houses after the openness and freedom of life in the desert. She documented her emotional struggle in a poem that she sent to her family in the desert. She said:

> My brother why you let me married to a town man
> None of you wants to live in a town
> I neither want living in Darin nor Qatif
> Nor this town and its people
> I love being free riding my camel, I love its maneuver
> I love being in desert where a clean sand is abundant
> Where I can pick fresh mushrooms by my hands
> Where I can smell fresh flowers

The questions then arise as to why the Bedouin as well as *Utub* were willing to abandon their traditional mode of life, the nomadic, and adopt an unaccustomed new life, the urban existence?

In searching for reasons, the proper question might be restated as, what were the factors that led many nomadic groups to abandon their nomadic way of life to settle in urban areas? According to the ethnographic analysis, there were several models that tried to provide an answer to this question. Philip Salzman, for instance, stated that there were three major models that have been overemphasized in anthropology. The first one is "the drought and decline model," which places much emphasis on climatic variations such as extreme temperatures and the absence of pasturage and water as a factor for pushing nomads to urban areas. The second is "the defect and degradation

model," which results from tribal wars over scarce pasture. The third is "the failure and fall-away model," which is due to individual pastoralists' migration to urban areas seeking employment because pastoral life cannot provide them and their families with their basic economic needs.[150]

Did 'privacy' exist for them before? At the time, they were nomads living in tents, the sense and the meaning of privacy must have been something other than the later focus of the 'position of women' within the house. Visitors who approached tent could easily see all the family including men, women, and all the household living in the tent. Why then did they build their 'clay' courtyard houses with complete enclosure? Is it because the courtyard house type is universal and to the extent that the concept of "house" in their mind meant 'courtyard house'?

Perhaps they were influenced by what they saw in the already established settlements in the neighboring regions such as al-Hasa, Basra, and Najd, since Gulf Bedouin used to visit these regions at least once a year for trading and purchasing necessary goods. They always brought sheep and camels to the cities, as well as skins, wool, and dairy products for trading with the sedentary people. Besides economic interest, the Bedouin of Kuwait also provided security for Kuwait Town when it was subjected to tribal raiding.

The relationship between the Bedouin and sedentary people has been illustrated by anthropologists dealing with the study of nomadic groups in the Middle East. Although nomadic groups have a great degree of autonomy in terms of economy, politics, and social affairs, they always engage in relationships with sedentary groups. There was a close, mutual, and productive relationship between town men and nomadic tribes. Furthermore, in this relationship the nomad was at least an equal if not a dominating partner. A Bedouin then might be regarded as analogous to rural agricultural setting come to take up residence in an environment with which they are

---

[150] Philip Carl Salzman and Edward Sadala, *When Nomads Settle : Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 11-14.

already familiar, to some degree, and in which they have important and profitable commercial ties of long standing. Their nomadic lifestyle might be seen, and might have been seen by them, not as a radical alternative to life in the new cities, but as a natural corollary of urban life. In this view then, the "sedentarization might be seen as being less a choice between one mode of existence and a radically different one than a natural shift from occupation of one niche in a series of closely interrelated economic niches to occupation of the next niche in the series."[151]

Part of the decision to abandon nomadic life and settle in Kuwait was based on their relatives' encouragement that preceded them residing in Kuwait. The phenomenon is known as "chain migration," which means "the process by which prospective immigrants learn of opportunity, are provided with passage money, and have initial accommodations and employment arranged through immigrants who preceded them."[152] The new migrants almost always migrate to areas that are dominated by their own kin or ethnic groups. The decision by earlier *Utub* and the later Bedouin selection of Kuwait Town to settle, was strongly influenced by the early migrations of their relatives who preceded them in abandoning their nomadic way of life by settling in and around the old Bani Khalid town in Kuwait. The town used to be a seasonal place for Bedouin groups, especially in the summer time.

The processes of Badu settlement during the 1940s are shown in the aerial view in Figure 22. After they decided to settle, they built their blackish tents in the outskirts of al-Jahra village. Area a shows the heart of the old village, area b shows the recently settled places, and c shows the Bedouin tents built on the edges of the village. The transition from c to b is the most significant because the form and structure of a residence is markedly different from the tent and its basic

---

[151] Ibid., 42.

[152] Bryan Thompson, "Social Ties and Ethnic Settlement Patterns," in William C. McCready, ed., *Culture, Ethnicity, and Identity : Current Issues in Research* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 343.

materials and easy and light construction. In stage b, from whatever the available materials, the family basic unit of shelter was made. It seems random, but it was close and contiguous, and these units constituted the seeds and origins of Kuwaiti early urbanization. The next chapter examines the principles that organized the early settlement in Kuwait.
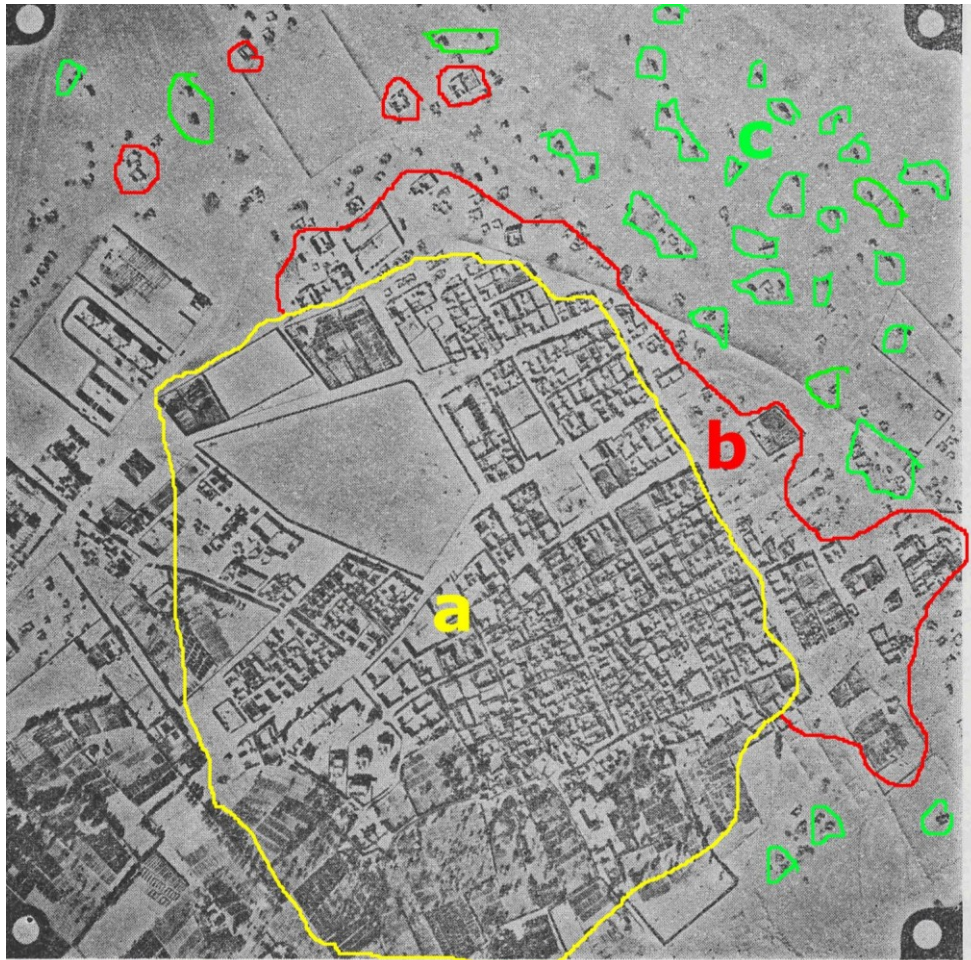
Figure 22 Al-Jahra village, Processes of urbanization. Source: Shiber, 1964.

3.5.1 The *Utub* Take Over Kuwait

The *Utub* lived in peace under the Banu Khalid's authority, however, the rise of the Wahhabis in central Najd in 1745 marks the beginning of the decline of the Banu Khalid. During their early settlement, the *Utub* strengthened their relationship with the Banu Khalid through

intermarriage, and built upon the Banu Khalid's established caravan trading connections. In this way, the *Utub* were able to expand both seaborne and desert caravan trade in a very short time. [153]

The pinnacle of the *Utub*'s real political power coincided with the death of the local Bani Khalid Sheikh, Sulaiman al Hamid, in 1753. The *Utub* eliminated the Bani Khalid rule and selected Sabah al-Sabah as the first ruler in what became the long line of the al-Sabah family. The *Utub*'s social affairs were fundamentally based on tribal kinship. As was the case in all tribal systems, Sabah had no mystical or spiritual power over the *Utub* tribe; he was simply trusted for his good judgment and wisdom and was able "to maintain the confidence of tribal elders, whom he was obliged to consult in all matters."[154]

The strong rapport between Sabah I and the tribes in the area led to his selection as ruler, while most other *Utub* families' interests were directed toward the sea and the maritime trade. Kuwait at the time depended on these tribes for several reasons. First, tribesmen provided basic necessities for the Kuwaiti community through the desert caravan trade; secondly, many of the workers employed in the maritime and merchant trades were from the tribes; thirdly, as Muslims, tribesmen paid tribute once every year in the form of *Zakat*, the third pillar of Islam, to the chief sheikh of their area, giving the al-Sabah house a crucial source of income. The ruling family gained more influence among tribesmen "partly by means of matrimonial alliances with other tribes in the neighborhood."[155] Sabah house also became aware of the desert activities such as the desert caravans trade that shaped the desert side of Kuwait.

Finally, and most importantly, Kuwait needed protection provided by these tribes against perennial enemy raids, especially after the decline of the Banu Khalid. Kuwait, therefore, wanted a

---

[153] Ffrench and G., *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, 13.
[154] Ismael, *Kuwait, Social Change in Historical Perspective*, 19.
[155] Lorimer, 1001.

sheikh who was "both respected and feared for the number of tribesmen he could call into arms in an emergency."[156]

---

[156] Ismael, *Kuwait, Social Change in Historical Perspective / J.S. Ismael*, 27.

4 THE MORPHOLOGY OF KUWAIT OLD TOWN

There is a general agreement among historians of the region that the rule of al-Sabah in Kuwait began in about 1752 when Sabah the First was chosen as leader by the other Utub families who had begun to settle in the town a few decades earlier.[157] This chapter looks at the development of the settlement as an urban and trade center up to Mubarak the Great' reign in 1896. To construct a clear image of the Old Town and its growth, it is necessary to examine two sources: the first is the principles according to which the town was growing. The second is the earlier written or visual descriptions of the Old Town, such as European maps and travelogues.

The previous chapter showed that members of the Bani Khalid tribe were the first to settle in today's Kuwait area in the early years of 17th century. There is no evidence of the type and form of their settlements. Old Kuwait, as one of the Arabic-Islamic settlements, however, it can be speculated from their building traditions as well as from the Islamic teaching principles which dealt with urban development and shaped most of the Arab settlements at the time. In Old Kuwait too, the principles of Islamic teaching were applied in the civil and criminal disputes including the organization of souks, streets, and building properties and construction clashes.[158]

This chapter discusses the evolution of Kuwait's early settlement through the examination of the urban processes and mechanisms during the early 18th century. It investigates the original laying out of Kuwait Town since the early settlement of the Bani Khalid tribe's members and the arrival of *Utub*, therefore, it attempts to provide answers to the question, what are the most significant urban principles that influenced the characteristics of architecture in Kuwait Town?

---

[157] Abu-Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait*.
[158] Royal Scottish Museum., *The Evolving Culture of Kuwait* (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1985), 39.

Two analytical frameworks are used: the first is Amos Rapoport's theory of architecture and culture, the second is Jamel Akbar's study *Responsibility and the Traditional Muslim Built Environment*. Both frameworks have an unambiguous and systematic approach in explaining and analyzing how culture significantly impacted the architectural environment. While Rapoport uses a cross-cultural approach in examining and comparing how culture was the primary factor that influenced architectural form, Akbar's study focuses on these Islamic cultural principles considerably impacted the Islamic towns and their built forms. Shiber affirmed that one "cannot underestimate the influence of Islam on the structure and architecture of the Near Eastern city. Islam exercises a spectrum of influence on the city, ranging from orthodox Islam in Saudi Arabia to transmuted Islamic teaching in Lebanon or Egypt."[159] Because Kuwait Town was deeply rooted in the Arabic and Islamic tradition and culture, it is necessary to trace the process of its evolution over time and to examine its physical composition by examining how the Kuwait culture and Islamic principles influenced the architectural forms of traditional Kuwait.

The creation and formation of Arab and Muslim towns can be categorized according to their decision-making processes, e.g. centralized formation and decentralized formation. Von Grunebaum suggested classifying the two types with respect to their evolution as "created" and "spontaneous" towns. By 'created' towns he meant the towns that were created according to centralized decisions such as the fortress towns, like ar-Ribat in Morocco, the military town-camp Basrah in Iraq, and capital or political towns such as Baghdad, which was the capital of the Abbasids dynasty. "Spontaneous" towns are those that have been developed without direct or

---

[159] Saba George Shiber, *Recent Arab City Growth* ([Kuwait]: Kuwait Govt. Print. Press, 1969), 158.

systematic planning any kind of governmental or ruler intervention. The best examples of spontaneous towns are Karbala in Iraq and Mashhad in Iran. [160]

Viewed from the sky, most Arabic cities looked similar. As both the 'spontaneous' and 'created' towns evolved and became cities, it is important to ask why did they eventually develop similar urban patterns and characteristics (Figs. 23, 24 & 25).

Figure 23 Aerial view of al-Hasa. Soruce: Shiber, 1964.
Figure 24 Aerial view of Kuwait in 1951. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1951.
Figure 25 Aerial view of al-Muharraq town in Bahrain in 1951. Source: Yarwood, 2000.

To answer the above question, it is necessary to compare and deeply analyze the Arab/Islamic towns and cities, a task that is out of the scope of this research. The basic principles that shaped the traditional built form in Kuwait, however, might contribute some possible answers to the above question since Kuwait is deeply rooted in Arab and Islamic culture.

Rapoport argued that the seemingly 'disordered' town "is often misunderstood by members of other groups who see it as representing a lack of order or as being disorderly or chaotic." And he asserted that it "is impossible since all environments reflect culture, being cultural landscapes, and cultures orderly, being a system, and leads to the systematic choices that result in cultural

---

[160] Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Islam; Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, [2d ed. (London,: Routledge & Paul, 1961), 144.

landscapes."[161] Because the urban setting of Kuwait Town up to the middle of the 20th century was organized according to "social order" rather than "geometric order", it is crucial to understand and decode this social-cultural system and its principles that shaped the built form accordingly (Fig. 26).
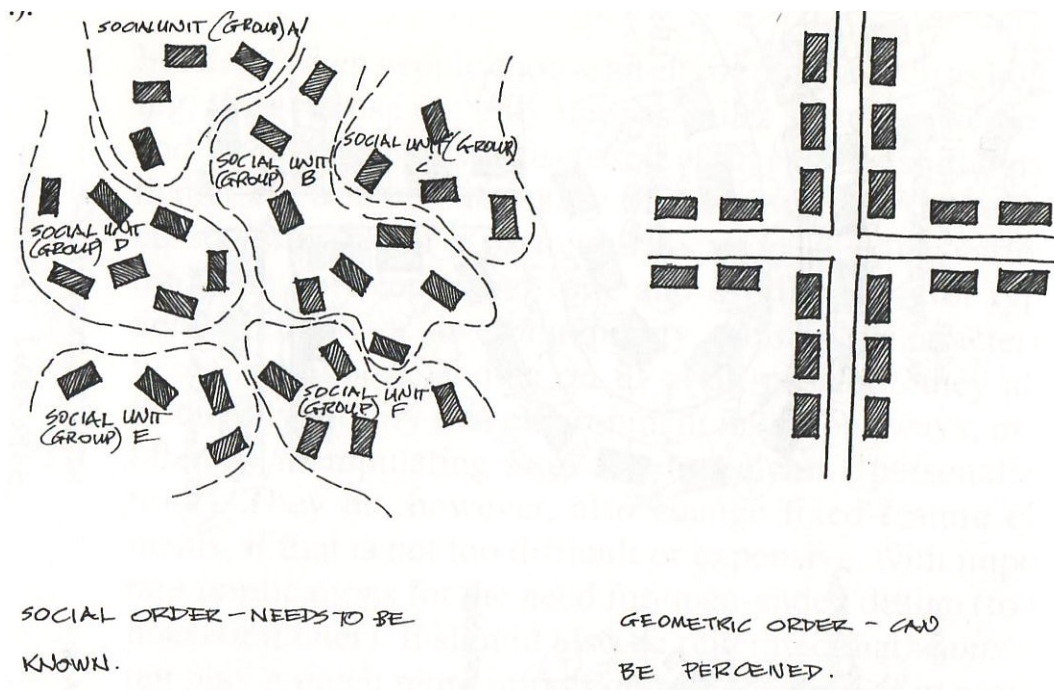
Figure 26 Social order settlement vs. geometric order. Source: Rapoport, 2005.

4.1 The Two Mechanisms That Formed Kuwait Town

There are two mechanisms according to which Kuwait Old Town was urbanized: the Islamic law and the Kuwaiti's local customs or *urf*. Both types of mechanisms impacted not only Kuwait but many other surrounding Arab and Muslim towns. Although some of these rules were universal, the majorities, especially those of *urf*, were accumulative reactions and experiences produced by each town. Hence, each town had its own urban and architectural local customs. Both types had their impact on the Arab and Islamic traditional towns. The Islamic law was a

---

[161] Rapoport, *Culture, Architecture, and Design*, 56.

centralized imposed system focusing on the macro principles that created a unifying or a universal built environment. The *urf*, on the other hand, was operating on the micro level according to daily in-site cases. The *urf* focused on the details of the local built form and its impact on the existing built form, such as the architecture of houses and their character and how they interrelate to other houses. Practically, the two types were simultaneously working together in the traditional Kuwait environment.

4.1.1 General Islamic Principles that Influenced the Early Settlement in Kuwait Town

There are generally three mechanisms, according to Islamic law, that created the ownership of properties: by revivification, by transferring property through selling or giving, and by inheritance. Because the town's population continued to expand, revivification of vacant land was the most essential mechanism.

4.1.1.1 *Ihya'*: The Revivification of Land

Revivification and allotment were among the significant mechanisms for establishing ownership of land in areas around early Kuwait Town, as was the case in many Muslim cities. These principles of revivification are based on incentives; settlers are provoked to act in order to own properties without the permission of authority. In traditional towns, the exercise of the claims of control and the use of land bring the claim of ownership, that is, property shifts from the category of dead-land to owned and revived land.

The first step in reviving a land was *khatta*, which basically meant the act of claiming a land often "by marking out lines or physical elements to establish the boundary of the property."[162] Figures 27 and 28 show the making of *khatta* by marking the lands. Figure 27 is an aerial view of

---

[162] Jamel A. Akbar, "Responsibility and the Traditional Muslim Built Environment" (MIT, 1984), 159.

Fiylakah Island's residential area in which the new and expanding settlers marked their new properties with physical objects. The most common method of *khatta* or marking a land was by building a low wall on the perimeter of the desired land as shown in Figure 28. This step does not necessarily mean marking out the internal organization of the property, but it was more to reserve the right of a land than building on it.
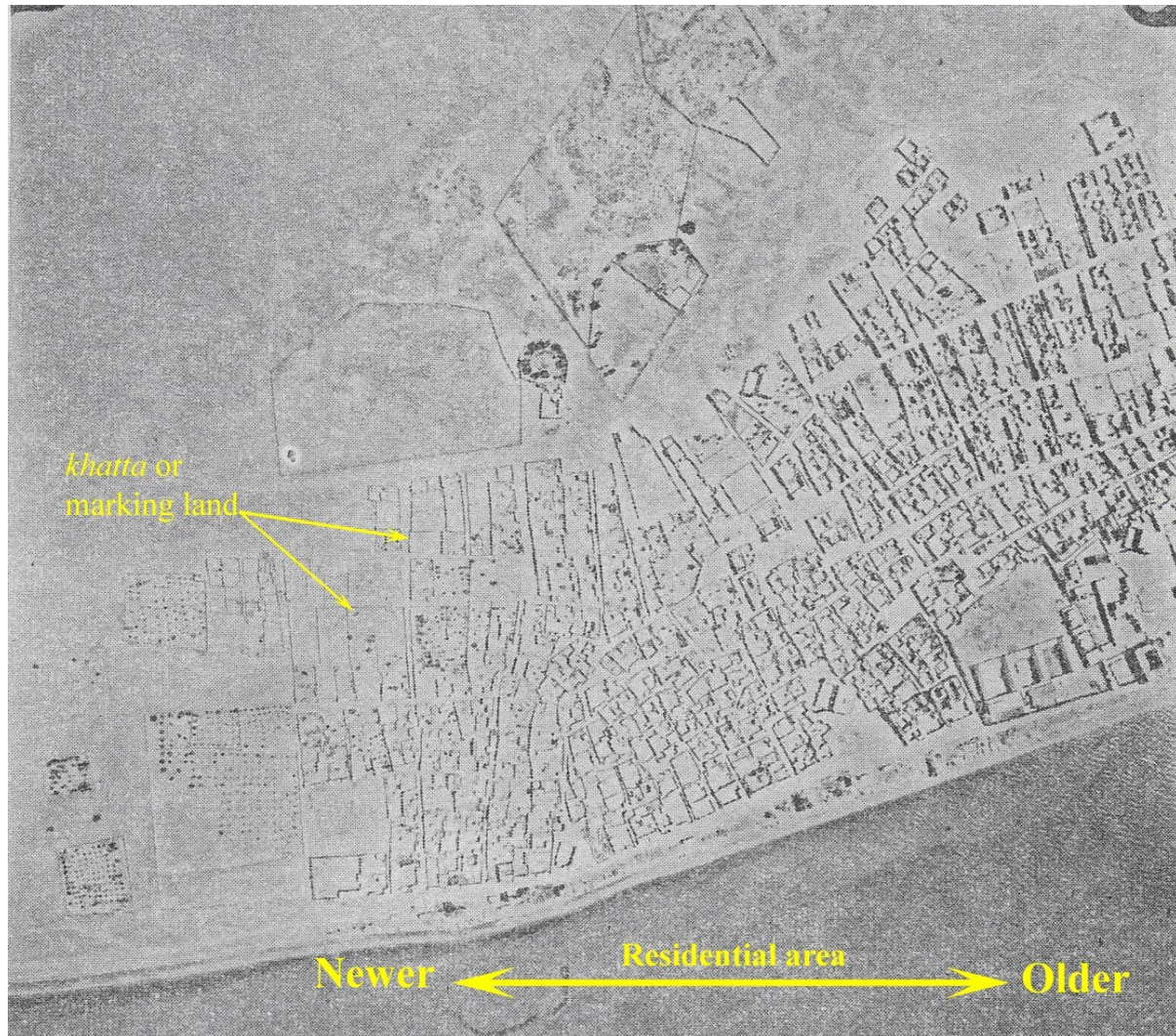
Figure 27 Aerial view of the residential area in Fiylakah Island. Source, Shiber, 1964.
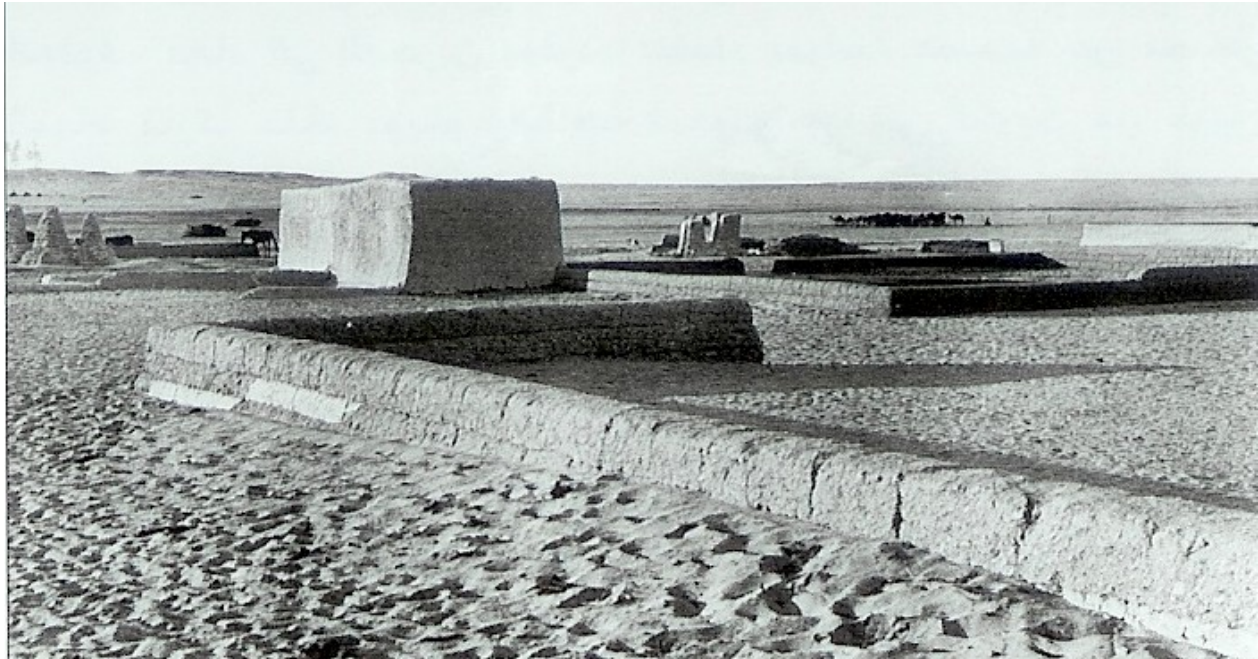
Figure 28 First step towards building was to do *khatta* or marking a land with a low surrounding wall. Source: Facey, 1998.

The revivification of non-owned and unused lands—dead lands—was implemented through Islamic laws that required certain principles in reviving dead lands. The Islamic law generally considered lands as dead-lands if "there is no trace of building or cultivation, if it is not used by the neighboring locality as, for example, a common pasture, burial ground, or as a source of wood or food for cattle. Otherwise, all lands are dead if not owned by individuals."[163] It was important to stress the meaning of "dead-land" because according to this definition one could know which land to choose to revive. This Islamic description only provided a broad definition of the "dead land," and did not specify how buildings needed to be built on the land. Akkbar argued that "most, if not all, opinions by jurists assert the possibility of reviving dead-land abutting urbanized area."[164] For example, when different families revive pieces of land while one piece of dead-land in the center remains not-revived and has no access, who would claim it? In such case other principles such as easement or servitude rights resolve the overlapping territorial disputes.

---

[163] Ibid., 71.
[164] Ibid., 188.

Each of the surrounding families could give, sell and rent the right of servitude so that the individual who wanted to revive the central land has to buy or rent the right of passage through the territories of the neighbors. The expansion of Kuwait Town resulted from the land acquired by Kuwaitis utilizing the principle of *ihya'*, a word in Islamic law literally means 'life-giving.' This simple principle was following the Hadith saying, "He who has utilized land that does not belong to anybody is more rightful [to own it]."[165] In other words, using and controlling dead-lands used to bring ownership to the reviver.

4.1.1.2 *Iqta'*: Allotment of Land

Aqta' simply means that a ruler allots a dead-land to an individual. Lands that are owned by individuals cannot be allotted by a ruler for any reason.[166] Two types of allotment were used in Islamic traditional cities: allotting a land was to be owned by reviving it and allotting land with the right of utilization only, but not with ownership.

The implicit fact resulting from these principles was that a land was never sold by the state or the ruler to people; rather it was taken over at no cost by those who put in effort to revive the land. Because the land did not cost any money to own, this principle also "implies incentives; parties are provoked to act in order to own properties."[167] Since the land could be owned without any governmental engagement, people were encouraged to claim ownership over the land chosen.

The major difference between *khatta* and *aqta'* is that in *aqta'* the land is bestowed as an allotment. The difference between these two is in the way of establishing the boundary. Khatta

---

[165] Sahih al-Bukhari v. 3 p. 306
[166] Akbar, 74.
[167] Ibid., 82.

means that the person or a group of people decide to claim propriety, "often by marking out lines or physical elements to establish the boundary of the property. *Aqta'* implies that the boundary is decided upon by an external party which is often the authority. This means that the only relationship between the authority and the party of a *khattah* is the permission of the authority. Demarcation means to differentiate on dead-land and not in a specific site like *khatta* and it does not need the ruler's permission. The demarcated dead-land can be revivified by others than the demarcator, while the *khattah* denotes a recognized property that may not be violated by others.

