



INDUSTRIAL BANK OF KUWAIT

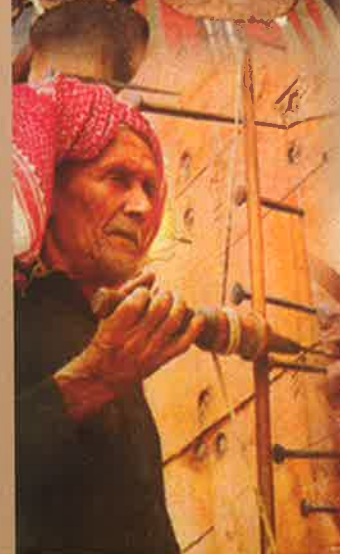
*The Old Crafts, Trades,  
and Commercial Activities  
in Kuwait*

*By:*

**Mohamad Abdul Hadi Jamal**



Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait  
Kuwait 2009





*The Old Crafts*

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# Foreword

The Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait [CRSK] has the pleasure to introduce one of the most paramount books which reveals the origins of Kuwait's heritage, its old environment, its memories and features, its history and originality, It is the book of Ustaz Mohammad Abdul Hadi Jamal. It documents and authenticates the various community activities in old Kuwait which depended on Kuwaitis hard work and their strenuous efforts to adapt with their life circumstances to achieve and communicate with their requirements in that old primitive society.

The Book at our hands represents a documentary study of the professions, vocations, trades, and business activities prevailed in Kuwait over the past three centuries. Many facts and topics of this study depended -besides archival and written sources and references- on striking recorded interviews with narrators who have witnessed and certified a part of such historical eras, or uninterruptedly told by fathers through forefathers.

It is natural that there have been extensive collections of necessary professions and occupations, which are indispensable in any urban society, such as construction, carpentry, smithery and iron works as well as crafts related to stitching clothes, furnishing, and food industry, in addition to other activities required for daily living. There were other crafts closely related to the Kuwaiti economy and its various requirements. Kuwait, with its unique geographical location, has constituted a significant commercial hub or mediator between the Arabian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the heart of the Arabian Peninsula; a matter that led to a wider diversity in crafts and business activities.

The Center acknowledges the extensive efforts being exerted by the author and his accustomed systematic accuracy and precision in the process of tracking and uncovering the facts and events, mentioning the inherent features and documenting the relevant treasures of information. With this encyclopedic work, he has preserved significant features and landmarks of Kuwait's history, which consequently will provide the opportunity to researchers, scholars and learners to derive the characteristics and elements of the old Kuwaiti society. The general content of this book confirms the statement of one of those who have deep insight in Kuwait's history that «Kuwait is the gift of its citizens».

CRSK hopes that this Book - with the studies and research it comprises on Kuwait and the images of its ancient historic and social accomplishments and realities - constitutes a cultural message embedding plenty of entertainment, knowledge and benefit for the readers and students.

The Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait [CRSK] would like to extend its gratitude to the Industrial Bank of Kuwait for adopting such an invaluable publication, as it is the economic institution, which has been contributing remarkably to enriching the Arabic library with a number of serious sober scientific publications.

**Professor Abdullah Yusuf Al Ghunaim**

**CRSK Chairman**



## Preamble

The method and pattern of the society's satisfaction of its material, physical and moral requirements are considered a part of its civilization. These requirements are satisfied through the production and utilization of the local, exporting or importing products. This Book relates to a significant aspect the cultural heritage. In this context, it addresses crafts, trades and commercial activities practiced by the old generations of Kuwait, who strived to satisfy their basic needs. Such crafts and occupations were professed and asserted by the old generation, fathers and ancestors, and represented the productive activity in that phase of history. The book is comprehensive, whether in terms of its coverage of all the areas of Kuwait (sea, city, villages and islands), or in terms of trades, crafts and business activities prevalent in those areas. This work presents accumulated number of crafts, trades and commercial activities in detail, highlighting historical and social events. Further, the book handles those trades, crafts and work which have been responding to the requirements of a certain historical phase, mainly the era preceding the flow of oil wealth and the radical changes it has caused in the standards and modes of living. This is the period pre 1950. The book is not limited to dealing with the crafts, trades and commercial activities, but, it attempted to manifest certain tools that had been used in the majority of crafts and trades. In addition, the book has also dealt with the products of each craft and trade, when such products multiplied, and distinguished between them. Additionally, when necessary, the book recounted a number of significant historical events associated with the development of a certain craft or trade. It has dealt, in detail, with all kinds of crafts and trades, whether they were run by a single person working for his own account, or workshops or small plants containing a number of wage earners working under certain conditions or regulations. The book is written in an attractively interesting, graded and pleasant style to the reader, leading to smooth follow-up thereof. Undoubtedly, it is a valuable addition to our Arabic library and has a special significance to those interested in the economic history and the development of the production process. In view of the significance of this work, it has been adopted and published by the Industrial Bank of Kuwait and the Center For Research and Studies on Kuwait. This book has been authored by one of the bank's staff, Mr. Mohamad Abdul Hadi Jamal, the Counceler General to the Bank Projects Division. He is a remarkable and diligent researcher who relied in compiling his scientific material, not only on books, references and documents, but also on his direct contacts, live dialogues

and conversations with citizens from the old generation who had been living during that period and professed a number of crafts and trades. Such a method required continued efforts, patience, reviews and checking, therefore it is not strange that preparing the scientific material of this book has exhausted five years. Additionally, the researcher has published other previous works of historical nature, including History of Postal Services in Kuwait, History of Currency and Banknotes in The State of Kuwait, Kuwait's Old Markets And Kuwait's Ports Yesterday and Today (Past and Present).

Hereupon, we would like to seize this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciations to the researcher for the endeavors and efforts he has exerted and the work he has presented for the service of his country and the reviving its heritage.

**Saleh Mohammed Al-Yusuf**

# Introduction

This book covers old professions, crafts, trades and commercial activities exercised by the former greathearted generation of fathers and forefathers, which produced considerate men who had exerted surpassing efforts to live on its land, while staying in integrity and security, despite the harsh living conditions which accompanied them throughout such days. In virtue of the remarkable geographical location of Kuwait, trading became the main activity, which constituted the backbone of the economy, around which all other various living work revolved, including vocations, crafts and other small business activities. They as a whole, formed, the economic activity of Kuwait in such old days. That location, in addition to the nature of Kuwait's population, their living style, political, economic and the commercial conditions in the neighboring countries, effectively played a vital role in the emergence of Kuwait as a significant commercial center. That center continued for long years to provide such areas with many of their living needs, coming from the East and West. Those conditions led to Kuwait's becoming an indispensable commercial center for those countries which did not hold enough facilities and potentials, matching suitably with the number of their populations, such as infrastructure, laws and necessary measures to facilitate the flow of goods and conveniently at low costs. For instance, such countries did not have adequate numbers of ports to satisfy the requirements of their population of imported goods. In addition, their commercial laws imposed huge taxes on one side, or banned the import of many goods on the other. That encouraged merchants to buy their needs of goods from Kuwait and to introduce them into their countries through various means and methods, whether by sea or land. Owners of small boats in Iran, for example, used to sail to Kuwait to buy nearly everything available in order to smuggle them to their country through the small ports and beaches of the villages scattered along the Eastern part of the Arabian Gulf. Further, the caravans of donkey drivers from southern Iraq used to roam that desert separating Iraq and Kuwait, back and forth, especially during the spring season, to transport and deliver various types of goods unavailable there, whether through legal means or otherwise. The same situation applied to the Arabian Peninsula regions. Of course, that led to the prosperity of transit trade in Kuwait, in addition to the revival of craftsmanship works to provide such areas with the goods and commodities not available there, in which the Kuwaitis were famous and skillful in producing.

Ships were the fundamental basis which the old Kuwaiti economy relied upon, as it was the link for bringing goods to Kuwait from abroad, in addition

to transporting big numbers of men to the pearling locations. Then, those boats became the main source of income for all the population of Kuwait, whether directly - through transporting goods to Kuwait from India and East Africa - or indirectly through the various crafts and businesses practiced by Kuwaitis, which heavily relied on the proceeds of the commercial activity and the outcome of the diving season each year.

Crafts and trades were multiplied according to the needs thereof, whether for the consumption of the local population or for satisfying the needs of the caravans, which continued heading to Kuwait City from the various surrounding areas to buy the products, and be carried back to their countries. We have been trying to cover in this research such crafts, trades and other commercial businesses and identify their details, as well as record what we have managed to get of the information related to them. Therefore, we have divided the book into four main chapters. The First Chapter deals with the crafts and trades related to the sea; while the Second Chapter deals with the crafts and trades inside Kuwait City. The Third Chapter, is about the workshops or small factories and various commercial activities which began by the last century. It took place as a result of the expansion in the demand for a number of goods and services which required relatively larger establishments to offer the goods and services rather than depend on units which have been relying on one person as an owner of a shop or craftsman who worked single-handedly in his shop. The Fourth Chapter is allocated for crafts and trades carried out by Kuwaitis in the villages and Failaka Island.

The main source of this research was the meetings and interviews the writer held during the past years with a number of the old generation, who had practiced such work and lived through them day after day, and was the source of income for them and their families. The author has not however overlooked - as well - the literature and documentary proofs, which covered such work over the past years. Despite the significance of such interviews with the old generation, were written sources in Kuwait National library, which are abundant with many publications, books, and research in this field. Researchers who preceded the author have had a remarkably pioneering role in preserving much of the heritage of this country, and provided the researcher with a lot of the required information to satisfy his needs. It is note worthy however, to refer here to a significant aspect of this research, namely its heavy reliance on verbal sources - i.e. personal interviews - as a main source of information that depends on the memory of the conveyor. The author addressed maximum concern to rely on more than one source for every single piece of information, without conforming conclusively on accuracy of such information, especially because of the old age of the other party interviewed and

the lapse of many years through such events. Among the bases the author has put also in the research is to specify a certain period of time, or in other words, to place a boundary for the period under research. The purpose thereof is to emphasize on a certain period of time which ended with the change of conditions as a result of a significant event, which is the inflow of oil funds. Such funds have changed the living style and superseded the previous conditions almost completely. Therefore, the author considered the beginning of the fifties of the past century (the year 1950) as the date when the research stops, as Kuwait entered - starting that period - into the modern renaissance age and gradually departed from the preceding eras, which were characterized by hard living, difficulties of life and dependence of man on his hands for producing the goods on which he had been living. Starting that period, the Kuwaiti economy witnessed an unprecedented prosperity, which covered the various economic sectors, upon which a big number of expatriates rushed into the country, causing constant economic and social leaps and developments leading to radical changes on all aspects of life.

Among the matters, which will be observed by the readers in some aspects of this book, is addressing in some locations, to a number of historical, political and social events, and pointing out meaningful top stories directly related to a number of trades and crafts. The objective underlying this is to bring into view a number of related social and economic aspects to serve the subject matter and to complete and signify its features. For example, the problem of scarcity of water in Kuwait historically, upon covering water transport and delivery trade thereof. Correspondingly, «the Year of El Bishoot» was referred to when writing about the trade of stitching cloaks. The author further, followed up the developments witnessed by Kuwait in the public health field from the beginning of the previous century, when dealt with the old folk medicine and medication. In his view, this adds a special flavor to the matter, to overcome boredom if the research is confined only to the details of each trade or craft. In addition, this style adds to the reader's knowledge new aspects, which he may not have learned or experienced before. In the meantime, it is entertaining and interesting as well to know the style of living and how such kindhearted people dealt with each other, and tolerantly assisted each during the past harsh days.

At the end of this introduction, the author extends his sincere gratitude and appreciation to everyone who contributed to publishing this book in the form presented to the reader. If it were not for such remarkable efforts, the useful and constructive indispensable guidelines, and directives in addition to the invaluable information the author would not have been able to introduce this work in this form, which can satisfy those concerned with this aspect of the history and heritage of

Kuwait. The author dedicates special gratitude to those kind and generous men whom he held remarkable interviews with which provided him with abundant information, constituted the backbone of this book. The author wishes to those who are living among them good health and wellness, and those who passed away, mercy and forgiveness. All of them have been the unknown soldiers on whose shoulders this book was grounded and became a true reality due to their knowledge and contributions.

In this concern, the author would also extend his gratitude to those who stood by him since the beginning and have been exerting invaluable efforts to arrange interviews with tens of men from the old generation, and helped to elucidate many matters. They contributed to providing him with the information and the images reflecting many of the topics handled. At the forefront of them, are the brothers Sadeq Yali Ahmad, Mohammed Ali Al Khars and Adel Mohammed Al Matrook, to whom sincere gratitude and high estimation are offered. The author would also like to remember here the late A'shour Yusuf Al Sabbagh, who was a competent source of information and encyclopedia for all matters, which revolve in the inquirer's mind. He, May God have mercy on him, contributed to enriching this book with much of the information and facts which are indispensable for completion of such a research.

At the end, the author would also like to indicate with all acknowledgement and appreciation the remarkable role and extensively effective contribution allocated by the Industrial Bank of Kuwait since the first moments he initiated work in this book. This generous institution has escorted this work since its inception, by offering moral support and encouragement as well as efficient help represented in all the secretarial work, typing, photocopying and many other services needed. Such Services were culminated by adopting the printing of this book as a favor to the subject matter and contribution to showing the shining lustrous aspects of their beloved country. Therefore, the author is extending his sincere gratitude and appreciation to this pioneering institution, topped by brother Saleh Mohammed Al Yusuf, Chairman of the Board of Directors and the Managing Director, and everyone who contributed to this work from the Bank staff and secretariat, especially Projects Division Secretariat.

Furthermore, the author would like to extend his sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, chaired by Prof. Abdullah Yusuf Al Ghunaim, for the insightful pieces of advice, and discerning recommendations he offered due to his experience in Kuwait's history and heritage. He has extended his sound intact opinion and accurate observation in the technical structure of this

book, as he was concerned since the start of this book to seek his advise of the abounding details. Occasionally, informing him of the phases reached in working therewith. His encouragement and support have had a conclusive impact in producing this research in this form.

The author would not miss at the end to extend his sincere appreciation and gratitude to his family who contributed to this work through the significant revisions and amendments as well as offering constructive suggestions, particularly his dear wife. He would also, thank his daughter Nadin who spent long days following up and organizing the technical work of the book, especially the photographs of crafts and trade, sorting, classifying and indexing them and saving them on CDs which saved a lot of effort and time and led to upgrading and increasing the standard of the work significantly.

**The Author**

**M.A. Jamal**





# *Chapter One*

## **Sea-Related Activities**

*Part One: Sea-Related Crafts*

*Part Two: Sea-Related Trades*



# *Part One*

## *Sea-Related Crafts*

### **Manufacturing Sailing Ships (Al Glafah) And Its Role In The Ancient Economy Of Kuwait**

Since inception, Kuwait was known for the sailboats industry. The dhow-building was a craft known as (*Glafa*), while the craftsman was called (*Gallaf*). This industry flourished and prospered over the past three centuries, but was faced with ups and downs according to the international economic situation, in addition to the regional and local commercial activity which was directly impacted by such developments. That craft became one of the most significant historical, social and economic features of Kuwait. Many travelers and historians who visited Kuwait over the past periods, have written about such industry and its significant role in Kuwait's prosperity in general. However, it seems that most of the emphasis had been highlighted on the use of such dhows, their commercial activity and role in the Kuwaiti economy, without addressing the same focus on the other side of the issue, which is not less significant, namely manufacturing thereof. This emphasis on the trade activity may be considered as a natural matter in view of the visible and tangible effect of this business on the general life of the vast majority of Kuwaitis and the relations of that activity and its interactions with the business centers in India, as well as a number of Asian and East African countries, through the voyages of those boats, their business in the transport of goods and docking at the coasts of such countries. This has made them qualified enough to gain high reputation and enabled Kuwait's merchants and sea captains and sailors to visit such countries and transport goods back and forth, as well as reinforce their relations with them, which gave them a remarkable role among their counterparts in those countries.

However, when the researcher considers the other side of the activity -which is the manufacturing process- and attempts to highlight it, he will discover that there is another world of creativity beside careful and professional serious work which is not less significant than the other activities for which Kuwait gained fame in the past eras. That contributed in forming the Kuwaiti

genuine characteristics and traits over the past three centuries which Kuwait is entitled to take pride in among established countries in this industry. Dhow industry can be considered one of the most important crafts which prospered in Kuwait over the past three hundred years. It included a big number of craftsmen «*Galaleef*». Such shipwrights spent most of their days starting from sunrise till sunset manufacturing sailboats under the supervision and direction of a selected elite of experienced and highly efficient technicians, known as «*Astad/ Ustad*», (or masters dhow builders).

Those in charge of this craft played a fundamental function in providing the major business sectors in Kuwait, throughout those centuries, with their needs of boats of various types and volumes in order to carry out the different works upon which Kuwaiti economy had been relying during those periods.

Kuwait's merchants and *nukhudhas* or sea captains and sailors sailed with those types of boats to India and neighboring countries and East Africa, to transport goods back and forth from those countries to earn their living. Further, pearl divers used during those periods their ships made in Kuwait for pearl diving in the various areas of the Arabian Gulf, as well as transporting pearls to the selling centers. Meanwhile, many commercial and craft activities depended on the other types of ships for accomplishing their various tasks, which included for example transporting waters from Shatt al Arab to Kuwait; transporting sands from Kuwait's coastlines to the other side of the Arabian Gulf coast in A'badan; and transporting the rocks used in building from the northern coasts of Kuwait to the city, in addition to fishing and short trading travel journeys to the Gulf ports, called as «*gata'a*».

Each boat was very precisely manufactured to perform the required objective for building thereof, as it was conditioned as needed in order to carry out that role very efficiently and effectively. The *Astads* or master and his shipwrights or craftsmen «*Galaleef*» inherited their craft from their fathers and forefathers, as the father was concerned to have his sons accompany him to the work sites and locations when they reached the age of twelve in order to acquire experience through observing the work, servicing the master and his workers at the location and handing the tools to them, as well as carrying out simple tasks.

### **Manufacturing Process**

The boat manufacturing process starts following the agreement between the merchant or the **nukhudha**, (sea captain) wishing to buy a certain type

of boat with the «ustad» master for building such boat, in compliance with the required specifications in order to perform the desired objective for building it. Both would agree on the ship size and objective for building -in order to identify its type- its cost and the period expected for completion and delivery. The merchant or the nukhudha in most instances would supply the master with the required wood of various types and other materials required for building the ship. In addition, he would bear the daily wages of the craftsmen in addition to the cost of offering two meals daily to the workers during the work period, in addition of tea and coffee. The meals were prepared in the house of the master, who used to appoint one or more cooks at the merchant's account in order to do so. The master would settle the account with the merchant every once in a while in order to pay the wages of the workers and the cost of foodstuff<sup>(1)</sup>. Some masters manufactured the boat for the merchant against a certain lump sum (contracting agreement) and would bear the full costs, while others manufactured ships at their account in order to sell them after completion of construction. This was usually carried out by financially capable masters, as such work involved risks that might lead to non-profitability of the process or not selling the ship<sup>(2)</sup>.

The manufacturing process started when the shipwright began preparing the various types of timber, which had reached Kuwait from India in the form of boards or big lumps in order to be cut down according to the specifications into segments and pieces suitable for the use. Usually, dry wood for which not less than one full year lapsed since cutting was serviceable for using. There were certain types of wood which required two or more years to dry out before using. A number of merchants who owned ships bought the wood from Nibar (India) and supervised its cutting down there, and left it to dry for a period which could be extended to two years, before sending it to Kuwait to be used in manufacturing their ships<sup>(3)</sup>.

Boat manufacturing is considered a hard and complicated process with many details. Those who are inexperienced with the work would face difficulty in understanding or following up its steps. Also, the manufactured parts making up the boat, their names and the location of each of them in the boat, as well as its manufacturing, may place the researcher in confusion while trying to

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(1) An interview with the late Mohammed Ibrahim Al Gallaf.

(2) An interview with Mr. Jassim Mohamed Al Abdullah Al Astad.

(3) An interview with the late Hussein Ghulum Al Gallaf

read them on paper without following up the manufacturing process step by step in reality<sup>(1)</sup>. We will attempt below to briefly address the main steps for manufacturing the ship by the shipwrights, which we were able to extract from the various interviews with a number of masters and craftsmen, after we had observed a number of them while rebuilding «Al Muhallab» ship in the year 1996<sup>(2)</sup>. These steps are summarized in the following:

**1. Extending the base:** the first step in manufacturing the ship starts with identifying the length of the base, known as «*al-bees*» which comes ready to be used from India. On it a number of wooden seats are fixed on the ground known as «*Ta'oum*» along the base extension. The base is connected with them firmly, in preparation of starting the installation of other parts of the ship where they are fixed. The width of «the base» reached one yard approximately while its length ranges between 30 to 50 yards or more according to the size required.

**2. Fixing the two boards of the ship front and rear (amyal).** The second step in manufacturing the ship is to fix the front and rear columns of the ship with the base. The column (or meel as called locally) is a big rectangular-shaped wood fixed on the edges of the base to identify the tilting of the ship from the front and rear sides before starting the fixing of the remaining parts of the ship. The tilting of the front chest is measured and then the tilting of the backside through the use of an instrument used by the craftsman known as «*al hindasah*» brought from India. *Al Hindasah* is an appliance or a small device in the shape of a triangle, with one of the sides

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(1) The sailboat consists of tens of pieces and parts, each of which carries a certain name and performs a certain task. However, we will suffice here with mentioning only the main parts for the ship in order to serve the subject matter and show the significant role played by the craftsmen in building the ships which brought goodness to Kuwait, as well as the level of accuracy and seriousness in the work they performed. For more details, the reader may refer to the many books written on this subject by various writers who specialized in this field.

(2) Al galaleef and al astadhiya who were interviewed and contributed to building Al Muhallab are : Mr. Jassim Mohammed Al Sabaghah, Mr. Zayed Bin Attiya Al Gallaf, the late Mohammed Hassan Al Hadab, Mr. Yusuf Abdullah Bin Yusuf Al Gallaf and Mr. Mohammed Khalil Al Aswad. We have also derived many information from two interviews with the late Mohammed Ibrahim Al Gallaf and Mr. Jassim Mohammed Al Abdullah Al Astad, and Mr. Mohammed Ali Bin Hatab, who were among the generation that contributed efficiently to building ships in the first half of the last century, knowing that the detailed steps for manufacturing sailboats mentioned in this book were written step by step during our interview with Mr. Mohammed Ali Bin Hatab. Also, a number of valuable writings were used to clarify some aspects which required explanation. At the forefront of these writings are: «Marine Terminologies Dictionary in Kuwait» by the late Ahmad Al Bisher Al Roumi, published by Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait -1996.

in the form of a quarter circle (resembles the protractor) divided by lines into small measuring sections to measure the degree of tilting. The distance between each line from the other is approximately one half centimeter and this distance is known as «*khana*». A piece of lead in cylindrical shape known as the «*bild*» is hanging from «*al hindasah*», fixed by a thread to measure the degree of tilting in some parts of the ship. Normally, the tilting of the front side is more than the tilting of the backside. Upon measuring the required tilting and approving it, nails are hit into the column to fix it to the base.

**3. Fixing «*al malij*»:** two big boards are then placed along the two sides of the base, each of them is called (*al-malij*), or malich. Each is fixed in a rectangular hole (resembling a duct) dug up on the two sides of the base. Then, the two edges of the strake are fixed also with the front column and back column.

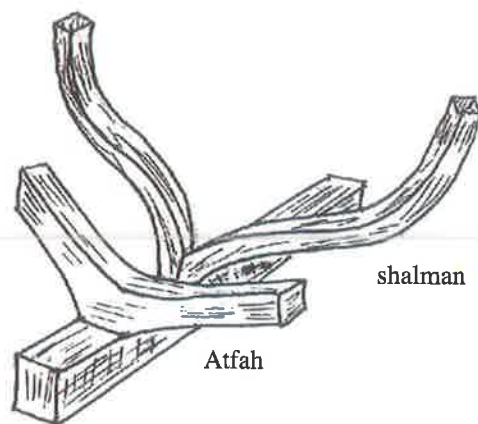
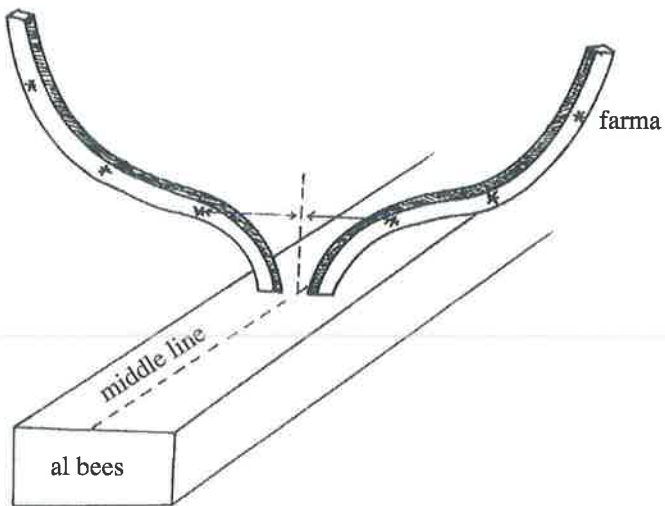
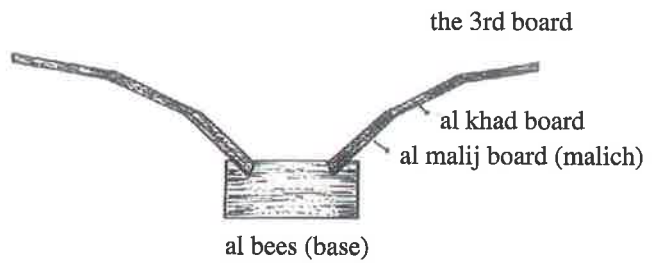
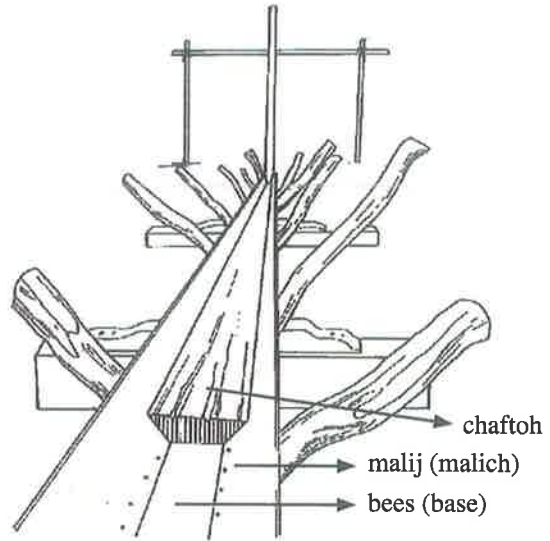
These two «malij» determine the shape of the ship base from outside. *Al malij* is considered the first board in the ship body and is made of teak wood. It is to be fixed to the base with medium-sized nails of 5-6 cm approximately.

**4. Fixing the chaftoh:** The fourth step is to fix a long thick board called chaftoh placed above the base and is fixed to al malij with nails and also with the amyal. The purpose of such big boards is to strengthen the ship base and tightly connect it with each other. After fixing the boards, it is painted with big quantities of «*damer*» which is a special kind of insulation material. Then, it is covered with cotton to prevent leaking of water inside the ship, and filling any gaps between the parts forming the ship base.

**5. Fixing al-Khad:** The next step is fixing the second board on both sides of the ship. This board called «*khad*» is fixed above «*al malij*» on each side of the ships' both sides. *Al khad* is the second board in the ship body. Then, the third and fourth board and others are fixed on the two sides until these boards reach before the «*dawaran*» i.e., the diameter of the ship body. The number of these boards is normally seven forming the lower part of the ship body.



ship base at the beginning of manufacturing



Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait- Dr. Yacoub Yusuf al-Hijji

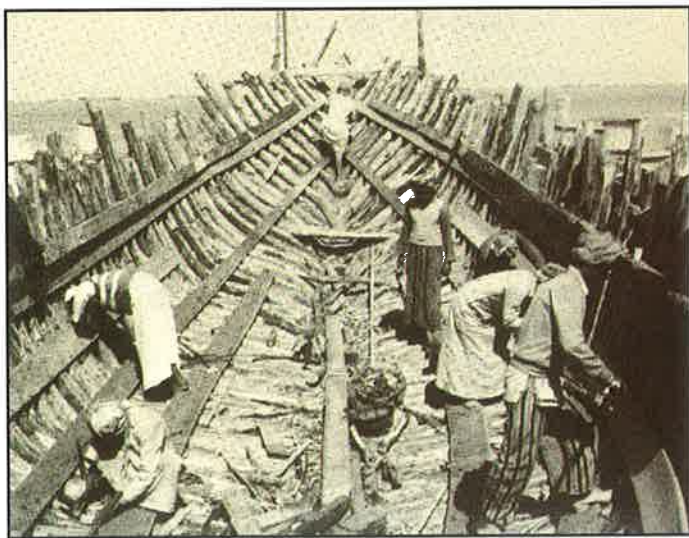


6. After this, a number of wooden pieces are fixed over the bees in the ship concave, each of which is called «*al farma*». These are pieces of wood to be connected to each other in a semi-circular form to outline the structure of the ship, as well as its width and capacity. Al farma is made of two similar pieces fixed to the bees.

7. After that, the distance between each of «*al farmas*» is calculated in order to place smaller parts between them, each of which is called «*al atfah*». Al atfah is fixed by the *chaftoh* and the boards (*al malij*, *al khad*, the third and fourth) on the two sides. The number of the *otaf*, plural of «*atfah*» ranges between four to five pieces between each «*farma*» and the other, according to the size of the boat. A distance is left between each *atfah* and the other in order to fix a bigger piece of five sides of the ship known as «*shalman*», a crook of timber, arib.

8. «*Al shalameen*» -plural of «*shalman*»- are fixed between each «*atfah*» and the other. The *shelman* consists of two similar pieces forming an incomplete circle and resembling al farma, but of a smaller size. «*Shalameen*» and «*otaf*» form atafa both shipsides. *Shalman* consists of two similar pieces while atfah consists of one piece only which is smaller in size than «*shalman*». *Shalameen* and *otaf* are fixed to al *chaftoh* and *al khad* and the boards from the third to the seventh.

9. After that, woods supplementing the sides are placed above shalameen and *otaf*, each of which is called «*tenkasah*» and the plural is «*tanakees*», to fix the remaining boards on the ship body.



«Galaleef» or Shipwrights involved in manufacturing «al boum»  
Source: Kuwait- Miracle on the Desert, David C. Cooke-1970

10. The remaining boards are fixed to the ship body and tied to the sides, until they reach the board called «*al qaitan*». This board is fixed after completing the periphery of the ship body near the surface of the ship called «*sat-hah*».

11. Then, the ship body building is completed to «*al mandharah*», which is the last board in the ship body on both sides, that is usually a little protruded to the outside compared with the remaining boards, Usually, it is thicker than the remaining boards forming the body.

12. Internal boards are fixed above *shalameen* to support them internally, known as «*hizamat*».

13. After this, the upper frame of the ship is fixed, outlining its surface on both sides. This part is called «*tarrayek*».

14. The remaining upper parts of the ship will be completed, and then the surface will be built, followed by the front surface, then the rear surface of the ship which is higher than the ship surface. A number of columns are built on the rear surface.

15. One mast or more called *diqil* be fixed for the ship, made of a special type of wood called «*fan asl*» or «*fan Ibrahim*», which is like bamboo, but does not break easily. Also, a small kitchen will be built, called «*sraidan*», in addition to wooden tanks for water, each of which known as «*fintas*». A small toilet or more are fixed behind the ship on its side known as «*zuli*». There are many other parts in the ship for which there is no room to mention here.

16. After that, cotton pads submerged in sesame or coconut oil are to be placed between the boards forming the ship to prevent leakage of water inside, known as «*kalfat*». Then, the ship is to be painted with special oil called «*sell*» from inside and outside.

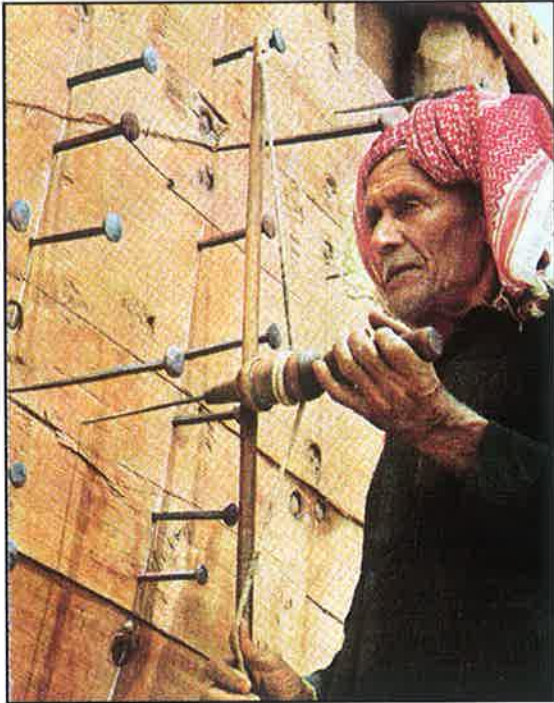


A shipwright involved in working.

Source : Kuwait, Oscar Mitri - 1970

17. Upon completing the building of the ship, a «*jalboot/jalbut*» will be built, which is a small boat attached to the big boat for the use of the ship captain or transport of some items from the land to the ship, and by completing these steps the ship will be ready for sailing.

The master does not prepare any map or plan for the new ship. Rather, he requires only knowing its size and type as well as its load limit in order to sail the ship. The master chooses a number of technical



Darrab drilling the Vessel's side to fix nails.

Source: Kuwait, Oscar Mitri-1970.

workers -*galaleef* «craftsmen»- whom he is accustomed to working with in order to carry out this task under his supervision.

The number of such shipwrights ranges from fifteen to twenty *gallaf* and *darrab*<sup>(1)</sup>, according to the size and type of the ship and the period required for delivery and acceptance. The master will allocate a certain work for each *gallaf* according to his experience and mastering of the work. Most of them work without need for guidance, supervision or directions from the master in view of the experience of each of them in their work. The master spends several hours daily among the craftsmen to follow up the progress of work and give general directions and orders daily to complete the work. Also, he appoints a person to be in charge of them during his absence, known

as «*mojadami*» to supervise the work, who is usually more experienced than the remaining *galaleef*. A number of boys or trainees, each of whom is called «*walad*» or «*wolyid*» used to help them. The manufacturing of a single ship takes between 45 to 60 days, according to the size and type. Al *galaleef* work on the two sides of the ship, and every four or five of them take their locations on either side to help find a type of competition among both sides in order to complete the work rapidly and accurately, which will in turn be for the benefit of the merchant or the *nukhudha*. Al *gallaf* was paid half a rupee per day at the beginning of the twentieth century, which increased to one rupee and then one rupee and a half<sup>(2)</sup> by the mid forties approximately<sup>(3)</sup>. As for al *darrab*, he used to take less than this, while the *wolayid* did not get any payment, except the collected «*qeshbar*»<sup>(4)</sup> to take to his family to use as fuel. Al *galaleef* called the process of manufacturing the ship as «*wishar*». The master used to pay al *galaleef* their wages every Friday morning, after receiving the wages from the merchant or sea captain for whom the ship to be built. Normally, the master keeps a record for the accounts of each *gallaf* in which

(1) Al Darrab is the person who hits nails of various sizes to fix the ship parts in order together. He is of less rank and knowledge than Al *gallaf*.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ali Jassim al Sabaghah.

(3) Kuwait used the Indian currency at that time, and one rupee is equivalent to 75 fils.

(4) Al *qeshbar* is wood sawing remains, used for fuel at houses.

his working days are calculated and the amounts he receives. Also, the accounts for the breakfast, lunch, tea, coffee and similar expenses borne by the ship owner are recorded in such book<sup>(1)</sup>.

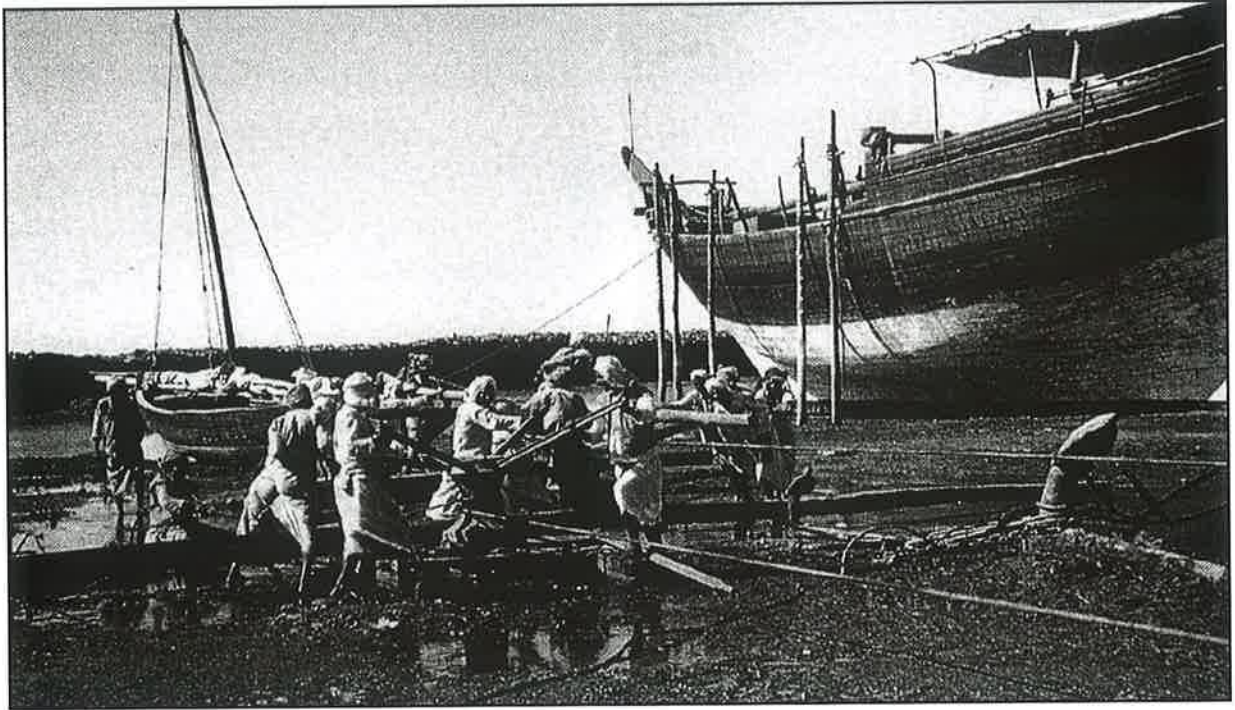
Al gallaf used to arrive at the work location directly after Fajer (dawn) prayer in order to prepare the tools for work which will continue until before Maghrib (twilight) prayer. There will be two short breaks during the working period; the first for breakfast at approximately 9:30 a.m. and the second at the noon prayer for lunch. The «*Astad*» or master used to offer such two free meals to the craftsmen during their working period. Lunch is cooked in his house and brought in trays or pots to the work location to be eaten by the workers there. It is usually of rice with fish or meat.

The ships are usually manufactured close to what was called «*niq'a*» (dhow basin; a flat shallow place with stagnant water near the beach surrounded by a circular wall) or inside a courtyard overlooking the sea called «*a'marah*», to facilitate the process of hauling the ship into the sea after completing the manufacturing process. After finishing the construction of the ship, a large number of ship builders and laborers working nearby usually volunteer to fill in the spaces between the boards of the ship outside walls with cotton pads. This work is done on the sound of the drums to give a sound to enchant the workers. A number of them sing such sea songs on these tunes and melodies, while others clap helping to raise enthusiasm to complete the work. When the work is complete, around 30 to 40 workers or more would gather according to the size of the ship to push it inside the sea. A device called «*al dawwar*» (capstan) is used to move the ship towards the sea, while wooden ramps will be placed underneath it to facilitate the process of moving down. Al dawwar is a big iron device which resembles the pulley used to move and pull big parts of materials and transfer them from one location to another. *Dawwars* were brought from India.

*Al dawwar* is based on a big wooden basis fixed in the ground with strong foundations. *Al dawwar* consisted of an upper part around which there were big holes (approximately 5-6) to place rectangular pieces of strong woods, each of which called «*barrah*» of a length of approximately 1.80 m. There is also a long rope made of strong steel wires to pull the big parts connected with such a rope upon rotating al dawwar. *Al dawwar* has steel teeth made for preventing it from going to its original set up upon rotating. Al dawwar is rotated by a number of workers or sea sailors, each of whom holds the «*barrah*» in front of him and pushes it forward to move al dawwar, and then pull the big part with the steel rope.

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(1) An interview with the late Mohamed Ibrahim Al Gallaf.



Al galaleef landing the ship into al niq'a through al «dawwar» after completing the construction. A number of Kuwaiti galaleef are seen rotating al dawwar inside al niq'a for hauling the ship inside the sea, in year 1939.

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hiji - 1998.*

Big ships (sailing boms) have also dawwars to move big parts, in preparation of moving them by porters from the ship to al Fordha toward placing them on two wooden wheeled carts in order to pull them to transfer big parts into the required location<sup>(1)</sup>. Usually, the ship is landed to the sea at the beginning or middle of the Hijri month, when the seawater is at the highest depth near the coastline during the flow period. During such a day, the master or «*Astad*» prepares breakfast as well as lunch for laborers volunteering to carry out that process.

### **Tools and Equipment Used in the Industry**

The tools of *al galaleef* used in their work basically consisted of the hammer «*al jadum*», «*masharah*» or saw, and several other special tools. The majority of those tools were locally manufactured. *Al jadum* or the adze is considered as the most significant piece used by al gallaf in his work to cut and edge the wood, followed by al mangar, used for drilling the wood, then «*al majdah*» which is a tool similar to the drill, used to make holes for the nails. There are various types and sizes of each type of equipment. For example, there are different types of saws, including «*dastia saw*», «*sahah saw*», «*qas saw*» and «*jarrarah saw*».

(1) An interview with Mr. Saqr Abd al-Wahhab Al Qatami.



Al gallaf tools

Source: Kuwait National Museum

Each type has a certain use, for example «*jarrarah saw*» has big teeth used for sawing between two big boards in order to be compatible. Meanwhile, the soft «*dastia saw*» is used to complete this process and remove any pores between the two boards. As for «*al manqar*», it has many types including *walaiti*, *al qoobar*, *al mobayat* and *bu khraza*<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for the master's tools, they consisted of the «*jack*», which is the chalk and the thread he fixed on the two edges of «*al bees*» upon starting the work to guide *al galaleef* to fix *al meel* and *shalameen* (or sides).

It is worth noting that the majority of ships were made on the sea coastline or near the docking areas of ship owners in order to be ready for landing down into the sea. However, there were a number of locations (*a'maras*) which were famous for manufacturing ships inside them.

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(1) An interview with the late Mohammed Ibrahim Al Gallaf.

## Al Gallaf's Other Work

The process of manufacturing ships was invigorated during the summer season, and became less or stopped during the winter, which forced many galaleef to search for other works to earn their living. Some of them worked at the port while others manufactured simple items inside their own houses to sell, including «*gobgab*», a wooden slipper, and small tables «*takhtah/takhtat*»<sup>(1)</sup>, chairs, and kids' toys such as «*balbool*», «*dawama*», and «*darray*» which is a device with four wooden wheels held by the child while being trained to walk<sup>(2)</sup>. Also, some galaleef who have had experience constructed small boats inside their houses during such period to sell in order to earn living. Small sizes of such boats were used for fishing or as rescue boats and the like.

Generally, al gallaf manufactures small products which require high skills and precision in working along with patience. Among the products manufactured by them in addition to the above, are «*mondatt*» or wooden columns. Those columns were made with beautiful decorations, of eight sides, used for supporting the ceilings of balconies of houses and mosques. Those big four- side pieces of wood came from India. Al-gallaf used «*al jadum*» to shape them into eight sides and make decorations on the top parts. Al gallaf also, manufactured «*beshtakhtata*» which was a decorated box made of teak wood and used for keeping tea tools such as tea pot, cups and plates, while there were other types of *beshtakhtas* used as writing tables and keeping stationery tools.

In addition to manufacturing ships, al gallaf used to repair and maintain ships, as well as replace the damaged parts. The ship was repaired and maintained annually prior to the start of the season by some time. Sailing ships were usually, cleaned after the end of the season, and docked at the seacoast away from the water in al niq'aht in order to be exposed to the sunrays during the summer season. As for diving ships, they used to stop work by the end of autumn and remained near the niq'a throughout the winter season until May, which is the beginning of the working season. Prior to the start of the season, a number of al galaleef started the work by replacing some damaged wooden parts, repairing the others, and replaced rusted nails. Cotton pads also, dipped in sesame oil or coconut oil were inserted between the boards (known as «*kalfat*») Then the ship was polished with «*sell*» and «*shawna*»; oils to preserve the wood from damage or exposure to insects, worms and rodents which feed on them. After words, the ship was hauled to the sea to start working. Sailing ships sailed to Basrah to carry dates to India with the

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(1) Takhtah is a small table used for sitting or placing things above it.

(2) From interview with Mr. Ali Jassim Al Sabaghah.

beginning of their availability there in the month of August, while diving ships headed to «**al hairat/hirat**»<sup>(1)</sup> by end of May to start work.

Al gallaf usually prefers to work in manufacturing ships rather than in maintaining them, as the former takes longer time which means more income for him. Ships are manufactured at dry convenient locations than the ship maintenance location, which takes place in al niq'a in humid environment surrounded by water from each side. Maintenance operation continued for several days, after which al gallaf was forced to transfer to another location to perform the same temporary work which might not continue for long.

A number of galaleef or beginner ustads (masters) also worked on travel ships as escorts to repair any damage that might happen during the trip. Such work was carried while the ship was at sea, or at harbours according to the trouble the captain might, also, ask the ustad to make him a small vessel during the trip where the latter assisted by a number of sailors manufacture it on boum and be submitted to the captain by the time the boum landed at Kuwait.

### **Ranks and Titles in Ship Manufacturing**

Ship manufacturing or «*glafa*» was a trade for which laws, rules and regulations were laid down and observed by everyone who practiced that craft. There were ranks, grades and various levels of responsibilities at work. «*Al ustad*» or master was the highest authority or team leader who gave orders which everyone complied with. He was like the engineer and designer of the ship and supervisor of implementation and regulation of the work during the manufacturing process . He supervised every small and big matter to ensure that the work was carried out according to the required specifications, perfect manufacturing and following the applicable rules in such trade. Al ustad also played the role of the contractor who received the order from the merchant for manufacturing of a certain ship, where he would agree with him on the full details. As for the technical worker who carried out the work, he was known as «*al gallaf*» and possessed long experrise, and al ustad depended fully upon him for performance of the work. No person reaches such a rank unless passing through a long period of work and experience during which he would prove his merit and ability to rely on. There were other workers of less skill than al galaleef, each of whom known as «*darrab*», who was the person responsible for nailing the boards in place. As for a new trainee, he was called as «*wolayid*». The *wolayid* was upgraded to *darrab* after al ustad observation of the level of his work and accuracy, and after spending few years under training, assisting al galaleef, and

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(1) «Al hairat or hirat» are the locations of searching for pearls.



preparing the different pieces for them. The darrab might also be upgraded to the rank of gallaf after few years of work during which al ustad used to test his ability and entrust some technical task to him to perform. As for the rank of al ustad, it was only reached by very few. It was a very significant rank that dhow builders were very much adhered to monopolize it and confine it to a very limited number of prominent relatives who would prove their merit and reliability at a remarkable level of work, management, experience and courage in decision making in order to become worthy of such a rank. When a person acquired that rank, he would start working in building small boats such as jalbut for example, until his ability would be proven gradually, and would become capable of managing the work in a complete manner. Then, he would enter the extensive field of work with full confidence.

### **Laws and Practices Followed in the Craft and Work Conditions**

Al ustads and al galaleef adhered to laws and practices which governed the work relations among them and regulated the responsibilities and roles of each team, which none of them might violate. Among those customs for example, was that no ustad might complete the work of any other who disagreed with the merchant or *nukhudha* and owner of the ship. That was considered a big shame and a breach of the ethics of the trade. Among the significant bases of the craft was that al ustad used to offer daily two meals to al galaleef and workers: breakfast and lunch. Among al gallaf duties also, was to attend the work site before sunrise. If he did not attend on the specified time, it was no good for him to go there late, then it's better to stay at home. Among the practices followed, also, was that the big ustad would hold the feast banquet at his house, attended by al galaleef for lunch on the day of Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha to have lunch at al ustad's house prior to the noon prayer. Al ustad also used, to offer advances to al gallaf prior to the start of work on board, and gradually deducted it from his daily wage. Al gallaf would receive his wage -or part thereof- weekly. He would receive one «*glatah*» against his work in the ship manufacturing if al ustad agreed with the *nukhudha* or the owner of the ship that the latter would bear the daily costs for building the ship. Meanwhile, al ustad would receive two *glatahs*, and *al mojjaddami* around one *glatah* and a half. As for the *wolayid*, he sometimes obtained half *glatah* or his share would be only «*al geshbar*» (remains and excess wood resulting from sawing) taken to his family to use as fuel.«*Al glatah*» is counted by dividing up the amount agreed upon between the merchant and al

ustad on a number of shares after deducting expenses from the amount. The expenses included the value of lunch offered by al ustad to al galaleef during the work period<sup>(1)</sup>. As for the materials used in manufacturing the ship, they were brought by the merchant on his account, and consisted of wood, nails and the remaining parts forming the ship.

Al ustad and galaleef used to stop working on Fridays, feasts and other religious holidays. They usually spent those holidays in the cafes spread in Safat to smoke *narjeelah*, (hable- bable) drink coffee and tea, and meet with friends. Everyone would dress in their best clothes, and Friday for them was like a feast day.

Ship building (*glafa*) -as other ancient crafts- was an exhausting job with modest return which would barely fulfill al gallaf's living needs, spending his day in hard work from sunrise until sunset. According to traditions, al gallaf would bring his tools with him to work location at its best condition, and is not expected to maintain them on site. Therefore, he was forced to do so during his holidays, or after returning home from work. Also, it was unacceptable for al gallaf to speak to his colleagues during work time so that he would not be blamed for wasting time or causing his colleagues to lose concentration. Also, al gallaf would lose his daily wage if he was forced to leave work urgently prior to noontime, regardless of the reason. But if he was forced to do so in the afternoon, he would only get his half wage. Among the practices followed by galaleef was that they would stop work completely if one of them or any of their relatives passed away, as everyone headed to the graveyard and offered condolences on such day. They would never be compensated for that day as well.

Al Galaleef, especially the darrabs, were exposed to certain diseases, the most significant of which were back, neck, joints and knee pains as a result of the nature of their work. Usually if al gallaf sat down during the working time for a break, it would be difficult for him to stand up again as a result of the pains he suffered. Hitting long nails, some of which would be of more than one meter length, and more than one inch thick<sup>(2)</sup> is considered among the most difficult and hard work, especially when hitting them into difficult types

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(1) An interview with the late Mohammed Hassan Al Hadab.

(2) This type of nails is known as «al chawya» and their length is more than one meter.

of wood like «al bees». Such a work would require giant hammers causing body exhaustion. Normally, three strong men would cooperate to complete that work. There were different types and sizes of nails used in the ship, such as «*bu shebr*», «*bu feter*», «maghlatani», «kewessi», and «chawya», and each of which had a specific use and location on the ship hull.

### **Types of Ships Locally Manufactured and Their Use**

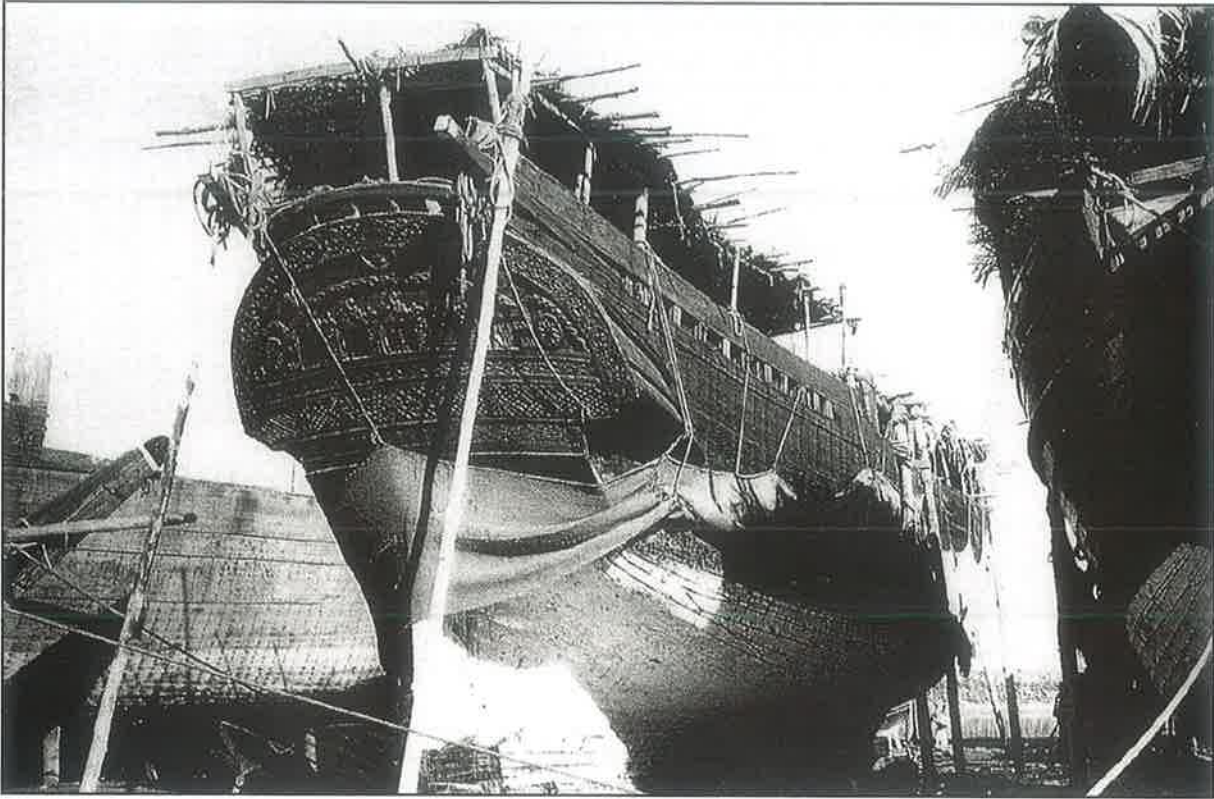
There were many types of sailboats which were manufactured in Kuwait differed in size and shape according to the purpose they were used for. The following are some of the many types and their main uses:

1. Travel ships (merchant ship): Al baghlah, al bakara (baqqarah), al dankqiya and al boum
2. Pearl ships: Al bakara, al boum, al sanbuk, al jalbut or jalbout, al showi, or (shui)
3. Tawasha ships (pearl trading ships): Al boum, al jalbut, al showi.
4. Fishing ships: Small showi, small jalbut.
5. Sand carrying ships: Al dooba or al duba<sup>(1)</sup>, al boum al gata'a and al ablam.
6. Rock carrying ships: Al tashala, small jalbut.
7. Water carrying ships: Water boums.
8. Al gata'a ships: Al sanbuk, al boum, al jalbut.
9. Goods transport hoys from the big boom or ship to the port: Al tashala or al dooba<sup>(2)</sup>, pulled by «al tuk/tug» which is a towing ship.

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(1) Al dooba or duba was made of iron, and was used in transporting big quantities of sand from Kuwait to A'badan, and they were made outside Kuwait.

(2) Al dooba made of wood in Kuwait were first used to transport goods from the ships to at fordhah for the account of «Hammal Bashi Company» then such cargo dhows made of steel were later brought from abroad to carry out this work.

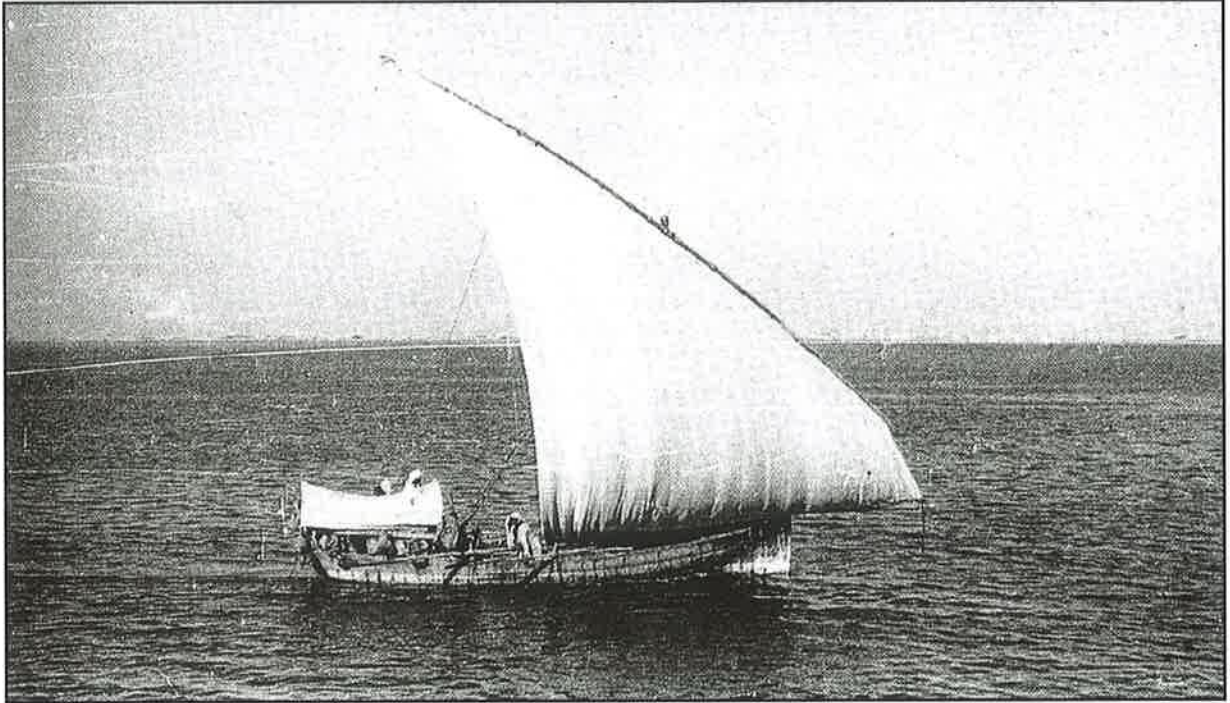


Al baghlah «Amir Al Behar» at Niq'a Al Shamlan in the year 1939

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*

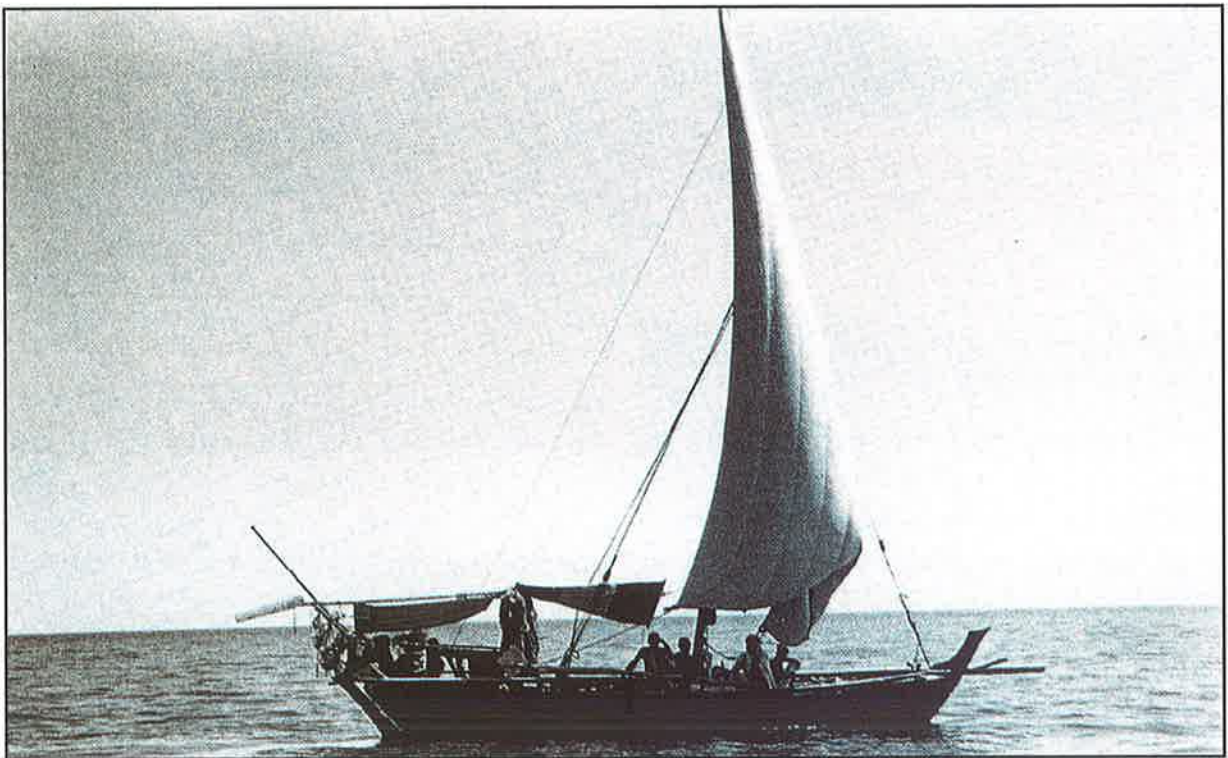
There are other types of ships including «al balam», made in Basra as well, and used for transporting dates, grass and fodder from Basra to Kuwait, «al kater» (allocated for the use of the nukhudha (sea captain) in his transports», and «al keet», which was a small jalbout of approximately 10-12 arms length used by the nukhudha upon landing to the coast from the boum, «al mashowa», a small ship used for transferring nukhudha and luggage from the ship to the coast. Al jalbut was used also in case of wishing to land to take some objects or bring water from the nearby ports, as a wooden tank was placed in it.

Each type of those ships was manufactured according to the size, shape and accessories required to serve the desired objective.



Jalbut at high seas

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*



Shui

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*

## Characteristics of Kuwaiti Ships

Kuwaiti ships are none compatible with each other, in view of the absence of any ship dimensions or plan for ships manufactured in Kuwait. This is because al ustads were manufacturing the ship «in their view», i.e. according to their perspective<sup>(1)</sup>. The majority of designs of ships made in Kuwait were originally inspired from abroad, except «al boum» which is a complete Kuwaiti industry. The origin of other ships goes back to different countries, such as Portugal, India, Oman, Iran and Iraq. Ships made in Kuwait are considered the most beautiful ones made in the Gulf. The Kuwaitis developed that industry and introduced new designs which truly gave the Kuwaiti ship the first position in the region, with respect to the overall peculiarities<sup>(2)</sup>. Among the most significant types manufactured in Kuwait were al Hourî, al Katter, al Jalbout, al Shu'i, al Mashoot, al Tashalah, al Douba, al Ghanjah, al Kotia, al Baghlah, al Baqqarah, al Batil, al Sanbouk and al Boum. Each type of these ships had a history dating back to its origin and development, as well as the method of its manufacturing and uses. Al Kotia and al Ghanjah, for example, are designs which go back to India, while the origin of the deep-sea Baghlah is Portuguese and Al Sanbouk from Yemen. Al baghlah resembles the pirates' ship, and has sharp front or beak, and resembles a dragon or a snake with beautiful decorations. It has a patch at its rear, and rooms inside, as is the case in the pirates' ships<sup>(3)</sup>. The first shipwright who manufactured al baghlah in Kuwait was the late Mohammed Al Ashwak, who built it for the family of Al Abduljalil<sup>(4)</sup>.

Also, Al Guroof family was known for manufacturing al baghlah in the nineteenth century. Kuwaitis and other Gulf citizens used al baghlah for far away journeys, and it was greatly known in Oman. Among the last of those who owned al baghlah in Kuwait were the late Issa Al Qatami, Abd Al Wahhab Al Qatami and Nasser Eisa Al Oud. It was called «*Al Houla*». Al baghlah was developed in Kuwait by the end of the 19th century on the hands of the late Ali Al Astad, the grandfather of the late Ahmad Bin Salman Al Astad, who was famous in the 1940's and 1950's for designing and manufacturing the biggest boats «al boum» in Kuwait and developing them in terms of appearance and use, which led to increasing their speed and load limit. Among the first who owned the «advanced or developed boum» was the late Mohammed Bin Shahin Alghanim, who named it «*Al Kakah*»<sup>(5)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jassim Mohammed Al Abdullah Al Astad.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ali Jassim Al Sabaghah.

(3) An interview with Mr. Mekki Ibrahim Al Gallaf.

(4) An interview with Mr. Ibrahim Mohamed Bin Shaiba.

(5) Ibid.

As for Al Sanbuk, it was of two types, one for far away voyages and the other for traveling inside the Gulf, known as «al gata'a». Also, the types of al boum ships and their sizes differed according to the purpose of manufacturing them, as it was used for remote traveling, diving for pearls, al gata'a, al tawasha and carrying water. It is worth noting that the biggest boum manufactured in Kuwait was «Al Dhow» which sank in Bombay bay in India, after docking there for four years, which led to the erosion of its woods, breakdown and inability to repair it.

Generally, Kuwaiti boums are considered among the most advanced in the Gulf with respect to beauty, precision of manufacturing, durability, fast sail speed and load limit. Al boum is truly considered the bride of the Kuwaiti ships, and rather their Beauty Queen without contestant. Al boum is considered among the inventions which were created and developed in Kuwait on the hands of talented ustads. It was developed and enhanced generation after generation, in order to be adapted to sailing conditions, tolerate wind fluctuations and climatic conditions, and streamlined flow among the haughty or difficult waves due to its unique design, with the ability of relatively carrying big quantities of goods which exceeded 400 tons<sup>(1)</sup>. Al boum is considered as the best and fastest ship which could penetrate the waves, resisted them and sailed through all seas with ease, challenging most difficulties. It was assisted by its streamlined design which cut the waves into halves and easily sailed through them. It has four sails, two main sails, which are al *oud* (*big*) sail fixed in the middle, al qalami (a small sail placed in the middle of «*al neem*» at the rear, and the third mast is «*al boomiyah*» which is a sail connected with «*al dastoor*», which is a sail without «*farman*» (frame), and connected with the mast, then «*al kuba*», which is a small mast connected with the big mast and is high on top. The sails were used according to the force of winds and the required direction<sup>(2)</sup>.

Usually, it is the characteristics of a good ship that can sail in all seasons, as each season has its climatic conditions which affect the direction and force of wind and the sea condition. Nukhudha Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaibah mentioned, for example, that a number of Kuwaiti ships were manufactured to suit those conditions and adapt to them, and moreover benefit from their «negative» effects, to increase speed and safety. The ship on which the wind was on its direction while sailing - i.e «*al dabir*»- requires having its

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(1) An interview with nukhudha Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mekki Ibrahim Al Gallaf.

rear wide, where the wind coming from its back would assist to increase its speed. As for those known as «*saikh*», they are cylindrically-shaped and streamlined and could sail opposite the wind direction easily at great speeds. Al Muhallab boum was of that kind. Also, those ships sailed at much faster speeds than the regular ships, when they were on the wind direction, i.e. (*al dabir*)<sup>(1)</sup>. But if the winds were opposite the sailing direction of those ships - which would happen upon the return of Kuwaiti ships by the end of the season from Africa during al bareh seasons (the wind coming from the north) - the sailboats of «*al saikh*» type could reach Kuwait within ten days only instead of one month. This was the period taken by the regular ships coming from Africa on their return to Kuwait by end of the season. This is attributed - of course - to the outstanding degree of accuracy and precision in manufacturing, known for the Kuwaiti ship manufacturers.