The principles of revivification and allotment in Islamic law ensured the easement right for the new generation to dwell, a major issue in Islamic law. The right of servitude was also a significant factor in shaping the traditional town. For example, a group of individuals may revive pieces of land while one piece of dead-land remains not revived in the center with no access. Dwellers who want to revive the central piece have to buy or rent the right of passage. In many cases, however, the inhabitants are not necessarily contending, as they were relatives, friends or neighbors and they achieved agreements without disputing each others.

4.1.2 Priorityship Principle: First Come, First Served

In early times, there was a common rule applied to the revivification: the earlier the settler had came to claim the ownership the more he could enjoy more possible choices regarding the built form, such as the site selection of the house, its size, and its orientation. In general, earlier decisions of settlement were based on diverse factors such as sources of water, natural setting and social relationships. In the case of Kuwait Town, the most attractive focal point was the proximity to the *kut* and the harbor area (Fig. 29)
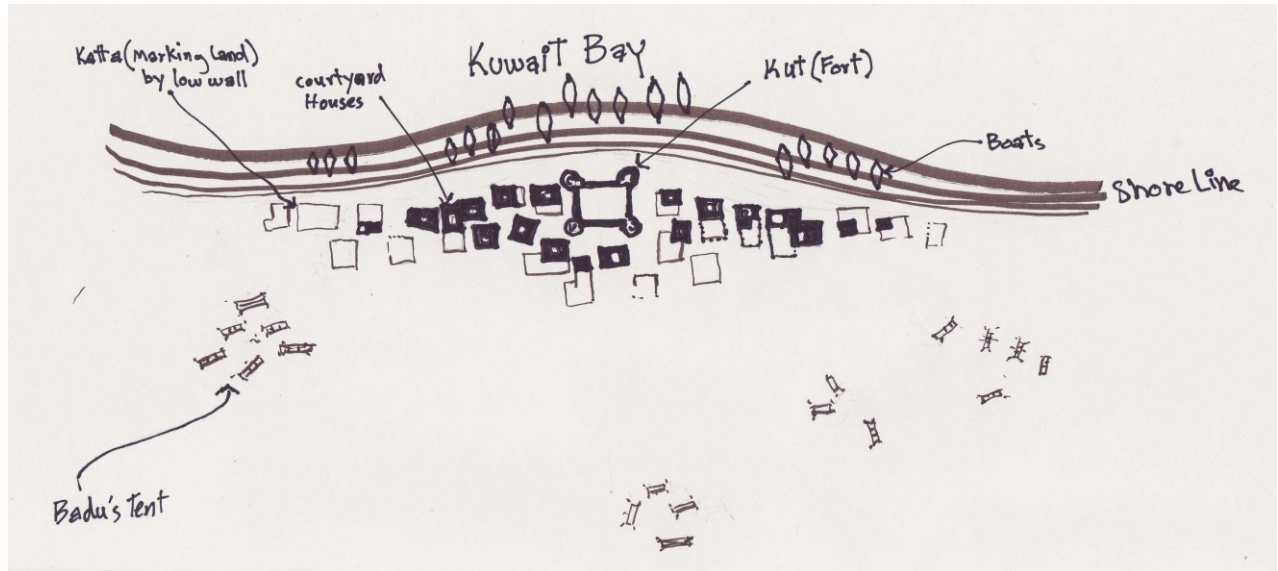
Figure 29 Reconstruction of the early settlement in Kuwait around the late 17th century. Source: Author.

The rule of priorityship was a significant factor in shaping the site location of the houses and streets. The most important location in Old Kuwait was its harbor, which provided natural secure and safe anchorage for fishers' boats. The harbor was famous for its rich pearls and its many favorable types of fish. Proximity to this harbor was important because it reduced walking distance.

The date of settlement of tribal and family areas can be determined through the relative position of each *fereej*[168], a Kuwaiti name for a tribal or family block, to Kuwait's initial harbor center. Logically, the closer the location to the Old Town center denoted earlier arrival and settlement. In Figure 30, the numbers indicate houses' priorities in reviving and owning the place; the higher the number the later the revivification. Houses that bear number 1 means they were the earliest houses to settle around the fort. Later on houses numbered 2 and 3 were settled.

---

[168] *freej* or the tribal quarter area within Old Town is discussed in the next section.

Figure 30 A reconstruction of Kuwait's early settlement, stage one. Source: the author, 2009.

The location of earlier houses and their pathways in stage one were considered within the later houses in stage two. In stage two, house 4a for example has to deal with house 2a because it blocked the shortcut pathway of house 2a, therefore, house 4a has to provide the right of servitude for the older house 2a (Fig. 31). The owner of the House 4a has also to negotiate with other neighbors before he builds his, and establish good relations with them, otherwise they may object to him because he is blocking their pathway, invading their privacy, or simply they want to expand by reviving 4a land. According to priorityship rules, these earlier neighbors have the rights to raise any of these objections.

Figure 31 A reconstruction of Kuwait's early settlement, stage two. Source: the author, 2009.

More complex situations are developed in stage three (Fig. 32). 6a and 6b for instance, have to give the servitude right for their neighboring older houses and the easement right for their

future neighbors to minimize the walking distant by maintaining the pathways through their properties, or simply not reviving these pathways if the neighbors would object. Property 8a is a new settler's; he has the right of easement so that older settlers might allow his pass through their properties by creating an allay. Property 8a also has to give the right of easement to the future settlers.
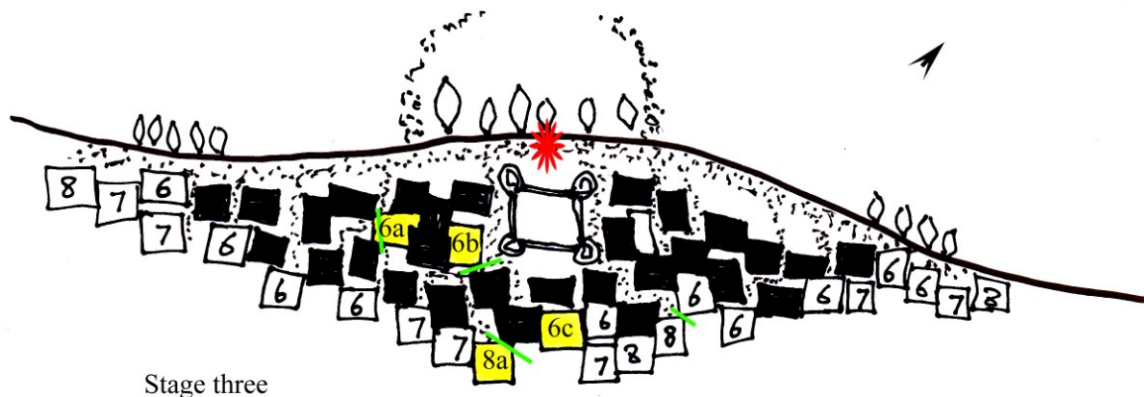
Figure 32 A reconstruction of Kuwait's early settlement, stage three. Source: the author, 2009.

The situation in reality must have been much more complex and sophisticated than these simple examples. The more the settlers build, the more constraints they create for the coming settlers. Every new increment of growth had to obey rules in responding to the situation existing before, and this new increment also increased the constraints on the next coming increment, such as ownership boundaries, servitude rights, and right of way. However, these examples demonstrated how Kuwait Town's old harbor was the most important attractive point. Settlers sought to build their houses as close to it as they could. The closeness to the coastline was the second most important focal point that settlers preferred; these two magnetic considerations made Old Kuwait to grow in an almond-like shape.

4.2 Tracing the Growth of the Old Kuwait Town from Travelogues

Most of these travelogues were written by European travelers and officials who passed or worked in Kuwait at the time. Their descriptions provided crucial historical sources regarding the development of Kuwait Town. This section attempts to trace the gradual development of the architecture of Kuwait Town over the time according to these travelogues (Fig. 33).
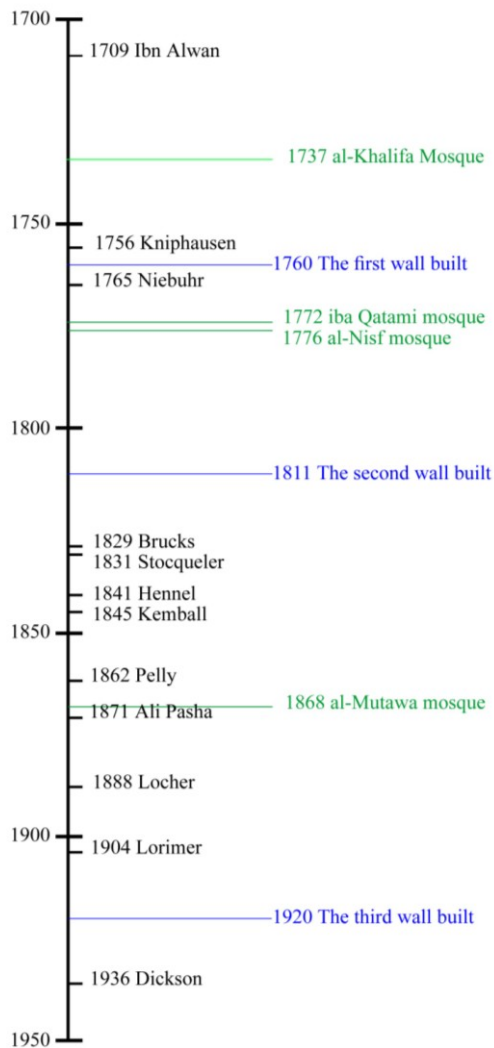
Figure 33 Timeline of travelers and major buildings in Kuwait history. Author, 2009.

4.2.1 Ibn Alwan's Visit to Kuwait in 1709

Before discussing the urban development and architectural features of the reign of the first *Utub*'s ruler in Kuwait, Sabah I, which started around 1752 and lasted less than a decade, it is important to examine the earliest text that described Kuwait Town that dated back to the year 1709. This document was written by a Syrian traveler named Murtudha ibn Alwan, who visited Kuwait in 1709 and stayed two nights before he continued his return to Syria via Basra. In his travelogue, ibn Alwan described his experience in Kuwait in a short paragraph:

> Fifteen days after our departure from al-Hasa we came to a town *[balad]* named al-Kuwayt, in the diminutive form [of *al-Kat*]. It is a sizeable town that resembles al-Hasa. To be true, it is smaller [than al-Hasa], but in its buildings and towers it is its like. We had pilgrims with us from Basra who parted with us here in Kuwait and continued their journey on a road *[darb]* called al-jahr̄a. The distance from Kuwait to Basra is four days, by boat it is even only one day, since the harbor is in the immediate vicinity of Kuwait. Fruit, melons, and other victuals are brought to Kuwait from Basra by boat every day, for it is a port city *[iskilat al-bahr]*. We stayed there one day and two nights and then, on the 20th of the month, moved on with God's blessing in the direction of al-Najaf al-Ashraf. This [town of] Kuwait is [also] called al-Qurayn. Before we reached it we had travelled along the coast of the sea for three consecutive days with the ships accompanying us. The harbor is directly adjacent to the town, without anything in between. All the cereals, i.e., wheat and others, arrive by sea because [Kuwait's] soil does not allow for agriculture; even date palms do not grow there nor any other trees. Nevertheless, prices are lower there than in al-Hasa because so much is transported here from Basra and elsewhere .[169]

Ibn Alwan's description of Kuwait at the time is significant in several respects: first and foremost, it is the oldest source that provides the name of Kuwait as it was used since his visit, besides *Grane*, the older name of Kuwait. Before the discovery of ibn Alwan's report in 1978 by the German scholar Ulrich Haarmann, the common belief among scholars and Kuwaiti historians was that the earliest sources about Kuwait were to be found on European maps or in European travel reports. In addition, the discovery of ibn Alwan's travelogue raises significant questions about the accuracy of earlier historical research on Kuwait, such as that of Abu-Hakima (1965)

---

[169] Slot, ed., *Kuwait the Growth of a Historic Identity*, 38.

and Slot (1991), since they mostly agreed that there is "no contemporary literature available in Arabic on [the early] critical phase of Kuwaiti history, the first half of the 18th century." Such a conclusion has proven to be premature.[170]

But how did ibn Alwan's interesting manuscript reach Germany? A Prussian consul in Damascus in 1848, Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, was a collector and very interested in "dealing with countless Arabic manuscripts, which he collected and then sold to German customers, notably the Royal Library in Berlin."[171] Ibn Alwan's was one of these Arabic manuscripts that remained undisturbed in the Berlin Library for more than one hundred and thirty years, until Dr. Haarmann providentially discovered it and published its contents in a German scholarly article in 1978.

Of even greater interest is that fact that ibn Alwan was aware of and wrote about the urban architecture of the places he visited. For example, in other pages of his travelogue he reveals his curiosity about contemporary Baghdad architecture and he "diligently searches for architectural remains of Abbasid glory in the Iraqi capital."[172] Thus, his observations on Kuwaiti architecture of that time are valuable, coming as they do from a man who bears some knowledge and taste about architecture. Although brief, his observations are crucial to understanding the architectural history of Kuwait. Kuwait appeared to him to be situated in an ideal geographical location at an important junction between al-Hasa in the south and Basra in the north.[173] He observed that the harbor of Kuwait was its most important asset, by which imported goods arrived in the city and then were mainly resold to the many caravans and Bedouin tribes who live in the central and northern parts of Arabia. Ibn Alwan even noted how the prices of goods in barren Kuwait were cheaper than those of the famous oasis of al-Hasa. His report depicts Kuwait as an active seaport in the northern

---

[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid., 31.
[172] Ibid., 36.
[173] Al-Hasa is a large city located in the middle of the eastern part of Arabia about 60 km from the Gulf.

part of the Gulf importing different kind of goods from Basra. It also recognizes Kuwait as an important town for caravans between al-Hasa and Basra, which proves the important role that Kuwait played in the desert trade since its early days.

The most important of ibn Alwan's observations, however, is about Kuwaiti architecture and how it resembled, to him, the architecture of al-Hasa; he observed that Kuwait "is a sizeable town that resembles al-Hasa (Fig. 34). To be true, it is smaller [than al-Hasa], but in its buildings and towers it is its like." In other words, it appeared to him that al-Hasa was the larger, sister city to Kuwait. The architecture of the two towns was similar, but to what extent is that similarity found between the two towns?

William Palgrave visited al-Hafuf, the heart of al-Hasa town, in 1862 and drew a map of the town in which the *kut* or fort was the most dominant building (Fig. 35). In ibn Alwan's Arabic description he noted that the two towns were similar in two respects: (عمارتها و أبراجها), *a'marh*, which means "architecture" in the exact English translation, and *abraj*, which means "towers." The meaning of the second word is clear, since there were no non-religious towers in the Old Kuwait skyline, but the minarets of the mosques were not very tall (these minarets will be discussed later in more detail). The word "*a'marh*" is more ambiguous because of its vague connotations. Firstly, he could have used the term "*mabani*," which precisely refers to buildings, but he did not. Instead he used the term "*a'marh*," a word that was at the time mainly used by writers and scholars to refer to architecture.

What ibn Alwan actually saw at that time in Kuwait is still open to interpretation. What architecture was he referring to? He stayed in Kuwait for less than forty hours, part of which was during the night, before he continued his journey to Basra. Was it really possible for him to accurately observe the architecture of the town during this short time? We can only guess from the

short description he made of the city's architecture that he was in some way moved to notice that particular Kuwaiti art form.

Ibn Alwan in his travelogue wrote a "lengthy report on al-Hasa," where he spent three-and-a-half weeks; he described the town and its buildings in more detail.[174] The close similarity between al-Hasa and Kuwait Town at the time was not surprising since both cities were ruled by one royal family at the time, the Bani Khalid tribe. At the time that the *Utub* arrived in Kuwait incrementally, there was a *kut* or citadel surrounded by a few neighborhoods and mosques as indicated by ibn Alwan's report. The buildings were built of dried-mud and centered on a *kut* exactly as of those in al-Hasa town. The *Utub* probably settled near Kuwait Town and built their tents after they gained permission from the Buni Khalid's chiefs.

Figure 34 Ibrahim Castle in al-Kut district, the heart of al-Hasa city

---

[174] Slot, ed., *Kuwait the Growth of a Historic Identity*, 39.

PLAN of HOFHOOF.

Gardens

Open space where the weekly Fair is held

Road to Mebarraz

Gardens

Road to Djesm

Gardens and much water

Road to Kelabeeyah

Broken Ground

Gardens

Gardens

Fields and Gardens

Road to Ghomer

1. Koi or Fortress
1'. Residence of Belāl
2. Keep
3. Open Place
4. Keysarreeyah
5.5.5. Quarter of Keley eeyah
6.6.6.6. Quarter of No āther
7. Mosque
8. Aboo 'Eysa's house
9. Southern Gate, way to Nejed
10. Northern Gate, way to Mebarraz & Omm Sebua'
11. 11. 11. 11. Other gates
12. 12. 12. 12. Moat, partly filled with water
13. Conical hill & old fort
14. Fort of Khobeym
15. Another isolated hill, and fort

Figure 35 Al-Hafuf town map, the heart of al-Hasa, drawn by Palgrave in 1862. Source: Palgrave, 1965.

4.2.2 Early European Written Descriptions about Kuwait Town

In 1756, Baron Tiddo Frederik van Kniphausen was the first European explorer to write about Kuwait. He was also the first to record more detailed information on *Grane*—the alternate name of Kuwait at the time—and on the *Utub*. In addition, he was the first European noted as trading with Kuwait. In 1747 Kniphausen went into service with the Dutch East India Company and in 1749 he was appointed Chief Resident in Basra. Kniphausen's accounts are of significant

value in describing Kuwait's early political and trading history because they are a direct and contemporary source. He recognized al-Sabah, who was then a young man, as the sheikh of Kuwait at the time. In 1756 he wrote a report that included a description of Kuwait:

> Leaving the Euphrates and going along the Arabian coast one encounters the small island of Feltschah (Fiylakah), and opposite it, on the shore, Grien (Kuwait). Both are inhabited by an Arab tribe of which we have spoken before: the Etoubis. They are formally dependent on the sheikh of the desert although they pay him only a very small contribution. They have some 300 vessels but almost all of them are small because they employ them only for pearl-diving. During the bad monsoon, pearl-diving and fishing are their only occupations. They amount to 4,000 men, all armed with swords, shields, and lances. They have almost no firearms and are even incapable of handling them. This nation is almost continually in conflict with the Huwala, who are their deadly enemies. Because of this and because of the small size of their vessels, they hardly extend their navigation beyond the Bahrain pearl-banks on one side and Cape Berdistan on the other side of the Gulf. Several different sheikhs rule them, all living in relative unity. The highest ranking sheikh is Mobarak Eben Saback [Mubarak bin Sabah], but because he is poor and still young, another, called Mahometh Eben Khalifa, who is rich and possesses many vessels, enjoys almost equal respect among them. Beyond Grain there is the ruin of a Portuguese fortress, and there are no other inhabited places on the way down to Qatif.[175]

His report implies that although Kuwait was still small and its weaponry primitive, it was a nascent sea power. He presents Kuwait as a port town populated by 4,000 men who operate more than 300 small vessels. But these numbers conflict with those given in Carsten Niebuhr's 1765 book, the first text to mention Kuwait using its current name. Niebuhr traveled throughout the Gulf region from 1761 to 1765 as a 'scientific expeditor' to Arabia in the service of the King of Denmark. He later published a recounting of his expedition, in which his description of Kuwait is different in some respects from Kniphausen's description made nine years earlier:

> Koueit is a town and harbor 3 days journey from Zobeir or old Basra and not far from Chor Abdilla, a long estuary to the west of the mouth of the Shatt al Arab. The Persians, and, in general the foreigners, call this town Grane, a name very similar to *Gerra* mentioned by Plinius (book VI, 3o and Strabo book xvi, 885). This town is reputed to own 800 ships. Its inhabitants occupy themselves chiefly with pearl-diving on the Bahrain banks and with fishery. The number of its inhabitants is commonly estimated as 10,000. In the hottest season though, when a large part of them stay in the region of Bahrain and many others travel with camels for the caravans to Damascus, Aleppo and other places, the number of inhabitants of Koueit or Grane is estimated to be less than 3,000. The tribe of Arabs who rule here is part of the Beni Otba but is subject to the tribe Beni Chaled in Al Hasa. It seems that the Otba tribe is trying to make itself independent, because it is said that the inhabitants of Grane take refuge on the island of Feludsje which belongs to their territory.[176]

---

[175] Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait*, 89.
[176] Ibid., 108.

While only nine years separate Kniphausen's and Niebuhr's reports, the population and number of vessels given by Niebuhr are almost more than double those of Kniphausen. Could it have been possible for Kuwait to grow so rapidly in just a few years?

Other sources resolve the discrepancies between the contemporaneous reports. The Ottoman sources of an earlier period mentioned that when the *Utub* settled in Basra for a few years they occupied 2,000 houses. Knowing that their lifestyle centered on large extended families, their numbers must have been at least four times the number of their houses. Other evidence of the rapid growth of Kuwait, although written over a hundred years later, is the report sent by Midhat Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, during his visit to Kuwait in 1871. In this report, clearly impressed by what he had seen, he states that Kuwait's "development increases day by day and is impressive."

While Kniphausen's report of Kuwait at that time gave no information about the desert side of Kuwait, Niebuhr made an interesting observation on Kuwait's desert activity. Besides the small caravans, there was a major caravan route that went directly to Aleppo in Syria from "Grain [Kuwait] without passing Basra."[177]

The First Wall of Kuwait Town

The first fortified wall, built around 1760, surrounded the first town from the south while the coast was its limit to the north. Because of its continuous growth, new settlements emerged outside the wall and, by the early 19th century, it was necessary to build a newer and bigger wall around the city to contain the emerging settlements. The growth of the settlements was organized according to two interconnected rules: Islamic Law and the *Urf,* which refers to the inhabitants' customary practices. The first fortified wall in Kuwait was built in 1760 to protect it from the

---

[177] Ibid., 79.

frequent desert raids from the south. The wall enclosed a small town that subsisted on pearl diving, and consisted of "modest mud dwellings erected on high ground adjacent to the harbor."[178] The foundation of the town's first street network can be traced to the time of the first aerial view of Kuwait in 1951. A team formed by the Kuwaiti Municipality in 1980 and led by Hamid Shauib, the renowned Kuwaiti architect, traced the outlines of the first and second walls of Kuwait on the 1951 Hunting Aerosurveys map of Kuwait Town (Fig. 36).[179] The first town was circulating the Sief Palace and occupied an area of eleven hectares. Evanglia Ali, who has worked on the Kuwait Municipality Preservation Team since 1986, described the first town according to the street network foundation. She found that:

> It seems certain that the early 18th century village contained a sea road and a wall road, as well as two main inland pedestrian routes. The first inland path provided a direct link from the harbour to the Shamieh wells and the desert hinterland beyond, presumably through the principal town gate, and may be considered Kuwait's first Main Street. The second, unremarkable before the mid-1700s, but progressively more prominent thereafter, attempted the southerly coastal connection. The sea road and both inland routes were to become lasting features of the town and subsequent city.[180]

Among the few remaining traditional buildings that were built after the erection of the First Wall in the late 18th century, only one building, Khalifs Mosque in the Sharq area, was built before that date, originally built in 1737 (Fig. 70).[181] This mosque was also known as sheikh's mosque because of its closeness and association to Seif Palace; all rulers of Kuwait performed their prayers in this mosque. The layout of the Khalifs Mosque is similar to those of all the old mosques of Kuwait, and "they were of essentially the same type as the open mosques typical of Saudi Arabia and Mesopotamia."[182] Such mosques had prayer halls with roofs supported by rows of timber

---

[178] Arlene Fullerton and Géza Fehérvári, eds., *Kuwait : Arts and Architecture : A Collection of Essays* (Kuwait: Oriental Press, 1995), 174.
[179] Ibid., 186.
[180] Ibid., 175.
[181] The exact date of building the First Wall is not know. While the Kuwait historian al-Qenae dated it in 1798, others gave earlier dates.
[182] Lewcock and Freeth, 25.

columns. There was usually only one prayer hall to each mosque, with a columned porch which was open to a courtyard on the side opposite the *qibla* wall.
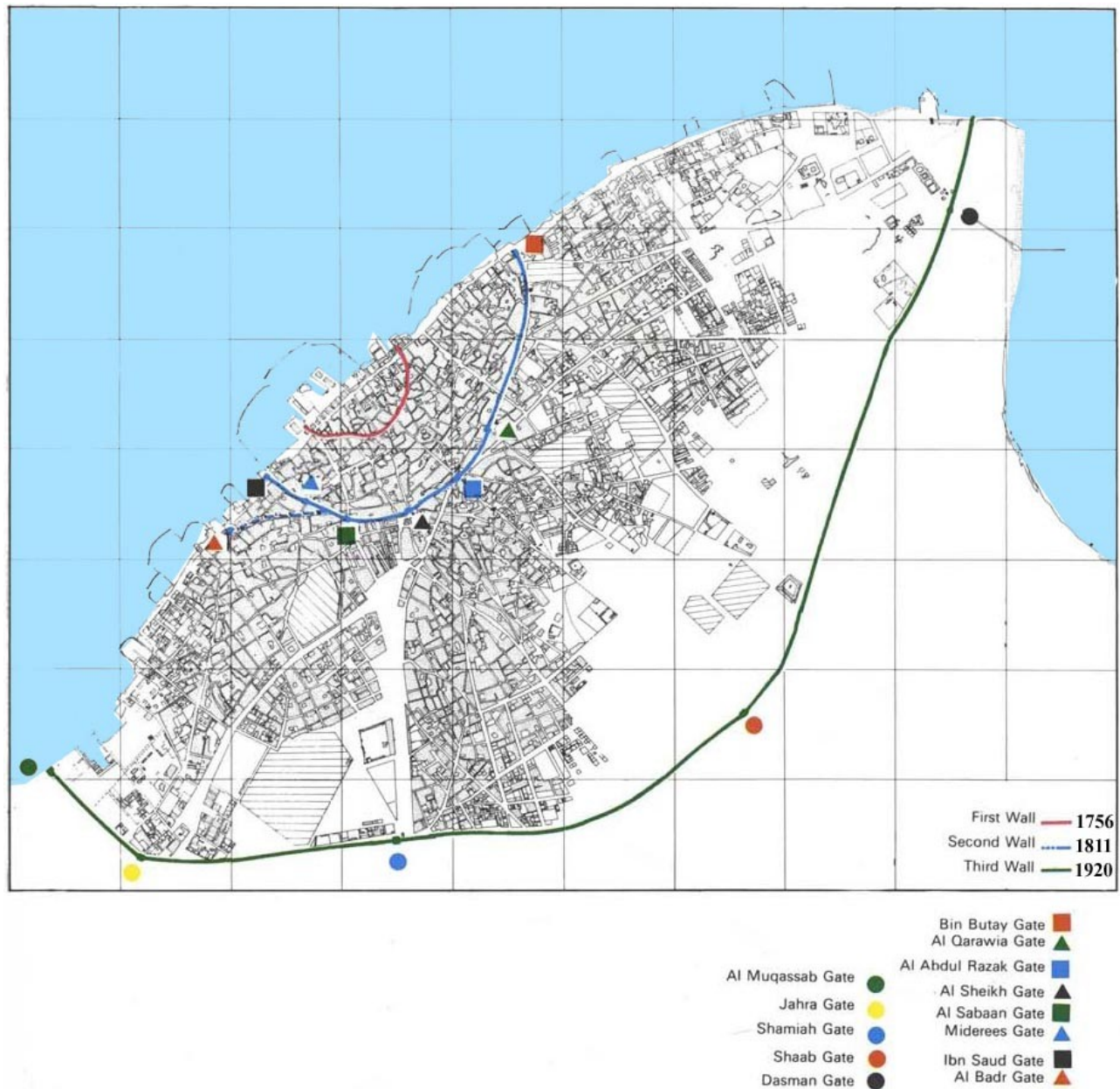

Figure 36 Kuwait three walls' locations. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1980.

Although the reign of Sabah I was short, Kuwait grew in importance during that time and became a promising sea and desert power. One of the main achievements of the rule of Sabah I "was to build a wall around the settlement of Kuwait to guard against attack from the interior."[183] There were three major impacts of the First Wall on the growth of Kuwait Town at the end of the 18th century. The first impact was that Kuwait Town became an enclosed town not welcoming new settlers with no relatives living within the walled town. Kuwait people grew homogenous and family names became a significant identifier of one's social status. The second was that the future growth of town was sized and limited by the borders of the wall, causing the residential areas to be more compact and dense (Fig. 37). The new generation, at a certain point, could not build within the walled Town because all areas were taken over. The Third important impact was that the presence of the old fort, the *kut,* was not necessary anymore since it had lost its major function of providing protection. The Kuwait rulers began demolishing the old fort and built the ruler's square over the fort's territory.

By the early nineteenth century, Kuwait's political influence under the al-Sabah rule was stable, and the growing city attracted many settlers and merchants. Kuwait's power was acknowledged among all the powerful tribes in the Arabian Desert. At the time of the building of the second wall in 1811, J. H. Stoqueler observed that the wall was "more for show than protection, as it is not a foot thick."[184]

---

[183] Schofield, 3.

[184] Lewcock and Freeth, 26. quoted from J.H. Stocqueler, *Fifteen Month 'Pilgrimage in Khuzistan and Persia,* London, 1832, 18. Captain G. F
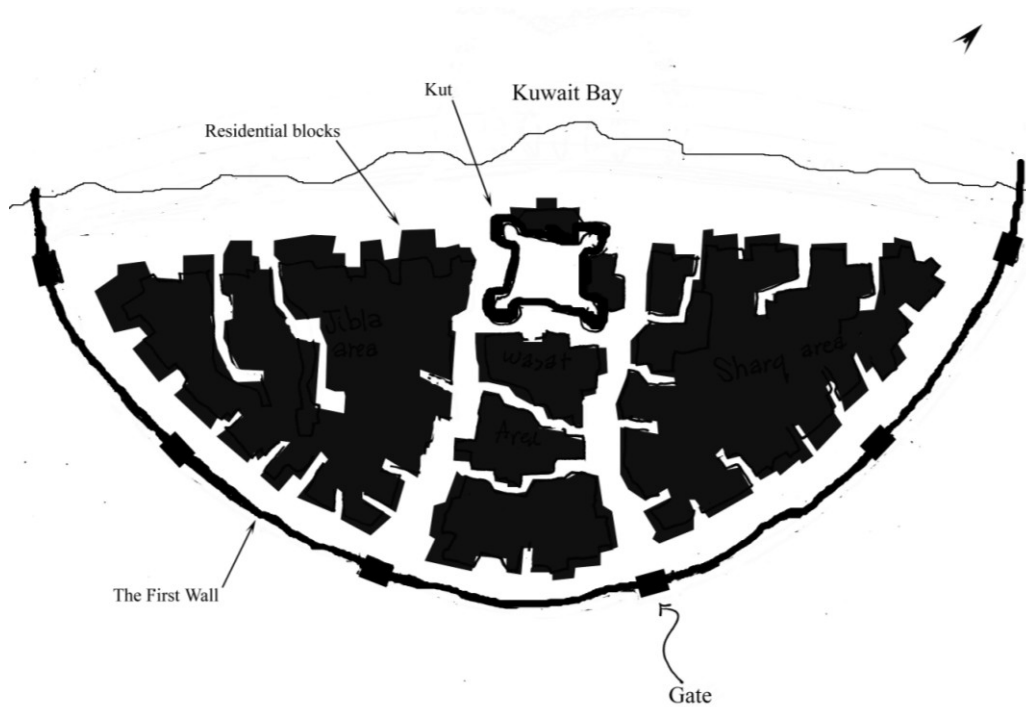
Figure 37 A reconstruction of Kuwait Town's First Wall around the end of 18th century. Source: Author, 2009.

The wall, in fact, served as a customs house for collecting a "small tax on the sales and purchases of the Bedouins at the town gates."[185] Captain George Brucks of the Indian Navy in 1829 described Kuwait Harbor in his survey of the Gulf and recognized how Kuwait "enjoyed peace while all other parts of the Gulf have been embroiled, and to this [Kuwaitis] owe their maritime greatness."[186]

---

[185] Schofield, 8.
[186] Ibid., 7.

5 The Old Town and Its Main Elements

The early European travelers' accounts and these by Kuwait local historians such as al-Reshied and al-Qinae all agreed that the Old Town characters and configurations of its buildings had not changed much until the discovery of oil. They all seemed to agree about four aspects of Kuwait in all the times: 1) al-Sabah as the political leader, 2) Kuwait's appropriate natural harbor, 3) the size of the Kuwait's population and their trading aspect, and 4) the existence of a wall around the town.

Furthermore, it is possible to conclude that throughout most of the period from the mid-eighteenth century to after the middle of the following century, the town of Kuwait was growing as an attractive settlement and enjoyed relative prosperity and internal harmony. It would be in order to examine the physical form of the town as it continued to develop until the end of 19th century and the beginning 20th century. The following account will highlight the Kuwait Town's earlier physical form and its urban patterns.

The town grew in area within the limits of its third wall, which was built in 1920. A few other small Kuwaiti villages and communities began to develop on the coastal areas to the south of the town. Until 1946, the beginning of Kuwait's new and modern era of development, the town evolution and urbanization were similar to the patterns common in other trading towns of the region, such as Bahrain.

The Old Town of Kuwait was established on a naturally protected sea bay that accommodated Kuwait's most important economic activities of trade, pearl-diving and fishing. Like many of the urban settlements and cities created in the Arab and Islamic world, Kuwait Old Town achieved a higher degree of harmony with its environment by the means of simplicity,

organism, and functionality: Old Town was compact and human in scale, and because walking was the major means of transportation, besides riding mules or a camel, distance and shortcut were crucial factors that shaped the location and the size of buildings in relation to other buildings. Therefore, souks and open spaces, houses and other buildings were located in narrow and winding alleys and walks (Fig. 38).

Figure 38 Aerial view showing part of Kuwait Town and its compact houses and narrow and winding alleys. Source: Kuwait Oil Company.

5.1 The Town's Main Structures

Since its origin, Kuwait Town grew in an oval shape. The essential urban elements were the coastal area, the residential quarters consisting mainly of courtyard houses, and the souk streets area (Fig. 39). The town was surrounded by a wall extending from the sea on the east to the sea again on the west, the purpose of which was to protect the inhabitants from the attacks of the desert tribes, and it had a number of gates with cemeteries located outside the wall. This section examines

Kuwait Town's major traditional elements as urban settlement through the examination of the social principles that relate to traditional building rules.

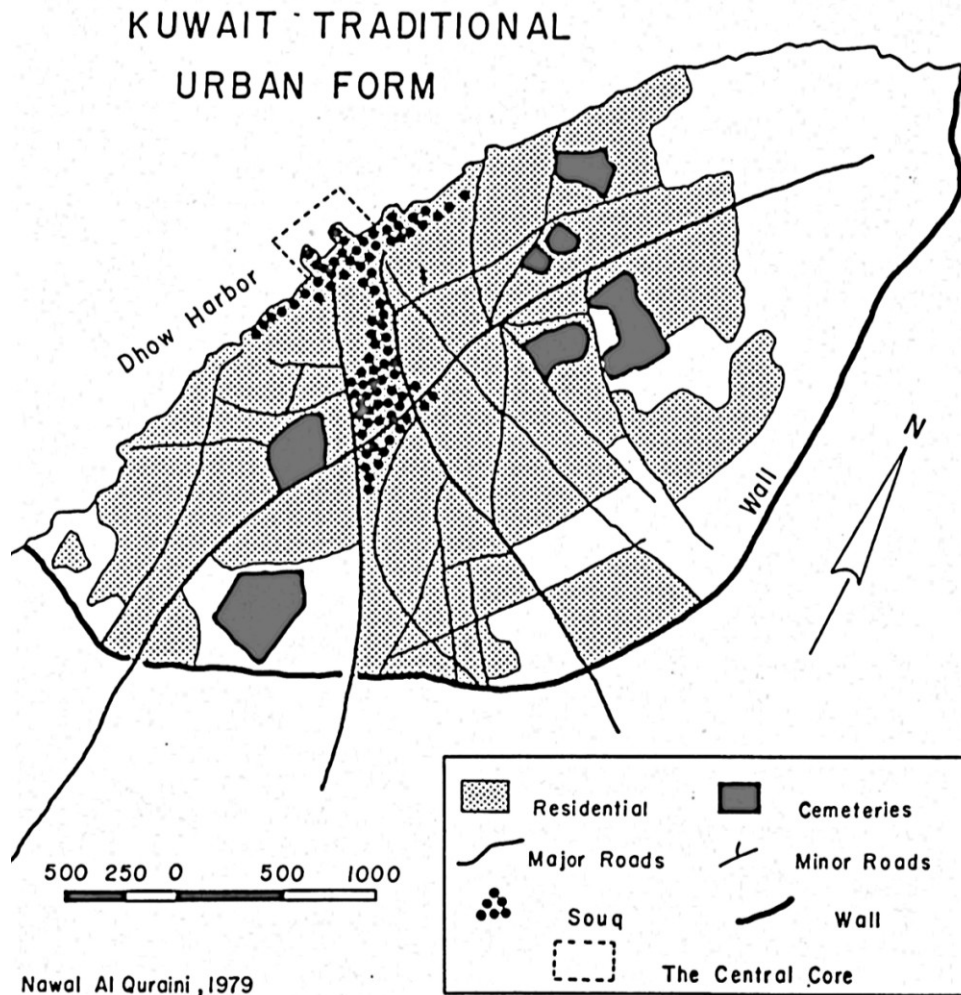**Figure 39 Kuwait's major areas up to the 1940s. Source: al-Quraini, 1979.**

5.1.1 Street System and the Art of Walking

Street systems in the traditional environment were primarily of two types: the through street, which was considered a public right-of-way and had to be at least wide enough for two packed camels or mules to pass; and the cul-de-sac which, according to Islamic law, is considered

to be the private property of the people having access it to from their front doors. Following the Islamic teaching that stated that "if you disagree about the width of a street, make it seven cubits," in which the cubit is about forty six to fifty cm (or 3.23 to 3.50 m. total), making it the basis width that would allow two fully loaded camels to pass at the same time.[187] The minimum height of the through street is also 3.23, corresponds to the maximum vertical height of a camel with the highest load (Fig. 40).

The cul-de-sac or dead-end street is a semiprivate street that allows movement between neighbors' houses without emergence into a wholly public street. It was created in two ways, either planned by a group of individuals who decided to settle in a large land and designated part of it to be dead-end street; therefore, it became a private street. Or it might emerge over time by incremental growth (Fig. 42).

5.1.1.1 The Concept of *Fina* and the Development of Traditional Street Form

The irregularity of the traditional streets in Old Kuwait was greatly influenced by two major traditional principles: revivification as explained in the previous chapter, and the concept of *fina* (Fig. 41). A *fina* was the width of about one meter adjoining the edge of a building and extending vertically along the surface of the façade, which the owner or inhabitant had certain rights for using, such as *sabat*. *Sabat* was an element above the street that was often projected as cantilevers. Such projections were permissible because the roads in the traditional Kuwait Town, were the remains of the revived dead-lands. The lands of the road could not be revived because they became the passers' movement way. In contrast, the *sabat* over the street did not block the passers' path, therefore, it was allowed to be build over the street as long as it was higher than a loaded camel.

---

[187] Besim S. Hakim, *Arabic-Islamic Cities : Building and Planning Principles* (London ; New York: KPI, 1986), 146.

Sabat was a room bridging the street, and the buttressing arches spanned between the walls on either side of the street to provide structural strength and support for the opposite walls (Fig. 43). The use of *sabat* was especially encouraged when owners needed to add more rooms to the house but there was no ground space left.
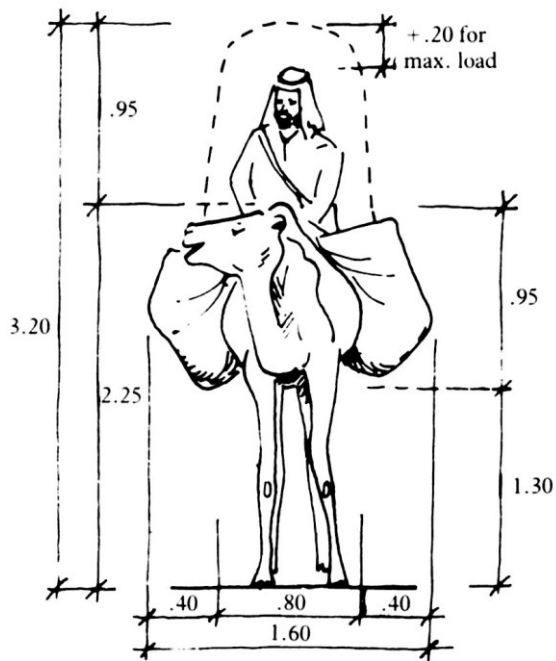
Figure 40 Maximum horizontal and vertical dimensions of a fully loaded mature Arabian camel. Source: Hakim, 1986.
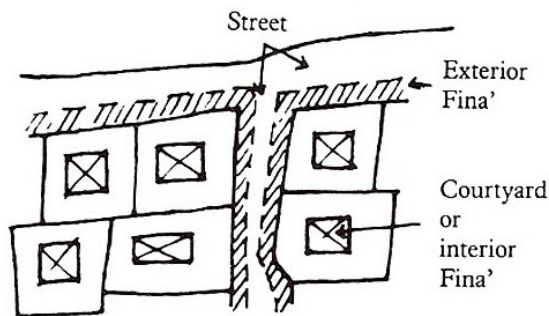
Figure 41 *Fina* rights in traditional Kuwait. Source: Hakim, 1986.

stage 1   stage 2   stage 3   stage 4
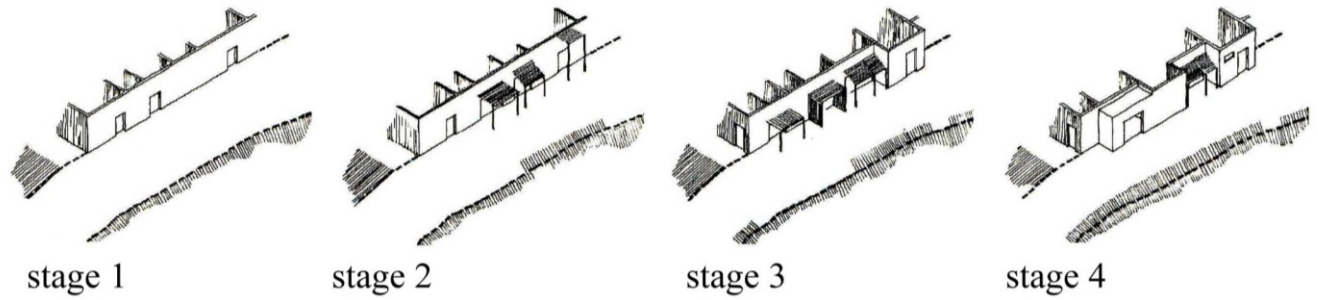
Figure 42 *Fina* **rights and the development of street. Source: Akbar, 1992.**
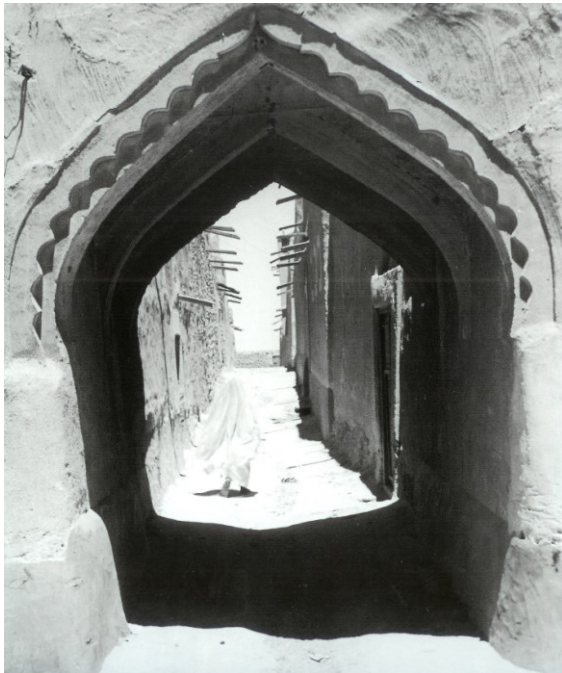
Figure 43 Traditional Kuwait *sabat*. **Source: Facey, 1998.**

5.1.2 Residential Areas: Urban Form Follows Social Organization

The residential areas were distributed throughout Old Town's three areas, and later in the

Mirqab area. The Qibla and Sharq areas were the largest populated districts. They both expanded

around the sea-front and traditionally have had the most affluent of Kuwait's population, including

sheikhs, merchants and sea captains. The number of Kuwaiti houses by 1914 was estimated as

3500 with the population of more than 35,000. [188] The traditional houses were single-story, made of roughly fashioned sun-dried mud bricks or lumps of coral. Like most Arab cities, the residential areas were densely built up and honeycombed with alleys and passageways which gave shade against the hot sun and protection against sandstorms. Houses were flat-roofed and usually enclosed within courtyards by high walls.

When the third wall was built in 1920, Kuwait Town developed into four major zones. In Old Kuwait, socio-urban characteristics persisted until the introduction of Kuwait's first urban planning in 1951. These socio-urban processes inculcated a social basis to urban fabric in the form of the *freej*, a residential block or neighborhood that was originated from relative or kinship bases such as tribal or family bases. As discussed in the previous chapter, the traditional planning and property ownership principles began with the ceding of urban space to tribe, family, or a group of people who may have been related by kinship, descent, common origin or function. They might have been allotted a space by the ruler within the evolving urban space of the town, or they might have simply marked a territory by themselves and revived it. In both cases, the dividing details of the arrangement were left to them.

At first one could not have recognized the hierarchy of the roads and the major urban patterns in Old Kuwait. From the point of view of engineering, there is no one straight street or one orthogonal residential block in the Town. The Old Town urban forms followed the social organization and produced urban patterns that were social in origin and in nature. Within each tribal area the tribe itself created plots for its constituent families, and secondary roads would emerge giving access to the core residential blocks. Over the generations, however, each plot

---

[188] Lewcock and Freeth, 14.

would be subdivided many times according to Islamic law. The most obvious indicator of such family plots were the cul-de-sac or dead-end streets.

5.1.2.1 Micro-social Unit: *Freej*

Freej was the basic residential block or neighborhood that was often inhabited by an extended family in Old Kuwait. Early settlers in Kuwait came from different surrounding regions such as Najd, Iraq, Persia, and Arabian Desert. The position of a *freej* to Sief Palace, which was the initial central node in the early 18th century, corresponds to the social standing of the *freej*. The closer the location of a *freej* to the old center, the earlier arrival and the higher social standing it held. The Wasat area, for example, contained prominent *ferjan* (plural) such as the ruling family *freej* and many merchants' families.

Each *freej* had its own social products and produced distinguished architectural products. The most important architectural product of each *freej* was a mosque in the local square named after a donor from within this *freej*, "a custom which has proven of inestimable value in identifying old town locations when all other landmarks have disappeared."[189]

Sharq, Jiblah and Wasat were the oldest quarters that can be traced back to the early settlements in Kuwait. As in many Arab cities, the micro unit in building these major quarters was based on tribal foundation. Within the quarter of each tribe's area are substructure units of a family area that form the basic urban patterns. Such a basic unit was known as *fereej*.[190] These *ferjan* or neighborhoods were each dominated by a single extended family. Most of these families came

---

[189] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 177.
[190] *Freej* is singular, *ferjan* is plural.

from Najd in central Arabia such as al-Sabah family; from eastern Arabia such as Hasawia families; others came from southern Iraq or from Persia's coastal towns.

The Old Town was generally divided into three major areas or neighborhoods, with the fourth neighborhood as the most recent one. Each of these areas contained its residential as well as its other functional areas such as mosques, public squares and cemetery. This type of division with further sub-divisions and elements of form and function within the town structure are attributes that are common to Arabic and Islamic cities. The four major quarters (Fig. 44) were Sharq in the east, Jibla in the west, Wasat at the center, and Mirqab in the southwest.[191]
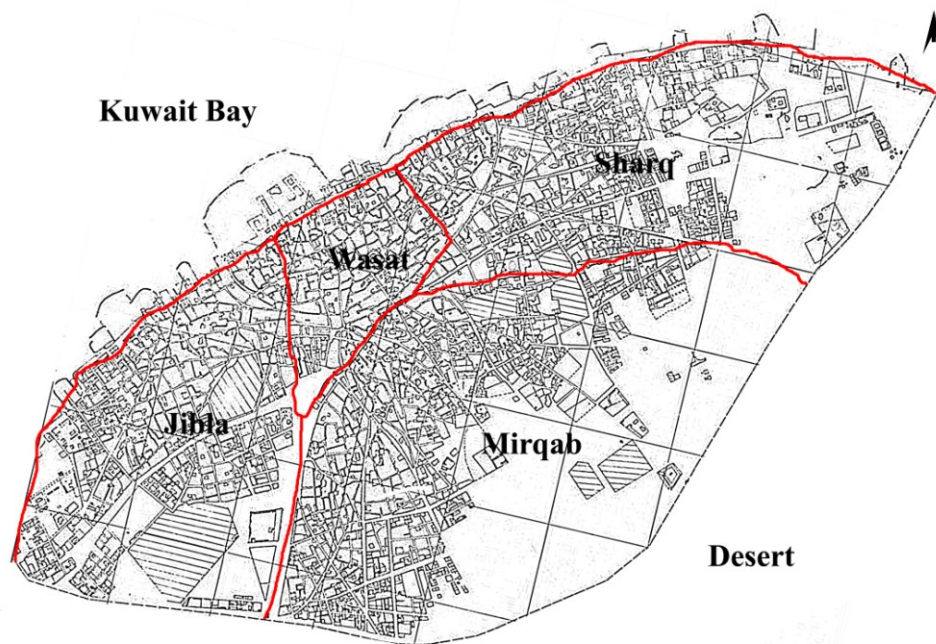

Figure 44 Kuwait Town major residential areas as in 1951. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1980. Author's emphasis.

5.1.2.1.1 Wasat Area

---

[191] Ffrench and Joint, *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, 35.

Wasat area was the smallest area in Old Kuwait, containing only 120 families. It was the oldest and most important area in Old Kuwait. It was first settled by Bani Khalid and in the early 18th century by the *Utub* tribe ever since. The relative position of each *fereej* to Kuwait's initial harbor center was crucial to earlier settlers. Logically, the closer the location of *freej* to the Old Town center dented earlier arrival and settlement. In addition, proximity to the town center meant higher social standing of the family, therefore, the *Wasat* area, which in Arabic means the middle quarter between *Sharq* and *Jibla* areas, was first settled by the *Utub* families. Al-Sabah family, part of the *Utub* tribe, was the first to settle in the *Wasat* area, particularly in and around an area that used to be called *buhaitah*.[192] *Freej* al-Shouikh (sheikhs' freej), as its name tells, was one the oldest and most popular areas in Old Kuwait. It was mainly occupied by al-Sabah families. Their houses were found at the heart of the Old Town such as Seif palace, the most important building in the old town. *Freej Jena'at* was a famous neighborhood from which famous Kuwaiti merchants, religious men (imam), and historians such as Yousif al-Jenae came. In 1927, this neighborhood was considered a small block containing only 200 souls.[193] *Freej* al-Awazim was a residential area for families from al-Awazim tribe of whom most of its members lived in Kuwait's desert areas outside the Third Wall. A tribal area is only very loosely defined on the ground. Generally, *Wasat* quarter has few residential sections, however, it includes most of the traditionally significant areas of the Old Town such as the souks, Safat, the harbor, and the old Customs House.

Sharq Area:

Sharq area contained about 490 families by the 1930s. Settlers who came to Kuwait after the

---

[192] Basem Al-Loughani, *Kuwait in Black and White* (Kuwait 2007), 146.
[193] Trench, v.2, 8.

al-Sabah family, built their houses to the east of al-Sabah family houses, thus, that area has been called *Sharq* area ever since. By the early 20th century the eastern part of Sharq area housed many important large scale buildings such as the Dasman Palace, the building of British Political Agent (it later became the British Embassy), and sheikh Khazal's palace (Fig. 45 and 46). *Freej* Ibn Khamis was one of Sharq area's neighborhoods named after the al-Khamis prominent family as well as a wharf.

Freej al-Yahud (Jews' neighborhood) was one of the famous quarters in the Sharq area. The first group of Jews settled in Kuwait in 1895, was only ten persons. During Shiekh Mubarak the Great's reign (1896-1915), rapid developments in "infrastructure, services, and commercial opportunities began to attract people from surrounding counties, a larger number of Jews, estimated at 100-200 by 1908, arrived."[194] Lorimer in 1917 estimated that the number of Jewish families was 83 and had their own synagogue.[195] In 1927, their numbers increased to 161 souls. Few of them were merchants, but the majority were cloth sellers and goldsmiths.[196] Kuwaitis liked these Jewish families as they integrated into Kuwait society.[197] Whereas English-speaking Christian missionaries were initially banned from residence in Kuwait and faced difficulty finding Kuwaitis who would let property to Christians, Jews in Kuwait at the time were able to rent and buy property.[198]Mubarak the Great was reluctant to allot a land for the American Mission Hospital and it was not until years later that he granted them land in 1913.

Freej al-Yahud was not "surrounded by walls, nor some of the Jews lived in other neighborhoods,"[199] it was rather in the heart of Old Town close to the market areas in which many

---

[194] Alkanderi: 448.
[195] Lorimer, 1050.
[196] Trench, v.2, 8.
[197] Alkanderi.
[198] Ibid.: 453.
[199] Ibid.: 447.

of the Jews used to sit in *Abu-Nashi* coffee shop, considered the most famous coffee shop at that time.
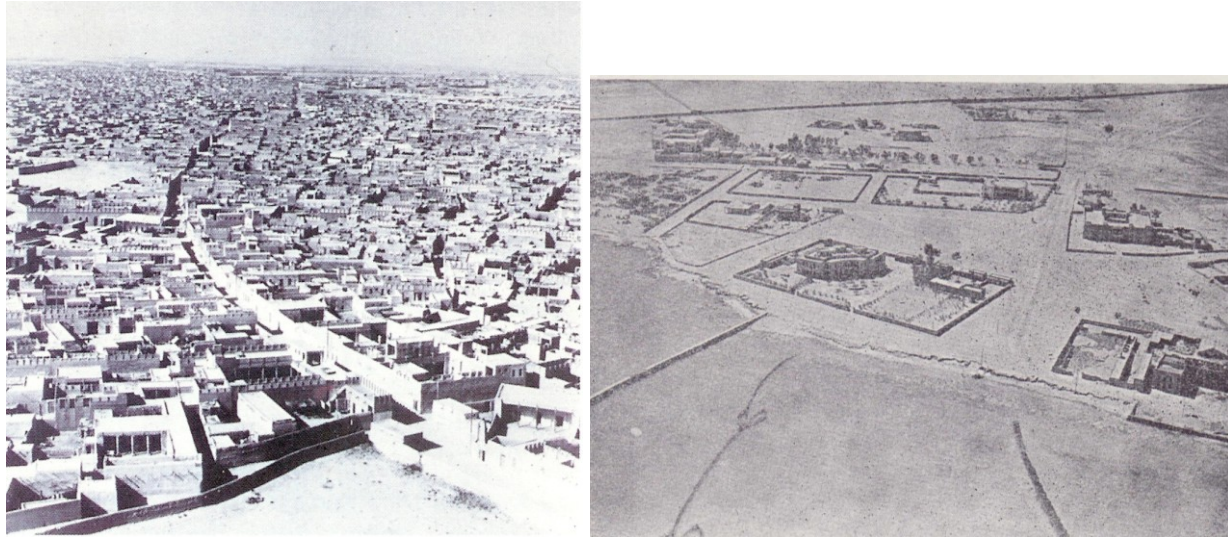
Figure 45 Oblique view of Sharq area in 1940s, the curved path was created by the second wall. Source: Fullerton and Fehérvári, 1995.

Figure 46 The eastern part of Sharq area, showing Dasman palace in the background and political agent at the front. Source: Shiber, 1964.