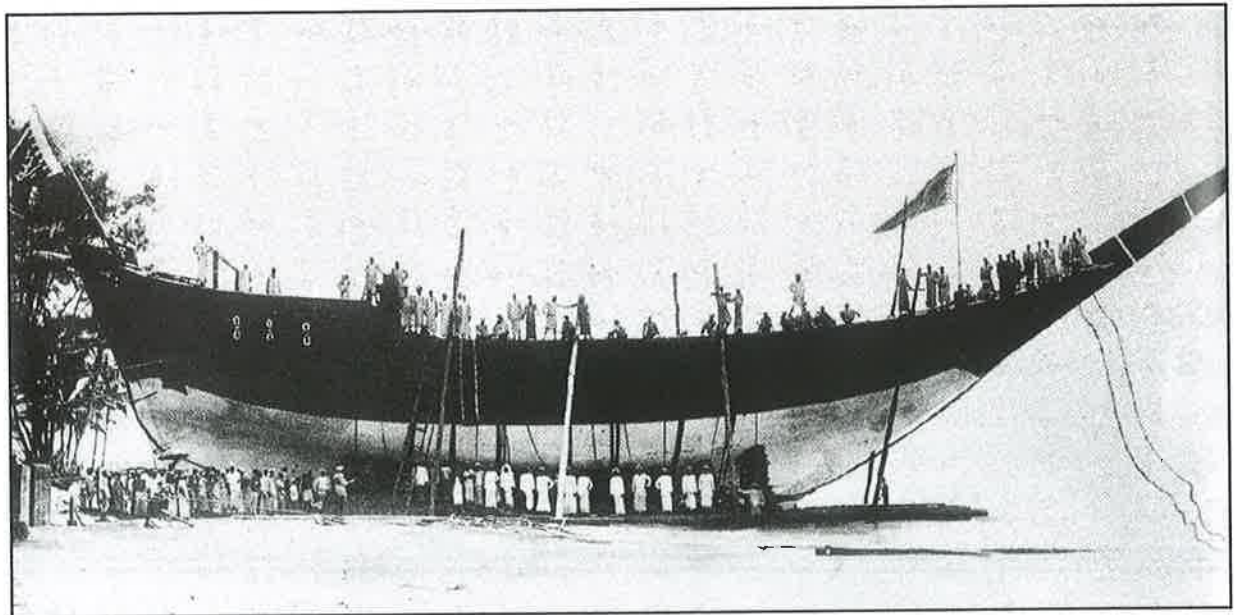
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(1) An interview with nukhudha Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba.





«Al Dhow» sailing with «al oad» and «al qalami» sail. It was one of the most famous Kuwaiti ships, and its load limit amounted to 6,000 maans  
*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*



«Al Muhammadi» boum on the coastline of Calcutta Port in India, before landing down into the sea.  
*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*

Prominent ship manufacturers included Salman Al Astad, his son Ahmad Salman Al Astad, and his nephew Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Astad, who developed and upgraded the levels of that industry. They also built sailboats which could benefit from the wind direction wherever it was, and would sail at fast speed whether the wind was on their direction or opposite. Sailing opposite the wind direction is known as «*yawish*» which is the opposite of «*al dabir*»<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Building Al Duwab and Al Ashariyat**

The manufacturing of «Al Duwab» or *duba* prospered in Kuwait during WW11. The «Duwab» was a wide flat ship used for loading and towed by another ship known as «*tuk*» or «*tug*»<sup>(2)</sup>. It was intensively used by the British troops during WW11 to transport their soldiers, weapons and supplies across Shatt Al Arab between Iraq and Iran. Those boats were also used as a passage for crossing tanks across the two banks. Hundreds of those boats were manufactured in Kuwait during that period, as the British authorities - under agreement and blessing from the government of Kuwait- agreed with the late Ahmad Salman Al Astad to carry out that task. The late Ahmad Al Astad mobilized himself with a number of astads and tens of galaleef and workers to perfectly complete that task. Among al astads who supervised the building of the boats were the late Hussein Al Ghabban and Mohammed Hussein Bu A'layan<sup>(3)</sup>. Teak wood pieces cut for that purpose came ready from Britain, packed and numbered in patches placed in wooden boxes with a map for each of them and the instructions thereof. They were opened and the pieces transferred to the work locations in order to re-fix each of them according to the attached maps<sup>(4)</sup>. The late Shaikhan Al Farsi and Sayed Hameed Behbehani read and translated the instructions, written in British, for the galalaeef - under the supervision and direction of the late Ahmad Al Astad and other astads - to tie and connect the parts with each other and complete the process of manufacturing al *duba*. Special devices were made to prevent them from moving away while performing the work. Three sizes of *duwab* (plural of *duba*) were manufactured: big, medium and small. The *duba* length ranged between 20 to 30 meters, and its width 6 to 9 meters approximately. It was flat shaped and did not contain any sail or engine. Rather, it was tugged by a small steamship known as «*tuk*», or «*tug*». The walls of the «*duba*» consisted of two layers of internal and external wood, between which special tarpaulin was used to prevent leakage of water inside. The tarpaulin was

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(1) An interview with Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba.

(2) «Tuk» or tug is the towing ship and the name is taken from English «tug boat».

(3) An interview with the late Hajji Mekki Hussein Al Juma'a.

(4) An Interview with Mr. Mousa Hussein Al A'ttar.

to be fixed to the internal wall of the *duba* using a special adhesive material and then the external wall of the *duba* was fixed. Those boats remained floating on the water surface of Shatt al Arab throughout WW11, as the soldiers were taking shifts on guarding from above their surfaces to monitor any movements.

Al gallaf used to receive two rupees as a daily wage for his work in fixing al *duba*. Around 8-10 galaleef worked on each *duba*, under the supervision of one *astad*. All the boards and accessories were brought, in addition to small electric engines and hammers from Britain for using in the work. An American citizen called Mr. Mak and another British called Mr. Gali, supervised the work. Whenever two boats had been manufactured, the «tuk» would tow them to Shatt Al Arab. Also, water boums were used during some periods for towing *dubas* there against 100 rupee per *duba*, after «tuks» faced some problems<sup>(1)</sup>. Al *duba* was delivered to the required location for using as a bridge. Some *duwab* included two passages on top of their surfaces for the passage of war tanks and vehicles back and forth. Work was carried on the *dowabs* while turned upside down, then adjusted by a «crane» upon completion of building thereof<sup>(2)</sup>.

Work in fixing *duwab* continued for four years, during which around 300 *duba* were built. At the beginning, four galaleef were trained, including Hajji Abdullah Bin Ali Al Gallaf and Sayed Hassan Bu A'shour. The working period in one *duba* lasted for two months. Upon completion of the training process, the *duba* construction period was reduced to two weeks and then one week<sup>(3)</sup>. *Duwab* were manufactured in Shuwaikh area near the seaport, which was known as «the charcoal palace» located outside the City Wall area, next to the Quarantine Building, located near Al Salam Palace currently. Workers were carried from Sharq area to the site by two lorries. They used to gather at «*Al Mataba*» area. The number of galaleef who worked in *duwab* manufacturing amounted to approximately 150 gallaf, in addition to 16 *astads*. Six to seven *dubas* were made weekly, at the rate of one *duba* per day<sup>(4)</sup>.

After completion of fixing the *duwab*, a number of skilled galaleef were selected to make «*ashariyat*» for the British forces as well. *Ashariya* is a big ship carrier with a front similar to its back. Its origin goes back to Kufa area in Iraq. It was used to transport supplies, and used as bridges (or ferries) for the British forces to move across rivers, as well as in Shatt Al Arab area for the passage of war tanks and vehicles during WW11. A prototype was brought at

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(1) An interview with the late Mohammed Hassan Al Hadab.

(2) An interview with Mr. Zaid Bin A'ttiya Al Gallaf.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

the beginning from Iraq for the Kuwaiti galaleef to manufacture <sup>(1)</sup>. A quantity of sand was placed inside the ashariya for balance purposes during passage of heavy tanks and vehicles.

It is worth noting that the then British Consul to Kuwait at that time held a celebration at the British Consulate after the end of WW II and the victory of the Allies, to honor the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the Ruler of Kuwait, as well as the late Ahmad Salman Al Astad. Also, the British government presented a medal with a letter of appreciation to the late Ahmad Salman Astad, as an acknowledgement for his services offered to the Allies. The late Ahmad Al Astad was known as the «dean» of astads in Kuwait at that time.

### **«Lanj» Or Steamboat**

The significance of speed increased with the passing of days and the development of life. Therefore, the value of time increased which was counted according to the minute and valued with huge amounts of money. With the development of trade and the increase in dependence on the speed of communication means, Kuwait followed other countries in many aspects, including the development of sailboats. Diesel-operated engines were installed in the Kuwaiti sailboats since the year 1945. Kuwaitis gave the name of lanj or lanj' or «lanch» to fuel-operated ship, instead of the sail; it was a dhow having auxiliary engine. The first traveling boom on which an engine was fitted instead of the sail was owned by the late Ahmad Alghanim, which was fixed by the late Mubarak Al Sabej, with 120 HP. Also, the late Abdul Mohsen Nasser Al Kharafi fixed another engine on one of his boats. Among those who worked in fixing engines were Abdullah Al Shamlan, Mohammed Hussein and Yusuf Al Mudhaf<sup>(2)</sup>. As for the first «gata'a boom» to use the engine, it was «Jabri» boom owned by the late Ahmad Salman Al Astad, Zaid Abdul Hussein Al Kadhmi and Hajj Mekki Hussein Al Juma. The nukhudha of the ship at that day was Mr. Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba. The engine was brought from Al Mohammara Port (Khurram-Shahr) in Iran and installed in by Mr. Mohamed Sa'ud Al Mudhaf. One mast and one sail were kept for the ship to be used in case of necessity<sup>(3)</sup>. Those types of engines were known in Iran in the 1920s during the rule of Shah Ridha Bahlavi, for using them for the traces of the Iranian inspection ships which used to follow the smugglers in the Gulf. The «lanj» was used to transport passengers and goods across Kuwait and Mohammara in Iran by the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties. The use of engines widely spread afterwards greatly, as all the owners of sailboats replaced their sails with engines, thus leading to the disappearance of sails after few years.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Zaid Bin A'ttiya Al Gallaf.

(2) An interview with Mr. Khalid Al Shaheen Alghanim.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba.

## The Most Famous Astads and Galaleef in Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>

Astad or master and galaleef or shipwrights are known in Kuwait that they inherited that craft from fathers and ancestors. There were no handicraft or occupational schools or teaching places for those who wanted to learn that craft. Rather, the child was raised up and used to accompany his father every morning attending to the work location to start apprenticeship, inherited by his father from his fathers and forefathers. Children helped their fathers by handling the tools to them, and transferring «geshbar» from the work location to the house, as well as cleaning the work locations and carrying simple tasks which did not require effort or knowledge. The child would gradually recognize the basic principles of his father's craft, which encouraged him to learn in order to help him in the future to earn his living. When the child started acquiring some simple skills at the age of not more than ten years in many instances, a small amount of money would be allocated to him by al astad which could reach one quarter or one-half glatah (share).

Some Kuwaiti families were famous for ship manufacturing, from whom a big number of astads and galaleef, gained fame in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, since the beginning of the 19th century or earlier. Among the ancient families famous in that field at that period of time were Al Quroof family and Al Ashwak family, in addition to other families which were known as the families of «al astad». Among the famous figures in that field also, particularly by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century were the late Abdullah Mohammed Bin Ghanim, Ali Mohammed Bin Ghanim and Mohammed Al Quroof (who migrated at the beginning of the past century to Kufa in Iraq to practice work and was the first to manufacture the boum), Hajji Salman Bin Fardan Al Astad developed the boum and made it at the forefront of sailboats in terms of appearance and efficiency, Hajji Ahmad Al Ashwak and his son Yusuf Al Ashwak, Hussein Al Mansur, Salman Alghadban, Hussein Alghadban, Mohammed Al Astad (grandfather of the famous astad Ahmad Salman Al Astad), Hajji Humud Al Badr and his brother Hajji Hussein Bin Bader, Hajji Jassim Bin Rashid, Saleh Bin Rashid, Yusuf Bin Rashid. In addition, there were other large numbers at a later stage, including Hajji Abdulrasul Alghadban, Mahmoud Bin Hassan, Mousa Bin Sabet, Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Astad (who built Al Muhallab boum in 1934), Hassan Bu A'lyan, Mohammed Hussein Bu Alyan, Hajji Hasan Bin Abdullah, Hajji Nasser Bu Alyan, Hajji Ali Bin Hasan, Hajji Mohammed Bin Abdullah Bin Ghanim, Hajji Yusuf Ibrahim, Hajji Salman Al Ashwak, Hajji Fardan Ahmad Al Ustadh, Ali Abdulrasul, Mohammed Al Quroof,

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(1) An interviews with a number of astadiya (ustads), including Zaid Bin A'ttiya, Mohammed Ibrahim Al Gallaf, Yusuf Abdullah Al Gallaf, Jassim Mohammed Al Abdullah Al Astad, Ali Jassim Al Sabaghah, Mohammed Khalil Al A'wad, Mohammed Bin Hattab, Mohammed Al Hadab, in addition to Hajj Mekki Hussein Al Juma'a.

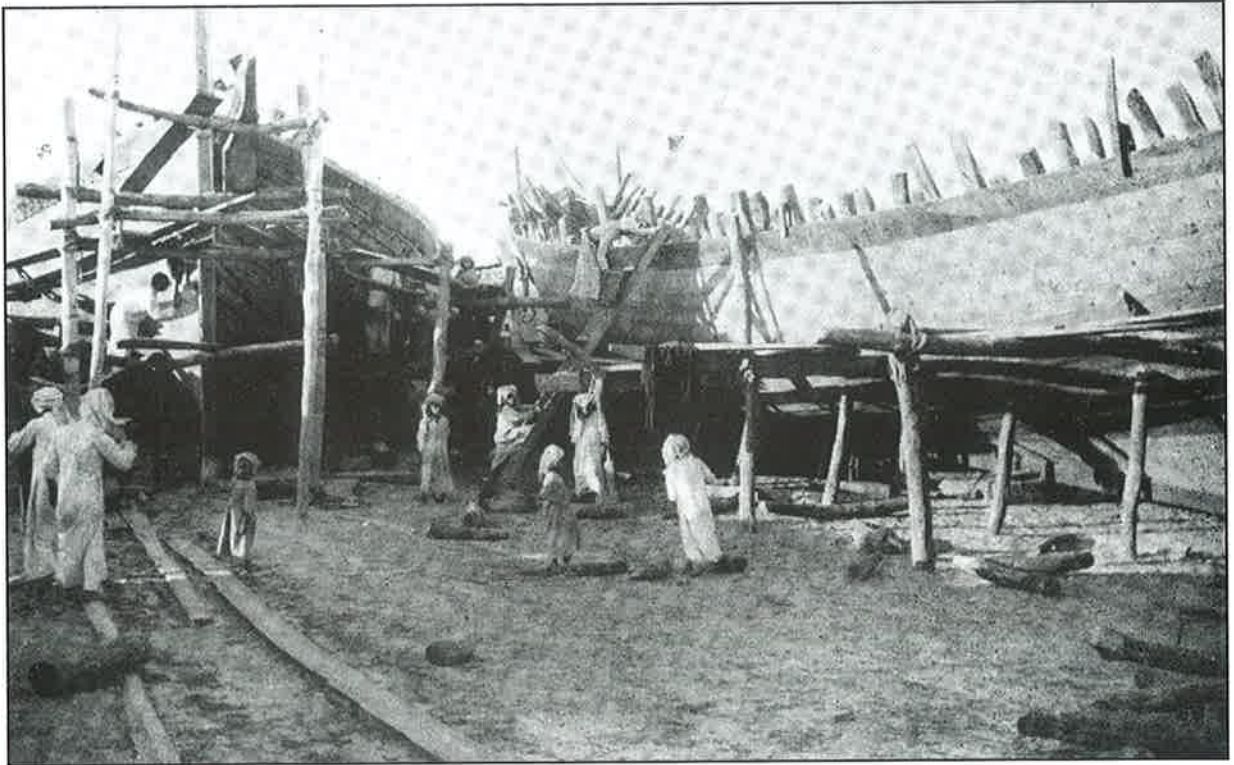


Late Ahmad Salman Al Astad sitting at his yard with a number of assistants. A ship under construction is seen in the background.

*Source: Old Kuwait, Photos & Memories, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*

Humud Bin Hassan, Hajji Jassim Al Sabaghah, Hassan Bin Abdullah Al Astad and his brother Mohammed Abdullah Al Astad, who was famous for manufacturing the most beautiful boms all together by the beginning of the last century for Al Qadibi family, and hence was admired by everyone including famous astads. It is worth noting that when that boat sailed to Basra, people there would gather to enjoy its beauty. That astad also manufactured a beautiful yacht for the former ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Ahmad Al Thani. Among famous astads also were Abdullah Marzouq Al Astad and Rashid Bin Jassim Al Astad who was famous for the accuracy and precision of his work, and his knowledge of the smallest details. It is said that he used to relax during the work period at the rear of the ship and smoked al godow (narjeelah), while observing the works of galaleef working for him. If any gallaf inserted a nail incorrectly or in a wrong location at the farthest point in the ship, he would know from that sound the type of error and could recognize it. Among the astads (ustads) also were Mohammed Al Abbasi, Abdul Hussein Bin Zaid, Ahmad Al Ibrahim, Khalil Rashed Al Gallaf and a number of persons from Al A'radi and Al Marhoon families. It is mentioned that each merchant or ship owner used to deal with a certain ustadh who fully understood his needs and requirements, as

well as the method of his work closely. For example, astads Hussein Al Ghadban and Hajji Ali Bin Hassan were an example, and later Hassan Al Abdullah and Jassim Abdulrasoul, manufactured ships for the late Hamad Al Saqer<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of astads manufactured ships in their buildings or yards overlooking the sea, while the others manufactured ships near the merchant's niq'a to facilitate the process of landing the ship down into the seawater.



The yard of the late Hajji Ahmad Al Astad: during the 1930s and 1940s; it resembled a beehive where work was continuous.

*Source: Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freethe, 1956*

Among the most famous and essential yards where ships had been manufactured were the yard of the late Hajji Ahmad Salman Al Astad, the yard of Hajji Rashed Al Astad, the yard of Bin O'mran and the yard of Hajji Humud bin Bader. The yard of Ahmad Salman Al Astad was the biggest and most famous yard and was like an integrated factory supplied with the necessary tools and equipment for manufacturing ships throughout the year. He used to receive continuous orders from everywhere, especially Sheikhs, senior merchants and those capable of owning outstanding ships, and he rarely stopped work. He had hired between 60 to 70 craftsmen for building three to four ships at the same time<sup>(2)</sup>. It is worth noting that the late Ahmad Al Astad manufactured a yacht for the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, known as «Bayan», which was among the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Ali Bin Hatab.

(2) An interview with Mr. Yusuf Abdullah Al Gallaf.

## Al Boum



Rebuilding Al Muhallab in the year 1996 opposite Kuwait National Museum. The right photo shows the first stages of manufacturing, while the left photo shows the final stages.



most beautiful and best leisure ships on which an engine was fitted.

It is known that Kuwaiti shipwrights were not accustomed to writing their names or putting any sign distinguishing them on the ships they manufactured. However, everyone who worked in that field, including captains, merchants and ship builders, could distinguish the production of each *astad* and could easily recognize the ship manufacturer by looking at it, as the design of the ship, its appearance and structure indicated its manufacturer.

### **The Most Famous Ships and Their Owners<sup>(1)</sup>**

A number of Kuwaiti ships gained a big fame due to their size and beauty. Among those ships being very famous were «Al Dhow» owned by the late Hamad Al Saqer, of a load capacity limit of 6000 *maan*<sup>(2)</sup>. Also, among the big ones were the boat of Bin Rashdan, manufactured by Hajji Salman Al Astad, with a load limit of 5000 *maan*. Al Muhallab was also among the famous boats, and was owned by Mohammed Thunayan Alghanim, and manufactured for him by Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Astad. There was a boat called «Fateh Al Khair» owned by Muhammed Thunayan Alghanim, then he sold it to Al Khalid family. Also, «Tayseer boat», owned by the late Abdulaziz Al Uthman, was famous, while «al Bateel» owned by the late Abdulrahman Bin Roomi, called «the Prince of Diving», was famous as the most beautiful ship and was used for the returning ceremony during the diving season.

Among the famous boats also were the boat of Al Mubarak family, Al Mohammadi Boat and Al-Alawa Boat owned by Ma'arafi family, which were among the biggest boats. Those boats were built in Nibar in India by Humud Bin Hassan, with a number of Indian workers. However, they did not last long as the wood from which they were made was not completely dried, thus leading to the fracture of the wood and the dismantling of the boats. It is worth noting that the late Ahmad Salman Al Astad bought the said two boats against a modest price and then dismantled them and dried the wood for a long time. Then, he built a number of small boats out of them<sup>(3)</sup>.

There were many other ships famous for their beauty, special characteristics, durability and big size. The researcher may obtain detailed information on them by searching in other sources specialized in writing about sailboats industry in Kuwait<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) Sources: interview with a number of masters and shipwrights or craftsmen including Zayed Bin A'ttiya, Mohammed Ibrahim Al Gallaf, Yousef Abdulla Al Gallaf, Jassim Mohammed Al Abdulla Al Astad, Ali Jassim Al Sabaghah and Mohammed Ali Bin Hatab.

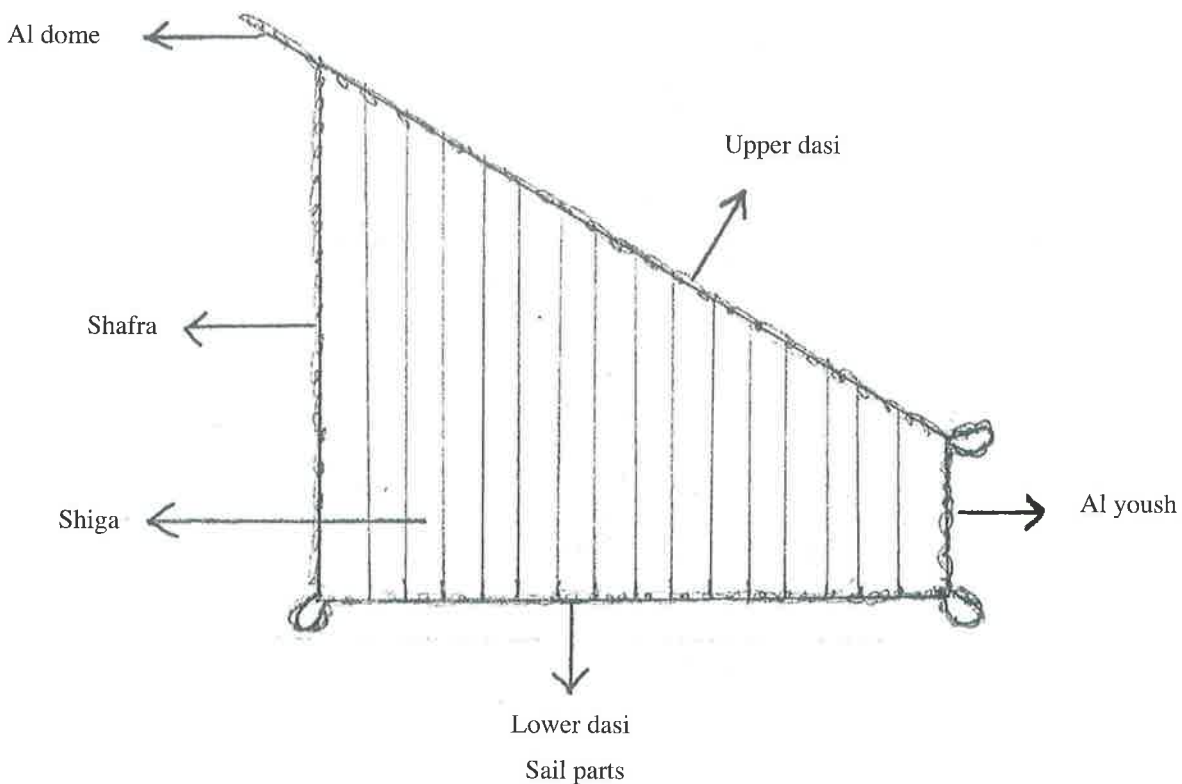
(2) *Maan* approximately 76 kg.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ali Jassim Al Sabaghah.

(4) See «Ship Industry History in Kuwait And Its Various Activites» by Dr. Najat Abdulqader Al Jassim and Dr. Bader Eddin Al Khousousi, as well the book titled «Maunufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait» by Dr. Ya'qub Yusuf Al Hijji, published by Center For Research and Studies on Kuwait.

## Sails Industry

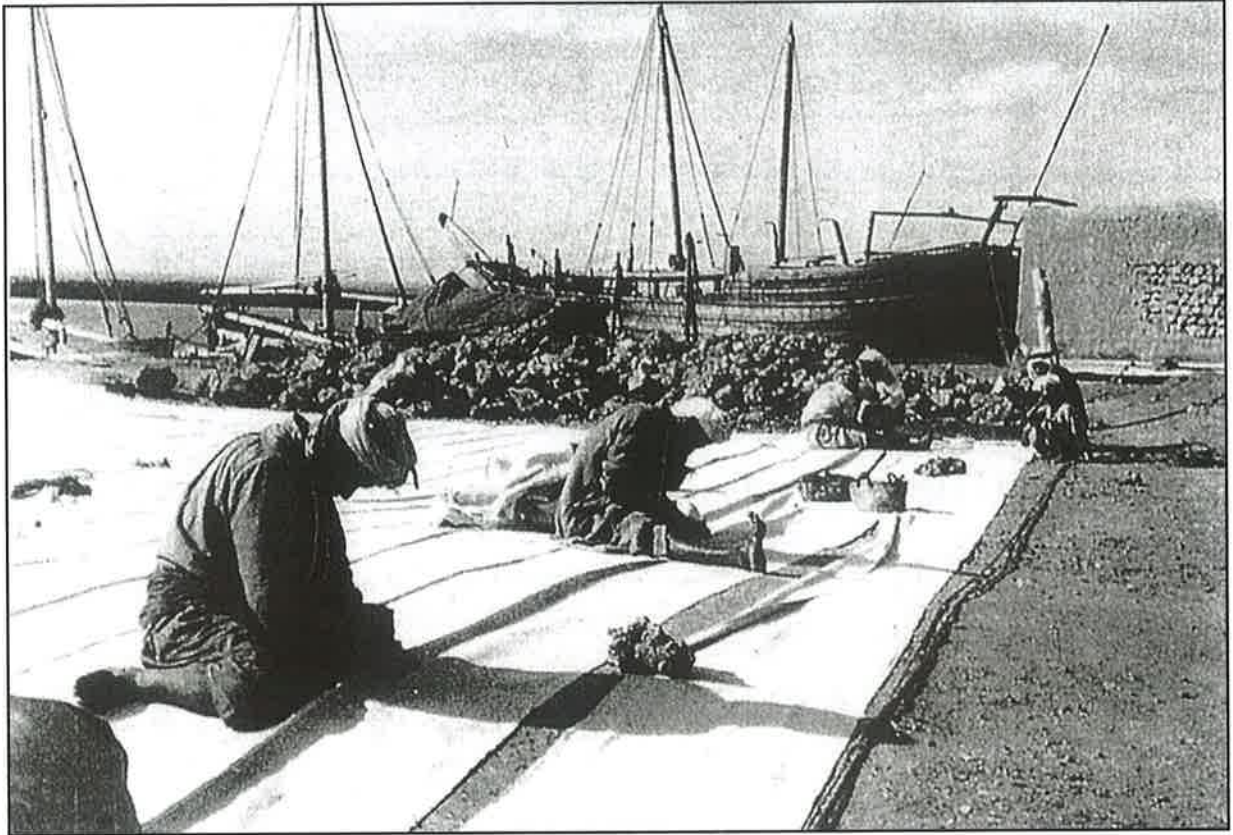
Ship sails were made of thick cotton material brought from India and Bahrain in bundles, each of which known as «**duriah**», each containing around 20 to 30 meters, with a width of almost one arm. The sails were stitched in Kuwait by craftsmen who were specialized in this work. The size of the sail and thickness of its material differed according to the type, size and use of the boat. The concerned captain would cut the sail according to the required size and type. The process started by fixing big nails on the ground, then they would be connected with each other through ropes to take the shape of the sail required to be manufactured. Those sides were mostly made of two thick ropes of «**kembar**»<sup>(1)</sup>, and hence the sizes of the sides were outlined and



defined. Then, the material rolls would be opened and spread on the ground within the rope boundaries and lined longitudinally beside each other from the base of the sail to the top<sup>(2)</sup>. The main sail of the ship- known as al O'ud Sail - consisted of three main sides, and a smaller fourth side, each of which has a certain name. The lower part of the sail or its base is called «**lower dasi**», the upper part «**upper dasi**», the main side «**al shafra**», and the small size «**al youshi**». The sailors would

(1) Kembar is a rope made of the fiber surrounding the coconut shell.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulatif Yusuf Al A'sousi.



Kuwaiti laborers stitching a sail on the seacoast.

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*



Another group of sailors making a sail.

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*

start stitching the rectangular material pieces, each of which known as «shiga»- and tied with strong cotton threads known as «sutli». also, the pieces were stitched with each other with a big needle known as «dafrah» or «maiber»<sup>(1)</sup>.

Big rings would be made of the same ropes at the lower two angles of the sail and above «al yoush»- the small side of the sail- in order to connect those parts of the sail with «al damen» rope from underneath the sail to fix it with the boat. As for the upper angle of the sail- on top of shifra - there is a rope known as «al dome» instead of the ring. There are proportionate measurements between the parts of the sail, taken into consideration upon manufacturing each type of sail<sup>(2)</sup>. The sails were usually made on the seacoast in the vast yards near the dhow yard.

Sails are divided up into several types, including «al o'ud» , which is the main sail of the ship and fixed on the main mast of the ship and approximately located in the middle of the ship. Among the sails also are al qalami and «safdirah», which is smaller in size than al oad, followed by «al terkait» which is a short sail smaller in size than safdirah. There is another sail known as «al geeb» which is the smallest sail in size and used when the wind is strong. Also, there is a sail known as «al boomiyah» and used by traveling boats, and placed at the forefront of the boat. It is not connected with the sail but tied with ropes to a wood known as al satoor, and used when the winds are strong. The sail is hoisted and moved in the ship by «mahala» or «goffah» which is a small wooden movable wheel on which the rope tied to the sail is fixed and pulled when moving the sail is required.

It is worth noting that among the most famous manufacturers of sails in Kuwait were the late Rashid Bin Salamah, Jassim Bin Abdullah Alghanim, Mohammed Bin Abdullah Bin O'baid, Nisf Bin Hussein Al A'sfour, Mousa Bin Omran and Jassim Bin Mohammed Al O'mani<sup>(3)</sup>.

## **Fishing Tools Industry**

### **Fishing Nets Industry<sup>(4)</sup>**

Nets, which were locally manufactured, were used in the past for fishing and hunting birds. For each type of nets there were certain specifications and certain names, according to their uses. Fishing nets were made of thick cotton threads, which were locally woven or imported from abroad in rolls. The net industry started first by rolling three threads together, i.e. winding them with each other, to form

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(1) An interview with Mr. Talha Mahmoud Al Mesbah.

(2) Pearl Diving History In Kuwait And The Arabian Gulf, Part II - Saif Marzouq Al Shamlan-1989.

(3) An interview with the late Ibrahim Khalil Al A'radi and Mr. Hassan Ghareeb Al Dashti.

one thick strong thread to resist the pressure of water currents and fish caught in the net. The rolled threads were folded around a big piece of wood to take their final shape as one thread. Then, they were soaked in water for a certain period until saturated, and then left to dry in order to be ready for making the net.

The net maker would start by determining the size of the opening or the «eye» of the net. Then, he used to select a special «matraqa» to start making the net, or «tarq» as known for this purpose. «Al Matraqa» consists of a rectangular piece of wood of a length and thickness according to the required opening of the net, in an oval shape and resembles an almond. This helps to pull or extend the thread knot when rolling it thereon with the aim of making the net required. The opening or eye was called «quba». The size of the opening in the net was measured by the number of those openings in each «yard» of the net (about 30 centimeters). For example, there is a net with 30 openings in the yard and others with 20 openings, while the number of openings in other types of nets may reach 12 openings in the yard. This depends on the type of fish required to be fished through the net.

Netting or hammering them thereof started with wrapping the thread on «al matraqa» then folding and tying it in a special manner. It is pulled firmly afterwards to form the required «quba». The manufacturer of the net would continue this process until al matraqa was filled with wrapped threads forming a number of «eyes». Then, he used to push them outside al matraqa in order to form other openings, and so on, until the required number of eyes (openings) was finally completed, forming the width of the net. If the width of the net contained 70 openings, for example, he would push this number and then started making a new row with the same number, connected with the previous row, and so on until the net was completed. The length of the net ranges between 30 to 50 ba'a or more (between 55 to 90 meters or more) according to its type, where the width is one ba'a equals (1.80 meter approximately). The «ba'a» is a measure equals the length of a man's two arms and chest. As for the number of openings in one ba'a, it ranges between 70 to 100 openings or «eyes». Upon completion of the netting, it is stretched to fix a thick rope (kembar) at its upper and lower ends by introducing these two ropes between the openings after tying one edge of each of them together to do so. These two ropes are used to define the sides of the net and assist in controlling its width so that there is no difference in the width. The upper rope is used to fix «al karab»<sup>(1)</sup> therein in order to float on the water surface, while pieces of rock - and later lead- are fixed in the lower rope to assist the lower part of the net going down to the sea bottom. «Al karab» pieces are fixed around one ba'a

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(1) Al karab, singular «karba», is the thick ends of date palm fronds; which is triangular in shape .



Net maker while holding «al matraqa» which determines the size of the opening of the net.

*Source: Bu Shehri Studio*

(similar to an arm) between each other. The type of net is referred to according to the number of its openings in one arm. For example, the net with twenty openings in one yard is recognized as «20 quba net», and the net containing 12 openings as «12 quba net» and so on. Each type of net is used for fishing a certain type of fish. For instance, 20 quba net is used to fish Maid fish, while 14 quba net is used to fish «Shawoom» fish, and so on. The fewer the number of openings in the yard are, the wider the openings are, and hence it is suitable for fishing the biggest fish<sup>(1)</sup>.

Some net makers in the past used to save some money to buy cotton rolls from shops specialized for selling fishing tools and used to hire some specialized workers or some women to weave them and transfer them into threads against a certain wage, instead of buying ready-made threads.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hassan Ghareeb Al Dashti.



A number of net makers busy at work.

*Source: Bu Shehri Studio*

The majority of fishing net types in the past were locally made, including «al taroof», and «al leekh» used for fishing different types of fish. This is in addition to «al kofa» used to fish shrimps, as well as «Al salya» used to hunt birds. During the 1930s and 1940s, some nets made abroad especially in «Brawa» area in India, started to appear in the market due to their cheap price. The sailors started to bring them from India in the boats to sell them to fishermen. The importation of nets made by machines increased in the following years, and were sold at cheaper rates, which led to the discontinuation or cessation of such a handicraft, professed by many Kuwaitis in the past.

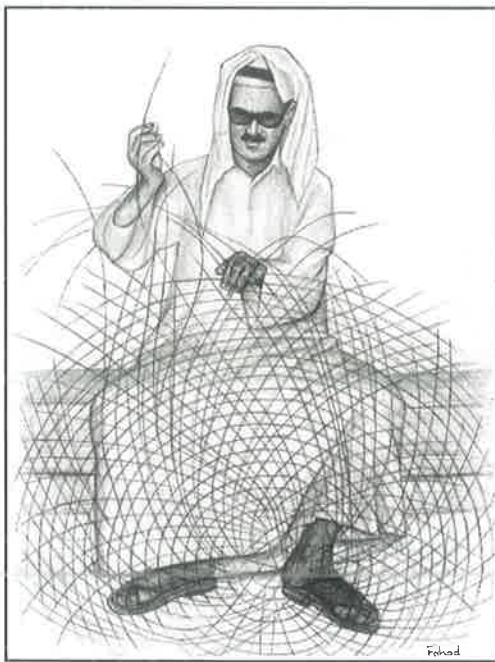
### **Al Garageer Industry**

«Al Gargoor» is a crate in the shape of half ball or a dome made of wires used for fishing and was made by persons specialized in that craft. The gargoor maker would first make the upper part then the base, fish entrance and back door. The fisherman would buy the parts of al gargoor separate from each other, and then assemble them together in preparation of using for fishing. The maker would start

the work by stretching the wires and then pulling them tightly to increase their strength. Then, he would assemble the wires and interlock them with each other by using his fingers, starting from the top of al quba, then its middle or center, and then stretching the wires and interlock them with each other in the form of openings resembling a star.

Al gargoor is hand-made and the process starts by using special wires of special quality and strength. The wire is pulled to add more strength so that al gargoor is upright and not affected by the surrounding factors leading to its indenting or damaging its structure. As for the base, al gargoor maker starts it by making an overlap of the wires from its center. He stretches the wires in each direction to make the openings (or stars) and so on until he reaches the edge of the base, and gathers the wires to make the ring or the circle perimeter. As for the door «or al faj», it is made of light type of wire, so that if the fish hit it while entering al gargoor, it will find it smooth and does not lead them to escape.

There were different types of wires used in making gargoors and they were brought from abroad in the form of round rolls, and they were of special type characterized by strength. There were thick wires from which big gargoors to be made, with a diameter reaching two and a half ba'a, while the thin wires are for



the smaller size gargoors of one ba'a and a half diameter or less. The openings of the net differ in size according to the type of gargoor. Gargoor with big openings is called «*Sharikh*» while the smaller openings are called «*Qateen*».

A good gargoor is characterized by non protrusion of its opening outside. Rather, it is made in such a manner which does not attract the attention of the fish if it swims around it, and enters al gargoor without feeling that due to its special technical structure. The protrusion of the door outside al gargoor body does not help fish to enter easily. The door is made of soft wires so that it does not hurt the fish if it collides with it, helping it to continue going inside even if it collides with it.

Al gargoor making, by interlocking wires from al quba center or base

**Source: *Our Craft Heritage - Kuwaiti Traditional Crafts Exhibition - National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, 1997.***





Al gargoor upper part «quba» after completion.

*Source: Ancient Things- Khalil Ibrahim Al Shano- AlAyyam for Press, Publishing and Distribution Establishment- Al-Manama - Bahrain.*

## **Al Hodhoor Manufacturing<sup>(1)</sup>**

Al **Hadhrah** - plural **Hodhoor**- is a fishing tool extensively used in Kuwait in the past. It consisted of a big enclosure (or court) surrounded with walls made of the stems of canes brought to Kuwait from the lakes of Iraq and Iran. The canes stems are tied together with ropes made locally from the remaining parts of palm trees. Spears were also used to strengthen the hadhrah. Kuwaiti Bedouins were famous for making al hodhoor, which widely spread over Kuwait's coastlines, Failka and some villages in Kuwait and other islands. Canes brought to Kuwait through small sailing boats, were made of hollow stem ranging between three to four meters long or more. It was basically brought from Al Ahwar, Al Qasba or Al Mohammara in Iran and sold in punches. Cane stems were also used for the erection of trellis and making of rugs or floor cover called «barya», where the stem is longitudinally cut while still green. If it is dry, it will not be suitable for making the «bawari».

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(1) The majority of information was obtained through several interviews with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

Al hodhoor maker would buy cane stems, and spears from Al Fordhah<sup>(1)</sup> (port), then he sorted and selected the stems according to the required thickness for each part of al hadhrah. The manufacturing of the hadhrah started by lining the stems next to each other on the floor, in order to be tied firmly together with ropes from one edge, then in the middle and finally to the other end. The thick stems were selected for making the main wall of the hadhrah. Each part of al hadhrah is made of a certain thickness of cane. For example, the main wall (see the drawing) has a special stem, while the body has another type and so on. Usually, four to five persons used to manufacture a part of al hadhrah which had several parts .



A number of hodhoor makers dedicated to work  
*Source: Bu Shehri Studio*

The ropes used to tie the cane stems together were made from the part of the palm tree where dates grow. Such parts were brought from Basrah free of dates, and then soaked for several days in the seawater after placing them in jute sacks or canvas under the wet sand. Then, they were hammered, to transfer them into threads from which the ropes, used to tie the canes together, were made in order to

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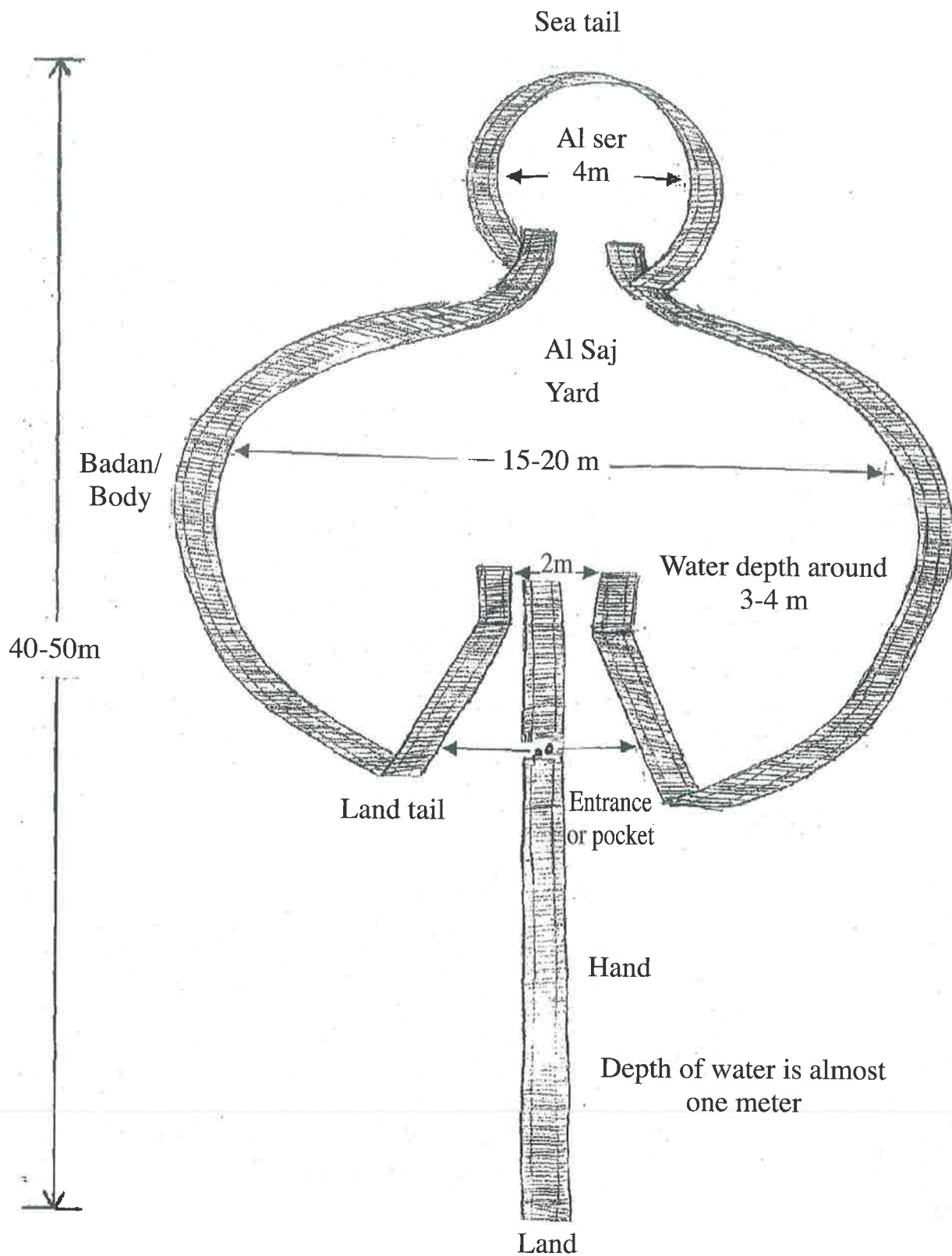
(1) Old port located near Seif Palace.

manufacture al hadhrah. When the threads are made, they are lined with each other and stitched by hand and rolled like the hair braids to form a strong rope of a finger thickness, and tie canes together in order to make al hadhrah.

The canes are tied with each other through these ropes, at 50-70 cm distances. Therefore, around 5 to 7 stitches of ropes are made in the wall of al hadhrah, and its other parts as well.

Spears - or *maradi* as also called - are placed between the canes at distances ranging from 50 to 70 centimeters to support al hadhrah walls. The spear is longer than the cane in order to be fixed to the ground while fixing al hadhrah at the sea. Also, a «ring» is placed for the spear to tie the rope with pulling al hadhrah wall to the outside and prevents its collapse while being used.

The types of hodhoor differ according to their use, and location, and whether exposed to the waves or not. The length of al hadhrah ranges between twenty to thirty meters approximately 14 meters, and height six meters. It contains around forty to fifty spears (Maradi). Al hadhrah has several parts: al sur, badan or body, al wali, tail, bab or door and other parts. Each part is made of certain thickness of cane. For example, the body is made of cane stem thicker than that used in making al sur and so on. When al hadhrah is complete, it is fixed on the sea coast and its entrance will be towards the coast and al sur- the body- inside the sea. The spears will be tied with thick ropes at the fixing place of al hadhrah through the ring fixed on each spear, and the other edge of the rope is tied to big sea rock, so that al hadhrah does not collapse. Rocks are also placed around the hadhrah walls to strengthen them. We will explain briefly below the role and significance of each part of al hadhrah in fishing and we will also include a sketch thereof.



A sketch of al hadhrah, derived from the «The Short Kuwaiti Encyclopedia» (by the late Hamad Al Sa'idan - 1972) introducing some additions by the author.

- 1. Al Hadhrah inlet or entrance:** Al hadhrah inlet faces the coast, and its width from outside is approximately 5 meters, gradually narrowing to two meters near the yard mouth.
- 2. Al Yad / Hand:** consisting of a wall of cane dividing the inlet or entrance into two parts. It extends from the near coast to the entrance of the hadhrah. The hands help to force the fish coming with the current to go to al hadhrah inlet and then enter the yard. The depth of the water at the hand tip on the coast side is approximately one meter. As for the depth inside al hadhrah, it is three and a half to four meters at the maximum flow.
- 3. Badan /Body:** This is the main wall of the hadhrah and is circular half, with a diameter of 15 to 20 meters.
- 4. Al Ser:** Al Ser (sur) is the internal part of al hadhrah, in the form of a relatively small circle located at the end of the body, facing the sea, where the fish gather when the tide is on the ebb the water is less or completely absent in the other parts of al hadhrah, and hence it is easy for the fisherman to catch them.

### **Using Al Hadhrah**

Al hadhrah is fixed near the coast, with its entrance (or pocket) facing the land. It is necessary to give much concern to the entrance and fixing it firmly so that the fish entering al hadhrah can not leave it. Also, al hadhrah walls should be strengthened and spears fixed to the ground upon tying the wall, and tied with thick ropes through the ring fixed on the upper part of each spear. Then, each rope will be pulled firmly outside al hadhrah and fixed to the sea rocks around al hadhrah. The length of the rope fixed to the spears is approximately four to five abwa'a (plural of ba'a) i.e. approximately 8-10 meters. To increase the strength of al hadhrah walls, a quantity of rocks are placed around their walls internally and externally. These rocks also lead to blocking any outlet from which the fish may leave or go out. When al hadhrah installation is completed, the «hand» is placed at its entrance, and therefore it is ready for use.

The process of fishing in al hadhrah starts when the water starts to flow bringing fish along to the coast, and enters al hadhrah from the mouth. The yad or hand helps the fish to enter and prevents them from going to the other direction, and therefore not to escape from the «trap» prepared for them. The hand does this on the sides of the entrance, which is divided into two halves. The edge of the external hand is near the coast, while the other edge is in the internal opening of al hadhrah, leading fish to go to the yard.

When fish enter al hadhrah, it is difficult to come out. So, they gather in the yard. Upon the start of water ebb, water gradually diminishes in al hadhrah, especially near the coast. So fish are forced to go inside the yard, and then to «al ser» where they gather as the water depth is suitable for most fish to swim.

Al Hadhrah owners go to «al ser» to collect the fish during the ebb period in a small «*Houri*»<sup>(1)</sup> with a strainer, consisting of a grid or cotton bucket in the form of a big vessel with pieces of lead at the bottom to lower them into the bottom, and their upper part fixed with two columns in order to hold them up. The fisherman would put the strainer in the water to pick up the fish and unload them inside the boat until it is filled and then taken to the coast, then he could return back to «al ser» if there are remaining fish, and so on until the fish is carried to the coast in preparation of taking them to the market.

Al hadhrah might remain in use for a period ranging from seven months to one year, as the cane sticks would break afterwards as a result of the strength of the waves, climatic fluctuations and lapse of time. This leads to damaging al hadhrah, and the fisherman is forced to replace them. As for the spears, they can be reused more than once and taken from the old hadhrah to fix in the new one.

All kinds of fish enter al hadhrah according to the season, including Soboor, Zubaidi, Sheem, Shamahi and other fish. As for Beyah, Showom and Subaiti, they enter al hadhrah in the winter, which go during such period to the coast looking for warmth. Also, small hadhrah are fixed for Maid during the winter period. As for Zubaidi, its season starts by the end of March and continues till October.

Usually, al hadhrah makers carry their work in the yards and empty spaces near their residence and at the locations close to where al hadhrah will be installed upon completion. Ready hadhrah is transported to the sea coast on the back of donkeys, in order to install it on the coast at the assigned locations. It is known that the government issued official documents for al hadhrah, and each owner of a hadhrah retained the document proving his ownership of the hadhrah which was installed by a licensed person at a certain location of the sea coast. Al hadhrah was fixed at certain location, and the distance between each hadhrah and the other was not less than six hundred ba'a, so that they do not affect each other. If some disputes occurred between owners of al hadhrah, the matter was arbitrated by persons appointed by the government for settling such disputes, and their judgments were effective and enforceable. Among them were Mohammed Bin Meda'ij and Rashed Al Foudari<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) boat

(2) An interview carried by Mr. Mansour Al Hajri with Mr. Hamdan Mohammed Al Khatlan, Al Rai Al A'm Newspaper, 6/3/1998.

Al hodhoo areas extended from Maseelah to Al Da'aiya areas, then from Benid Al Gar to the farthest point of Qibla areas. Among the areas al hodhoo installed were, Bubyah, Failaka, Maskan Islands, O'shairej, Doha, Sulaibikhat, Subiya, Kazma and Umm Al Namel Island and Salmiyah.

The locations of al hodhoo were sold and bought against expensive prices in the past. The price of «al mansab», which is the place of installing al hadhrah, ranged between 50 to 60 Austrian riyals (Maria Teresa) at the beginning of the last century, which was more expensive than the price of a house that ranged between 30 to 40 riyals (one riyal equivalent to approximately two rupees). It is worth noting that the owners of al hodhoo were paying fees to the government for al hadhrah and each of them had certain locations. It is said that one of al hodhoo owners in the past - called Bin A'bood - rented Maskan Island from Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah (1917-1921) for fixing al hodhoo there against two hundred rupees per year. Sheikh Salem stated that he should fix a lighthouse to guide water ships; gata'a ships and fishing ships. However, he did not pay attention to that condition, which led the government to lease it to the late Ibrahim Bu Rashed and his sons in the year 1934 instead of him. They fixed a long column to guide ships and fixed a lamp or bulb on it to warn ships from coming close to the island and avoid collision with the surrounding rocks<sup>(1)</sup>.

Fish trapped by al hodhoo fixed on the islands were carried to the Fish Market in Kuwait through sailboats.

The journey from Maskan Island to Niq'aht Al-Uthman took around two hours, if the winds were favorable. The fish were then transferred from there with large straw containers called «jilla» and carried by porters to the Fish Market. Fishermen working at al hadhrah on the beaches of Kuwait City took their catch to the Fish Market in the city at night on the backs of donkeys to reach there by sunrise to sell it in the market auction. Brokers usually carry on the sales in auctions.

### «Wargiah» building<sup>(2)</sup>

Wargiah (Warjiyyah) is a small fishing boat made from the spines of date palm leaves; thick palm trees fronds or stalks, and its length ranged between 4 to 5 meters. It carries only one person who uses it for fishing by fish hook (middar). Such a small boat was made of treated palm trees stalks, buried under the mud or sand near the coast for a period of time which might last for two weeks, to be saturated with water and be serviceable for use and bending. The boat parts were tied together with each other with ropes, and lined to help it to flow on the water surface. Its depth inside was approximately 60

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(1) An interview by Mansour Al Hajri with Mr. Mohammed Ayad Al Ashram in Al Rai Al A'm Newspaper on 3/4/1988.

(2) An interview with the late Ibrahim Khalil Al A'radi.



Al Warjiyyah

Source: Kuwait National Museum

to 70 centimeters. The fisherman from inside would row to enter the sea, while some fishermen would fix a small sail to move it. The caught fish is placed inside the boat in which sea water gathers to help keep the fish alive until reaching the beach.

### **Al Shenbak<sup>(1)</sup>**

The word «*shenbak*» means a wooden box wrapped with ropes which resembles the net. The sailors made shenbak by «overlapping» ropes around the wooden box, using a knife and a thick «needle» of special type to interlock ropes together. The sailors would make stitches in the form of tied rings of the ropes in a circular manner, starting from beneath the box to the top and so on, until the grid is complete around the box, except its cover, which remains without shenbak. Handles were also made of ropes on the box sides, to facilitate the process of carrying and handling.

Kuwaiti sailors accompanied with them, during their sea voyages to India or diving, some wooden boxes (netted with ropes) to keep their luggage and commodities which they might buy from the ports passing through, in order to sell on their trip back to Kuwait or giving them as gifts to their families, which was called «al sogha»- i.e. travel gifts.

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(1) The majority of this information was taken from the book «Kuwait-Gulf Joint Traditional Crafts» by Mrs. Hind Yehya Saleh Al Yehya.



*Al shenbak* protects the wooden box from climatic conditions, especially humidity and salinity of sea water which leads to damaging it by the lapse of time. It also protects it from fracture when colliding with the woods and goods loaded on the ship. Al Shenbak adds a beautiful appearance to the box through the decorated netted openings.



Making Al Shenbak

*Source: Bu Shehri Studio*



## *Part Two*

### *Sea-Related Trades*

#### **Traveling And Trading**

##### **- Trading And Sailing Ships In Kuwait**

A number of travelers and foreign researchers interested in the economic, political and social conditions in the Arabian Gulf countries pointed to the activity of Kuwait's Port at the beginning of the 19th century and its role in the importation of a great deal of goods from India through Kuwaiti sailboats to be re-exported to the neighboring countries. They have also emphasized the significant role of such ships in transporting a number of goods from neighboring countries to India, which was not less significant than the re-exporting process. The trade of transporting dates and horses to India was one of the most prominent activities practiced by Kuwaiti merchants in the past, which yielded rewarding profits.

##### **Kuwait's Trade in Brucks' Report of 1829**

*George Barnes Brucks was employed by the Indian navy and was asked by them to visit various ports in the Arabian Gulf for the purpose of submitting a report on their customs, religions, trade, and sources of wealth.*

Kuwait, in view of Bruck's report, was an important town which was known for its indulgence in local and international trade. Unlike other ports on the Gulf it had, because of its location, a Spiral trade with inner Najd and northern Najd, which it supplied with wheat, coffee and Indian produce. Its merchants owned fifteen large vessels - Baghlas and Dhows - whose tonnage averaged between 100 and 400 tons, and twenty ships of the previous type with a tonnage of 20 to 150 tons. There were other types of vessels in the Kuwaiti merchant fleet numbering one hundred and fifty, averaging in freight capabilities from 15 to 150 tons each. These sailed to Gulf ports and countries around the Red Sea and Indian sub-continent.

Kuwait imported a wide assortment of goods. Among the list, Brucks included cloth, rice, sugar, wood, spices and cotton. Evidently Kuwait at the time of his visit was an importer of coffee from the Yemen, tobacco and dried fruits from Persia, wheat and dates from Basra, and cloth, dates and fish from Bahrain.

Kuwait exported ghee and horses which were brought from neighbouring bedouin tribes, and for which they bartered certain commodities which the bedouins could not get at home. The total amount of imports was almost 500,000 dollars (riyals)» while the exports were less than one hundred thousand riyals. Most of the Kuwaiti catch of pearls found its way to local markets<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Captain Hennell, 1841<sup>(2)</sup>**

*Government asked Captain Hennell, a British Resident in the Gulf, to proceed from Abu-Shahr to Kuwait for the purpose of reporting on its harbour and the feasibility of the British moving its forces from the Island of Kharij to Kuwait if compelled to do so. Though Hennell did believe that Kuwait would be a good substitute for Kharaj, he recorded a few notes pertaining to Kuwait's trade which are useful in this study.*

This Town presents a singular instance of communal prosperity, although wanting in almost every advantage, excepting its magnificent harbour. Its population is large, as it can produce about six thousand men capable of bearing arms.... of inhabitants nearly twenty five thousand individuals. They possess thirty one Buglas and Bateels, from one hundred and fifty to three hundred tons butthen, which trade constantly with India. Fifty smaller vessels are employed in the coasting commerce of the Gulf, and about 350 boats engaged in fishing and on the pearl banks.



A number of Kuwaiti ships docked at Al Mo'ala Port in Aden, during the 1930s.

*Source: Old Kuwait: Memories in Photographs, Y. al-Hijji.*

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(1) Kuwait Modern History (1750-1965) - Dr. Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakma, p.291

(2) Ibid, quoted from (Bombay Government Selections), 24 pages (p.532-533)- p.291

Hennel presents the view that the Shaikh of Kuwait collected no taxes or customs, the port being entirely a free one. The Shaikh's income was approximately 3,000 dollars, and he spent that revenue together with the profits from his trading vessels on keeping up «a public tabe of plentiful but coarse description to which every one appears to be welcome».

### **Colonel Pelly, 1863 & 1865**

*Perhaps the fullest reports dealing with the subject of this chapter can be found in John Lewis Pelly's three reports on the region. Pelly, British Resident in the Gulf for some time, in his long and detailed reports, mentions Kuwait within the context of trade in the entire Gulf region. It is important to note that he was writing of Kuwait from first - hand Knowledge.*

Upon reaching Kuwait town, he noticed small boats, 60-70 tons each, bringing in commodities from northern ports of the Gulf to be conveyed by the large Kuwaiti Baghlas to Bombay. Similarly, he stated that produce from Undia was transported on those large ships to Kuwait where it was distributed by smaller vessels to neighbouring northern ports of the Gulf. Heading the list of those imports from India (Bombay) was teak plank, the wood essential to the ship building industry.

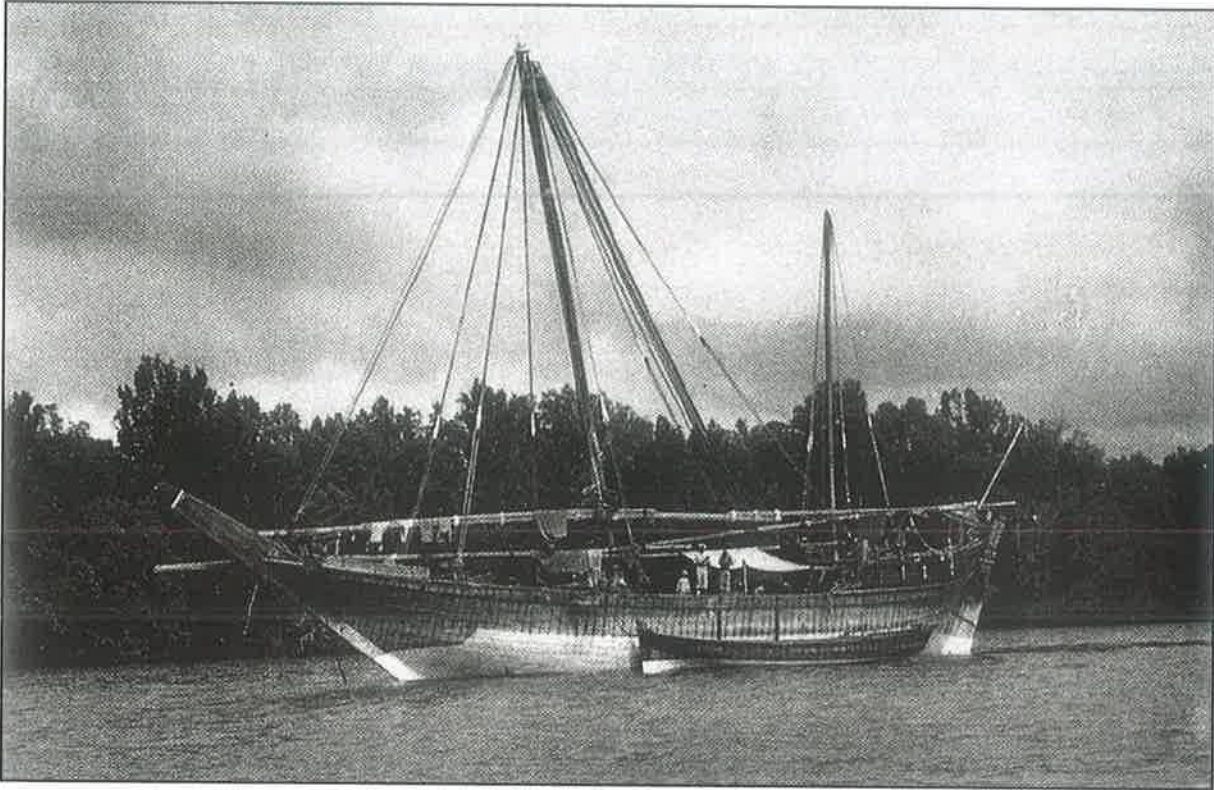
In a following report<sup>(1)</sup> Pelly wrote that yearly imports at Kuwait from Malabar and Bombay were estimated at 200,000 rupees, money paid for cloh, rice, coffee, wood and spices. Kuwait exported 800 horses to India every year at an average of 300 rupees each. Exports to India included wool for 40,000 rupees, dates for 60,000 rupees and perhaps other commodities in the range of 40,000 rupees a year. Horses were bought for Kuwait merchants by agents among the Arabs of Shammar in northern Arabia They were then brought to Kuwait rather than Basra for export in order to avoid paying duties.<sup>(2)</sup>

Kuwaiti vessels were manned by 4,000 Kuwaiti sailors who were highly regarded for their pleasant dsposition and hard work. Thirty of those vessels averaging 100 tons were sent to Bombay from the Shatt al-Arab every year, each loaded with 2,000 baskets of dates priced at one thousand French riyals with a total value of 30,000 French riyals or the equivalent of 60,000 rupees. These dates were shipped from the Shatt al - Arab on Kuwaiti boats. They imported part of the fodder for the horses from Zubair, a town between basra and Kuwait - town. Sheep, ghee and milk were purchased from Kuwait bedouins who brought their animals to the main gates of the town to sell. Among the numerous tables Pelly produced in his Remarks, the following shows Kuwait's annual export trade with Abu-Shahr.

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(1) Previous source, quoted from (Bombay Government Selections).

(2) Ibid., p. 295.



Kuwaiti ship docked at «Samba Oranga» African bay.

*Source: Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji*

Kuwaitis used the word «safar» (sifar) or «travel» to refer to the process of deep-sea voyaging for trading in their sailboats from Kuwait to India and Africa. They had also given the word «sannan» to the departing boum to India and «Mo'ali» to the returning «boum»<sup>(2)</sup>.

«Sifar» - or trading by sailboat - was one the most important works on which Kuwaitis depended for their living in the past. Their ships toured the Gulf, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean back and forth, taking with them huge quantities of Iraqi dates, and returning with different kinds of goods on their way back home, as mentioned by travelers in their reports. The number of «safar» boats or «boums» by end of the 1930s amounted to more than one hundred and fifty boats, which were used to sail to India, Yemen, and East Africa for trading in various goods.

The journey started by going from Kuwait to the ports of Shatt Al Arab, such as Basrah, Fao and small adjacent villages for buying dates and loading them on their boats to India. From India, a number of them headed to the coasts of East Africa for which they carried a number of Indian goods. Then, they returned to

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(1) Ibid., p.103- 104.

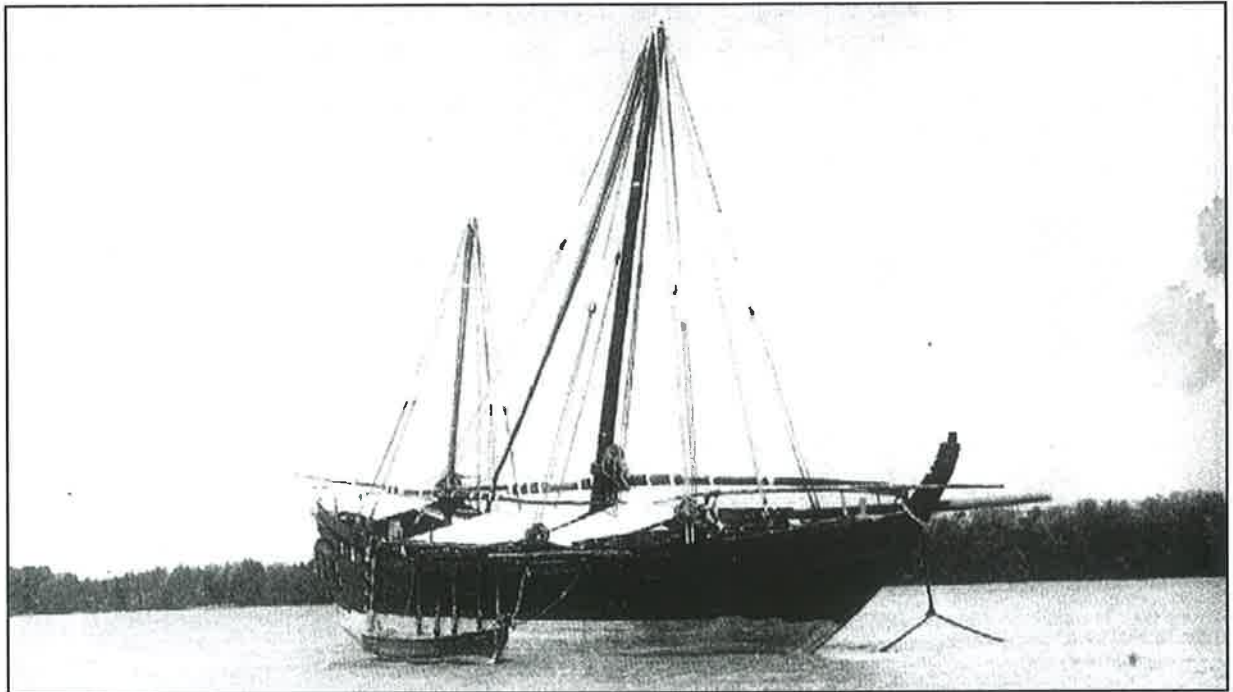
(2) «Boum» is the large deep-sea vessel for carrying cargoes, travelling long distances.

Kuwait, carrying with them types of timber and spices. As for the ships returning directly from India to Kuwait, they carried different types of goods which Kuwaiti market yearned, for which the, whether for local consumption or for re-export to adjacent countries. We will address briefly as much as possible below with the «sifar» journeys which yielded a large part of income for the Kuwaiti economy, upon which a big sector of the citizens entirely depended.

### **Safar Voyage<sup>(1)</sup>**

Preparations for safar «sifar» voyages started by the sea captain (ship commander or nukhudha) contacting the sailors and assistants who were accustomed to traveling with him in order to clean and prepare the ship for traveling. The nukhudha used to offer advances to such sailors to be recorded on their accounts. He also was accustomed to assigning «al mojadami», the deputy of the nukhudha and head of the sailors, to buy the logistics and the required foodstuff for the voyage, the most significant of which were rice, sugar, flour, tea, lentils, dried shrimps and salted fish.

An account would be opened for recording such expenses in order to deduct them from the profits gained at the end of the journey. Big numbers of Kuwaitis



Al Badri Baghla in the delta of «Alrufji» River, Tanzania, the year 1939.