Jibla Area

Jibla area was placed at the western part of Old Kuwait and contained about 430 families (Fig. 47). *Freej Saud* belonged to the Saud family and was one of the most populated neighborhoods in Jiblah area. One of the distinctive features of *freej* Saud was that the houses were very compact and close to each others to the degree that no camel could pass through their alleys.[200] This *freej* was one of the earlier neighborhoods in the Jibla area as it was close to *Fardha* and Sief Palace. It was stuck in the middle between other neighborhoods and Sief Street in the north, therefore, it could not extend further with any addition or extension of its houses had to utilize every vacant plot within the neighborhood, leading eventually to reducing the width of its alleys.

---

[200] عادل عبدالغني
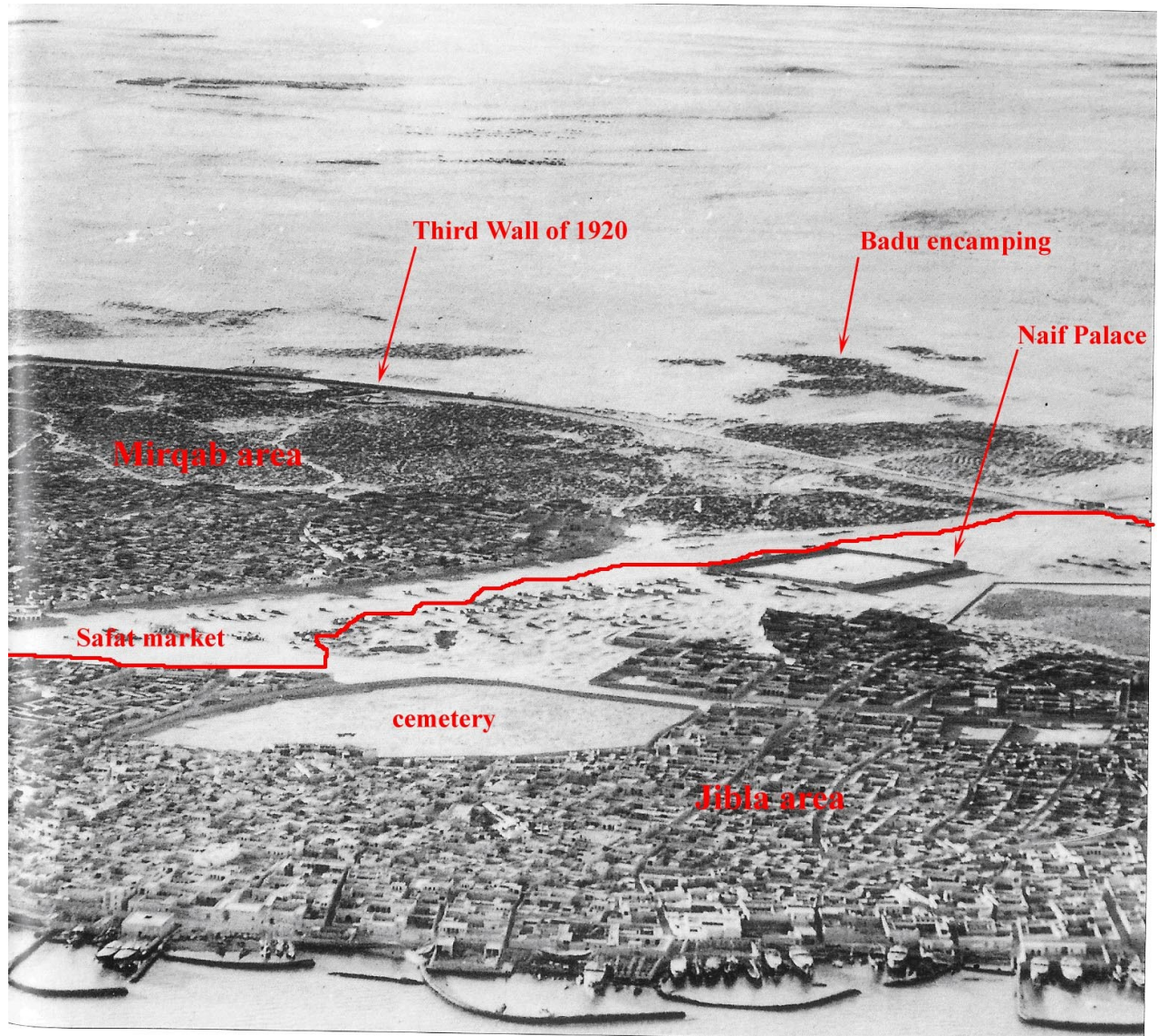
Figure 47 One of the early significant pictures of Kuwait, taken in 1927, showing the Jibla area in the front and the new Mirgab area in the back with the Third Wall wrapping the town. Outside the wall a new Badu settlement taking place. Source: Facey, 1998.

Mirqab Area:

The Mirqab area was the latest residential area as it was the farthest from the sea and the center of the town. It was also the most populated area. The houses in this area were smaller compared to those of Sharq and Jibla areas. Mirqab houses were built in a relatively short time to house Kuwaitis' young generations and immigrant laborers who came during the early years of the

20th century.

To summarize, since the al-Sahah ruled Kuwait in the middle of the eighteenth century, Kuwait town constantly grew and attracted many merchants and immigrants from sea and desert. The Old Town merged the new settlers in functional and organic urban patterns that followed their social and cultural values. The *freej* was the micro social unit that consisted of a large and extended family. The location of a *freej* within the Old Town's residential areas connoted its social and financial status. The Wasat area housed the ruling family and many merchant families. Jibla and Sharq areas were the places in which most of the expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took place. Mirgab was the latest and most populated area in the Old Town by the mid twentieth century.

6 THE TRADITIONAL SOUK

The souk has traditionally been the commercial centre of the Arab town.[201] In Kuwait Old Town the major economic activities were closely related to the sea such as fishing and pearl diving since they were the main source of livelihood for the town. Kuwait Harbor, the *Fardha*, was a major sea port in the northern part of the Arabian Gulf, importing and exporting light industries and handcrafts, and also ship building and maintenance, and diving equipment manufacture and maintenance. The sea trading activities were concentrated around the *Fardha*, Old Kuwait's major harbor. On the other hand, Safat Square accommodated the desert trading activities that mainly dealt with the Bedouin tribes coming from the Arabian Desert (Fig. 48).

This chapter examines Old Kuwait's three major areas that dominated commercial activities, each of which had its own spatial character: the *Sief* Street area, *Safat* Square, and the central souk area. *Sief* Street specialized in wholesale trade. *Safat* Square, an important feature of the town, represented one end of the souk and served as the point of arrival and departure for camel caravans coming from and leaving for the desert. The central souk area with its various sub-souks was the most dynamic area in which most of sales took place. The names of these traditional souks often reveal the type of commercial activities taking place, for example, *amarah* meant warehouse, *saha* meant a central place specialized in specific work.

---

[201] Souk is a noun that means a market, or part of a market, in an Arab city. Retrieved in July 17, 2009 from website: http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/souk
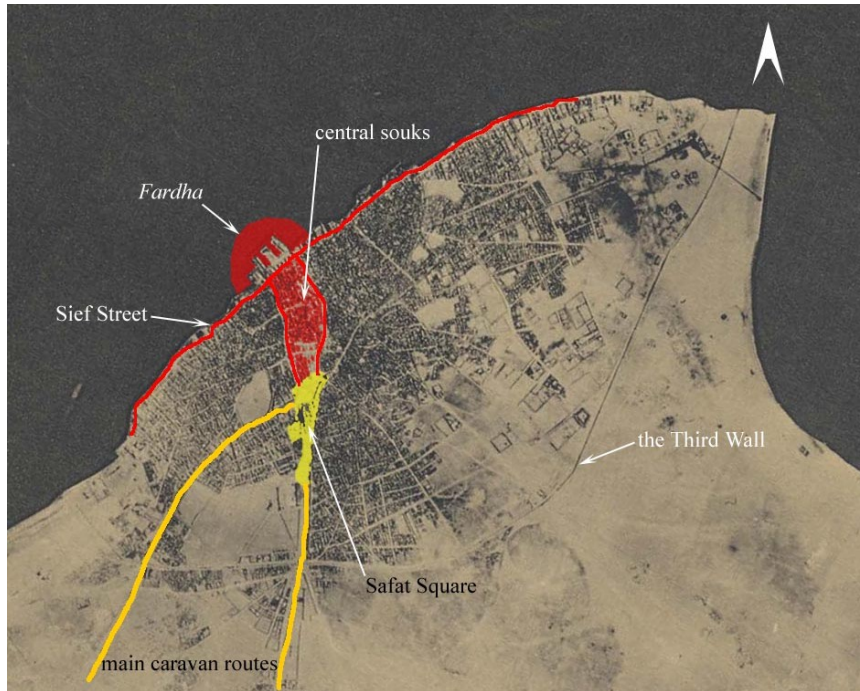
Figure 48 Aerial map of Kuwait at 1952. Major commercial places highlighted. Source: Kuwait Municipality. Author's emphasis.

6.1 Sief Street:

Sief Street was the oldest and longest street in Old Kuwait and was stretching for more than six kilometers in length within the third walled town. Most of the important traditional Kuwaiti buildings were located on *Sief* Street, including *Sief* Palace, al-Khalifa mosque, al-Bader house, and Dickson's house. *Sief* Street forms a long, thin strip following the coast line. This layout of *Sief* Street arose from the constrictions of the site over three centuries, forcing extreme linear extension before extending in depth. The original growth began around the *Sief* Palace in the Harbor area because it was the urban commercial core where the importing and exporting ships loaded and unloaded. Most of the Kuwaiti merchants built and owned their *neq'a* or wharfs besides their *amarat* (a wholesale storage building type), thus, a series of small harbors were created along the coast resulting in the elongation of *Sief* Street. The thin stretch form of *Sief* Street arose because it was easier to extend along the coast before expanding deep in the town (Fig. 49).
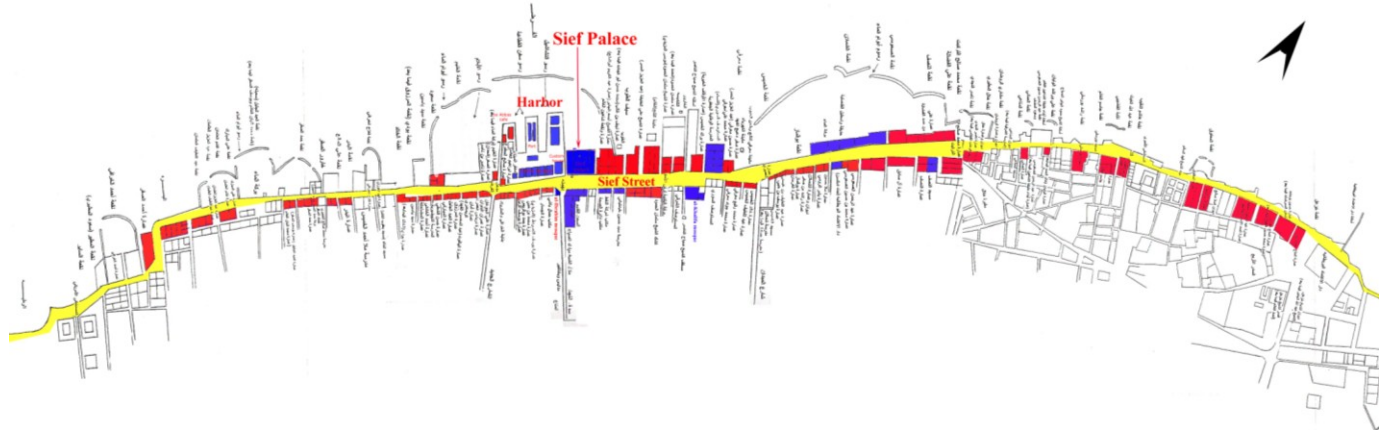
Figure 49 a map of *Sief* Street in 1951. Source: Jamal, 2004. Yellow: Sief Street. Red: amarat (wholesale storges). Blue: governmental buildings. Author's emphasis.

Sief Street became the edge separating land from sea and delineating the northern edge of the town, just as the wall surrounded the town from the south. Unlike other streets, the originality of the Sief Street's boundary was maintained throughout the centuries. The only reclaimed land from sea was Sief Palace and the extention of *Fardha*.

Besides its major function as the main commercial spine street in Old Kuwait, Sief Street was also the most entertaining place in the town. Different activities were taking place at the same time. The passers-by enjoyed the diverse places and buildings on this street. The most important feature, however, that every Kuwaiti enjoyed, was the scene of the sea itself. Families whose houses stood on the Sief Street, could enjoy the scene from their roofs. But the majority of Kuwaitis went to Sief Street daily for several reasons; women would go there for washing clothes during which they could gather and socialize. Kids went there to play, swim and race with their peers. Men went there for their work as sailors, sellers, and general workers. The whole family would go all together to celebrate the long awaited return of Kuwaiti ships from India or Africa, events which were full of emotions. Other events for the whole family to see and celebrate were the sheikh ceremonial events and the launching of a newly built Kuwaiti ship (Fig. 52).

116

Besides the main Kuwait Harbor—used to be called *Fardha*—there were two main features running along Sief Palace; on the sea side the main feature was the *neqa'a*, on the land side *amarat* (plural of *amarah*) were the main architectural features (Fig. 51).
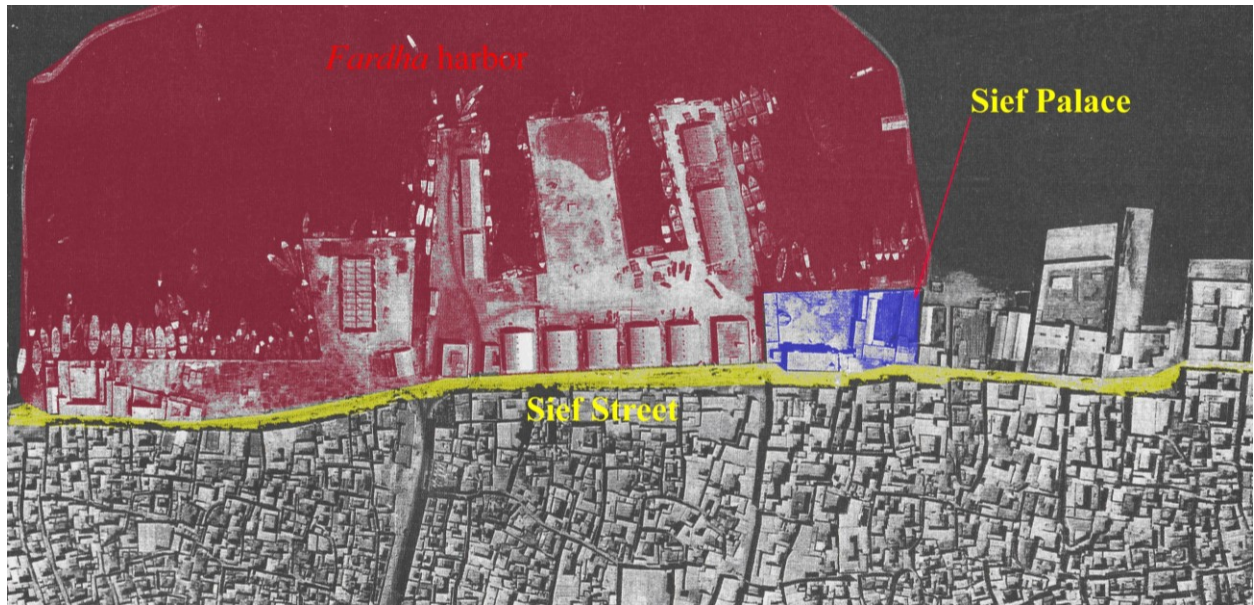
Figure 50 *Sief* **Street and the three major features running along it. Credit: Kuwait Municipality. 1951. Colored by the author.**

Figure 51 *Sief* **Street as the main spinal commercial and entertaining street in Old Kuwait. Source: Facey, 1998.**

Figure 52 Launching a new boat on Sief Street, 1912. Source: Abu Hakima, 1984.

6.1.1 Neqah (harbor)

Neqah was the Kuwaiti traditional name for the little harbors in Old Kuwait (Fig. 53). Most of the prominent merchant families of Kuwait built their own harbors were named after themselves such as el-Khamis and al-Shamlan *neqa'h*. Some of these harbors were known for their specialty in particular commercial services such al-Shamlan *neqah* which had reservoirs for storing water brought from Shatt el-Arab in southern Basra.[202]

In its basic form, *neqah* was a small harbor surrounded by an artificial wall of sea rocks. It was used for protecting ships and boats from windstorms and strong tides, as well as for ship maintenance work. The *neqah* often had two openings, one to the east and one to the west to keep the water inside always fresh. The height of the *neqah* wall was one and half meters tall where it started on the shore and went to more than four meters deep in the water. The width of its base was

---

[202] Mohammad A. Jamal, *The Old Souk of Kuwait* (Kuwait Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait 2004), 79.

often seven meters, gradually narrowing to one and half meter at the top.[203] Up to the middle of 20th century there were about forty *neqah*, stretching from the east of old Kuwait town to its west border. They varied in size and shape: small and large, often with two openings but some having no defined entrances.

Figure 53 Neqaa or wharfs in Jibla area after 1951. Source: Jamal, 2004.

6.1.2 Fardha

Fardha was the main and the biggest harbor in Old Kuwait; it was mainly used by large trading ships.[204] This harbor was located at the center of Old Kuwait's coast and west of *Sief* Palace (Fig. 50). *Fardha* was always busy with incoming and outgoing large boats that were trading with northern Gulf harbors, including Basra and several Persian harbors.[205] The layout of

---

[203] Ibid., 116.
[204] Ibid., 19.
[205] Ibid., 28.

Fardha consisted of a large empty platform for loading and unloading; during loading and unloading time the taxes were collected by workers operating from a small free-standing building in the center of the platform (Fig. 54). The *Fardha* was divided into three zones; each specialized in a certain kind of goods. The central area was mainly reserved for cereal, dates, and wheat. The east area was for construction material such as wood, and the west area was where daily vegetables and fruits imported every day from Iraq and Iran could be found.

Figure 54 *Fardha* in the early twentieth century. The small building was the custom house. Credit: Jamal, 2004.

6.1.3 Amarat (Wholesale storages)

Commercial buildings dominated the coastal line of Old Kuwait along Sief Street and concentrated around *Fardha* area. *Amarah* was principally a retailing warehouse for storing the imported bulk goods and selling them wholesale. There were more than seventy *amarat* in Old Kuwait by the 1940s.

The *amarat* were referred to by the merchant's name, for example, al-Romi's *amarat*, al-Zabn's *amarat*, and al-Nisf's *amarat*. This type of building also specialized in ship building materials as well as construction materials. Many of the Kuwaiti merchants brought mangrove, bamboo, fishing equipment, clothes, and so forth from Basra, Iran, Eastern Africa such as

Zanzibar, India, and elsewhere. All goods were unloaded directly from boats and stored in the *amarat*. A small office fronted the street, from which goods would then be sold. This also fulfilled a social function, the merchant would meet his friends and entertain them with tea or coffee whilst discussing matters of mutual interest. The layout of *amarah* in its simplest design was a courtyard building with a vast, open, and central court. The plan of *amarat* can be classified into two types, central plan and linear plan.

The central plan had a central courtyard or an open court for warehousing with several storage shelves or rooms surrounding. A good example of a central plan was al-Ayyob's *amarah* (Fig. 55).
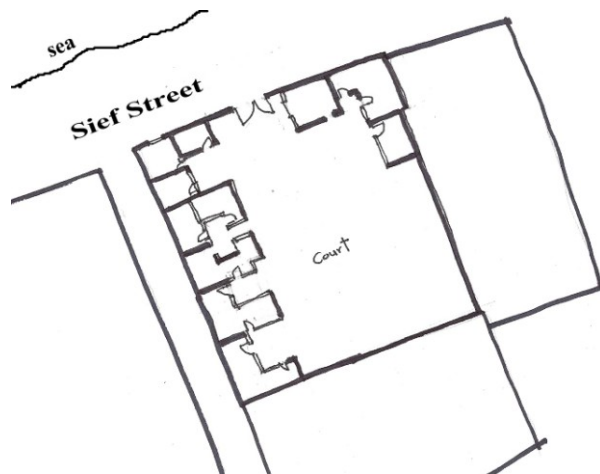
Figure 55 Al-Ayyoub's *amarah*. Source: author, 2009.

The linear plan was also common in Old Kuwait but generally smaller than those of central courts. The linear *amarah* often had two stories, with the first used as shops and the upper as a residential accommodation as in Ibn Khamis block (Fig. 56). This block was located on Sief Street and consisted of three different building types, with the mosque appurtenances spread among the *amarat* shops and the house (Fig. 56-b). In this complex, with the exception of the mosque, reported to be originally built in 1772, the *amarat* and the house were in use since the late 19th

century.[206] The ablution court lies sandwiched between a small house and a shop, with living accommodations over. A further entrance passageway runs down to the sea between the two *amarat* shops. The storage area mainly consisted of storerooms made of wood whose internal height reached six meters.

6.2   Safat Market:

The central square of Kuwait Town was called *Safat* Square and has always been a notable feature as it was the largest public space in Old Kuwait. *Safat* is a name derived from the Arabic word *safa* meaning vast and clean space. *Safat* Square was a vast open area at the south entrance of the Town from which a network of major commercial streets began. It provided a welcoming urban relief for the whole town's inhabitants, and "simultaneously provided a sufficiently spacious urban enclosure, and a protected haven for camel caravans coming to the end of harsh journeys through vast desert expanses."[207] *Safat* square originated as a departure and arrival trading point for the desert caravans crossing the Arabian Desert. These caravans, often organized by heads of Bedouin tribes, brought different commodities, mainly camel and sheep products as well as desert firewood that were used as logs in Kuwaiti traditional houses. In exchange, these caravans often filled their needs by buying dates, textiles, cereal and grain from Kuwait. Before the erection of the third wall in 1920, the *Safat* area was undefined, however, the whole empty space south of the Wasat area stretching west to reach *dehla* cemetery and south to reach *Naif* Palace was all called *Safat* (Fig. 57).

---

[206] Kuwait Municipality, "Sharq Al-Sief Area: Planning & Schematic Design," ed. Municipality of Kuwait (Municipality of Kuwait, 1989), 83.
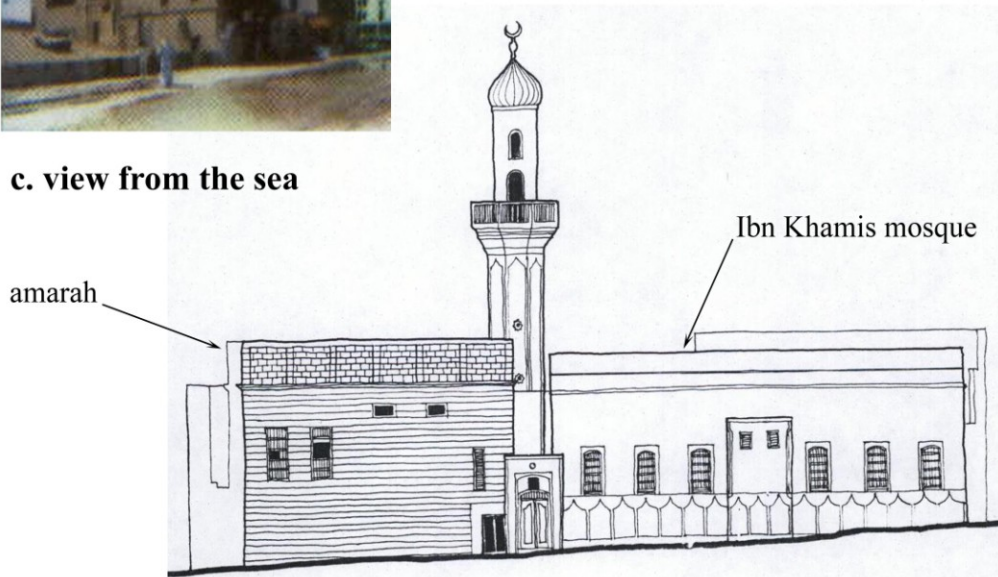[207] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 180.

a. site plan

b. plan

c. view from the sea

d. west elevation

Figure 56 Ibn Khamis block, including mosque, *amarat* shops, and a house. Kuwait Municipality, 1987. Author's emphasis.

In 1914, Mubarak the Great built a small free-standing building in the centre of Safa*t* as a custom house for collecting taxes from Badu traders who used to shop near Safat square in the stalls that specialized in goods they normally sought, including weapons, leather goods, tents and rope. This custom house was moved, after building the third wall, and located next to the *Shamiya* gate.

Besides its main function as a trading place, two other important functions took place in Safat Square. The major public events such as celebrating Eids, victories, and celebrating the inauguration of rulers all took place in *Safat*. Different traditional men's dances and shows were practiced and attended by Kuwaiti rulers and sheikhs. During Eids, many children's traditional games took place such as swing and horse and camel riding.

The other major event in *Safat* Square was the daily meeting of the Security Council that took place on the east side of *Safat*. The duty of this council was to punish thieves and murderer in public. Some of the sheikhs, accompanied by religious judges and guards, sat every day in front of the council building witnessing the physical execution of the punishment, which mostly was by lash.

During the 1920s and 30s, *Safat* Square was surrounded by important governmental and commercial buildings such as the Security Council, Court, and al-Ghanim shops. One of *Safat*'s daily activities was the brewing of fresh coffee by various coffee houses. At the center of *Safat* Badu used to gather daily and build their huts, which provided shadow while they exchanged news in the course of their shopping expeditions in Kuwait's souks.[208]

It was in the *Safat* where the sea and the desert economies and cultures interfaced and fused. Imported goods flowed into the town at the *Fardha,* and were redirected through the

---

[208] Ffrench and Joint, *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*, 32.

bazaars of the souk to *Safat* Square. In the city's permanent marketplace, imported commodities were exchanged with members of the nearby Bedouin tribes for essential animal and dairy products and loom-woven textiles. South of *Safat* Square was a permanent caravan encampment and open air market, features which have been extensively recorded in the early European photography of the town.

Figure 57 Safat Square in 1934. Source: Abu Hakima, 1984.

6.3   Central Souk

The area between Safat Square and Sief Street was a maze of narrow and twisting lanes and streets, some covered with rough matting, others covered by temporary duster (screen), and each had a number of stalls selling similar goods (Fig. 58). The central souk was naturally divided into various districts according to the nature of each activity. The blacksmiths' souk for example, occupied a district that was only reserved and specialized in blacksmiths' works. Within these

districts most accommodation would be devoted to one category of shop or workshop. The national or family connections with craft and trade may be summarized as follows. Family names sometimes derived from the type of work that they were famous at, for example, *as Safafir* were copper-workers, *as Saghah* were goldsmiths, *al-Hadda* were Blacksmiths, *al-Najar* were carpenters, and *al-Galalif* were boat-builders.

The commercial core of Old Kuwait was the central souk and its many stalls, concentrated at the heart of the town. Figure 58 shows the traditional souk areas stretching from Safat Square towards the dhow harbor and the Ruler's Palace on the waterfront. This block between Safat and the sea was a maze of narrow twisting lanes, some of them roofed with traditional rush matting. Each of these lanes contained a row of small stalls, mostly selling closely allied goods.

6.3.1 The Merchants' Market: Souq al-tujjar

The Merchants' Market was the oldest and most important market in Kuwait.[209] It was located south of the old sea port, facing Sief Palace and extended southwards and connecting to another major market that was called *souq el-dakli*. It was a wholesale market for major commodities such as spices, sugar, rice, clothes, etc. The Merchants' Market was covered with a ceiling made from straw mats, as were the other markets. In the early days of modernization in Kuwait, the Merchants' Market was the preferred place for establishing modern institutions such as banks, services, insurance companies and other services. For instance, the first electric company in Kuwait was established in 1934 and its head office stood in the Merchants' Market.

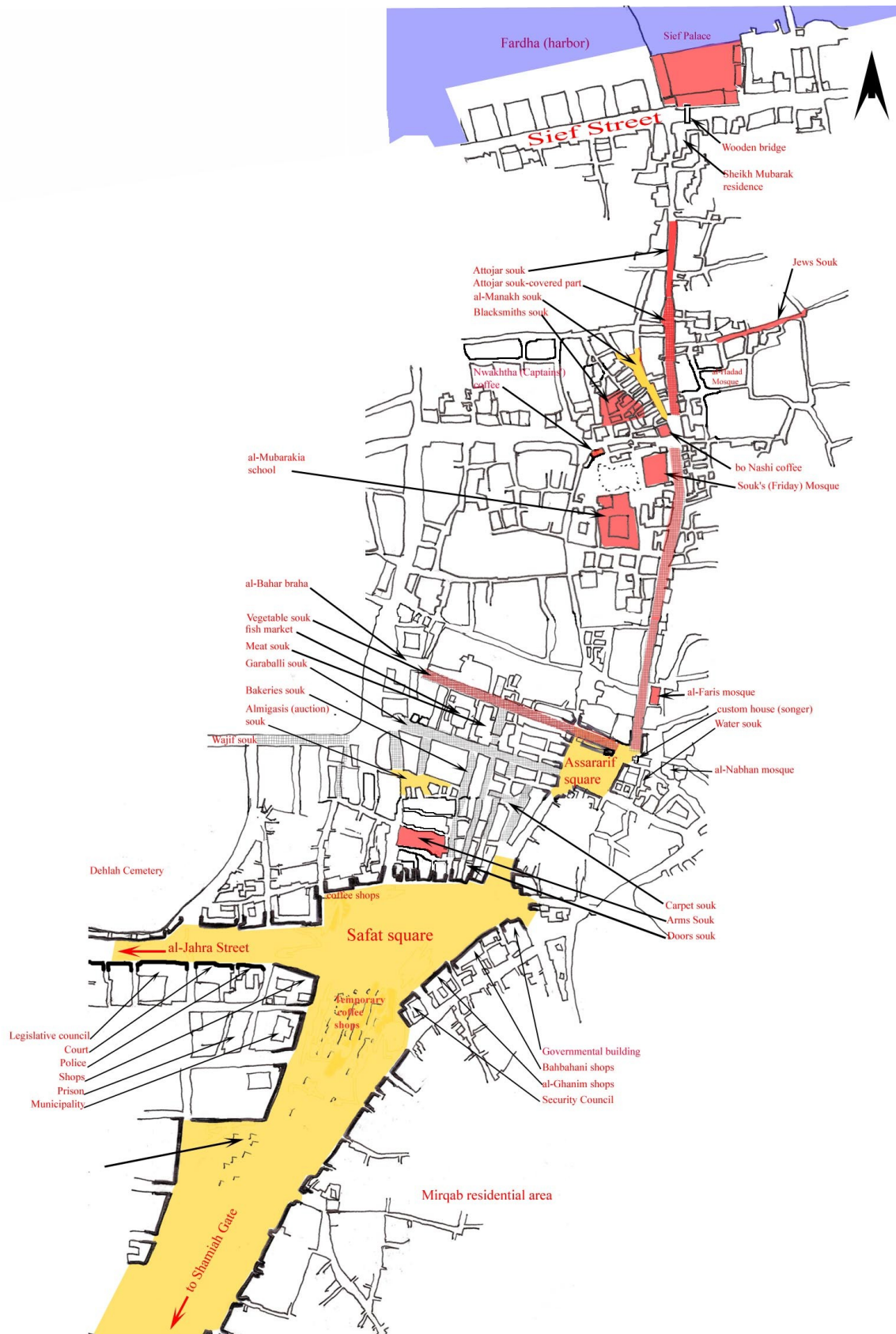
[209] Jamal, *The Old Souk of Kuwait* 10.

Figure 58 plan of Kuwait's souk areas in the early 1940s. Source: Author, 2009

6.3.2 al-Dakhli market (souq al-Dakhli)

Al-Dakh1i means interior, which explains the name of this market. It was located in the central part of the old city. That traditional retail market can be considered as an extension of the Merchants' Market, and housed retail shops, especially during the period prior to 1900. Within this market, there were many shops offering meat, fish, rice, wheat, spices, vegetables, fabrics, china household items and utensils, plants or herbs used for drugs, dates, etc.

The *Al-Dakhli* Market started to change at the beginning of the 20th century, when Kuwait's economy witnessed remarkable growth. Increased trade with India, after steamships started visiting Kuwait twice a month was the result of the Protection Agreement signed by Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah with Great Britain. Several new markets were built during that period and old markets started to deal in more specialized products. A lot of old shops moved from *Al-Dakhli* souk to other new locations, and new shops opened instead during the 1920s, selling fabrics, household items and clothes. Tailors and bookshops were also opened to meet the rising demand, as a result of the economic development and the opening of Mubarkya School in 1912 adjacent to this Market. Several cafes and tea shops also opened to meet shopkeepers' and customers' requirements for popular drinks at midday and early evening. Shoppers also liked to relax and sip some tea and coffee and chat with each other after shopping (Fig. 59).

Figure 59 Souk al-Dakhli, the interior or the covered souk. Source: Facey, 1998.

6.3.2.1 Unit Shops

Unit shops of accommodation were adaptable as they could be used as shops, workshops or for storage, depending on the property market. In 1914, there were "about 500 shops" in Kuwait, specialized in all sort of commercial activities.[210] The front façade of a unit shop was generally three meters wide while its depth varied; six meters was the average length. The average height was about three meters, but some units had an internal height of about five meters. There was a mezzanine in the rear, reached by ladder and often used as storage. The only access was through the front door from the street as there were no windows, rear or side doors. The door of the unit

---

[210] Lewcock and Freeth, 14.

shop, as was the case in Kuwaiti traditional houses, was the only adorned element. It was a multi-leaf door secured only at night by a padlock. The shopkeeper or craftsmen sat in full view, and in direct, almost intimate, contact with the passers-by in the narrow street (Fig. 60).

Figure 60 A grocery unit shop in 1912. Source: Abu Hakima, 1984.

One of the famous souks in Old Kuwait was *souk el Beban* (doors' market). It took place in the area north of *Safat* Square (Fig. 58). This souk specialized in selling doors of all kinds (Fig. 61). The value of the main entrance door was an authentic Kuwaiti tradition. The external facades of the Kuwaiti traditional house were often plain and contained no decorations. The only exception was the main entrance door which was treated differently than the other parts of the external facades. The main door was the vulnerable threshold between the private household and the public; therefore, it was "accorded particular symbolic importance."[211] Kuwaitis usually decorated only the front door of their buildings, expressing taste and identity, as the "ornate front doors were

---

[211] Ernst J. Grube and George Michell, *Architecture of the Islamic World : Its History and Social Meaning* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

a signal of wealth to the passer-by."[212] The sophistication or level of such decoration depended on the financial ability and taste of the owner and that is why it represented the owner's social status. The doors of wealthy houses were made of big teak wood timbers and preciously ornamented with carvings and big round-headed nails.

Figure 61 one of old souks in Kuwait in 1920. Source: Abu Hakima, 1984.

There were many kinds of doors in Kuwaiti houses; the most prominent ones were the *Bousafaghah* door which was a one shutter door, the two shutters door, and the *Boukhokhah* door. The latter was the most famous of all doors. It was a huge door with an embedded small door at one of the lower corners (Fig. 62). The embedded small door allowed an individual to enter with no need to open the huge door, which was opened usually for the water man and his donkey and many other large objects. The embedded small door is called "*khokhah*" and usually a big ring attached to it.

---

[212] Michael Emmison and Philip Smith, *Researching the Visual : Images, Objects, Contexts and Interactions in Social and Cultural Inquiry*, Introducing Qualitative Methods. (London: SAGE, 2000), 155.

Figure 62 Door bo-khokha. Source: Rajab, 1997.

To conclude, Old Kuwait commercial activities took place in three major areas, each of which had its own spatial character: the *Sief* Street area, *Safat* Square, and the central souk area. *Sief* Street specialized in wholesale trade and featured *amarat* type or warehouse buildings that took two forms, the central plan and the linear one. *Safat* Square was a significant feature of Old Town and served as the point of arrival and departure for camel caravans coming from and leaving for the desert. The central souk area included various sub-souks and was the most dynamic commercial area in which most of the unit sales took place. The names of these traditional souks often reveal the type of commercial activities taking place, for example, *amarah* meant warehouse, and *saha* meant a central place specialized in specific work.

7 THE TRADITIONAL MOSQUE

7.1 Background of the origin of mosque architecture in Islam

The first mosque in Islam was built by Mohammad and his companions in Medina, in today's Saudi Arabia. It was a basic open courtyard space surrounded by walls of sun-baked brick, and the prayer hall was a rudimentary hypostyle construction. Attached to the wall of the courtyard was the Prophet Mohammed's house, which was simply a separated set of rooms, each of which had its own access to the courtyard.

According to *Sharea*, the Islamic teachings, the only significant requirement for building a mosque was the orientation; the prayer hall must face Mecca. Otherwise, the building was not considered a mosque. Other features were introduced later to mosque architecture such as the *mihrab,* a niche, which was usually located in the middle of the wall that faced Mecca; its function was to evoke the place where the preacher led the prayer. The minaret, which functions as a high place for the call to prayer, usually located outside the mosque, was also added later and it was believed to be introduced from the Pharaoh and Roman tower-watch.[213] Since ablution is required before praying, many mosques have a water fountain that usually contains running water. All these features, except the orientation to Mecca, are not required by Islamic law but were added later.

Mosques, because of their sacred function, were among the few traditional buildings that survived the widespread destruction and rebuilding that began in Kuwait in the mid-1950s. The mosque is an important building type within the context of Islamic architectural developments, and the significance in studying Kuwait's traditional mosque architecture is that most building types, ranging from the residential unit to the educational facility to the governmental building, were

---

[213] Grube and Michell.

www.manaraa.com

transformed completely with the arrival of 20th century modernity. The only building type "for which such drastic breaks have been avoided, and for which an element of continuity has been maintained with the pre-modern past, is the mosque."[214] The basic function of the mosque, the place for performing the prayer, has not undergone any change since the early Islamic period. Unlike the other building types that experienced revolutionary changes in both their functional and visual aspects, change in mosque architecture in Kuwait was evolutionary and slow. If the Kuwait government had not implemented the Mosque Reconstruction Project in 1953, the traditional features of Kuwait old mosques would have not changed at all.

7.2   Names of mosques

Not all the Kuwait traditional mosques are named after their major contributors or the builders who sponsored them. In fact, some of the traditional mosques have popular names other than their original owner or builder, for example, al-Sarhan mosque was originally built by Yasen Al-Gnaee in 1784 and was one of the early mosques of Kuwait. Its popular name was al-Sharhan after the al-Sharhan family.

As in many Islamic settlements, mosques were significant buildings. Most of the prominent Kuwaiti families have "a mosque in the local square bearing the name of a donor from within that clan, a custom which was proven important in identifying old town locations when all other landmarks have disappeared."[215] Building a mosque was an important way to prove and maintain the family's domination of a neighborhood, but the primary reason was purely religious.

7.3   The Location of Mosques in Old Kuwait

---

[214] Mohammad Al-Asad, "The Modern State Mosque in the Eastern Arab World, 1828-1985 (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia)" (Harvard University; 0084, 1990), 14.
[215] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 177.

Except for the souk mosque, traditional Kuwaiti mosques were built by members of *freej*. What is significant about the location of Kuwaiti traditional mosques was that they were located within close walking distance from each other, The clue to understanding this phenomena was that mosques were places for prayers in which devoted Kuwaiti Muslims prayed five times a day; hence, the location of the mosque was greatly debated with the members of *freej* to find the most accessible location. The most important issue was that a mosque should be close enough to reduce the walking distance, especially for elderly members who would otherwise easily became exhausted.

One would expect that the *freej's* mosque would be found at the center of the freej, but that was not the case. On the contrary, each *freej* in Old Kuwait often had a mosque located at the corner of the residential block or at the intersection of streets (Fig. 63). Placing the mosque in the corner of the *freej* where it faced other residential blocks meant that the mosque was shared by different members from different *freejs*. This strategy was socially crucial because it helped in breaking the isolation that would otherwise have existed in each *freej*. Al-Mutawa mosque, for example, was located on the streets intersection and close to two mosques: al-Hamdan and al-Mazidi (Fig. 63).
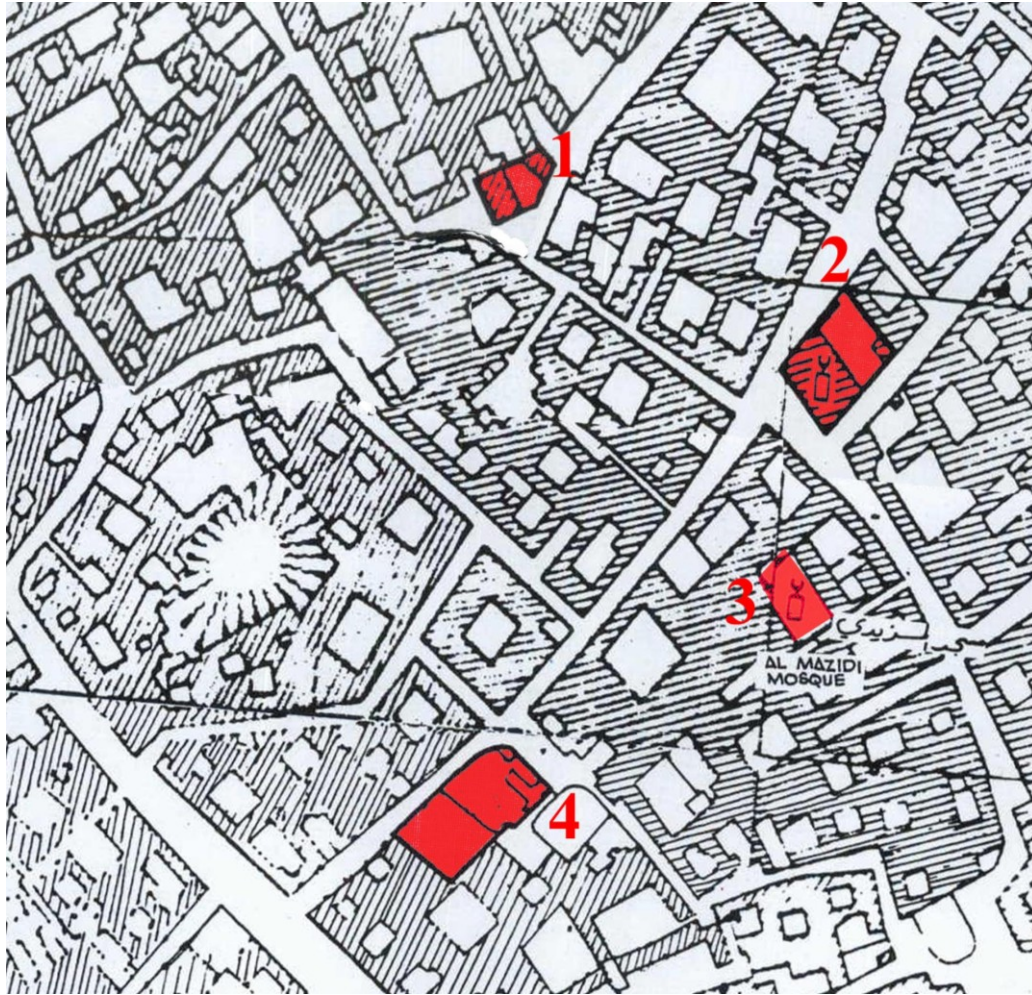
Figure 63 1: al-Hamdan mosque; 2: al-Mutawa mosque; 3: al-Mazidi mosque; 4: al-Sahaf mosque. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1987.

7.4 Layout of the Mosque

Kuwait traditional mosques have one prayer chamber or hall, one columned porch, and one courtyard. The prayer hall must face the *qiblah* direction, *mihrab* is a niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the *qiblah*, that is, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying. The wall in which a *mihrab* appears is thus the *qiblah* wall. Because of the location of Kuwait in relation to Mecca, the *qiblah* wall is the southwestern wall in all Kuwait mosques. The qiblah wall often included *minbar* (the imam niche) and *mihrab* (the

136

preacher's pulpit) that consisted of few steps and a low balcony facing the prayers. The prayer hall often consisted of wooden pillars, often with the famous Kuwaiti column capitals (Fig. 64)
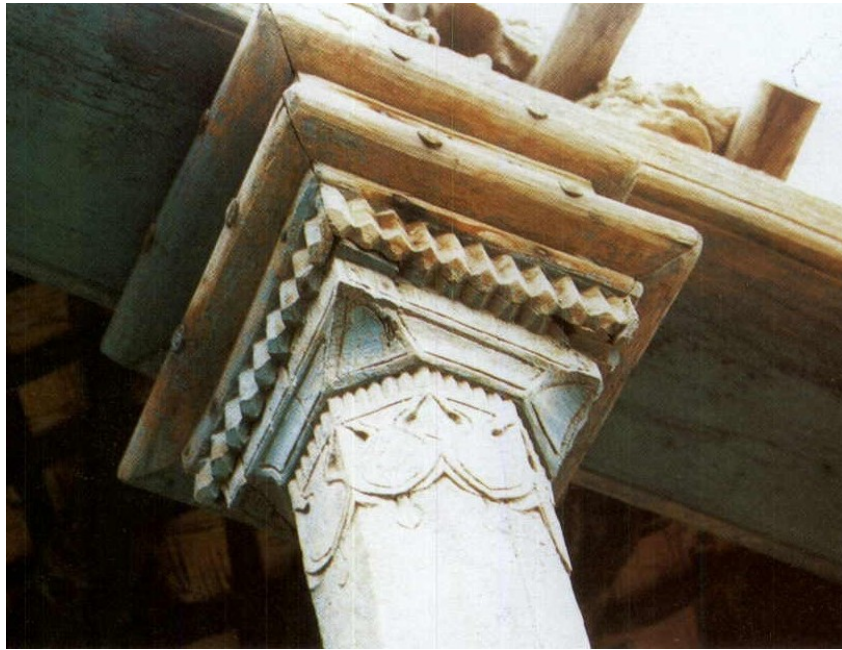

Figure 64 A common column capital style in Kuwaiti mosques. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1986.

7.5 Minaret

The minaret's function in Islam was simple; it was used by muezzin who climbed up inside the minaret to call for prayer. The structure of traditional minarets of the Kuwaiti mosques were considerably low. Many of them were at the level of or just above the mosque's roof. Barclay Raunkiaer noticed in 1912 that there were not many minarets in the Kuwaiti skyline because "their height is so low that they hardly show above the houses."[216] This unique Kuwaiti phenomenon was due mainly to religious and cultural reasons. Because the vast majority of Kuwaitis came from Arabia, Najd in particular, the devoted Sunni Islamic tradition prevailed and frowned upon any superfluous artistic adornment in mosques. The cultural reason was that the low minarets ensured

---

[216] Barclay Raunkiaer and Gerald De Gaury, *Through Wahhabiland on Camelback* (New York,: Praeger, 1969), 50.

that muezzins could not look down into neighboring courtyard houses where unveiled ladies might be seen. The Kuwaiti tradition of giving muezzin duty to an elderly blind man strongly supported the concerns for visual privacy. [217] Raunkaer illustrated a characteristic type showing a square-base with walls sloping slightly up to a four-arched pavilion, topped with a pyramidal roof (Fig. 65). The round-base minaret was also a common type in Kuwaiti traditional mosques (al-Saeid mosque, al-Muttawa mosque, and Sahaf mosque [Fig. 66 & 67). Some traditional mosques have a crescent finial in metal (Saeid mosque).
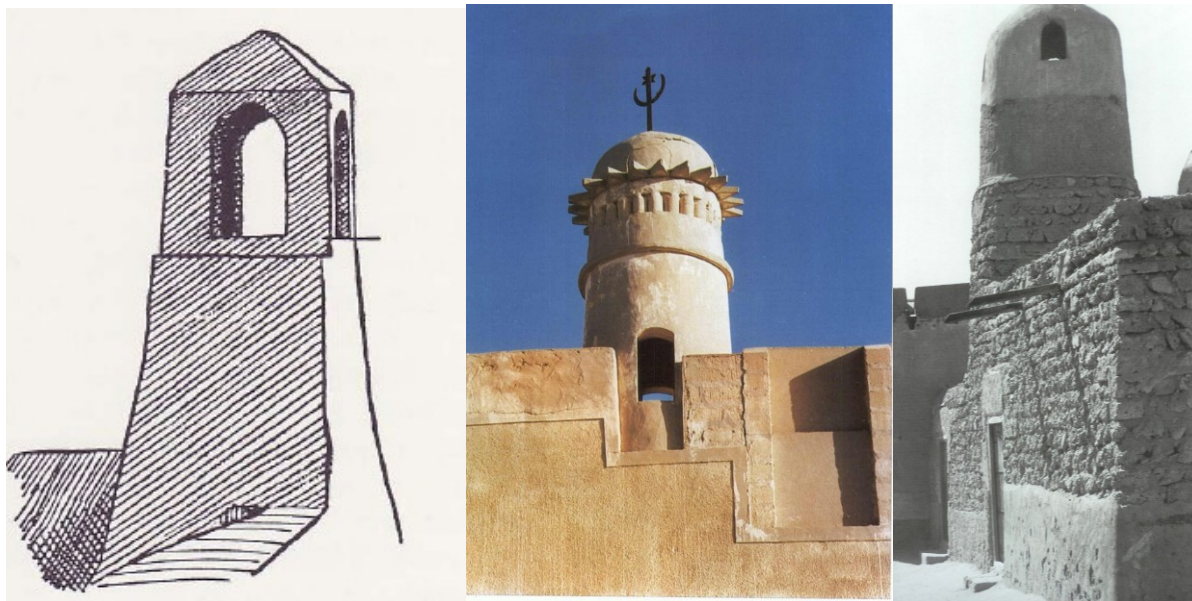
Figure 65 Raunkiaer's illustration of Kuwait minaret in 1912. Source: Raunkiaer, 1969.
Figure 66 Al-Saied mosque minaret. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1986.
Figure 67 Unknown traditional mosque, circular-base minaret. Source, Facey, 1998.

Most Kuwaiti traditional mosques consisted of a walled courtyard with a covered veranda along one side, and sometimes an inner room. From this court a rough stairway of masonry led up to a minaret in the form of a small square tower placed on the top of the wall.

.

---

[217] Zahra Dickson Freeth, *A New Look at Kuwait* (London,: Allen and Unwin, 1972), 19.

7.6 Friday Mosque

Up to the middle of the 20th century Kuwait Town contained about fifty mosques, twelve of which were Friday or congregational mosques. The largest and most important mosque in Old Kuwait was Masjid al-Souq al-Kabir (the market great mosque) located in the middle of the souk. This structure was completely reconstructed in 1953. Whereas the mosque was treated as an integral unique element in the traditional urban environment, Shiber noted that it "has been treated as an isolated"[218] element in the modern Kuwaiti urbanization. This mosque was originally built in 1794. A marking over the main gate's entrance indicates that it was renovated in 1839 with major support from Indian merchants (Fig. 69).

Such financial support might explain its characteristic styles and features. Before the major governmental reconstruction project that transformed most of the old mosques in 1953, the Friday mosque had a flat roof and low-profile form. Its original wooden pillars surrounded the courtyard with an arcade of bracket capitals.[219] The current Friday mosque, however, carries few traditional features and many non-Kuwaiti traditional characters such as the large central dome and the high, three-story minaret.

As in many Islamic cities, the congregational mosques were often provided with open squares. Kuwait's Friday mosque had a large open space that functioned as a development space of the status of the mosque. Although all religious activities were accommodated within the mosque and its courtyard or *sahn* area, the open public square or *saha* that differentiated al-tajjar souk from al-Dakhili souk, was used to support religious activities such as overflow prayer space, ceremonial processions, selling religious goods, and raising religious funds.

---

[218] Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanization; Documentation, Analysis, Critique. Al-Madianah Al-Kuwaitiyyah*, 103.
[219] Lewcock and Freeth, 25.

Figure 68 Friday or souk mosque aerial view. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1986.

Figure 69 The main gate and the inner court. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1986.

7.7 Al-Khalifa Mosque

According to the Kuwaiti historian, Adnan Bin Salem Bin Mohammed al-Roumi, in his book *A History of Mosques of Old Kuwait,* al-Bahar mosque was the first mosque built in Kuwait in 1696; it is no longer in existence. The oldest surviving mosque in Kuwait currently is the Khalifa Mosque in the Sharq area (Fig. 70). The Kuwait municipality considered al-Khalifa mosque as "one of the most complete examples of a Kuwaiti mosque."[220] It is one of the important local traditional buildings in Kuwait and, because of its proximity to the Sief Palace, it was the main place for prayer and meeting associated with the Palace. The original mosque was reported to

---

[220] Municipality, "Sharq Al-Sief Area: Planning & Schematic Design."

be built in 1737 and was a small mud brick structure, but Kuwait Municipality estimated that it was established in 1772. [221] In 1901 the mosque was enlarged by Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah the Great, although it can only accommodate 200 people, and in 1954 it went under extensive repairs and renovation carried out by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. At this time the minaret was also elongated. [222]

The al-Khalifa Mosque was located on the edge of the Old City on rising ground. The prayer chamber is a double range containing seven bays and is identically matched by the *liwan* (Fig. 71). The columns are timber and the roof's soffit is paneled in with *chendi (wooden poles).* Its column capitals and joinery reflect the good workmanship that Kuwaiti carpenters were known for (Fig. 72).
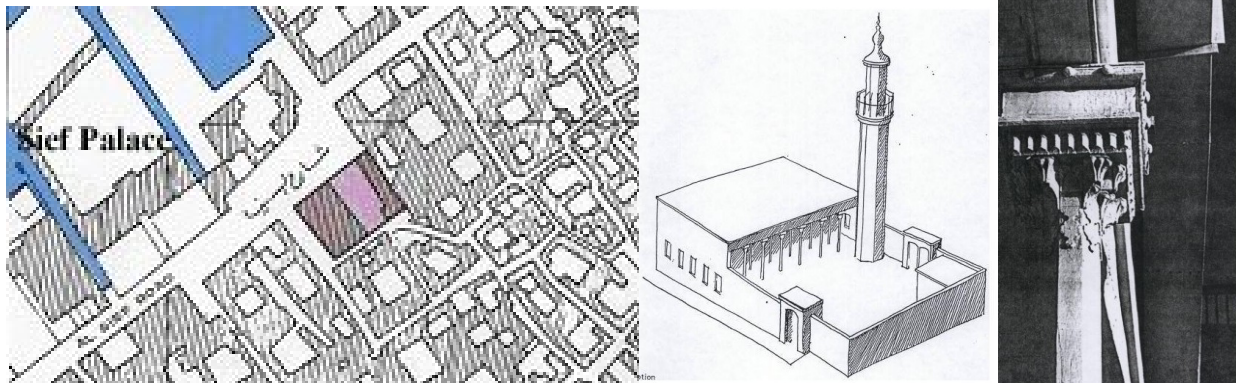

Figure 70 Al-Khalifa mosque location map, note its proximity to Sief Palace. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1986.

Figure 71 Al-Khalifa mosque. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1986.

Figure 72 Column capital in al-Khalifa mosque. Kuwait Municipality, 1986.

---

[221] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 199.
[222] Municipality, "Sharq Al-Sief Area: Planning & Schematic Design," 26.

7.8 Al-Nisf Mosque

Al-Nisf mosque is also one of the oldest surviving building in Kuwait. It was built by Buti Al-Buti around 1776, however, most of the current features of the mosque date to renovations done by the families of al Nisf, Assousi and al Asfur in 1866. Its old inscription above the entrance states that the mosque was built on the site of an even older mosque. The mosque is relatively large, and features a combined *mihrab* and *minber*. The prayer chamber has two ranges of columns in five bays and a single range in the open air *liwan* forming one continuous structure. The eight columns in the chamber are cubic in form and simple in design (Fig. 74).