*Source: Dhow building in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji.*

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(1) An interviews with : Khaled Mohammed Al Shaheen Alghanim, Eissa Ya'qub Bishara, Eissa Abdullah Al Uthman, Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba, Ali Hussein Ghadanfari, Ali Hussein Al A'ssousi, Mahmoud Hussein Al A'ssousi, Juma'a Jawher Shihab, Saqer Abd al-Wahhab Al Qatami, Mohammed Ali Abdalnabi Shamsah and Abdurrahman Ali Al Sagheer.

worked in such ships for living. During the season, the city looked almost deserted except from women, children and the aged.

Safar voyages normally started at end of August each year by going to Basra to buy and load dates to take them to India.

They ended with the beginning of the summer months, when the ships returned from India and East Africa, while being loaded with different types of goods. The load limit per ship ranged between 3000 to 5000 maan of goods<sup>(1)</sup> (i.e. 230 to 380 tons). In the 19th century and before, Kuwaitis used a type of big deep-sea dhows known as «baghla», as well as «baqqarah». Later, they used «boum» which had been designed in Kuwait and proved its success in resisting the waves and winds, after being developed at the beginning of the twentieth century to be suitable with the prevailing climatic conditions in the areas through which they sailed during such voyages. The biggest sailboat of «boum» type built in Kuwait was known as «dhow» with a load limit of 6000 maan, i.e. almost 456 tons, owned by the late Hamad Al Saqer, one of the richest merchants in Kuwait at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **First Phase: Heading to Basrah, Fao, and Adjacent Areas to Load Dates**

Safar voyages usually started by end of August and the beginning of September approximately, when certain types of dates in Basrah started maturing and to be picked up in preparation of selling them. The boat sailed from Kuwait to Basrah, usually unloaded. The boat owner was usually aware of the prevailing transfer rates or what was locally known as «al nole» which is the transport rate of «al maan». «Al nole» in the past ranged between one rupee to one rupee and a quarter for transporting one «maan» of dates from Basrah to Karachi<sup>(2)</sup>. However, it increased in the last years to 10 rupees then to 15 rupees by end of the forties. At that time, India was one of the biggest dates markets in the world and included commercial centers and merchants specialized in that commodity. Different types of dates were transported, the most prominent of which were Al Sa'amaran from Basrah to India. The sailors, under the supervision of the captain, followed up the purchase of dates for the account of the Kuwaiti merchants and supervised packing in containers made of palm tree fronds, each known as «qallah», before loading into the ship. The Iraqi merchant or broker would agree with the land and palm tree owners for the type and required quantity of dates and the price. Also, there were a number of Kuwaiti commercial offices in Basrah whose owners carried out the same process for supplying Kuwaiti merchants and captains with dates. Further, the owners of the ships would agree with Kuwaiti merchants to carry their goods against a price agreed upon from Basrah to Karachi according to the prevailing shipping rates. Most of the Kuwaiti merchants purchased dates from Iraqi

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(1) «Maan» is a weighing unit used in the past in Kuwait. It weighs approximately 76 kilograms.

(2) Karachi was one of the most important ports in India in the past before the separation of Pakistan in 1947.



merchants, while a number of others owned palm tree farms in Iraq.

As for the owners of the small ships who worked for their own account, they headed directly to the owners of the palm trees in Basrah to buy their needs and load them on al mashowa or al balam<sup>(1)</sup>, small boats, from the farms in the villages scattered along the coast, to the boum docked at the nearest deep area in the port<sup>(2)</sup>. Among the areas rich in dates were Abu Al Khaseeb, Yusufan, Al Qata'a and Al Sayeba villages or the areas near Fao such as Al Dourag, Al Zayadiyah, Al Fadaqia and Al Ma'amer. Dates of «al sama'aran type» were available at the beginning of the season in August, and then Al Hilawi, Al Khadrawi and Al Zahdi. The majority of dates came from Iraq; as for Iran, its dates were scarce, less in terms of quality and more costly to transfer, which accordingly gave preference to the Iraqi dates. The nukhudha used to appoint supervisors from among the sailors to select the dates and follow up their compression and packing to avoid any cheating process which might occur. The dates were tested directly from the palm trees and kept in the stores of the Iraqi merchant or fields, where they were prepared and covered with leaves therein before packing. The dates were compressed and packed under the supervision of the sea captain or his representative in a «qallah» made of palm tree fronds, which usually weighted from half maan (38 kilograms) or one maan (76 kilogram)<sup>(3)</sup>.

The ship would wait from 15 to 25 days for the process of compressing, packing and loading the dates. Then, the official papers and documents would be completed from the Customs Department before traveling. The cargoes were loaded on the ship in the presence of a government commissioner who supervised the loading, received the fees due and issued the «manifest» certificate for Karachi port for example, or any other port to which the ship would sail. Small ships such as al balam would transport dates from the villages and fields cut by small rivers passing through them to the «boums» docked offshore at the deeper areas. Normally, around 5000 to 6000 qallah of dates were loaded on each ship, i.e. around 190 to 225 tons as an average. Before departing Basrah, the sea captain would buy a cow or a number of sheep to slaughter them, dry and salt their meat and put them in metal cans in order to be eaten during the journey. The ship had to leave after completing the accustomed procedures, and headed to one of the ports of India for unloading its cargo and to hand them over to the agent of the Kuwaiti merchant there. Further, a number of ships would sail with the dates to Yemen and East Africa directly. The majority of ships usually depart from Basrah to India from mid-September till the beginning of October<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) A type of small sailboats

(2) An interview with Mr. Ali Hussein Al A'ssoui.

(3) AnN interview with Mr. Ibrahim Mohamad Bin Shaiba.

(4) An interview with Mr. Juma'a Johar Shehab.

Climatic conditions were usually good in the autumn. However, with beginning of winter and the «Al Ahimer» season, winds and storms were strong, while rainfall increased, leading to difficulty in sailing and the possibility of confronting great hazards resulting from the unexpected changing climatic conditions in the Gulf and Indian Ocean. Therefore, a number of merchants brought big quantities of dates from Basrah to Kuwait at the beginning of the season prior to the rainfall in order to store in the storehouses «al bakhakheer» in preparation of transporting them during Sifar Season to A'den and Africa, after the ships return from al Nibar. A number of Kuwaiti ships sailed to A'den and Africa, usually following their return from India, to carry dates to such areas, and then would return with timber and other goods. Special small cargo boums called «Al Tashasheel» (tashalah) carried such dates from old Kuwaiti port called «Al Fordha» to the big ships docked in the deep areas next to the coast of Kuwait City. Storing dates in Kuwait at the beginning of their season helped ships to avoid sailing to Iraq during the rainfall season, which coincided with the period of the ships' sailing to Africa and A'den from Kuwait. Hence, the dates were ready in their stores for transporting directly. A number of ships Also sailed directly from Basrah to Yemen and East Africa to transport dates there<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Second Phase: Sailing to the Ports of India**

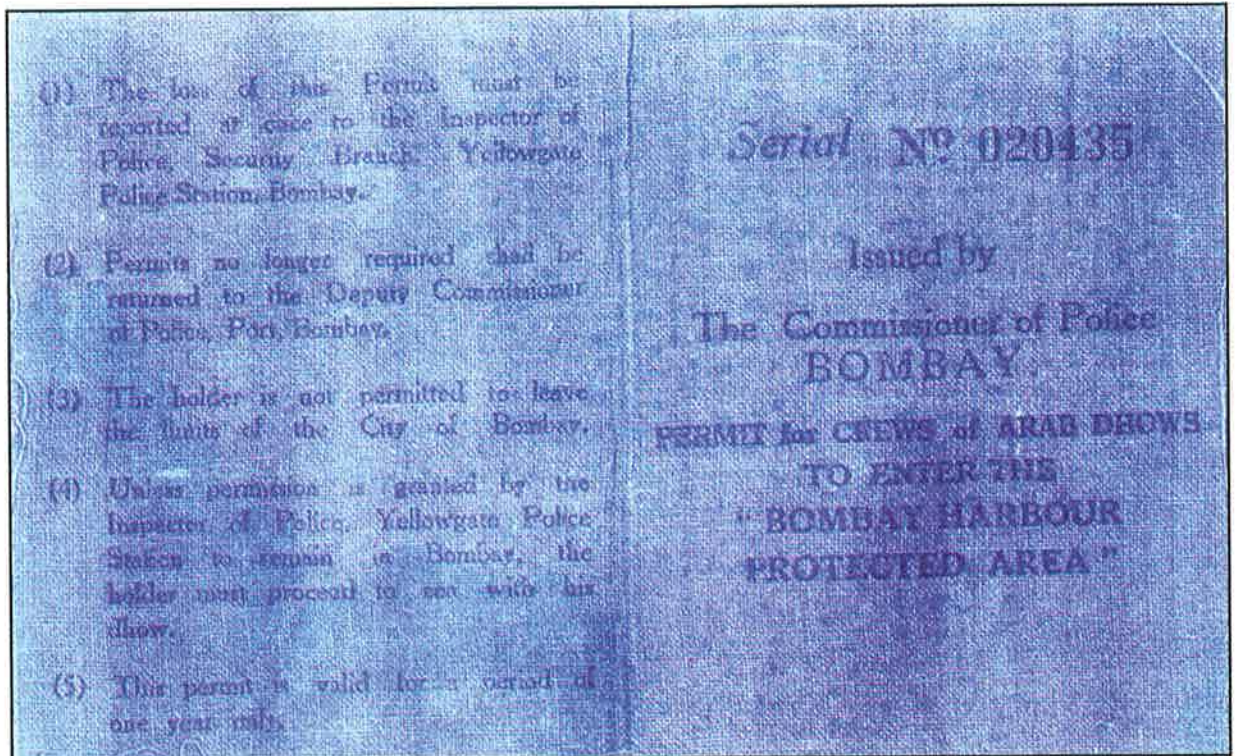
Ships used to depart from Shatt Al Arab after completing the loading of dates, sailing to India. The journey by water to Karachi took in normal conditions between 10 to 15 days, according to the direction and strength of the wind. Karachi was the first stop for Kuwaiti ships heading to India, followed by Khormaian. Normally, the dates were delivered to the agent of the Kuwaiti merchant in each Indian port. There were a number of Kuwaiti merchants residing in India at a number of Indian ports, each of whom managed a commercial office for buying and distributing dates, as well as supervising the exportation of other goods to Kuwait and other countries, and across Indian ports as well. Those merchants supervised the selling of dates of Kuwaiti merchants or purchased dates for their accounts and sold them to the local merchants specialized in selling such commodity. Among the works carried out by the Kuwaiti commercial offices, there were receiving and approving goods, completing the Customs formalities and hosting the nukhudhas in the place allocated for them called «mudheef», which was a type of hostel. Also, the commercial offices specified with the local authorities the timings for unloading the goods at the port, in coordination with the captain, in order for the «al tashalah» to deliver them there. Then, the office had to transfer the value of the dates sold in India to the Kuwaiti merchant <sup>(2)</sup>. Among the Indian ports which included offices of Kuwaiti merchants were <sup>(3)</sup>:

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(1) An interview with Mr. Sager Abdul-Wahab Al-Qatami.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ibrahim Mohamad Bin Shaiba

(3) An interview with Mr. Salim, Mohamad Al Shaheen Alghanim and Mr. Bader Sultan Al Eissa.





Cover of a sailor's Identity card in Bombay

Name MR. RASHID  
 Native of KUWAIT  
 Distinguishing marks RED CORNET  
53 Y.R.S. 17.5.9" T.M.  
 Reg. No. of Vessel TOYLEER (S.114)  
 Port of Registration BOMBAY. 4A.12.49  
 Name of Tindal MR. RASHID (SELF)


**CAUTION:** Any person other than the holder, who attempts to use this pass is liable to a term of imprisonment which may extend to 5 years.

Left Hand thumb impression. Left Hand index finger impression.

**NOTE:-** This pass must always be in possession of the holder while he is in Bombay and must be produced on demand by any Police or Customs Officer or a member of the Naval Examination Service.

This pass does not entitle the holder to land in or use any of the Military, Naval or Docks Protected Areas.



Identity Card was issued by the authorities of Bombay City in India for foreign sailors who visited the city. This is the identity card of a Kuwaiti sea captain in the 1940s.

- Bombay Harbour, comprised the offices of the late Mohammed Al Sederawi, Jassim Al Ibrahim, Hussein Bin Eissa Al Qana'i and his brothers, Ali Al Shaya', Saleh Al Shaya' and Sheikh Abdulatif Al Abdulrazzaq.
- Karachi Port, comprised the offices of the late Abdulrahman Al Shaheen, Mohammed Al Marzooq, Yusuf Al Marzooq, Fahad Al Marzooq, Sa'ud Al Fulajj and Mohammed Dawood Al Marzooq.
- Calcutta Port, comprised the office of the late Yusuf Al Saqer, who owned a building there in which wood and all ship accessories were being sold.
- Khormaian Port, comprised the office of the late Abdulaziz Al Saqer.
- Barawa Port, comprised the office of the late Mohammed Thunayan Alghanim.

After completing the unloading of the cargo at the port, instructions would be issued to the sea captain from the merchant, or the owner of the goods, or the owner of the ship requesting him to sail to the next port to unload the remaining cargo or part thereof, and so on. He would sail, for example, to Karachi or Bombay, and then to Nibar until unloading the goods completely at the specified ports. Also, he might receive some instructions after completing the unloading of dates for shipping certain goods across the Indian ports. For instance, he might be requested to load a certain type of salt from Bombay to the ports of Nibar, Calcutta or Koji, as well as other ports of South India, where such salt was used as a fertilizer for the coconut trees there. That type of salt was abundant in a number of islands near the Bombay Harbour in an area called «Oro», where it was gathered in huge quantities, especially during the flow period when the water used to cover such islands for a long period<sup>(1)</sup>.

India imported different types of dates, for which each type has a certain use. For instance, dates of «Al Dairy» type was used for manufacturing dyes, where it was soaked, marinated and mixed with other materials for using to dye fabrics. As for «Al Zahdi», it was used for producing «vinegar», while «Al Sa'maraan» was used as food due to its low cost. It is worth noting that other huge quantities of dates were transported from Basrah through big ships to India. Tens of «balams» or ablam also transported quantities of dates to the stores of merchants in Kuwait, in addition to the seeds of dates which were used as fodder for livestock in Kuwait. There were also some factories in Basrah which removed the seeds of dates and then stuffed them with almonds and cashew, packaged into small paper packs for export to India. That led to making available huge quantities of dates seeds which were sent by «balams» to Kuwait as fodder for livestock<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Khalil Al Aswad.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mahmoud Hussein Al A'ssoui.

### Third Phase: Sailing to the Ports of East Africa

After completing the unloading of dates at the Indian ports and completing some other tasks, directions might come from Kuwait to the nukhudha, for instance for shipping certain goods to East Africa or buying a number of goods and returning to Kuwait. That was carried according to the market conditions and availability of opportunities. Among the products shipped from India to East Africa was «Al Kabaril», which is a special type of bricks such as ceramics. The demand for that commodity was prosperous in East Africa as it was used to cover the roofs of houses. A number of Kuwaiti ships sailed, while carrying such bricks and a number of other products from India to the ports of East Africa, especially Zinzipar, Dar Al Salam and Mompasa. The journey by sea took between 25 to 30 days in normal conditions. Further, a number of ships sailed directly to East Africa from Kuwait, passing through the port of A'den to load salt, dried salted fish such as «al khabat» and «chanad» required in those areas, especially Zinzipar, in addition to passengers<sup>(1)</sup>.

The ships brought with them from East Africa to Kuwait «chandal» which was the stems of trees growing in the jungles of East Africa, used to support the roofs and

1949 No. 225380

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that

*Khalifa*

Sex *m* Age *30* Race *Arab*

Son or daughter of *Fadhala*

has been vaccinated against Yellow Fever at

*MOMBASA* on *23 FEB 1949*

Signed *Alkhatib*  
Government Medical Officer of Health

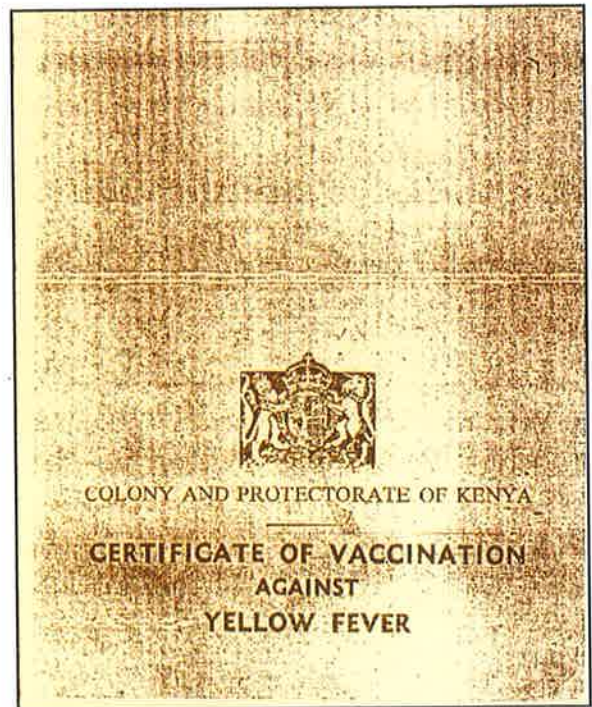
Signature of person vaccinated of (a) *Father* (b) Mother

No. of Passport

Date of Passport for

Med. Res. used on *M. 426*

COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA  
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH  
MOMBASA



Vaccination Certificate against «Yellow Fever» of the late Khalifa Al Fadhala, issued by the Kenyan authorities in Mompasa on 23 February 1949.

(1) An interview with Mr. Saqer Abdulwahab Al Qatami.

ceilings of houses. Each 20 stems were tied in one bunch known as the «koreya». Each ship carried between 300 to 700 «koreyas». The captain paid fees to the British authorities there amounting to 15 shillings per «koreya». Therefore, the majority of ships used to register their half cargo of «chandal» in their records in order to reduce the amount of fees. Kuwaiti ships departed East Africa at the end of the winter season or at the beginning of the spring season after representatives of the British government toured the markets while calling «O! strangers, remember your families», in an attempt to remind the sailors that the returning season to their countries has come and they should leave before the climate would change and the winds and storms might become stronger and their return journey might become more difficult<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Last Phase: Return to Homeland**

Upon sailors' completion of unloading and selling the various goods at the Indian ports which they visited one after the other, they used to come to the end of that mission and get ready to buy and load the required goods, in compliance with the instructions of the ship owner or the other merchants. Afterwards, the sailors would start to get ready for the return home journey. Among the goods which Kuwaiti ships brought to Kuwait from Indian ports were wood, coal, cement



The Kuwaiti deep-sea boum «Bayan» on the coastline of «Kuwale» African Island, 1939

*Source: Dhow building in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hiji.*

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(1) An interview with the late Mohammed Hassan Al Hadab.

and «kimbar» (i.e. thick ropes), textiles, in addition to tea, sugar, rice, flour, spices and uncountable other products. During the 1930s, India was the main source for supplying Kuwait with the majority of its requirements, whether made in India or in European countries and the USA, as ships did not directly sail to Kuwait from such countries. During their presence at Indian ports or cities, a number of sailors used to purchase some simple goods for their own accounts aiming at selling them at a more favorable price in other ports they might pass by, or upon their return to Kuwait in order to generate some profits therefrom. A number of captains were treating their sailors with ease and tolerance when they purchased such requirements, for the purpose of helping them to get an additional income, while a number of others did not tolerate that at all. Among the goods brought by sailors were coconuts, spices, pickles, textiles, and «wizars» i.e. the men's veil to cover the body, and a number of household items for selling<sup>(1)</sup>.

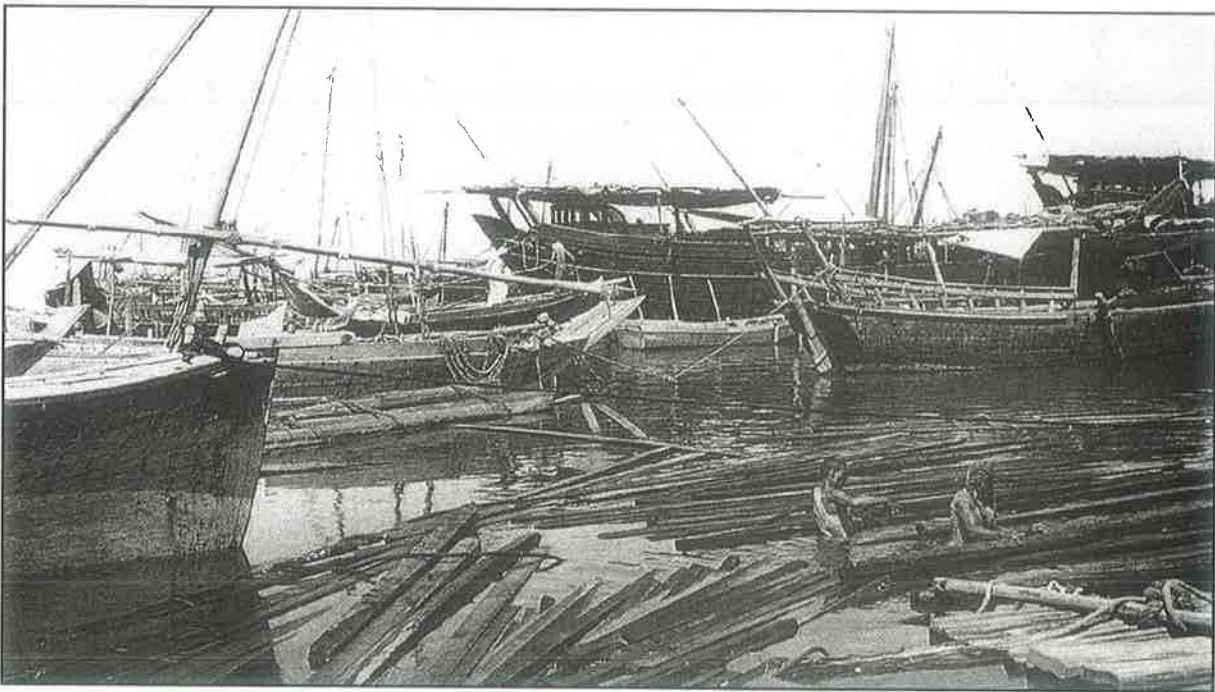
Usually, the nukhudha tried to return to Kuwait prior to the storms' season which would start in those areas by the end of summer. The ship's delay after the return date would lead them to confront serious climatic conditions which would face them on their way back such as the strong winds and storms known as «al barrasat», that could lead to the sinking of the ship. That had happened to many Kuwaiti ships which met that fate because they delayed their return. In some instances, when the sea captain realized that he was late in returning home - for any reason- he might have canceled the return voyage and stayed in India till the following season, instead of taking the risk and facing the dangers and sailing within the stormy season. That would force the sea captains or sailors to stay at a number of Indian ports and cities searching for jobs, no matter how simple they would be, in order to cover their expenses. So, a number of them were seen working in restaurants and other places against little wages which might not exceed 6 Annas per day. Among the most difficult places in the return voyage was the Indian Ocean area- between the ports of India and Muscat- as the storms were very strong there, very high waves and dangers surrounded the ship from every side. Upon crossing that area safely, the nukhudha would feel comfortable and matters would calm down, as the atmosphere would change and sailing become easier. Therefore, the nukhudhas were longing for reaching Muscat, to which the voyage from Bombay lasted between 10 to 20 days, according to the wind direction. Upon approaching Muscat, one of the sharp-eyed persons would go up the ship mast trying to see some landmarks or scenes of Muscat. When he observed such signs, he would loudly inform his fellow sailors, who would become enthusiastic, and started to clap, shout of joy and celebrate such occasion. The captain would order the ship's cook to make a special type of sweets (pudding) made of dates and ghee in order to celebrate that occasion. Upon reaching Muscat, they would have restored their strength, their morale

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(1) An interview with the late Khalil Ibrahim Al Ramzi.

increased and their psychological state became more stable. The journey by sea from Muscat to Kuwait lasted between 4 to 5 days in normal conditions, and could extend to 15 days if the winds were unfavorable <sup>(1)</sup>. Once the ship arrived at Kuwait, it anchored inside the sea at an area called «Twaina» located opposite the western part of the city, facing Al Saqer Niq'aht, where its cargo was unloaded in small boats called «tashasheel» to carry them to «Al Fordha», in preparation of completing the procedures for their entry and payment of the customs duties before being carried by the horse-driven carts to the stores (A'maras)<sup>(2)</sup>.

After completing the unloading of the goods, the sailors would go ahead to their families, after spending a period which could have reached up to six months or more in the sea, after which they were in a very bad need for rest.



Different types of timber being unloaded at the niq'a or shipyard.

*Source: Ibid.*

After unloading its cargo, the empty ship used to go to the niq'a, where it anchored near the coastline waiting for the next season. The ship entered the niq'a during the period which witnessed the highest flow of the seawater, which was the «al haml» period coinciding with the beginning or middle of the Lunar month, to avoid collision of its bottom with the niq'a bottom. The ship would then be prepared with its small mast hoisted, in preparation of slow sailing towards the opening of the niq'a then to its specified location near the beach. That

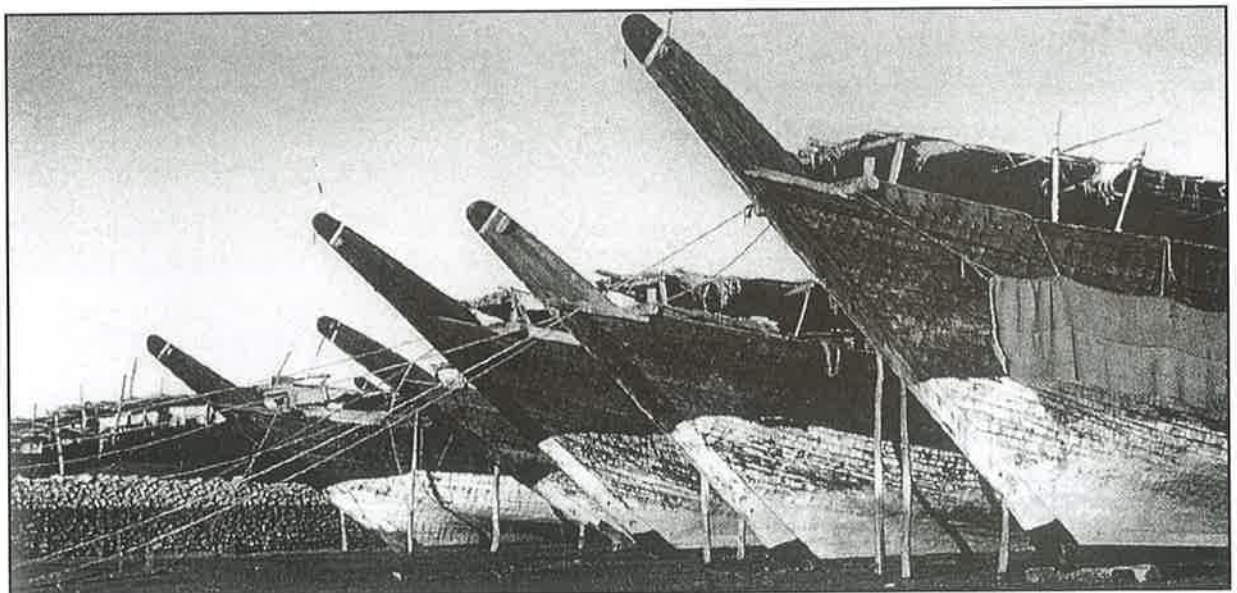
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(1) An interview with the late Ja'afar Mulla Juma'a Ahmad Baqer

(2) An interview with Mr. Eisa Ya'qub Bishara.



was carried normally at midday, when the water level reached its highest flow level of tide, and then it would be entered gradually to reach near the beach. Afterwards, sailors would prepare the ship for temporary retire by inserting a number of squared wood, each of which was 6 meters long, under its base, to lift it off the ground level. Normally, three pieces were placed on the front side and other such three pieces on the rear, which were tied to wooden poles vertically placed on its sides to prevent it from falling or tilting. Those poles were called «*mujadafat*». Afterwards, after drying off the sea water the sailors started cleaning the ship and then dyeing it with special oil. The sailors used animal ghee to paint the ship walls internally and externally. Its upper part was painted with «*al sill*» and the lower part by «*al wadak*» (*wadach*) and «*al noura*». Then, the ship was covered with arbors made of dried plant stems and wood to protect it from the sun rays and other climatic conditions, waiting for the next season. The shipwrights would be called at the time to repair any defect which might have been sustained by ship during the travel period and to replace the damaged parts thereof<sup>(1)</sup>. Normally, big travel boums would make one voyage per year to India, where they stayed there for few months unloading dates and loading wood and other goods. As for the small boats, some of them sailed twice to India, in early August taking some types of dates, then return with some goods to Kuwait after three months. Then, they would stay in Kuwait for a short period, after which they would sail back to India after carrying other quantities of dates from the stores of merchants in Kuwait or in Basrah<sup>(2)</sup>.



Kuwaiti «boums» docked at the niq'a after sailing for long distances to India and Africa, and returning to the homeland while carrying different types of goods (1939).

*Source: Dhow building in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji.*

(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Hussein Al A'ssousi and Mahmoud Ali Al A'ssousi.

(2) An interview with Mr. Sager Abdul Wahab Al Qatami.

## **Al Harfi**

A number of sailing ships- especially small boats- would go to India prior to the usual season to obtain some benefits. This type of journey was known as «al harfi». They used to carry dates before being available in commercial quantities. At the beginning, they would go to Basrah to collect the dates which had fallen off at the beginning of the season, prior to being in commercial, quantities known as «dousan». Those were the dates falling off the palm trees and were considered of second class. The nukhudha or sailors of such ships would go to small villages and farms in southern Iraq to buy «al sa'maraan» dates, which matured before other types and sell it to the sailors.

After inspection the nukhudha bought the dates, supervised compression and packed there of in «*qallahs*», The dates were placed on «*al khosaf*» which were straw mats, and covered, to compress it with their feet. Then, the straw mats would be folded and tied together and weighed to make the «qallah». Then, it would be carried to the boum through small «balams» or other boats. Upon completing the loading process, it would leave to the Indian ports which in would reach before the season, to benefit from the prevailing practice there for non-collection of taxes on the first shipment of dates reaching those ports prior of the season. The boats would race to deliver their cargoes there in order to be the first in queue arriving at each port to benefit from the prices, being normally higher during that period due to the low supply, in addition to avoiding payment of taxes<sup>(1)</sup>.

## **Ship Crew**

The ship was administered by its crew, consisting of the nukhudha and his main assistants, to whom he would allocate certain tasks to be performed under his supervision. The ship would also have a number of sailors, varied according to the size of the ship and its cargo. The following are some details of the ship crew and a brief description of the responsibility and role of each member.

### **1. Nukhudha (Ship Captain)**

The nukhudha or sea captain in big boats which were used for traveling outside the Arabian Gulf- India and Africa- was usually knowledgeable and well informed of the sea paths and aware of all the details connected to them, besides everything related to the sea, as he could not reach such a rank without extensive knowledge.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Al Sagheer.

Among the significant characteristics which must be enjoyed by the nukhudha or captain are: intelligence, wisdom, experience, ability to lead and decision-making, capability, bearing the responsibility in addition to courage and generosity. He must also have a strong personality and everyone should comply with his orders literally without any slackness. He is the prime responsible person for leading the sailors, their behavior, good conducts, and confirming their capacity to perform the work. Further, he is the first and last one responsible for navigation of the ship and the sea routes, as well as solving any problems that may confront the ship, whether during the voyage or upon landing at various ports. This is in addition to the abilities of selling and delivering the goods carried by the ship. The nukhudha is either the owner of the ship or its commander and representative of its owner, and the link between him and the merchants and agents at the ports he would sail to. Normally, Kuwaiti ships were owned by senior merchants, and the nukhudha was the person responsible for commanding and delivering the goods to their agents at the various harbours, against obtaining a certain share of the ship's income<sup>(1)</sup>.

In view of the absence of schools or educational means to teach such a trade or to master it, the majority of Kuwaiti nukhudhas have inherited it from their fathers and forefathers. A number of nukhudhas were accustomed to accompanying their children with them for «sifar» voyages when their age would reach fifteen years, after spending few years learning reading and writing in informal schools, or katateeb.

The boy at that age would pick up information and absorb it fast, upon the encouragement of his father who used to teach him every small and big detail to enable him hold that position in the future.

## **2. Al Mojadami**

Al Mojadami or mjaddami is the deputy of the nukhudha, and is boatswain, considered the chief seaman in the ship. He assists the nukhudha in organizing and controlling matters, implementing his orders, transferring his directions to the ship crew, as well as supervising the repair and maintenance of the ship and providing it with its logistics.

## **3. Al Sakkuni**

Al Sakkuni is the person responsible for the ship «steering tiller or wheel» or rudder called (sekkan), and directs it according to the instructions and orders of the nukhudha. Such a helmsman is well-informed of all directions. Normally 4 «sakkunis» would be working on board the ship, who alternated in performing the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ibrahim Mohammed Bin Shaiba.



Sailors spend most of their day during sailing the ship doing various types of hard work, and rarely stop working, especially upon changing the direction of the wind and its strength, which forces them to turning the sail from one side to the other or lowering it and hoisting another sail, which is a burdensome work.

work. The nukhudha directs him and indicates the route to him through «al दौरا» (compass) and locations of the stars.

«Al दौरا» is the most significant device or appliance upon which the nukhudha relied upon for steering the ship and issuing his orders to «al sakkunis» to sail according to the required directions. «Al दौरا» is divided into two parts: the East and the West.

Each half is divided up into sixteen parts each carrying the name of a star. These parts are called «matala'a» in the eastern part of «al-daira» and «maghayib» in the western part. The eastern part comprises the following main matala'a: yah, farqad, naash, naqa, ayook, wag'a, smak, thuraya and matala'a. As for the main «maghayib» in the western part, they are: jouza, tair, ekleel, agrab, hamarin, suhail, salbar and qutb. «Al-daira» stars from «yah» which is equivalent to the southern pole, and ends at «qutb» which is equivalent to the northern pole. Between each matala'a and the other or maghayib and the other, there are 12 degrees. Each one of these matala'a or maghayib represents a specific direction, known as «nakt, nakit»<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ibrahim Mohamad Ben Shaiba.



for the sailors to make ropes out of them during their free time.

During the night, the sailors were divided up into two groups, each of which had a shift or «zaam» to monitor the ship and the climatic conditions while sailing. Members of the first group start work from sunset till midnight, while members of the other group went to sleep. When the first half of the night was over, the second group woke up to take over its responsibility and members of the first group went to sleep. The Sailors spent their time during the shift drinking tea and probably eating some foodstuff (zahab) which some of them brought along with them, such as sweets, while entertaining themselves by exchanging talks and memories. In addition, they might exchange goods, sell, or buy them from each other, if they bought such goods from the ports they visited.

In the event of any emergency, such as storms, change of wind direction or similar incidents, everyone was alert to confront the problem and cooperate to solve it, as



Sailors sleep above the ropes or at any other place onboard the ship during the period allocated for sleeping in order to take rest and restore their energy.

that required the cooperation of all the ship crew in order to change the position of the ship sail to be suitable with the wind direction<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is worth noting that the number of seamen working on the ship depended on its size and cargo, as one sailor was hired for every one hundred «maan (76 kilograms)» of cargo. If the ship cargo capacity was 2000 maan for example, then the number of its sailors should be twenty, while they would amount to fifty sailors if the cargo was 5000 maan<sup>(2)</sup>.

## **5. Al Naham and the Remaining Crew**

A number of nukhudhas used to take with them a chanter during the voyage, known as «Naham» or Nahham to provide an atmosphere of entertainment to the sailors after a long day of work, as well as to break boredom. Al naham would sing during the night, as well as before reaching «al banader» (the ports), and in some situations which required encouraging the sailors and raising their morale. The historian Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan mentioned in his book among the most famous «nahams» were: Farhan Abu Haila, Sulaiman Al Ghareer, Saleh Kaheel, Sa'ad Bin Fayez, Abdullah Al Yehya, Bakheet Bin Basheer, Salem Al Marti, Abdulaziz Al Daweesh, Hussein Al Mulla, Joher Abdulsayed, Mulla Faraj Bin Hindi, Amer Al Daweesh, Mohammed Al Qashti, Uthman Al Dara'a, Rashed Al Jimaz, Abdullah Bin Mubarak Bin A'assi, Ahmad Bin Saleh Al O'mani, Sa'ad Al Abkal, Yaqub Kaheel, Sa'ud Saram and Sa'ud Al Ghareer<sup>(3)</sup>.

Further, the ship was escorted by a cook and a shipwright (gallaf) to repair any defect or failure, which might be sustained by the ship during sailing. Some captains entrusted the craftsman accompanying the ship to build a small ship for him during the journey instead of being without job, especially if the ship was not exposed to any problems. The craftsman would spend his time building the ship, with the assistance of some sailors. The base of the ship desired to be built would be stretched above «al neem» (rear surface of the ship) and the craftsman would start his work with the beginning of sailing the ship and its building would be completed usually with the end of the journey and their return to Kuwait. Usually, a jalbut, mashowa or balam was normally built during such voyages<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Hassan Al-Mahmeed.

(2) An interview with the late Ali Hussein Ghadhanfari

(3) History Of Pearl Diving- Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan, 1989- p.250

(4) An interview with the late Hussein Ghulum Al Gallaf.

## Dividing the Ship's Income

The income of the ship was divided into two halves, after deducting the costs of foodstuff and other expenses. The first half would be the share of the ship owner. The second half would be divided up into shares- or «qalaet», or «qalayet» distributed among the ship crew, according to the share agreed upon, as follows:

1. Al nukhudha or captain- 4 shares.
2. Al mojadami- one and a half to two shares, according to his experience.
3. Al sakkuni, one and a half share
4. Sailors, each would get one share
5. Al naham or nahham, one and a half to two shares, according to his level.
6. The Cook, one and a half share.
7. Al-gallaf (or the shipwright), two to two and a half shares, according to his experience.

## Emergency Cases and the Problems Confronting the Ship

Ships are exposed to many problems because of the strong waves and winds, which may be confronted during the way. This leads to the failure of some parts, fracture of sails, or occurrence of more dangerous damages, which may lead to the sinking of the ship. The gallaf used to repair things which could be repaired amidst the sea if he was able to do so, while the work which might be postponed would be delayed until reaching any of the near ports. If the ship was exposed to danger because of the storms and severe climatic conditions, the captain might be forced to throw quantities of the goods in the sea to avoid sinking. In some instances, he would be forced to throw the entire cargo, which would lead to the merchant's loss of his goods without getting any compensation from anyone, while the captain and the remaining crew would lose their wages for the goods, which had been disposed off according to the law of the sea<sup>(1)</sup>.

If any of the crew members suffered from a sickness, anyone who was experienced or knowledgeable in medical treatment would treat him with popular medicines such as «*aloes*» or other similar medicines to relieve his pains until reaching the nearest port. In the event any of them died, they would kneel down in prayer for him, wrap him in a cloak and drop him into the sea after tying the body with a piece of steel or similar weights. The ship would hoist a black flag on its return to Kuwait to indicate the death of a member<sup>(2)</sup> of the ship crew .

The financial return from the journey was not attractive for the sailors, despite

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(1) An interview with Mr. Juma'a Jawher Shehab.

(2) Ibid.



all such difficulties and sufferings. However, the majority of Kuwaitis were forced to carry on such jobs and face danger in search for a source of living. The sailors stayed away from their homeland and families for long periods, which might extend up to seven months or more in hard work, while their income did not exceed fifty rupees. That was during the twenties or thirties of the last century. The situation improved afterwards, with the beginning of the forties and the sailor started to get the average of 500 rupees per journey, especially during World War II, when the commercial conditions in Kuwait prospered and the demand for goods to be re-exported to adjacent countries increased.

### **Problems Between Workers in «Safar» Voyages**

Working onboard travel ships was not free of problems, which occurred among the sailors or between them and the captain. Usually, the captain was the decision maker in all matters on board the ship. Among the accustomed problems was the occurrence of a quarrel between the sailors, or some of them refusing to work, escaping or any other similar acts. If problems occurred between any of the sailors and the nukhudha, they would turn to a knowledgeable person in sea affairs called «rai al salfa» in Kuwait to decide on their matter. «Rai al salfa» was keen and cognizant of the sea matters and who possessed experience, sound opinion, and fairness. «Rai al salfa» used to consult a number of experienced captains prior to passing his decision, which was binding and enforceable on everyone. A number of famous captains undertook that task, the last of whom was the late Mohammed Al Shaheen Alghanim, who became «rai al salfa» at the beginning of the last century, and was the man turned to for matters related to Safar ships problems<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the problems the sailors confronted were the accumulation of debts owed to the captain who was always concerned to select the best sailors to escort him in Safar voyages. Therefore, many captains were concerned to offer advances to the remarkable sailors to ensure that they would stay with them. Their debts would be accumulated and therefore they would be obliged to work with a certain captain. It was accustomed among the captains that no new sailor would be allowed to join the work unless confirming that he was not a debtor; not obliged with any debt towards the other captains. That was verified by the sailor through submission of «barwa», which is a release certificate (quittance) issued by the captain he previously worked with indicating that the sailor was out of any debt towards the captain. In case a sailor was indebted to any captain, the captain wishing him to join his service would pay his debts, in order to be free to join him, and the value of such debt would be registered with the new captain.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdul-Lateef Yusuf Al-A'ssousi.

## Discontinuation of Safar Voyages

Safar or travel journeys by sea continued to India and Africa through Kuwaiti sailboats until the late forties. That activity passed through ebb tide and flow periods, according to the local, regional and international conditions. Its activity climaxed during and after World War I, but then it was stagnant during the 1930s when the economic depression prevailed over the world.

It is known that the Kuwaiti commercial fleet played a remarkably significant role during World War I, because most of the steamships stopped sailing to the Gulf countries, the Indian ports, adjacent areas and East African countries. Therefore, those areas relied largely for the majority of their commercial exchanges on Kuwait's ships. The deterioration of the pearl diving during the 1930s contributed to increasing the marine shipping activity, transferring of capital investments and leading to their expansion. However, the competition of the steamships almost led to the elimination of that activity. If it were not for the outbreak of World War II, which restored activity to Kuwait's sailboats. The prosperity of gold smuggling trade from and to India during and after World War II directly led to the increase of the activity of Kuwaiti ships. That activity continued to prosper until the end of the forties of the last century, when steam ships started heading intensively to the Gulf ports, with the preference of merchants and foreign companies to ship their cargoes of goods on those ships to ensure their safety and fast arrival, which greatly affected the sailboats activity. It is worth noting that the Kuwaiti merchant ships sector witnessed new developments during that period, due to the increase in the speed of ships and their competition against the steamships, whereby engines were installed on many Kuwaiti boats. In the meantime, ships retained the sails for time of necessity as Kuwaiti sea captains were not accustomed to the engines and did not rely fully on them due to recency of using thereof and probably due to the absence of full confidence in their performance. However, that did not save the situation as reliance on those ships started to decrease gradually after the termination of the war for many reasons. Among the most important of them was the increase in the commercial steamships activity in the Gulf and many Kuwaiti sea captains abandoned the sea - activities to work with Kuwait Oil Company which restored the production and pumping of oil after the end of the war, and the need of the company for big numbers of workers. Such development drove many sailors to join the company's service due to lesser risks compared with sailing in the high seas, in addition to the attractive wages they received. By the beginning of the 1950s, the activity of Kuwaiti merchant ships heading to India and East Africa completely stopped. The activity was confined to the trading ships, which continued transporting goods between the Arabian Gulf ports, known as «*al qata'a*» boats. Steamships of

giant tonnages and fast speed replaced sailboats for transportation, which doubled their quantities and values up to tens of times by the beginning of the fifth decade of the last century. Ship owners during that period started selling their sailboats - at low prices to be dismantled- a process called «*tashteer*»- in order to sell their wood for fuel. Therefore, some yards were active for carrying on such job and hiring workers to dismantle the ships in preparation of selling their wood and other parts<sup>(1)</sup>. Thus, the era of the sea activities was over, ending a period that extended for three centuries during which Kuwaitis earned their living from sailboats.

## Al Qata'a

The word «*al qata'a*» is given to the Safar activity using trading sailboats between Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf ports. The ship doing so was known as «*al boum al qata'a*» or the Gulf-trade boum. Those journeys by sea were undertaken by medium-sized ships, such as boums, jalbuts, and a number of showai or shu'i and sanbuk. The tonnage of «*al qata'a*» ship ranged normally between 800 to 1500 maan (60 - 130 tons).

Those ships sailed from Kuwait to the Arabian Gulf ports, carrying different goods, including tea, sugar, rice, wheat, barely and dates, to sell at Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Al Jibeel and Muscat. In addition, a number of ships sailed to Al Muhammara, A'badan and Basrah to transport dates, rice, wheat, flour, barely, and other goods to the Gulf ports. Bahrain was the most significant center for «*al qata'a*» trade, as ships sailed there to deliver different goods and continued sailing to Qatar, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. A number of ships sailed to Muscat to deliver some commodities and bring available goods there such as dried lemon (*sahari*), dried fish, «*al gurm*», goats, and the like<sup>(2)</sup>. Usually, the ship used transport a full consignment for a certain trader to one of the Gulf ports in order to be delivered to his agent there. However, if the ship cargo was incomplete, the captain usually waited on his sail to receive other goods from a number of merchants, as he was forced to load several consignments to be delivered at more than one port. That normally happened when the trading activity was stagnant in recession periods. Those ships returned in most cases empty from such countries due to the absence of significant goods there, which might be carried to Kuwait. Kuwait was a distinguished commercial center, in which the majorities of goods were available and supplied all those countries with most of their needs of various materials imported from India, Iran and Iraq<sup>(3)</sup>.

«*Al qata'a*» ships transported different materials to the Gulf countries against fees based on the weight. The merchant would agree with the captain, for instance,

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Mohammed Al Shaheen Alghanim.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Ali Abdulnabi Shamsah.

(3) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Ali Abdulnabi Shamsah.

to deliver 1000 maan of rice to Bahrain and hand it there to his agent against a certain fee. Transport rates varied according to the availability of ships and the level of commercial and economic activity in general. The fees or «nole» in the 1930s ranged between 8 to 12 annas per maan if a big number of ships were available in the niq'a, and increased to one rupee or one and a half if the number of ships available for transport was insufficient.

The merchant brought his goods to the dhow yard through porters who delivered them to the «askela» where the sailors carried them inside the boat in preparation for sailing. The number of sailors matched the cargo quantity. The captain escorted with him one sailor per 100 maan (76 kilograms) of cargo in qata'a ship. The ships were escorted by a mujadami, two sakkunis and a cook, in addition to the other sailors and sea captain.

The income was divided among the ship crew after deducting travel expenses- which were basically food during the way- and then the balance was divided into two halves, one to be paid to the ship owner and the other half divided among the ship crew. The number of shares or «qalayet» differed relatively in «al qata'a» than Safar ships, due to the period of traveling and its ease, compared with the ships sailing to India. The captain in «al qata'a» ship received two shares «qalayet», whereas the mujadami, sakkuni and cook received one and one quarter of a share for each, while the sailor got one share. The captain would take, in some cases, another share from the share of the ship owner, and therefore he would get three shares. The value of a share ranged between ten to twenty rupees per trip in the 1940s, while it was much less in the previous years<sup>(1)</sup>.

Normally, brokers (called *sharitiya*) traveled with «al qata'a» ships carrying with them simple goods to sell in the Gulf countries and buy substitute goods to sell in Kuwait. Among the goods they used to buy was textiles and man's head covers «ghetra» from Bahrain and dates from Al Qateef, while some of them brought big quantities of Austrian riyals (Maria Teresa) from Muscat, where they bought each against one rupee and sold it in Kuwait for one and a half rupee. «Al Qata'a» ships stayed for one or two days in each port, where the sailors went down to the markets by day to search for popular goods to sell in Kuwait. During the night, they stayed inside the ship to play cards, chat and entertain themselves<sup>(2)</sup>.

A number of «al qata'a» ships went to different Iranian ports also, including Bu Shahar, Dailam, Hindian and Al Dourak to bring barely and oats from there, and directly transport them to other Gulf ports, mainly Bahrain. Further, a number of

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Karam Johar.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Al Sagheer.

«al qata'a» ships transported dates from Al Muhammara and Basra to the remote coastal cities in south Iran, which did not have palm trees. Among the goods transported to the Gulf ports were dates' seeds, flour, raisin, kerosene, and textiles. In addition, those ships carried with them to Bahrain, A'badan and Basra some Kuwaiti tomatoes and marsh melon during the season, which usually became ripe in Kuwait before those countries. «Al qata'a» ships also carried with them passengers- called «*al ebriya*»- against 5 rupees per person to the near ports such as Bahrain and Qatar, and 10 rupees to Muscat. The number of «*ebriya*» amounted in some cases to 40 or 50 persons per ship.

The voyage from Kuwait to the near Gulf ports such as Basra and A'badan lasted for twelve hours if the wind was favorable. However, if the north winds blew, the trip might last for few days. Ships were forced in such case to lower their sails upon reaching Fao port and hired small steamboats to tow it from there to Basra port. That boat was called «motor» and the plural is «mawateer». The boum owner would pay ten Iraqi dinars for towing his boum to al A'shar (Basra port.) As for the trip to Bahrain, it lasted from two to three days if the northern wind was blowing, and in case of the blowing of the «al koas» winds (south easterly winds) the trip might last for five days. The case applied for Muscat, to which the trip took four days during the blowing of the north winds, and up to fifteen days if «al koas» wind was blowing. Generally, the wind played an essential role in determining the back and forth sailing trips to those ports<sup>(1)</sup>.

Navigation between the Gulf ports was characterized by danger, especially for the beginner captain who did not enjoy long experience. The route taken by «al qata'a» ships included many rocks and big heights under the water surface, known as «*qassasseer*» and the singular is «*qassar*», with which the ship could collide and damaged. There were no guide signs for ships at that time, which forced al qata'a ships to sail during the day and stop during the night. The majority of those rocks and qassasseer were seen during the day, which helped the captains to avoid colliding with them. In case al qata'a ships left Kuwait during noon time, they would reach Al Mesha'ab area at sunset to spend the night there. Then, they would sail in the early morning to the Tanajeeb area in Saudi Arabia where they would spend another night there. Tanajeeb area was considered among the areas protected from the waves and north winds. It was a sandy coast containing a natural niq'a surrounded with sand dunes, where small ships could go during the night. In the next morning, the ship would sail from Tanajeeb to Ras Tanorah, and from there to Bahrain. A number of captains- especially those with limited experience- spent their third night in Ras Tanorah, and then would sail on the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Ali Abdulnabi Shamsah.

third morning to Bahrain, while the senior captains would sail directly to Bahrain to reach it at night in order to start their work early in the next morning. Al qata'a ships sailed parallel to the coast passages and lines known to them, to avoid the places where rocks existed. The routes of al qata'a ships differed from the routes of Safar ships to India, which sailed in the deep waters amidst the Gulf, and might confront dangers of other types, which could be more destructive<sup>(1)</sup>.

## Pearl Diving

In the past, Kuwaitis relied, to a great extent, on pearl diving, as no house in Kuwait was free from a person who worked in that trade, whether a captain, sailor, diver or other workers. The pearl diving season started at the beginning of summer season (end of May) and ended at the beginning of the autumn (end of September), and extended almost for four months.

Alleys and markets were nearly devoid of men, and many shops closed down their doors as their owners went for diving for a source of living, which was usually better than the income they earned from their normal work, whether it was a craft, selling or buying. Despite the difficulties and dangers faced by Kuwaitis from diving business, they had endured all of them to earn their living.

In view of the abundant materials and publications issued on this trade and the availability of comprehensive information and details in many books dealing with this issue in detail, we will summarize, as much as possible, the writings about such trade, and we will point to its basic aspects only for the purpose of giving this significant trade its record emphasis among the ancient trades we addressed.

Shortly prior to the arrival of the diving season, the sea captain would contact divers and rope holders (*Sib*) whom he previously knew and depended on. Usually, the captain offered an advance to each one of them called «*tisjam*» whether prior to the season directly or during the year to guarantee that they would later escort him. Few weeks prior to the season, sailboats would be prepared, cleaned, maintained and the damaged parts replaced in preparation for sailing off. The types of ships used in diving in the beginning were «al bateel» (battils), «al baqara» (baqqarah) and «al showi», then «al boum», «al sanbook» (sanbuk) and «al jalboot» (jalbut) were used. Their sizes differed between small, big and medium.

The captain used to buy the food and other requirements called «*al machla*» basically consisted of dates, rice, sugar, ghee, flour in addition to some ready-made food such as dried bread, sweets and other necessary food supplies . A number of

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(1) Ibid.

the sailors used to bring with them «*zahab*» prepared by their mothers or wives to eat during the trip, while some strict captains did not allow the sailors to bring any «*zahab*» with them. The number of seamen in most diving ships ranged between 30 to 50 persons, and might reach up to 70 in some instances, according to the size and type of the ship<sup>(1)</sup>.

The locations to which they headed for diving were called «*al hairat*» and the singular is «*al haira*». Those locations were situated opposite to the coastlines of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain, and some of them were near Oman. The depth of the bottom in *al hairat* ranged between 7 meters in the near diving locations to approximately 20 meters or more in the far diving locations. Normally, the depth of the diving location did not exceed 25 meters (i.e. 13 *ba'a*). *Ba'a* is the length of man's two arms with the chest, and is almost 1.80 meters. Diving had a prince called «*Amir*» who leads the ship fleet, which would follow him wherever he went and docked near him, wherever he stops (in *al hairat* where to go). The



A diving ship roaming al-hir, hoisting its sail using oars to move from a place to another.

**Source:** *Folklore Selections, January 1988 GCC Heritage Center- Dowha- Qatar.*

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Karam Ahmad.

ship was commanded by the nukhudha who had an assistant called «*ja'adi*», and «*sakkuni*» who held the ship steering wheel, to navigate it under the instructions and supervision of the nukhudha. This was in addition to «*al mujadami*» who was the senior seaman and a number of divers, rope holders, cook and a chanter «*naham*» (*nahham*), in addition to regular workers or boys who escorted the ship to get trained and carry out some simple tasks against a simple wage or money, less than that received by the sailors, each of whom known as «*radhif*». There were also other escorts of boys who carried out simple tasks such as cleaning, making tea and similar tasks, each of whom called «*tabbab*». The *tabbab* did not receive any wage but worked for his food and probably some tips<sup>(1)</sup>.

When the diving ships left the coasts of Kuwait, families of the sailors would normally wait there to bid them farewell, and voices would be loud with invocations and singing, emotions would flow and the fear and hope would be mixed, with the invocation and appeal to God that He would return them back safely to their homeland, with enough money to support their families after suffering from the trip of pain and long endurance.

Upon the arrival of the ships to *al hairat*, pearl diving starts. The sails are lowered and tied, then, the anchor «*al sen*» is thrown into the sea water to prevent the ship from moving. «*Al sen*» is a big rock with a hole to which a thick rope called «*khrab*» is tied and then dropped into the sea bottom. Usually, work started at sunrise and ended at sunset. The sailors normally woke up at dawn, and everyone performed prayer. Then, they would have a light breakfast consisting of dates and coffee, then every body started work. The divers would wear «*al shamasheel*»<sup>(2)</sup>. They were distributed to the two sides of the ship, and «*al sayeb*»- the robe holder- would hold the long rope to which the diver held to go down to the deep waters. This robe was known as «*zeibel*». A big piece of stone or lead called «*hayar*» is tied to the end of such rope to help the diver go down fast to the bottom. Once the diver reaches the bottom, «*al sayeb*» would pull the rope, and then the diver would hold another rope called «*eadah*» which he used to tie to his hand while under water searching for oysters at the bottom. A basket made of ropes would be hung in the diver's neck, known as «*al daieen*» in order to put his catch of oysters inside. When the diver reached «*al qo'a*» or sea bottom, he immediately started looking for oysters putting his catch in «*al daieen*». He walked on the sea bed searching for shells while holding the rope in his hand. The diver usually walked for a distance ranging between 20 to 30 meters, before he was in a dire need for breathing. The diving period takes one minute to one and a half minute in the water. The diver does not

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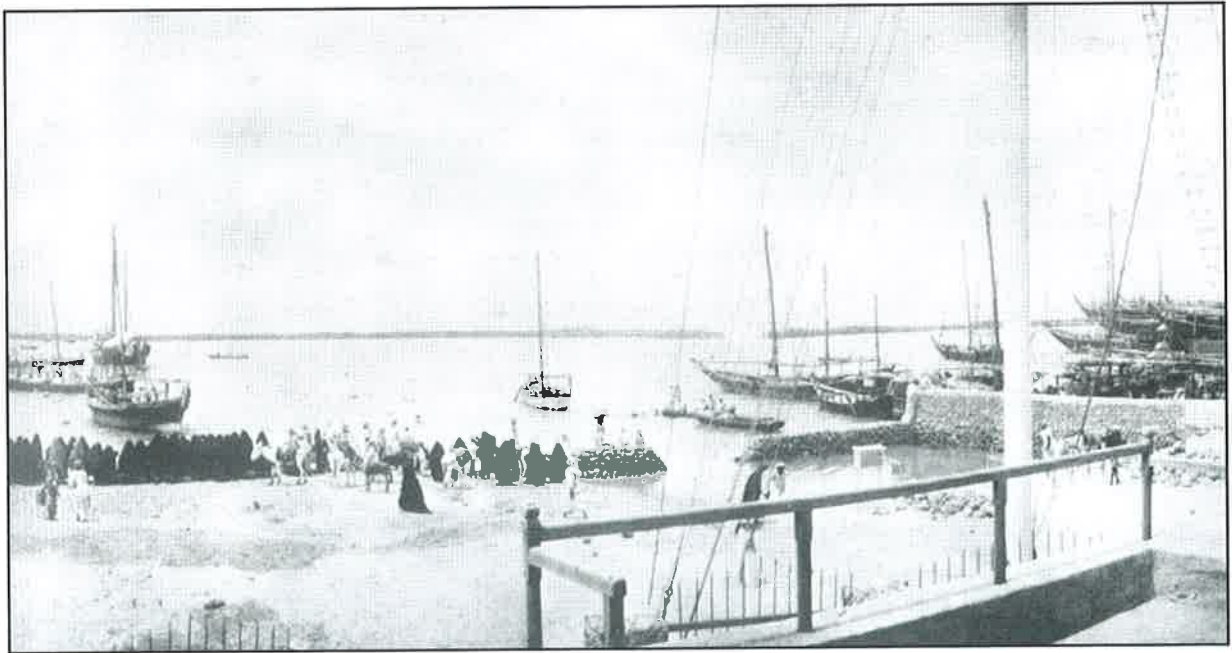
(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Al Sagheer.

(1) A black short worn by the diver. It was believed that the black color keeps sharks away from the diver.



use anything to protect his eyes, which remain open in the water, but closes his nose with a small peg made of bones known as «*fitam*», to prevent entry of sea water. In addition, he puts pieces of leather on his fingertips to cover the fingers, called «*khabt*», to protect his fingers from the rocks or upon picking the oysters and removing them from their place. There were many marine weeds and plants in the seabed known as «*zaria*», «*baima*» and «*fasaka*». There were also big rocks called «*lahth*» upon which the diver used to climb or hide behind to catch oysters fast before they could feel his presence and lead them to hold tightly to the rocks and hence would be difficult to remove.

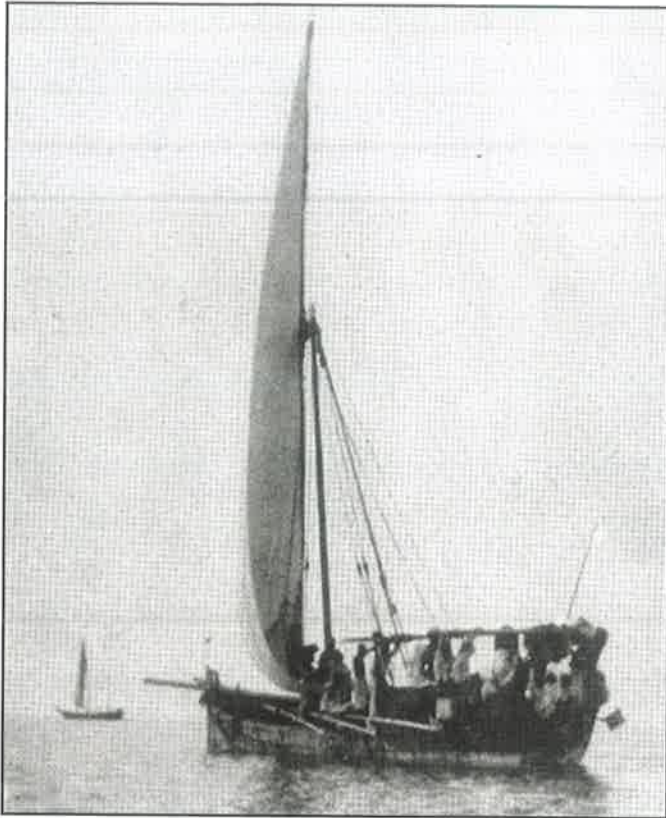
The diver will not use any tool to separate the oysters from the rocks, rather depend on the force of his hands to pick them up from their places. When he feels that he needs to breathe, he will pull the rope or move it strongly to give a signal to his colleague (al sayeb) standing onboard the ship in order to pull him. When «al sayeb» pulls the rope, the diver will tilt with his body, while holding «al daieen» which he removes from his neck to facilitate the climbing process<sup>(1)</sup>. The diver should be cautious of colliding his body- especially his head- with the ship bottom while climbing. «Al sayeb» should also be alert all the time to be ready to pull the rope immediately when he feels the sign of the diver. His negligence, even for one moment, may expose the diver to the danger of death. After the diver climbs



Citizens gathering at the niq'a located opposite the British Consulate, bidding farewell to one of the ships sailing for diving.

*Source: Kuwait, Ministry of Information, Ralph Shaw- 1976*

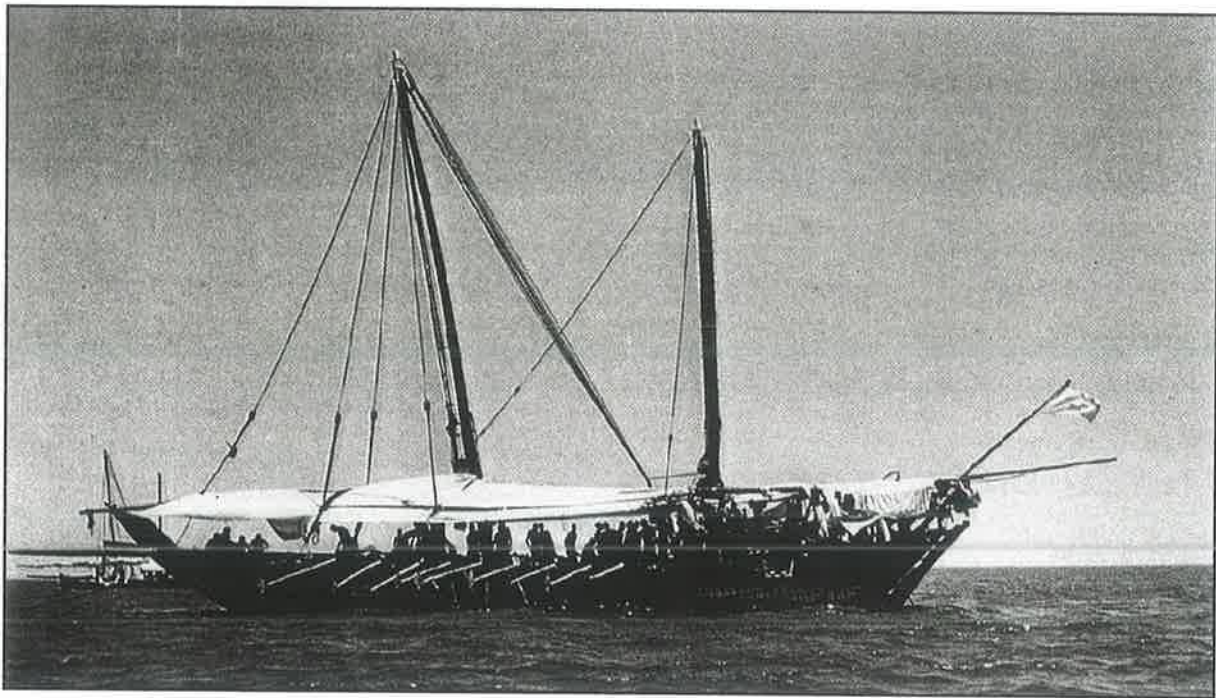
(1) An interview with the late Abdulrazzag Hassan Al Shamali.



A small «showi» (shui) in al hairat, 1922  
Photography: American Bishop Calvary.

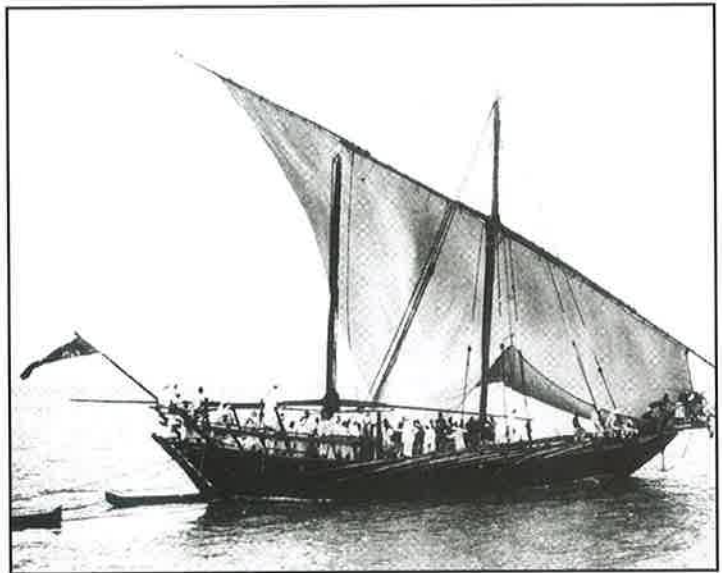
*Source: Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and  
the Arabian Gulf.*

*Saif Marzooq Al Shamlaan- Part I*



Several types of sailboats headed to the diving places, including al baqqarah, al boom, al sanbuk, al jalbut and al showi. The upper photo shows a small «showi» in «al hairat» in the year 1922 (Photo by the American Bishop Calvary). The lower photo shows a sanbuk on a diving trip in the year 1939.

up to the surface of the water, he remains for a short period to breathe and unload the oysters he collected- if any- then returns again to repeat the same process. The diver usually carries out ten diving or «tabbat» as called by sailors, then he and «al sayeb» would take rest. That process would be then carried out by another diver and rope holder, until the end of the day. Every ten divers are called «zam». The sailors would take rest at noon to perform the prayer and then have lunch consisting of dates and water. The sailors do not eat heavy breakfast or lunch to avoid negative effect on their activity and movement. Their main meal is the dinner, consisting of rice, fish or some meat, if any, or any other cheap food to fill the stomach. Nukhudhas used to take with them some dried meat to cook for the sailors with rice for dinner, every once in a while<sup>(1)</sup>. The sailors would have dinner after Maghrib prayer. Once they performed the night prayer, everyone would go to sleep to wake up by dawn of the following day for prayer then cracking the oysters caught on the previous day, with all hope for getting the types of precious pearls they were aspiring for, such as «dana» or «al hasba» whose value reaching up to thousands of rupees, which hopefully might lead to changing the direction of their lives if they were lucky. Such pearls are handed over to the nukhudha in order to keep in a box. In some instances, the catch may daily reach up to



Another diving ship, returning to Kuwait in the year 1933, after the end of the pearl season in mid September. It is worth noting that Kuwait possessed before the World War I (700) diving ships on which around 10,000 to 15,000 men worked.

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers- William Facey and Gillian Grant, 1998.*

40 or 50 big sacks of oysters, which the sailors used to crack all day. Each one of them places the oyster shells beside him in order to place the pearls he finds and hands over to the captain. In each oyster there is a living animal called «karsha» (snail), when removed, the pearl if existed, will be seen underneath. The sailor uses an iron tool called «maflaqa» to open the oyster and remove «karsha». There are many types of pearls of different colors, shapes and sizes, as well as prices. The most expensive types are «dana» and «hasba».