Most of the older mosques in Kuwait are on or near the sea front, in the areas of Shaq and Qibla. These old neighborhoods were once within the confines of the first city wall, built in 1752 but demolished long ago. The al-Nisf Mosque (Fig. 73) , is facing the sea and located next to the old al-Nisf family home. It was renovated in 1867 and again in 1956 by the Ministry of Awqaf.[223]
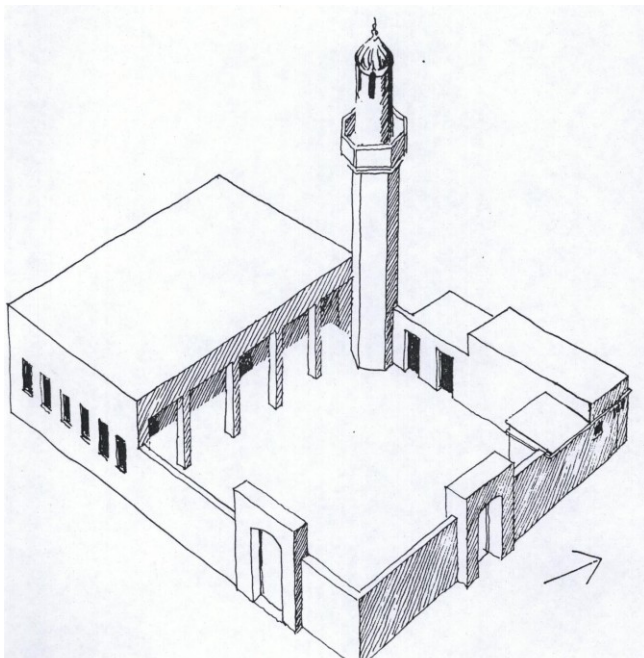
Figure 73 Al-Nisf mosque. Source: Kuwait Minicipality 1987.

---

[223] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 199.
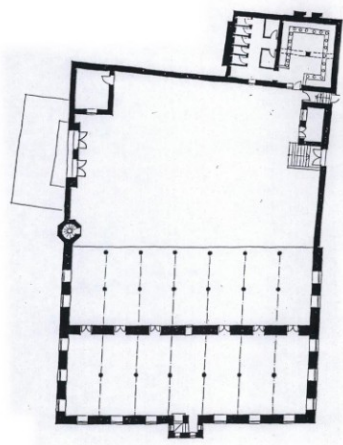
al-Khalifa mosque
1737-1772
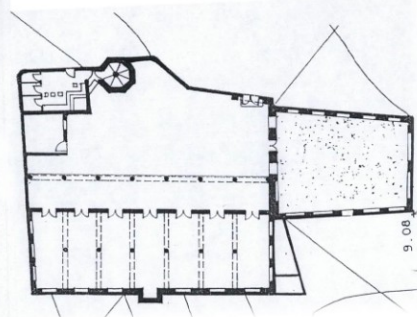
Ibn Qtami mosque
1772-1882
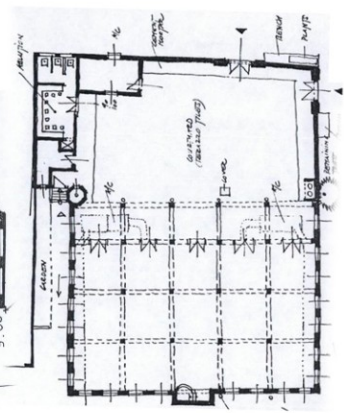
al-Nisf mosque
1776, rebuilt in 1866
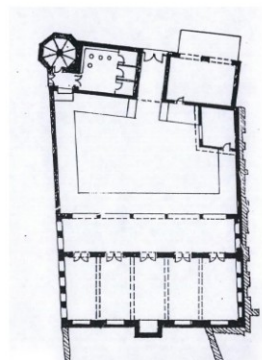
al-Awfan mosque
1867
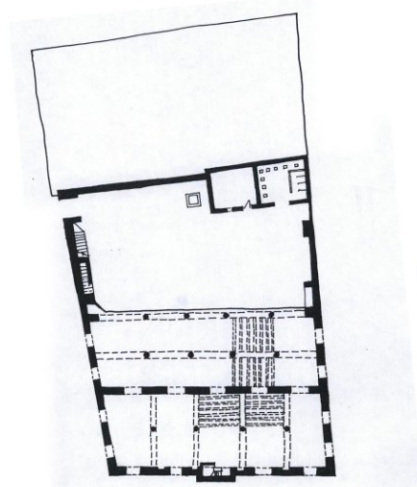
al-Mutawa mosque
1868
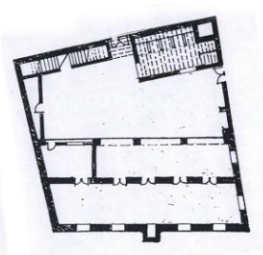
Abd-al Illah mosaque
late nineteenth century
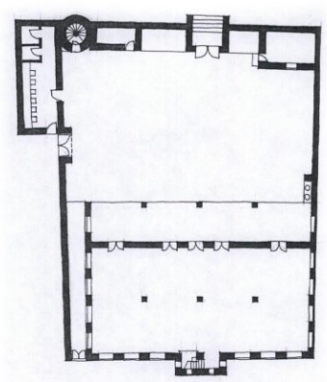
al-Mana'e mosque
late nineteenth century
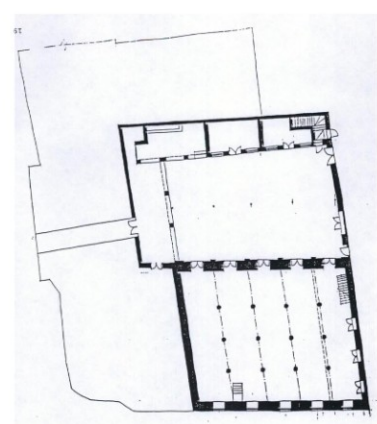
Ma'rafi hussainiah
1905
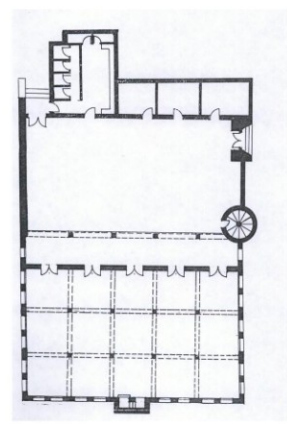
al-Rumi mosque
early twentieth century

Figure 74 mosques' floor plans. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1987. Author's collection, 2009.

8 THE DIWANIYAH AND HAREM

Traditional Kuwait architecture was deeply rooted in the traditions, customs and culture of Kuwaitis. Residential architecture in particular emphasized the segregation between male and female. Almost all the traditional houses have a *diwaniyah*[224] and *harim*[225], the two major spaces in traditional Kuwaiti residential buildings. In the large houses of affluent Kuwaiti families, there were at least two adjacent courtyards, the first called *harim* and used by the family and whose privacy shielded them from the public gaze.[226] The second is the *diwaniyah,* which was used by the males to meet and entertain their friends. Some affluent families built a *diwan*, a relatively new independent building by itself with similar functionality of *diwaniyah*. This section focuses on these three areas: *diwaniyah, diwan*, and *harim*.

8.1 Diwaniyah

The term *diwaniyah* originally referred to the male section of the Bedouin tent where they and their visitors gathered. In Old Kuwait as well as today, the *diwaniyah* was an indispensable feature of the Kuwaiti men's social life as it was the reception area where a man received his friends, business colleagues, and other male guests. A daily social event in the evening took place in a special room which was intentionally built separate from the rest of house and often visually blocked by a zigzag doorway or simply by a wall. Only men were present and sitting around on soft benches or cushions, conversing casually, smoking, nibbling snacks and relaxing over beverages such as tea and coffee. Relatives and friends came and went throughout the evening.

---

[224] Men's reception area.
[225] Family and females' court.
[226] Lewcock and Freeth, 2.

The host is hospitable and entertaining. The *Diwaniyah* was also the core of Kuwait's social, business and political life as it is the place where topics of interest were discussed, associates introduced, alliances formed, and networking activities undertaken.

In its layout, the *diyaniyah* reception room is often located next to the main entrance with a doorway that leads to the guest's court. It was often the first room a visitor encountered upon entering the house. In the *diwaniyah,* the famous Arab hospitality is shown to guests who are always treated kindly and given refreshment. These are prepared before the guest's eyes in the brazier of the coffee-hearth placed on a designed corner of the *diwanyah*. This corner was the most decorated place in the house containing many artifacts and antiques, stacked inside the many square alcoves of the wall, representing the history of the hosting family (Fig. 75). The display of the furniture in the *diwaniyah* is arranged so that "we know when we come into a room whether we are expected to remain standing or sit down, and if we are to sit down, where, and how."[227] By placing the seating furniture around the coffee-hearth in the corner, guests received an instinctive feeling of warmth and familiarity, therefore offering maximum hospitality.

The *Diwaniyah* role was intended not only to provide the setting for traditional hospitality for male guests, but also to provide a kind of closed circuit so that the women of the family were free to move in the house without any cultural embarrassment.

---

[227] Ball and Smith, 81.
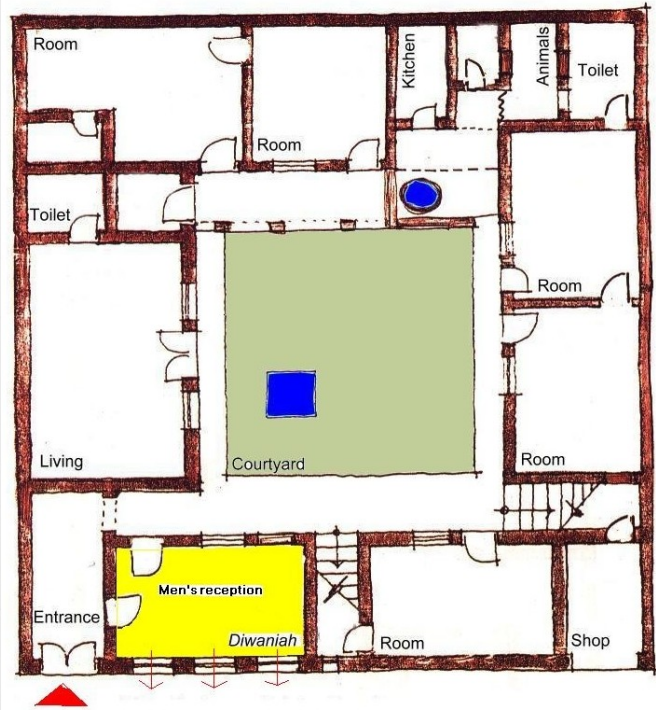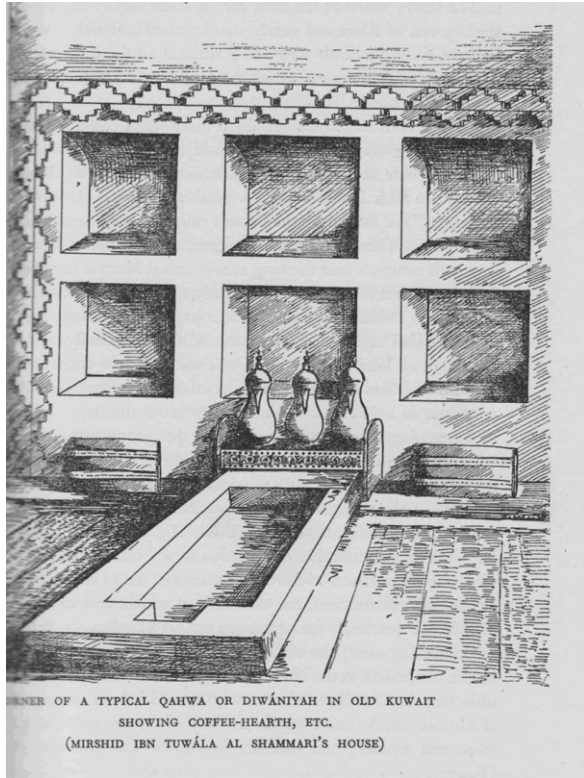
Figure 75 Typical decorative corner in diwaniyah. Source: Dickson, 1956.

Figure 76 Al-Ibrahim house, a typical layout of traditional houses, *diwanieh* located at the corner close to the main entrance. Source: Mahgoub, 2009.

8.2 Diwan

Diwan was a rare and a more luxurious building type. There were a handful of *diwan*s owned by some Kuwaiti merchant's families such as al-Assawoosi, al-Shamlan, al-Rowdhan, and al-Nisf. A common feature of all *Diwan*s is that they are located straightforwardly on the Sief coastal street facing the sea (Fig. 77 a, b, c, and d), a location by itself that is very valuable.

Another important feature in *diwans* is the *dakah*[228], long low outside benches built against the front wall of the house (figs. 77 & 78). The *dakah* seating unit or area often is located in the

---

[228] *Dakah* or *datcha* as both names in frequent use in Kuwait.

pleasant shadowy area of the northern wall of the *diwan* and facing the cool breezy air coming from the sea. An enjoyable gathering often started in the *diwan* after three o'clock and lasted to sunset. It was regularly visited by Kuwaiti élites and merchant males for "informal social intercourse, while at the same time allowing for a constant perusal of coastal activities."[229]

Diwan is an unusual Kuwaiti element in that the other features of Kuwaiti houses are inward-looking while the *diwan* is outward-looking, as if it connects the house to the outside world. Diwan is an important example of a peculiarly Kuwaiti local type of building. The sequence of such meeting places along the shore is a direct reflection of the importance of the maritime trade in Kuwait, and *diwan* is one of the most significant.

The *diwan* was a new building type in Kuwait at the turn of the twentieth century. It evolved from the *diwanyah*, the simple men's reception room that almost all Kuwaiti traditional house have had regardless of their size and owner's states. The first building type of *diwan* appeared in 1896. Before it became the first *diwan*; the al-Assawoosi *diwan* was the surviving men's reception courtyard of the demolished early 19th century merchant's house on the eastern part of Old Town.[230]

---

[229] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 177.
[230] Municipality, "Sharq Al-Sief Area: Planning & Schematic Design," 162.

a. al-Nisf diwan

b. al-Shamlan diwan

c. al-Assossi diwan

d. al-Rowdhan diwan
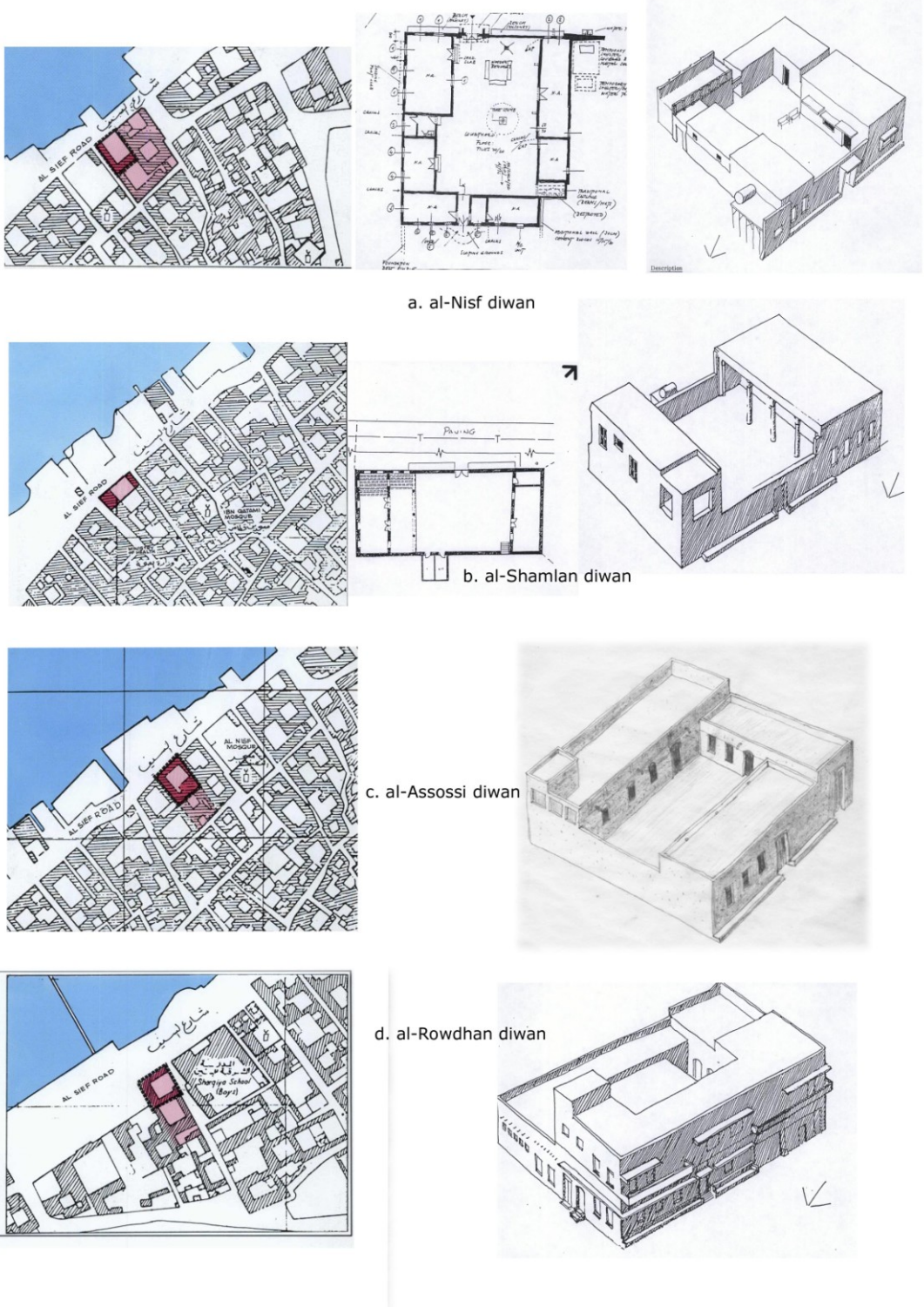
Figure 77 Location and layout of the diwan buildings in old Kuwait Town. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1987.

8.2.1 *Diwan* al-Assawoosi

The *Diwan* al-Assawoosi is a building of simple plan and modest proportions (Fig. 77-c), exemplifying the common classical Kuwaiti architectural tradition in its clear lines and conspicuous lack of decorative detail. Its layout consists of a single story row of rooms arranged around a central courtyard. Traditional construction material such as mud, coral stone and timber were used.[231]

As in many traditional building in Kuwait, diwan al-Assawoosi has a fine pair of heavy wooden doors of the studded teak type in the main reception entrance leading directly from the seaward side into the main meeting room (Fig 78). These doors are massive and difficult to operate; however, they had a significant social function in that they were only "open on festive occasions, while everyday access was provided through a door inserted in the right door leaf."[232]

---

[231] Fullerton and Fehérvári, eds., 177.
[232] Municipality, "Sharq Al-Sief Area: Planning & Schematic Design," 161.
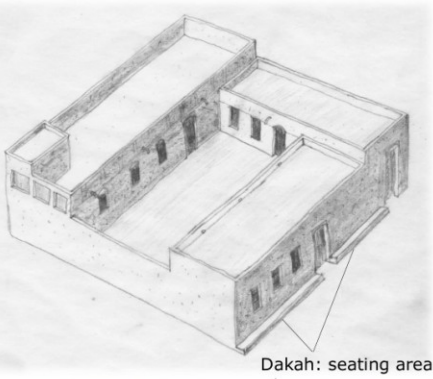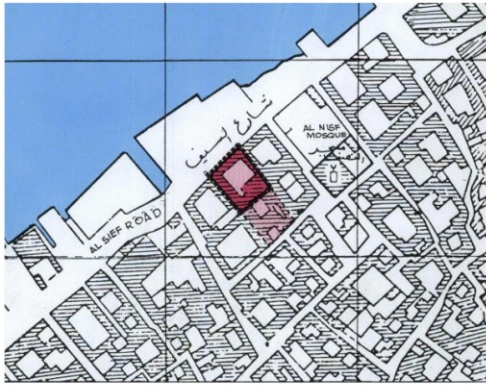
Dakah: seating area
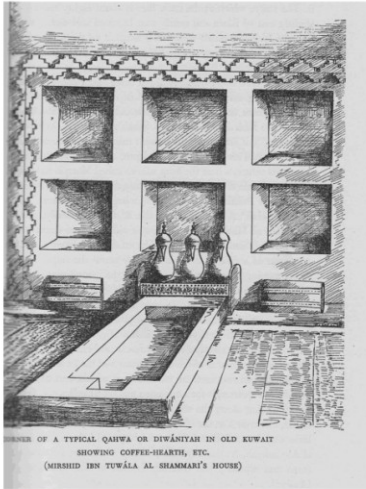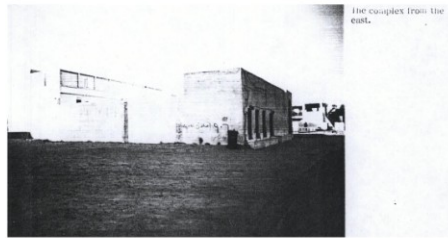
Diwan al-Assawoosi

Figure 78 Al-Assowssi diwan. Source: Dickson, 1956; Kuwait Municipality, 1987.

8.2.2 *Diwan* al-Shemlan

The *Diwan* al-Shemlan is likely the best example of the traditional *diwan* building type. Built in the late 19th century,[233] it has a small courtyard between two wings of rooms; the one to the west is a tall single story building with arched *liwan*, the eastern section is a two-story wing carrying a belvedere or viewing balcony at its seaward end (Fig. 79-f). Kuwaiti vernacular decorative skills are clearly expressed in the detailing of the column capitals, the soffits of the girders, and the frieze (Fig. 79-g and h).

8.3   The Family Court (Harem)

The harem was the heart of Kuwaiti traditional houses. It was basically a central courtyard surrounded by a veranda and often rooms on all sides. The one-story *harem* was common; however, sometimes there would be one room—or semi-room—on the second floor. This room was a favorite sitting-room for the lady of the house during the day because it provided a chance to see the street below and enjoy fresh ventilation from its projecting wooden screen or lattice window. Daily life in *harim* was never considered oppressive because:

> in the courtyard there was space to move and no sense of overcrowding. For most of the year the yard served as the place where women would gather together with their friends, and in this way it took the place of a large reception room which did not usually exist in their part of the house. In normal everyday life mistress, servants and children mingled there in an atmosphere of pleasant companionship.[234]

---

[233] Ibid., 177.
[234] Lewcock and Freeth.

a. site plan

b. aerial view

c.

d. plan

e. north elevation

dakah: outside benches for seating

f. above and below:
side elevation of the roof room

g. column capital in
the courtyard liwan

h. capital and roof con-
struction with traditional
frieze

Diwaniyah Shemlan
late nineteenth century
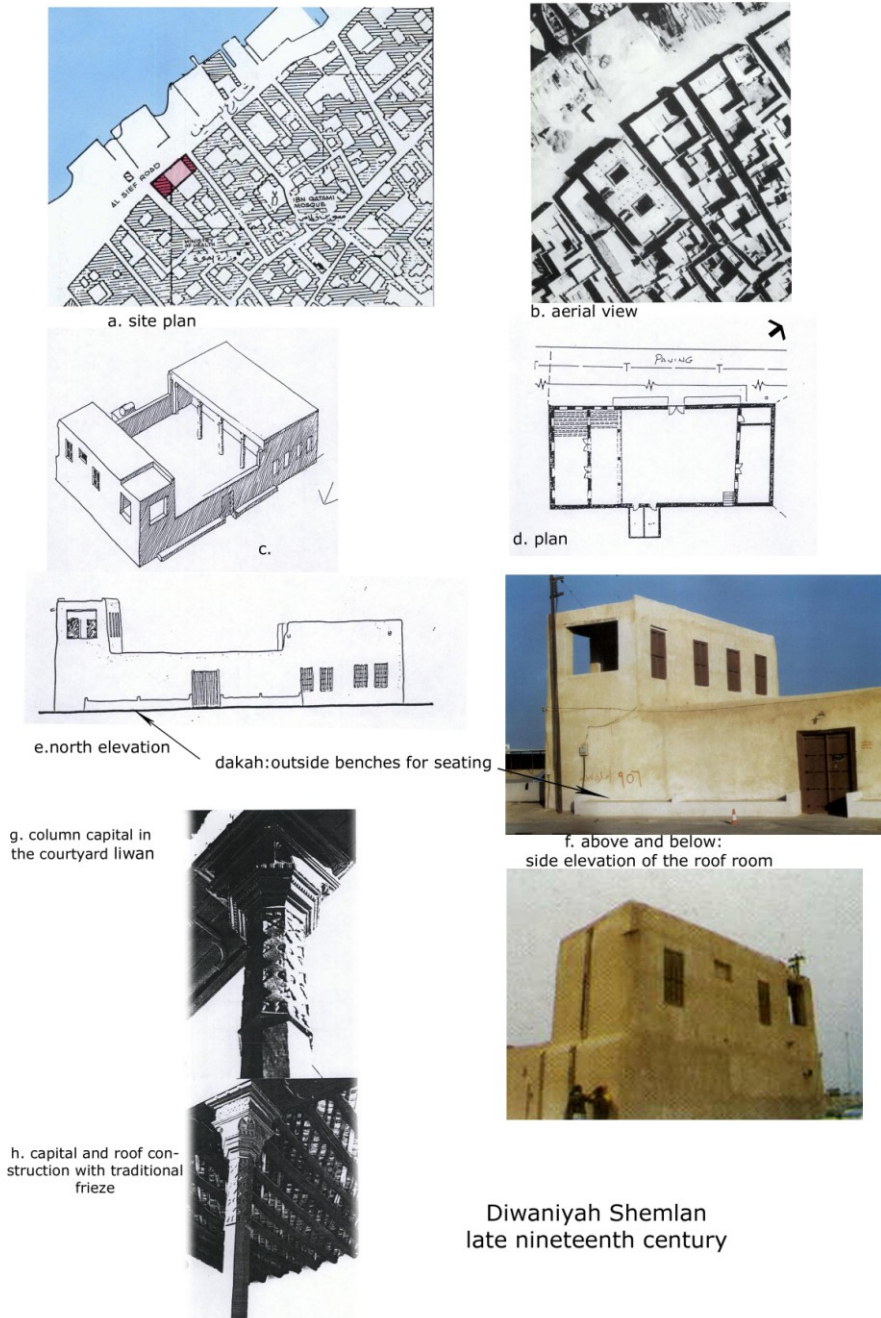
Figure 79 Al-Shamlan diwan. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1987.

Bourdieu argued that "the house is organized in accordance with a set of homologous oppositions - high: low, light: dark, day: night, male: female, fertilizing: able to be fertilized."[235]

---

[235] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990), 275.

These oppositions structure issues like the placement of the *diwaniyah*, the storage positions of water jars and the locations of activities like cooking, sleeping and sex. Women's activities are associated with the 'inside' part of the building such as carrying water, wool sewing and needlework, the fireplace and cooking.

In small houses, one courtyard dominated the plan and it acted as the family court, while the *diwaniyah* was often placed at the corner of the house, either adjacent to the external entrance or screened doorway (Fig. 80, room # 3). Most of the small houses have a smaller and more inconspicuous doorway that leads to an alley or backstreet used by female members of the house as a shortcut to their neighbors. It was important that "when the door opened no one from the street could gain a clear view of the women's courtyard,"[236] therefore, doors often opened to either an L-shaped portico, to a wall, or a wooden-screen set away from the entrance door to the inner side of the entry; there are examples of both in al-Askar house (Fig. 80).
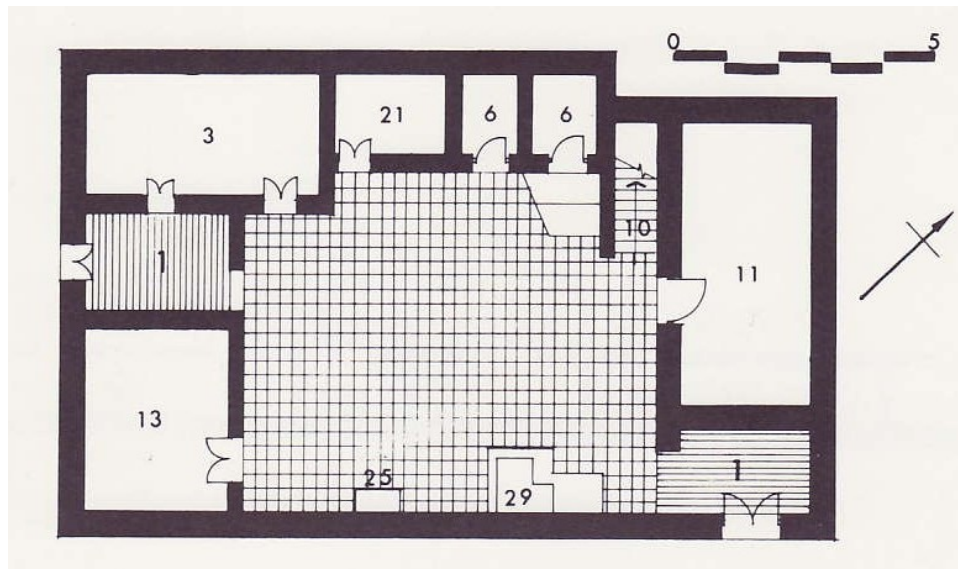
Figure 80 Al-Askr house, diwanyah is #3. Source: Lewcock, 1978.