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(1) An interview with the late Matar Abdullah Al E'idan



Al khabt : A cover made of leather to protect the diver's fingers from the sharp edges of the marine rocks and coral reefs in the seabed.



Al fitam: A peg made of turtle bones to block the nose toward preventing leakage of water inside during diving process.



Al daieen: A woven basket hanged by the diver around his neck to collect oysters.



Al hajar: A piece of lead used by divers to help them upon going down the seabed and tied to the leg of the diver

*Source: Folklore Selections, January 1988- Published by the Folklore Heritage Center of the Cooperation Council for Arab Gulf Countries. (GCC)*

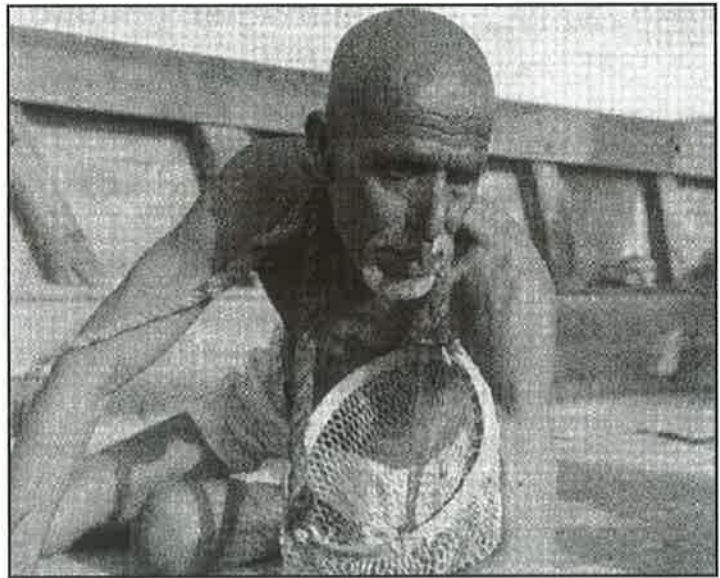


Diving tools from right to left : eada rope - daieen- sleeping mat- lead stone- fitam - khabt- mafalej- stone- zabel.

Source: *Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Saif Marzooq Al Shamlaan- Part I.*

If no acceptable quantities of oysters were found at a certain location of Al Haira, «*al mahmal*»<sup>(1)</sup> used to sail to another location in the same haira, in the hope of catching a better quantity of oysters.

Several days may pass for the ship in any of al hairat during which they may not get any pearls, being forced to leave al haira to another. During this period, «*al naham*» used to sing melodies to entertain the sailors and to raise their morale. The boats move from one haira to the other during the night so as not to lose the working hours during the day.



A photograph of a diver onboard the ship with «*fitam*» on his nose and «*al daieen*» around his neck. Photography by Al Arabi magazine's mission to Bahrain, 1958.

(1) The ship is also called «*Al Mahmal*».



Divers while holding the ropes ready for diving.

*Source : Ministry of Information- Kuwait*

During the diving trip, the nukhudha and the sailors usually suffer from the hot climate, malnutrition and, strageness in addition to frustration, especially if they do not get a good quantity of oysters. This exposes them to the danger of accumulation of debts and the potential of being forced to sell their properties on their return to Kuwait to settle their debts, which may accumulate for several years, without being able to pay them. This makes them yield more and more to the conditions and orders of the nukhudha, as some of them were very strict while dealing with their sailors. The nukhudha gives the sailors a monthly leave of 3 to 4 days when the crescent of the lunar month is visible. Some of them go to rest in neighbouring areas such as Bahrain or Daren in Al Ahsa'a or the beach near them to change the environment and forget the working conditions, even for few days <sup>(1)</sup>.

When the end of the diving season becomes near, the sailors are seen exhausted from work and longing to return to their home and families at any cost, even if they do not get anything. The ceremonies for the end of the diving season would start (known as al guffal) by having the prince of diving shoot three shots from his ship and hoisting Kuwait's flag on his ship, then hoisting the sails. Then, all the ships in the accompanying fleet would follow him. Chanrers would

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(1) An interview with the late Abdulrazzag Hassan Al Shamali.



Scene of «al isyub or rope holders while pulling the divers from the seabed  
(Photograph by Al Arabi Magazine Mission) to Bahrain, 1958.

*Source : Pearling in the Arabian Gulf, Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- Part I.*

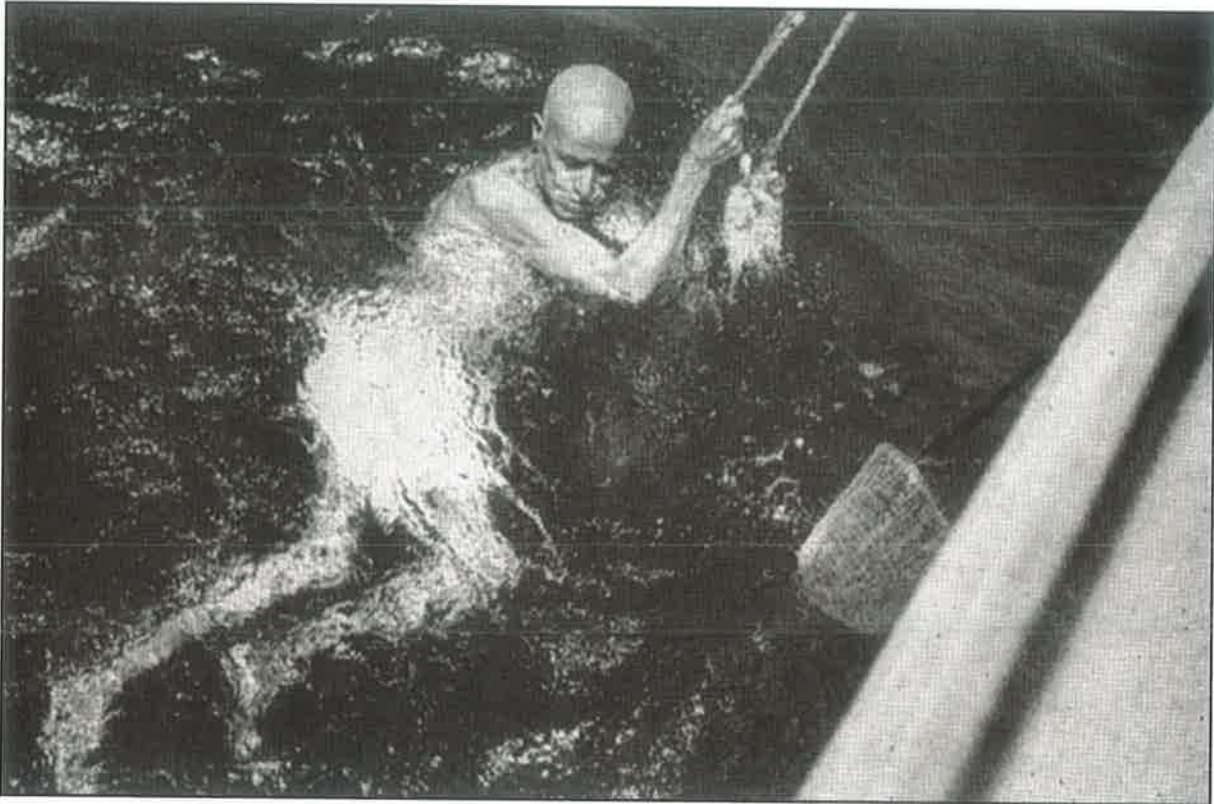
start to sing while the sails being hoisted, and the ships sailing towards Kuwait, where the families would be waiting for them, with the sounds of drums and loud voices of joy to welcome the dear comers back home.

Thus, the hard diving trip ends by the arrival of the nukhudha and the sailors to their families, and each of them having his share of tiredness in order to receive his share of the income. The



Divers and rope holders sitting around «al sridan» burner in the ship.  
Photograph by Al Arabi Magazine Mission to Bahrain, 1958

*Source: Pearling in the Arabian Gulf- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- Part I.*



A diver coming out from the sea, pulled by «isyub (sib)» (Photograph by Al Arabi Magazine Mission to Bahrain, 1958).

*Source : Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Saif Marzooq Al Shamlaan- Part I.*

lucky is the one who gets out of this trip with enough money for living and fulfilling his needs and the needs of his family of food and cloth, even for a short time. The unlucky suffers from the accumulation of debts when he returns to his family penniless, while debts pile up, as well as concerns, weak body and helplessness.

One of the popular poets of Kuwait, the late Mulla Ali Al Moosa, who worked in diving for several years, reflected the condition of divers and their suffering during this hard trip in a poem indicating the suffering



Cracking oysters in the morning prior to the resumption of work  
*Source : Kuwait, Miracle on the Desert, David C. Cooke- 1970*





Sailors including divers and isyub during break while entertaining themselves with singing.

*Source : Folklore Selections- January 1988- Publication of the GCC Folklore Heritage Center- Doha- Qatar*



A boum returning to the ship yard after a long trip in the sea.

*Source : Kuwait was My Home, Zahra Freeth- 1956*

endured by them without getting a consideration worth all such suffering. Among the heart breaking lines of his poem were<sup>(1)</sup>:

*Their diving does not deserve trying  
I wish I were in Najd even if paralyzed  
And did not come to take the wage  
They said the pearl market is stagnant,  
But I'm not requesting anything,  
Do not think of anything  
All the money I am holding is yours  
After what I have seen it a mockery,  
And the burden has increased  
I said you diving of uselessness,  
If there is safety for me  
The sea is not for me  
Ugly and unjust and it is stretching its  
I warn those who go for diving  
There are a lot of other income  
Tiredness and efforts in diving are wasted  
They made it against us and the  
How come ten  
Does not see the rivers of heaven  
This is the habit of our captain  
Ugly and unfair, hated  
Their diving does not deserve trying*

*As its beginning and end is cunning  
But Safe and sound from these horrors  
While each merchant has met his client  
And that buying and selling are not going on  
I accept very low return  
All I own is yours  
Your right we bear  
And knew that there is no compensation  
And no consideration was received  
I would be always patient for you  
I would never go to the sea  
Neither for my father or forefather  
Legs, anyone who comes near it is a loser  
After this, not to come again  
Who among you have evidence  
With the unjust and harsh ones  
One ten they take from us  
Made it the art of the artist  
In the reasons for this wage  
We know him from the past  
By everyone, may God take him  
As its beginning and end is cunning*

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(1) Pearl Diving History In Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- Part 1- 1975- p.358.

Another poet who worked in diving has also described the treatment he received from the nukhudha when he fell ill, and that they accused him as deceiving them<sup>(1)</sup>:

*You take consultation about diving      You listeners do not ever go for diving*  
*If I say my head is aching,              and if I say my stomach, they said give him «hallool»<sup>(2)</sup>*  
*And if I say I'm not well, they said      Deceiving and the excuse they do not accept*

## **Ranks and Responsibilities in Diving**

The diving team members are divided up into different ranks and jobs, each of which has a specific responsibility and a certain share of income, and all of them are headed by the Diving Prince, who takes the lead with his group at the forefront of the fleet, which follows him everywhere he goes.

### **1. Diving Amir**

The diving prince is considered the head of the diving «mission» sailing to «al hairat». He directs the ships, possesses experience and knowledge of the diving locations, depths of the sea, climatic changes and similar aspects. He guides and escorts the ships to the diving locations. He also announces the end of the season on September 23, when he shoots three shots from his ship and hoists the flag of Kuwait, divers stop work and follow him to return to Kuwait<sup>(3)</sup>.

The historian Saif Marzooq Al Shamlaan said that the most important diving princes in Kuwait's history were Abu Tammam, the first diving prince in Kuwait who owned a battil. The second prince was Bin Mehanna, who appointed after him Ahmad Bin Yusuf Al Rumi. As for the last diving prince, he was the late Rashed Bin Ahmad Al Rumi, who passed away in the year 1963<sup>(4)</sup>.

### **2. The Nukhudha Or The Sea Captain**

«Al nukhudha» is the sea captain of the diving ship and the prime responsible person for the vessel. Among his characteristics are intelligence, insight and knowledge of the sea affairs. The nukhudha or captain is usually described as being strict in most cases with his subordinates. He is the man who makes arrangements and preparations for the diving trip, selects and identifies the required manpower, supervises the supplying of the ship with foodstuff, as well

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(1) Pearling in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- Part 1-1975- page 358.

(2) Very bitter drink (medicine).

(3) The Short Kuwaiti Encyclopedïa, Hamad Mohamad Al Sai'edan- p.1103.

(4) Pearling in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, op cit p.263.

as summons the sailors two weeks or more beforehand to clean and maintain the ship preparing it for work. Further, he has the first and last word and opinion in all matters related to work onboard the ship during the trip, and thus all obeys his orders. He is entitled to punish the violating sailors and solve any problems, which may occur between them.

The nukhudha is well informed of the sea affairs, diving locations, climate and its effects, in addition to the details of the ship parts and any problems, which may occur therein, and find solutions to all. There are some nukhudhas who borrow funds from pearl merchants «al tawaweesh»<sup>(1)</sup> to re-lend them to the sailors. This action usually forces the nukhudha to sell the catch of pearls to those tawaweesh. There are nukhudhas who go for diving at their own account without borrowing from tawaweesh, whereby they rent the boats from owners, and bear the full expenses. Therefore, they are free to sell pearls to whomever they choose, and therefore get more favorable amounts. As for the nukhudhas who take advances from tawaweesh to fund their trip, they are obliged to sell their catch of pearls to them at a relatively low price.

### **3. Al Ja'adi:**

Al ja'adi is the deputy of the nukhudha, who assists and substitutes him in the ship.

### **4. Al Mojadami:**

Al mojadami is the chief sailor. He supervises the other sailors and is in charge of them in the ship.

### **5. Al Ghais:**

Al ghais is the sailor diving for pearls fetching oysters at the seabed.

### **6. Al Sib: (isyub)**

Al sib is the person holding the rope for the diver (the ghais) to go down to the seabed and then pulls him to the ship surface after completion of his task.

### **7. Al Nahham: (chanter)**

Al nahham is the chanter accompanying the ship during the diving season to entertain the nukhudha and sailors and raise their morale.

### **8. Al Radhif:**

Al radhif is the person assisting the nukhudha and sailors who carry out simple

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(1) Al tawaweesh (singular is tawwash) pearl merchants.

tasks and be trained on working in order to get a job on the ship in the future. Normally, this person is a boy of an age not exceeding 15 years.

### **9. Al Tabbab:**

Al tabbab is the small boy who comes on the ship to be trained on working and serving the nukhudha and the sailors during work, and to carry out cleaning works and making tea.

As for the distribution of income, it is carried out among the colleagues in the trip on the accustomed basis according to which each one of them gets a pre-determined share. First, one fifth (20%) of the income is deducted for the share of the ship owner. Then, the costs of foodstuff are deducted, and the balance distributed based on the following shares (qalaeet):

- nukhudha or captain: three shares
- Al ghais: three shares
- Al ja'adi (assistant nukhudha): two shares
- Al mojadami (chief sailor): two shares
- Al sib: two shares
- The cook: two shares
- Al sakkuni: one and a half share
- Al nahham: one and a half share
- Al radhif: one share

The nukhudha or the ship owner may give an increment to a number of the ship crew such as al mojadami and al nahham from the ship share if their performance proves outstanding.

No share is allocated for tabbab, who is entitled to search for the remaining pearls in the oysters, which were cracked, and all the pearls he finds will be his share to sell for his account upon returning back. He may also get some tips from the nukhudha or sailors upon returning back. It is worth noting that the pearling ships used to pay taxes to the government equivalent to three shares per each voyage, which is equivalent to the diver's share. The Legislative Council cancelled this tax on 26 September 1938<sup>(1)</sup>.

**Al A'zzal:** some of those wishing to go for diving at their own accounts agree with some captains to accompany them in the ship and dive for pearls alone, against payment of the cost of food in addition to a share of the income they get, against selling the pearl catch. Normally, it is one share. Al A'zzal is free to dive at any

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(1) Pearl Diving History In Kuwait And the Arabian Gulf, Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- p.103.

location he wishes with the other divers in the ship.

### **Going for Diving Before and After the Season:**

Some sailors and those searching for income opportunities, used to go to the diving locations prior and after the season for more income. This type of work is not usually of big benefit. However, some persons were accustomed to practice it. This type of diving is called «dashah», and there were three dashat<sup>(1)</sup> of this type: al khanjiya, al raddah and al rudaidah.

- 1. Al Khanjiya:** It is going to the diving location few weeks prior to the beginning of the season. A number of persons go to explore the diving locations, as well as diving for pearls and bring their catch with them. The majority of these persons join the regular diving trips afterwards.
- 2. Al Raddah:** It is going for diving once again after the end of the season, whereby some divers go for income. A number of small ships used to carry out this process. Al raddah usually takes around 20 days, during which the climate being cold. A number of friends and relatives used to agree among themselves- for example in the diwaniya- to carry out such trip to earn an additional income.
- 3. Al Rudaidah:** Some sailors go for diving at the beginning of the winter after the end of the diving season and al raddah, for income. A number of them used to go to close by areas such as Nuwaiseeb to search for oysters on the beach during the ebb. They carried with them a «jafeer», which is a container, while walking to collect the oysters. However, in most cases they only got a very small amount of pearls. The weather being normally cold, the majority of them would spend their time in entertainment and barbecuing fish at night on the sea coast.

### **Diving Locations (Al Hairat)**

There are many diving locations in the Arabian Gulf, some of them belong to Kuwait and the others to the neighboring countries. The near diving locations belonging to Kuwait are called «Al A'dan» and are located opposite to the Kuwaiti coast, extending from Shua'iba village in the south to Ras Tanajeeb in Saudi Arabia, where small ships go there carrying a small number of divers. Al A'dan diving locations are characterized by being not deep, where depth ranges from one ba'a to five ba'as<sup>(2)</sup>. Those diving locations included: Hawalli, A'feesan, Al Beldani, Khalaloh, Bu Dhalam, Ghamida, Al Qurain, Al A'dan, Al Khafji, Bu Asiya, Ras Al Zour, Ras Jalia'a, and Umm Al Haiman, which are Kuwaiti diving

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(1) «Dashaat»: plural of «dashah»; the voyage.

(2) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- p.202.

locations. There are also diving locations belonging to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar, and are known as «al hairat», which included Dareen, Al Mesha'ab, Al Jubail, Khalaloh, Al Baddani and Hawalli.

### **Al Tawashah and Al Tawaweesh (Pearl Merchants)**

Al Tawwash is the merchant who buys pearls from the diving nukhudhas and sold them to pearl merchants in the international markets, particularly India and Europe. Some Tawaweesh (pearl merchants) sell their purchase of pearls from captains to senior pearl merchants in Bahrain and Kuwait, which were considered as the most significant centers for pearl trading in the Gulf. Al Tawaweesh used to sail with their deluxe ships, which were usually of the «jalbut» type, to the Gulf diving locations, to buy pearls from the diving ships directly.

They enjoy a luxurious means of living, rarely found among sailors of regular ships. Al tawwash brings with him sometimes a jeweler or goldsmith of extensive experience in the types of pearls to evaluate the precious types offered to him such as «al hasbat» and «al danat»<sup>(1)</sup>. Al tawwash is accompanied by a number of friends who help him in pearls dealings by convincing the nukhudha to sell his pearls to al tawwash at low prices, or they interfere during the deal to reduce the value of the offered pearls. Al tawwash used to move among the diving ships with a small rowing «teshala» or «guls», as he tours the ships to see the pearls and offer the price. Normally, al tawwash takes with him some foodstuff and sheep to distribute to his clients of nukhudhas from whom he expects to buy their pearls at the price he offers. Besides, al tawaweesh used to pay advance loans to the nukhudhas and sailors to guarantee that they would buy the pearls they catch during the season<sup>(2)</sup>. In many instances, the nukhudhas sold their catch of pearls to al tawaweesh at a low price to learn later that al tawwash sold them in the nearby markets - such as Bahrain or Kuwait- at double price. Therefore, cautious smart captains used to go by themselves to Bahrain to sell their pearls at high rewarding prices, which exceeded the price offered to them by al tawaweesh.

Al tawaweesh used to gather at Al Bader Market, where pearls were bought and sold after the end of the diving season, to exchange information, know the market conditions and conclude commercial transactions. Al tawaweesh may be divided up into small, medium and big. Small tawaweesh used to sell the pearls in the markets of Kuwait and Bahrain, while the big ones used to sell

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(1) An interview with the late Ali Moosa Mohammed Al Ali.

(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Al Sagheer.

their goods directly to the merchants and specialized companies in Europe and India at big quantities. They used to go to the markets of Bombay in the mid-autumn to sell the pearls they had gathered, at the prevailing international rates in India and Europe. Those merchants had set up commercial relations with the pearl merchants in Europe, particularly in London and Paris<sup>(1)</sup>.

A number of Kuwaiti pearl merchants started to travel to Europe at the beginning of the 1930s to meet their agents there and to have a close view of the European market. The first who carried such a task was the late Ali Bin Hussein Bin Ali Al Saif, who traveled to Paris in the year 1930<sup>(2)</sup>. He was accompanied by the late Eissa al Saleh Al Qanai, as a translator, as he knew little English. The late Hussein Bin Ali Al Saif traveled also to Paris in the year 1931 with his son Yusuf, accompanied by the late Eissa Al Saleh Al Qanai as a translator also. In the year 1932, the late Mohammed Bin Shamlan bin Ali Al Saif traveled to Paris, with the late Musa'ed Al Saleh Al Qanai, who was fluent in the Indian language. They used to communicate with an Indian merchant from the «Panian» sect, who had an office in Paris and used to market their pearls there<sup>(3)</sup>.

Among the most famous tawaweesh in Kuwait, at the beginning of the thirteenth century Hijri, was Sheikh Ahmad Bin Rizq (1220 AH- 1805 AD) and later Sheikh Mohammed Bin Ali Bin Moosa Bin A'sfour. At the beginning of the twentieth



Pearl ships of «battil» type, docked at a ship yard in the year 1911- Shakespeare

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers- William Facey and Gillian Grant, 1998*

(1) An interview with Mohammed Saleh Mohammed Al Saleh.

(2) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- p.269.

(3) Pages from Kuwait's History, Yusuf Bin Eissa Al Qana'i- 5th edition- 1408 AH- 1987 AD, p.67.



century, the late Hilal Al Mutairi was considered the biggest and most famous pearl merchant in the region. He formed enormous wealth from this trade, estimated at approximately seven million rupees during the 1930s<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the most famous tawaweesh also was the late Ali Bin Hussein Bin Ali Al Saif and his son the late Hussein, who owned a giant deluxe «jalbut» known as «al tayyarah», with a length of more than forty meters, and was described as being among the most beautiful of Kuwaiti ships manufactured by the late Ahmad Al Astadh. It resembled the yacht and sailed with two sails. Upon his arrival at «al hairat» using «al tayyarah», Mr. Al Saif used to bring along with him a big number of sheep to distribute to the nukhudhas while taking a round among «al hairat» to buy pearls. Upon completion of the purchase deal, he used to return with the diving ships to Kuwait, and then to sell his purchase of pearls in India.



Photo Caption: A pearl merchant at Al Bader Market in the 1940s.

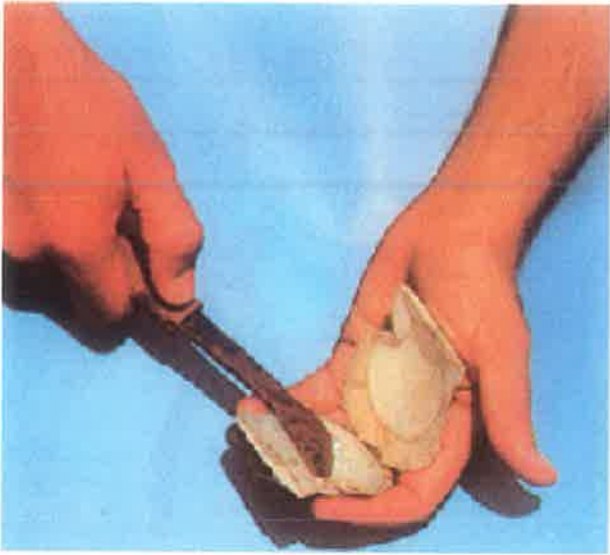
Source: *Kuwait: Transformation of an Oil State*- Jill Crystal, 1992.

Among the big tawaweesh also was the late Shamlan Bin Ali Al Saif, the late Ibrahim Al Mudhaf, the late Abdurrahman Yusuf Al Rumi, the late Fahed Al Fouzan, the late Ali Al Banwan, the late Nasser Yusuf Al Bader, the late Jassim Al Mubarraki, the late Zayed Al Khalid Al Khoudair, the late Hamad Al Khalid Al Khoudair, the late Mohammed Thunayan Alghanim and the late Sulaiman Al Ya'qub<sup>(1)</sup>. Among Al Tawaweesh also was Ahmad Bin Hussein Al Roudhan, who installed an engine to his «jalbut» and was accompanied in his trips by a big number of friends, as he used to make big banquets during his tour among the diving ships. It is said that he used to take with him in the «jalbut» china plates and spoons for eating. That was considered as an unusual luxury at that time, indicating wealth and overspending. The accustomed habit was that food was placed in «manacheb» which were big trays made of big tree branches, from which a considerable number of persons eat. It is said that the late Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah accompanied the late Ahmad Al Roudhan in a number of tawasha trips before becoming the Amir of Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>.

There were other big numbers of Kuwaiti tawaweesh of lesser fame, including

(1) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- page 174.

(2) An Interview with Abdurrahman Ali Al Sagheer.



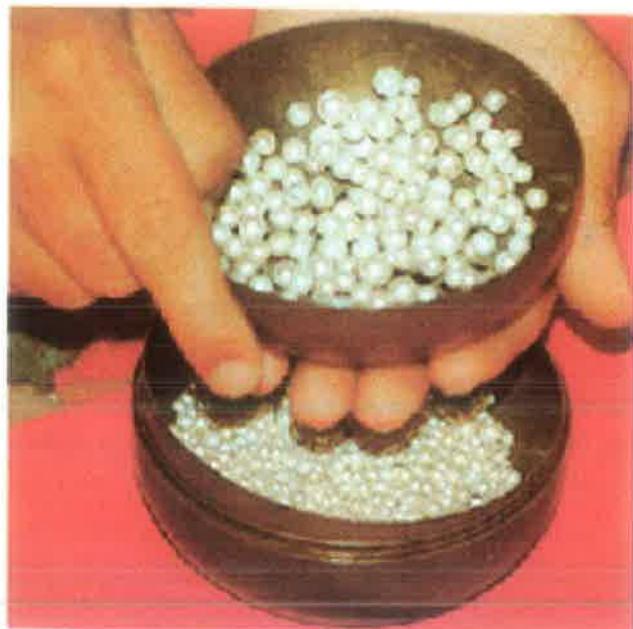
Cracking the oyster to extract pearls.



Oysters and pearls



A precise scale to weigh pearls.



Sorting pearls according to size.

*Source: Folklore Selections- Publication of GCC Folklore Heritage Center  
(October 1987- January 1988 Editions.)*

those who traded in this commodity. In addition, there was another type of dealers with this commodity, who were less significant than tawaweesh. Those were the gold jewelers who used to go directly to the nukhudha to buy their annual needs of pearls they used in making jewels in their shops. Such persons went to Al Shamlan niq'a or Al Ghunaim niq'a to conclude deals with one or more nukhudha to buy «al tabbaba»<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of them sometimes pooled their money to make one transaction when its value exceeded the capacity of any of them. «Al Tabbaba» could also be offered in a sort of auction in which a number of small tawaweesh or jewelers would compete to get the best prices. As for the big and precious quantities of pearls, they were sold in Bahrain or India, and their values in rupees or silver riyals were brought back in big sacks.



The late Hussein Bin Ali Al Saif, accompanied by the late Musa'ed Al Saleh Al Qanai, 1932, on board the «La Martin» ship on the way from France to Beirut.

*Source : Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- Part II.*



Al Tawwash tools consisted of wooden boxes and copper (sieve) to sort the pearls, precise scales and magnifying lenses to check the pearls.

It is known that pearls were sold by weight and that there were precise scales for weighing them. The weighing unit used to be called «tola» and «methgal». The pearls would be separated from each other according to size, using copper «tasat»- singular «tasa»- a pan with holes of different sizes (sieve) to classify pearls according to size. The bigger the size of the pearl is the more expensive it is.

(1) «Al tabbaba» is the catch proceed or collection of pearls available with the captain.

## **Historical Events Related to Diving for Pearls**

### **- The Dispute Between Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah and Pearl Merchants**

Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, Kuwait's Ruler during the period 1896- 1915, doubled up the taxes on Kuwait's merchants, following the battle of *Hediya*, in which his army was unsuccessful against the troops of Sa'dun Pasha, the leader of Al Muntafiq tribe in Iraq during the year 1910. Taxation aimed to generate new income for Mubarak to recruit other troops to deter Sa'dun. Mubarak reached a compromise with most merchants who promised to pay the new tax. When he held the pearling fleet back in Kuwait, three prominent pearl merchants protested with their feet. They were Shamlan Bin Seif, Ibrahim Bin Mudaf and Hilal Umtayri. The later left to Bahrain, the other two to Jinnah City in eastern Peninsula. Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah sent his son Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak to reconcile with them in view of their big role in the pearl trade, which constantly yielded considerable incomes for the State Budget. Sheikh Salem went there to hold meetings with them and convince them to return, which led to the return of Shamlaan Al Saif and Ibrahim Al Mudhaf, while Hilal Al Mutairi abstained from returning. Therefore, Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah went personally to Bahrain and met Hilal Al Mutairi, in the presence of Sheikh Eissa Al Khalifa, the ruler of Bahrain at that time, and hence he was convinced and returned to Kuwait. This indicates the significance of pearl trade for the Kuwaiti economy at that time<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **- «Al Tafha» Year<sup>(2)</sup>**

Trading in pearls was distinguished by fluctuation and instability of prices, depending on the catch yields every season. If the income of diving was feasible in a certain year, it would bring huge amounts of money for the Kuwaitis making them live in good condition, forgetting the hardships and difficulties of work. The economic conditions as a result flourished and markets became full of merchandise as the sailors received their remuneration. The families would start buying their needs of clothes, furniture and household necessities, leading to the recycling of funds and the benefit of everyone. However, if the diving season was weak, this would negatively reflect on the economy and affect all the aspects of living, causing stagnation. As a result, Kuwaitis suffered from numerous economic difficulties, as they went through days and years of

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(1) Kuwait Political History, Part II - Hussein Khalaf Al Sheikh Khazaal- p.280.

(2) Al Tafha year means the year when the business flourished and economic conditions improved tremendously, leading people to call that year «Tafha Year» or «Glut Year», i.e. superabundance.


scarcity, which led to increasing the debts of mariners and those with limited income, who relied on the diving season to increase their income and pay back their debts, as well as cover any new expenses during the year.

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دام بقاه

هذا لوجه الامير محمد بن الوليد شملان ابن علي بن سيف المرزوم  
 بعد السلام والسؤال عن خاطركم وعنايتكم في خير وسرور جعلكم الله كذا لك  
 يا ولدي الذي ثابت عندي واتيقن ولا فيه شك انه وحوك احسن اللازمي ولكل امرير ضمني  
 ويسر خاطرني تبتلون حالكم وحالك من بعد ولا عندي في ذلك شك هذا ثابت عندي  
 واعرف واتيقن انك ما تقبلها الفوايه التي لوان تبلفنا وانك ما تقبل في كل امرير بحل يا مربي واسمي  
 ويخرج الصدوق ما هي زينة او توارسنا احسن الله يحفظ اجمع مع فارس الوقيان منظرنا  
 لاجماعنا الذي ما اشوق سبب يوجب لك وهو واجب منهم هكذا واننا ايضا اعرف انك  
 اننا والله ما نرضاه في هذا الفايه دون العمل واننا ابو اجمع في الهياة ازبر وادب وامر وانها ومع هذا شقيق  
 الله مطلع على اجمع تشبه عنديكم فاذا شققني تشبه عنديكم تنزل عن الخطر كلما ازبر وامر وانها فانه بارك  
 الله بي جيتني ورؤيتني على الحال السابق بل ازبر شققه لجمع وامانت وحسن محسوبي مثل جابر  
 وخوانه عندي واننا ايضا ما استنكرة منك شي فقط الحولة كان من حسن ظني ما استنكرة لان  
 اننا والله ما عندي فيكم شبره ولا ظن فيكم لا اجمع ولا وشرة عليك اذا حصل نصيب تبين بالبهومي  
 فاذا ما جاز لك السوق تافرونا الله موقفا للاخير فالون اذا انا ابو شقيق واننا ولد فعلي و  
 تافروني الكويت وصين وناصر وفارس يواهبون اجماعه ويجون معهم سوس اننا والله واننا  
 ايضا تكتب مع صين وناصر حفظ لاجماعه هذا الذي انا اراه وامر به واننا والله تاعده لدمي ولكلما  
 ير ضمني وسمنا انك تباركة بالجزيرة اننا والله مبارك هذا ما لدم سلم لنا على اجماعه  
 ابراهيم وهلال وباتي اجماعه ومنا احبك الولد جابر وخوانه يسلموه اجمعنا

مبارك  
 الضباع



A letter from the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, dated 24 Sha'baan 1328 AH to the late Shamlaan Ali Al Saif, inviting him to return to Kuwait with his companions.

Source: From Kuwait's History, Saif Marzooq Al Shamlaan- 1986 AD

The year 1331 AH (1912 AD) was one of the best diving years during which Kuwaitis were able to generate huge amounts of money from selling pearls, as a result of increase in the catch and the rise in the international rates for that commodity. This was attributed to the fact that Kuwaitis did not go for diving in the previous year due to the problems, which occurred therein, between Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah and the pearl merchants, after *Hediya* battle. Therefore, Kuwaitis were prepared in the next year with more than 800 diving ships carrying approximately 30,000 sailors. The profits of the pearls catch that year amounted to six million rupees<sup>(1)</sup>. That year was called the «tafha» year (Glut Year), i.e. superabundance. Kuwaitis lived that year and the next few years enjoying the best years of their lives, and experienced unprecedented luxury and welfare, as a result of making big profits from selling pearls in the international markets. It was said that people were walking in the alleys and markets, while their pockets were full of silver rupees, and in some instances golden liras, which the passers-by could hear their rattle, as a result of their big numbers and as pockets were filled therewith<sup>(2)</sup>.

#### **- Divers' Strike**

Mr. Abdullah Khaled Al Hatem said in his book «From Here Kuwait Started» that many divers abstained from working by the end of the twenties of the last century and refused to be involved in diving due to the insufficiency of their income share, although they shouldered many burdens while facing risks resulting from such process. Therefore, ship owners raised this matter to Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah the Ruler of Kuwait, who summoned some of those on strike to explain to him their points of view. During the meetings, they explained to him their conditions, indicating that the advances they used to take from the nukhudhas were insufficient to fulfill their expenses to feed their families whom they used to leave for long months without food. Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber was convinced of their viewpoint and proposed a compromise, according to which he dropped their debts for that year, and as a result everyone was satisfied and sailors agreed to resume their work again<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) The Short Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammed Al Sa'iedan- Part II- p.929.

(2) An interview with the late Hajj Ismail Ali Jamal.

(3) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdullah Khaled Al Hatem- 2nd Edition- p.124.

## - Diving Law

Sometimes, disputes or disagreements took place between the nukhudhas and the sailors, leading to the creation of some problems, which would require solution. The nukhudhas used to turn to the people who were capable of providing solutions to such problems, especially those aware of the sea matters. Those persons are called «ahl al-salfa» (i.e. specialized people). Among those famous persons were the late Sulaiman Al Ya'qub, then Ibrahim Al Mudhaf who continued till year 1926<sup>(1)</sup>, followed by the late Salem Bu Qamaz, who worked in that job till diving activity halted<sup>(2)</sup>. The government tried to regulate the relationship between those working in diving in order to reserve the rights and duties of each, and to avoid the occurrence of problems or disputes. Therefore, it had applied for and obtained a declaration from the Court in the year 1933 illustrating the responsibility of the sailors and the captains, and defining the relationship of each of them.<sup>(3)</sup>

Further, the Legislative Council tried in the year 1938 to assist in solving the problems arising between the captains and divers. Therefore, it formed in October of that year a committee of senior diving captains and experts in order to stipulate a diving law. The committee consisted of the late Rashed Bin Ahmad Al Rumi, Abdullah Bin Nasser Boursesly, Ahmad Bin Rashed Al Najada, Sa'ud Al Mudhaf and Ali Al Banwan. Their council sessions resulted in drafting the diving law, which did not see the light that year as a result of dissolving the Council.

In the year 1940, the Law of 51 Articles was passed by the Ruler of Kuwait, the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, after ratification by the new Shura Council in 29 May of the same year. The law regulates the relationships between the nukhudhas and the other sailors and outlines the responsibilities and duties of each of them, stipulating the rights and obligations in detail.

## **Decline of Pearl Diving Activity**

Pearl diving continued as the main source of income for Kuwaitis and the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy for a period exceeding a century until the third decade of the last century. Kuwaitis did not think then in the occurrence of two significant events. The first was the introduction of artificial pearls by Japan after substantial research resulting in the production of huge quantities of culture pearls, showing no difference from the peals for which Kuwaitis had to dive deep into the sea to catch, while bearing all types of difficulties and dangers. Japan achieved magnificent

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(1) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- p.101.

(2) An interview with Mr. Rashed Salem Bu Qamaz.

(3) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part II- Saif Marzooq Al Shamlan- p.124.

results, leading to a substantial drop in the price of pearls due to their abundance in huge massive quantities and commercial types which did not seemingly differ from the natural pearls in shape. That produced a heavy negative impact on such an industry, and ended the feasibility of working in this pearling field, and tolerating hardships for an income which did not give comparable return against the sufferings resulting from such work. A large number of Kuwaitis abandoned that trade and refrained from tolerating its risks, as it no longer could yield an income appropriate with the difficulty of the work. That had also pushed a big number of sailors to work on sailboats going to India, which did not last for long as well.

The «disaster» started in the year 1928 when Japan announced the availability and development of culture pearls at competitive prices, and with types which were not less in quality than the natural pearls. Such event reduced the number of ships going for pearling gradually in the subsequent years, which led to almost the decline and extinction of that trade by the end of the 1930s. As for the sailboats, they also started to vanish after a short period, due to the increase of the number of steam ships sailing to the Gulf after the end of the Word War II, and being competitively advantageous compered with the sailboats due to the low cost of shipping, maintenance and fast delivery, as well as safety against storms and winds. That encouraged merchants to ship their goods on steam ships, thus reducing the role of sailboats.

As for the second event which the Kuwaitis did not think about, was the discovery of oil at the most appropriate time, thus to saving the situation and compensating what happened when their main source of income vanished. Oil started to be pumped out during an era which witnessed almost the shut down of all doors in the face of Kuwaitis which put them in an unenviable situation. Had it not been for the discovery of oil during that period and the turning of big numbers of Kuwaitis to work in the Oil Company as well as the flourishing of the commercial activity, it would have been difficult to imagine the living conditions of Kuwaitis as a result of halting of the pearl diving business and traveling to India. The discovery of oil has led, in few years, to changing the life of Kuwaitis and their living style radically, after which the years of hardship had only become memories, and those who lived through them could hardly believe that such nightmare had vanished.

### **Transporting Water with Ships from Shatt Al Arab to Kuwait**

In the past, Kuwaitis relied on wells and rain to supply them with drinkable water. With the increase of population, those sources were no longer sufficient in view of the scarcity of rainfalls, its seasonality and the increase of salinity in the water



wells based on the increase in draining and exhausting their waters. The crisis was aggravated during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah. That led a citizen- the late Mohammed Al Ya'qub- in the year 1909 to install a number of wooden tanks in his boum and sailed to Shatt al Arab to fill them with water, and sell the water against a rewarding price. That example encouraged a number of ship owners to follow him, and they built dhows and boums for transporting water.

Hence, that trade spread and yielded rewarding profits and provided new employment opportunities in addition to satisfying the citizens' need for water<sup>(1)</sup>.

Afterwards, different types of ships were used to transport water, including «al tashalah», «al jalbut» and «al boum», on which a number of tanks had been fixed inside them. In addition, the size of such ships differed as some of them contained four tanks, while others contained eight or more. The wooden tank was called «fintas» and its average length was between three to four meters, with two meters width and two meters and a half depth.

The water ships normally departed Kuwait before noon time, sailing to Shatt al Arab to reach there in the evening. Then, their tanks were filled with water, and they returned back at night to reach Kuwait in the following morning. In normal cases, the period of such a journey depended on the winds, as it did not take more than 12 hours back and forth if the winds were suitable, especially during «al bareh» days<sup>(2)</sup>. But if the winds were unfavorable, the trip might take one full week long. It was normal for the number of trips to increase in the summer, in view of the increase in the demand for water and the suitability of winds for the ships- fortunately- during that period. Among the natural phenomena which assisted



A Kuwaiti water boum amidst the sea water

Source: *Manufacturing Sailing Ships in Kuwait*, Dr.Ya'coub Yusuf Al Hijji-

(1) An Here Kuwait Start, Abdulla Khaled Al Hatem- 2nd Edition - 1980-p.156

(2) Ibid, p.269.

ships to transport water is that fresh water in the summer season reached very close areas at the end of Shatt al Arab near the southern part of Fao, which facilitated the process of transporting and delivery<sup>(1)</sup>. It is said that the Iraqi government imposed taxes on Kuwaiti ships which carried water from Shatt al Arab to Kuwait, and that such ships did not leave Shatt Al Arab unless those fees had been paid.

As for the process of filling the ship tanks with water, it started when they reached Shatt al Arab, whereby the «jali»<sup>(2)</sup> was placed its both sides of the ship in order for the sailors to stand on it while carrying water from the «Shatt» through a medium-sized tin can called «zeelah»<sup>(3)</sup> in order to fill «al fintas». The sailors poured the water from the «Shatt» in a wooden pipe which connects to the opening of the tank, called «salifa». The sailors, whose hose number ranged between four and eight according to the ship size, filled the tanks with water, whereby each one of them poured water in the tank beside him for the purpose of filling the opposite tanks at the same time to maintain the balance of the ship. Everyone tried to work at the same speed during the process of filling the tanks, so as not to fill the opposite tank before the other and then the balance of the ship would be distorted. The process of filling the tanks took around two hours, during which the sailors worked fast at the same tone resembling a machine in its force and regular performance. Each of them carried water from the «Shatt» and poured it in «al salifa» almost without stopping, while being busy only with the work, disregarding everything and not thinking in anything else. After the tanks had been filled with the water, they went inside the ship in preparation of returning to Kuwait<sup>(4)</sup>.

After being filled with water, the boums queue to refund the Iraqi government which imposed customs duties of 375 Iraqi fils (i.e. around 3 to 4 rupees) on each ship



«Fintas», a wooden water tank for storing water inside the sailboat.

Source: Kuwait National Museum.

(1) An interview with Mr. Kaseb Hassan Al Faras.

(2) Jali is a rectangular board of wood tied to the ship, of approximately 40 cm height above the water surface.

(3) «Zeelah» or «guti» is a metal can of medium size, at the opening of which a wooden piece is fixed between its opposite sides to facilitate holding it by hand and transporting the water from the sea or pool.

(4) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Al Sagheer.

transporting water from Shatt al Arab to Kuwait. Upon the receiving of the bill or «manifest» from the Iraqi Customs officials, the ship would sail to Kuwait. The Iraqi Customs boats which collected the duties sailed to the gathering place of Kuwaiti ships usually in the evening, which led them to wait for long hours and delayed their arrival to Kuwait in many instances.

The water boms were forced to take water from the Iraqi side of the coast due to its depth, contrary to the Iranian side which was shallow, as the boats were unable to pass through it. The dredgers continued removing mud from the Iraqi side of Shatt al Arab for the purpose of cleaning and deepening the waterways to allow the ships to enter Basra port. As for the Iranian side, it was filled with mud and it was not possible to get pure water for drinking therefrom. Moreover, it was not possible for anyone to go through it to the Iranian beach without danger, as its depth did not exceed one meter.

A number of those who worked in that trade said the wind direction had a significant effect on the quality of water in Shatt al Arab, its salinity and reaching its southern edge also. If the wind direction is «northern», fresh waters availability reached the southern edge of the Shatt, reaching Al Fao coast, and facilitating Kuwaiti boms filling and transporting of water. But if the wind was transferred to Koas «south easterly», the saline sea water reached A'badan's port approximately, forcing the sailors- as well as the residents of A'badan Iranian port- to go to the Iraqi side of the Shatt to get fresh water through metal cans «guti». In addition, fresh water reached the end of the coast in the south during the summer season, while retreating in winter to approximately reach Basrah. That was attributed to the quantity of fresh water coming from the mountains of Turkey where the snow used to melt during the summer, and hence leading to the abundance of water and its flow towards the south, while that ceded during the winter, when the saline water overwhelmed to reach almost the Iraqi Customs site at Basrah Port. The line separating the salty and fresh water was seen clearly as a straight line separating between the blue water and the reddish water- which is the color of the mud in those areas. Normally, Shatt al Arab water was filled with alluvial deposits, which gradually precipitated at the bottom of fintas «tank» with the passing of time<sup>(1)</sup>.

When the water boats arrived at Kuwait, some of them sailed to Al Shamlan niq'a in Al Sharq area, while others sailed to Alghunaim and Al Abduljalil dhow basins near al Fordhah,<sup>(2)</sup> in Qibla area, respectively, where the water carriers would come to buy the water and carry it to their clients. The donkey drivers and water carriers

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(1) An interview with Mr. Kaseb Hassan Al Faras.

(2) Some boats docked also at Thunayan dhow basin in Qibla.



«Al hammara» donkey drivers carrying water at the shore, unloading water from the boums coming from Shatt al Arab in waterskins atop donkeys.

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers- William Facey and Gillian Grant- 1998.*

headed to the boums through small ships «*al mashowa*» when the sea is in high tide «*al saji*», with their waterskins or their tins to fill them with water and return to the consumers. If the sea was on the ebb «*thaber*», everyone went walking to the boat to climb on its surface through a wooden ladder and directly scoop out water from «*fintas*» using tins «*zeelah*» to fill their waterskins and «*guti*», tins. It was called the boat is in a state of «*tajdeef*»<sup>(1)</sup> while being docked at the niq'a in case of the ebb of water, by fixing and tying long wooden poles on its sides known as «*mojadifat*» to prevent it from tilting or sinking. Two or more are placed on each side while being docked in shallow water. Also, a wooden ladder is placed for the escalation of the water carriers to its surface. When the waterskins and cans were filled by the carriers, each of them would go to «*al karrani*», who was the representative and accountant of the ship owner in order to pay for the water value. The latter would register the

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(1) Docking and anchoring the boat.



Water carriers (Kandarīs) transporting water coming by water boms from Shatt al Arab in tins (tanks) for their clients.  
*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers- William Facey and Gillian Grant-1998*

number of containers and the collected value in order to hand over to the ship owner or captain who stayed with his sailors onboard the ship in most cases, until the end of the process of selling the water. Water was sold at prices ranging between 40 to 70 guti tins per rupee, according to its availability (approximately one to one and a half paisa per tin)<sup>(4)</sup>.

The process of sailing-water-carrying boms to Shatt Al Arab was carried out either in agreement between the bom owner with the captain to divide up the profits or to hire it by the captain who would pay a certain amount of money to the bom owner. The captain would agree with the owner to obtain his customary share, which was two qalatas «shares», while the sailor would receive one qalata,

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(4) Kuwait used the Indian rupee (equivalent to 75 fils at that time). The rupee was divided up into 16 Annas and the Anna into 4 paisas, i.e. the rupee is equivalent to 64 paisas. The paisas is equivalent to almost 1.2 fils, i.e. the big tank of water was sold at approximately one and quarter fils.

after deducting the boum expenses, including the rent agreed upon. Then, the remainder would be the boum owner's share. But if the captain hired the boat from its owner for his own account, he would pay the rent agreed upon to the sailors, which normally did not exceed two rupees per sailor for each voyage. The wage was also paid to the ship owner, and the balance of the income would be for him, after payment to «al karrani». The captain would take with him a number of sailors, between four to eight, according to the size of the ship. The number of ships working in transporting water from Shatt al Arab to Kuwait in the 1950s amounted to more than forty ships before desalination plants were established<sup>(1)</sup>.

In the past, Kuwait went through grave crises when the winds stopped and the sailing ships could not sail to Shatt al Arab to transport water. Also, the overcrowding relay of the dhows and the disorder prevailing as a result, as well as the filthiness of the water due to disregarding the health conditions for the cleanliness of water, led to serious crises. Therefore, the government encouraged merchants to establish a company to transport water from Shatt al Arab for the purpose of regulating that work and providing clean water on a twenty-four hour basis. A company was formed for that purpose in the year 1939 to replace the ships which used to transport water without taking into consideration hygienic specifications and the regulations imposed by the government<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **A Brief Summary on the Problem of Water in Kuwait and Attempts to Solve It**

Kuwait encountered the problem of the shortage of fresh water since its first days. The first settlers depended on water supplies from wells and rainfall, which were too hard to depend upon on the long run. Rains were seasonal, and rainwater might increase or decrease, thus leading to the difficulty of depending on them due to the absence of dams or reservoirs to store water for long periods. There were areas famous for the existence of fresh water- such as Shamiya, Adiliya, Hawally and Nugra. However, it was insufficient to provide the expanding population with water basis. Water became scarce there and its salinity increased with the lapse of time and the pressure increased on water. As for the villages of Kuwait; Jahra, Fintas and Fahaheel they were at the forefront of areas where fresh water wells were available, which assisted the cultivation of a number of crops there.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the problem of fresh water was persistent and the inhabitants started to face the danger of its shortage, especially during the summer days when temperature rose, and the need for more water increased to compensate the water lost from the body upon exerting any effort. Therefore, that situation was the main concern of the government and the population, who had

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(1) An interview with Mr. Kaseb Hassan Al Faras.

(2) See Chapter Three of this book for details.

to think of a solution to meet that issue. Therefore, the idea of transporting fresh water from Shatt al Arab river emerged in the year 1909 and the idea succeeded. That led Kuwait to depend greatly on that source for tens of years, as tens of ships sailed daily there to Shatt Al Arab water.

Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah addressed a special concern to the problem of the shortage of drinkable water in Kuwait. He purchased an Indian ship with a big tank, which used to transport water between the Indian districts, and started using it to transport water from Shatt al Arab to Kuwait. He named the ship «Sa'aed». That was considered as the first ship owned by the government of Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>. Also, Sheikh Mubarak addressed concern for the continuation of providing fresh water to the citizens and avoiding the danger of its discontinuation for any reason. Therefore, he purchased in the year 1914 the first machine for distillation of sea water from «Cetric» Shipping Company- Britain for the amount of 250,000 rupees, which was brought to Kuwait and operated but did not achieve notable success<sup>(2)</sup>. The problems and negotiations continued between the Government of Kuwait and the company even after the death of Sheikh Mubarak but to no avail. In the year 1922, an agreement was reached between the Government of Kuwait and the company to return the machine to the Company and pay its full value to Kuwait, after it had proved unsuccessful by all means. Also, the idea of extracting deep underground water emerged during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah. Britain started after signing the Protectorate Convention to search for underground water in the lands of Kuwait without any positive results<sup>(3)</sup>.

In the year 1905, the first well containing a relatively big reserve of fresh water was discovered in Hawally. Britain secretly encouraged also the Oil Company to search for a local source to provide fresh water to Kuwait, through exploring new wells in order not to depend on Iraq<sup>(4)</sup>. Britain's concern emerged from the method through which Iraq started to exert pressure on Kuwait in the 1930s when Iraq obliged the Kuwaiti ships transporting water from Shatt Al Arab to Kuwait to go to Fao Customs Station to obtain licenses and pay the fees for transporting the water. The Iraqi Customs managers frequently procrastinated granting the required license and therefore the Kuwaiti ships were forced to wait idle in long queues for periods extended from 12 to 15 hours. The Iraqi authorities justified their situation by saying that they doubted that those ships were smuggling goods. Therefore, Britain encouraged the Oil Company for

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(1) Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem From Here Kuwait Started, 2nd Edition: 1980, - p.156.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Kuwait Municipality in Fifty Years- Dr. Najat Abdulqader Al Jassim, p.133-143

(4) Ibid.

drilling to explore sources for pure water. Special derrick equipments were brought from Holms Company for this purpose. Numerous attempts were exerted afterwards to extract deep underground waters. However, they were unsuccessful due to the existence of water at great depths, the increase in the cost and the possibility of the increased salinity by time. The idea of leaving such water as a future reserve prevailed. In the year 1951, three artesian wells were drilled in Sulibiya area, followed by many other wells in Roudhatain and Umm Al Aish, throughout the years. However, they were unable to satisfy the increasing need of the population for water<sup>(1)</sup>.

The idea of bringing potable water through pipes from Shatt Al Arab river emerged at the beginning of the reign of the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah when negotiations were held with Iraq. However, the idea did not succeed due to greediness and the problems raised by the Iraqi side which placed strict conditions infringing upon the sovereignty of Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>. For such reasons, the process of transporting water by sailboats from Shatt Al Arab to Kuwait continued as a main source for providing the inhabitants with water. In the year 1951, Kuwait Oil Company built a small plant for the distillation of seawater in Mina Ahmadi with a production capacity of 80,000 gallons of fresh water daily. Quantities of such water started reaching Kuwait City through a pipe line which was extended for that purpose<sup>(3)</sup>. The problems of providing water continued till 1953 when giant plants for the distillation of seawater were built in Shuwaikh and Shuaiba. Then, the first distillation plant was operated in March 1953.

### **Transporting Sand from Kuwait to A'badan**

The process of transporting sand from Kuwait to A'badan in Iran flourished during the 1920s and 1930s. Sand was extracted from the coasts of Kuwait, especially Benid Al Gar and Shuwaikh areas. It was transported there onboard sailboats. This trade constituted a significant source of income for hundreds of Kuwaitis who were involved in that hard job when economic conditions reached their worst level at that period. The old and the youth from all districts used to go after early morning prayer or perhaps before that to the working sites where they would obtain a job in order to earn their living. Also, that activity constituted a good source for the government which imposed a tax of

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(1) Ibid- p.150.

(2) Efforts continued on part of the Kuwaiti side afterwards, and throughout the reign of Sheikh Abdulla Al Salem Al Sabah and Sheikh Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah, until few years prior the brutal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, without any result.

(3) Ministry Of Electricity And Water- State of Kuwait-Annual Statistics Book- 1997- p.50.



8 rupees on the «carrier» or ship loaded with sands to A'badan. The sand was transported from Benid Al Gar in boats for the account of Alghanim Company. A number of captains, owners of jalbuts, tashasheel and boums were involved in that activity afterwards.

The captain or ship owner used to agree with a number of persons ranging from 6 to 8 in order to fill the ship with sand, to transport it to A'badan. Sailboats had the capacity for 800 to 1000 maan of sand (i.e. around 60 to 75 tons). When the work expanded and the demand for sand increased, «doubas»<sup>(1)</sup> were introduced into service and started to transfer hundreds of tons from the coasts of Shuwaikh and Benid Al Gar to A'badan for the account of Alghanim Company, which employed hundreds of workers to undertake that task.

### **1. Transporting Sand By Means of Sailing Ships**

At the beginning, sailboats such as tashasheel, jalbuts, ablam, and medium-sized boums were used to transport sand from Benid Al Gar and Shuwaikh to A'badan. The transport process started by bringing a sailboat to the beach during the flow period (saji) so that when the ebb period (thaber) approached, the sailors would tilt one side of the ship and fix it to a specific location using «mojadefat» and to place wooden «foot boards» in order to climb using them to the surface of the ship to fill it with sand.

Upon the completion of the ebb, three or four workers would fill the sand from the sea coast into big baskets made of palm trees leaves, called «*farkh al Jila*», while a similar number would carry them to the ship board. The process took from 6 to 7 hours during which the majority of the ship was almost filled. If the ship was not filled during the ebb period, the ship would be raised and float in the water with the coming of the «water flow». Therefore, they would move it to a certain distance inside the sea to avoid the friction of its base with the seabed when it was filled with sand. Then, they would start transporting sand to the ship through «*al mashowah*», a small ship attached to the big ship- until the sailing boat was completely filled. Work would continue until the end of the day, at which time the workers would take rest and have dinner. Then, they would sail to A'badan after the night prayer. There, they might be forced to queue until their role would come. Iranian workers would unload the sand and pile it at the coast, in preparation of measuring the quantity<sup>(2)</sup>. That was carried by filling the quantities of sand in big wooden boxes, each of which holds 8 to 15 cubic meters. Upon completing the measuring process, the person in

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(1) A Special cargo ship that can carry large quantities of sand.

(2) An interview with Mr. Juma'a Jawher Shehab.

charge there would hand the ship captain a receipt indicating the quantity of delivered sand, to hand it over to the Kuwaiti contractor to pay the loading fees to the workers. The charges for transporting a box of 8 cubic meters amounted to approximately 10 rupees (i.e. one rupee and a quarter per cubic meter). Accordingly, the Kuwaiti worker's income received against carrying out that hard work for a period which might extend for one full week was calculated as follows, assuming that the ship transported 160 cubic meter of sand per trip, and that its income was 200 rupees (160 cubic meters multiplied by 1.25 rupee). After deducting the cost of food and the remaining expenses of the ship, the balance income was distributed among the workers and the nukhudha. The captain used to receive one and a half glatah and the worker one glatah. Therefore, the income could be divided as follows (assuming that 6 workers and one captain worked on the ship, making the number of shares or «galayet» or qalayit 7.5 rupees).

- Total income:	200 rupees
- Minus food expenses and the like:	60
Balance:	140 rupees
- Rent for using the ship (paid to its owner) equivalent to half the income:	70 rupees
Net income:	70 rupees
- Share value 70 rupees ÷ 7.5 share =	9.33 rupees

Therefore, the worker received 9.33 rupees (one galata) and the captain 14 rupees (one galata and half) against their work for a period ranging from three days to one week, depending on the climatic conditions. One trip back and forth took two days in normal conditions, especially if the wind direction is «koas». But, if the wind direction is «northern», then this leads to extending the trip for six days or a full week. The transport of sand to A'badan continued all the year approximately, except the period of the sea upheaval, especially during certain periods in the winter, when the process of transporting sand stopped as a result of the inability of ships to dock near the sea coast<sup>(1)</sup>.

## 2. Transporting Sand by «Douba» (or Dubah)

Sand was transported from the coasts of Kuwait to A'badan later by freight ship or cargo lighter called «douba»<sup>(2)</sup> for a long period of time at the account of Alghanim Company. Work started at Benid Al Gar coast, and then moved to Shuwaikh area, as

(1) An interview with Mr. Juma'a Jawher Shehab.

(2) A ship for transporting goods, flat shaped and wide, usually made of steel.

the doubas faced many problems resulting from the climatic conditions in Benid Al Gar. That area was considered as «open», and the strong «koas» winds constituted an excessive danger for the doubts, especially when loaded with sand, thus exposing them to sinking. In fact, two doubas were sunk there and remained at that site for a long period. As for Shuwaikh area, it was «protected», as it was located opposite to «Ghodhai coast» which protected it against the strong waves resulting from Koas and northern winds. The transport of sand from Shuwaikh area continued for long years. The main center for transporting sand was in the western part of the city in a location outside the City Wall near the old police station of Shuwaikh residential area. Big areas called «*darakeel*» (quarry) were dug up there from which sand was transported to the doubas which anchored at the same location of Marriott- Al Salam hotel, burnt down by the Iraqi invaders during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

A big number of Kuwaitis worked in that field, as hundreds of them were racing to reach the work location before sunshine in order to get work there. A number of those who worked in that field said they used to wake up at night before «al fajr» prayer and left their houses to the site, and performed «al fajr» prayer on their way. They reached the location while it was still dark. They went there in groups, fearing wolves which were present outside the city wall<sup>(1)</sup>.

The company required around 150 to 200 workers per day to extract sand from the quarry and carry it to «doubas». Much bigger numbers than needed used to come. The unlucky who did not get selected to work by «*al tendail*»- (the foreman) returned home. Reasons behind rejection were either because of minor delay in arriving at the location which might exceed few minutes; or due to weak body structure or simply because of the «tendail» not being convinced of their ability to work in the way he wanted. Among the foremen who supervised the workers at Alghanim Company were Jassim Abu Al Banat, and Bin Haider who was famous for his strictness. He used to close the record for registering workers by sunrise and never accepted anyone for work after that time. Work continued from sunrise to sunset. If the worker turned around or stopped for rest or went for his personal needs, he would be blamed for «relaxing with his work» by the foreman, who would abstain selecting him on the following day. The worker used to collect 6 Annas per day- which increased through the years to 12 Annas- against that hard work. The workers were given a break at noon for half an hour for lunch and prayer, after which they returned to work until sunset, when they would wait for the foreman to give them the wage for their day's work<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Assa'd Hussein Haider.

(2) Ibid.

The transportation of sand was divided into two parts: the first was digging out the sand at the quarry and the second was transporting it from there to the of the duba's board. The transport worker received little more wage than the digger, as the former used to collect 12 Annas per day, while the latter received a half rupee (8 Annas). The diggers used to dig the land and extract sand, and to pass it through the sieve to remove the gravel and rocks and then filling it into deep baskets known as «*farkh al jila*», for the transport workers to deliver to the board of the dubah through «*al doassah*».

The depth of the digging location known as the quarry (*durkal*) was almost two meters after carrying sand there from. Two workers would put the basket on the head of such worker who would carry it to the dubah. Afterwards, wooden carriages were used to transport sand from the quarry to dubah made of big boxes with steel wheels, and they were pushed by two workers on a railway, connecting the quarry with the dubah<sup>(1)</sup>. Other workers used to unload the sand from the carriage into the basket and place it on the heads of the workers in order to deliver it inside the dubah. The filling of the dubah took two to three days according to its size. The digging continued for almost two meters or more downwards until reached water level. The digging workers used «*al sakhakheen*»<sup>(2)</sup> and sieves (*gharabeel*) in their work, while sand was filled in big baskets known as «*farkh al jila*», each of which had a capacity for almost 50 kilograms of sand. One dubah could take up to 4000 maan (i.e. around 300 tons of sand). Upon completing the filling of two dubahs, they would be towed with the «*tuk*» (tug-towing boat) which was placed between them and then towed both together to A'badan Port in Iran.

Some of those who witnessed the process of transporting sand to the dubas described the movement of workers while carrying the sand from the quarry to the dubah through «*al doassah*» extremely active like ants. That was due to their big number, systematic work while passing on the «*doassah*» with regularity and compliance, and barely any of them turned to his right or left without being scolded by the foreman who continued monitoring them.

Such big quantities of sand were used in the process of concrete manufacturing in order to build A'badan Port and its adjacent construction projects at the beginning of the twentieth century. Several «*darakeel*» or quarries were dug up along Shuwaikh and Benid Al Gar coasts at that period to meet that increasing demand for sand which created many employment opportunities for hundreds

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Moosa Hussein Al A'ttar.

(2) Plural of «*sakheen*» which is a building tool used for scooping sand or mud (ladle).

of Kuwaitis who worked there. Occasionally, their numbers- as recorded by some who worked in that trade- reached around five hundred Kuwaiti workers, between diggers and carriers to fill the dubahs and al tashasheel.

### **Cutting Up and Transporting Rocks from the Sea Coasts to the City<sup>(1)</sup>**

Some coastlines in Kuwait are covered with a layer of rocks extending for few kilometers. Among the most significant of those areas were O'shairej, Shuwaikh, Watiya, Sharq and Benid Al Gar beaches, and other areas. There were several locations in O'shairej area which contained good types of rocks such as «*al kharoor*», «*al hodhoor al saba'a*», «*bu mantafa*», «*ruwayes*», «*bu lokma*» and «*bo al farayeel*». Rocks were used in the past to build houses, niq'a walls, drains walls and so forth. There were different types of rocks including thick, thin, solid and fragile rocks. Each type was located at a certain area and had its special uses. The sea rocks were considered of relatively expensive building materials in the past, and they were used in building the houses of merchants and the rich.

A big number of Kuwaitis worked in the past in breaking and removing rocks from their different locations and bringing them to the city to sell them to consumers, which provided many working opportunities for large sectors of the citizens.

Jalbuts or tashasheel sailed to the areas where the rocks were available in O'sherij and other areas. In each jalbut or tashalah (local cargo dhow) there were around 4 to 6 persons used to break the rocks and transport them to the beaches of Kuwait city for selling. To do so, a number of individuals used to rent a ship against a certain amount of money which might reach up to half their income from that process after deducting food expenses, they then would divide up the balance among themselves. Any of those working in that field, such as the captain as an example, would rent the ship and agreed with some sailors or workers to work in breaking and transporting rocks against a certain wage and the remnant would be for his.

The voyage usually started in the after noon by al tashalah sailing to O'shairej after being supplied with the necessary foodstuff and working equipment consisting of big iron «*heeb*»<sup>(2)</sup> for breaking down and cutting the rocks. Big quantities of

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(1) The majority of information on this part was obtained through several interviews between the author and Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti.

(2) «A heyab», plural «heeb» is a thick iron rod of around one meter length, with one sharp edge and the other is flat, for demolishing buildings or breaking rocks. «Heeb» used in breaking sea rocks at those locations are usually thicker and longer than the standard heeb.

old or useless ropes were laid over the bottom or the ground of the ship to protect the flooring from fracture or breaking when the rocks would fall on them during the loading process. The trip to reach there took around two hours, after which the jalbut or tashalah would reach during the ebb (thaber) period, then it would be stopped inside the sea after being fixed by thick wooden poles placed on its sides, and tied with ropes to avoid falling. Then, the workers would go to the rocky area near the coast with their tools in order to start breaking down the rocks. Workers would start cutting big parts of rocks of length amounting to two meters and one meter width. They would dig its sides with the «heeb» until reaching the depth of 30 centimeters or more. Then, the big piece of rock- called fersh- was put on the ground.

Afterwards, they would start cutting big rocks into smaller rocks by putting the «heeb» below one of the edges of the big rock towards lifting it, and then would place a piece of rock below the big rock known as «hashriya» so that underneath the big rock was hollow. Then, they would start breaking it down into smaller parts as requested. A special «heeb» known as «taflees» would be used to break down the big rocks. It is a big «heeb» with a wide ball-shaped base. The group would continue their work until a sufficient quantity of rocks were broken and then they would «pile» them to be carried into the ship during the flow «saji» period. The loading process started by towing the jalbut or tashalah from inside the sea to the rock location, where it would be stopped between the two piles. The towing would be carried out with maradi (singular mardi) a bamboo long pole (lance) of medium thickness used for that purpose. The workers would start lifting the rocks and throwing them inside the ship, where two persons on each side of the ship would carry out that work. In that way, the first phase of such hard work would be complete. The level of the seawater during the loading process would be at one and half meter depth which would increase the difficulty of work. The depth of water might increase sometimes above the height of individuals if they delayed the work. That would force them to dive to take the pieces of rocks from the bottom and throw them inside the ship, which would lead to doubling up the difficulty. After completing the loading process, they would start once again pushing the jalbut with the «maradi» inside the sea until it reaches the suitable depth, and then they would hoist the sail and go to the city. The return trip would take from two to three hours, to reach the niq'a, to start again unloading the rocks to the beach on the two sides of the ship in two piles, as well. The rocks were sold there to people who used them in building their houses. The rocks were loaded on donkeys. A number of persons at the niq'a would evaluate the rocks, as the value of one shipment

would range from two to three rupees at the beginning of the last century, and then increased during the 1930s to around 10 to 15 rupees per pile<sup>(1)</sup>. By the end of the forties, the price of shipment increased greatly to around 50 rupees. Delivering one way from the niq'aht to the location amounted to around 5 rupees atop donkeys. The rocks were transported from the niq'a to the building location usually during the ebb period. The carriers would come with their donkeys to load the rocks which were stowed in «al manqal» in a special manner and then the caravan would go to the building location for unloading.

The trip of transporting rocks from O'shairej would take in normal conditions twenty four hours, after which the workers would exhaustively return facing hardship, especially during the winter season as they would face the chilling cold and suffer deadly diseases in some cases. Once the worker reached his home, many parts of his body were injured with wounds during the work which he did not feel then in addition to suffering from severe pains in the joints and muscles.

There were several types of rocks, whether in terms of thickness, strength, shape or components. Each type was serviceable for a certain use. The thickness of rocks ranged between 30 cm to 70 cm. There were types of smooth and leveled surfaces which did not differ to a great extent from the cement bricks. Meanwhile, there was a type with many protrusions known as «bu al baroos».

There was also another type known as «*al bakhsh*» used in building the foundation of walls, abundant in the area opposite to Al Watiya. Also, there was a type of thin thickness known as «*al faroosh*» which was strong and used for building drains due to its big size that would amount to one square meter. There was also a type known as «*bo zaboot*» which was light and easily breakable and abundant in O'shairej and Benid al Gar area.

## **Fishing**

The fishing trade is among the oldest occupations in Kuwait, and practiced by many Kuwaitis in the past as being their source of income and living. Fishermen used to go to the fishing sites, either walking along the beaches of Kuwait and villages spread around them, or on donkeys back, or at sea with their tools (nets) which varied according to the location intended for fishing and return to the fish market for selling the catch. Fishermen used different types and sizes of ships for fishing, including «*warjiyyah*» (or *huwairiyyah*) constructed entirely of palm tree fronds or stalks tied together, which could carry one man, and small size sailboats «*al shu'i*» in which a few number of fishermen from three to four persons sailed to areas close to the coast, or big ships «*jalbuts*» which sailed to the remote areas near Abdulla Bay, Boubyan Island and Doha with 5 to 6 fishermen or more.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Karam Ahmad.

Among the most significant fishing means used in the past were «*al hodhoor*» and nets of different kinds, in addition to «*al midair*» (hook) and other means such as «*gargoor*» and the like. «*Al hadhra*» was among the most significant fishing tools in Kuwait in the past, upon which the inhabitants of the villages depended, especially Al A'wazem, as well as the inhabitants of Failkah Island. The owners of «*al hodhoor*» provided the city with most of its needs of fish. As for the nets, there were different types of them, and some of them were used on the coast while others were used at sea.

«*Al warjiyyah*» was as one of the oldest types of fishing boats through which the fisherman went along the shore. The fisherman sat inside «*al warjiyyah*» whose length ranged between 4 to 5 meters overall, with approximately one and a half meter width. It sailed using rows, while almost filled with water. Some individuals also used to fix a small sail to assist sailing. The fisherman sitting in *al warjiyyah* would throw the «*thread*»- «*al midar*» or «*fishing hook*» into the sea near the coast, to fish a limited quantity which he used to put in the water inside *al warjiyyah* to keep it alive until he reached the coast, and then he would take it to the fish market to sell. Fishing with *al warjiyyah* was as a difficult process since the fisherman rowed and fished together<sup>(1)</sup>. The fishing hook was also used in small and medium ships to fish in the seabed such kinds of fish as «*al hamoor*», «*al sho'wm*», and «*al subaiti*». The fisherman in such ships would sail through *jalbout* or *shu'i*, with the hope of getting a better catch. He also used the hook to fish at the coast or inside the *niq'a*, where he sat on the yard wall after throwing the hook inside the sea waiting for the fish. As for owners of big fishing ships, they used to sail to remote areas with their nets to fish big quantities of fish, including *subaiti*, *soboor* and shrimps to carry to the city for selling in the auction or to their clients who were usually shop owners or ships coming from Iran.

The fishermen spread at most of Kuwait's coasts neighbouring the southern villages, Failkah Island and the capital, in addition to Sulibikhat, Subiya and Boubyan to search for a good catch to bring them reasonable income that suitably match with their efforts.

### **Fishing Seasons**

Fishing-seasons were connected to the lunar month and moon lit nights. Fishermen used to divide the lunar months into several periods pointed to as the «*al haml*» and «**al fasad**» periods. During «*al haml*» period, the sea witnesses both strong waves and water currents which pull the hook and prevent it from going down to the bottom and float it on the sea surface. That leads to difficulty in fishing with the hook. However, such period was considered good for fishermen using nets, especially inside the sea, as the water currents would lead to drifting fishes towards the nets. Owners of «*al hodhoor*» also prefer «*al haml*» period as fishing increased due to the strong water tide which

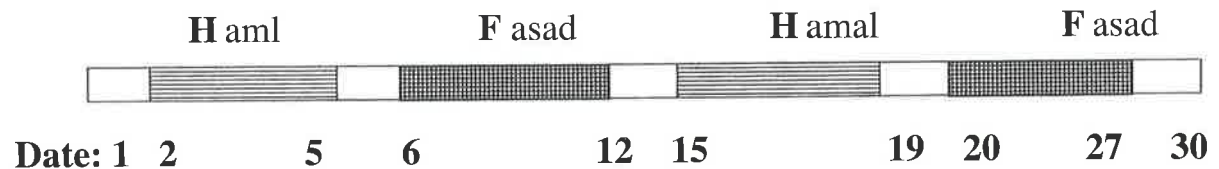
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(1) An interview with the late Ibrahim Khalil Al A'radi.



might drift with it fishes to the coast. As for «al fasad» period, the sea witnesses a calm period, almost free of waves, which assists the hook to go down to the bottom and catch fish, and this is what the fishermen using hooks look for<sup>(1)</sup>.

The lunar month witnesses both two «haml» and «fasad» periods. The first haml starts on the second day of the month and extends till the fifth day. As for the first fasad, it starts on the sixth day of the lunar month and extends to the twelfth day, which is a good period for fishing with hooks, and the best day is the ninth day of the month. As for the second haml period, it starts on the fifteenth till the nineteenth. The period from the twentieth to the twenty seventh is also a «fasad» period, during which fishing with hooks increases. The 25th day is the best day of this period as the sea is calm<sup>(2)</sup>.



Haml and fasad periods during the lunar month

There are many types of fish during the different seasons, but they reproduce and grow, while the taste of every type is distinguished during a certain season. In winter and spring, it is the season for Zubaidi, Nuwaibee, Balool and shrimps, while Soboor reproduces and increases in August. This is normally associated with the maturity season of *Al Sa'maraan* dates season. Fishermen go to the sea throughout the year. However, fishing increases with the coming of the spring, especially for those who got to the north near Abdulla Bay, to catch shrimps and Zubaidi, as well as Al Qaiyd area, at the eastern coast of Boubyan Island, which is one of the best areas for fishing different types of fish, especially Zubaidi, during the end of March till the end of May, where fish reproduce during this season, especially at the beginning and the middle of the lunar months.

Al Shou'i and Jalbutis used to carry the fish fishermen caught from the villages and Failka Island to the niq'a inside the city, where they were packed in «al jalil»<sup>(3)</sup> (baskets) there and delivered to the fish market for selling in the auction in the early morning by the brokers. The majority of fishing ships used to reach the niq'aht in the early morning or during the night in order to sell their catch in the market in the early morning.

«Al Jazzafeen»<sup>(4)</sup> (fish wholesale dealers) used to buy the fish from fishermen in order to display them in their shops in the morning for selling,

(1) An interview with the late Abdulrasul Karam Ahmad.

(2) An interview with the late Abdulrasul Karam Ahmad.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Al jazzaf is the fish wholesaler.

or to be sold in the auction market against an agreed percentage. By evening, al jazzafeen used to sell the remainder of their fish at low rates due to the unavailability of refrigeration means- for storage. Many poor people used to go to the fish market in the evening to buy the fish at low prices or take them for free. Owners of sailboats (ablams) going to Basrah also used to buy big quantities of fish- especially Soboor- that were available at big quantities and cheap prices in order to open their abdomen, salt them and take them in the «*ablams*» to Basrah to sell there. A number of fishermen would directly go to Basrah when they fished big quantities of Soboor during the season, after salting them, to barter them for dates or sell them there. Every 100 Soboor fish were sold against two rupees<sup>(1)</sup>.

Abdulla Bay was full of Zubaidi during «*al qaid* season», and tens of ships went there for fishing. Few fishermen remained there for seven- day period to fish Zubaidi and to sell it to the Iranian steamships which used to sail there to buy it. Each ship would fish around 3000 to 4000 fish, and every 1000 fish was sold against 15 Iranian Tomans. So, the Iranian ships would be filled with fish, amounting to 20,000 to 30,000 fish per ship. The Iranians brought with them big quantities of ice to chill fish, then they would go to A'badan Port and Al Muhammarah, where it was packed in big wooden boxes filled with ice, in order to be shipped by train to Tehran and Shiraz. In some instances, the surplus quantities of fish were salted, dried and canned to sell to the owners of small ships from Basrah and the Iranians who used to buy big quantities of them to take back to their country at subsequent periods. Before they went to the area, fishermen equipped their ships with big quantities of salt, cans, knives and sharpeners to sharpen the knives. At sunset, they would light the bulbs, grind the salt to become soft and salt fish abdomen. Then, they spread them to dry, before placing them into the cans and storing them in «*al khi*», which is the body of the ship underneath the surface<sup>(2)</sup>. The number of ships sailing to Abdulla Bay during the season at that time ranged from 100 to 150 or more, and each one of them used to carry a number of fishing nets. Each ship would throw its nets away from the other, as the area was usually filled with nets. The nets would be thrown during the water ebb period (thaber). When it is the flow period (*al saji*), it drifts with it fishes and fills the nets.

Fishermen would go to Abdulla Bay, near Boubyan Island, at the beginning of the lunar month and one trip took a full week. They went there twice during

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(1) An interview with the late Matter Abdulla Al Eidan.

(2) Ibid.

«al sarayat» period to fish the biggest possible quantity. The income of one trip ranged from 100 to 200 rupees as per the quantity of the fish and the selling prices. The income of the ship was distributed among the fishermen after deducting the expenses of the trip, which were the food expenses, value of the equipment and the rent of the ship which was estimated at one tenth of the income. Afterwards, the remaining amount would be distributed among the fishermen. Each one of them received an amount of approximately 15 rupees per trip (i.e. two rupees per day), which was a good amount during those days.

### **Drying Fish**

Very big quantities of fish were caught during the fishing season, which exceeded the need of the market. That forced the fishermen to dry them in order to sell afterwards to the owners of ships coming from A'badan or Basrah or the diving ships or travel ships in order to feed on them in their long trips. Fishermen would cut open the abdomen of fish, remove the intestine then salt them and cover a big area of the land with «bawari»<sup>(1)</sup> (singular: bari), then a number of straw mats would be placed on top of them and the fish placed on the mats in layers of heights which might reach half meter or more. Then, the fish would be covered with straw mats, on top of which bawari would be placed and covered with sand. It would be left for two or three weeks, so the water, fats and blood would dry. Then, they would be exposed to the sun for one or two days until they might completely dry and then stored to be sold during the diving and travel seasons<sup>(2)</sup>. Among the fish used to be dried this way were Zubaidi, Saboor, Sheem, and sharks upon which the diving naukhudhas rushed for purchase.

### **Fishing Locations**

Fish were available in the past in the majority of the seawaters in Kuwait. Each area was famous for certain types of fish to be abundant there. The following locations were among the most significant fishing locations in Kuwait:-

- **Al Yal (sea coast)** at which the majority of types of fish were available, but some of them were abundant at certain locations more than others.
- **Al Raksa** : Al nagroor, al hamoor, al sakn, al shamahi, al nuwaibi
- **Al Doha**: zubaidi, shrimps
- **Abdulla Bay**: Zubaidi, saboor, shamahi, nagroor
- **Failaka** : Zubaidi, saboor, halwayoh
- **Maskan** : Zubaidi, shrimps

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(1) Al Bawari is the plural of «baria» which is a type of straw mats made of the branches of a certain type of plants cane brought from Al Ahwaar.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Abdulatif Idris.

- **The Areas near Boubyan** Island and edge of Abdulla Bay opposite Boubyan (especially during Al qaid season): Zubaidi, saboor, nagroor and shrimps were abundant there.
- **Om Al Fanayeel:** Nuaibi, zubaidi, saboor, sheem

## Fishing Tools

Fish live at different places and depths in the sea according to their types. Therefore, their fishing methods differ according to the type of fish and their locations. For example, zubaidi and soboor live in the middle of the water at depths ranging between one meter and a half to two meters, making the nets the best means for their fishing. As for shrimps, they live in the bottom of the sea and therefore al koofa<sup>(1)</sup> is the best means for drifting it. Hamoor, sha'm, subaiti and nagroor live at depths ranging from 10 to 20 (ba'a) arms, whether at Al Riksa or other areas. Hooks (midar) are the best means; and al «gargoor» as the suitable means for fishing.

As at the sea coast, the maid and zouri are available in big quantities and are easily caught with nets. Al tawareef<sup>(2)</sup> were also used for fishing the fish living near the coast such as maid and sho'owm. As for the «hadhrah», it is used for fishing many types of fish which are available near the coast during the flow period, which enter «al hadhrah» and can not leave, such as she'em, lukhmah, jarjoor, saboor, zubaidi, sha'm and tens of other types.

Therefore, fishing tools differed according to the location of fishing, as well as the type required to be fished, and we will describe below some details on the fishing tools used in the past in Kuwait:

### 1. Al Hadhrah

Al Hadhrah (plural hodhoor) is a barn with walls made of sticks and «maradi», fixed at the coast to catch fish. The hadhrah has a door facing the sea coast, from which the fishes enter during the water flow, and during ebb, it is difficult for them to leave. So the fisherman goes inside to collect the fish gathered there. Al Hadhrah is considered one of the most ancient and significant fishing tools in Kuwait, and used to form the main means for fishing there.

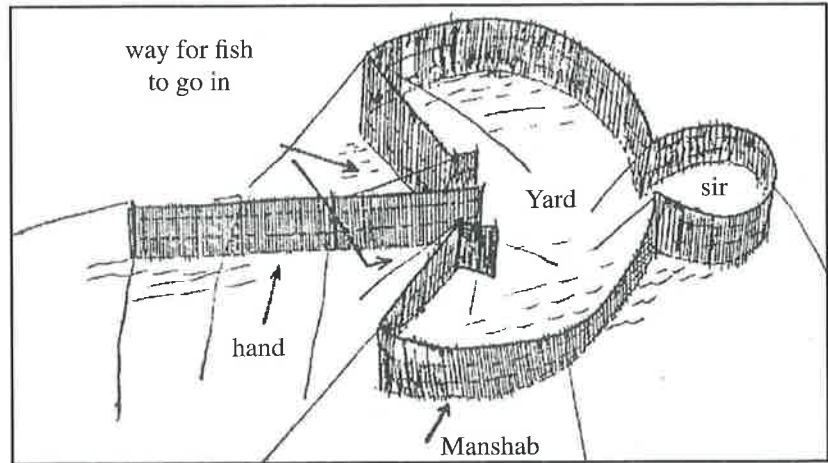
The majority of fish could be caught through al hadhrah, whether fish living in muddy areas, such as some coasts of Failka, Boubyan, Subiya and Doha, or fish living in the rocky areas such as the coasts of Kuwait city and the southern areas. Among

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(1) A special type of nets for fishing shrimps connected to the ship while sailing.

(2) Plural of taroof, which is a net used to catch fish near the coast, and the length of taroof is approximately 60 to 70 meters or more, and its width around one meter and quarter, and every one of its edges is held by one fisherman.

fish living in the muddy areas are subaiti, shamahi, nuwaibi, chim, and latham (lukmah). As for the rocky areas fish, they include sha'm, mazizee, badiha, talaha, naisara, dwailmi, qarqafan, seken, she'em, jarjoor, subaiti, hamoor, balool and al shabanba'. Also, hazardous and poisonous fish enter hadhra such as farajeel, dajaj, sharks, and tabigiya.



Hadhra

Source: *The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia*, Hamad Mohammed Al Saidan

Fishermen normally gather fish from hadhrah once a day, although the «chaber» ebb happens twice per day, because the water retreats to a far distance once per day. So fishermen go during this period to al hadhrah to collect the fish. Fishing in the rocky areas increases in al hodhoo during the winter season, while the fishing of zubaidi increases during the spring and summer seasons, especially in Boubyan (the muddy land). Fishing by al hodhoo is also better during «al haml» period, as the strength of the water currents increases during the flow period and throws the fish towards the coast, and hence they enter «al hodhoo» leading to abundance of fish<sup>(1)</sup>.

The majority of «al hodhoo» owners used to go with their catch to the fish market in the city to sell it in the auction through their wholesale clients, where shop owners used to buy it there. The majority of fishermen in the southern areas take their catch there on donkeys backs, packed in «jalil» (plural of jila) and two jilas were placed on the back of the donkey or the «kedeesh» (horse)<sup>(2)</sup> to carry to the market, while fishermen from Failka Island and remote areas such as Subiya and Bubyana would go there through «mahamel» which are sailboats, singular is «mehmal». But if the quantities of fish are big and difficult to sell, the owners of hodhoo would open the fish abdomen and salt them to export to the coastal areas in Iran and Basrah. Such fish were packed in big sacks for export. A lot of fish were salted in Boubyan area, as its climate being dry due to the strong hot «somoom» (hot) wind blowing there, which would help to dry the fish within a short period<sup>(3)</sup>.

(1) The strongest flow of water (saji) happens at the beginning and middle of the lunar month, and is called «al chail».

(2) Kedeesh is the horse used for transport and heavy duties.

(3) An interview with the late Matter Abdulla Al E'idan.

Hodhooor were seen at the majority of the coasts of Kuwait from the north to the south, and most of them were owned by Al A'wazem and a number of Al Rashayda. Al Fawadera -especially those inhabiting Failka Island - also used to make hodhooor and catch fish through them. Al Hodhooor were manufactured near the sea coast. They were filled with hodhooor starting from Al Masseyel in the south, opposite to the palace of the late Sheikh Fahed Al Salem Al Sabah near Al Finitees, then to Subiya, O'shairej and Boubyan Island in the north, passing by the coasts of Da'aiya, Benaid Al Gar and Umm Al Fanayeel (near Kuwait Towers at present) where there were huge quantities of Soboor, in addition to Sharq area and «Umm al Mashiya» opposite to Dasman Palace, as well as Shuwaikh and Doha<sup>(1)</sup>. The number of hodhooor in the southern part of the country reached around thirty hadhra, owned by Al A'wazem. There were also hodhooor in Warba Island.

## 2. Nets

Nets were manufactured of strong cotton threads. The length and width of the net; as well as the width of its openings differ according to the method desired to be used and the type of the required fish. There were nets for catching fish living in the sea bed, and nets for fish living near the surface, as well as others for catching fish at the coast and so on. Each type of such nets had its own name and method of use. Generally, they were used to hold the fish while passing and hitting the net. Therefore, weights made of lead known as «bloud» were used at one side of those nets, and the singular is «bild» leading this side to go down below, when the net was thrown into the sea, for holding and catching fish. As for the other side of the net, pieces of the karab<sup>(2)</sup>, (and afterwards foam and similar materials) were fixed to make it flow on the water surface.

### A. Nets Used for Catching Fish Inside the Sea (Leekh):

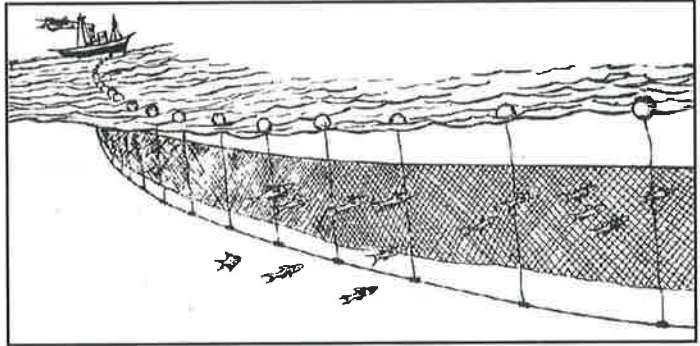
Shu'is and jalbuts used to sail in the past inside the sea to certain locations for catching certain types of fish through nets known as «leekh». Among the most important areas to where fishermen went to fish zubaidi and soboor were Doha, Raksa, Abdulla Bay and other areas near Boubyan, Failaka and Maskan islands. The length of «leekh» ranges between 200 to 400 ba'as, and its width

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(1) There were seven hodhooor in Doha owned by Al Othaina Family, and referred to as the «seven hodhooor».

(2) Karab is the lower part of the palm tree fronds, which is wide shape and spongy, filled with air which helps it to flow on the water surface.

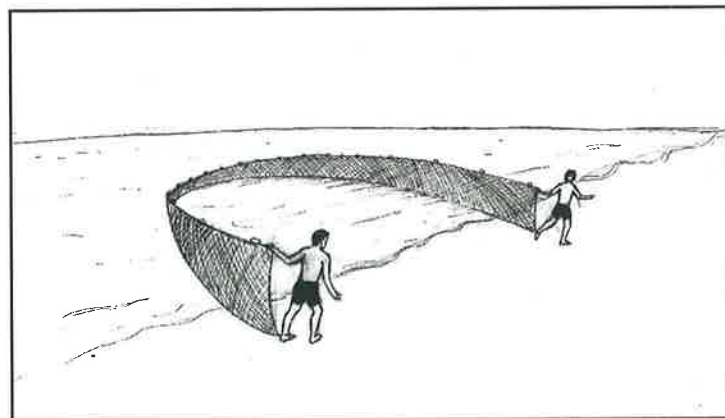
from three to four ba'as<sup>(1)</sup>. The lower edge of the net was normally fixed with a number of yellow baked bricks (ajor: tiles) brought from Basrah or lead pieces to lower the net edge down below, which leads in a way to the stability of the net and not being pushed by the waves.



Leekh used for catching fish inside the sea

*Source: The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammed Saidan*

A number of «karab» also were fixed in the upper edge of the net leading to stability of such part so that it would not be drifted by the water currents. Big pieces of cork were used for that purpose afterwards. That type of net was used for catching fish swimming in the upper parts of the sea near the surface. The fishing process starts when the net is gradually thrown in the sea while shu'i or jalbut is sailing, so the part containing the lead weights goes down and the part to which karab is fixed floats on the surface. One edge of the net is tied to the ship. When throwing the net, shu'i stops waiting for the passing of fish which hit the net while swimming, so their fins get entangled in the holes unable to swim away. The fisherman waits after throwing the net in the sea for a period up to one or two hours. Then, he starts pulling it gradually to take the fish and place it inside the ship. Most of the fish caught



Al Tarooof used for fishing near the coast

*Source : The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia (drawing by Ibrahim Somal), Hamad Mohammed Al Saidan*

(1) The length of ba'a is around 1.80 cm, which is a measure of the length of the two hands including the chest.

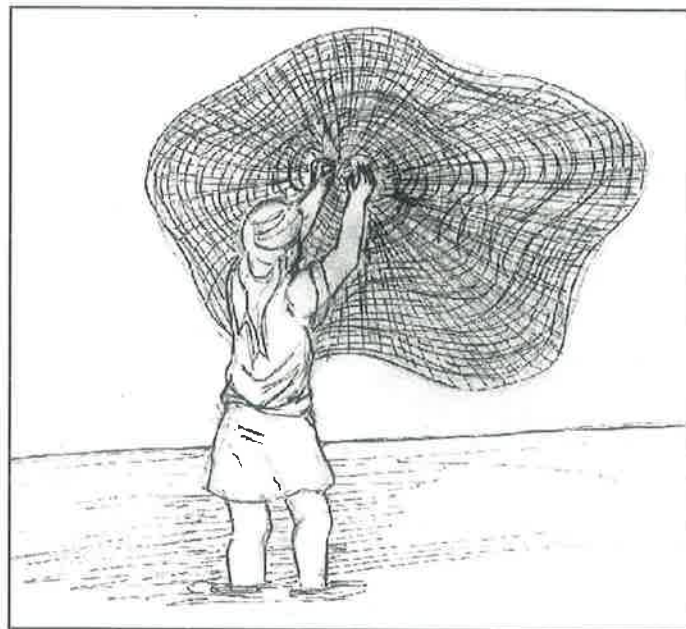
in the upper part of the sea is zubaidi, saboor, hef, khobat, and halwayoh. The «qabba» of the leekh is around 9 to 10 qabbot (openings)<sup>(1)</sup>.

### B. Al Tarroof:

This is a rectangular type of net made from cotton threads, of length amounting between 70 to 100 «ba'as», and width of two and half «ba'as», at the lower part of which pieces of lead are attached in order to go down into the sea, and in the upper part Karab to help it flow. *Al Tarroof* is used to catch fish at the sea beach, where two or three fishermen hold its two edges. A fisherman stands near the coast, while holding one edge of Al tarroof, the other fisherman goes inside the sea and on his shoulder the remainings of the tarroof, to be gradually thrown while walking. Then, the two fishermen pull al tarwoof near the coast, after the fisherman going inside the sea turns around the fish, so the fish surrounded by al tarroof are drifted and caught. Among the most significant fish caught by al tarroof are maid, sho'owm, qorqofan, biyah, majwi and hawaseem. The net of al tarroof consists of 18 «qabba».

### C. Saliya:

This is a round-shaped net, of a diameter up to around 4 baas, at the edges of which small pieces of lead (bloud/bilds) are fixed to help lowering saliya edges to the bottom upon throwing it into the sea. At the middle of the upper opening of the saliya is a rope which the fisherman pulls when he wants to close the saliya on the fish below, so the fish inside are already caught. Saliya is used to catch fish swimming near the coast at the sea surface, such as maid, biyah, sho'wom and zouri<sup>(2)</sup>. The fisherman places the saliya on his shoulder and goes inside the sea at



Kofah for catching fish while sailing

Source: *The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia- Hamad Mohammed Al Saidan.*

(1) Fishermen use the word «qabba» for the number of openings in one yard of the net. It is said that the «qabba» of the leekh is 9-10, i.e. it has 9 to 10 openings (or eyes) in one yard. The more the number of the openings increases, the smaller the numbers is and vice versa.

(2) Zouri is a small-sized fish used as bait to catch certain types of fish such as subaiti and sho'owm.



a depth of almost one meter, then he throws it, so it spreads and its edges go down towards the bottom, pulling away the rest of the saliya with them, which falls on the fish down below, so the fisherman pulls the saliya from its upper middle part and it closes while the fish are inside.

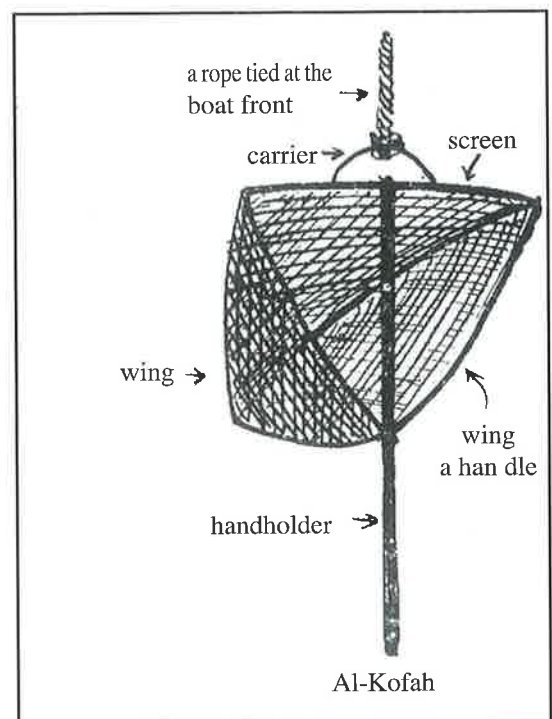
#### D. Alskar:

There is another type of fishing called «*alskar*», which means closing the opening of the niq'a or bay<sup>(1)</sup> during the flow period (*saji*), where two fishermen stand, each of them at one of the edges of the niq'a or bay opening, and fix the nets to close the opening during the flow period (**saji**). The lower part of the saliya (to which lead is fixed) goes down, while the other part (with which karab is fixed) floats. The two sides of the net are tied to the rocky wall on the sides of the niq'aht opening of a width amounting to around ten meters. Fishes usually enter the niq'aht or bay during the flow period and leaves during the ebb period.

When the net is placed, the fish may hit the net during the ebb of the water and therefore caught inside. Among the fish caught through this way is subaiti, sho'owm, maid, nuwaibi, qirqifan, and many types of fish which go inside such dhow basins.

#### E. Alkofah:

It consists of a big net resembling the basket, made from strong cotton threads, to which a weight is attached to go down into the bottom. The opening of Kofah is made of al maradi, its shape is of half circle, made of several parts (see the figure). The opening of the Kofah ranges between 3 to 6 meters. It is tied with two ropes on its two sides, fixed at the two sides of shu'i<sup>(2)</sup>. The Kofah is thrown from the shu'i into the bottom of the sea to catch shrimps during the sailing of the boat and so it sweeps the shrimps in the bottom. With the continuation of the sailing of the ship and filling the kofah, it becomes heavy and when the fisherman feels that, he pulls it up and take the shrimps out, then he



Kofah for catching shrimps while the ship is sailing

Source: *The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia*- Hamad Mohammed Al Saidan.

(1) Narrow extension (or tongue) from the sea water inside the land.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Abdulatif Idris.

throws it again and so on. The «qabba» of the kofah is 20, which are small leading to holding the shrimps inside it.

### 3. Al Gargoor

This is a big cage made from wires in the form of a dome, of a height approximately amounting to six feet with an opening near its base, wide from the outside and gradually narrows inside, so it is difficult for the fish to come out from al gargoor after entering through the opening. Also, there is another opposite opening in the form of a door used by the fisherman to take out the fish. Al gargoor is placed inside the sea, at a distance of one kilometer approximately from the coast in which a number of dead

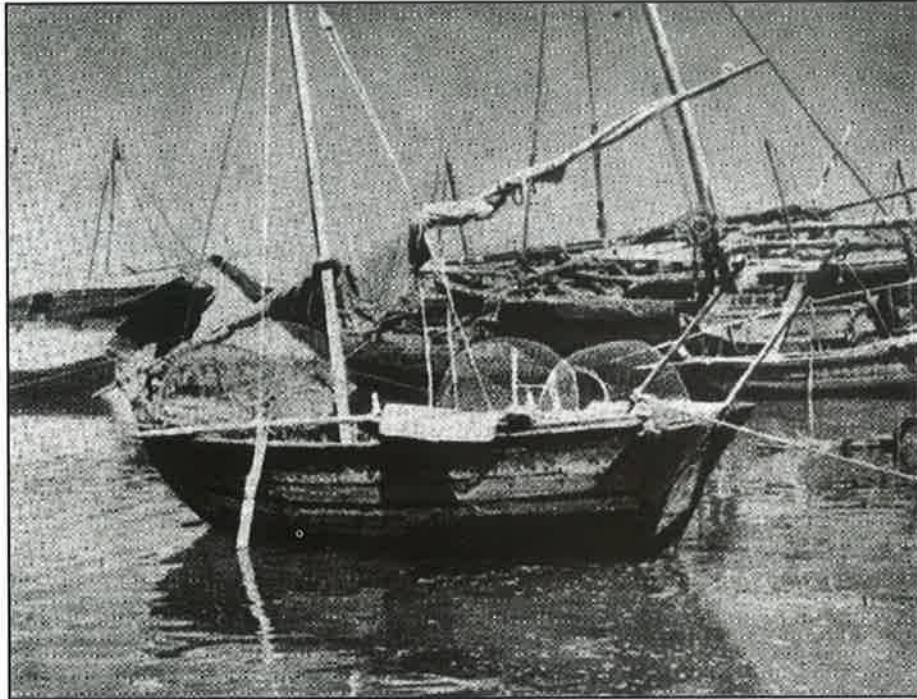


a number of «garageer» on the sea coast

*Source: The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammed Al Saidan*

fish, such as soboor or other foods, such as bread, are placed to lure fish inside it. The fisherman used to take gargoor inside the sea by small boats which sailed through rows or sails. A rope, having a piece of wood or karab fixed to it, is tied to the top of al gargoor in order to float on the water surface (known as «chibal» or tafahiya) to assist the fisherman to identify its location. The fisherman would leave al gargoor

for a period which may reach up to a full day, after which he would return to take the fish caught inside. Among the fish caught by al gargoor are hamoor, sha'ari, nagroor, bint al nukhudha, sho'owm, balool and other seabed fish.



A fishing sailboat carrying a number of garageer for fishing

*Source: Kuwait Register Today- 1956- Printing and Publishing Department, The Government of Kuwait*

Among the locations in which garageer were placed are Al Raksa, O'shairej, Doha, Failaka, O'uha, Qaroah and Umm Al Maradem. The depth of the water at these areas ranges between 30 to 60 feet. Diving ships also used to utilize al gargoor to catch fish.

#### **4. Al Midar (The Hook)**

This is a tool used for fishing. It consists of a strong cotton thread (called al *saimismi*), to which «midar» or hook is attached to catch fish. Bait is placed in the midar- locally called «yeem» to attract fish, and is used to catch fish at the coast or inside the sea. «Al haddaga» or fishermen used to catch fish in the past through midar, while sitting inside the «warjiyyah». Also, small and medium - sized sailboats used midar. One hook or more was used in the thread to catch the biggest possible number of fish. Below the midar, a «bild» was fixed- which was a small cylindrical piece of lead- to help lowering it down into the sea bed. Pieces



Threads and (midars) hooks for fishing

Source: Kuwait National Museum

of soboor, maid, zouri, shrimps, or kothaq fish were used as baits to attract the fish desired to be caught by midar, which are nagroor, hamoor, sakan, sho'owm, nuwaibi, sha'ari and subaiti.

### 5. Al Mishbak

Al mishbak is a long cotton thread with several big midars or hooks to which the bait consisting of maid fish or hassom is attached. A lead «bild» weight is attached to the edge of the thread. Al mishbak would be thrown, containing between 20 to 25 midars or more, into the sea and left for a certain period. The fisherman would wait after throwing al mishbak, inside the ship (shu'i) for a period extending up to two hours, after which he would pull al mishbak that could have caught a number of fish. Among the fish caught by al mishbak are al balool, sho'owm, hamoor, subaiti, nuwaibi and waher.

### 6. Al Mayroor

«Al mayroor» or al majroor, also called as «*al dariyah*»- is a thread tied to one side of the ship, and a piece of shining iron, steel or tin which resembles a fish would be fixed at its other end with a big-sized hook. The ships use this method to catch fish while sailing at sea. When the mayroor is thrown into the sea, the big fish see it while moving. Then, such fish thinks it may be a small fish, so it will try to eat it. The hook will then be stuck inside the mouth of the fish leading to catching

it. This method is used by al qata'a ships and boums while sailing amidst the sea to catch big fish. Among the fish caught with this method are hamoor, subaiti, chana'd, she'em and sakan.

### **7. Al Si'dooh**

Al Sidoooh is a big stick of almost two meters length, at the end of which a thread of around 3 to 4 meters is fixed, with a hook or two at its end. In the middle of al si'dooh thread a «*tafahiya*» or a small ball would be attached to float on the water surface during the fishing process. Small pieces of fish or sea worms or paste would be used as a bait, due to the small size of the hook. Al si'dooh is used to fish near the coast or on top of the niq'a wall (al qaf). Al si'dooh is thrown by the fisherman who will wait while watching al tafahiya. If it goes down into the water or moves, it means that a fish is caught, so the thread would be pulled. Among the fish caught by al si'dooh are sho'owm, hawaseem, battan and muchawa.

### **8. Al Gumbar**

Al gumbar (qumbar) is fishing at night during the flow period with a sharp piece of steel resembling the sword, held by the fisherman with his hand while walking on the beach, holding his lamp to attract the fish towards him. If a fish approaches, he will hit it with the steel bar, hold it and then put in the bag. Among the fish caught through gumbar are waher, biyah, subaiti, maid and other fish swimming near the coast.

### **9. Poison**

The habit of throwing poisons on the sea coast to kill fish for the purpose of catching them was also popular, especially among boys playing near the sea coast. The poisons for catching fish are known as «*ritah*». Some boys used to buy certain types of seeds from the spices sellers, grinding them like powder and mix them with flour and sill (special kind of shark oil), then throw them in the sea shortly before the ebb period. When the ebb period is completed, the dead fish will float on the water surface, so the boys collect it. The mischievous boys used to carry this harmful operation of no benefit to anyone. Additionally, the taste of the fish changes when it is caught through this method, and no one likes to eat it.

### **Owners Of «Al A'marah»**

Al A'marah is a building with an Arabian courtyard and a number of rooms, used to store timber utilized in manufacturing sailboats and materials and tools for travel and diving ships, in addition to a number building materials. Al A'marah usually has an entrance, consisting of a small room or shop where its owner

usually displays models of some of the commodities he sells. Al Seif Street, overlooking the sea, was full of a'marahs, from the extreme east to the extreme Qiblah area, where in addition to timber, nails used in building ships, ropes, fibre cotton, mats, arrows, tree branches used for house ceilings, jondal and other materials used in maintenance of ships sill, tari (tar), damer and



Hajji AbduLateef Al Hammar and Hajji Hussein Ali Al Moosa  
*The last Kuwaitis selling marine tools at «the A'marah».*

wadak or wadach<sup>(1)</sup> were sold. The owners of big a'marahs are directly supplied with goods from India when they sail with their ships there, while owners of small a'marahs buy their needs from merchants for sale in their stores<sup>(2)</sup>. The A'marah was envisaged among the significant sale outlets in the past in view of the significance of dhows which were considered the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy, on which it relied in import and re-export trade, deep sea trade, pearl diving, fishing, local transportation and many other work. Ship owners, captains and sailors buy most of their needs from such a'marahs. The owner of the a'marah would sit normally in his shop located at the inlet of the a'marah, with a number of his friends who usually were ship owners, merchants or captains, to chat while working. Some a'marahs have also «habob», the plural of «heb», which is a big water vessel made of pottery, to store cold water for passers-by to drink. A big number of ship owners and merchants held a'marahs for their own use to store the materials and tools concerned with their ships during the period of work was at stale mate which could continue for several months.



The last remaining a'marah, among tens with which Al Seif Street abounded.

(1) These materials were used in polishing the walls of the ship to prevent leakage of water inside, as well as protecting the wood from damage and insects feeding thereon.  
 (2) An interview with the late Fadhel Hasan Al Mazeedi.

The parts and tools which could be moved from the ships to such a'maraha were taken there after the season comes to an end, while the ships docked at the coast waiting for the new season. Those merchants did not usually exercise selling through their a'maraha while a number of galaleef used their a'maraha for manufacturing ships<sup>(1)</sup> therein. The number of such a'maraha located in Al Seif Street was approximately eighty during the 1940s.

### **Owners of Niq'a**

Big ship owners in Kuwait since olden times, retained niq'a as dhow basins or yards opposite their a'maraha or diwaniyas in order to shelter their trading ships and the ships belonging to others after the end of the season. The owners of ships themselves used to build their niq'a's, as the government started in the last century issuing documents authenticating their ownership. The niq'a's are as old as Kuwait, whose economy depended, on the ships and maritime trips. It consists of a pool on the sea coast, surrounded with a wall of sea rocks used for docking sailboats to protect them from winds and waves, as well as maintain them from the damage sustained while working<sup>(2)</sup>. The ships usually dock at the niq'a in queues along the coastline after work. They are covered with arches and straws to protect them from the sun heat and other climatic conditions till the start of the new working season, when they are cleaned and properly equipped for work. In most instances, the niq'a is not free of ships docked there due to the difference of the working seasons for the merchants and diving ships. The former are docked at the niq'a after their return from their travel voyage in June and remain there till the middle of August, while latter remain at the niq'a after the end of their working season in September, till mid May. The niq'a also receives throughout the year the fishing ships which bring their catch to the fish market. Meanwhile, water-transporting ships from Shatt Al Arab go to a number of niq'a in order to be received by coolies to carry water to their clients. Rock-transporting ships from O'shairej also go to the niq'a to unload their cargoes at a number of big niq'a, to be carried from there on donkeys backs to the building locations<sup>(3)</sup>.

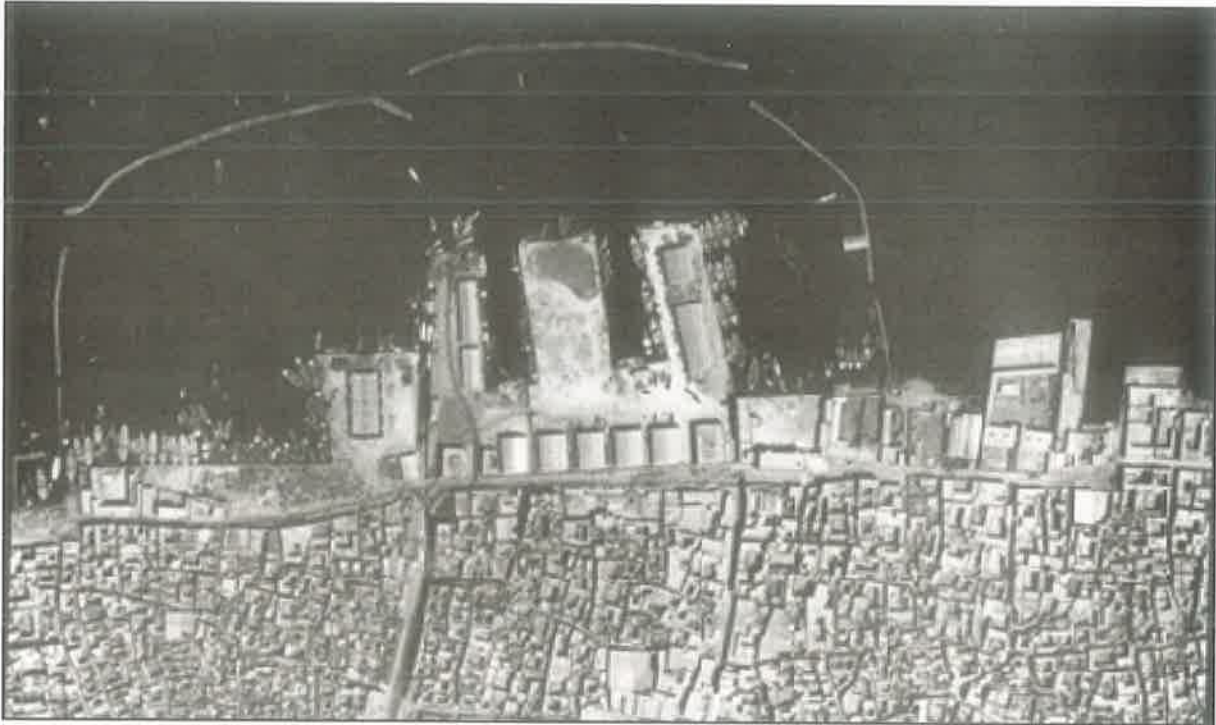
Travel ships are docked in the water inside the niq'a, due to their big size and difficulty of transporting them to the land, especially that the period of anchorage is short and may not exceed two or three months. As for the diving ships, they are docked on the land due to their relative small size and the ease of towing them there, as well as the long period of anchorage at the niq'a, which may extend up to eight months. The niq'a's were also the business centers for the maintenance

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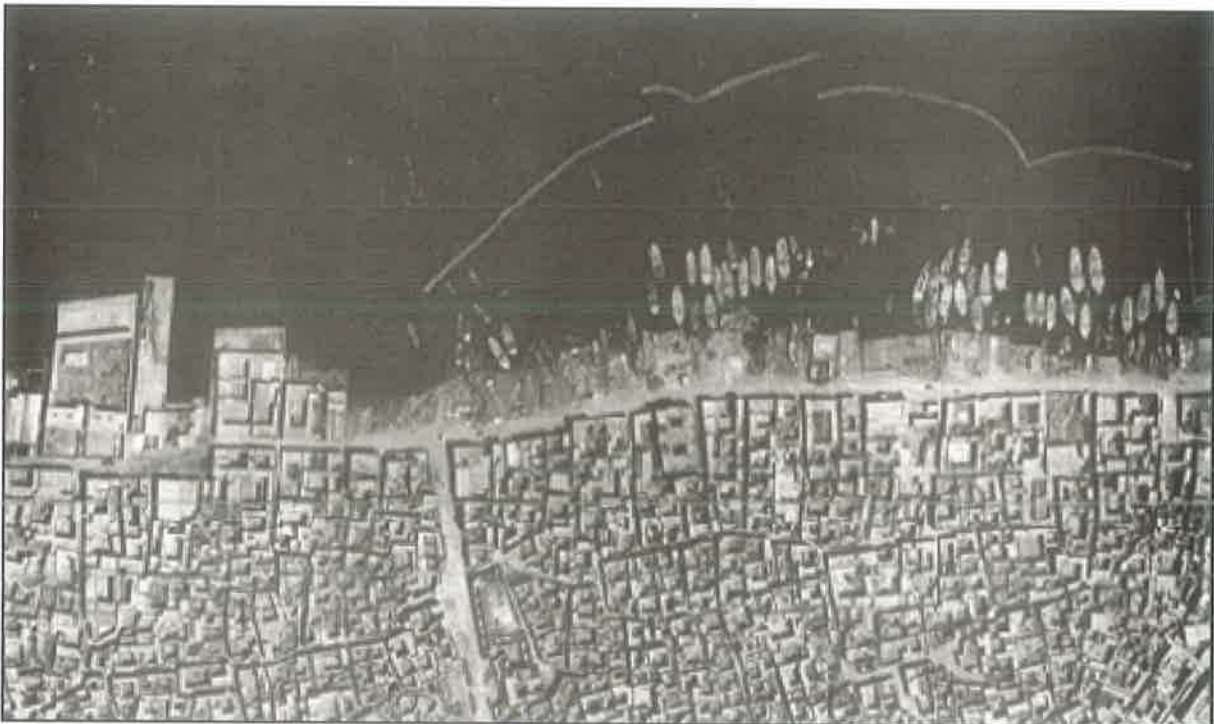
(1) An interview with Mr. Saqr Abd al-Wahhab Al Qatami.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulatif Yusuf Al A'sousi.

(3) From interview with Mr. Eissa Ya'qub Bishara.



The coast of old Kuwait City included tens of the niq'a, whose numbers exceeded 40. They sheltered the different sailboats. In the upper photo, Al Sheikhs niq'a and Alghunaim niq'as are seen having a large number of docking dhows. The lower photograph shows Al Nisf, Al A'sousi, Al Shamlan and Al Khamees niq'as, where other numbers of sailboats were docked.



*Source: Kuwait Municipality*





A number of niq'as along the sea coastline, crowded with docked dhows.

*Source: The Art of Dow-Building in Kuwait, Dr. Ya'coub Yusuf al- Hijji*



Niq'a Al- Sager, the only remaining one

of ships, where galaleef would repair and maintain sailboats on their beaches and replace their damaged parts. Sailboats were also manufactured near such beaches in order to facilitate the process of lowering or drifting them into the sea after their completion<sup>(1)</sup>.

The coast of Kuwait City included more than forty small and big niq'as. The height of the niq'a wall ranges between one meter and a half near the coast to four meters or more inside the sea, according to the depth of the niq'a and the extension of its internal wall from the coast. The width of the wall at its base is approximately four meters, which gradually narrows down to around two meters at the surface. This assists in strengthening the wall and keeping it for the longest possible period to resist the strong waves breaking on its walls. Therefore, the ships docked inside the niq'a are protected<sup>(2)</sup>. The niq'a usually has two outlets, eastern and western, each one of them called «*fateq*» and used for the entry and exit of ships. The existence of two opposite openings or more in the niq'aht helps renewal of its waters due to the currents resulting from ebb tide and flow, and preventing the formation of «*siyana*», which are muddy and organic residues resulting from the stagnation of water and not being changed, which leads to the accumulation of dirt and the existence of foul odors. A number of niq'as have the capacity to accommodate a big number of ships. The main users of the niq'a usually share the costs of its maintenance and rebuilding its walls destroyed or damaged due to the waves and strong seasonal winds<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Hussein Al A'sousi.

(2) An interview with Mr. Saqr Abd al-Wahhab Al Qatami.

(3) An interview with Mr. Rashid Salem Bu Qamaz.

## *Chapter Two*

### **Crafts And Trades Inside Kuwait City**

*Part One: Crafts Inside Kuwait City*

*Part Two: Trades Inside Kuwait City*



# *Part One*

## *Crafts Inside Kuwait City*

### **The Construction Sector**

The main activity of the construction sector in the past included building of houses, mosques, shops, barns and «lawaween» (balconies), wells and drains. There were no wide streets or infrastructure of the standard known at present, which required precise planning or special preparations for such type of building. However, the city was not free from some buildings of special pattern, which were built of two floors, and each one of them was referred to as «koshk» in addition to a number of palaces and public buildings, such as the American Hospital built in the year 1912, which required precise planning and execution. Also, there were a number of buildings of public nature such as Kuwait Wall, its gates, as well as the Old Port (al fordha) and the niq'a or dhow yards. The majority of houses consisted of one floor and the majority of them included a courtyard in the middle, surrounded with rooms and lawaween built of mud bricks (known as leben), while there were some houses built of rocks. As for the ceilings, they consisted of chandal, bascheel and bawari. No body knew the cement before the year 1912. Cement was brought to Kuwait that year by the American Missionary in order to build the American Hospital. People were not using maps in planning the house, which commonly consisted of a certain number of rooms, lawaween, their locations and the toilet, if any. The areas of most of the houses were small, as well as the rooms; the length of each did not exceed 6 arms (around 3 meters) as average, and 4 to 5 arms<sup>(1)</sup> for its width. The height of the ceiling ranged between 3.5 to 4 meters. In addition, the house owner would agree with the carpenters to make a number of doors and windows, and determine their types. Owners of big houses would agree with galaleef also to make «mondats» and «sowras»<sup>(2)</sup> on which the ceiling of the house, lewan, or portico was based.

Building materials consisted of mud, rocks and gypsum were locally made.

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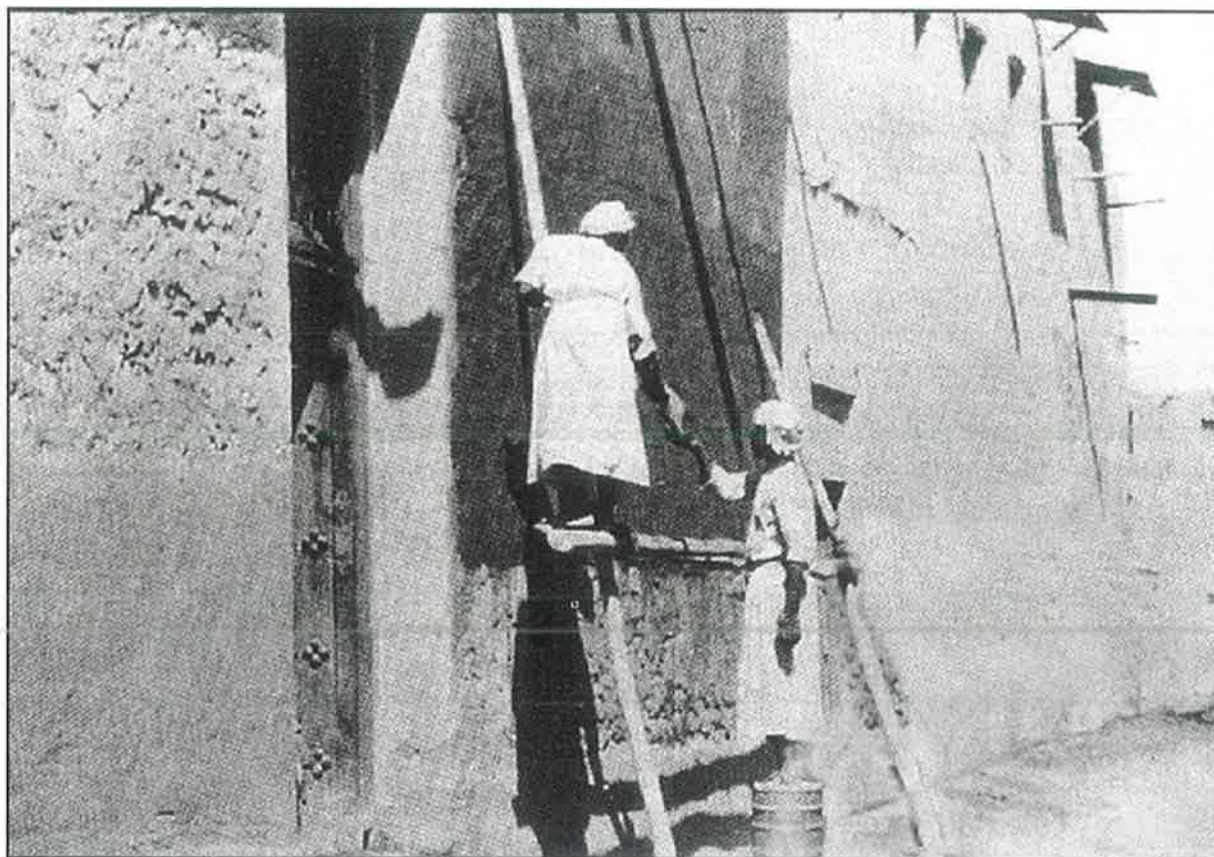
(1) «Arm» is one yard, which formed the measuring unit for the length at that time.

(2) «Mondats» is the plural of «monda» which is a thick wooden beam or pole to support the ceiling of the lewan and «sowras» is the plural of sowar, which is a wooden bridge, fixed above the «monda» upon which big roofs are based.

The majority of people used mud for the building, while many of the wealthy built their houses of rocks. The building process was carried out by a person who had experience in such work called «al astad», assisted by a number of workers, each one of them called «bannay» and the plural «bannani», i.e. masons. Al astad depended in his work also on a number of workers specialized in some tasks who had long experience, including for example the person who prepares «al qeela», i.e. the mud and water mix, and the person who handles, selects the suitable rock for each location in the building.

### **Al Astad**

The word «al astad» or ustadh is given to the «building foreman» who plays the role of engineer, building executor and in charge of masons. «Al Astad» is a master in all works related to the construction of the house, starting from building the walls, plastering them, to fixing the ceilings with their different details. He used to plan the house, after agreeing with its owner on the basic requirements, and then to select the workers, organize their work, guide and supervise them, and agree with them on the daily wage, which were paid to them at the end of the day by the



Al astad plastering the house wall and a mason next to him handing over the gypsum.

house owner. Al Astad carries out the building process by himself, starting from the placement of the first brick in the house foundation, until completion of the last touches, except the doors, being made by the carpenter<sup>(1)</sup>. Al Astad would also agree with the suppliers of building materials to bring his needs to the location at the expense of the house owner. Al Hammara, (owners or drivers of donkeys) used to transport the materials, such as rocks, gypsum, mud and bricks to the building site against a certain amount of money.

Al astad tools usually consisted of the thread and the angle, in addition to «shaqool» or «bild» used to ensure the straightness of the wall and not being tilted. This is a small piece of pyramid - shaped steel, fixed to a thread passing in a hole in the middle of a square small piece of flat iron. Al astad also used «al kafshah» or «hadidah» used to scoop mud to be put between the bricks or rocks, and then level it, as well as smoothing the plastering of the walls, after being plastered initially by a long piece of wood. In addition, al astad used «al shishah» which is a scale made of wood in the middle of which is a small glass vessel with water, used to ensure the straightness of the wall horizontally.

### **Al Bannay**

Al bannay is the mason or builder who carries out the work requiring muscular effort to assist al astad in completing his work. Among the works carried by the mason is to extract water from the well to use in the building, mix mud with water to make «qeela», carrying bricks and rocks and handing them over to al astad during the building process, assisting al astad and receiving different orders from him and execute them during the work. Al astad brings with him to the location a number of workers as needed, who are selected from among the persons who usually gather near his house every morning, in search for work. Al banany<sup>(2)</sup> starts the work at the building location in the early morning and leaves with the evening prayer. The owner of the house would offer them a simple breakfast in the morning (around 9:00 a.m.) consisting of bread, milk and dates, as well as lunch consisting of rice and fish or stew. Many people offered only bread, dates and milk also as lunch for the workers. As for the daily wage of the mason, it ranged between half Rupee to 12 Annas, depending on the experience of the mason and quality of his work.

Afterwards, the wage increased to one Rupee, then two Rupees, until it reached five Rupees in the 1940s and 10 Rupees in the 1950s. The working opportunities for the mason were not continuous or guaranteed, as the building process stopped during the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti.

(2) Plural of bannay «the masons».

winter due to the negative effect of rain on the mud, causing distortion of the building. The strength of the cohesion of walls built of mud or rocks depended on the sun, drying the mud, and then it was possible to build another layer of the wall after the cohesion of its lower parts. The mason used in his work al sakheem, al heeb, al jadum (adze) and al qalam (iron for breaking), al zebeel and al teb (bucket), and the metal pan afterwards, which was used instead of al zebeel to carry mud. This is in addition to ropes, ladder and jute fabrics to put gypsum on top until it is prepared or «cooked» in preparation of using it.

### **Mobayedh (Plasterer)**

A number of astads carried out by themselves the plastering and polishing process of the house walls. However, there were a number of astads specialized in that work, every one of them known as the «Mobayedh» who polished the walls or plastered them with gypsum, after the completion of the building. He is assisted in his work by a worker called «khabbas» who prepares the gypsum mix, or «cooks» it as locally called, to be used by al mobayedh in his work. Mobayedh used to plaster the walls twice, the first time with his hand initially, or by a piece of wood, and the second and last by «kamshah» or «hadidah» to smooth the walls.

### **Al Khabbas**

Al Khabbas is the worker who «mixes» the gypsum, i.e. places certain quantities of gypsum in a special vessel (pan) which contains water, in order to prepare it for the the astad or «mobayedh» who plasters and whitens the walls. Al khabbas places small quantities of gypsum gradually in the pan which reacts with the water, and becomes ready for use. This process was called «tabkha» (cook), and he handed it to al astad in small quantities, called «lokma».



A Mason while preparing «qeela», i.e. the mud and placing it in the pan to hand it over to al astad.

*Source: Ancient Items, Khalil Ibrahim Al Shenno, Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Establishment, Manama, Bahrain.*



## Building Method and Al Astad's Role<sup>(1)</sup>

Building would start with an agreement between the house owner and al astad on the number of rooms and lawaween in the house and the method of dividing it up. Then the workers would start digging for the foundation (al asas)<sup>(2)</sup> under al astad's supervision. The depth of «al asas» depends on the strength of the land, its solidity and rigidity. Construction would begin upon reaching the solid soil, normally of approximately one meter depth. Building materials consisting of mud, rocks or bricks made of mud being brought to the location, and work would start by building the foundation, which is normally of rocks. The width of the wall ranges between 60 to 70 centimeters. A number of masons would be allocated for making «al qeelah»<sup>(3)</sup> and another number for handing over «al qeelah» and bricks to al astad, while others carrying out the remaining work such as extracting water from the well to use in making al qeela, and assisting al astad in the precise and delicate works such as extending the thread to measure the straightness of the wall. When the wall was one meter high, openings would be made for the windows, if any. Also, the locations of the doors would be identified. One room normally contained a door and internal window overlooking the courtyard. A long piece of wood or palm tree branch would be placed on top of the opening allocated for the door or window, called «darwand» to identify the height, then the building would be completed on top of it. When the wall level reached the required height, normally not less than three meters and a half, al astad would start preparation for building the ceiling which would start by lining al chandal on top of the walls. A distance ranging between 20 to 25 centimeters would be left between each chandal and the other. Al chandal is the stems of trees brought from East Africa, and the length of each chandal is approximately 3 meters, polished with tar to protect it against woodworms. Rows of «bascheel»<sup>(4)</sup> around 3 to 4 centimeters width would be placed on top of al chandal. lined in the form of squares roughly 10 centimeters side, which al astad described the shape as «al bidhana» (i.e. almond). Bascheel is placed on top of al chandal for many purposes: decoration purpose, as the shape of the ceiling would look very beautiful if al astad has artistic skills and high taste, to give additional strength to al chandal to carry the quantities of mud placed on top of the roof and support al bawari, which are straw mats made of sheets of bamboo spread on top of it in order to place the mud

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(1) This information was obtained from the author's meeting with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti.

(2) Al Asas which means the foundation.

(3) Al qeelah is soil mixed with water and ready for work.

(4) Bascheel: longitudinal sheets of thick bamboo brought from East Africa.

on their tops. it is fixed to al chandal through nails. Upon completing the spread of bawari- also known as al mangoor- they are fixed to al chandal and bascheel with nails, as well. Then, another layer of mud approximately 10 centimeters thick will be placed on top of them, and then the wall around the roof would be built of approximately 60 cm height. It is pyramidal in shape on top so that the rainwater does not collect on top of it. This upper part is known as «wesham». Afterwards, a layer of ash is placed on top of the mud layer on the roofs of the rooms, of thickness which also amounts to approximately 10 to 15 cm for the purpose of absorbing rainwater and preventing it from leaking into the rooms. Afterwards, a last layer of solid mud mixed with hay or chaff is placed to form the upper layer of the roof, which is to be leveled.



Room ceiling composed of bascheel, chandal and bawari

Source: Old Kuwait city, Kuwait municipality, 1988.

Normally, the level of the tilting is sharp so that the rainwater does not collect on top of the roof. Afterwards, the (mizrabs) or «marazeem» are fixed, made of wooden duct hanging from the roof outside or inside the building, through which rainwater pours down to the street or the courtyard. Its length is normally 50 to 60 cm, and its width between 20 to 25 cm. Upon completing the construction of the roof, al astad will build a wall of one and a half meter to two meters, and fix «*buwagdeer*»- plural of «*bagdeer*»- along the wall of the surface to assist in bringing air to the roof if the house owner wishes so. There are several types of «*buwagdeer*», including those for the roofs and others for the rooms built on the roof, and a third type for bringing air from the top of the roof to the diwaniyas or big rooms in the ground floor. Bagdeer may have one opening for bringing air from one side (which is the bagdeer for the roofs or upper rooms) or two or four openings. Each one of these types has their patterns, engineering and construction type.

Among the most significant requirements of rooms are «*al rawashen*» which are niches 25 centimeters inside the wall, used for placing some of the household items thereon. Upon completing the construction of the house, the locally made gypsum is used to plaster the walls of the rooms, lawaween and the front side of the house. There are two types of gypsum, rough and smooth which are sieved. The two types are used to plaster the walls according to the desire of the house owner. Mud is also used to polish the house walls of poor families. As for the flooring of the house courtyard, it is usually made of soil. However, a number of wealthy people, especially during the 1930s and 1940s, started to use yellow tiles brought from Basrah to tile the courtyards.

A number of building astads in Kuwait were famous at the beginning of the previous century for the precision of their work, beauty of their designs, and high efficiency in performing the best and most difficult types of buildings despite the lack of modern facilities. The families of Al Rabah, Al Bahoo, Al Abdulsalam, Al Farhan, Al Bannay, Al Mogahwi and Al Osta, were famous for the pre-eminence of a number of astads in each family, each one of whom accomplished several remarkable, beautiful and precise works. Such buildings remained for long years after them as a witness for the high standard of performance carried out by those astads. They included the late Nasser Al Farhan, who constructed a number of significant buildings including Al Seif Palace, the American Hospital, and the Old Church, the house of the bishop, and the house of Dr. Eskder<sup>(1)</sup>. The family of Al Abdulsalam was famous for their talent in engineering, building and decorating of palaces. At the beginning of the previous century, the late Ibrahim Abdulsalam and his brothers A'shur and Ahmad were prominent from that family. Among the achievements attributed to the late Ibrahim Abdulsalam and Rashed Al Rabah, who were famous at the beginning of the last century, was the building of the old vegetable market within a period not exceeding two months although it had more than two hundred shops<sup>(2)</sup>. As for the late Ahmad Al Farhan, he built many government schools in the 1940s and 1950s. Also, Khalifa Al Bahoo built the foundation of the Amiri Hospital at the end of the 1940s, while Ahmad Abdulkhaleq Al Banna was famous for gypsum decoration, and he was an artist with high taste in gypsum works and polishing walls with that material. He designed and built the facade of the American Hospital Gynecology Department upon its renovation in the year 1938. This is in addition to the design and implementation of the front arches and railings<sup>(3)</sup>. It is worth noting

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Abdulatif Al Abduljalil.

(2) An interview with Hajji Mousa Abdulhussien Al Naqqi.

(3) An interview with Mr. Hussein Ahmad Al Banna.

that the late King Abdulaziz Al Sa'ud of Sa'udi Arabia summoned a number of Kuwaiti astads after getting the reins of power in Riyadh at the beginning of the last century for building his «Moraba'a» Palace there. They included the late Ibrahim Abdulsalam, Mohammed Al Bahoo, Rashid Al Rabah and Ahmad Al Farhan<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the noticeably prominent astads during that period also were the late Hamad Bin Mulaifi, Abdulkarim Al Munayes and Bin Hawal.

If al astad started the construction of a house, he would start from the foundation and continued working until the work was complete and handed over to its owner. Al astad was an expert in building work, starting from rock, brick and mud construction work until the roofs, plastering, and fixing doors and windows. He carried out the same works of the contractor in the construction sector at our present time. However, he was an expert in implementing each small and big detail of the construction work of the building, and carried them out with his own hands, as well as supervising the workers who assisted him in mixing, handing over and preparation. Usually, he was the planner or «engineer» of the house drawings blue prints, after being informed by the house owner of his requirements and the number of the required rooms.

## **Building Materials and Their Applications**

The basic building materials were brought from different locations inside and outside Kuwait City. The following is a brief summary on their sources and their usage.

### **1-Rocks**

Rocks were plucked out from some areas near the coasts of Kuwait and brought to the niq'a, where it was sold there. They were purchased by building owners, and carried by donkeys to the location for building foundations, walls, wells and drains. Mud was used between the rocks gaps and hollow areas to bind them tightly together.

### **2-Mud**

Mud was brought from areas inside and outside Kuwait City called «matayen» which were dug up and then mud being taken from them to be used in building. Kuwait mud is divided into two types: «salbi» and «torbi», each of which has certain properties and special use. Salbi mud is of cohesive parts and sticky nature used to be placed on top of roofs after being mixed with dry hay or chaff to prevent leakage of rainwater inside the rooms. Some people used it

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(1) An interview with the late Abdulrazzaq Al Baseer.

to plaster walls instead of gypsum, especially those with modest income. As for «*torbi*» mud, it was less sticky and used in making bricks (mud bricks), as well as placing between the bricks and rocks upon building the walls in order to adhere together. Normally, the mud was fermented before using in the building, by pouring water on it after being formed in the shape of a pool and left for a period not less than twelve hours<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **3. Gypsum**

Gypsum is made at «*al majassat*» which are areas of land containing white mud called «*al gach*» or *alkaj*. The gypsum is made by burning the «*gach*», and the process starts by collecting hay or chaff, palm tree leaves and wastes and burning them on a specific area of «*al majass*» land. The fires continue burning for a period which may extend up to one full day or two days, after which «*al gach*» is transformed into gypsum and used in plastering walls. Cement was not known in Kuwait before the year 1912, when it was used for the first time in building the American Hospital. Afterwards, merchants started using it in a limited manner to build water pools, then houses. It was called «*Saraj*», and imported to Kuwait from Russia in wooden boxes (drums) each of which weighted around 50 kilograms. It was sold for three Rupees. The first merchants to import cement were the late Jassim and Yusuf Boodai<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Types Of Building<sup>(3)</sup>**

#### **1. Mud Building**

The types of building differed depending on the desire of the house owner and his income. As we mentioned, it was of two types: mud building and rock building. Each type had its advantages and disadvantages. Mud building is cheaper but not as strong as rock. Mud building may be divided up into two parts:

The first is mud brick building, i.e. bricks made of mud, (laben or adobe bricks). Each brick measures 30 cm long, 20 cm wide and 15 cm high blunt, and the top part is called «*al sanam*». Mud would be placed between each brick and the other upon building the wall in order to strongly bind them together.

There were specialized workers in the «*laben or adobe*»; i.e. making mud bricks, who used to pour the mud in wooden moulds, at the building locations. There were

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Saleh Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

(2) An interview with the late Mutref Mohammed Al Munayes.

(3) The information related to this part was obtained from the author's meetings with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti.



The wall of one of the old houses made of mud bricks

*Source: Ancient Kuwait City, Kuwait Municipality- 1988*

special locations for manufacturing bricks at some courtyards and surrounded areas from where they were carried to the building location by donkeys. The mud bricks makers take their wages against the production of 1000 bricks.