---

[236] Lewcock and Freeth, 3.

The *harem* courtyard in small houses was modest in its shape and configuration and rarely had any decorated features. In some small houses with finer detailing, one or two of the courtyard sides may include a veranda or loggia, as in al-Ibrahim house (Fig. 76).

Affluent houses often take the form of two or more adjacent courtyards; one of these courtyards—usually the biggest and most decorated one—is the family living court. The *harim* court was inherently an inward space that preserved foremost the Kuwaitis' social value of privacy. All the rooms were organized around a central courtyard that provided occupants with fresh cool air and indirect sunlight. Such a courtyard was likely to have verandas on all four sides, as does al-Ghanim house (Fig. 81).

Key
1. Entrance Passage
2. Men's Reception Court
3. Loggia
4. Men's Reception Room (diwan)
5. Bathroom
6. Kitchen
7. Animal Court
8. Private Living Court
9. Family Living Room
10. Women's Reception Room
11. Sleeping Room
12. Business Court
13. Well
14. Kitchen Court
15. Storeroom
16. Small Yard
17. Masonary Bench
18. Coffee Room

Ground floor plan
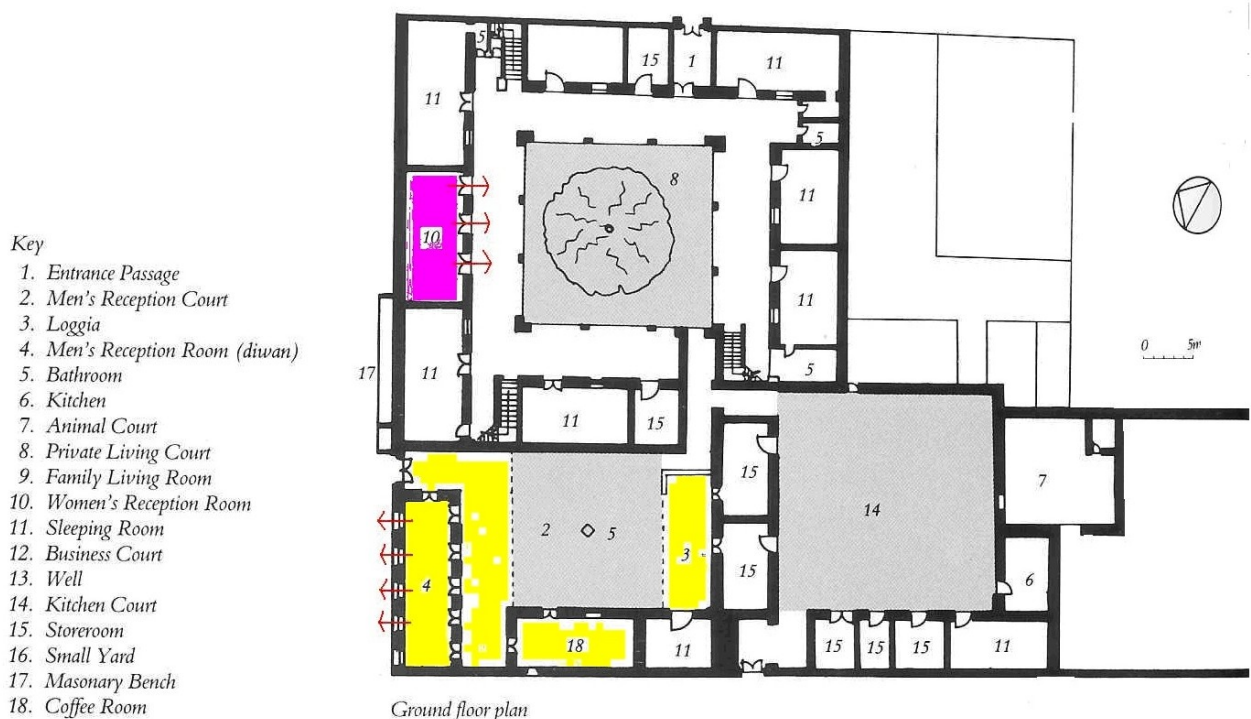
Figure 81 Al-Ghanim house plan. Source: Lewcock, 1978.

9 KUWAIT TRADITIONAL HOUSES

The rapid modern architectural and urban development in the post-oil period caused a building boom that has not integrated the traditional buildings of Kuwait into the modern context. Most traditional building types were demolished and replaced by new infrastructure and new buildings. The traditional building type that survived the 'tear-it-down' process was mainly the mosque because of their sacred importance. A handful of traditional houses restored by the government in the 1970s also survived and were opened to the public as heritage museums. [237]

Old Kuwait from the air looked like a beehive. This form is largely attributed to the courtyard houses, which suggest the social and environmental harmony of the traditional architecture of Kuwait. Kuwaiti traditional houses have been built in one of the harshest places on Earth. The harsh and brutal desert climate forced Kuwaitis to minimize their architectural openings to nature. Old Kuwait itself was founded on a small extension of desert into the Gulf, which provided protection from sandstorms and broke down the extreme heat of the desert. The later Kuwaiti boundary wall also provided some protection against sandstorms and partly broke them down before they reached the city. The courtyard houses themselves were built to be compact, protecting each other from the ruthless sandstorms and heat, while allowing only the minimum necessary interstitial spaces for fresh air and circulation.

9.1 The Three Major Factors that Shaped Traditional Buildings in Kuwait

---

[237] Al-Bahar, " Contemporary Kuwaiti Houses," 71.

The traditional houses were masterworks that grew as a simple yet appropriate solution for basic problems and needs. Traditional Kuwaiti houses were an appropriate response to the three major realities that faced Old Kuwait's society: Kuwaiti mores, climate, and realities (Fig. 82). The most significant factor of these was Kuwaiti mores. Although climatic and technical abilities were also important factors, the form of Kuwaiti traditional houses can mainly be attributed to Kuwaitis' choices, which were deeply based on their cultural values.
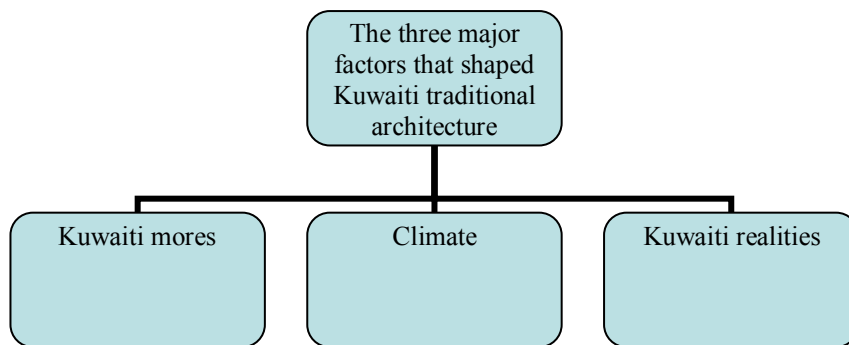
Figure 82 The three major factors that shaped architecture in Kuwait

9.1.1 Kuwaiti mores

The first and most important one of these realities was Kuwaiti mores and habits. Kuwaiti mores consisted of social and religious values, such as privacy and hospitality, that were underwritten by Kuwaiti tradition and Islamic teaching. These Kuwaiti social and cultural practices that interacted with physical realities are all key factors in defining and shaping the identity and character of Kuwaiti architecture. A wide range of Kuwaitis' concerns and responses translated into architectural behavior when dealing with their built form. Privacy, for instance, in traditional houses, literally meant the family's privacy. In practice, privacy meant the separation of the males' guest reception areas from the rest of the house. In other words, the family's females (*harem*), in their house, should not be seen by male strangers. The individual's privacy was not essential because it was taken care of through the family's privacy, which was the essence and

core of the traditional houses' paradigm. Although traditional houses were built without pretension in their design, the initial approach in building a traditional house was to accommodate and satisfy the inhabitants' sacred social mores and needs.

9.1.1.1 Privacy and the Concept of Introversion
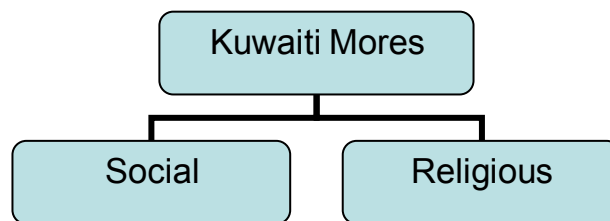
Figure 83 Kuwaiti mores

Privacy in physical terms "refers to personal clothing and the private domain of the home."[238] The privacy of neighbors must be respected and its invasion is prohibited in Islamic law. The best illustration might be the direct visual corridors invasion into the private domain of others. The Islamic teaching succinctly describes this concern as: "He who looks into a house without the occupants' permission, and they puncture his eye, will have no right to demand a fine or ask for punishment."[239] The social and religious mores had been accommodated through many generations to produce such a simple solution that was suitable by clearly adapting the concept of "introvert." This concept successfully achieved the degree of privacy that the old Kuwaitis wanted. The courtyard is a central place in the house providing satisfactory privacy and freedom for the family. Because of centrality, the courtyard acts as a general space among others places of the

---

[238] Hakim, *Arabic-Islamic Cities : Building and Planning Principles*, 20.
[239] Ibid., 151.

house and acts as the focal point where different activities and tasks are taking place such as gathering, eating, sitting, celebrating, playing, relaxing and even sleeping during summer nights or taking siesta at noon. To ensure the privacy of the family, traditional houses empowered the separation of two aspects: the public spaces from private, and men's reception areas from the "*harem*" or family's spaces. The men's reception area was the space used only by males to get together when male visitors and guests were visiting. It usually consisted of the *diwaniyah*, the male seating area that included a space for preparing coffee. In a large house, the men's reception area and its utilities were usually located beside the main entrance, which opened to a short passage or to a blocked wall that made the circulation path indirect.

9.1.1.2 The Courtyard as the Essence of the Traditional Houses

Kuwaitis built their dwelling units to suit their environmental, social, and economic needs. In this chapter, the traditional houses are looked at "beyond traditional standards of aesthetic quality, pedigree, and uniqueness in evaluating buildings, de-emphasizing issues of personal taste regarding style and instead focusing on social, cultural, and historical contexts."[240]

The courtyard was the most important element in Kuwaiti traditional houses as well as in many Arab houses. Hussan Fathy, the renowned Egyptian theorist and architect, explains the importance of the courtyard as the essence of the Arab house:

> Yet, to the Arab especially, the courtyard is more than just an architectural device for obtaining privacy and protection. It is, like the universe itself. In this symbolic pattern, the four sides of the courtyard represent the four columns that carry the dome of the sky.[241]

---

[240] Kelli Shapiro, "From Modernism to Mcdonald's," *JAE* 61 no. 2 (2007).
[241] Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor; an Experiment in Rural Egypt* (Chicago,: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 57.

As in many Muslim pre-modern societies, the social and cultural life of the inhabitants is a key factor in Kuwaiti architecture. This argument is apparent in Kuwaitis' social values; they advocated strongly for personal and family privacy. The social and cultural practices were strong influences on the courtyard house formation. The general guidelines for the family's privacy—especially women—are given by the Islamic law in the Quran and Hadith.[242] A clear recommendation for family privacy is in a verse in the Quran that states "and when you ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain."[243]Another clear recommendation from Hadith deals with the visitors of the house and the privacy of family:

> If anyone removes a curtain and looks into a house before permission and sees anything in these which should not be seen, he has committed an offence which it is not lawful for him to commit…but if a man passes a door which has no curtain and is not shut and looks in, he has committed no sin, for the sin pertains only to the people inside.[244]

General guidance drawn from these Islamic teachings and similar is that the family's privacy should be respected in all cases and the entrance of the house should have a door or screen that prevents the privacy from being invaded by passers-by on the street.[245] In traditional Kuwaiti society as a whole, the house was seen as the domain of women, whilst men belong outside in the sea, desert, streets and markets. A man who spends too long in the house is open to ridicule as a 'house man.' For a Kuwaiti man, the town as a whole has been considered as the setting for his life, while the house was merely a more private, enclosed, and sheltered part of his living realm. In contrary, the house for Kuwaiti woman was essentially regarded as the total setting for her life.

---

[242] Hadith: the saying of the Prophet Mohammad

[243] Quran: surra # 33. verse # 52.

[244] Brian Edwards, ed., *Courtyard Housing : Past, Present and Future [Et Al.]* (Abingdon [England] ; New York Taylor & Francis, 2006), 90.

[245] The importance of the main entrance is discussed in more details in the Doors section in Chapter #

The town for her was seen as a connective tissue and almost a wasted space to be traversed, and secondary in nature.

9.1.1.3 Privacy and the Single-story Phenomenon

The great majority of the traditional Kuwaiti houses were single-story buildings. That was because of two simple reasons: privacy and air circulation. Due to the social and cultural practices that grew from religion, the single-story was the fairest solution that prevented the possibility of being spied on from neighbors' upper floors or roofs. The second reason that contributed to the single-story phenomenon in Kuwaiti traditional houses was assuring equal flow of air circulation to all houses. This required an equal height for all houses. One of the famous Islamic teachings that was explicitly implemented in most Islamic cities is the Hadith that says "do not block his (the neighbor's) air by raising your building high without his permission."[246] This Hadith is one of the direct and most explicit Islamic recommendations concerning building issues. Moreover, building a simple house and keeping its height within the average height of a city was correlating to the Islamic teaching that associated the exaggerated height of the building with an expression of arrogance and extravagance by the owner; in a related Hadith, Prophet Mohammad said that the "Hour (of doom) will not be established till…the people compete with one another in constructing high buildings." [247]

---

[246] Edwards, ed., 91.
[247] Ibid., 92.

9.1.2 Climate

Climate is always a determining factor in architecture; one can observe its effects on building forms.

```
                          ┌──────────┐
                          │ Climate  │
                          └──────────┘
              ┌───────────────┼───────────────┐
        ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
        │  Desert  │   │ Hot dry  │   │ Shortages of water│
        └──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────────────┘
```
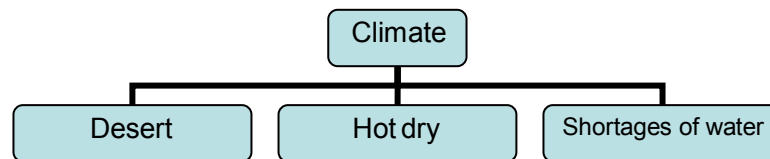
9.1.2.1 Courtyard and Environmental Issues

Besides its social and psychological advantages, the courtyard was useful in coping with the hot and dry climate. Heat control was the most important environmental issue in Kuwait. Since there are very few cloudy days in Kuwait, natural screening and protection from the direct sun, such as trees, were almost absent. Hence, the ground and all exposed surfaces absorb a huge amount of solar radiation during the day and radiate heat back during night. For a place with such a high daytime temperature, the courtyard offered the perfect solution in conjunction with the excellent traditional thermal resistant materials for walls and roofs: mud. While the sun heats the air on the roof, the cool evening and night air sinks through the courtyard, acting as a well in the center of the house. Then the cool air flows into the surrounding rooms, pushing up the hot air and cooling the walls and floors, reducing the interior temperature of the house.

Kuwaiti traditional dwellings consisted of a courtyard around which the other components of the residence were located. Of the total area enclosed by the outer walls, a typical courtyard occupied 25-30 percent of the total house area.[248] An affluent house might contain more than one courtyard. In this section, the traditional Kuwaiti houses are classified into two categories according to

---

[248] Edwards, ed., 84.

161
www.manaraa.com

the number of courtyards they contained; small houses have one courtyard, large houses contain more than one courtyard.

The thick mud wall in traditional houses played an important role in maintaining a comfortable temperature inside the house during the hot days of the summer, as well as the cold nights of the winter. The mud walls remain surprisingly cool most of the day because mud is a poor heat conductor and therefore retains heat for a long time. Walls that provide coolness during the morning, thus, have actually been storing the heat that they received during the night. Walls become a radiator of air during the night for the surrounding spaces, and that is why inside a mud brick house it feels warmer at night than outside.[249] For this reason and as a solution, the Kuwaitis used to stay in the ground floor during the day where they were protected from the extreme heat by their traditional houses' thick walls and roofs. After sunset, they slept on the roofs of their houses, enjoying the cool night air.

9.2   The Importance of the Roof in a Traditional House

Almost all traditional Kuwaiti houses have flat roofs, with a slight slope towards the street side. Roofs served as a sleeping, relaxing, and refreshing space. The scarcity of precipitation in Kuwait—25 days annually—encouraged the utilization of the roof for human activities, creating the flat roof phenomenon in traditional Kuwaiti architecture. In areas where the precipitation is heavy, such as Northern Europe, the gables of the buildings are very steep, while in the sunnier areas of the south, the roof pitch decreases steadily. In hot and arid lands such as the North African coast and Kuwait, the roofs become quite flat; in Kuwait, for instance, the flat roof provides the

---

[249] Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor; an Experiment in Rural Egypt.*

most comfortable place for sleeping during most of the year.[250] The roofs in old Kuwaiti houses had many uses:

1- The best, cool, breezy place to sleep on hot summer nights.

2- A place to hang washed clothes, as well as drying food such as meat, shrimp, and fish.

3- A place where rain accumulates and goes to the reservoir through the *marazeem* or gutters.

4- A place where kids establish traps for hunting birds.

5- Before having toilets inside of houses, the roof had a special corner for such a purpose.

The stairs were important in the traditional house as the only way to get to the roof. They were often made of two wooden logs, parallel and equal in length. They were linked to each other with smaller wooden stairs, equal in distance and fixed with nails and ropes or with specific openings at the two wooden paralleled logs.[251]

It is surprising to find that the use of domes and vaults were rare among Kuwaiti traditional buildings as developed in other Islamic countries. Although Kuwait does not have any resources of wood and timber, except for a few palm trunks that are locally available, traditional houses were largely roofed by timber imported from India and Africa.[252] Brick domes and vaults were widely used among many Arab cities, and particularly in the northern Gulf areas such as in Basra and Iran; however, the majority of old Kuwaiti traditional houses were built with a flat roof not because of a lack of knowledge of constructing domes and vaults, but because Kuwaitis wanted a flat roof to use as a relaxation space.

---

[250] Fathy and Shearer, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture : Principles and Examples with Reference to Hot Arid Climates*, 4.

[251] مريم العقروقة, البيت الكويتي القديم and محمد الخرس
(الكويت مركز البحوث و الدراسات الكويتية2003).

[252] Lewcock and Freeth, 12.

Despite the fact that a pitched or arching roof might have several advantages over the flat ones, Kuwaitis preferred to enjoy the openness of flat roofs. With a pitched roof, the higher part of the interior provides a space for warm air to circulate far above the heads of the inhabitants. Furthermore, heat transmission to the interior is further reduced because the solar radiation is spread on a larger roof area in the pitched roof than the flat. In addition, part of the pitched roof is shaded and protected from the sun's direct radiation, "absorbing heat from the sunlit part of the roof and the internal air, and transmitting it to the cooler outside air in the roof's shade."[253] However, the enjoyment of the roof's breezy air circulation proved to be the crucial factor for Kuwaitis in building their roofs.

In addition, the working of timber was a large industry in Old Kuwait which also supported a robust boat-building industry. Because the city imported large quantities, wood poles were a relatively cheap material. These situations made most Kuwaitis consider timber as their first choice for constructing a flat roof, so that they could relax and enjoy the pleasant night breeze during summer seasons. Staircases leading to the roof were often located in the family living courtyard. To ensure the privacy of the family, the traditional roof habitually had two structural elements; the parapet wall and the roof semi-room.

9.3 Types of Parapet Wall

Traditional buildings have different types and shapes of parapet walls and each has a specific function. The roof parapet served as much for providing privacy for the family as it was for protection from falling down the roof. Islamic teaching was decisive in requiring that

---

[253] Fathy and Shearer, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture : Principles and Examples with Reference to Hot Arid Climates*, 50.

occupants using the roof as living space build a parapet wall. This order came from the Hadith from the Prophet that says "If anyone spends the night on the roof of a house with no stone palisade, Allah's responsibility to guard him no longer applies."[254] Some of these parapet walls were more common for a period of time while others were recent. The common parapet type in most of the traditional buildings (including houses, mosques, and other public and private buildings) was the two-paneled parapet wall.

9.3.1 The Plain Mud-Brick Parapet Wall

This type was the most basic and was intended for providing safety—from falling off—as well as providing privacy for the family who extensively used the roof area. It was constructed of sun dried mud bricks and stood less than one and half meters in height.

9.3.1.1 Two-Paneled Parapet Wall

An oblique aerial view of Kuwait Town in the first half of the 20th century shows that the two-paneled parapet was the prevailing type. This type was functional as well as convenient to build. It makes the roof a safe place that captures the breezy cool air while simultaneously acting as a screen that protected the occupants' privacy from their remarkably close neighbors, as it was in the compact houses of Kuwait's Old Town (Fig. 84). While it provided complete privacy for the family who was using the roof, it worked as ventilation system that maintained the flow of air over the roof by a basic mechanism; it was designed and constructed in such a way that increased the air movement at seating level through its slight opening and its projection. Its mechanism relied on the simple fact of changing air pressure through the change of surface area of the external walls. By creating a row of small receding niches on the external walls, the air dynamically moved

---

[254] Abu Dawud. Book 41, Number 5023 retirevied in April 25, 2009 from
http://www.muslimaccess.com/sunnah/hadeeth/abudawud/041.html:

from the higher pressure area at the external wall to lower air pressure surface area at these receding niches, causing constant acceleration of air flow through the horizontal small openings of the niches of parapet wall. Each niche was constructed out of two panels; the lower panel was the outer one and usually was an extension of the wall built of rammed earth. The upper panel, which formed the upper half of the niche and was usually supported by a wooden lintel, was recessed a little behind creating a horizontal air gap.

Figure 84 An oblique view of Kuwait Town in the 1940s, showing the prevailing two-paneled parapet wall. Source: Kuwait Oil Company.

9.3.2 Wooden Lattice Parapet

The wooden lattice parapet wall, (*shakhakhil* is its local Kuwaiti name) was not commonly used in traditional buildings; however, it was occasionally used for the inner parapet wall overlooking the

courtyard (Fig. 88-b). The lattice parapet was made of local wood such as palm reeds, which were abundant in Kuwait's small oasis, and was about one meter tall by three meters long.[255] The primary use of this type of parapet wall was to cool and to some extent to provide partial privacy, since it was mainly found in the inner parapet walls of affluent houses such as al-Khalid's house (Fig. 85). The wooden lattice parapet basically was a screen that allowed fresh air to pass through and break down the sandy wind so that air passed through while sand and dust fell down. They also blocked direct sunlight and reduced reflected heat and solar radiation. Moreover, these wooden screens had hygroscopic properties; they absorbed the humidity of the air that passed through them which reduced its temperature, and retained cool humidity in the air that had passed through them, creating a cool and pleasant environment behind them. [256]

Figure 85 Al-Khalid house, wooden lattice parapet wall, 1960. Source: Lautrette, 2006.

9.3.2.1 Cat-ear-shape Parapet Wall

---

[255] الخرس and 73, العقروقة.
[256] James Steele and Hassan Fathy, *An Architecture for People : The Complete Works of Hassan Fathy* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1997).

This type of parapet wall often figured into governmental buildings such as the Naif palace and its use was also widespread in mosques (Fig. 88-e). The roofs were surrounded by high parapet walls that "were decorated with triangular projections, similar to a cat's ear in shape, and usually plain and unornamented."[257] These types of parapet walls were mainly for decorative purposes since their height was short compared to other parapet types. A clear example of the intended decorative purpose of the cat-ear-shape parapet is the 'horizontal' parapet wall of al-Muttawa mosque, where the basic function of the parapet wall, the safety of the inhabitants, was ignored in favor of the decoration (Fig. 88-e).

9.3.3 Roof Room

The second element in the traditional roof was a single room or semi-room. In the traditional house, a roof room was often a light wooden structure with large side openings that provided maximum ventilation while blocking the direct sunlight so that the room could quickly cool after sunset (Fig. 87). In some houses the roof room might have a projecting wooden lattice window that provided "not only ventilation but a chance to see what was going on in the street below, and was a favorite sitting-room for the lady of the house."[258]

---

[257] Lewcock and Freeth, 3.
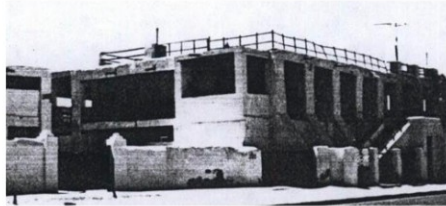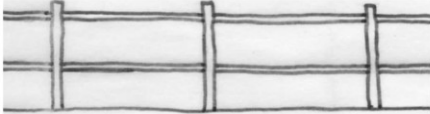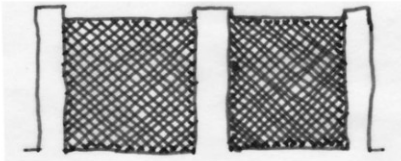[258] Ibid., 2.

Figure 86 traditional house, old Kuwait town,
Figure 87 roof room, old Kuwait, 1987. Source: Kuwait Municipality, 1987.

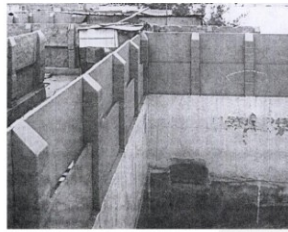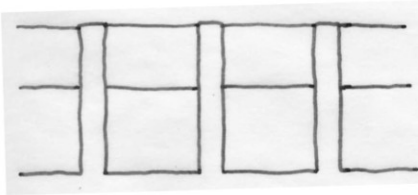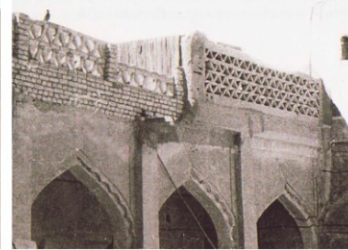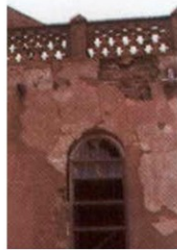## Type of traditional parapet walls
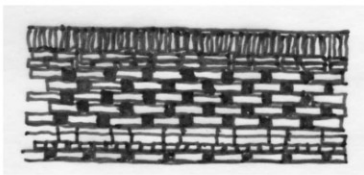
a. Wooden fence

b. Lattice parapet

c. Two-paneled parapet

d. Balustrade parapet

e. Cat-ear-shape parapet

Figure 88 Types of traditional parapet walls in Kuwait. Source: Author's collection.

9.3.4 Roof as Male's Reception Area

Kuwaitis spent most of the night on the roof; therefore, the roof in traditional houses was one of the most pleasant spaces. Usually, the traditional house's roof was built with some common features that enhanced its function not only as a roof, but also as a reception and relaxation place. First, there was the lightweight covered room, which was mostly open or having large openings from all sides. They used to use this room, especially in summer, when the father of the house who spent most of the day working outside the house, would usually come back around noon. Then the whole family usually took a siesta until 3 p.m., minimizing movement in exposed areas in the hottest time of the day. They would use the roof room and the courtyard loggia for sleeping. A. Locher, the American traveler who visited Kuwait in 1888, enjoyed sleeping one night on the roof a Kuwaiti's house and described this experience:

> he invited us to accompany him to the flat roof of the house, which throughout Arabia is the usual place of promenade, it, being by far the best place to enjoy the evening breeze. The roof also serves as dormitory for the inhabitants, who are compelled by the excessive heat of the atmosphere to sleep on the top of these houses, the only-place open to the fresh air and comparatively free from dust and vermin. The bedding is carried into the house in the morning, and placed on the roof again shortly before sunset. From the top of the roof, we had an extensive view over the tranquil bay containing 3024 small, barren islands, and saw our steamer quietly at anchor. The whole population of Kuweit seemed to have assembled on their roofs to enjoy-the refreshing breeze, which refreshing came wafted gently across the bay. The scene before us was one of great interest.[259]

---

[259] A. Locher, *With Star and Crescent: A Full and Authentic Account of a Recent Journey with a Caravan from Bombay to Constantinople, Comprising a Description of the Country, the People, and Increasing Adventures with the Natives* (Philadelphia,: Ætna publishing company, 1889), 66.