As for the second type of the mud building of the walls, it was called «al aroug» or uruq building which means using layers of bricks, mud-walls. It was based on pouring quantities of mud at the location in the form of layers at the specified site. The height of each layer is around one arm (40 to 45 cm) and called «erg» or erq. Each layer is built separately, and then the following layer is to be placed on top after the lower layer dries and so on. «Al erg» is left for one or two days to dry before building the next «erg» on top of it. The wall usually consists of eight «aroug» or layers. The mud is fermented before using in order to acquire more strength and cohesion. Building «al aroug» was considered one of the most difficult types of building, and only specialized astads were professional in such field. Its cost was less than the cost of building walls with mud bricks and it is usually used to build the walls of big courtyards, farms and the like.



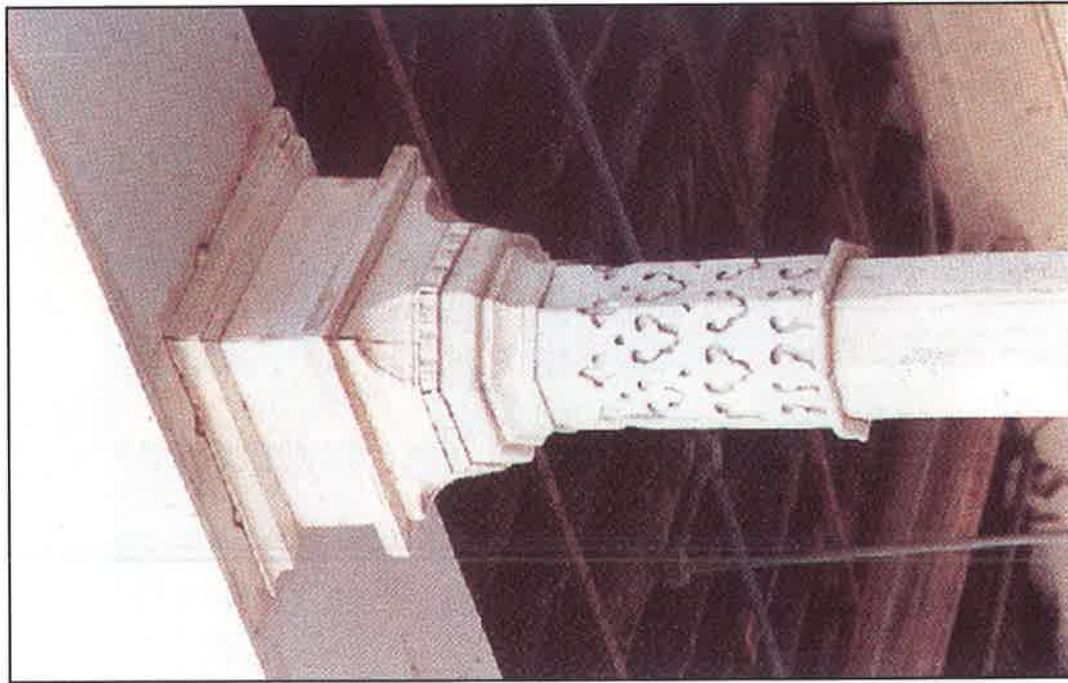
A part of a wall built of sea rocks



A two-floor house. The upper room is seen with ventilations known as «bagdeer».







A «**monda**» or wooden column to support the lewan ceiling. The beautiful decorations engraved on top are seen.

*Source: Ancient Kuwait City, Kuwait Municipality -1988*



Lewan or portico is among the main requirements of the houses and mosques in view of its significance in keeping away the sun heat and rays from the rooms. This is a photograph of a lewan in one of the old mosques.

*Source: Ancient Kuwait City, Kuwait Municipality -1988*

## 2. Rock Building

In the second type of building, sea rocks are used, and mud is placed between the rocks in order to adhere together and form the walls. This type of building is considered difficult also, as the sizes and shapes of rocks used in building the walls vary in size and shape contrary to mud bricks. Rock building requires outstanding skill and long experience of the *astad* in order to select the suitable rock in terms of shape and size to place in the appropriate place, without being forced to remove it from its location after placing it, and replacing it by another rock, and continue in this trial and error way, which leads to wasting time and elongating the building process.

The walls in the old buildings were remarkably broad and wide. In such way, they assisted the thermal insulation, in addition to giving strength and stability to the buildings, which could easily collapse after being exposed to continuous rains, especially if they are set up of mud.

### House Requirements and Attachments<sup>(1)</sup>

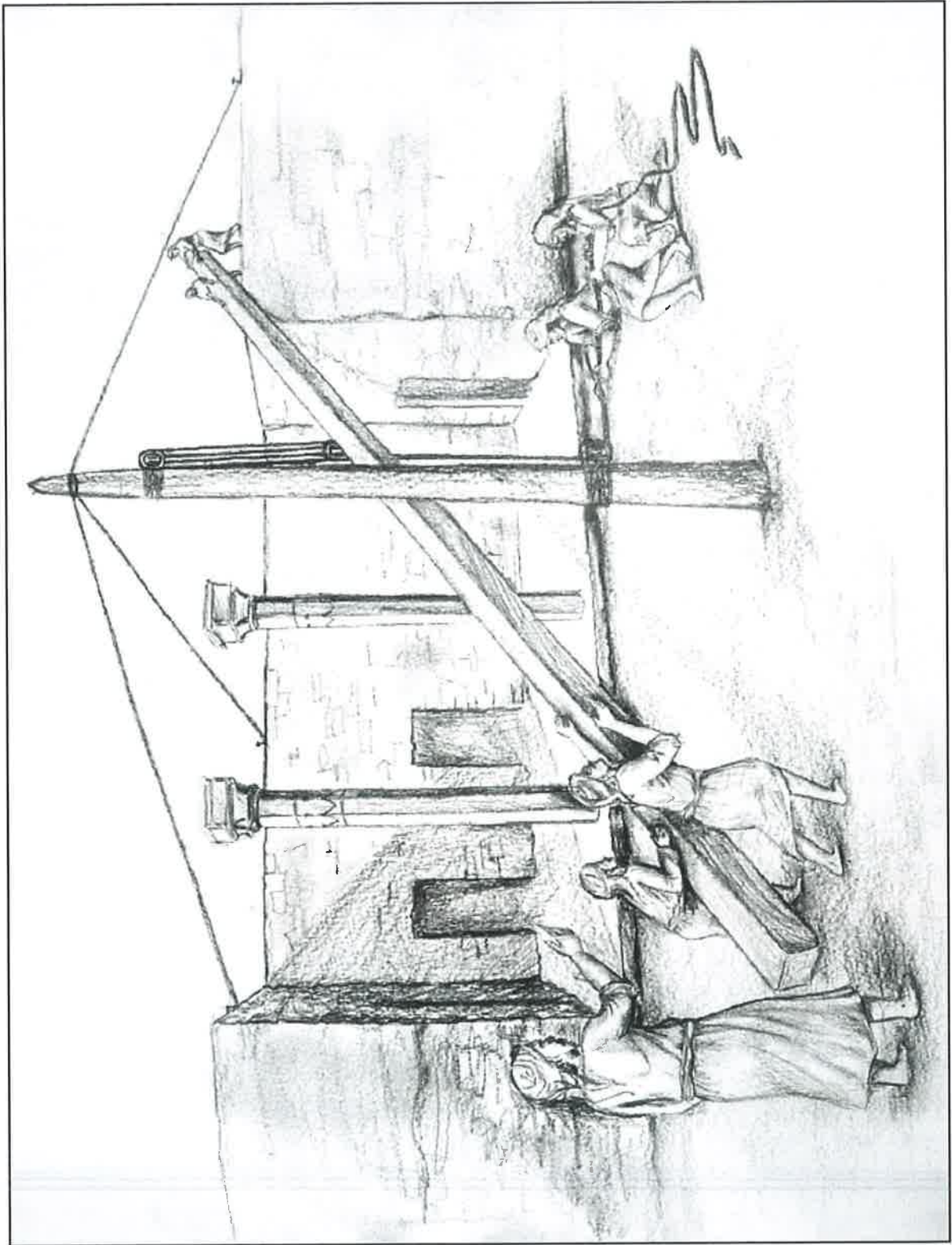
The old Kuwaiti house consisted of overlooking rooms and one *lewan* or hall or more. Many houses were usually attached with a *diwaniya*, separate from the main courtyard, in addition to the back yard for the sheep, containing a toilet and kitchen. Among the most significant requirements of the old house was the well and drain. Building the *lewan* was among the most difficult tasks in the construction of the building, as requiring lifting the heavy beams on the two walls upon which to be based. It also required a big number of workers to work under the supervision of a skilled *astad* specialized in this type of work. Such beam normally measured 10 to 15 meters or more, according to the length of *lewan*. It is a long, thick and heavy piece of timber also used in



The roof of an ancient mosque. Two *sowars* «beams» are seen while carrying *al chandal* upon which the roof is based.

*Source: Ancient Kuwait City, Kuwait Municipality - 1988.*

(1) *Ibid.*



Lifting «Al sowar» to the roof; a wooden thick suspension bridge on which the lewan or portico roof is based.

building the base of the ship (*al bais*) supporting the deck. Therefore, lifting it on top of the roof is burdensome requiring careful calculations. Therefore, a special method based on the pulley theory was used. The process started by fixing a big ship mast (*degal*) near the wall desired to install the beams on top. Then, the beams were tied with thick ropes and those ropes would pass through «*al qafiah*»<sup>(1)</sup> fixed on top of «*degal*». Three «*qafiahs*» were used in the process of lifting to facilitate the pulling of the beams with ropes on top of the roof. One of the edges of the beam was lifted on top of the roof, and once fixed, «*al degal*» was moved to the other edge of the roof where the second edge of the beam was to be placed. When the two edges of the beam were placed on top of the roof, the upper part of the «*monda*», known as «*chiblah*»<sup>(2)</sup> should be fixed to fill the gap between *al monda* and the beam. Usually the monads were fixed in the *lewan* or portico before lifting the beams «*al sowar*» to the roof, and the distance between each «*monda*» and the other was 3 to 4 meters. Usually, «*al chiblah*» was decorated and beautiful engravings, carried out by *galaleef*.

As for «*al jeleeb*» or the well, there were persons specialized in digging and building wells. However, *al astads* used to dig and build wells for the houses. The depth of the well's water was different and it was normally between three to eight meters or more, according to the area. For example, the depth of the water well in some areas in «*Sharq*» was approximately two and half meters, while in *Derwazat Al Abdul Razzaq* was between 3 to 4 meters. As in *Qibla* area, the well depth might reach 7-8 meters, especially in the high areas, such as «*Fereej Sa'ud*»<sup>(3)</sup>.

## Types Of Soil In Kuwait

Soil in Kuwait is divided up into four main types:

- 1. Mud:** This is of two types: «*al torbi*» mud, used for building and «*brick*» adobe making; and «*al salbi*» mud, used for placing on top of the roofs. *Dasman* and *Da'aiya* areas were famous for the availability of «*al salbi*» mud, while the southern area of the city was famous for «*al torbi*» mud.
- 2. Al Gach:** This is highly saline white mud, abundant in most Kuwait areas at different depths ranging between a half meter to more than three meters.

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(1) *Al qafiah* is a big wooden pulley known as «*mahhala*» fixed on top of «*degal*» or *doqol*, which is the ship mast. It is used to pull the beam to the top of the pole.

(2) *Chiblah* is a big wooden square base placed between the «*monda*» and «*al sowar*» (beam) to provide the necessary support to the beam which consists of a big wooden arch on which the *lewan* roof is based.

(3) An interview with the late *Mutraf Mohammed Al Munayes*.

This mud is used in making gypsum at areas known as «al majassat», which were in the past inside the City Wall, but were moved afterwards, outside the City.

3. **Al Hos-hos:** This is a type of white mud used for backfilling and leveling the floorings of roads and markets, and placed under the walls during the rainfalls to protect them from collapsing. That type of mud was abundant in Safat and a number of other areas. There were two big reservoirs in Safat near the current Municipality building used to receive rainwater. Owners or drivers of donkeys used to take «al hos-hos» from such areas and transport it on donkeys backs to the city to sell it to people, who used it to backfill lanes and roads and put it next to wall bottoms to protect them from rainwater. Owners of shops used to spread it in front of their shops to prevent the formation of wet mud or small water pools which were usually formed after the rainfall in low and dug up areas, causing the creation of some problems and accumulation of dirt.
4. **Sand:** Sand covers the majority of Kuwait's desert and is also available on the sea coasts. Its use increased in construction, following the use of cement at the beginning of the last century.
5. **Gravel:** There are huge quantities of gravel spread on top of the land surface in Kuwait's desert, as well as below the ground layers in «darakeel», quarries. Gravel was not of any significance in construction in the past. However, it became a main part of the construction materials after the use of cement largely started by the fifties of the last century (1950s).

### **Well Diggers (Digging Up Wells)**

The well (al jeleeb) is considered among the most significant necessities of the old Kuwaiti house due to using its water for bathing and washing utensils. The majority of waterwells inside the city were of high salinity and used to be known as «*al kharij water*», (i.e. Gulf water), except very limited areas with low salinity waters used for farming. Water came out at a depth ranging between three to ten ba'as according to the area. The majority of Sharq area was famous for the closeness of its water at the land surface, while Murgab area and a number of areas in Qibla are famous for the depth of its water. Some persons were specialized in digging up wells, while a number of them were famous in precisely and rapidly carrying out work. Usually, two persons dug up the well, one of them to dig and the other to extract mud from the well through a drum fixed with a rope, carrying it away from the hole. Many well diggers were blind. The well was dug up by using «*al heeb*» and «*al sakheen*», until its

depth reaches almost one and a half meter below water level. Then, the water would be cleaned and al astad would start building around it a wall of rocks of approximately one-meter diameter. The process of building the wall is known as «*al tawy*» and this is a careful and exhausting task, as the space for the astad's movement is very limited, in addition to the irregularity of rocks used in the building. The well wall was used to be built in sandy areas- especially in Sharq area - so that the walls would not collapse and cause concealment or backfilling of the well. In Qibla area, the majority of wells were without walls due to its strong soil.

The process of digging the well and building its wall took around three to ten days, according to the type of soil. A number of well diggers were famous for digging up the well in one or two days. Well walls were built with big-sized sea rocks, connected together starting from the well base to the top. Cement was not used, rather rocks were placed on top of each other in the same manner of building the cement brick, i.e. the rock was placed on the two rocks in the row below it, so it was based on them, and so on. This method is called «*mokhowlafa*». Also, a «neck» was to be built for the well, being a wall above the ground surface with approximately one meter or more. The diameter of the well is approximately one meter, after building the wall using rocks of about 25 cm thickness .

The types of soil differ from one area to the other, which reflects the ease or difficulty of digging the well and building its wall. If the land was solid, it was difficult to dig and required greater effort and longer time, but it was easier to build its wall. But if the land was sandy, the sand and mud would continue falling from each side while digging the well, which might lead sometimes to backfilling a big part of the well after reaching the well bottom and coming out of the water. This requires starting work again. The accumulation or collection of water at the bottom of the well in the sandy soil was fast, which affected the process of building the wall which required the place to be dry to a certain extent. That forced al astad and his workers to extract big quantities of water from the well as soon as possible in order to be able to build the foundation<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the most famous well diggers at the beginning of the last century in the city was a blind person known as Dhabeeb Al A'zmi. However, he was famous for digging up the well within only one or two days. He used to complete the work in a perfect manner during such a short period, assisted by his brother. The

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(1) An interview with the late Mutref Mohammed Al Munayes.

wage for digging up the well was approximately one Rupee at the beginning of the last century, which gradually increased until it reached ten Rupees in the 1940s. The house owner used to receive the well after ensuring that the water level is reached, and then he would hand over the wage to the digger. The deeper the depth of the well is, the more the digging fee increases<sup>(1)</sup>.

Al astad or the well digger also used to build the drain, which did not differ to a great extent from the well in terms of digging and building, however, wider it was. As for building its walls, it resembled «*al tanoor*» (mud oven) in its shape. Al astad would start building its foundation, which was normally wide with a diameter of two meters or more. Al astad would start narrowing it down gradually while building the wall, until the building might reach the ground level, at which point, the diameter of its opening would be around half meter. This method of building gives strength to the drain wall and its upper part might look like the roof of a dome, where the rocks are based on each other, giving it additional strength and preventing it from falling down.

## **Manufacturing Building Materials**

### **Gypsum Manufacturing (Al Jus)**

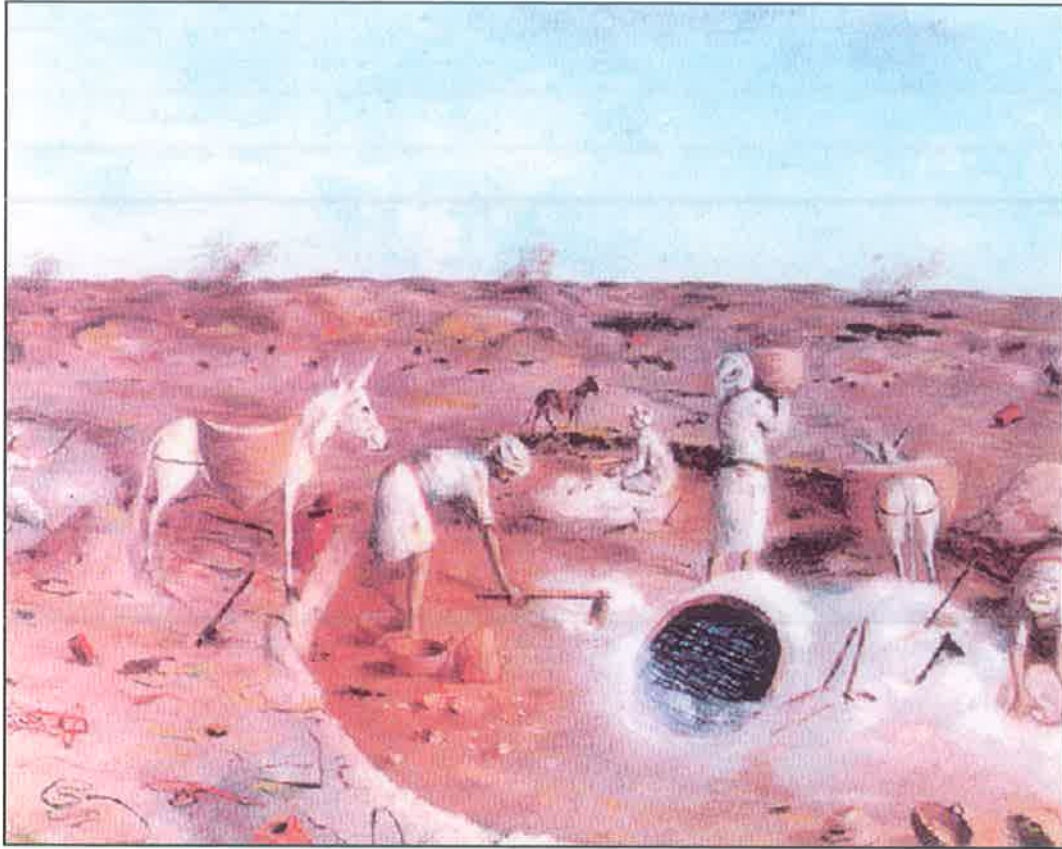
Gypsum or «jus» as locally called, is a basic material in the building operation. It is used basically for whitening walls. Gypsum is made of a white calcified soil known as (*gatch*) or kaj, found in most areas of Kuwait, at a depth of half meter or more, and is usually covered by a layer of «*al torbi*» mud. There were special locations for making gypsum at the beginning of the last century inside Kuwait City, known as «*majassat*» or «*mayassat*». Such areas extended from the southern part of Derwazat Al Abdul Razzaq to near Derwazat Al Maqsab, passing by Murgab and Ramadan (opposite Naif Palace), and reaching the location of Derwazat Al Shamiya and Jahra. Majassat were transformed from that area to other uninhabited areas during the reign of Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah, when Naif Palace was built and burning gypsum process in Ramadan area, opposite to it, was prohibited. After building the City Wall, majassat were moved outside the City. Hence, majassat of Sharq area were moved behind Derwazat Al Bura'isi (Al Sha'ab), and the majassat of Qibla area were at the west of that site<sup>(2)</sup>.

Gypsum was manufactured by persons specialized in that trade, known as «*al jussaseen*», whom the government allocated pieces of land in those areas.

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(1) An interview with the late Hajji Ismail Ali Jamal.

(2) An interview with Hajji Mousa Abdul Hussein Al Naqqi.



Al Majas: A drawing by artist Badr Al Qatami

*Source: Poems on Ancient Trades, Poet Badr Mohammed Saleh Mohammed Al Turkait.*

Gypsum makers would identify a square piece of land in al mujas area, with a side length ranging between 25 to 30 meters, and dug up to the depth of almost a half meter to remove the mud, until «al gatch» or kaj layer might appear. When the mud was carried from the hole and al gatch appeared, plant stems and palm tree leaves were spread above it in equal rows, then dried hay or chaff and «al qasia'a»<sup>(1)</sup> brought from the sea coasts spread over, in addition to wood wastes and different wastes brought on the backs of donkeys from the City. Al jus started to burn such wastes after spreading them, so they will remain burning for a period of time which might last for two or three days, during which smoke and fire burning such materials were ablaze, before they are extinguished, leaving behind piles of ashes. When it was confirmed that the fire was out, workers went to the hole to remove the ash, and al gatch changed into gypsum. Workers start hitting gypsum with big wooden pieces to break it into smaller pieces, until it is transformed into dust. The wood used

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(1) Sea plant which grows in the sea near the coast, consisting of leaves and small hollow brown «balls».



for hitting was called «*mufadha*». Its length is almost one meter, and width about 30 cm<sup>(1)</sup>. Then, they start to filter the gypsum in big sieves, to separate the gravel and sand from the gypsum and remove any strange or irrelevant objects and rocks. After that, it is packed in drums to be transferred to «*al weger*» or «*wejer*». Normally, gypsum is transferred in «*weger*» or «*wejar*» on donkeys backs. «*Al weger*» is a large sack made of sheep hair, filled with gypsum and be taken to the required places. The gypsum layer resulting from the burning process is approximately two to three feet deep, and known as «*baten*». After transporting gypsum, the burning process is repeated twice or thrice (two *baten* or three) in the same location, until the depth of the hole is approximately one and a half meter, because it will be more difficult to transport gypsum from there. Hence, working in the hollow pit should be stopped, and be moved to another location to dig another hole or cavity, and so on<sup>(2)</sup>.

The process of making gypsum and transforming it into powder is difficult and physically exhausting. This is in addition to the pollution of the air with dust and smoke, causing many diseases to the workers. There are different types of gypsum, including shinning white used for plastering, and the reddish, which is placed between the layers of rocks or bricks in building the walls, or to level the flooring of rooms. Al jus or al majus owner has several donkeys to move gypsum to the required locations and one of his workers usually accompanies five to six the donkeys loaded with gypsum, to the required location. As for the process of selling gypsum, it is carried out directly between al jussas and the owner of the house, whereby the two would agree on the price and quantity identified by the *astad*. Gypsum selling unit was known as «*kara*» which equals 20 *weger*, and one *weger* is five drums, which consists of one journey per donkey<sup>(3)</sup>.

Al- *astad* would receive the gypsum cargo at the location, after checking its quality, as some gypsum could be «*dead*» and unfit for use. This depends on the quality of the mud used in making it, as well as the period of burning thereof. Therefore, al *astad* would take a sample from the «*wejer*» prior to unloading it at the location and mixing it with water, as well as making a paste and turning it into a big dough. He would leave it for almost five minutes, and then started to break it. If it is fragmented, it means it is «*dead*» and not fit for use. But if remains cohesive, it means it is good and he requests the donkey driver to unload it at the location.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Rashed Al Shamali.

(2) An interview with Mr. Hajji Ibrahim Al Shamali.

(3) An interview with Mr. Rashed Abdulla Al Shamali.

## **Al Matayen (Mud Locations)**

«*Al Matayen*» are locations for extracting and digging out «red mud» used in building and construction, and the singular is «*matyanah*». The majority of matayen sites were located within the City Wall, where plots of land were allocated for persons working in that field, where they provided construction sites with their needs of mud. Among the areas which included a number of matayen in Sharq area was the area extending from Dasman to Derwazat Al Bora'aisi (Derwazat Al Sha'ab now), including «Bab Al Hawa» area near the Christians' graveyard, as well as «Al Shawafat» area east of Derwazat Al Abdulrazzaq and other areas in Magwa'a near the old Sharqiya Cinema. There were several «matayen» in Qibla and in Salhiya and in other areas now located near Fahad Al Salem Street. Mud was found above the ground surface and might extend deeply two meters or more. Work at «al matayen» is divided up into two phases: «cutting» mud and moving it to the building location, and making mud bricks called «*laben*» or adobe. A number of workers would dig the ground, transport mud from there and load it on donkeys' backs to be delivered to the construction locations. Work was distributed among the workers, and each one or two of them would cut the soil layers by «al heeb» while other two workers would load the mud in drums by «al sakheen», and another would unload it into the «wejer».

## **Al Mulaben (Brick Manufacturer)**

«Al Laben» or adobe are the bricks made from the mud, through wooden moulds. The person manufacturing mud bricks is known as «*al melabben*» and also «*al khashti*». The mud brick manufacturer makes bricks at the building location, while others manufacture it at the sites where it is extracted. A number of those working in the building materials or donkey transporters used to buy lands containing «al torbi» mud for mud brick making, and hire a number of workers to dig them and extract the mud, either for selling as it is and carrying it on donkeys to the building locations, or for manufacturing mud bricks (al laben) at the location, then sell them.

The process of making mud bricks starts by extracting and digging out mud from the land and forming it in the shape of a round pool, then fill it with water extracted from the well dug up in the same location. It is left to be fermented for a period which may approximately last for twelve hours, after which the making of the mud bricks starts. The fermentation process gives strength to the mud bricks. The pool is filled with water in the evening,

in preparation of starting the mud brick making in the next morning, using wooden moulds.

There are two types of wooden moulds, one consisting of one «khana» «mould» or «house» for making one brick, and the other has two moulds for making two bricks at the same time. The length of the «brick» is approximately 30 centimeters, its width 20 centimeters and its height 15 centimeters. It has a pointed back or «sanam» formed manually after filling the mould with mud. The height of the mould is only 5 centimeters. However, the height of the mud brick is more than this as the brick maker forms its «back» or upper surface by hand in order to be pointed to give more adhesion and strength between one brick and the other during the building process. This type of mud brick is known as ripped, i.e. has rips, so that when the mud is placed on it during construction, it will adhere with more strength. The mud maker used to take a wage of two Rupees and a half to three Rupees against the manufacturing of 1000 bricks during the 1940s. The brick maker and his assistant could make around 1000 bricks per day<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Cutting and Transporting Rocks from the Sea Coast<sup>(2)</sup>**

Rocks were considered among the expensive materials used by the wealthy people for building their houses. Rocks were brought from the coastal areas located west of the City, including O'shairej, Shuwaikh and Watiya, in addition to Bnied Al Gar area in Sharq. Workers go there by jalbuts or tashasheel to bring different types of rocks, including thick, thin, solid and fragile rocks.

Rocks were unloaded at the niq'a to sell to the buildings' owners, carried on donkeys backs after placing them into special containers in the shape of crates made of wood called «*al mangal*». A number of specialized persons in the niq'a would evaluate the price of rocks, and the value of each shipment ranged between 10 to 15 Rupees in the 1930s. The price of the shipment increased by the end of the 1940s to approximately 50 Rupees. The wage for delivery of one way to the location was approximately 5 Rupees. Rocks were normally carried from the niq'a to the building location during the ebb period, when the transport workers came with their donkeys for loading after being stacked in «*al mangals*» in a special manner.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulatif Abbas Al Hamar.

(2) See chapter one - part 2, for details.



Donkeys were used for carrying rocks from the niq'a to the building locations. Rocks were brought from O'shairej through «tashasheel» which unloaded them at the niq'a in the form of piles.

## **Carpentry and Smithery Sector**

### **Al Sharrah (Sawyer)**

-*Al Sharrah* is the carpenter specialized in cutting big pieces of wood or branches into sheets and boards of different thickness as required, to use in the production of different wooden products, starting from ships to doors, windows and house furniture. Al «sharrahs» used in their work big saws of length of up to two meters each, with one handle or knob at one of its edges and two handles at the other edge. A big scaffold consisting of thick wood would be installed to place the big square wood required to be cut on top of it, known as «al bidan». The length of «al bidan» ranged from 10 to 15 meters and its types differed according to the product required, including «al jangali» and teakwood used to produce ships and doors, in addition to other types, less solid. The carpenter would sit on «al bidan» required to be cut and fixed on top of the scaffold, while holding the saw in his hands. Opposite him below would be another carpenter or assistant standing on the ground and holding with hands the other edge of the saw. This edge of the saw has two handles. «Al Sharrah» standing on this side would hold each knob with one hand. If he wants to saw

«al bidan» into two halves, for example, a straight line would be drawn in the middle to be referred to by «al sharrah» while cutting. This line is drawn on «al bidan» through «shankar» which is a thread, pulled between the two edges of «al bidan» with two nails, after dipping this thread in red dye, then pulling it upward strongly and leaving it to collide with «al bidan» so the required line would be drawn for reference. This process would be repeated on the upper and lower sides of «al badan» with the same measurement, so that each line on the upper side of «al bidan» meets the other line from the other side, to assist «al sharrah» standing on the ground to guide the saw through «al bidan» in the same upper path. «Al sharrah» and his assistant would each pull the saw to his side back and forth until the cutting reaches the middle of the wood. Then, they would fix it opposite the first direction and resume cutting it until being slid into two. But, if «al bidan» was required to be cut into several slides, a number of straight lines would be imprinted on it according to the required thickness. Again, the same previous method would be followed for cutting the first part into several segments. Then, «al bidan» would be rotated to the opposite



A squared-block of wood on which lines are imprinted in preparation of sawing by «al sharrah».

*Source: Kuwait National Museum.*

direction to complete cutting the second part.

The distance between the path of one thread and the other represents the required thickness per each board, as «al bidan» is cut into several segments (boards). The majority of «al sharrahs» took the seacoast as their working places due to close proximity to the shops where big timbers were sold, as it was difficult to carry them to remote locations. «Al Sharrah» would provide shade through an arbor which he would build at the work location to protect him from the sun heat. Also, a number of «sharrahs» practiced their work at the locations near the workshops and carpentries such as Derwazat Al Abdulrazzaq. Al Sharrah used to receive his wage against cutting per linear meter of «al bidan» or the number of boards he cuts from «al bidan»<sup>(1)</sup>.



Al Sharrah while sawing the big square wood (al bidan)

*Source: Our Handicraft Heritage - Kuwaiti Traditional Crafts Exhibition, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters-1997.*

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(1) An interview with Mr. Eqab Mohammed Al Khateeb.

## The Carpenter

The main work of carpenters in the past consisted of manufacturing big external doors for the houses, which were of several types, including a door with one «saffaqa», door with two «saffaqa», «bu khokhah» door, toilet door<sup>(1)</sup>, room doors, windows, big chairs used at the coffee shops, as well as chairs used for placing water cask or jar, «burma» and «gherash» on top of them, in addition to the closets (cupboards), simple beds, traps for catching mice, qobqabs or slippers, «al daraaj», «al karoka»<sup>(2)</sup> and other household needs.

The carpenter is different from «al gallaf», the shipwright, who works in building ships and more precise products. The carpenter was usually apprenticed to father and ancestor, as is the case for other crafts which were widespread in Kuwait. The carpenter's tools basically consisted of the saw, hammer, al jadum (adze), al randa, al chillabtain, foil, al barina (bow-drill), screwdriver, and the chisel used in engraving and decorating woods, al sakaniyah- the clamp used to hold the piece of wood while sawing to prevent it from moving. The carpenter buys big pieces of teakwood, of length amounting between 10 to 15 meters, called «bu haz,» from the shops spreading along the coast. He takes them to «al sharrah» to cut them as required, then he starts his work in designing, cutting and transforming them into the required product. They used to buy other types of wood, including red wood known as «al fini»; white wood known as «o'looch» or (o'look) the plural of elk from different sources including the merchants who imported different commodities and products such as cars and textiles, used to be packed in large wooden boxes of different sizes. The merchants used to dismantle and cut the boxes to sell as required<sup>(3)</sup>.



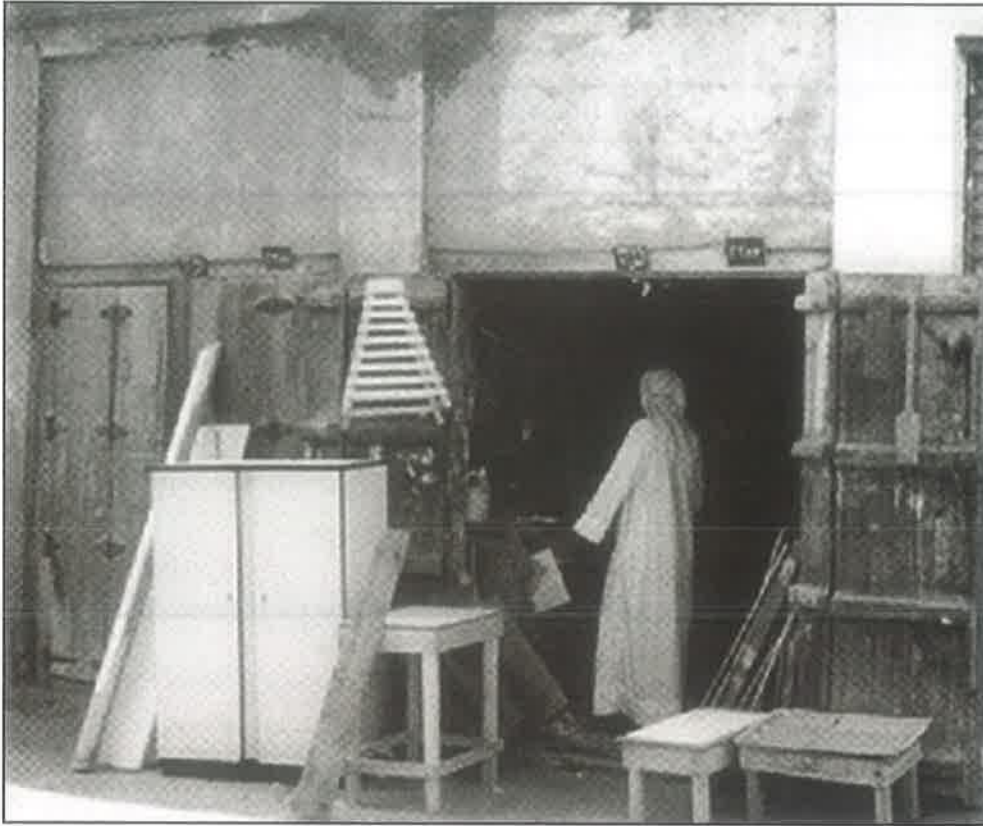
Al Sharrah saw

Source: *Folklore Heritage*, October 1986- Published by GCC Folklore Heritage Center.

(1) «Saffaqa» door means a door with one plank, and two saffaqa are two planks, «bu khokha» door (wicket) is a small door fixed in the middle of the big external door, used for regular entry and exit from and to the house, while the big door is only opened for big loads or weights by carriers and animals, including big sacks containing supply materials, «al arfaj» carriages carried by camels and water-skins carried by donkeys inside the houses. As for what was called the toilet door, it is a medium-sized door with decorations and iron rods in its upper part, and was increasingly used since the beginning of the 1940s approximately.

(2) «Al daraaj» is a small-sized carriage with three or four wooden wheels used by the small child at the beginning of walking, while holding it to train on walking. As for «al karoka» it is a wooden bed for children, hung to a small wooden arch, and the bed is based on two columns of wood. The mother would shake «al karoka» to keep the child silent when he cries.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ali Mousa Hussein Al A'ttar.



A carpenter in his carpentry, with a number of products next to him such as small beds, al burmah chair, cupboard and incense burner.

*Source: Ancient Things, Khalil Ibrahim Al Sheno, Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est. - Manama - Bahrain.*

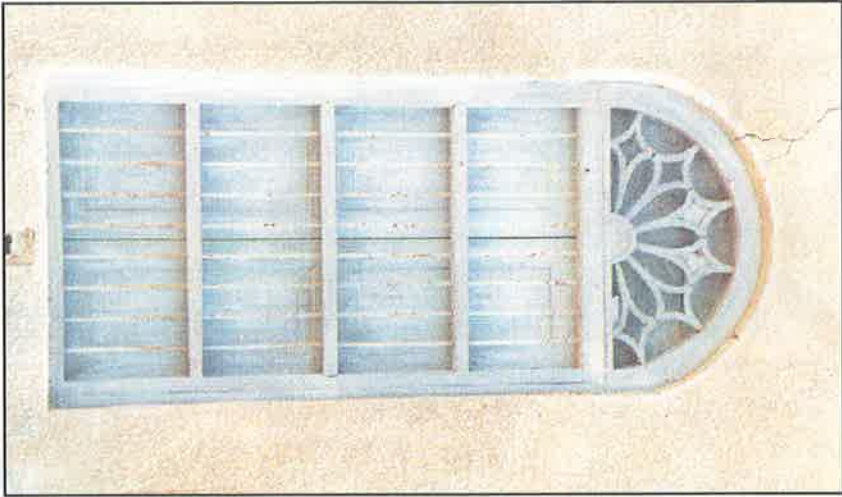
Among the materials used by the carpenter in making doors and windows- in addition to wood- were «al battat» or hinges<sup>(1)</sup> and protruded nails used in making big external doors for houses, in addition to rods used for windows placed for rooms inside the house. The carpenter purchased such materials from the blacksmiths. As for the small and medium - size nails used in fixing the pieces of wood together, they were brought from India. That type of nails is called «*walayati*». Blacksmiths in Kuwait did not manufacture such type of nails due to its small size and the need for moulds for making them. Besides the necessity of producing enormous quantities which exceeded the need of Kuwait at that time.

Carpentry craft was not easier than other occupations in the past. The carpenter had to exert exhausting muscular effort to complete his work, as he relied on his physical strength in using the tools. Most of the wood used for making doors was

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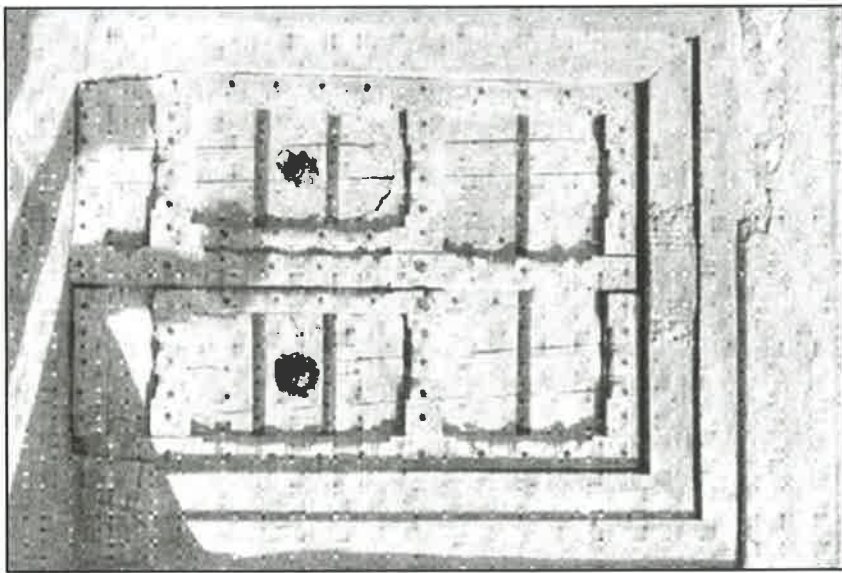
(1) Al Battat is the plural of bata, which is an iron joint used for doors.





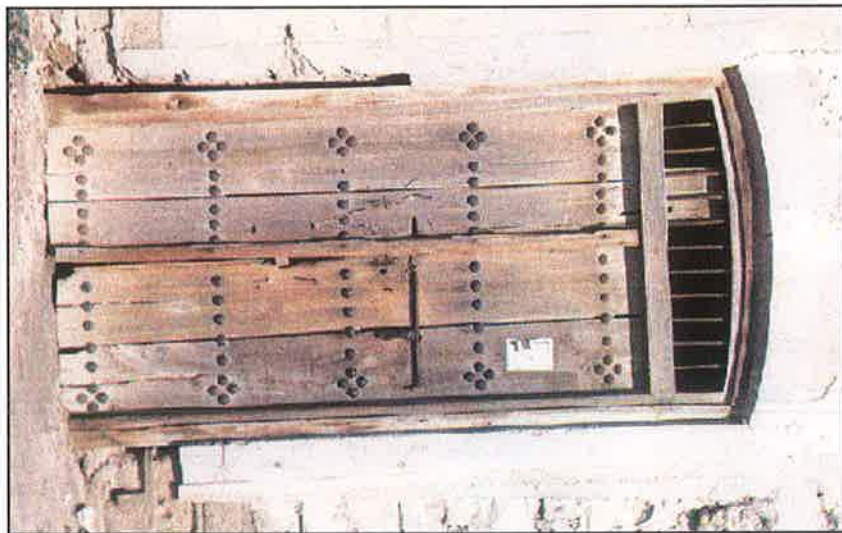
Old Window

Source: *Ancient Kuwait City, Kuwait Municipality, 1988*



Decorated Bu Khokhah door (wicket)

Source: *The Arab of the Desert, H.R.P. Dickson 1972 (first published in 1942).*



External old door with two «saffaqa» decorated with protruded nails.

Source: *Ancient Kuwait City, Kuwait Municipality, 1988*

of «*al janqali*» or teakwood which is solid and requires strong effort to saw. One «*muraba'a*» - a long piece of wood- was cut into four pieces. In addition to their solidness, those pieces of wood had «*ma'areedh*» or veins, which increased difficulty upon sawing them by hand saw. The process of drilling the window «*charchoob*»<sup>(1)</sup> (window frame) to insert the iron rods was very exhausting as well. There was an iron tool called «*al barina*» or bow-drill with which *al charchoob* was drilled manually to insert the iron rods. Between 15 to 20 holes were drilled for each window. That required great muscular effort to press strongly on «*al braina*» while rotating it by hand inside the wood, resulted in severe pains in the shoulder<sup>(2)</sup>. To present an idea on manufacturing the external door of the house, for example, it consisted of many parts and pieces which required long and exhausting manual work to complete manufacturing the door. Such manufacturing started with fixing *al charchoob*- which consisted of four big sides- then starting preparing and fixing other parts of the door, which basically consisted of the *shalameen* and boards. *Shalameen* are rectangular thick pieces of wood placed horizontally to fix the door boards on them vertically through big protruded nails. The *shalameen* were placed in the rear side of the door and punctured, as well as puncturing the boards with the drill to make holes suitable to the thickness of the nails, the length of which might reach 25 centimeters. The nail was inserted in the hole of the board and hit by the hammer until coming out from the other side of the *shalman* where being folded. The process continued until all boards were fixed to the *shalameen* to complete the manufacturing of the door in preparation of fixing it in its place, after making its supplementary parts<sup>(3)</sup>, such as *al battat*, *al khashm*, *al khoukhah* and *al mizlag*<sup>(4)</sup>. The manufacturing of window was also no less exhausting than making the door, as the window contained a number of iron «rods» which required making a big number of holes in the upper and lower frame of the window, as well as its middle wood, which strengthened it, and supported its small doors upon which they were based. The window normally had four doors with very delicate design and beautiful decorations which required carefulness and precision in work. More than one person worked in manufacturing doors and windows, each one of them specialized in a certain work. For example, one would work in cutting and designing wood, another in polishing it, a third in making holes with the drill, a fourth in decoration and a fifth in making frames and so on<sup>(5)</sup>.

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(1) *Charchoob* is the frame of the door or window fixed to the wall.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ali Mousa Hussein Al A'ttar.

(4) *Al khashm*: a rectangular piece fixed in one of the edges of the door shutter from the central side, to prevent the other shutter from exceeding the first shutter upon closing the door. Normally, *al khashm* is decorated with beautiful decorations. *Al mizlag* is a wooden piece for closing the door from inside.

(5) An interview with Mr. Ali Mousa Hussein Al A'ttar.

## Manufacturing Vehicles' Wooden Frames (Bodies)

Carpentry works in Kuwait started to increase and develop by the end of the 1930s, after using vehicles for transporting commodities to Saudi Arabia. A number of carpenters became specialized in making «bodies»<sup>(1)</sup> for big transport vehicles (lorries). Pieces of woods were designed and manufactured in Kuwait, and fastened on the lorries after blacksmiths fixed an iron frame on the vehicle, in order to fix the wooden boards on them using nails. Thus, it would be in the shape of a large box or crate. A number of carpentries were specialized in that work, as they used to saw long «muraba'a» wood according to the required design, and tie them together with nails to form «the body». The height of the body perimeter might reach up to two meters on the vehicle's sides. Two doors were made in the rear part of the body. A number of carpentries, including Al Shayji, Mohammed Al Saqo'bi, Abdulla Al Hirz and Saleh Al Fahed carpentries were famous for making vehicle bodies at the end of the 1930s and 1940s. Al Khalaf sons, and Al O'baid and Sharrah were also famous during that period. Those carpentries expanded and hired many technicians and workers to meet the increase in demand. At that time, the worker used to receive a daily wage of half Rupee paid by the carpentry owner on every Friday evening. The worker used to have breakfast and lunch on account of the business owner, as he used to come to work before dawn and to leave at sunset. A number of modern carpentries were also opened by the mid forties, for which a number of foreign technicians were brought to work. Saudi Arabia was active in importing big quantities of wood and doors manufactured in Kuwait in the mid 1940s. They were transported by lorries, in order to be installed in cities' gates and royal palaces, due to their quality and remarkable standard.

Thus, many carpenters were encouraged to use more advanced and precise tools in their craft, in order to meet the increasing demand for such products. A number of carpentries were also displaying ready-made doors made by them, at a number of shops in the Doors (Biban) Market near Al Silah Market<sup>(2)</sup>.

### Crate Maker

The crate maker (*al qaffas*) is the person who manufactures products from palm trees branches, such as the crates for birds, beds, «*al ammariyat*» and «*al rokook*», and so forth. Those crates were among the significant products used by Kuwaitis in their daily life, whether for household use or for commercial activities.

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(1)Body: a big wooden structure (crate) fixed on top of the chassis of big transport vehicles in order to place goods inside it.

(2) An interview with Mr. Eqab Mohammed Al Khateeb.

The crate maker used palm tree branches in his production, brought by «balam» boats or ablams from Iraq and Iran. The crate maker bought hundreds of bunches of palm tree branches or the entire cargo of the boat, which might range between 800 to 1000 bunches. The price per 1000 frond ranged between 10 to 15 Rupees. The crate maker would remove the fronds from the branch, and then cut its wide base (*korba*).

Then, the sticks (palm tree branches) would be stored for use in such works. The process of removing the fronds from the branch was the first step in the manufacturing process by the crate maker, who used a sharp tool similar to «al mahash»

and known as «akfa» to separate the fronds from the branches, and another tool like an axe to cut «al karab». The crate maker would dispose of «al karab» by selling it to owners of ovens, bakers or ordinary citizens for around 3-5 Rupees per 1000 piece, to be used by them as fuel.

As for the next step, it was soaking the branches in the seawater at the niq'a. With a number of his assistants, he would dig up a rectangular hole along the sea coast during the ebb period, at a depth of 40 to 50 cm approximately, and bury the branch bunches into them, and then returning after one week to take them to the work



A crate maker making a small bed of palm tree branches.

*Source: Bahrain National Museum.*

location, and place other bunches in the same place known as «*al manqa'a*».

Soaking the palm tree branches would make them soft and supple, easy to form, cut and perforate or puncture. The crate maker would only use the branches of «*al berhi*» palm trees in his production, due to their strength, thickness and ease of working with them. The soaked branch bunches would be stored in «*al bakhar*»- i.e. store- after transporting them on the back of donkeys there. They were covered with jute material or sackcloth to prevent them from drying. The moist branches are not left usually more than 3 to 4 days before using them, to avoid drying. Therefore, the crate maker may be



A baby bed (*manaz*) made of palm tree branches and prepared for sleeping.

*Source: Folklore Heritage, July 1987, Published by GCC Folklore Heritage Center- Doha- Qatar.*

forced to go to the niq'a twice a week to take out the moistened branches and place other quantities in their place<sup>(1)</sup>.

The crate maker would cut the palm branches according to the required lengths, and puncture them in the specified locations to interlace the branches together in order to form them in preparation of producing the required piece, whether be a crate, bed or other product. The crate maker would use special tools as an axe for cutting, «akfa» to cut the edges and small pieces, a wood hammer resembling



Bird and poultry crate was among the significant products for the crate maker.

*Source: Ancient Things, Khalil Ibrahim Al Shino, Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est. - Manama - Bahrain*

the hammer used for softening «harees» or wheat, and «mijwab»; a tool in the form of a thick hollow pen, sharp in the lower edge to puncture the branches. The branches would be punctured by placing the sharp edge of «al mijwab» on them and hitting it with the hammer, and then moving «al mijwab» to remove the remains of the branches from the hole, until its formation was complete. There are different sizes of «al migwab» according to the required range and breadth of the hole. The crate maker would place the branches on a piece of a tree trunk to use it as a support while making the hole. A certain thickness of the branch would be used for each product, due to its different uses, including light products such as bird crates, and other heavy products such as big «rokok», or big family beds for the use of two persons<sup>(2)</sup>.

The crate maker would make different sizes and shapes of each product. For example, al rokok had different sizes including the small for simple uses for packing grapes to carry them from «Fordha» to the market, and medium size known as «filaifi» used for packing water melons coming from Fintas, Abu Halifa and other villages to the City, and big size used for packing dates, which has the capacity for approximately 100 kilograms, and carried by porters from the Fordha to the Vegetable Market. Al Rak

(1) An interview with Mr. Hussein Jassim Al Rayash.

(2) Ibid.

is a pyramid-shaped with square base, and the side of its base is approximately 30 cm, while its height ranges between one meter to one meter and a half. The width of its opening ranges between one meter to one meter and a half. The manufacturing of «al rak» was more difficult than the other products, due to the necessity of strengthening the base with thick palm branches, and interlacing them in a special manner, and tying the four corners of al rak to the base and the remaining parts. The making of one big rak would take a full day. The crate maker and his assistants could manufacture seven small raks or more in one day. The small rak was sold for approximately five Rupees while the big rak was sold for fifteen Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>. The merchants who imported foodstuff by ablam from Iraq and Iran kept hundreds of raks to use them in transporting their products from «the Fordha» to the Vegetable Market. Each merchant would place a certain mark on his raks to identify them and avoid mixing or replacing them with the raks of other merchants. «Al Sayali» (liquid tar) was used to mark or imprint certain signs to identify them and help porters to know to which merchant they would belong. That helped porters to carry them to the designed location of their owner in the Fordha or to his shop. Rak may be used for two years or more if used properly and correctly and not exposed to breaking by throwing it on the ground while filled up with products. Merchants were the main clients for buying different types of raks from the crate makers.

As for beds made of palm tree branches, they were of different sizes and shapes, each of had its own use. There was the small «*manaz*» used for new born babies, and the big *manaz* for big baby of three months and above. As for the single and double bed, each one had its own specifications. The length of the single bed was two meters and was one and a quarter meter wide while double bed was two and a half meters and of the same length as the single bed. As for their heights, it ranged between 40 to 60 cm. The bed made of palm tree branches was characterized by strength, durability and tolerating heavy weights, as well as the long time if used properly. It was used for sleeping in the open air above the roofs, in the courtyards and lawaween. It was preferred not to use inside the rooms, so as to avoid damage as a result of humidity or infection by some insects such as bugs or «*al kitmil*» which could penetrate the palm tree branches with the passing of time. The palm tree bed was not affected by rain and cold, but affected by the sun. For extending its lifetime it required to be sprayed with water daily during summer, especially in the evening before sleeping. The prices of the beds differed according to the type of branches used, quality and durability. For example, the price of *manaz* for babies ranged between 3 to 7 Rupees according to size. The price per single bed was 10 Rupees, and double bed between

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hussein Jassim Al Rayash.

15 to 20 Rupees. A good bed may be used up to three years, if used properly and avoiding the scorching sun heat. The beds market usually flourished in the spring season, as people started to go out to sleep in the courtyards and above the roofs. This also coincided with the season of bringing palm tree leaves and branches from Basrah and Al Muhammarah. Tens of boats carrying branches and fronds, as well as other products, used to come to Kuwait to be sold at the Fordha for different uses. The poor and medium-income families were the main consumers of beds made of palm tree branches, due to their cheap prices, compared with wooden beds, for which the cheap types cost between 40 to 50 Rupees.

Among the main products manufactured by the crate maker was «*al ammariyat*» (huts) which consisted of two rectangular-shaped pieces used to shelter the sellers at the yards for selling different products. Many markets in Kuwait and their surrounding yards, as well as Safat, contained hundreds of ammariyas which sheltered sellers of different products who brought their commodities in the morning for selling and sought shelter in such ammariyas from the sun heat or rains. The length of one side of the ammariya amounted to around four meters and its width two meters, while its height at standing position is around three meters, and sold by the crate maker for ten Rupees. The seller would cover the ammariya with canvas, straw mats or «*bariyah*». By the end of the 1940s, it was covered by tarpaulin to protect it from sun and rain. The sellers existing in the courtyards and open areas, such as Safat, were the main clients for buying such ammariyas.

As for bird crates, they were also characterized by their different sizes and shapes. There were small, big, square, round, camel type (pyramid), cylindrical and other shapes. Each type of birds had a certain crate suitable with its size and living conditions. For example, the small square-shaped crate was for nightingales, bulbuls or the humming birds, in which one bird would be kept alone to sing. The length of one side of this crate ranged between 25 cm to 50 cm. It was known for such humming birds that they stop singing if they might live together. The big crates included a crate called «*al karimi*» used for «*yakarim*» birds. The length of one side of this crate was one meter, being square-shaped with height of one meter and a half. Two small boxes (or rooms) are fixed on the upper part of such crate for hatching and its size was enough for four «*yakarim*» birds. Also, there were crates of big size for keeping pigeons and chickens when carried to the market for selling. The prices of crates ranged between one Rupee to two or three Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>.

Winter was a period of stagnation for the crate maker, as the people had no

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hussein Jassim Al Rayash.



need for such types of beds, and for the few number of birds, in addition to the few quantities of fruits coming from Iraq and Iran, which were packed in raks. Therefore, the crate maker would barely sell one or two pieces per day during such period. Spring witnessed the contrary, as the demand for all types of products prospered and people go to the crate makers to buy their different needs.

The late A'wad Al Qaffas and his father, Hajji Mohammed, were among the most famous crate makers in Kuwait. Their work location was in a barn located near Al Bahar mosque at the outskirt of the Vegetable Market overlooking «barahat bin Bahar». Hussein Jassim Al Rayash, Yusuf Al Foudari and others exercised that craft as well.

### **The Blacksmith**

Blacksmithery is considered among the most important ancient crafts in Kuwait, due to the need of people for products made of iron in many aspects and uses inside houses and shops and different crafts. There was a special market for blacksmiths, which was one of the most ancient markets in Kuwait. It consisted of several alleys, which comprised more than forty shops in which different iron products were manufactured, especially big nails which were used for ship building. Normally, not less than three persons worked in the blacksmithery shop, including al astad, al darrab and al naffakh. Al astad supervised his workers, and participated with them. The re-sponsibility of al darrab is summarized in hitting the iron pieces after removing



A Blacksmith using anvil

*Source: Bu Shahri Studio.*

them from the oven (koor) in order to shape them as required, while al naffakh (blow man) would operate his blower to guide compressed air towards the oven to increase its blaze, guiding its fire towards the iron piece. Al darrab was usually strongly-built while the blower was operated by young boys who were starting their career in such craft.

The naffakh or the blow man received a daily wage of two paisas while al darrab received two Annas. The blacksmith's income amounted to one Rupee per day. Al astad and al darrab stood opposite to each other in a hole of a depth of up to the knee level, and in front of them is a support table (sindanah) on which the piece of iron required to be made is placed in order to hammer, after removing it from the oven while being excessively hot. Al darrab and astad would hammer the iron piece placed on sindanah, hammer in turn with the other hand. The blacksmith depended on his experience which he gained from his father and ancestors, in addition to the strength of his muscles and tolerance of the hardship of work which required exposure to the burning fire throughout the working period, and using the hammer- which is one of the most important tools used in his work- in a skillful and controlled manner<sup>(1)</sup>.

The blacksmith's tools consisted basically of hammers of different sizes, as well as clamps which are also of different types, and used to hold the iron pieces while hitting them to form the required shape. This is in addition to the chisel, sindanah, «*al mafras*» and «*al mehwash*» used to turn coal to aerate, the cutter used to cut iron, the file, pen and «*al sumbah*» used to puncture the iron piece upon hitting it with the hammer. The majority of those tools were made of stainless steel. The blacksmith also used in his work a number of moulds known as «*qobba*»; the mould used for making the heads of nails used in making house doors, and known as «protruded nail». Also the blacksmith used «*al koor*» which was indispensable to him; an oven of rectangular shape, with length of around 30 cm and width of 20 cm. Its depth was between 80 cm to one meter. Burning coal was used in the oven and the compressed air guided towards it through the manual blower<sup>(2)</sup>. The blower was made of the skin of sheep and resembled the sack, with two wooden knobs extended outside to help air enter inside the blower when the naffakh moved the knobs up and down. When they are pressed to return them to their normal position, the air was forced outside strongly towards the oven (koor) through the blower opening. The piece of iron required to be forged is placed in the oven, and the fires are guided towards it until being soft to enable the blacksmith to forge it and make the required piece.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ali Al Haddad.

(2) Ibid.

Afterwards, it was placed on sindanah, for hammering and forging or molding as required.

The blacksmith produced many products used in different aspects of life. The most important users of blacksmith products were craftsmen and those working in different trades, such as galaleef, carpenters, safafeer (coppersmith), butchers, masons, ship owners, fish and vegetable sellers, as well as others.



An anvil (Sindanah) on its wood base

*Source: Kuwait National Museum.*

The blacksmith produced for them the tools they worked with. For example, the blacksmith would make al gallaf's tools including al jadum, hammer, mejdah and manger, in addition to «al bawara» and different sizes of nails used in ship making, of lengths ranging between 20 cm to one meter. There were «bu fiter», bu sheber», al maghlatani» and «al chawya»<sup>(1)</sup>. The sizes of «al bawara» differed also according to the size of the ship. The big travel boat required a «bawara» suitable to its size, while «qata'a» boum, diving and fishing boats required smaller sizes of «al bawara». The blacksmith manufactured al saffar's (coppersmith) tool, including the hammer, sindanah, chisel, as well as the construction tools, consisting of heeb, al jadum, hammers and axes, in addition to the requirements of the carpenters and materials they used in their work, as «al battat», chalaleeb and protruded door nails used frequently in the past. There were also other products which the blacksmith manufactured, such as chains, rings, rods, clutches, coffee mehmas (the handle used to move the coffee beans during roasting process) and «al molmus»<sup>(2)</sup>. The blacksmith also made the weighing tools used in commercial shops. The Municipality used to provide the blacksmith with a special stamp to be stamped on the weighing

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(1) «Al fiter» and «al sheber» were old manual measures used in the past. The first is the length of distance between the tip of the index to the tip of the thumb. The second is the distance between the tip of the thumb to the tip of the small finger. Al maghlatani is a medium-length nail, while al chawya is a very long nail of around 1 meter length. The blacksmith sold those nails by weight to al gallaf for using in ship building.

(2) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ali Al Haddad.

scales. The weighing scales included weights starting from 1/8 ounce to five ounces<sup>(1)</sup>. As for the heavy weights- one maan (equals 168 pounds), half maan and hander (equals 112 pounds)- they were imported from India<sup>(2)</sup>. It is difficult to count the blacksmith's products, as they covered many of the requirements of the ancient society in different fields and aspects.

As for the raw materials used by the blacksmith, they are iron, coal and kerosene. Coal was carried in big «shelfan»<sup>(3)</sup> from India, Iran and Africa, and brought by boums or trading boats, while kerosene was brought in cans from A'badan by the doubas and boats. One sheleef (large sack of jute or canvas) of coal weighed one hander (around 50 kilograms) and was sold for one Rupee. The majority of iron reaching Kuwait for the use of blacksmiths at the beginning of the last century consisted of scrap parts of different sizes and shapes, brought by boats from an area known as «Silwig» in A'badan, where used iron was collected and sold. The word «silwig» is derived from the English word «salvage» which means «remains». Also, scrap iron was brought from broken ships and the doubas which were left on the beach of Bnied Al Gar area, where some persons used to go there to cut the iron and load it on the backs of donkeys to sell to blacksmiths in the market<sup>(4)</sup>. It was mentioned that such location included a number of wooden ships and doubas, abandoned by their owners after breaking down and being unserviceable. The blacksmith used to cut the iron masses and form them as required, using primitive and exhausting methods which basically depended on his physical strength, skill and patience, as oxygen was not used to melt iron at that time. Instead, the blacksmith used the heat of the oven to soften or melt the iron, forming it into the required product by the heavy sledge (hammer) and «al mifras». Iron reached Kuwait as a raw material of different types and in commercial quantities from Europe after the end of World War II, when steamships brought it from such countries in different shapes, including different types of braided iron, rods, angles, sheets (plates) and beams. In the past, scrap iron constituted the main raw material used for production<sup>(5)</sup>.

Blacksmiths manufactured a number of products according to the request of their clients, while some of them produced brisk or best seller products during their free time in preparation for the season. Those products included the big

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hussein Ali Mousa Al Haddad.

(2) Maan is equivalent to 168 Pounds and hander equivalent to 112 Pound (around 50 kilograms).

(3) Shelfan is the plural of «sheleef» which is a sack of canvas.

(4) An interview with Mr. Abdulhameed Abbas Cheragh Al Haddad.

(5) Ibid.

nails used in manufacturing ships, which witnessed a large demand during the travel and diving seasons. The blacksmith worked almost all the year round, but work increased before and during the travel and diving seasons, as the boats required replacement of certain parts such as nails of different sizes, bawaras and other products. Therefore, work increased during autumn and spring which preceded the travel and diving seasons. As for winter, during the stagnation period, a number of «brokers» and shops selling nails ordered different types of nails at relatively low prices, in order to sell in the season to galaleef and ship owners.

The blacksmith used to go daily to his work immediately after dawn prayer, to benefit from the low temperature during his work. Two or three hours after sunshine the blacksmith would take his breakfast during the break time, before which he would complete a big part of the work. Then, he would resume work until noon prayer. Breakfast normally consisted of dates and bread. A number of blacksmiths stayed in their shops during the noon period which witnessed promotion of work during the season. They would return home before sunset, while others preferred to take a nap at home and then return after the afternoon prayer and continue work until after the night prayer.

The blacksmiths used to take comfort and enjoy singing in chorus some popular songs while working. Usually neighboring blacksmiths and their assistants practiced singing to entertain themselves in order to pass time and reduce the harshness of work. There were special songs for them, which blacksmith memorized and sang with tones suitable with the hammering on «sindannah». Al astad played a major role in organizing and dividing the hammering on «sindannah» while chanting with other astads in adjacent shops. Those hits were called «*tarni'a*», as al astad hits his hammer assisted by al darrab. Also, a number of neighboring astads used to exchange poetic verses, as one of them would sing a verse, while the other would reply with the completing verses, and so on<sup>(1)</sup>.

Many blacksmiths used to take their small sons with them to the shop, before reaching ten years in age, in order to apprentice them to such craft. The boy would start the training period with cleaning the place, removing the ashes from the oven, breaking down coal and preparing it for use. After a period, he would be transformed into a «blower», then he would start hitting iron to become «darrab» which was the rank preceding al astad, in which he would stay for several years. With the lapse of time, al darrab would gain experience gradually from al astad, relying on himself for forming the piece, as well as knowing the method of placing the iron on «sindannah»,

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(1) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ali Al Haddad.

as well as the level, strength and locations of hits in each stage of the work, until becoming a «master» astad in smithery. Astads differ in their skills, precision of the work, development and creativity in production quality according to the effort of each one of them. Therefore, a number of blacksmiths who were famous for the quality of their products and precision of their manufacturing were prominent. A number of products required great efforts to make, including protruded nails used for making decorated doors, in addition to clutches, al bawarat, and anchors, which depended on the precision of work, patience and exerting heavy efforts for completing the work<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the work carried out by the blacksmith from time to time was maintaining the oven. It was often cleaned from the remains of coal and mud falling from its walls. The blacksmith also used to maintain «sindannah» which would show signs of wear away by time due to the severity of hitting. So, it was taken to the seacoast, where a big oven would be built. Then, it would be placed inside it. Blazing fire would be directed towards the sindannah to make it soft and then to repair it. The blacksmith and his assistants would hit it with the heavy sledges to level its surface. Then, it was dipped into the sea, to make it hard, in preparation for use. After being exposed to water while hot, sindannah becomes very solid having the form like steel.

Many families worked in the smithery field in Kuwait, and a number of skilled blacksmiths were prominent and famous for the precision of the quality and durability of the products they manufactured. Those families gained their names from the craft practiced by members of their families. A number of blacksmiths in the past were famous for producing small products which were difficult to make through traditional means. Such products included «al bawara», clutches, and locks which a limited number of blacksmiths in Kuwait produced. A former blacksmith says quoting his grandfather<sup>(2)</sup> that he used to make «clutches» to handcuff thieves and criminals who were arrested during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah and Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak. If a thief was arrested, he would be taken to the shop directly to put the clutches in his legs, and sent to jail. The clutch consisted of a ring made of an iron rod, of thickness around 14 mm, placed on sindannah, after heating, then hit with the heavy sledge, while being in the hand or leg of the thief, without being harmed, so it was closed, becoming too difficult to open.

Mr. Abdulhameed Abbas Cheragh Al Haddad quotes his grandfather Cheragh Al Haddad that a thief was caught during the reign of Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah, and brought to the shop where they made a clutch and cuffed him, then taken to the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hussein Ali Al Mousa Al Haddad.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulhameed Abbas Cheragh Al Haddad.

jail. After one month, Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak ordered to deport him to Basrah where he came. So, he was sent there in a boat, while cuffed with the clutch in his legs. After one week, he was returned back to Kuwait from there, while being cuffed, as no blacksmith in Basrah was able to remove the clutch from his legs in a technical manner which did not harm him. So, he was brought to the shop of the late Hajji Cheragh Al Haddad, who removed it with ease and then he was returned to his country. Clutch is removed by placing it on sindanah and pointing the edge of the «iron pen» at the welded location and hit it carefully with special technique to open it.

The late Cheragh Al Haddad was an artist in making hammers, big nails for the boats, rings (*al sungol* - i.e. chains) in addition to complicated and small things used by blacksmiths and coppersmiths such as «*al nai*», *sindanah*, and other items. He and the late Ali Al Mousa Al Haddad were among the few who manufactured big bawaras (anchors) for travel ships, for which a special oven would be dug up for heating the thick square iron from which bawara was made. It was said that he had a special sindanah brought from India, of a length exceeding one meter, to use in making bawaras.

### **Al Saffar (Coppersmith)**

The coppersmith in Kuwait was known as «*al saffar*» and the plural is *safafeer*. This word is taken from the word «*al safer*» which is the local word for good copper. There was a special market for coppersmiths in Kuwait known as Safafeer Market, located in a number of alleys scattered near «*al Silah*» Market (Weapon Market). Al safafeer used to manually manufacture in that market different types of copper products such as cooking pots, trays, dishes, ladles, jars, big plates, coffee handlers and kettles and different household items. Al saffar also used to whiten copper utensils and polish them internally with a thin layer of white lead, to prevent poisoning of the foodstuff which would interact with copper when cooked in such utensils. Kuwaitis in the past used copper utensils in all



Al Saffar practicing his work

Source: Arts and Museums Department Activities, Ministry of Information, Heritage and Museums Department- 1986

household activities such as cooking, storing foodstuff, eating, washing tools and so forth, before the forties when aluminum utensils started reaching Kuwait. The raw copper sheets, were imported in the past from India. Then, they were brought from the USA and China, after the number of steamships coming to Kuwait from those countries increased in the forties. Copper sheets were sold by weight at the price of one Rupee and a half per «oqiya» (ounce), an old weighing measure equaling about 2.25 kilograms. There were different measures and thickness for such sheets, as required<sup>(1)</sup>.

The process of making the copper utensil such as a tray or a cooking pot started by cutting the copper sheet into the required measurement using a special steel scissors. If what is required to be made is a cooking pot, for example, the sheet would be folded like a belt and teeth or big protrusions would be made on the sides required to be welded together to form the pot wall, until the two sides interlocked together and the pot wall would be strongly held together. After that, the place required to be welded would be heated by being exposed to the oven fire, until becoming soft, and then hammered to be held together and the piece would reach the final required structure. The molten copper would merge in the two sides together and the interlocking teeth opening would be filled and closed. Upon completion of making the pot wall, its base would be made according to the required size determined by the compass or dividers.

Then, the base would be placed under the pot wall, after zigzagging it and zigzagging the lower part of the pot, so they would interlock together and then the welding process would be carried out. Then, those parts would be hit together until welding together by fire. The material used for welding is called «*tankar*» which is a mixture of copper and magnesium. The pot would be shaped according to the required design with the hammer while still soft from the heat<sup>(2)</sup>. There were different sizes of pots for which their sizes were identified by a quantity of rice which would be cooked in each of them. The rice «oqiyah» was used as a measuring unit for the size of the pot. For example, there was a pot of one-oqiyah capacity, another of two oqiyas, a third of five oqiyas, and a fourth of ten oqiyas, and so on. There were pots for cooking an entire sack of rice (a bag of approximately 90 kilograms). The capacity of the pot was estimated by the length of the diameter of its base. There were also different types of pots suitable for the required use. For example, pots were made for mashed wheat and sweets, made of thick copper to retain heat and distribute it equally inside the pot while cooking. That type of pots was forged by a special manner; by expanding the base and narrowing the opening of the vessel

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(1) An interview with the late AbdulRasul Taqi Al Saffar.

(2) An interview with the late Abdullatif Mulla Juma'a.



as much as possible. The mashed wheat pot is called «*qatifi*», while there were other types, including *al sadiri*, *al Baghdadi*, *al safari*, and *al Bahraini*, known for its big size and strength, and preferred by ship owners for cooking meals for the seamen during the travel trip<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of Kuwaiti coppersmiths were famous for manufacturing the best types of pots , especially the sweet (*halwah*) pots which required extensive amount of experience and art in forging or molding them.

A number of sweet makers from Muscat used to buy their pots from Kuwait. Among the most famous pot makers at the beginning of the last century were the late Abdulla Hijji Al Saffar and A'skar Al Saffar. As for the coffee pots, they were also an art by themselves. A number of safafeer were specialized in making Kuwaiti coffee pots «*dalla*» which were distinguished

by their beautiful shape and quality. It was said that some attendants of dawaween were experts in recognizing the person who made the coffee pot by looking at it. Among the most distinguished coffee pot makers was a person called Jari, who was famous and known for being the best manufacturer of coffee pots in Kuwait and the Gulf. Also, among famous coffee pot makers in the past were Ali Bin Ahmad Al Saffar, Mahdi Bin Ahmad Al Saffar, Abdulla Al A'radi, Mohammed Bin Herz and Mohammed Jassim Al Saffar. Coffee pots were made of yellow copper known locally as «*beetal*» and pots are of different types, including the Kuwaiti, al Hasawi, al Raslani, al Baghdadi and a type known as «*Shatra*», an area in Iraq.



A shop at al safafeer market, in which a number of products such as trays and cooking pots are seen.

(1) An interview with Mr. Ibrahim Abbas Al Saffar.

A number of Iraqi merchants used to buy Kuwaiti coffee pots to sell in the famous «*Al Shyoukh*» Market in Iraq. Al safafeer sold their products of coffee pots by piece or a full set consisting of three pots of different sizes for different uses. The coffee pots set consisted of three pieces as follows: «*al lukma*», the utensil in which the coffee was made, «*al khomra*» in which the remainder of the coffee to be placed to use it as a base for the next preparation, and «*al masab*», the utensil in which the pure coffee to be placed to present to the guests. A number of safafeer in the past used to make coffee pots of silver at the request of the Sheikhs, especially HH the Amir, who used to present them as gift to his guests. One of al safafeer, who was the late Salman Al Moosa, used to engrave beautiful engravings and high quality decorations on such coffee pots<sup>(1)</sup>.

Al saffar relied in his work on the strong heat to melt the copper. For that purpose, he used a hole in the ground «oven» (called *koor or coor*) of a depth of approximately half a meter and opening of almost 30 centimeters. A rectangular or a square side would be built around the oven of side length of almost one meter and height of 30 to 35 cm. A pipe would be extended to the oven and connected to the manual blower, made of leather, operated by one of the boys (workers). The compressed air increases the blaze. Coal was used in such process.

The most significant tools used by al saffar in his work in addition to the blower were al nai, which is a rectangular piece of iron, with one wide side, al raibal, the hammer, the engraver, clamps and the cutter, which resembled the axe and used to hit the thick copper sheets to cut them, as well as the big scissors for cutting copper sheets and the compass. There were different sizes and shapes of those tools used by al saffar for each type of product.

Among the work carried out by al saffar was also repairing old utensils and fixing batches for them, in addition to tinplating or whitening pots and trays (i.e. tasfeer, as called locally for such process) and so forth. Tinplating is polishing the internal walls of the pots, trays and other copper utensils with a thin layer of lead to prevent interaction of their copper walls with the foodstuff placed inside them, which causes poisoning of such materials. The tinplating process would start by cleaning the pot by placing some sand, soft iron powder and burning wastes taken from the oven inside the pot desired to be whitened. A piece of leather would be used to clean it. Al saffar or any of his workers would put his feet on the piece of leather and move it to scratch the inside of the pot for the purpose of removing the dirt, prior to starting the process. If the pot was big, it would be placed inside a hole of one meter depth in which al saffar would

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Jassim Al Saffar.



Al saffar's tools

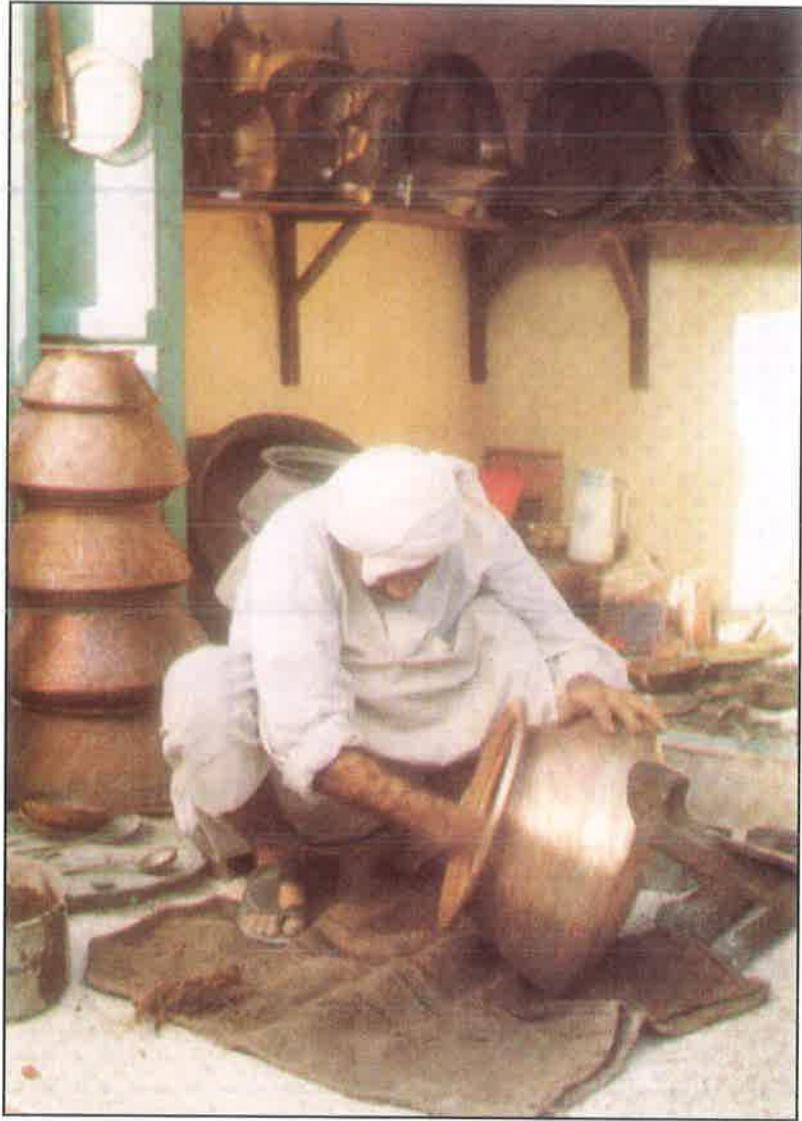
go down and put his feet inside it and move them, while holding to the side of the hole until it was cleaned. Afterwards, al saffar would tin the pot using lead and «ammonia». The process was completed by heating the pot on the oven fire through its opening towards the oven until its temperature increased. Then special materials would be placed inside it; ammonia and lead. «Ammonia» was the chemical powder of white color spread on the internal wall of the pot after heating it, which would interact with lead, leading to its distribution on the wall of the pot required to be tinned. Then, the vessel would be wiped with a big piece of cotton, so a light layer of lead would be attached to the internal wall of the pot. That would lead to covering the copper and insulating it with a thin silver layer to prevent it from contacting the foodstuff placed inside<sup>(1)</sup>. Upon completion of the tinning process, the pot would be washed with water, ready for use for a period extending up to six months or more, according to the type of use. Al saffar bought ammonia, which was brought from India, in the form of bars to be ground into powder before using.

Al saffar's income was considered among the lowest incomes in the past, despite the great efforts he exerted, in a very hot and polluted environment, and absence of minimum health and hygienic conditions. For example, making a big pot would take a full week, during which al saffar and his assistant would work for

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdullatif Mulla Juma'a.

long hours until completed. The pot was sold at a price ranging from 40 to 70 Rupees according to its size. That price barely covered the daily wage of al saffar and his assistant. If he made a profit around 10 Rupees, then he would get around one and a half Rupee per day. Al saffar used to increase his income marginally by selling production wastes of copper small pieces remaining from cutting the sheets (known as *al qradhah*). He used to collect them from time to time to fill up a sack or two for selling them to a number of merchants who exported them abroad. There were two Jewish merchants called Saleh and Ezra who were specialized in buying some types of wastes, such as leather and copper, and also used to compress lead and pack all in canvas sacks to export to Europe<sup>(1)</sup>.



Tinsmith (tinplating) copper utensils was among the works carried out by al saffar at the beginning of each season

*Source: Postcard - Theorist Bab Al Bahrain*

Also, a number of boys working in that field used to collect what was known as «al saffar's dirt» which were the remains of materials used in cleaning pots, such as ashes, lead, copper, ammonia and water, which al saffar disposed of by throwing into the oven. It would sediment in that hole after the leaking of water to the ground, becoming very soft like flour. The boys used to sell that material, which was used by some people as a popular medicine for treatment of wounds,

(1) From interview with Mr. Abdullatif Mulla Juma'a.

pimples and «*al hazaza*» which was among the skin diseases spread in the past. Some women used to go to al saffar shops to take a small quantity of that material to treat the skin sores and rashes sustained by many children in the past.

Al Safafeer market comprised of around thirty shops which carried out the same work, and each of which had their own customers. Most of the workers in that market were relatives and cousins who inherited the craft from their fathers and forefathers, and mastered it through experience and knowledge. Sons were apprenticed to their fathers on that craft when each of them reached the age of almost ten years, as they were taken to the market to start their career by blowing, then would gradually gain experience.

During the year, safafeer experienced several seasons when they used to work day and night to complete the works to meet citizens demand on their products. Among those seasons were the months of Shaban and Thul Hijja which precede the months of Ramadhan and Muharram, as well as feasts. Owners of diwanis, Sheikhs, big families, and religious forums used to prepare cooking pots, trays and other utensils for banquets and other invitations. A number of safafeer used to go to the houses of Sheikhs during such period to tinplate the pots and utensils, digging up ovens there to use for heating utensils, in preparation of tinplating them. That process took around three to four days. The market was also active before the travel and diving seasons, as the ship owners equipped their ships with the required utensils and got their old ones in repaired and tinplated for traveling and trading<sup>(1)</sup>.

The level of work usually dropped after the termination of the season, unless there was an extraordinary event which required making and cleaning copper utensils. A number of safafeer used to go to Shamiya on foot and other areas in which the Bedouins caravans camped during the spring season in order to receive their pots and other utensils to be tinplated. Each saffar carried between four to five vessels on his head to bring to his shop. But, if the quantity was big, they used to hire donkeys to take them there. Bedouins came to Safafeer Market after few days to receive their pots and trays, being cleaned and tinplated for an amount not exceeding half Rupee per pot. Some Bedouins used to replace their old pots with new ones from safafeer after paying the difference which might be few Rupees. Al saffar would repair the old copper utensils which might be fixed, and would cut and compress the damaged utensils and pack them into canvas sacks to sell to a number of persons traveling to India, who would sell them to owners of factories for melting and recycling. Al safafeer also bought the old utensils for that purpose. Copper scrap which was cut and

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jawad Abdulla Al Saffar.

compressed was called «*khoshalah*». Al saffar's sales ranged between 20 to 30 Rupees per day, from which he would make a profit of two to three Rupees during the normal days in the 1930s. Al saffar bought one «*oqiya*» of copper for three Rupees, and sold the piece made of the same weight against five Rupees per *oqiya* (i.e. he charged two Rupees per «*oqiya*» against his work)<sup>(1)</sup>.

The majority of safafeer- starting by the late 1940s- to manufacturing utensils made of iron sheets and metal after the use of such materials had increased as a substitute for the expensive copper products. Therefore, they started manufacturing tanks, pipes, jars, big plates, milk shakers, pots, vessels and sieves of aluminum and metal sheets (iron sheets polished with zinc). Metal sheets were imported from Belgium and Japan and brought in different sizes and thicknesses. Al saffar used for making products of iron sheets a hammer or sledge, scissors, compass and ruler, which is a rectangular piece of iron used to hit the metal sheet. The kerosene stove known as «*primus*» was used to direct fire to the metal sheet required to be formed into the required shape.

### **Al Tannak**

Al tannak is the person who manufactures light products and household utensils made of tanak, which are thin iron sheets polished with chrome. A number of Kuwaitis worked in that craft at a market for these products known as «*Al Tannaka Market*». That market turned at the early 1950s into a market for selling clover, after many tannakas left their shops and turned to work in other jobs, while some others retired after the demand for their products ceased to exist.

Among the products made by al tannak were tin cans of different sizes and sweet cans used for packing sweets and taking them as food with travel and diving boats. Al tannak also made a big number of small household items, including «*al torompah*» which is a manual pump used for withdrawing kerosene from the big tank for daily use. Al tannak also manufactured the cone and «*al kendiri*» bulb which was a container in which kerosene to be placed for lighting, «*al dowwah*» or «*al manqala*» (stove) and al *mongash* (coal clamp) and «*al bambo*» which was a small tube opened from its upper side, with sharp edge, used by buyers and sellers to know the quality of certain commodities packed in canvas sacks. It was dipped or inserted into the sack to extract a small quantity of the seeds or sugar for checking, «*al gool*», which was a cylindrical medium-sized tube of length ranging between 30 to 40 cm, with a cover, used

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(1) An interview with the late AbdulRasul Taqi Al Saffar.

to keep official documents and papers.

Among the tools used by al tannak in his work were the sledge, sindanah, scissors and «*al muqradh*» that was placed on the metal sheet and hit by the sledge to cut the sheet, in addition to al mufras, al choolah (*braimez*)<sup>(1)</sup>, and lead used for welding.



Al tannak with his products of different types of cans.

*Source: Ancient Things, Khalil Ibrahim Al Sheno, Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est.- Bahrain*

Al tannak would start his work by cutting the sheets with the scissors according to the required shape and size to make the product required. Then, he placed the piece on the sindanah to forge or mold it with the sledge and al muqradh, using «*braimus choolah*» which worked with compressed kerosene to soften the sheets and to get them heated, in preparation of welding it with lead. Among the most significant products of al tannak were sweet cans for which demand increased before the trading travel and diving seasons. Hundreds of sailboats were supplied with big quantities of sweets to be eaten by the seamen as breakfast with bread while traveling, which required big quantities of cans. The demand for big tin cans also increased in the spring, to store ghee throughout the year in houses and shops. The natural ghee was poured from the skin bags brought by the Bedouins. Sweet and ghee cans were among the products mostly made by tannaka, which yielded a rewarding income to them. Most tannaka closed their shops in the market and abandoned them since the beginning of the 1940s due to the discontinuation of diving, as a result of the production of culture or artificial pearls, as well as steamships which sailed to Kuwait loaded with commodities. That led to the reduction of the number of Kuwaiti sailing ships going to India, starting the mid 1940s.

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(1) Al choolah is the stove operated by compressed kerosene and known as «*braimez*».

## The Jeweler

Jewelry is among the old and significant crafts in Kuwait, for which specialized work developed with the lapse of time. It has acquired a special local nature which distinguished it from others in the neighboring countries. The jeweler is the person who manufactures gold and silver and transforms such metals into different articles of jewelry used for embellishment and adornment. A number of



A jeweler welding a small piece of gold using «al seraj» while blowing in it through «al bori» to guide the fire towards the piece.

*Source: Kuwait National Museum.*

Kuwaiti families worked in that craft and the main place of work was at the Jewelers' Market located west of the old «Al Manakh» near the Blacksmiths Market. Those families inherited their craft from father and forefather and the craft was limited to nearly seven or eight main families in Kuwait since old times.

The majority of jewelry in the past were made of silver, while few were made of gold due to the limited income of the citizens. Anyone who wished to buy a



Ancient silver jewelry

*Source: Folklore Heritage, January 1987, Published by GCC Folklore Heritage Center- Doha- Qatar*

piece of jewelry would agree with the jeweler for the fees of making it, then he would buy the gold at his expense, as the jeweler could not keep quantities of gold. The jeweler started his work by receiving the order from the client who agreed with him on the cost of work and the quantity of gold needed for making the required piece. Then, the client would buy the requested number of gold liras from the «sarraf», (the money-exchanger) and deliver them to the jeweler, who would melt and form the required figure. Then, he would hand the article over to the client after few days. The jeweler weighed the piece of gold in front of the client



before handing it over to him and then receiving his charges<sup>(1)</sup>. The gold used in making jewelry in the past was taken from Al Rashadiya Uthmani liras, which were considered the best types of gold for 21-22 carat.

The English gold pounds carrying the image of King George V were also used. Gold of other carats were not used for making jewelry in Kuwait, whether taken from other types of liras or golden bars, because Kuwaitis did not like them and as it was not of the required quality for making jewelry whether with respect to color or suppleness.

The Kuwaiti jeweler was distinguished from other jewelers in other countries in that he carried out all the phases of his work, starting from melting the bar, to pulling and then forming it into the different jewelry items. There were jewelers specialized in making special jewelry, in which they were talented in making and engraving. Among those products were al hejel, al hama, the sheath or sword pocket and dagger made of gold or silver. There were also jewelers famous for originating and designing remarkable jewelry with new engravings for wealthy women, merchants and Sheikhs.

### **Jeweler's Tools<sup>(2)</sup>**

The jeweler practiced his work manually using the tools, which basically consisted of «*al dowah*», *the blower*, *sledge*, *sindannah*, *al chelabtain*, *scissors*, *file* and many other types each of which had its roles and uses, according to the type and size of the required jewelry. There were many different sizes and types of each kind of tools, which we will attempt to address in view of their precision and role in each phase of the work in such precise craft.

### **Al Dowwah**

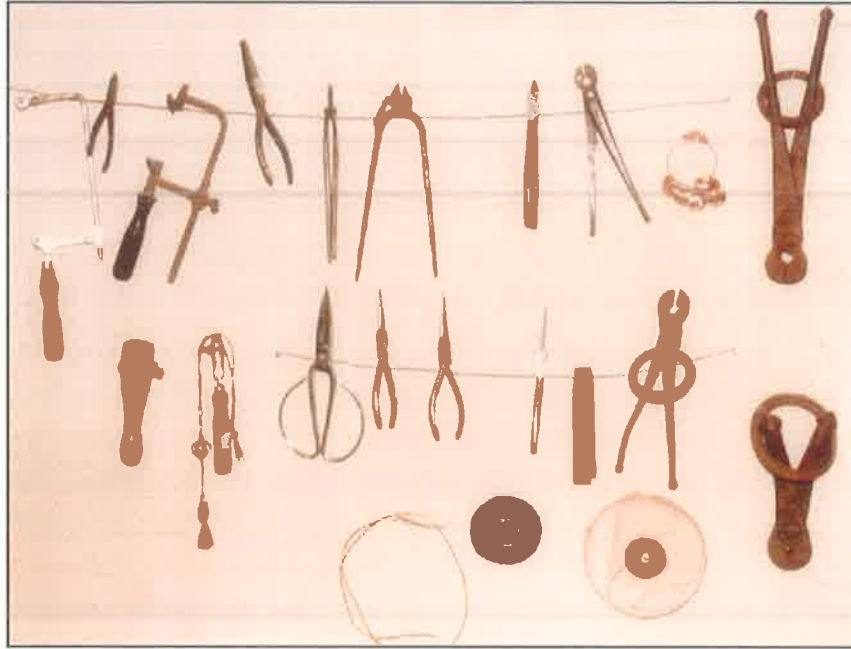
Al Dowwah or «*al manqala*» was among the most significant tools used by the jeweler to soften gold for the purpose of facilitating forging it with the hammer or small sledge. The jeweler's dowwah was made of a special type of mud with a round diameter of around 40 cm, and underneath it there was an opening with a tube for admitting compressed air by the blower. Pieces of blazing coal were put in the middle of «dowwah» against the opening through which the air coming from the blower could pass, helping to keep the fire blazing and increasing the temperature dramatically. The pieces of gold are directly exposed to the fire to soften them, or placed inside «*al kobja*»<sup>(3)</sup> if required to melt.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Taher Al Nasser

(2) An interview carried by Mr. Mohammed Al-Khars with the late Hussein Hassan Al-Khars and the late Mohammed Saleh Al-Bakkay.

(3) See explanation afterwards.



Jewelry tools

Source: Kuwait National Museum

### The Blower

The blower was smaller than the blower of the blacksmith or al- saffar, it was used to blow air and orientate it towards fire in al dowwah to increase its temperature and expose the piece of gold to fire. The blower was made of sheep skin with two openings, one for entering air and the other for discharging air and orientating it towards the fire through two wood knobs called (*safafeej*).

### The Small Hammer Or Sledge

There were different types and sizes of hammers or sledges, each of which was used for a special purpose. It was generally used to forge the piece of gold into the required shape after heating it. There were jewelry - for example al *maqamashat*- made after forging the piece of gold by the small hammer or small sledge into something similar to a thin pen, before transferring it into thin wires with a special device. Meanwhile, some jewelries require transforming the gold into thin sheets by using a certain type of sledge. Also, there were wooden sledges for other uses.

### Sindannah

This is cubic piece of iron with four legs on which a big piece of wood is fixed. The jeweler's sindannah had two side horns with thin edges becoming more thick when they would meet the sindannah, and used for placing bracelets and jewelry on them to hammer, forge or decorate.

### **Al Mingash (Tweezers)**

This is also called «*al shaft*» or tong, of different sizes, and used for clipping and handling the small pieces of gold and pearls.

### **Al Chillabtain**

Al chillabtain is a tool used for holding or clipping the piece of gold to hammer it with the small sledge, softening it with the file, cutting it with the scissors or compressing it to fold its edges, as well as other uses. There were different types of such tools, including those with broad, pointed, or rounded edges, each of which used for a certain purpose.



The Jeweler's dowwah

Source: Kuwait National Museum

### **Scissors And «Al Mifras»**

There were also many types of scissors, including the big, medium and small scissors with sharp edges or otherwise, each of which had its uses for cutting figures and different sizes of gold. The scissor cuts small things such as wires while «al mifras» cuts big and thick pieces.

### **«Al Seraj» And «Al Bori» (Welding Appliances)**

Al seraj is a small plate filled with kerosene, with a hole in one side and a thin tube on the other for discharge of kerosene. A small piece of material (cloth) is used at the opening of the tube to be lighted when «al seraj» is required. As for al bori, it is a tube for blowing air towards the kerosene flame to melt the piece of gold or weld it. It is placed on a piece of wood and the welding material is added to it. The blowing of the air from «al bori» towards seraj flame leads to increasing temperature dramatically, hence causing the gold to melt.

### **«Al Kobja»**

This is a pot or a container made from «salbi» mud mixed with ashes of burnt ground camel rib bones. The jewelers used such pots or vessels for melting gold when exposed to fire. «Al Kobja» (crucible), tolerates strong heat without being

affected. Al Kobja was brought from India and Iraq, and was of different size, ranging from 5 ounces to 40 ounces or more.

### **Al- Reejis**

This was an iron tube opened from the top with a holding knob. Al reejis was used to pour melted gold from inside Al Kobja or crucible to mould it in the form of a finger, for forging it according to the required figure. It was of different sizes.

### **The File**

It was used for smoothing the piece of gold after forming it. Files are of different types, including the rounded, the triangular and the square, and each one has its use.

### **Al Mantal And Al Makina**

There are many other tools used by the jeweler in his work, including a tool called «*al mantal*» which is a flat piece of iron in the shape of a ruler, with approximately 40 holes of different sizes. Al mantal is used to make the different hues of gold wires used in making some bracelets and necklaces. The wires are made by hammering the piece of gold with a special sledge in order to transform it into the shape of thin pen. The edge of the pen is inserted after heating in one of the openings of «*al mantal*» and pulled by *al chelabtain* from the other side, so it becomes in the shape of a wire of the size of the opening. If it is desired to make it thinner, it is inserted into the smaller opening and so on, until it reaches the required thickness. Al mantal is a part of a big machine of wooden parts of a length of around two meters known as «*makina*» used for this purpose.



A jeweler using al mantal to pull golden wires

*Source: Photographs from Kuwait Museum*

The wires of different thickness are used to produce a number of jewelry, including «*al mogamash*», «*darb al namla*», «*sefat al hasere*» and other types of bracelets and necklaces made of such wires after being pulled and forged as required<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Taher Al Nasser.

## **Al Ghazala**

Among the jeweler's tools is «*al ghazala*» which is a piece of wood with three legs and a rounded neck, of gradual thickness such as the arm, placed by the jeweler in front of him in order to pull the bracelets or soften them with the file or make engravings thereon. «Al ghazala» is used also for measuring the size of bracelets, and it resembles the body of the «deer» and this is why it has taken its name.

## **Al Roro**

The jeweler uses an iron tool resembling the pen, with a sharp head for engraving and carving gold called «al roro». The jeweler melts a quantity of wax to pour into the pocket of the jewelry required to be engraved with «al roro», including al hajol and sheath or sword pocket, in addition to similar items, to avoid indenting them during the engraving process. Upon completing the engraving, he melts the wax once again to remove it from the piece before weighing and handing it over to the client.

## **Al Sonbuk**

This is a rectangular piece of iron in the form of a pen, with its lower edge in a certain shape (round or square for example) with a sharp protrusion in its perimeter, used upon hitting it on its upper edge by the sledge to cut small golden sheets into the required shapes. There are different forms of the lower part of al sonbuk, including square, rectangular, round, triangular and others. The jeweler keeps a number of «sonbuks» to use in his work.

## **Al Taba'a**

This is a metal piece of yellow copper on which some engravings or numbers are printed. It is used to imprint such engravings or numbers on the golden sheets or other pieces of gold after heating them. Al Taba'a is placed on the gold, then hit with the sledge, which leads to imprinting the engraving or number on it.



Al Taba'a for carving some engravings on the gold

*Source: Kuwait National Museum*

## **Al Mahak**

This is a small piece of stone (gravel) of black color and smooth surface, used to scratch the golden piece for the purpose of knowing the gold carat. A substance is placed on the golden piece before scratching it with «al mahak». If its color does not change after scratching, then it is 24 carat but if the color changes after some time it means that it is of a lower carat. But if the gold color changes fast, then the piece is considered of low quality and of 18 carat.

## **Al Mejdah**

The jewelers use a device to pierce the pearls. It is a small nail with a very thin and sharp steel head, and its other edge is tied to a thread connected to a piece of wood. The thread is wrapped around the piece of wood to roll the nail or «al mejdah». The pearl is fixed while piercing lest it should move. It is also cooled continuously with water to avoid getting its temperature raised.



Al mejdah for puncturing pearls

*Source: Kuwait National Museum*

The jeweler also uses several materials to assist him to melt, weld or polish the gold, including ammonia, salt, and shura, which is also known as «barood salt», shab, tankar, and buiaq, a red powder used to polish and clean gold by placing it on a piece of chamois and wipe the golden piece.

## Types Of Jewelry

There are many types of local jewelry which the jeweler designs. Kuwaiti jewelry is distinguished than other ones in other Arabian Gulf countries. However, they resemble them in the names. Each Gulf country has its special traditional engravings and method of work. Women use jewelry for ornamenting the head, neck, ear, nose, arms, fingers, waist and feet. There are many sizes, forms and engravings for each type of these jewelry. The following is a brief summary of some of them:

**Head:** Among the jewelry used to ornament the woman's head is «*al hama*». It is a gold piece which adorns the vertex. It is composed of square units inlaid with sapphires set with rectangular frame inlaid with gems. It has many loops at both sides and behind to hold other gold pieces to adorn the sides and back of the head. The making of «*al hama*» takes a long time due to the precision of its work and consuming a big quantity of liras which may exceed forty ones. There is another jewelry for the head called «*al qubqub*». It is a gold piece semi-circular interspersed with sapphires. It is largely similar to al-Hamah. Pieces of al-serooh, and gold tilool are fixed on its sides and its back. Al-Qubqub is one of the bride's jewellery.



«Al tolool» hanging behind the head

Source: *Gold Directory - A special Bulletin for Jewelers*

Among the ancient jewelry ornamenting the head is «*al soroooh and Al-Tilool*» which is about eight pieces of gold in the form of a rectangle.

Its unit is made up of piked hemispheres and about 20 circles held together fixed from behind by al-Hamah and decorated with pieces of sapphires.

which vanished since a long time and the majority of contemporary jewelers can not make it professionally. Al soroooh and al tolool are hung to al hama placed on the top of the head, with which al tolool are hung on the back side of the head (from ear to ear), while al soroooh to be hung on its sides. Of the ancient jewelry worn on the head, which also vanished, was «*al maddadi*». These are rounded-shaped golden pieces of the size of liras, hung to a piece of material resembling the cap and known as «*kilootah*» worn by the woman on her head under «*al malfa'a*» or veil<sup>(2)</sup>, from which the pieces of «*al maddadi*» are hanging on the forehead of the woman.

(1) A type of precious stone of sky blue color

(2) Al malfa'a is the veil wrapped around the woman's head.

Also, «al ferkeetah» is used for the head, which is a golden clip, decorated with different shapes of decorations. Among the jewelries used for the head also are «al chitbat» which is also hung to the hair (al basayil).

**Neck:** A woman's neck is decorated with different types of necklaces, known locally as «al baghma». Among its types is «Umm al samak» which has square boxes, and between every four squares there is an engraving of a fish. This type of necklaces is big in size and covers the woman's chest. There is also «al mortehesh» which is a number of golden chains in the shape of rings tied to each other, to which two rectangular pieces of big sizes are



«Al soroooh» hanging on the sides of the head

Source: Kuwait, Oscar Mitri, 1970.



A girl wearing «al hama», «al soroooh» and «al tolool»

Source: Kuwait National Museum.

tied to its two edges, each of which has a clip attached to the dress.

Of the old jewelry used for the neck is «al Girdalah»: A broad gold necklace surrounds the neck with a cylindrical gold ornament in the middle. Multi-part-long gold ornament dangles from each of its units. Also, there is «al mazmat» which is like a goldhoop surrounding the neck. «Al jahadi» which is a necklace containing a number of hemispherical-shaped golden pieces hanging from the woman's neck, and underneath them is a big rounded piece, the length of its diameter may reach up to 6 cm.



**Ears:** Ears are ornamented by earrings or «al tarachi», of which there are many types such as «al tambool» which resembles «al bild»<sup>(1)</sup> with a clip and flower in the middle. Also, there is «al mashkhala» earrings in the shape of crescent, and small pieces placed among them in the shape of the heart, in the middle of which there is a flower.

**Nose:** The nose is ornamented with a small golden piece having a stone of shather or pearls, called «khizzama». It is fixed in a hole in the nose through a small clip. Khizzams are also made for small girls in the shape of crescent and star.

**Arms:** Arms are decorated with bracelets, and their types include «al mogammash», which is a rounded-wide ring with golden wire or several wires inserted in the pearls fixed with a special device used by the jeweler. Among its types is «mogammash bu wahda» or «bu tesa'a». Among the types of bracelets also is «darb al namla», «safat al haseer», «al maftool» (plural is mafateel) which are golden wires placed together like straw mat, not fully rounded and having an opening. There is also a type of bracelets called «akoora», bajela flower, fakhed ala fakhed, al horia, and meltefet, consisting of several small pieces like the almond placed in opposite direction to each other. Among the types of bracelets also is «al banager» which is a wide-shaped bracelet with small flowers and having key. Also, there is al shmailat, which are bracelets of wide-squared shapes decorated with turquoise and having domical bulge or protrusion. There were other types of bracelets called «dolo'e al b'aer (rips of camel) consisting of small round pieces of the size of quarter golden liras. Among the types of bracelets for children is «al majawel» and the singular is «mejwal» being small bracelets worn by girls. The bracelets are normally sold in pairs or braces, and worn by women in two pairs or four, and so on.

**Fingers:** Fingers are ornamented with different types of rings having different stones.

**Waist:** A woman's waist is ornamented with a golden belt called «al qayish» which is a belt consisting of small-squared sheets with beautiful decorations, with a head in the middle with a certain engraving, including the shape of a snake. There are other types of belts for ornamenting the woman's waist.

Among the jewelry used by the elderly women, especially the rich, was a type called «al borooj» which consisted of two big rectangular-shaped pieces each of which hung on one side of the dress near the waist. Al borooj are made in the shape of rectangular or triangular-shaped golden sheets, and the length of each

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(1) Al bild: a pyramid-shaped mass of lead used by fishermen for fishing with hook, used to lower the hook below into the water.



- A variety of Kuwaiti ancient jewelry:
1. al miznat
  2. al- Hujool, anklets/hayool
  3. gold belt, al-Qayish
  4. al hama
  5. al talool
  6. al serooh
  7. al mirtihish
  8. bracelet
  9. rings, zind
  10. al chiff
  11. al Qubqub- crab
  12. al- Girdlah

*Source: Snap shots from Kuwait, Past and Present- Ministry of Information*

piece would reach one inch, on which beautiful engravings would be carved, and they are connected with each other through rings. One borj contained almost 40 pieces, starting with one piece on top, until it reaches eight pieces or more in the lower row. Also, there is another type of jewelry called «al thorayah» hung on «al hashimi» dress above the chest.

Among the jewelry also were the golden «qayateen» used by the wealthy women and hung to the cloak, which are golden chains with small golden loops, tied to both sides of the cloak in the front.

**Feet:** Feet are decorated with «al hujool» which is usually hollow in structure, where wax is placed inside to avoid indenting, with small joints to open and close it. There are also non-hollow hujool which are less thick than the hollow ones. Other types of hujool are «kholkhal» and the plural is «khalakheel», for children, to which small pieces in the shape of bells are fixed with rings, so it gives a sound when the child is walking.

**Stones:** The majority of jewelry are decorated with many types of gems which come from different countries of the world. Among the most important gems are the pearls used in most jewelry and brought by the divers from the bottom of the Arabian Gulf (al hairat). Gems prices range between few Rupees to tens of thousands per one. The jewelers usually buy their needs of pearls from «al Tawaweesh» Market located in Al Badr Souk, while some of them go directly to the pearl diving

locations to buy «*al tabbaba*» which is the quantity of pearls caught by one ship. A number of jewelers may participate and collect an amount of money «*hatta*» to buy a quantity of pearls sufficient for their use throughout the year, and hence they would get suitable prices when they buy pearls from its original sources<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the types of gems is the red ruby (garnet) brought from India and used for rings, as well as agate (onyx) brought from Yemen, which is in several colors, starting from dark red, to whitish light pink. Emerald also was used for rings, in addition to Shather, brought from Iran with a bluish turquoise color. Among the most expensive type of gems are diamonds, of which the good types are sold at thousands of Rupees, and their best types are brought from India and Belgium.

The cost of work differed from one jeweler to the other, depending on his experience, precision of his work and quality of his production. Some of the jewelers were famous for the precision of work due to their long experience and knowledge of the principles of the craft, as well as details of the decorations and artistic engravings. This leads to appearance of the piece in the best form. Many users of such high standard jewelry appreciated the artistic touches of the jeweler on the golden piece and the efforts exerted to make it appear in the best perfect design. They did not hesitate to pay immense amounts of money to get these masterpieces which were made in high standard and remarkable appearance.

The jeweler made the article pursuant to the request of the client. In the past they did not make jewelry for display or selling at their ships due to the absence of sufficient cash with them to buy gold. Rather, they waited for the buyer to request the jewelry and made it according to order, after handing over the quantity of required gold to them. The demand for jewelry was limited in the past. Women of Sheikhs, merchants and ship captains were among the most significant clients. The demand for jewelry increased during feasts and occasions such as marriage, as well as upon the return of merchant ships from India, loaded with the different commodities which made local market, brisk selling and buying, and availability of cash. The return of diving ships - especially if the catch was rewarding- also constituted an occasion during which the gold market prospered, and hence wives and families of the ship captains went to the jewelers to buy luxurious jewelry<sup>(2)</sup>.

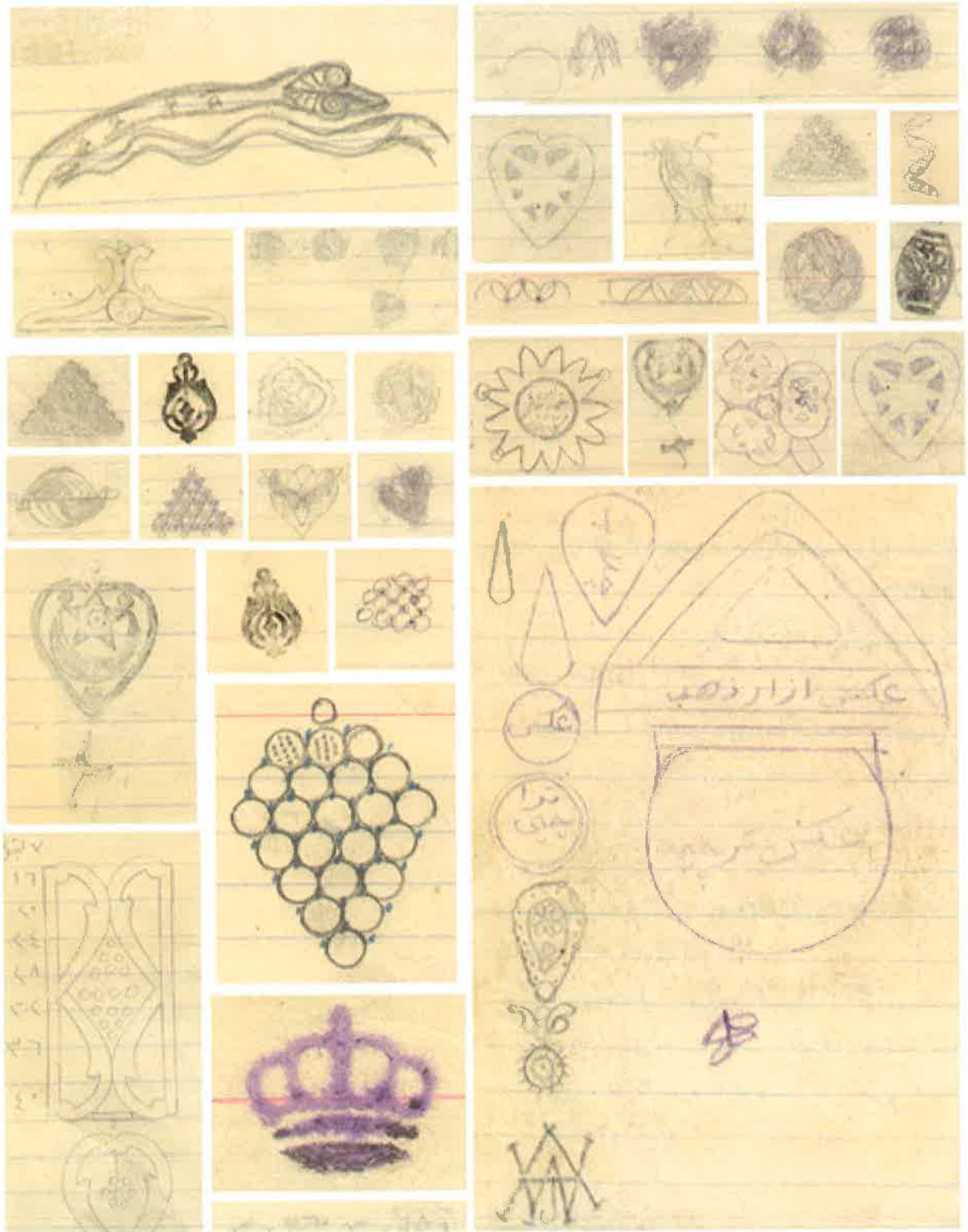
The silver jewelry market also prospered during the spring, when the Bedouins and merchants came, bringing with them their different products to sell in the city.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Mohammed Hasan Al A'ttar.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ali Taher Al Nasser.





Selected designs for a number of jewelry from the register of one of the jewelers, the late Ali Hussein Al Khars, 1345 to 1369 AH (1926 - 1949 AD).

They roamed the markets to buy different commodities, including silver jewelry, the most significant of which were rings and bracelets. Many of the sons and children of the jewelers went to Safat during this period with silver rings ornamented with stones made of Shazar in order to sell to the merchants.

It was said that the gold market reflected the local and international economic and political conditions. It witnessed a remarkable prosperity when the economic conditions flourished and the political conditions were stable. This implied an increase in the income of the majority of the population and the prosperity of their living standard. Among the periods which witnessed the prosperity of the gold market in Kuwait was the year of «al tafha» which followed the prosperity of the diving season in the year 1912, in addition to the years which followed World Wars I and II. During such periods, people used to go to the jewelers to order jewelry for their women, and also to buy golden liras, whose prices increased after World War II from six and a half Rupees before the war to thirty Rupees after the war. As for the worst periods of work, it was during the wars. The jewelers who witnessed those periods said the demand for jewelry completely stopped and the market suffered excessive stagnation.

It is mentioned that there was a number of very famous jewelers during the 1920s and 1930s, who were known for the precision of their production and remarkable types of jewelry. They included the late Tahir Al Naser, who was famous for engraving the pockets of swords. He used to decorate the sheath or sword pocket or «jerab» - as locally known- with very careful and beautiful decorations and drawings for the rulers and Sheikhs. The late Ali Al Saleh Al Bakky and Abdul Hussein Al Saleh Al Bakky were famous for engraving sheath or sword pockets and small jewelry. Among the precision work for which a number of jewelers were famous for making pearl necklaces, which were unique of their kind and very beautiful and good looking. The late Hajji Mohammed and Hajji Ali Khraibet were famous for that art<sup>(1)</sup>. Among those who were famous for the precision of their work was the late Ali Al Khars, who was known for mastering careful decorations on the jewelry and making them appear in a unique manner. He was famous for the precision of his work, to the extent that one piece took a long time from him to complete, while others made several pieces of jewelry during the same time. He was also known for his extreme honesty and dedication in the work, as well as carefulness in weighing the gold and ensuring that the client would receive his full right of gold delivered to him. It is said that jewelers addressed extreme concern to that matter in view of the

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(1) From interview with the late Abdulrazzaq Al Busier.

high price of the commodity with which they worked, and that any decrease in the weight would have a negative effect on the reputation of the jeweler. Everyone was also famous for devoutness and compliance with the principles of the craft which depended on mutual confidence, sincerity and trust, making them acquire the respect and trust of those dealing with them.

Among the other work undertaken also by the goldsmiths or the jewelers was «gold refinement or purification» along with refashioning the old pieces towards manufacturing small bars of gold ingots (melting). Hereunder, we shall deal with such activities.

### **1. Purification Or Filtration Of The Gold**

It is known for the nature of this craft that the jeweler must waste a part of the gold being forged by him, as he has to hammer the piece of gold, cut, melt and smooth it with the file. This leads to wasting some small pieces, which constitute at the end a considerable quantity. In view of the high value of the gold, that waste causes loss to him. In view of the significance of the weight of a piece of jewelry for the buyer before handing it over to him, and the necessity of compensating him financially for any drop in the original weight of the gold he gave to the jeweler and deducting its value from the workmanship value, it is significant for the jeweler not to be liable for such cost. Therefore, the jeweler is forced to follow a certain way to collect the biggest possible quantity of the scattered pieces every once in a while to recover the quantity of gold lost while working. Therefore, among the works carried out by the jeweler every once in a while is to broom the floor of the shop and put its dust in a sack or gather the dust in a hole made in the shop known as «*gabbor*». Once a quantity of dust is collected, he filters it to recover the quantities of gold. This dust normally contains very small particles of gold of the size of a sand *particle*- known as «*sohala*»- which may have been scattered here and there while the jeweler was scrubbing the gold pieces to smooth or decorate them with «*al roro*». The jeweler goes once or twice a year to the sea, carrying with him the sack of the dust which he unloads in a special copper container manufactured by *al safafeer*, which is a big pan, dipped into the water. Then, the jeweler would move the sand inside it to separate the gold particles from the dust. The moving of the dust while in the water leads to the precipitation of the gold particles and other metals at the bottom of the container while the dust remains in the upper part. Then, the jeweler removes the dust slowly from the container, and hence a small quantity of gold and other metals remain. The jewelers call this process «Gold filtration or refinement».

## 2. Melting And Re-Molding Old Jewelry

Among the work carried out also by jewelers is to buy old jewelry known as «*al khashool*» at suitable prices to melt for refashioning or forging them anew, instead of using golden liras, which saves some money for them. It is said that there were some jewelers who were specialized in buying that jewelry, melting and re-molding it into bars to sell as gold bars or export them abroad. Among the most famous of those who worked in that craft was the late Ali Al Mohammed Ali, who established a simple lab for this purpose during the 1930s, in which a Jew who lived in Kuwait participated with him, known as Saleh Mahlab, who used to export the gold resulting from this process. The lab location was in diwan of Al Mohammed Ali, located in the jewelers'» alley in Al Wasat area. The process of «filtration» or refinement is carried out by placing old golden pieces in «al kobja» (melting pot) where exposed to fire, so the gold inside is melted. The gold is normally mixed with other metals such as silver, copper, lead and broken stones, and other residues remain. When the gold is melted, «black lead» is added to it which mixes and interacts with the residues and sediments in the bottom of «al kobja», while the gold mixed with silver remains in the upper part. In order to separate the gold from silver, a quantity of «*al tizab*» is added and stirred, which interacts with the silver and melts it. Hence, it is separated from the gold which is transformed into small particles to residue at the bottom of «al kobja», while the silver mixture with «al tizab» remains in the upper part of the container. Once the container is cooled, the gold particles are separated and placed in a copper container which is exposed to fire, and hence the gold is melted. Then, it is poured or unloaded in «al kobja», to which a quantity of a chemical substance known as «*tinkar*» is added to help melt and purify the gold. Then, the gold is poured in small moulds, and thereby it is a 24 carat gold, sold by «tola». As for the silver and «al tizab» mixture resulting from this process, it is placed in a container with small pieces of copper which adhere to the silver and form a thin layer, then separated<sup>(1)</sup>.

## 3. Casting Small Golden Ingots

A number of jewelers worked during and after World War II in melting and re-casting big golden ingots or bars weighing 10 kilograms, and transforming them into small bars similar to «fingers» each weighed ten tolahs or less, which some merchants sent to India. That trade prospered for several years and became the main source of income for many ship owners. The ingots used

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jawad Mohammed Hussein Al Sayegh.



to reach Kuwait from the USA through Lebanon via the Middle East Airlines, packed in wooden boxes, each contained four cubic pieces of the size of a small brick, with a stamp of «10 kilograms» and number «999» in Arabic numbers, indicating that it is pure gold. Those pieces were first taken to the blacksmiths who cut them up into small pieces, after heating them in the oven to facilitate the cutting process. The blacksmith used to charge 10 Rupees for cutting one bar. Then, the small pieces were sent to the jeweler who melted them in «al kobja», and once transformed into a fluid, he poured them into small moulds. The moulds were left for some time to cool, and then stamped with number «10», indicating 10 tolahs, and number 999. The merchant bought the golden tolahs from the USA for approximately sixty four Rupees and sold in India for one hundred and twenty Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Inheritance Of The Craft**

Most jewelers trained their sons on that craft which they inherited from their fathers to assist the children to earning income. When the boy approximately reached ten years, he used to accompany his father to the shop to see the work conditions and trained in practicing the craft of his father and forefather. He would go to the shop every morning first to do simple tasks, such as operating the blower, putting coal in the oven, cleaning «al sindanah», preparing the place and executing the orders of his father or uncle, handing over the tools and other tasks. The apprentice absorbed the method of work to earn experience with the lapse of time, and then he started carrying out simple technical tasks, until he gradually learned the craft and his father would depend on him to start working next to him as a jeweler.

In the past, a number of jewelers used to send their sons to the Gulf countries such as Bahrain and Oman in order to work for jewelers there for certain periods extending up to three or four years in order to acquire experience, and bring new ideas and engraving decoration forms with them. Among those who spent a period at those countries were the late Mohammed Al Saleh Al Bakkay, Abdul Hussein Al Saleh Al Bakkay and few persons from Bin Sray family.

Many Kuwaiti families were famous for working in the jewelry craft from a long time, including the families of Bin Sray, Mohammed Al Ali, Al Saleh, Al Khars, Al Sayegh, Al Nasser, Al Arbash, Al Mousa, Al Nijada, Al Bather, Al Khraibit, Al Mehanna, Sheshtari, Al Attiya, Al Musalam, Al Salman and Al Ibrahim.

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(2) Ibid.

## Monitoring Jewelry Work By The Government

Since a long time, the government was concerned with protecting buyers from any tampering in the carat of gold used in making jewelry in view of the significance of that craft and the necessity of addressing concern for the interest of citizens, and not exposing them to any cheating. In the year 1936, the Municipality prohibited any person from practicing that business without obtaining a license. It has also alerted citizens of the necessity of dealing with reliable persons enjoying good reputation. The government appointed the late Khalid Yusuf Al Mutawa» as official in charge of examining and testing gold and ensuring its quality, followed by the late Ahmad Abdulrazzaq Al Mutawa», then the late Ali Mousa Hussein Al Sayegh<sup>(1)</sup>, who was one of the well known jewelers doing this work voluntarily for whoever went to him. The late Khalid Al Mutawa» was famous by the nickname of «Khalid Al Daram», and the late Ahmad Al Mutawa» by the nickname «Ahmad Al Daram», and the late Mousa Al Sayegh by «Mousa Al Daram» in view of their work, in the process inspecting gold and checking its quality, which was called as «al daram». The three were experienced in checking gold using the «*al mahak*» to know its caliber, and any buyer who wanted to check the quality of the jewelry he bought would go to the late Khalid Al Mutawa», then the late Ahmad Al Mutawa», followed by Mousa Al Sayegh, to check them and ensure their conformity with the government specifications.

## Tailoring And Textile Sector

### Al Qattan (Al Naddaf)

Among the old crafts known to Kuwait was «*al qatanah*», where «al qattan» services were indispensable for any citizen. Al Qattan or al naddaf is the cotton carder who used to prepare the cotton for carding, blowing it and then stuffing it in different forms of textile covers for various types of products used by people at their homes for sleeping, resting and relaxing, such as the mattresses, sofas, and the like. Long ago, a considerable number of Kuwaitis worked in that craft which they inherited, as is the case for other crafts- from fathers and forefathers. A number of families who gained their surname from the craft itself were also famous, and were called Al Qattan family. There are many families who may not have any relationship with each other but carried the surname of Al Qattan in view of the craft which their descendants professed, and inherited from their fathers and forefathers.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrida Abdulnabi Safar.

Al Qattan (the cotton carder) or «al naddaf», as locally called, used cotton, cloth and threads as main raw materials in his work. He used simple tools like the «bow», «*al shaj*», a thick stick, needle and finger protector «*koshtobana*» to practise his work. Cotton came from abroad in big bales or «*afrad*» as locally called, which consisted of big bunches, each weighted around 3.5 «*hander*»<sup>(1)</sup> (112 English Pounds) i.e. around eighty ounces of compressed cotton, covered with canvas and tied with two or three light iron rings. Al qattan bought one or two «*afrad*» from the merchant and placed them in his shop, so that when the client requested a mattress or similar products, he would weigh a certain quantity of cotton for making the required piece and start working. Al Qattan's work started by separating



Al naddaf while carding for separating cotton and softening it, using the arc and «*al shaj*».

Source: *Bu Shahri Studio*.

pieces of cotton from each other. Then, he would start hitting it with the stick. The hitting process called «*al tarweet*», which helps to separate the cotton pieces. When it becomes consistent, al qattan will start the «*nadf*» process by the bow to «soften» it, i.e. blowing it. The bow is a rectangular piece of wood, slightly arched, and its length is around one meter and a half, and its two edges are tied with a thick «string» made of sheep intestine. *The bow and the strings* were imported from India and al qattan used a small piece of wood in the shape of a «stick» known as «*al shaj*» to hit the string which touches the cotton desired to be blown. Whenever al naddaf hits the string touching the cotton masses,

(1) Handar is a big weighing unit equivalent to 112 English pounds.

this leads to blowing and softening it. The string was replaced every once in a while as it was damaged and broken from the heavy use. The separation process is difficult and continues for 4 or 5 hours per mattress. Quantities of dust and small fibers also scatter while separating, leading to the pollution of the air and affecting the eye, nose and throat. Therefore, «al naddaf» wears a mask or wraps the head cover around his face to prevent entry of dust to his mouth and nose. Most qattans separate the cotton in the open areas next to their shops to avoid accumulation of dust therein. Each one of them sits on a straw mat on which he puts the cotton to start separating it in the open air, until it is softened and fit for stuffing into the covers of pillows, mattresses, cushions, etc.

Upon completion of the cotton carding mattress, al qattan starts to put the combed cotton in the which he previously cut and stitched. After completion of stuffing the mattress with the cotton, he would stitch it and then «stabilize it», i.e. making stitches connecting the upper and lower sides of the mattress together. Each stitch would be apart from the other by around 20 cm, to prevent the cotton from moving around or piling in one side of the mattress. After that, the mattress is covered with a colored piece of material known as the «face» to give it a beautiful appearance, and to cover the «merickan» cheap material which protects cotton from inside.



Al Qattan using his tool to separate cotton. A number of his products are seen next to him, consisting of bed cover, mattress and back supports.

*Source: Bu Shehri Studio.*

Cotton comes from India in the shape of «afrad» and is imported from Dhafar in Oman in «shilfan». Dhaffari and Shishtari cotton is considered among the best types of cotton used for making cotton products in the past, while cotton imported from India was of a lesser quality. Dhaffari and Shishtari cotton were sold for two Rupees and a half per oqiya, while cotton coming from Bombay was sold for half a Rupee per oqiya, due to the poor quality of the latter and containing many residues and cotton seeds, bringing mice to the mattresses, gnawing or eating away its material and then those seeds. Among the most important products used by Kuwaitis in the past in their houses was the mattress (known as al dawshak), the bed cover, the pillow, al matrah (cushion) and the back support, and almost no house was free of such products<sup>(1)</sup>.

Most qattans' shops were located at Safat Square near the Cloaks Market belonging to the late Sheikh Fahed Al Salem Al Sabah, opposite to the old Pigeons Market. There were also a number of shops scattered at a number of markets, while two shops were located at Al Shoyoukh Khan, overlooking the Merchants' Market, which belonged to the late Hussein Al A'wad and Eisa Al Qattan, and then to their sons thereafter. Those two shops were amongst the oldest cotton carding places in Kuwait, and lasted until the mid 1950s when the Khan was demolished. Among the most important clients for al qattans were Sheikhs, merchants, owners of diwanias, in addition to the Bedouins who used to come to the city in winter to buy their different needs. Besides, al galaleef bought cotton «karayekh» (long pieces of cotton) to use in the «kalfat» of ships<sup>(2)</sup>. There were also distinguished bridegrooms who needed to furnish full rooms containing mattresses, covers, pillows, back supports and «al nashrat» (blankets) which al qattan used to embroider with beautiful decorations in order to be placed on top of the bed for ornamentation<sup>(3)</sup>.

Al qattan's work prospered in winter with the advent of the cold weather, as people faced the season by equipping their houses with new mattresses and cushions or renewing old mattresses by taking them to «al naddaf» to re-blow their cotton and replace their mattresses which might be worn out from heavy use. A number of qattans also used to practice their work at some of the houses of Sheikhs and merchants who used to call them for carding the mattresses and pillows they

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(1) An interview with Hajji Abdulnabi Eissa Al Qattan.

(2) Al Karaikh is the plural of karikha, which is a big piece of cotton (60 cm long and 20 cm wide approximately) which al qattan formed it into threads and soaked them in (sil) a kind of oil or grease to be used by al- galaleef to fill the gaps between the ship boards to prevent water leakage to the inside of the ship. The process of inserting cotton in the gaps is called «kalfat».

(3) An interview with Hajji Abdulnabi Eissa Al Qattan.

required inside their houses. So, al qattan and his assistants used to go there in the early morning to complete the work which might take two or more days, during which they used to have lunch there at noon break. The American Hospital built in the year 1912 was also among the important clients of cotton products as it used to replace big number of mattresses every once in a while, after burning down the contaminated mattresses as a result of being used by the patients<sup>(1)</sup>.

The summer season for al qattans constituted a stale mate period. Those who had some capital used to buy a quantity of cotton to make a number of mattresses and store them in order to sell at the beginning of the season, when the Bedouins would start coming to the city to buy their different needs, including big quantities of mattresses and cushions. The price per mattress in the past ranged from 3 to 6 Rupees according to the size, thickness, weight, quality of cotton and material, which increased a lot afterwards. The small mattress or cushion weighed from 10 to 15 oqiyas or more according to their size and the client's desire for thickness. As for the back cushion support, it weighed approximately from two to three oqiyas of cotton.

### **Al Hayek<sup>(2)</sup>**

Weaving profession occupied a significant position among the widely-spread and popular crafts in Kuwait since old times. The weaver - al hayek as locally called - used to stitch the pieces utilized in making cloaks from woolen threads which were locally available. Al hayek used in his work a complicated and complex machine called «*al eddah*» (like the loom), which consisted of a big number of parts and pieces, each of which had a special name and role in making the cloak material. The main parts of «*al eddah*» are made by the carpenter, while the weaver himself used to prepare the small parts and tools for weaving. Among the main parts in al hayek's tools was *al noal* (loom), *al daffaf*, *al bazaar*, *al naira*, *al mezraq*, *al meshbah* and *al medawes*. Al hayek or the employer used to buy the woolen threads from the women who used to offer the different types of woolen threads they had at the Wool Alley, which was abounded or occupied with women sitting on both sides of the road and each of them displayed her yarn and spun threads which she twisted and spun, then wrapped on the shape of small balls or rolls called «*weshaya'*», and the singular is «*washia'*». The price of one washia' ranged between twelve Anna to one Rupee and it weighed around two pounds and the buyer would estimate its weight and quality with his hands<sup>(1)</sup>. High quality woolen threads were also imported from Al Douraq and Behbahan in Iran. Quantities of wool

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(1) An interview with Hajji Abdulnabi Eissa Al Qattan.

(2) The information on weaving was obtained from the interviews with Hajji Abdulaziz Salem Mohammed Al Salem, Mr. Abed Ali Nasser Hussein Al Hayek, Mr. Jawad Mulla Hassan Al Nasser and Mr. Ali Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

and woolen threads offered for sale increase during the spring season, as the Bedouins bring big quantities of wool packed in big sacks carried by camels to Safat Square. The women would buy part of it to weave, then offered for sale, while the majority was exported to India and Iran on sailboats. Types of threads used in weaving and stitching differ, and range from thin, medium to thick. Each type has its own use, as there are different types of cloaks which weavers make for every season<sup>(2)</sup>.



A weaver sitting at his loom weaving wool used in making bisht.

Source: Bu Shehri Studio.

The weaver's work starts by preparing the threads he buys from the market, in the form of bunches called *weshaya'* or balls. He would unroll them, then roll them on a small wooden tool known as the roller (*doulab*), attached to another one called «*al farita*» in order to transfer thread from *weshiya'* to the roll

(or pen as called also) which is fixed to *al farita*. As for the next step, it is weaving or extending the threads longitudinally and inserting them in the allocated places of the tools. The weaver would start fixing the threads in *al noal* (weaving machine), then inserts them in the holes (*al bazaar*) and then (*al naira*), tying each woolen thread to a thread in (*al naira*) in parallel lines divided up into two parts. Each part consists of a number of lines overlapping with the other lines of the other part. These threads longitudinally extended are called (*al sadi*) and their length extends to approximately six arms. As for the threads inserted latitudinally by (*al mizraq*), they are called (*al dhareeb*) the width of one piece ranges between 80 cm to one meter. Each type of cloak has a certain number of threads according

(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulaziz Salem Mohammed Al Salem.

(2) An interview with Ali Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

to the width of the piece. The number of (al sadi) threads amounts to six hundred and forty threads<sup>(1)</sup>.

Before inserting the threads in the tool or the machine, the weaver would make «*al merees*» which was the dates mashed with water to daub and overlay the threads in order to be strong and easily woven. The weaving process would start after (al merees) got dried on the threads. The weaver would start his daily work using his hands and feet to operate the tool while standing in a hole around 70 to 80 cm deep, supporting his back on its wall. If he wanted to move any of the two lines of threads fixed in «*al naira*», he would press with one of his feet on the pedal (*midwas*) and one of the two lines would be raised and then he would put «*al mizraq*» between them, which is a piece of wood inside which the thread (*al dhareeb*) required to be inserted between the two lines. If the thread was inserted, he would pull it strongly and press it with the comb to the side which had been woven, then he would raise the other line of the linear threads by pressing the other pedal.

Hence, the lower line would be raised and al mizraq would be inserted once



Al Hayek Tools

(1) An interview with Mr. Abed Ali Nasser Al Hayek.



again between the two lines, and so on, until the weaving process of the cloak was complete. Therefore, the cloak threads are interlaced with each other and then woven. Whenever a certain part of the cloak was woven, he would fold it on the loom or weaving machine, which is a rectangular wooden piece with thick sides, to be rotated through a knob fixed to it known as «*al mifrak*», until the weaving of the required piece was complete. Afterwards, two workers would place it on a rectangular board of wood and take it to the sea to get it washed and to remove «*al merees*», and then would return it to dry in preparation of selling<sup>(1)</sup>.

Al Hayek dyes the cloak with the required color, using certain materials which he buys from the a'ttareen (spices' sellers). There are different colors of dyes, including white, black, brown, grey, off-white and so on. Each one of these colors has its own dye. For example, henna is used to dye the off-white cloak (*badri*), while a powder called «*al zagh*» is used to dye the cloak with black color. This material is of dark green color transferred into black solution when dissolved in boiling water. The threads to be used for weaving would be soaked in such solutions normally before weaving them, except the black cloak which is dyed after completing its weaving.

«*Al gorooof*»- which are normally the dried peeled layer of pomegranates are used - after being crushed, softened and cooked in boiling water, to fix the colors on the cloak material. Also «*al helailiah*» is used for the same purpose<sup>(2)</sup>.

A number of weavers worked for their own account and fixed one tool or machine or more in the house courtyard or diwaniya to weave cloaks. Also, there were employers, each one of them called «*ma'azeb*», who would employ a number of workers to weave cloaks at special places called «*al barkah*», in one of the courtyards attached to their houses. Al barkah contained a big number of tools which may amount to twenty, on which a similar number of weavers worked, who received certain wages against every cloak they wove. The worker's wage is calculated for each piece of cloak he stitched- for example one Rupee- or the revenue would be divided equally between the worker and the employer. The weaver who worked on half share basis is called «*nassaf*». He received his wage after deducting the value of the materials used in production. If the cloak was sold for ten Rupees for example and the cost of materials is six Rupees, then he would get two Rupees- which is half the profit- while the other two Rupees would be «*al ma'azeb's* share. A big number of youths in Sharq areas worked in weaving in the districts extending from south Derwazat Abdul Razzaq, passing by al Sawaber until the Christians' graveyard in Sharq area. Those areas were known as «*Fereej Al Heyak*», which contained more than one hundred

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

(2) Al helailiah is one of the materials available at the spices seller's shops.

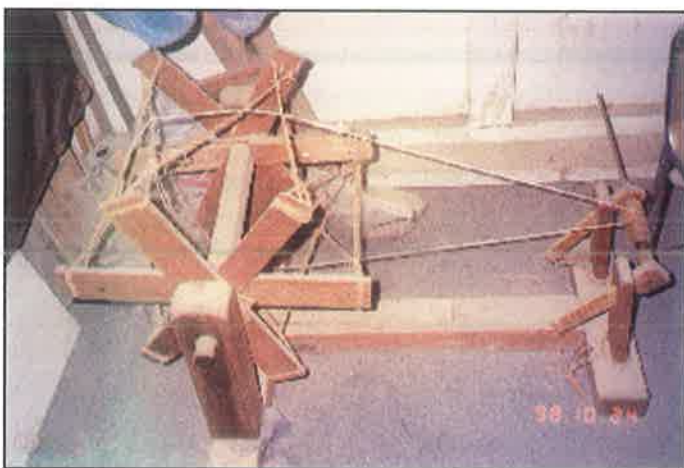
houses, the majority of their members worked in weaving. Also, a big number of workers came from Al Hassa and Bahrain to practise that craft, and inhabited the area allocated for work- al barkah- and their food would be on the account of ma'azeb who agreed with them on dividing the profit for each cloak they would weave. In many instances, ma'azeb used to lend amounts of money to his workers and were deducted from their wages. Usually, al ma'azeb encouraged his workers to borrow from him, especially the smart ones, for the purpose of helping them, as well as obliging them to work for him in order to repay their debts and decline the idea of working for others.

A number of employers (ma'azeeb) apprenticed boys to their occupation, and such apprentices were trained and employed without wage until they are taught the trade and acquired experience.

Then, the employer would start giving them small amounts of money. The boy would start first by «rolling the threads» i.e. transferring the woolen threads from washiya' to the pen by rolling «al dolab» on which washiya' is placed, hence the thread would go to the pen fixed on al farita. This is the first step in the work of al hayek, whereby he prepares the threads from which he weaves the cloak. Then, the boy gradually assumes bigger responsibilities, slowly trained on them until he masters the work and the employer starts depending on him and paying his wage.



Al dolab



Al Farita

Weaving prospered during the summer season due to the dry climate, as humidity and rain distracted the work and led to the moistening of the threads and difficulty of weaving them, especially when overlaid and polished with «al merees». Therefore, weaving work stopped during most of the winter season and a number of weavers would do other work to earn money. The weaver worked on the machine

throughout the day and did not leave the work unless for prayer and having lunch. Weaving is considered one of the most physically exhausting crafts, as all parts of the body move during the work. Through the weaver's use of the machine, all his body parts move, starting from the eyes and neck to the shoulders, back and legs, and ending with the feet.