Figure 89 Use of the roof as a male's reception area at night in Kuwaiti traditional houses. Source: Al-Ayoub, 2002.

9.3.5 Other Functions of the Traditional Roof

In some of the modest houses, the roof has another important function besides its refreshing role as a place during the night. Part of the roof, usually in the corners, "was often used by the women as a privy. Excrement dried in the hot sun, and would later be swept up and collected as fertilizer for the small market-gardens on the edge of town."[260] Such a place used to have different traditional names such as *al-Adab,* baytul khala. It was basically a small room with a traditional toilet that had a small square opening in the middle. This opening led to a hole where waste and dirt went. Also there was another sheltered hole where people washed after using the toilet. During the night it was often lit by an old kerosene lamp, locally known as al-zehewey.[261]

---

[260] Lewcock and Freeth, 6.
[261] الخرس and 56, العقروقة.

9.4 The Traditional Small Houses

Most small traditional houses began with a few rooms around one or two sides of a central courtyard. As the family grew, the need for more space enhanced their decision to add more rooms on the other sides of the courtyard. Figure 90 illustrates the growing processes in one of the 19th century traditional houses. The rooms are placed behind the loggia that surrounds the central courtyard on three sides (Fig. 91). The courtyard area in this house is 40 percent of the total house area, a large area that comfortably allows for future needed additions. Examination of the al-Askar house revealed that it "was built in at least two stages, with the original construction likely to be of considerable age."[262] The al-Askar house is the typical example of a small house. The house occupies a rectangular plot of ten meters wide by fifteen meters long. The rooms were arranged around a relatively large courtyard. Logically, the rooms surrounded the courtyard from three directions and were oriented to face the southeast direction, the most preferable direction that provided a reasonable amount of sunlight at the preferred time of the day. The main entrance was located in the center of the southern façade leading to the men's reception room or *diwanyah*, however, the doorway was visually blocked by a screen wall, which prevented strange men from looking directly into the family's court. The average number of rooms in the Old Kuwaiti courtyard house was three to four, depending on the size of the family. Each room had a different function. The rooms in the al-Askar house have a high ceiling that stood at more than four meters.
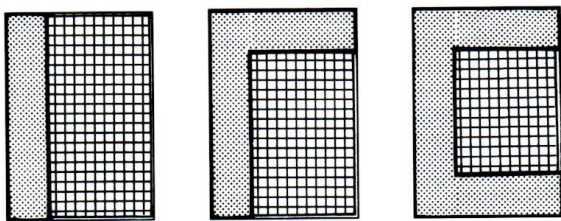
Figure 90 sequence of growth in traditional courtyard house, Kuwait. Source: Anwarul and al-Sanafi

---

[262] Lewcock and Freeth, 24.
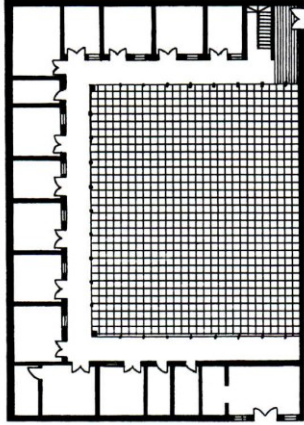
Figure 91 the final layout of the courtyard house. source: Anwarul and al-Sanafi

9.4.1 Al-Ibrahim house

Al-Ibrahim house is located in Fiylakah Island; this house's layout is typical of the average Kuwaiti traditional house (Fig. 76). When analyzing its layout, several aspects are seen as a response to its inhabitants' mores. The entrance opened to a passage which visually ended with a wall. This arrangement entrance was popular in most Arab countries. It is simply for preserving the family's privacy from male strangers. Noticeably, the men's reception area was located in the corner of the house, which was also a popular tactic in the traditional house for protecting the family's privacy. The size of the men's area allowed more space for the family's quarters. While all the family's rooms opened to the inside, only the windows of the men's reception area opened to the outside. The courtyard was mostly rectangular and located directly in the center of the house. It is surrounded by a cantilevered roof on three sides and a loggia on the fourth side. In many houses, the courtyard is surrounded by loggia on several sides.

Balconies were rarely used in traditional houses for several reasons. Most importantly, many traditional houses consisted of only one floor. A balcony was not preferred because it could expose the family to the outside and break the family's privacy. The harsh climate of Kuwait also did not

encourage the use of balconies. Although other Islamic/Arab cities had the same issues of privacy, covered balconies were never popular in Kuwait.

In wealthy Kuwaitis' houses, the separation between men and women, and public and private spaces was more pronounced. These houses usually contained more than one courtyard, so each space had its own courtyard, as in the al-Ghanim house. However, the *harem* or family courtyard was always the main courtyard which was larger, more functional, and more decorated than the other courtyards.

The traditional Kuwaiti city was compact. Most traditional houses had only one frontage to the street, where the worldly life was. Therefore, a private family's world was in need of private street frontage. This was maintained by introducing the courtyard as the central and essential element of the house.

The facades in traditional houses refer to the inside or the inward walls of the courtyards; they were simply the courtyard's facades, not the street facades. Such a revolutionary understanding of traditional architecture was concerned more with the inside, where the family spent most of their time. Indeed, it was a kind of architecture that was driven from the inside, and it was concerned more about what the occupants see and feel inside their house than what people see from the street.

The interior facades—courtyard facades—in traditional houses were carefully designed so that every wall looked beautiful and had some special features different from those of the other walls. A loggia or the surrounding arcade enhanced the functional role of the courtyard. In addition, due to the scarcity of drinking water, the courtyard was used to collect rain water by using a large piece of cloth or fabric which worked as collector and filter at the same time.

The courtyard played a social-psychological role. To the old inhabitants, it was their private world; they were free from the eyes of strangers. In addition, it was the most dynamic space in the house. It allowed the family to gather, socialize, and enjoy outdoor activities in a genuinely open yet private place that ensured their privacy and provided a momentous degree of environmental protection from the dusty and sandy winds.

10 CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined the evolution of Kuwaiti traditional architecture since its creation in the early 18th century and up to the early 20th century. From the Sief Palace area, the first seeds of Kuwait's urban structure grew around *al-kut* or fortress. Soon after, many tribes settled in and around it and a nascent town was growing. The first historical reference about Old Kuwait and its urban life and architecture came from the travelogue of Ibn Alwan, who visited the town in 1709. The early European travelers' accounts and those by local Kuwaiti historians all agreed that the Old Town buildings' characteristics and configurations did not change much until the discovery of oil. They all seemed to agree about four aspects of Kuwait over time: 1) al-Sabah as the political leader, 2) Kuwait's appropriate natural harbor, 3) the size of the Kuwaiti population and their gift for trading, and 4) the existence of a wall around the town. Since its origin, Kuwait Town grew in an oval shape. The essential urban elements were the coastal area, the residential quarters consisting mainly of courtyard houses, and the souk streets area. The town was surrounded by a wall extending from the sea on the east to the sea again on the west, the purposes of which was to protect the inhabitants from the attacks of the desert tribes as well as to levy taxes.

Several factors contributed to the immigration of the *Utub* from central Arabia and their eventual dominance in Kuwait, including the geographical location of Kuwait and its Bay (one of the finest natural harbors in the entire Arabian Gulf), and the balance of regional powers in the first half of the 18th century.

The *Utub*'s journey in the Arabian Desert, their time in Qatar, and eventually their brief residence in Basra, all must have significantly impacted their decision to transfer from a nomadic and semi-nomadic life to stable groups who settled in permanent houses. By the time they decided

to settle in Kuwait, they had moved away from itinerant camel herding and gained new productive means of survival, such as the maritime and merchant trades, and pearl diving. Certainly, the *Utub*'s way of life evolved rapidly, and with this change came the transformation of their living environments, from temporary shelter to fixed housing.

By examining the Gulf Bedouin's recent migration to cities, the question arises, do modern examples of sedentarization illuminate historical *Utub*'s sedentarization in the early 18th century?

The *Utub*'s early arrival in Kuwait was similar to that of the Bedouin encampment in Kuwait in the early years of the 20th century. They built their black tents around the already established village of Kuwait by Bani Khalid.

The social organization had a great effect on Kuwait's urban patterns. The tribal social structure was maintained through the transformation from nomadic mode to the sedentary mode of settlement. This is found in the residential blocks. Each block or *freej* was often occupied by one extended family or several related families.

The Kuwaiti traditional urban form followed the social organization. The social and cultural practices of Kuwaitis, after they interacted with Kuwait's physical realities, were all crucial factors that defined and shaped Kuwaiti traditional architecture and its characteristics. The socio-urban processes, for instance, inculcated a social basis to the urban fabric in the form of the *freej*, a residential block or neighborhood that originated from relative or kinship bases such as tribal or family bases. Early settlers in Kuwait came from different surrounding regions such as Najd, Iraq, Persia, and the Arabian Desert. The position of a *freej* to Sief Palace, which was the initial central node in the early 18th century, corresponded to the social standing of the *freej*. The closer the location of a *freej* to the old center, the earlier arrival and the higher social standing it held. The Wasat area, for example, contained prominent *ferjan* (plural) such as sheikhs' *freej* or the ruling family district, and many merchants' families.

Each *freej* had its own social products and produced distinguished architectural products. The most important architectural product of each *freej* was a mosque in the local square named after a donor from within this *freej*.

There were two mechanisms by which Kuwait Old Town was urbanized: the Islamic law and the Kuwaitis' local customs or *urf*. Both types of mechanisms impacted not only Kuwait but many other surrounding Arab and Muslim towns. Although some of these rules were universal, the majorities, especially those of *urf*, were accumulative reactions and experiences produced by each town. Hence, each town had its own urban and architectural local customs. Both types had their impact on the Arab and Islamic traditional towns. The Islamic law was a centralized imposing system focusing on the macro principles that created a unifying or a universal built environment. The *urf*, on the other hand, was operating on the micro level, case by case. The *urf* focused on the details of the local built form and its impact of the existing built form, such as the architecture of houses and their character and how they interrelated to other houses. Practically, the two types were simultaneously working together in the traditional Kuwaiti environment.

There are generally three mechanisms, according to Islamic law, that created the ownership of properties: by revivification, by transferring property through selling or giving, and by inheritance. Because the town's population continued to expand, revivification of vacant land was the most essential mechanism.

The rule of priorityship was a significant factor in shaping the site location of the houses and streets. The most important location in Old Kuwait was its harbor, which provided naturally secure and safe anchorage for fishers' boats. The harbor was famous for its rich pearls and many favorable types of fishes. Proximity to this harbor was important because of reduced walking distance.

The economic activities had a great impact on Kuwaiti urban and architectural patterns as well. Kuwait was located on two important old trade routes: the Gulf sea-route and the desert caravan track, therefore, its economic activities were closely related to two aspects: sea and desert. From the Sief Palace area the first seed of Kuwaiti urban life grew around *al-kut* or the fortress. Soon after many tribes settled in and around it and a nascent town was growing. The first historical reference about Old Kuwait and its urban life and architecture came from Ibn Alwan, whose travelogue detailed his visit to the town in 1709.

The Old Kuwait's commercial activities took place in three major areas, each of which had its own spatial character: the Sief Street area, Safat Square, and the central souk area. Sief Street specialized in wholesale trade and featured *amarat* type or warehouse buildings that took two forms, the central plan and the linear one. Safat Square was a significant feature of the Old Town and served as the point of arrival and departure for camel caravans coming from and leaving the desert. The central souk area included various sub-souks and was the most dynamic commercial area in which most of the unit sales took place. The names of these traditional souks often revealed the type of commercial activities taking place, for example, *amarah* meant warehouse, *saha* meant a central place specialized in specific work.

The most important street in Old Kuwait was the coastal street, called *Sief Street*. It had always been a lively area with a large variety of activity. It contained *Fardha* or Kuwait harbor, Sief Palace, prominent Kuwaiti merchants' houses and *diwans*, and many *amarat* or warehouse buildings. On the other hand, the impact of the desert side, with its trade and threats, was important; building a wall around Kuwait Town as early as 1752 aimed not only to protect the town but also to control the desert trading, which was dynamic dealing with the nomadic tribes coming through the desert from North and South.

Street systems in the traditional environment were primarily of two types: the through street, which was considered a public right-of-way and had to be at least wide enough for two packed camels or mules to pass; and the cul-de-sac which, according to Islamic law, is considered to be the private property of the people having access it to from their front doors.

The irregularity of the traditional streets in Old Kuwait was greatly influenced by two major traditional principles: revivification and what was leftover among the revived lands, and the concept of *fina*. A *fina* was the width of about one meter adjoining the edge of a building, extending vertically along the surface of the façade, which the owner or inhabitant had certain rights for using, such as *sabat*.

The modesty in design and form was a salient feature of traditional Kuwaiti architecture. Almost every aspect of Kuwaiti traditional architecture reflected a practice of modesty that was derived directly from two realities: religious guidance and a lack of natural resources. Of the many Islamic teachings, the following one is specific to buildings, saying: "Every building is a misfortune for its owner, except what cannot, meaning except that which is essential."[263] In the traditional buildings of Kuwait, especially houses, the best implementation of such Islamic recommendation is evident; often the houses had plain and stark facades with almost no decoration or fenestrations.

The concept of beauty without arrogance is reflected mostly in the exterior facades of the buildings. The Kuwaiti old houses were built to suit and to be practical for the social and religious practices; in accordance to Islamic teaching that says "no person with an atom of arrogance in his

---

[263] Abu Dawud. Book 41, Number 5218. retrieved in April 25, 2009 from
http://www.muslimaccess.com/sunnah/hadeeth/abudawud/041.html

heart will enter paradise,"[264] the excessive expenditures on buildings were frowned upon in the traditional Kuwaiti community. The external facades of houses had no decoration, except for the main entrance which was often decorated, especially the door, to express the owner's taste and identity. The interior of the building, in contrast with its exterior, was often decorated, particularly the facades of the courtyard, according to the financial ability of the occupants.

Traditional buildings have different types and shapes of parapet walls and each has a specific function. Some of these parapet walls were more common for a period of time while others were recent. The common parapet type in most of the traditional buildings (including houses, mosques, and other public and private buildings) was the two-paneled parapet wall.

It would be of interest to examine Kuwaiti traditional architectural and its evolution in the context of Kuwait's cultural evolution. It is hoped that this could provide a resourceful framework whereby architectural developments over time could be conceptualized, and would be a benchmark from which other work on this aspect of architectural evolution could be conducted with the objective of advancing our knowledge of Kuwaiti traditional architecture and its evolution in particular.

10.1 Recommendation for Future Studies

Several important buildings are found to have had major impact on Kuwaiti traditional architecture, these are:

10.1.1 The Sief Palace

---

[264] Hakim, "Revitalizing Traditional Towns and Heritage Districts," 158.

The Sief Palace was one of the most important buildings in Old Kuwait. It was located at the center of the Town and housed the ruler of Kuwait and many of his government officers. Yet, there is no one single reference to this crucial building, except for fragmented descriptions, the best of which was the one by Barclay Raunkiaer in 1912 that provided an amazing depiction of the Sief Palace and its startling halls. There is an urgent need for an in-depth and scholarly study that examines the visual, formal, and spatial characteristics of the Sief Palace and how its dominating presence architecturally impacted the Old Town.

This historical research study intended to fill the gap that exists in the documentation of Kuwait's history as it relates to architecture and urbanization before the discovery of oil in the region. Besides giving an extensive description of Kuwaiti architecture, this study also concentrated on investigating the mechanisms that produced a specific and distinctive architecture in Old Kuwait. An analysis of the few, surviving, and traditional buildings in Kuwait is significant, because these buildings represent a highly developed formula of the local culture and demonstrate patterns of particular lifestyles. Another goal of this study was to classify, describe, and indicate Kuwaiti traditional buildings and their features, and to link these traditional buildings to their cultural contexts, which represent the occupants and their beliefs, habits, and living patterns.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdo, Muhammad Fawzi. "The Urbanisation of Kuwait since 1950: Planning, Progress and
        Issues."
University of Durham, United Kingdom, 1988.

Abdullah, Thabit A. J. "The Political Economy of Merchants and Trade in Basra, 1722-1795."
        Ph.D., Georgetown University, 1992.

Abu-Hakima, Ahmad Mustafa. *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800; the Rise and Development
        of Bahrain and Kuwait*. 1st ed. Beirut: Khayats, 1965.

_____. *Eastern Arabia Historic Photographs*. London: Hurtwood Press, 1984.

Aga Khan Award for Architecture (Organization). *Conservation as Cultural Survival:
        Proceedings of Seminar Two in the Series Architectural Transformations in the Islamic
        World, Held in Istanbul, Turkey, September 26-28, 1978* Architectural Transformations in
        the Islamic World; 2. Philadelphia: Published for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture by
        Concept Media, 1980.

Aga Khan Award for Architecture (Organization), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and Malaysia.
        Kementerian Kebudayaan Belia dan Sukan. *Architecture and Identity: Proceedings of the
        Regional Seminar in the Series Exploring Architecture in Islamic Cultures*. Exploring
        Architecture in Islamic Cultures; 1. Singapore: Published for the Aga Khan Award for
        Architecture by Concept Media, 1983.

Akbar, Jamel A. "Responsibility and the Traditional Muslim Built Environment." MIT, 1984.

Al-Asad, Mohammad. "The Modern State Mosque in the Eastern Arab World, 1828-1985 (Egypt,
        Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia)." Harvard University; 0084, 1990.

Al-Bahar, Huda. "Contemporary Kuwaiti Houses." *Mimar* no. 13, (1984).

Al-Bahar, Huda H. "The Evolution of Kuwait's Domestic Architecture: An Empirical and a
        Theoretical Study." London University, 1990.

al-Ghunaim, Abdullah Y. *Kuwait News Messages of Ali Bin Ghuloom Ridha British News Agent in
        Kuwait*. Kuwait 2007.

Al-Hashm, Fuad. "A Capital Without...Memory!!" *Alwatan*, June 11, 2007, Last page.

Al-Loughani, Basem. *Kuwait in Black and White*. Kuwait 2007.

al-Qenaei, Yousif. *Pages from the History of Kuwait*. Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968.

Al-Quraini, Nawal M. S. "The Persistence of Tradition on the Kuwait Architecture." Ohio University, 1979.

al-Ragam, Asseel. "Towards a Critique of an Architectural Nahdha: A Kuwaiti Example." Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2008.

Al-Shamlan, Sayf Marzouk. *Min Tarikh Al-Kuwayt (from the History of Kuwait)*. Cairo: Maktbat Nahdat Misr, 1959.

Al-Shehab, Yousef. *Kuwait through History*. Kuwait, 1992.

Al-Zubi, Ali Z. "Urbanization, Tribalism, and Tribal Marriage in Contemporary Kuwait." Wayne State University, 1999.

Al Abad, Badi. "Contemporary Architecture." *Arts & the Islamic World* 3, no. 1 (1985): 60.

Alhasani, Nadia M. "Tradition Vs. Modernity: The Quest for a Cultural Identity." *Traditional dwellings & settlements review: journal of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments* 7, no. 2 (1996): 35.

Ali, Evangelia; Shuaibi, Faed; Al Anjari, Nezar; Al Matrook, Rhedha. "Old Kuwait Town." 1, 406: Kuwait Municipality, 1988.

Alkanderi, Faisal A. "Jews in Kuwait." *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations* 17, no. 4 (2006): 445-456.

Allison, T. R. *Materials Testing in the Arabian Gulf*. Kuwait: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, 1979.

Anderson, Richard, and Jawaher Al-Bader. "Recent Kuwaiti Architecture: Regionalism Vs. Globalization." *Journal of architectural & planning research* 23, no. 2 (2006): 134.

Anscombe, Frederick Fallowfield. *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Antoniou, Jim. "Plan for Amiri Diwan in Kuwait." *Middle East construction* 9, no. 7 (1984): 19.

Asfour, Khaled. "Bitter Lakes Villa, Egypt: A Dialogue with Hasan Fathy." *Mimar: architecture in development* 11, no. 2 (1991): 54.

Asfour, Khaled Sayed. "The Villa and the Modern Egyptian Intelligentsia: A Critique of Conventionalism." Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991.

Ball, M. S., and Gregory W. H. Smith. *Analyzing Visual Data* Qualitative Research Methods; V. 24. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992.

Banks, R. L. "Notes on a Visit to Kuwait." *Town Planning Review* 26 (1955): 48.

Borg, Walter R., and Meredith D. Gall. *Educational Research: An Introduction*. 5th ed., New York: Longman, 1989.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990.

Brown, Carl, ed. *From Madina to Metropolis; Heritage and Change in the near Eastern City*. Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1973.

Bulloch, John. *The Gulf: A Portrait of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the Uae*. London: Century Pub., 1984.

Carr, Edward Hallett. *What Is History?* 1st American ed. New York: Knopf, 1962.

Casey, Michael S. *The History of Kuwait.* The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2007.

Clements, Frank. *Kuwait*. Rev. ed. World Bibliographical Series; V. 56. Oxford, England; Santa Barbara, Calif.: Clio Press, 1996.

Costello, V. F. *Urbanization in the Middle East*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Cottrell, Alvin J. *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Curtis, William J. R. *Modern Architecture since 1900*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Daniels, John. *Kuwait Journey*. Luton: White Crescent Press Ltd., 1971.

Dickson, Harold Richard Patrick. *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sau'di Arabia*. 2d ed., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951.

_____. *Kuwait and Her Neighbours. Edited for Publication by Clifford Witting*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1956.

Dickson, Violet. *Forty Years in Kuwait*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1971.

Doughty, Charles Montagu, and T. E. Lawrence. *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. London, Boston: P. L. Warner, publisher to the Medici society, ltd. J. Cape, 1921.

Edwards, Brian, ed. *Courtyard Housing: Past, Present and Future [Et Al.]*. Abingdon [England]; New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006.

El Mallakh, Ragaei. "Planning in a Capital Surplus Economy: Kuwait." *Land Economics* 42, no. 4 (1966): 425.

Emmison, Michael, and Philip Smith. *Researching the Visual: Images, Objects, Contexts and Interactions in Social and Cultural Inquiry*. Introducing Qualitative Methods. London: SAGE, 2000.

Facey, William, and Gillian Grant. *Kuwait by the First Photographers*. The London Center of Arab Studies, 1998.

Fathy, Hassan. *Architecture for the Poor; an Experiment in Rural Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Fathy, Hassan, and Walter Shearer. *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture: Principles and Examples with Reference to Hot Arid Climates*. Chicago: Published for United Nations University by the University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Ffrench, Geoffrey E., and Allan G. Hill. *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*. Geomedical Monograph Series; 4;. Berlin, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1971.

Ffrench, Geoffrey E., and Allan G. Hill. *Kuwait, Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*. Medizinische Länderkunde. Geomedical Monograph Series. Berlin, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1971.

Ffrench, Geoffrey E., and Allan G. Hill , and Author Joint. *Kuwait: Urban and Medical Ecology; a Geomedical Study*. Geomedical Monograph Series; 4;. Berlin: New York Springer-Verlag, 1971.

Freeth, Zahra Dickson. *A New Look at Kuwait*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1972.

Fullerton, Arlene, and Géza Fehérvári, eds. *Kuwait: Arts and Architecture: A Collection of Essays*. Kuwait: Oriental Press, 1995.

Gardiner, Stephen, and Ian Cook. *Kuwait, the Making of a City*. Harlow, Essex; New York: Longman, 1983.

Grube, Ernst J., and George Michell. *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978.

Grunebaum, Gustave E. von. *Islam; Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*. 2d ed. London,: Routledge & Paul, 1961.

Hakim, Besim S. *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*. London; New York: KPI, 1986.

_____. "Revitalizing Traditional Towns and Heritage Districts." *International Journal of Architectural Research* 1, no. 3 (2007): 153-166.

Hatch, J. Amos. *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Hillier, Bill, and Julienne Hanson. *The Social Logic of Space*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

"Hotel in Kuwait." *Architectural Design* 28 (1958): 460.

Ismael, Jacqueline S. *Kuwait, Social Change in Historical Perspective*. 1st ed. Contemporary Issues in the Middle East. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982.

_____. *Kuwait, Social Change in Historical Perspective / J.S. Ismael*. 1st ed. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982.

Jamal, Karim. "Immigrant Workers' Settlements in Kuwait: Ishish." *Architectural Design* 44, no. 7 (1974): 408.

Jamal, Mohammad A. *The Old Souk of Kuwait* Kuwait Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait 2004.

Lautrette, Michel. *Kuwait Early Architecture* Kuwait: Al-Khat Printing Press, 2006.

Lewcock, Ronald B., and Zahra Dickson Freeth. *Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Northern Gulf*. London: United Bank of Kuwait, 1978.

Locher, A. *With Star and Crescent: A Full and Authentic Account of a Recent Journey with a Caravan from Bombay to Constantinople, Comprising a Description of the Country, the People, and Increasing Adventures with the Natives*. Philadelphia: Ætna publishing company, 1889.

Long, David. *Culture and Customs of Saudi Arabia (Culture and Customs of the Middle East*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005.

Lorimer, John Gordon. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*. Farnsborough: Gregg, 1970.

MacFarlane, P. W. "Planning an Arab Town: Kuwait on the Persian Gulf." *Town Planning Institute Journal* 40 (1954): 110.

McCready, William C., ed. *Culture, Ethnicity, and Identity: Current Issues in Research*. New York: Academic Press, 1983.

Mumford, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1946.

Municipality, Kuwait. *Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait*: Kuwait Municipality, 1980.

_____. "Sharq Al-Sief Area: Planning & Schematic Design." ed. Municipality of Kuwait, II Final Report: Municipality of Kuwait, 1989.

"Naif Avenue, Kuwait." *Architectural Review* 113 (1953): 126.

"Power Station at Kuwait." *Architectural Review* 120 (1956): 9.

Prosser, Jon. *Image-Based Researc : A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*. London; Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, 1998.

Rapoport, Amos. *House Form and Culture*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969.

_____. *Culture, Architecture, and Design*. Chicago: Locke Science Pub. Co., 2005.

Raunkiaer, Barclay, and Gerald De Gaury. *Through Wahhabiland on Camelback*. New York: Praeger, 1969.

Richards, Lyn, and Janice Morse. *User's Guide to Qualitative Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007.

Royal Scottish Museum. *The Evolving Culture of Kuwait*. Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1985.

Salzman, Philip Carl, and Edward Sadala. *When Nomads Settle: Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response*. New York: Praeger, 1980.

Schofield, Richard N. *Kuwait and Iraq: Historical Claims and Territorial Disputes: A Report Compiled for the Middle East Programme of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*. London: The Institute, 1991.

Shapiro, Kelli. "From Modernism to Mcdonald's." *JAE* 61 no. 2 (2007).

Shehab, Fakhri. "Kuwait: A Super-Affluent Society." *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 3 (1964): 461-474.

Shiber, Saba George. *The Kuwait Urbanization; Documentation, Analysis, Critique. Al-Madianah Al-Kuwaitiyyah*. Kuwait: Kuwait Government, 1964.

_____. *Recent Arab City Growth*. Kuwait: Kuwait Govt. Print. Press, 1969.

Slot, B. *The Origins of Kuwait*. Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1991.

Slot, Ben J., ed. *Kuwait the Growth of a Historic Identity*. Kuwait: The Gulf Museum Consultancy Company, 2003.

Society, National Geographic. *Atlas of the World*. 8th ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2007.

Steele, James, and Hassan Fathy. *An Architecture for People: The Complete Works of Hassan Fathy*. New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1997.

Templin, Thomas J., and Janice K. Olson. *Teaching in Physical Education* Big Ten Body of Knowledge Symposium Series; V. 14. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983.

Thompson, Jack Howell, and Robert D. Reischauer. *Modernization of the Arab World*. Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1966.

Trench, Richard. *Arab Gulf Cities*. 4 vols. Slough: Archive Editions, 1994.

Yarwood, John R. *Al Muharraq: Architecture of a Traditional Arabian Town in Bahrain*.London: Arts & The Islamic World (UK), 2000.

الخرس, محمد, and البيت الكويتي القديم. مريم العقروقة.
الكويت مركز البحوث و الدراسات الكويتية 2003.

العبدالمغني, عادل محمد. مدينة الكويت القديمة سور الديرة. الكويت, 2001.