Weaving each type of cloak and its weaving period differs according to its quality. Weaving al «*mazwiyah*»- a cheap cloak bought by seamen and Bedouins to protect them from cold weather - takes one day, as its material quality is poor and price is cheap. As for high quality cloaks, their weaving may take three days or more. This leads to the weaver's attention for selecting the quality of woolen threads and their color, in addition to the precision of work and quality of the product. The length of the piece woven for making the cloak may reach twelve arms with the width of around one meter. It is divided up into two parts, each of a length of 6 arms and each one is used to stitch one of the two parts of the cloak (upper and lower side). These two parts are connected together with threads which are stitched between them. There are smaller pieces of cloaks, such as «*al mukawser*» cloak which is stitched for adolescent of 14 to 16 years old, of the length of approximately nine arms. Also, there is a smaller type called «*al musder*» for the boy of around twelve years, and its length is seven arms. There are also black cloaks made of wool for women, as they in the past used to wear woolen cloaks all the time, before cloaks of lighter materials were introduced in the market by the end of the 1940s, including what was called «*kraib*» and «*breesam*». i.e. silk<sup>(1)</sup>.

The employer (ma'azeb) takes the piece of cloak which has been woven in order to sell in the market, either directly to the cloak tailors or through specialized brokers who used to sell them in «al Silah Market,» where locally made cloaks were sold. The Cloaks Market, built by the late Sheikh Fahed Al Salem Al Sabah by the end of the 1930s, became the headquarters for selling cloaks imported from Al Douraq and Hindian, which are of high quality, while locally made cloaks continued to be sold at «al Silah Market». Before the 1930s, cloaks were sold at «Al Badr Market», which was also called the Cloaks and Carpets Market.

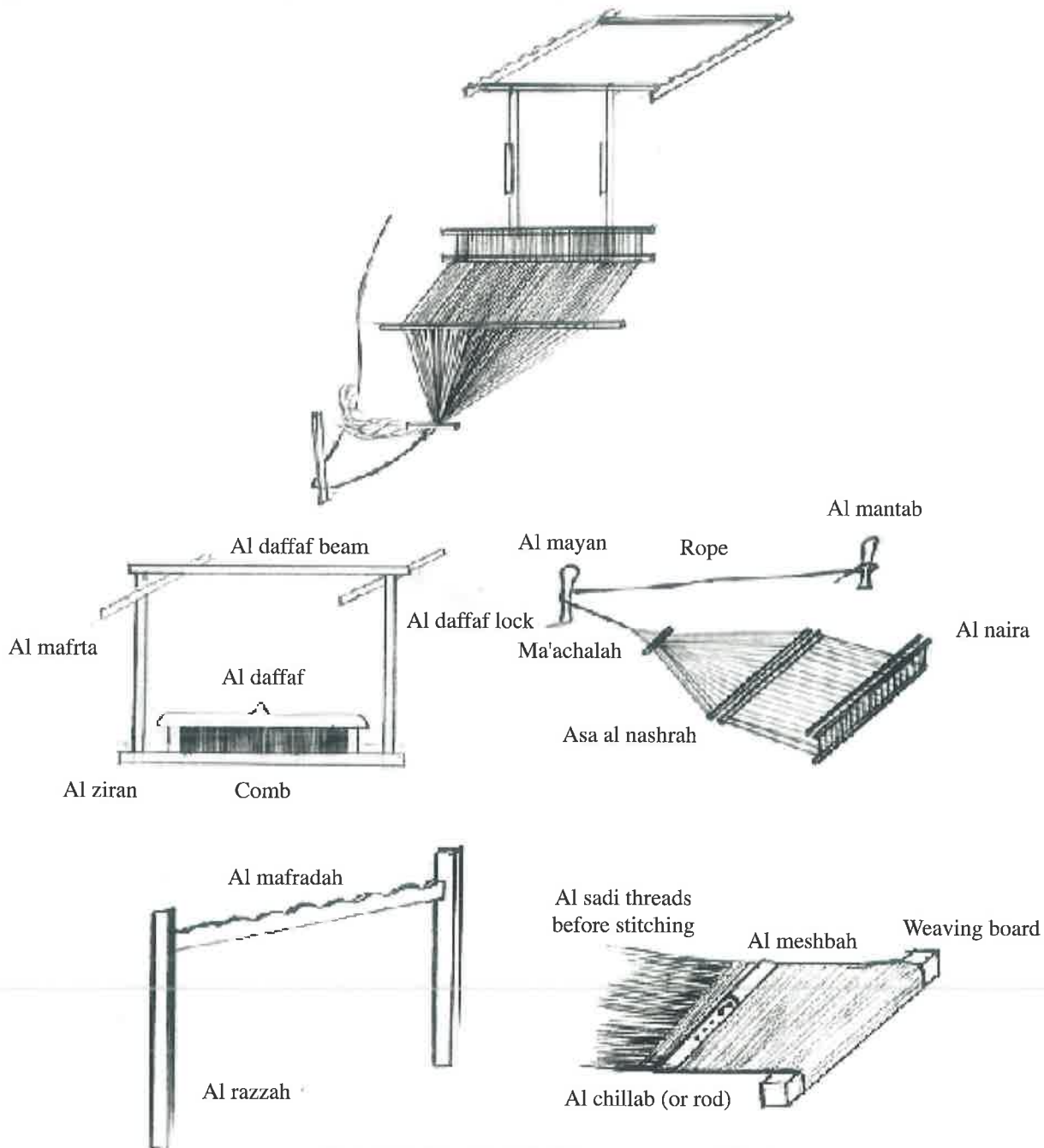
Among the most famous owners of weaving workshops in the past was the late Hajji Hussein Al Bahrani, who had the biggest workshop in Kuwait that contained a big number of weaving machines. His son, Ibrahim Hussein Al Bahrani was in charge of that work after him, and a big number of workers used to work for him. Other owners of workshop included the late Hussein Al Mazidi, Hussein Bin Ali Al Khamis and Hussein Bin Jaridan.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulaziz Salem Mohammed Al Salem.

## (Al Eddah) Machine And Its Important Parts<sup>(1)</sup>

Al hayek tools consisted of several parts which are installed in «al barkah» or the courtyard allocated for the work. A hole is made at the edge of the machine in order for al hayek to stand inside it while working. The following are the main parts of the machine (see attached drawing):



Illustrative drawing of the important parts of the hayek's tools

(1) An interview with Mr. Abed Ali Nasser Hussein Al Hayik.

1. **Weaving board and al mifrak:** The loom or the weaving board is a big rectangular-shaped wood with equivalent sides, having a wooden knob called «*al mifrak*» which is moved to operate the weaving board. The weaving board is used to fold the piece which has been woven of the cloak, which is the nearest part of the tool to the hayek and is directly located in front of him.
2. **Al mantab:** This is a camel leg bone fixed to the ground near the place where the hayek stands while working. Al mantab is used to tie the rope to pull «*al sadi*» threads or relax them according to al hayek's desire. The rope is tied from its other end to the edge of «*al sadi*» thread which has been woven. When al hayek weaves a part of the cloak, he folds it on the weaving board by «*al mifrak*» and then relaxes the rope rolled on «*al mantab*» to be able to insert the threads from the other side of the machine.
3. **Al medwas (foot pedal):** This is a wooden piece fixed below the hole in which al hayek stands while doing his work. The machine has two foot pedals (medwas), each one opposite to one of al hayek's feet, tied to one row of the weaving threads. Al hayek presses on one of the pedals with his foot whenever he wanted to move any row of the weaving threads rows to separate the two rows from each other in preparation of inserting the latitude threads (*al dhareeb*) between them to complete the weaving process. The part connecting each pedal with one of the two rows is called «*al ziran*» or «*al zeeran*».
4. **Al mizraq or (al jerib):** This is a small oval-shaped wooden piece hollow from the center, with a place to station a ball on which the thread is rolled. The thread is inserted between the longitudinal thread rows (al sadi) in the machine by al mizraq which is pushed between the two rows, and then the thread is arranged by the comb (al bzaar).



Al mizraq

5. **Al daffaf:** This is a big wooden piece with a big protrusion in the upper center (knob) and below the comb is fixed (*al bazaar*). Al hayek holds *al daffaf* - after inserting each thread (*al dhareeb*) between al *sadi* threads- and pulls it to the side for the purpose of arranging the threads in the part which has been woven of the cloak with the comb fixed at the bottom of al daffaf.
6. **Al bazaar (comb):** This consists of perpendicular copper connected lines at the bottom of al daffaf, which resemble the comb. The woven threads (*al sadi*) are inserted between the teeth of al bazaar after these threads come out of «al naira» to go towards al hayek. Al bazaar is used to arrange the latitude woven threads (*al dhareeb*) after inserting them between the longitude threads to form the required woven material.
7. **Al zeeran:** Stationed at the bottom of al daffaf (below the comb) there is a rectangular wooden piece called «*al zeeran*» fixed to two perpendicular wooden parts on its sides each of which is called «al daffaf lock» connected on top by a vertical wooden piece known as «al daffaf beam».
8. **Al daffaf lock:** This consists of two big perpendicular woods connected at the bottom of al daffaf with «*al zeeran*», and on top by a vertical wooden piece called «al daffaf beam», which is based on a big piece of wood called «*al mifarradha*».
9. **Al meshbah:** This consists of two small rectangular woods placed on top of the part which has been stitched of the cloak before folding it on the weaving board. In the center of the two pieces of wood on top, there are small holes opposite to each other to connect al meshbah two woods together by a small metal «*chillab*» or rod placed in the two holes opposite to them to determine the width of the cloak. The two edges of al meshbah are fixed to the edges of the cloak to pull it and determine its width after weaving. Also, al meshbah helps to prevent cutting of the woven thread passing through the comb. Al meshbah holes are used to elongate or shorten the width of the cloak, as required. Al meshbah is fixed in the part which has been woven of the cloak in front of al hayek directly.
10. **Al mifarradha:** There are two mifarradhas in the machine, which are two big wooden pieces with zigzagged edges on their upper parts, fixed horizontally to the machine on four big vertical wooden pieces each of which called «*al razzah*». Al daffaf beam and al naira beam are placed on «*al mifarradha*».
11. **Al razzah:** This is a vertical column on which al mifarradha is placed. The machine has four *razzahs*.

- 12. Al naira:** This consists of two small sticks or rods to which a big number of cotton threads are fixed to which long woolen threads (*al sadi*) are tied among them. Each thread of «*al sadi*» is tied to one of the threads of «al naira». The machine has two «*nairas*», each of which is fixed to one of the two pedals, to which one row of threads is tied. Al naira divides the weaving threads into two rows for inserting al mizraq between them.
- 13. Ma'aradhat al naira:** This is a rectangular piece of wood placed on «al mifarradha» to which two ropes connected to al naira are tied in order to raise it upward.
- 14. A'sa al nashra:** These are two sticks to which «al sadi» threads are fixed to control the direction of these threads and guide them towards al naira. Whenever a part of «al sadi» thread is woven and the stick approaches «*al naira*», the weaving knots in the other edge of al sadi (towards *al ma'ajala*) are opened and spread towards the sticks in preparation of entering al naira in order to be woven.
- 15. Al ma'achalah:** This is a stick to which the threads are tied before inserting them in a'sa al nashra by approximately one and a half meter. A rope passing through «al mayan» is tied to them from the other side, and then to «al mantab» fixed near al hayek. If al hayek wants to pull or relax the weaving threads (*al sadi*), he will do so by pulling or relaxing the rope, and then tying it again to «al mantab».
- 16. Al mayan:** This is also a camel bone placed at the end of the machine far away from al hayek.

### **Sewer (Al Mokhayet) (Bisht Maker)<sup>(1)</sup>**

The bisht is a woolen cloak of different colors worn by men. The bisht for Kuwaitis in the past was one of the indispensable necessities once the youth reaches the age of fourteen or before. It was not customary for a man to come out of his house- whether during summer or winter- without wearing the cloak, when he goes to the market, diwan or for any other task. Therefore, cloak (bisht) industry prospered and became one of the important crafts mastered by a big number of Kuwaitis, which brought a rewarding income to them. Big quantities of their production was exported to the Arabian Peninsula countries, and Saudi Arabia was ahead of them.

The craft of stitching cloaks was among ancient professions in Kuwait. The employer or ma'azeb used to employ a number of tailors to do this work. The number of workers or makhayta as locally called ranged between ten to thirty persons who worked for the employer in a special place, which was normally one of the court yards attached to his

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(1) This information on making cloaks was obtained from several interviews held with each of Saleh Ibrahim Abdulla Al Nasser, Ali Nasser Eissa al Baghli, Ali Hussein Al Nasser, Ali Mula Hassan Al Nasser, Abbas Mohammed Hassan Mohammed Al Ali and Mohammed Taher Ahmad Al Baghli.

house. Non-Kuwaiti workers - who mostly came from Al Hassa in Saudi Arabia - lived in the same place and the employer supplied them with meals. He was also concerned to give them loans- known as «*al raks*»- as was the case in other trades- such as diving and weaving- to ensure that they would not desert him. As for the Kuwaiti workers, they worked for the employer throughout the day hours except the lunch period. The tailor used to take his wage for each cloak he stitched. There were also shops of other cloak merchants who used to buy them from the tailors or brokers to sell them locally or for export. There were tailors who worked for their own account, as they used to stitch the cloak by themselves and sell it in the Cloaks (Bishoot) Market or through brokers<sup>(1)</sup>.

The material used in making the cloak consisted of the following:<sup>(2)</sup>

1. material (cloth) used in making the cloak, called «*al dorj*» prior to stitching, either from wool or Kashmir
2. *al zari*, which is a silk thread covered with silver and overlaid and polished with gold water
3. *al breessam*, with its natural silk thread



A number of tailors stitching cloaks for one of the employers during the 1930s.

*Source: Old Souks in Kuwait, Mohammad Ibrahim Alshibani*

(1) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ibrahim Abdulla Al Nasser.

(2) Al Baghli Cloak (*Bisht*), compiled by Riyadh Mohammed Al Baghli, p.31.



4. the lining, which is the material of the same color of the cloak, placed under «al darbawiyah»
5. honey wax, in which al zari threads are passed to facilitate stitching
6. al qaitan to ornament the cloak at the chest area, which is a golden thread to be fixed at «al darbawiyah», ending with golden balls.



Raw materials for stitching cloaks

Source: *Al Baghli Bisht*

The employer bought limited pieces of deluxe materials for cloaks from the merchants who imported them from Hindian, Al Douraq, Bu Sheher and Behbehan in Iran, and from Al Najaf in Iraq. There was also a special material for cloaks of lesser quality locally made by weavers, and most of it was of the cheap type used in making cheap cloaks used by sailors and Bedouins, known as «*mazwiyah*». There are several types of cloaks which differ in thickness, quality and color. They included the light summer, winter and medium type - called «*bain al beshtain*» - as well as the fluffy wabar, made of the camel hair. Tailors use al zari and al breessam (silk) in stitching and embroidery<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Hussein Al Nasser.



A cloak maker doing his work characterized by precision and professionalism

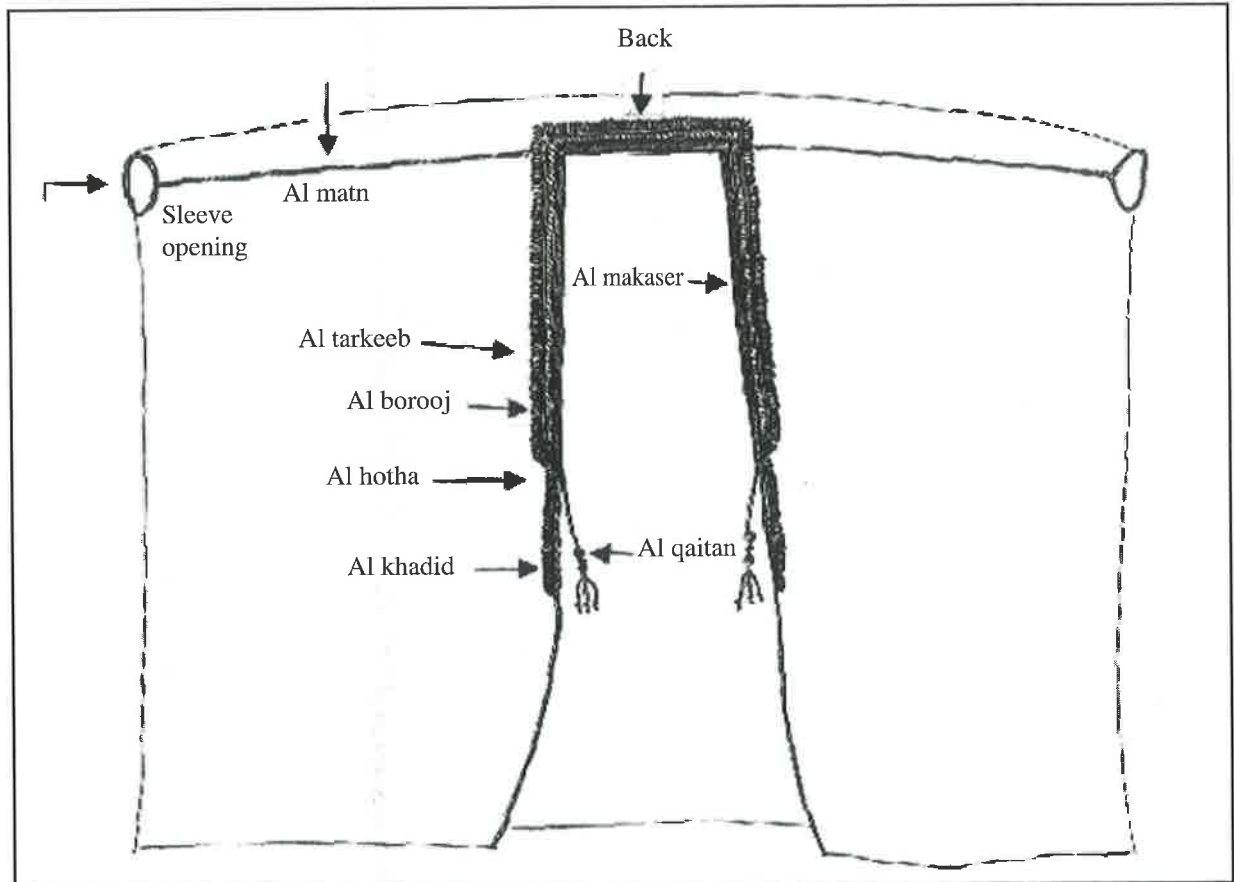
Source: *Bu Shehri Studio*

## Types Of Stitching

The cloak is divided up into two parts: upper, which is more significant, consisting of the shoulder and hand openings, and the lower, which consists of a completion of the upper part in order to elongate the cloak to reach below the ankle. Some cloaks are stitched regularly without any decoration or zari, while others stitched with beautiful embroidery of zari. The cloak free of any decorations is called «*bisht makaser*», i.e. regular, while the cloak embroidered with zari is called «*darbooyah*». Another type of cloaks was also famous and called «*bisth boodai*», which is half darbawiyah, and its embroidery is less in width than the regular embroidery. The originator of this idea was one of the old Kuwaiti merchants, the late Yusuf Boodai, for which that type of cloaks was famous under his name, and so called as «*bisht boodai*» or «*karmak boodai*»<sup>(1)</sup>. Al Darbooyah cloak is embroidered above the shoulder and at the front of the chest and on the two sides of the shoulders until the hand opening. The latter embroidery is called «*al maksar* or *al makser*» while the decorations on the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Hussein Al Nasser.



*Drawing by*

*Nadin Mohamad Jamal*

Parts of al darbooyah cloak

cloak shoulder and its front are called as karmak».

Stitching the cloak is divided up into four parts or types of stitching with al zari or zarri. Every tailor is specialized in only one type due to its difficulty and the significance of precision. These types of embroidery are «al maksar», «al tarkeeb», «al haila», and «al borooj». Each one of such types has its feature and art which is only mastered by specialized tailors. *Al karmak*- embroidered with al zari- consists of three main parts which are «al tarkeeb», «al haila» and «al borooj». Al tarkeeb means two external parallel lines which form the frame surrounding the internal decorations. Al haila and al borooj, are the internal decorations. The tailor uses al breessam (silk) threads in stitching parts of the cloak together. There are different colors of these threads which are suitable with the different colors of cloaks. These threads imported from India of bunches called «washaye'a» and the singular is «washia'h»<sup>(1)</sup>.

(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Nasser Eissa Al Baghli.

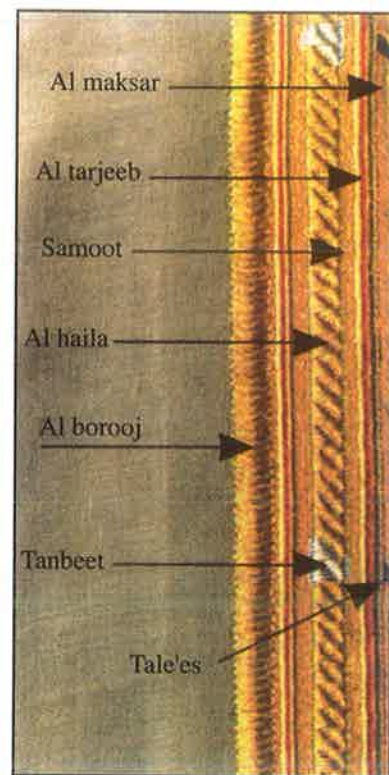
The employer cuts the cloak before handing it over to the tailor for sewing. The following is a brief summary on each type of stitching (or embroidery):

### Al Tarkeeb

Al tarkeeb (composing) is the first part of stitching the cloak, whereby «*al murakebchi*» who is the tailor specialized in al tarkeeb, stitching the two frames determines the spaces required to be embroidered of the cloak shoulder and its chest. The distance between the two lines is normally from two to three centimeters, as requested. Al murakebchi starts his work by inserting threads of cotton first to determine the embroidery path, as well as raise the level of embroidery a little bit from the level of the material, then he would cover this line with al zari threads to make the protruding lines called «al tarkeeb».

### Al Karmak

Al mukarmakchi - who is the «*mokhayet*» or the tailor specialized in stitching al «karmak» takes the cloak after finishing the stitching of al tarkeeb two lines, then he starts his work to make embroidery between them. His work includes embroidery of «*al haila*» and «*al borooj*». Al mukarmakchi's work is considered as the most important and precise part of embroidering the cloak, as it gives the cloak its elegant appearance. Although al karmak consists of traditional embroidery of known forms, nevertheless the skill of al mukarmakchi is the one which adds the required beauty. There were some workers who could perform that work in two or less days but might not perfect their work according to the desired standard. Additionally, the standard of their work is completely different from that carried out by specialists in this type of embroidery, giving the required time and effort to make it appears in the required form which fascinates the viewers with the elegance of its embroidery and the beauty of its appearance, especially those who know such elegant art. There were a number of al mukarmakchis who were famous for being creative in their work, making those concerned with that craft know the person who embroidered the cloak once they see it. Therefore, employers were keen to choose a good mukarmakchi and keep him with them at any price, whether through increasing the wage or increasing



Parts of al darbooyah (al karmak)

Source: *Al Baghli Bisht*

(al raks) to hundreds of Rupees. That was attributed to the fact that most of the merchants and Sheikhs used to deal with a limited number of employers who were famous for the high standard of their work and its creativity, depending on al mukarmakchi<sup>(1)</sup>. It was a practice prevailing in the past among employers - who were owners of cloak stitching shops- that the employer is entitled to burn down the cloak made by his own worker for other employers if he discovers this in the event he has extended loans to such worker.

### **Al Maksar**

Al maksar is the embroidery stitched in the shape of a long line on the front edges of the cloak and its sides. It extends from the shoulder to the arm to the hand opening. The tailor specialized in stitching al maksar is called «*al mokosarji*» and takes the cloak to start his work after completing the work of «*al mukarmakchi*». Some merchants are concerned that al maksar of the cloak is made of al breessam or al zari or twined or kindled zari. That requires the tailor to roll the silk thread or al zari to make it strong and with beautiful appearance, leading to the increase of the quantity of silk and zari used in making it, as well as the work period. Therefore, the price of the cloak is increased. This type of work is called «*al mahyous breessam or zari*». Among those who were famous for stitching the best types of maksar were Abdulla Al Nijada, Ibrahim Al Abad, Abdulla Su'airij, and Ibrahim Al Salman. Among the most skilled tailors also were Ahmad Al Shayeb Ahmad Al Mulla and Saleh Al Khawaja<sup>(2)</sup>. Al maksar is also considered among the precise work in stitching the cloak although it is only one line, as embroidering with al zari - even if it is of one line- is not easy to be highly proficient and precise. Al maksar consists of two parts which are the cotton thread fixed first to determine the route of embroidery with al zari, then embroidery with al zari which is stitched above it. Al maksar is an important part of the cloak and it is not complete without it, whether it is the standard or *darbooyah* cloak. The maksar of *darbooyah* cloak is stitched with al zari while the maksar of the standard cloak is stitched with al breessam with similar color of the cloak or by al zari also.

### **Al Birdakh**

Al birdakh is the process of polishing al zari by a wooden hammer. This is carried out after completing the making of the cloak. Although this process

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

(2) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ibrahim Abdulla Al Nasser.

appears simple, nevertheless it requires experienced persons, because hitting al zari incorrectly causes the cutting of the lines. The cloak making is complete only after al birdakh process.



Al birdakh

*Source: Kuwait National Museum*

### **Al Qaitan**

This consists of threads of al zari dangling from the sides of the cloak front at the end of al karmak. In each thread, there are a number of zari balls. Each thread of «al qaitan» is divided up at its end into three thin lines, each of which ends with a small ball of zari called «khalala», i.e. date or «braid». A number of tailors were specialized in making «al qaitan» and «al khalala» and there were a number of workshops only specialized in producing al qaitan.

### **Ornaments And Other Works For Decorating The Cloak**

The process of making cloaks and decorating them with al zari and the ornaments of several shapes does not stop at a certain limit, as tailors are creative in adding many of them to all parts of the cloak. Among the special additions is what is known as «*al shammās*» which is a special qaitan worn by Sheikhs only. «*Al shammās*»

is used to connect the two front sides of the cloak at the front, where «a ring» is fixed to one of its edges, and in the other edge a «*khalalah*». This also points to horseback riding (kighthood) or nobleness, and can be used by the horseback rider to connect the two sides of the cloak to al shammas so that it does not open up while riding. The late Hajji Ghanim Al Gallaf Al Bahrani, and the late Al Sayed O'mran al Sayed Ahmad Al Mousawy were famous for making «*al shammasat*». They also made «al khilal» or the dates from al zari or al breessam for the qayateen. There were also decorated «*karakeesh*» edges



Gold & Silver qitan dangling from the bisht (cloak)

Source: *Al- baghli Bisht*

for the cloaks of the well-known personalities, senior women and Sheikhas, called «*al a'milah*» which consisted of decorated edges each of which had a big «date» of zari on the sides of the cloak<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the means of decorating the cloak also is what is known as «*al jahool*» which is a thread of zari wrapped in the form of a flower hanging from the bisht. There were also special types of cloaks called «*ma'lamah*». This bisht was for the princes and a part of which was stitched with al zari while the other part with silk (breessam). There were persons specialized in making such type of cloak, normally worn by the Sheikhs of Bahrain and Muscat, and resembles the shape of what is called «*al bisht al abraq*», but is made of al zari and silk, while al abraq is made of different colors of wool<sup>(2)</sup>.

A number of tailors were famous for making those embroideries and mastering them, while a number of tailoring shops owners (employers) who were prominent in that industry had been approached by senior merchants and Sheikhs -who are considered the most important users of cloaks. They were keen to have their cloaks stitched by such persons due to the precision and high artistic quality of their work. These employers were devoted to keep the most skilled tailors and paid them rewarding wages according to the level and quality of work of each of them.

(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

(2) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ibrahim Abdulla Al Nasser.

For example, the tailor of «*al haila*» used to receive a wage up to 15 Rupees per cloak, while the tailor of *al boroj* used to receive 8 Rupees, *al tarkeeb* tailor 5 Rupees and *al maksar* tailor 4 Rupees. A number of employers normally hired few boys to train them on the work for a period extending from six months to one year. Those boys worked from morning until evening without wage, except the daily lunch meal during their training period. The boy started with simple tasks such as preparing *al zari* threads and transferring them from the bunches, and wrapping them on pieces of thick paper to prepare them for using by the tailor. The trainee also worked in repairing the old cloaks and simple embroidery tasks until he could master the trade and the employer would start assigning for him some duties in which he could rely on him against a simple wage.

Kuwait had many cloak tailoring workshops at the outset of the last century due to the significance of that trade and the people's demand for wearing cloaks on all occasions. Among the most important employers (or owners of those shops)<sup>(1)</sup> were the late Ahmad Mohammed Hussein Al Baghli, Hassan Ali Abdulla Al Baghli, Ibrahim Khalil Bu Hamad, Saud Abdulaziz Al Yaqut, Ahmad Abdulla Al Foiris, Abdulla Hussein Al Ameer, Tahir Abdulmohsen Al Qattan, Saleh Hamad Al Taneeb, Mohammed Hassan Al Mehanna, Ibrahim Ahmad Abdulla Al Baghli, Tahir Ahmad Ibrahim Al Baghli, Ahmad Mohammed Al Shawwaf, Ibrahim Ali Al Abdulla, Ibrahim Abdullatif Al Regum, Sulaiman Ali Al Ameer, Abdulla Hassan Al Fayez and Abdulla Mohammed Al Baqshi.

### **Al Zari And Al Breessam**

*Al zari* thread consists of thin silk threads covered externally with a very thin layer of silver polished with another thin layer of gold. It was brought from «Surat» area in India. *Al Zari* was of two types «genuine» and «coated» or plated. The first is of high quality and high price as it contained a bigger quantity of gold gilding or coating. As for the «coated», it contained a lesser quantity of gold, in addition to containing lead, although its appearance did not differ from the genuine. That could only be distinguished by those specialized in this trade who could identify it by following a certain method of checking, such as burning the edge of the thread to check the materials included in making it. To check *al zari* thread, match sticks are lighted and the edge of *al zari* thread is exposed to the fire. If the thread is divided into two parts and a thin silver line appears between them, then the thread is genuine. But if the thread shrinks when it is exposed to fire and is transformed into ashes, then it is of poor quality<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) Al Baghli Cloak (Bisht) - compiled by Riyadh Mohammed Al baghli.

(2) An interview with Mr. Saleh Ibrahim Abdulla Al Nasser.





Two bunches of zari, and two rolls of white and yellow zari used in embroidering cloaks.

Source: *Al Baghli Bisht*.

## The Tailor's Tools

The tools used by the tailor, locally called *al Mukhayet*, consists of a medium size needle called «*al maiber*» or «*astamboliyah*» in addition to the «*al koshtobanah*» (finger protector) which is used in a limited manner by a number of tailors to cover the tip of the finger to avoid the needle pricking while working. The tailor also uses a small piece of wax through which he passes al zari thread to soften it before using so that al zari with which the thread is plated does not fragment while stitching. Also, the tailor uses «*al bardakhah*», which is a wooden piece on which al darbawiyah is placed to polish it through the use of a special hand of a grinder made of wood.

## Types Of Beshoot (Cloaks)

There are numerous types of cloaks, with different quality, in terms of tailoring, quality of material and zari embroidery. These types include the following:

1. *al darbawiyah*: the best types of cloaks in terms of quality of material, quantity of al zari and its outstanding embroidery;

2. *al maksar*: this is a cloak embroidered with al zari at al maksar and al matoon only, which is of a lesser price than al darbawiyah;
3. cloak embroidered with breessam only, and preferred by the elderly.
4. *fluffy cloak* made of camel hair and worn during the cold winter nights;
5. *al mazwiyah* which is the cheapest type of cloaks in terms of quality and tailoring. It is made of goat hair and stitched commercially. Its stitching is either maksar or «qataya», i.e. plain thread.



A number of cloaks with different embroidery

Source: *Al Baghli Bisht*

As for the colors of cloaks, they are many; including light, dark and medium colors. Of the desired colors is al badri which is light beige, dark grey, blond, green, white, black, dark brown, light brown and gold yellow, whereas the majority of colors in the past were natural.

The prices of cloaks in the past ranged between 100 to 150 Rupees for deluxe cloak, and 40 to 50 Rupees for medium quality and 20 Rupees for al mazwiyah.

### **The Year Of Bishoot (The Cloaks)**

The cloak industry in Kuwait in the past can not be addressed without mentioning an event which caused a type of confusion for those who practised that craft and a shock to many citizens who were accustomed to considering cloaks as an indivisible part of their daily life and an indispensable piece of their dress. This event was the decree issued by the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait, in January 1931 stipulating prohibition of wearing the cloaks, as he started applying that decree on himself and stopped wearing cloaks and replaced it by «*al dagla*». Al dagla or dogla was a suit worn by the rich, which resembled «*dishdashah*» (men's dress) but of narrow shape and opened from the front part until the bottom with buttons. Its right and left sides are also open at the bottom. Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber attributed that decree to the difficult economic conditions that had been prevailing in the country, and that many citizens could not bear

buying cloaks. The people were obliged to comply with that order by force and avoided wearing the cloak for a period of almost one year. Then, the people started grumbling until they returned to wearing the cloaks again after permitting them to do so. The prohibition decree had a big adverse effect on the cloak industry sector, as the tailors and employers lost their jobs. Some of them went to work in other fields such as construction, diving and traveling, while others went to *al- Ahsa'a* and Iraq searching for jobs to earn their living. This situation continued until the circumstances returned to normal<sup>(1)</sup>.

### «Zari Ateej» (Old Zari)

A number of Kuwaitis worked in buying old zari from the people who wanted to get rid of it through selling the old cloaks and clothes embroidered with al zari. Those persons treated al zari by extracting the small quantity of gold from it. A person who bought old zari was called «Zari Ateej», as he passed in the alleys calling «Zari ateej, Zari ateej», So those wishing to get rid of the old cloaks, women clothes, a'bayats and old veils embroidered with zari came out to bargain the selling price until they reached an agreement. Zari Ateej used to separate zari from the old clothes, collect it and place it in a melting pot and heat it to extract a small quantity of gold and silver. Those people worked either for their own account or for golden jewelers against a certain wage or amount of money in return for the old zari they collected<sup>(2)</sup>. A number of jewelers also used to bring big quantities of old zari pieces from Bahrain and Basra for the same purpose. The process of extracting gold and silver from al zari consists of several steps starting with separating al zari from the old clothes in preparation of heating or burning it to extract the gold, silver and lead it contains. As for the next step, it is separating such metals from each other as follows:

1. Al zari threads are placed in a small oven to get them burnt. Then, the resulting ash is placed in a container with water to separate the gold powder mixed with silver and other metals from the ashes, until the metals sediment at the bottom of the container in the form of granules and separated from the ashes.
2. The granules are placed in the «kobja» or «kobeja» the crucible which is a small melting pot made of a mixture of mud and camel bones, and brought from India- and exposed to hot fire by the blower to melt the granules into a dense thick fluid.
3. At the same time, a quantity of «*al tizab*» diluted by water is placed in a special vessel and heated until it boils.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Hassan Mohammed Al Ali.

(2) An interview with the late AbdulRasul Mousa Mohammed Al Ali.

4. Then the metal mixture - in the form of fluid- is poured into al tizab vessel and interacts with these materials. As a result, a poisonous yellow gas with foul odor evaporates. The evaporation of this gas helps the mixture to separate the remaining metals which interact with al tizab. Hence the mixture of gold and silver only remains in the vessel in the form of small granules.
5. A quantity of pure concentrated tizab is added again to the mixture with a white powder called «*tinkar*». The vessel is exposed again to fire to melt the mixture and this leads to segregating the gold from the silver. The silver gathers around this material and melts like butter then floats on the surface of the vessel, while gold sediments at the bottom of the vessel.
6. After that, silver is separated and tizab water with the purified gold remains in the vessel in the form of small granules similar in size to the ground coffee seeds.
7. The gold granules are separated from tizab by pouring the mixture in a special sieve, which is a vessel with very small holes. Then, the gold granules are dried up and placed in the «*kobeja*» and exposed to fire to melt, in preparation of pouring them into moulds to become bars of pure gold.

«Zari Ateej» gets a very small quantity of gold which does not match the great efforts he exerts while roaming the alleys to buy old zari. The process of separating gold from the remaining metals, in addition to the risks and hardships he is exposed to as a result of this work is worthless since the quantity of the gold he obtains from such a trade is one out of each forty units of weight. He gets one tola out of every 40 tolas of zari which he collects and burns. Therefore, a number of those working in collecting old zari preferred to sell it directly to the gold jewelers or to those specialized in the separation process, and get a small profit instead of going into treatment operations by themselves, to avoid the difficult process of extracting gold which might imply some risks.

A number of gold jewelers opened labs or small workshops to extract gold from old zari, including the late Ali Yusuf Mohammed Al Ali, in participation with one of the Jews during the thirties of the last century.

### **Washing Cloak Process**

From time to time, the bisht is exposed to dirt and dust with the long period of use. This requires cleaning it and removing the dirt. As the cloak is stitched of pure wool, cleaning it with water without special care leads to shrinking or damaging its shape. Therefore, certain people were specialized in washing it and returning it to its original shape without having it affected. Those people used the sea water and special materials to remove stains and dirt. Two persons used to take the cloaks

required to be washed to the sea and placed them on a big rectangular board of wood or long arrow, each of them carrying its edge while going there. That view was customary for the residents of coastal areas in Kuwait, as they used to see cloak cleaners while carrying it during their return from the sea while placed on a long piece of wood and water is dripping from it along the way. The cloak becomes very heavy when washed and it is difficult for one person to carry it alone. The washer usually put the cloak into fresh water when he returned home - where he practiced such work- to remove the salts therefrom. Then, he would hang it to dry. The washer used afterwards a long wood with square sides to fold the washed cloak called «*al nool*» after drying. He used to fold the cloak and pull it on the nool and sprinkle it with little water while folding, then softening it with a piece of camel knee bone used for softening (as the iron is used now). The cloak would be stretched on the «*nool*» after that and exposed to the sun to dry. After drying, the washer would remove it from the «*nool*» and the cloak would appear soft, as if it had been ironed<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among those who were famous for cleaning cloaks in the past were the late Saleh Al Mubarak and his son Mohammed Saleh Al Mubarak, as well as Ibrahim Al Bahrani, Ahmad, Hassan, Turki and Eisa Al Khamis.

### **Al Khayyat (Tailor)**

Most of the tailoring work in Kuwait in the past was carried out inside the houses, as the woman - whether the wife, mother or daughter- stitched the clothes of the family members, both for men and women. Stitching was carried out manually, whether for male dress (*dishdashah*), female dress (*dara'a*) or *nafaneef*<sup>(2)</sup> (*girls' dress*) or other garments. The regular needle of different sizes was used to stitching regular clothes, while there were other types of needles for stitching *al zari*, *al breessam* and embroidering dresses worn by women. Among those types were «*karkhana needle*» which was of a special type and its head ended with an open hole through which the thread was inserted. There was a small handle of wood of the finger size fixed to the needle to hold while stitching or embroidering. Also, a wide metal ring called «*keshtabana*» was used on the tip of the finger to protect it from the needle while working. Hand stitching is divided up into two parts called «*shalalah*» and «*chafafah*». The first means initial stitching of the dress which aims at outlining the path of the final stitching, as for *chafafah*, it is the final stitching of the dress, *dishdashah* or *dara'aah*. It is said that most threads used in stitching materials in the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Mulla Hassan Al Nasser.

(2) «*Dararee'a*» the plural of «*dara'a*» which is a slack women dress, especially the elderly, while «*nafnoof*» is the singulary of «*nafaneef*» which is the dress worn by girls.

past were taken from the material itself and the tailor used to straighten them before using. As for ready-made threads, they were imported from India of different colors in the forms of *washiya* «bunches», before the thread rolls arrived later. *Washiya* was sold for two to four *paisas* according to its size. It was sold by owners of shops specialized in selling tailoring tools and other accessories called «*al barjoten*». As for the buttons, they were made from the same material. The tailor would make a small round piece of material and stitch it in a round shape to act as buttons.

A number of women stitched clothes for others against wages, while very few men worked in that trade for earning their living. Their number was very limited before the 1920s. It is said that there was one or two shops practicing tailoring business at the beginning of the last century, located at the northern entrance of Dakhli Market, the Internal Market which included different types of trades and crafts at that time.

The tailor's work was basically -at that time- stitching *dishdashah* and «*al zaboona*»- plural is *zibnat*- which was a dress resembling *dishdashah* but open from the front and might be tied at the waist with a thread or *qaitan*. Most Sheikhs and merchants used to wear *zibnat* stitched for them by those tailors, while the wide majority of the people - as we already mentioned - wore home stitched clothes.

Manual stitching continued until the middle of the first decade of the past century approximately, when sewing machines reached Kuwait gradually through some merchants who saw them in India while traveling there for trading. It is said that the first person to introduce the sewing machine to Kuwait was the late Mubarak Al A'sfour who worked as a tailor with a number of his relatives. Al A'sfour family were among the first families to work in tailoring after bringing the sewing machines, in addition to Al Bahrani family of whom its members worked in tailoring till the name of this craft overwhelmed their family name, and hence were nicknamed Al Khayyat family. It included Mulla Ali Al Khayyat who used to stitch *zibnat* for senior Sheikhs, including Sheikh Mohammed, Sheikh Jarrah and Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah<sup>(1)</sup>. It is said that the cost for stitching *al zaboona* or *dishdashah* at that time ranged between two to four Annas. The tailor used to stitch around 6 *dishdashahs* per day. He also embroidered *al zaboona* or *dishdashah* with *breessam* (silk) embroidery, headed by «*al shad*» (broidery), especially for the Sheikhs and merchants<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among the clothes worn by men- in addition to the *dishdashah* - were *al zaboona*, *al dagla*, *al mugta'a*, *al balto* and *al qat* in the winter, and *al shalahat* in the summer. The summer *dishdashah* was made from *bublyene*, *merikan*, *cotton*, *al malmal* and *al las* material. As for the winter *dishdashah*, it was made of wool. The following is a simple explanation of each type of those *old* clothes:

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(1) An interview with the late Mulla Ali Mulla Hussein Al Khayyat.

(2) An interview with the late Mulla Ali Mulla Hussein Al Khayyat.

**Al- shlah:** a light men's dress or slack dishdashah with long loose sleeves, without *gholah* (collar), usually worn in summer. Lishlah was stitched of naisso or malmal material or al wail in the shape of vertical rectangular pieces, except the sleeves taking the shape of a triangle. Lishlah was embroidered by al breessam thread at many locations thereof. Lishlah was normally worn by Sheikhs and a number of merchants.

**Azaboon:** a narrow dress similar to dishdashah, open from the front and the upper part is closed until the waist by breessam thread. It was stitched of light and thick materials.

**Al daglah:** a long winter cloth similar to azaboon to a great extent and has two openings on the sides starting from the knee level until the bottom. Al dagla had a pocket and buttons on the front side. Dagla was worn by the rich due to its expensive price and those wearing it were considered of unique social status.

**Al- Ghat:** a winter dishdashah with a coat of the same material, so it is a complete dress or suit, and in some instances pants are stitched with them.

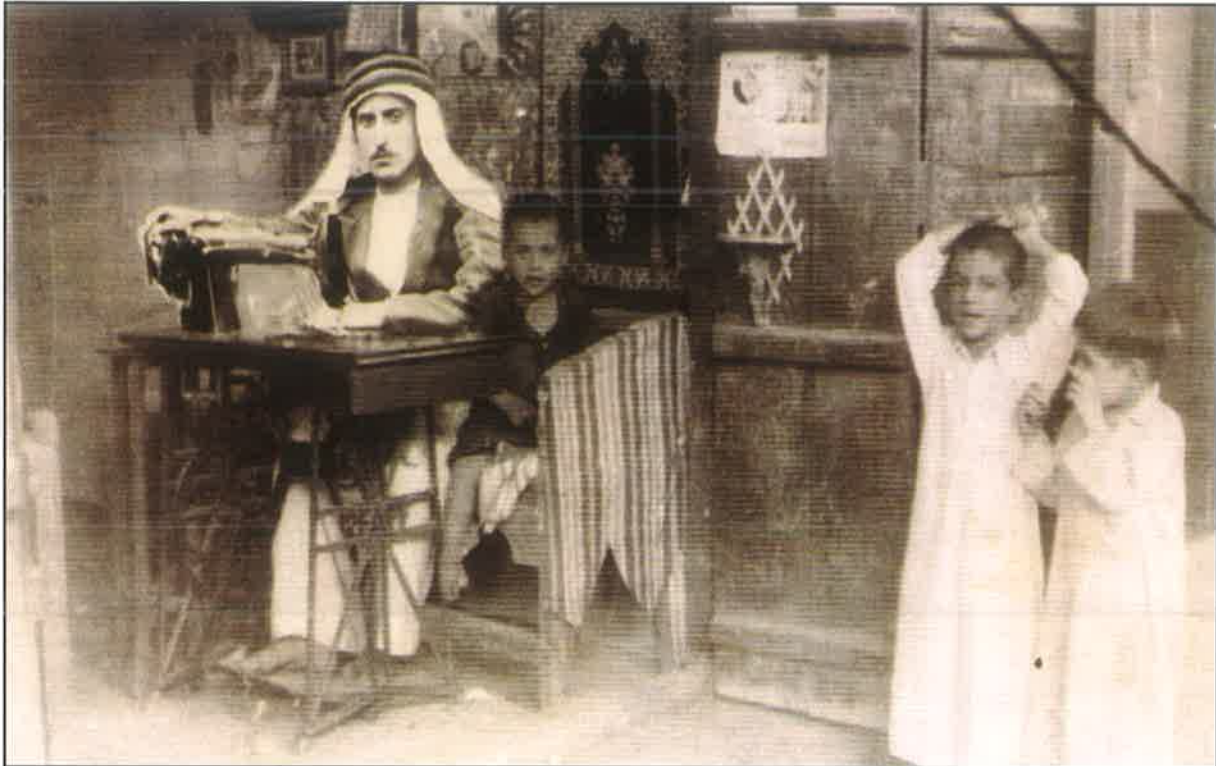
**Al- Magda'a:** a type of winter dishdasha.

Also, *the coat, barcoat* (overcoat) and *AsSidairi* (waistcoat) were among the winter clothes.

As for women, the youth used to wear «nafnoof» which was a dress with waist and a belt in the middle. The elderly women wore azaboon, which was a dress resembling al dagla to a great extent, and worn by the rich. Women also wore «*dara'a*» jubbah which is a slack dress resembling dishdashah to a great extent. Most women wore «al thawb» (garment) on top of al dara'a. Al thawb is a slack dress of black color, stitched of light cotton material called «*al jaz*» and embroidered with zari. There are thawbs of other colors such as brown, blue, red, green and violet, but the black color was the most rife.

## **The Introduction Of Sewing Machines in the Labor Market**

The late Abdulla Khalid al Hatem said that in the year 1907 the first sewing machine introduced to Kuwait and that the first one to use it for a wage in the market was the late Mubarak bin A'sfour, and an Iraqi person called Tawfiq Ahmad, who was the first to stitch European clothes in Kuwait. The introduction of sewing machines in Kuwait led to the increase in the number of those working in that field as a result of the ease of completing the work through it. The number of customers also increased who preferred machine stitching due to the low cost and speedy completion. A number of tailors expanded in their work through employing workers or tailors against wages to carry on that work.



The late Abdunabi Bahbahani in his workshop at Al- Dakhli Souk in 1940s.

The employer used to buy a number of sewing machines and employed a similar number of tailors, and supervised them, as well as designed and cut the material for dishdashas and other clothes according to the required measurements. The tailoring shop consisted of a number of sewing machines, ranging between 4 to 6 and a wooden table to cut the materials. As for the tools, they were the scissors and wooden ruler or that made of steel, keshtebana, and coal-operated iron. The machine was operated by a foot pedal. The tailor or worker as called also, used to receive a monthly salary of 15 Rupees. The employer also used to give him remuneration or «eadiya» after the end of the seasons, the most important of which were the month of Ramadhan and the two feast days. The worker used to work day and night to complete the work in hand. Work also greatly increased when Amirs or Kings of neighboring countries used to visit the country, accompanied by hundreds of companions as the government of Kuwait was concerned to give a gift to each one of them consisting of a dishdashah and *ghutra* (head cover) and the like, making tailors almost continuously work 24 hours during such periods. It is said that the stitching fee dramatically increased during the 1940s, so that the cost of stitching one dishdashah reached a half Rupee, coat two Rupees and dagla with coat four Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with the late Mansur Ali Jamal.



Mr. Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem says that the first person who started repairing sewing machines in Kuwait was the late Al Sayed Omar A'sem Al Azmiri. Sewing machines were of two types, the first type was of a small size and hand operated. It was sold with its wooden base, on which the machine was placed while operating. Women prefer that type, as they used to stitch clothes during their spare time while sitting on the floor and the machine in front of them. As for the machine used at the tailoring shops, it was of a bigger size and fixed on a high table, behind which the tailor sat on a chair and placed his feet on the pedal to operate . That machine was more suitable for workers who work long hours in such craft, as every one of them needed to have his body in a comfortable position to efficiently complete the work.

Two brands of sewing machines became famous in Kuwait since the introduction of such machines to the country till the mid fifties approximately, which is «Singer»-made in USA- and its first agent was the late Al Sayed Fakhri Al Sayed Rajab. He was appointed by the general agency of the company located in Baghdad in 1930<sup>(1)</sup>. By the year 1932, Mohammed Ameen Ahmad became the company's agent and was later famous with the nickname of «Ameen Singer». As for the second brand, it was called «Pfaf»- made in Germany, and its agent was an Indian person called Ghulam Mohammed who came to Kuwait in the 1930s and settled.

About the beginning of the 1940s, tailors started stitching «jackets and pants» when the number of expatriates, foreign employees and merchants coming to Kuwait increased in number . They were mostly Iranians, Iraqis and Indians. The demand for ready-made dishdashas also increased and tailors turned to stitching dishdashas at big numbers and they were sold by dozens to the garments shops in Wajef Market and other markets. Visitors to Kuwait from neighboring countries took them to their countries.

Those dishdashas were made of material called «*rayon*» brought from India, which was made from a special plant that was growing there. Most materials were brought from India, and some from Iraq, where some textile merchants and owners of tailoring shops went to buy different quantities of materials, especially for winter- in order to sell or stitch at their shops<sup>(2)</sup>. European and other materials reached Kuwait through India during the years preceding World War II. However, they started reaching directly from such countries after the opening of the British Bank for the Middle East in Kuwait at the beginning of the 1940s. Merchants started to open bank credits through it, and ships sailing to Kuwait directly from European countries, the USA and East Asia increased after the World War II.

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem-2nd edition-p.111.

(2) An interview with Mr. Hassan Machhadi Ahmad Behbehani.

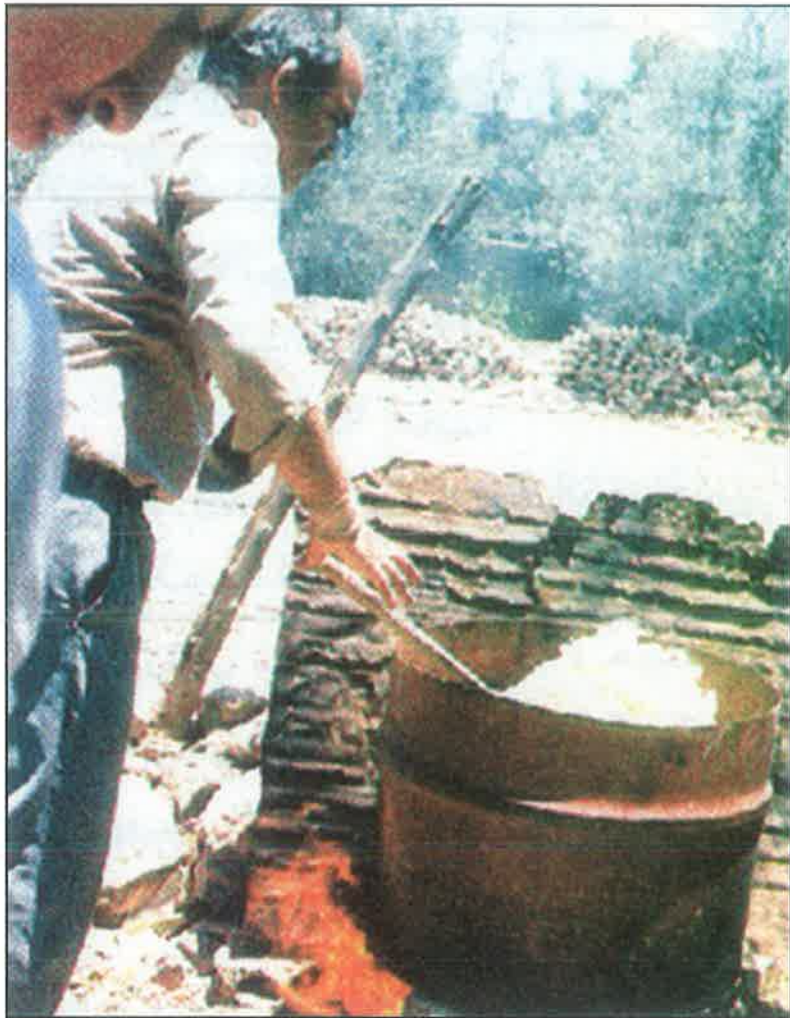
## The Dyer

Dyeing was among the significant crafts in Kuwait in the past. The word «dyeing» exclusively meant at that time the dyeing of garments, as there was no other type of dyeing activities. There was no need to paint the walls of houses or any other parts due to the nature of the building materials and quality of buildings in which dyes were not used.

Dyeing garments was carried out by specialized persons who mastered that work, using special types of materials and tools to carry out this work. Many textiles, especially for women, were brought in white colors or natural colors, for the buyer to select the color he/she likes. Among the most significant of such materials was a type

called «*al jaz*», used for making women loose dresses as well as the head veil and «*al bokhnag*» worn by girls, in addition to a number of *darra'ahs* and *nafaneef*<sup>(1)</sup>. The materials used in dyeing garments were sold at spice sellers and brought from India and Iran. It was either made from some types of herbs and other plants or their fruits, as well as the peels of some fruits or from minerals. Those materials included *henna*, *al howa*, *al ritah* and *al gorooof* which is dried pomegranates peels which are ground and powdered.

The process of dyeing is considered to be simple and uncomplicated. It starts



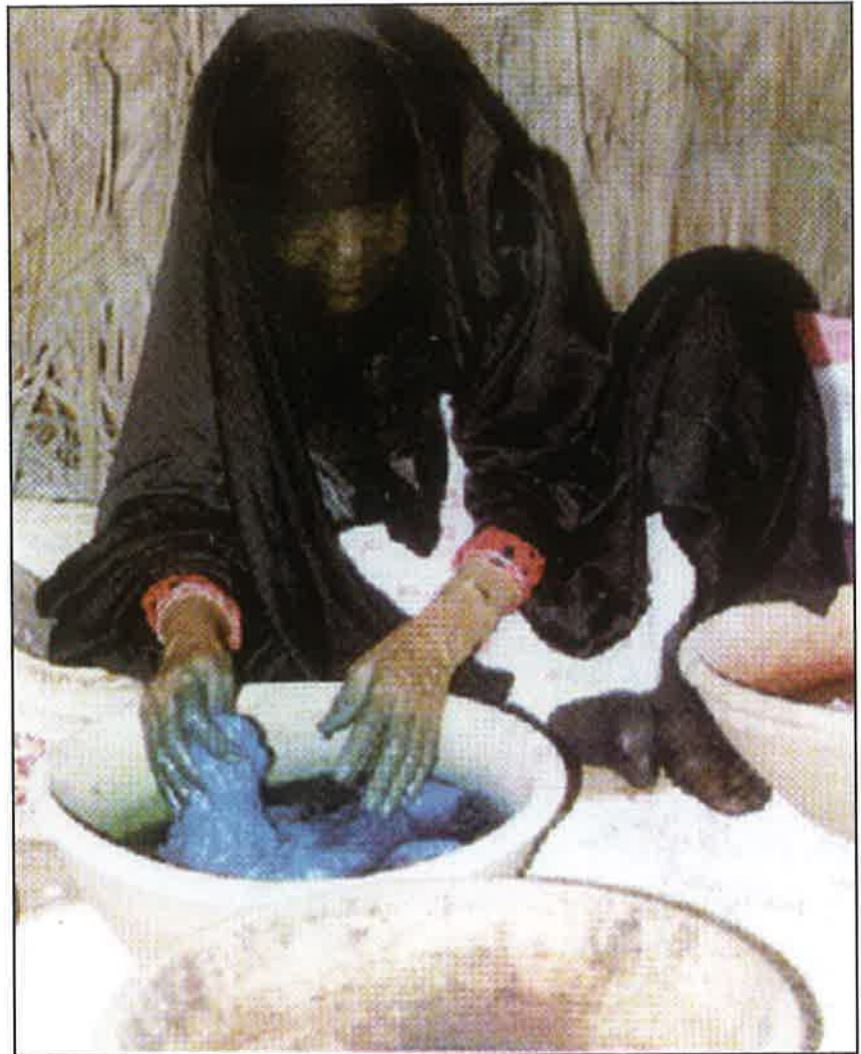
Dyeing clothes in the old traditional method

Source: *Folklore Heritage*, January 1988, Published by GCC Folklore Heritage Center, Doha, Qatar.

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(1) Al Bokhnag is a scarf worn by girls to cover the head, which dangles till the legs, and usually it is embroidered with azari in the side wrapping the head and its front also.

up with boiling the water in big vessels and then the dye is added to boil for some time, and stirred to dissolve, and becomes consistent. The mixture is left to reduce its temperature slightly below boiling temperature before placing the materials required to be dyed in the vessel. The clothes are stirred inside the vessel to make sure that water reaches all parts. The garments are left in the vessel for one full day or half day as per the quality of the required dye. Then, they are removed, squeezed of the water and dried by hanging on special ropes in the middle of the courtyard or on top of the roof in order to dry out in the sun. Afterwards, they are washed to remove any odors or residues which may be still hanging to them.



Dyeing cloth was a prosperous trade as certain types of cotton materials arrived uncolored. In the picture, a woman is dyeing materials, using utensils at her house.

*Source: Ancient Things, Khalil Ibrahim Al Sheno, AlAyaam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est.- Manama- Bahrain.*

Afterwards, they are washed to remove any odors or residues which may be still hanging to them. Afterwards, they will be ready for use<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the common colors at that time was black, red, green, yellow and violet. *Al hawa* is used to dye cloth in red, while *al gorooof* is used with other material for the brown color.

The dyer either receives the garments required to be dyed from his clients, or buys quantities of materials to dye them in preparation of selling them to owners of textile shops, locally called *al bazzazeen*.

(1) An interview with the late A'shour Youssef Al Sabagh.

## Al Kharraz

Al Kharraz is the manufacturer of leather products which basically consisted of shoes and soles, skin bags of different kind, and other products used for many objectives in daily life. Al Kharraz used different kinds of leather, such as goat, sheep, cows and camel leather, each of which is fit for making certain types of products. The leathers of goats and sheep were sold at around one Rupee while the leather of cows and camels at around 3 Rupees. Al Kharraz used to buy ready leather from the local tanneries spread in Murgab at that time, whose owners used to buy the leather from the butchers or broker to clean, tan and pull and prepare them for the use of al kharraz. The leather tanneries were old houses or walled areas or yards with pools for tanning. Al kharraz made his products in his small shop, in the Leather Market located south of the Money Exchange Square. He used simple tools, which consisted of big scissors, a knife with a sharp edge and al mikhraz; a big needle with a wooden rounded handle, and massalah; a big needle, in addition to a hammer to hit the skin, a rectangular piece of wood of around 15 cm in length with a sharp edge from one side and its thickness increases gradually called «*sombah*», and a piece of rough stone called «*mahakkah*»<sup>(1)</sup>.



Kharraz making leather soles.

Source: Bu Shehri Studio

(1) An interview with Mr. Mansur Al Hajri with Mr. Abdulla Abdulaziz Al Humud ( Daily Al Rai Al A'am 21/5/1999).

## 1. Manufacturing Skinbags

Skinbags differ in their types and sizes according to the required use. There are water bags, others for ghee and another for milk. A certain type of leather is used in making each one of them. For example, small waterbags and medium size bags, usually of oblong shape, are made of goat skin due to its thickness, strength and durability for placing water inside it and carrying it on donkeys back for long distances under the hot sun. The capacity of such type of skinbags ranges between one gooti and quarter of water to two gootis<sup>(1)</sup>. As for the big water skins carried on the backs of camels with the capacity of three gootis, they were made of camel skin. Also, there are sacks of big sizes taken by the travel and diving ship owners with them to fill with water from the springheads at the coastal cities in Al-Ahsa and other cities of the Arabian Gulf. The bags allocated for the Adani ghee (natural ghee) - called *ekka*- are made of the skin of sheep, not suitable for water due to their thin layer. Also, «*al samil*»- a bag used to place milk and shake it to separate butter- is made from sheep skin.



Al kharraz also makes different types of skin bags.

*Source Bu Shehri Studio*

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(1) Gooti is a metal tin or can of 4 gallons capacity, which used to reach Kuwait from A'badan, while filled with kerosene, cleaned and used to carry water or foodstuff.

Al kharraz designs and stitches the bag and determines its size according to the thickness of the skin. He used leather threads taken from the neck of the camel or legs of sheep, goats or cows to stitch them. The thickness of the leather threads ranges between one and half millimeters to two millimeters. Al kharraz uses the full uncut (complete) skin for the production of sacks, while he produces slippers and other small products from the cut skins. The making of the sack started by polishing the skin with «widach» or wodak , which is coconut oil or sesame oil, and left for a period up to two days to absorb the oil and become soft and easy to use. Afterwards, al kharraz started cutting the skin, preparing it and determining the required size. Then, he would carry out the stitching process using a big needle called «*al mijthab*». The animal neck skin is used as the opening for the sack, while the skin of the feet and legs is used for holding the sack while carrying or hanging it on the back of donkeys or camels when transported<sup>(1)</sup>.

The bags remained in use for long periods which might extend to more than one year without being damaged. They were normally stored in safe places to avoid being eaten by mice especially before using them, as the smell of fat remains for sometime if the bag was not used. The color of the new bag is usually reddish as a result of using «*al gofr*»<sup>(2)</sup> in dyeing it. However, it is soon changed into black color<sup>(3)</sup>, due to the heat of the sun. People used to avoid drinking from the new bag due to fat odor. Therefore, the coolies used to soak new bags in water for a certain time, to get the fat odor vanished, and its color would change into black.

## 2. Slippers Making

There were two main types of slippers made in Kuwait, and Najdi. Some areas in Saudi Arabia were famous for making the first type, also which made by Kuwaiti leather makers. That type of slippers was bright in color, mostly yellowish or reddish.



Najdi Slipper

The upper part was *Source: Arabi Magazine- Issue No. 242*

(1) An interview with Mr. Rashid Abdulla Al Shamali.

(2) Al gofr is dried pomegranate skin, used in many applications.

(3) Ibid.

decorated with leather thread in addition to al zari silver and golden threads for the expensive ones.

The manufacture of Al Najdi slipper started from its bottom, which is made of several layers of leather. Then, the front toe called «the ring» is fixed. Finally the two back rings, called the ears are fixed to the upper part of the sole. This part is called «*al jas'a*» which consisted of three to four layers, of which the upper parts are slightly smaller than the lower parts, thus giving a beautiful appearance to the slipper. Some colored decorations were also made on the upper part, normally of yellow, red or brown. The leather threads made of camel skin are used to stitch Al Najdi slippers due to their strength and durability. That thread was called «*shasef*»<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for the Kuwaiti slipper, it is the nearly similar to Al Najdi slipper, but differs in color. Colored leather is not used in making the Kuwaiti slipper, although it is decorated with some instances by colored leather threads which are normally green. The old Kuwaiti slippers were also distinguished by their durability and ability to tolerate heavy use and not being affected by water or sun heat. Those slippers were divided up into two types: the first was called «*mossab'a*» which had seven leather threads inserted or stitched to its sole in seven rows, giving it additional strength while wearing in all conditions. As for the second type, it was called «*morab'a*», containing four leather threads inserted to its sole, two leather threads on each side, which is less durable than the first type. There is also a slipper called «*umm ehda asharah kharazah*» «the one with the eleven threads» and other types<sup>(2)</sup>.

### 3. Other Products

The leather maker manufactures other numerous products which the community needed then in its daily life such as belts and straps used in tying animals, horse saddle, and *al farashiat*, the singular is «*farashiya*», which consisted of a bucket in the shape of an open sack used for extracting water from the wells. The leather maker also used to repair, punctured or torn soles and the remaining leather products. The leather maker also used to sell ready-made soles imported from Najd or other cities in Saudi Arabia and Al Zubair.

When the sole is sold, the kharraz connects its upper part according to the size of the buyer's feet. But, if they are bought as a gift for another person,

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(1) An interview between Mr. Mansur Al Hajjri and Mr. Abdulaziz Al Humud (Al Rai Al A'am Newspaper, 21/5/1999).

(2) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Al Turki.

they are normally taken in an incomplete form in order to use it as he desires by stitching at any leather maker. Most leather makers in Kuwait lived in Murgab area which was also famous for the existence of a number of leather tannery workshops. The leather makers are famous for the precision of work and the outstanding skill in that craft. Their products are distinguished by high quality and nice appearance.

Those leather makers sufficed most of the country's various needs of the many leather products used by the citizens, whether at homes, shops or for the water transport means and so forth. There were around twenty shops for leather makers in their own market. They mainly depended on making various types of sacks (bags)<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Making Drums And Tambourines<sup>(2)</sup>**

The Tambourine is a round wooden frame of 3 to 4 inch width, one of the sides of which is covered with leather to use in singing by hitting on it with the fingers. It is used by folklore bands who also use drums and maraweels. Drum and tambourine industry was prosperous among the folklore bands, using such



Tambourine Making

*Source: Kuwaiti Jewels in Handicraft Industries, Public Authority for Industry*

(1) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Al Turki.

(2) Most of the information has been derived from the booklet: «Kuwaiti Jewels in Handicraft Industries», published by the Public Authority for Industry, 2002.



instruments in organizing the parties and occasions. Each band used to make the musical instruments it needed by itself. Those instruments were made of animal skin, especially goats, in addition to wood and ropes.

The process started by tanning goat skin and drying it up, to place it around the wooden frame brought from India. and tie it with ropes, then cut the extra parts thereof around the drums or tambourine.

Usually, al maraweess and drums were decorated through dyeing the wood and placing some decorations on them. Drums were used by folklore bands, while some are sold to amateurs and shops selling musical instruments, as well as those who are concerned to buy them.



Drums and Tambourine Manufacturing

*Source: Bu Shehri Studio*

## Foodstuff Sector

### The Qassab (Butcher)

The word «qassab» is given locally to the butcher who slaughters animals, as well as the meat seller in the market. Some well-known Kuwaiti families worked in this trade, from forefathers to fathers. Members of the one family used to cooperate in distributing the responsibilities among themselves in order to earn their living and distribute income among them. Some of them used to go to Safat or outside the City Wall to buy sheep from the Bedouins which brought their herds with them to sell in the city. Other members of the family would carry out the slaughtering and skinning process at the slaughterhouse, while others carry out selling at their shops in the Meat Market.

Sheep were brought in big quantities to Kuwait to display for sale at Safat. They were bought by merchants, brokers or butchers who gathered them in barns and used to feed them or grazing outside the City Wall until it was time to slaughter them. The price per head of sheep ranged between three to four Rupees during the 1930s, which increased afterwards to six Rupees per head. Some workers at the slaughterhouses usually helped the butchers to inflate the slaughtered animals in order to separate the skin from the meat, for skinning, hang the slaughtered animals, cut and load them on donkeys back to carry to the Meat Market, against a certain wage which were normally pieces of meat given to them. They would sell the meat at the market for their own account<sup>(1)</sup>. The worker would inflate the slaughtered animal from its behind leg, after cutting a part of the skin to blow air through it, and then inserting a stick or cane in the opening, guiding it to several directions of the leg to assist to distribute the air upon blowing it to different parts of the body. The worker blew the air from his mouth directly to the body of the slaughtered animal, leading to its inflation and separation of the skin from the meat, in order to facilitate the skinning process. Afterwards, the abdomen was cut open and liver and kidneys to be separated from the remaining abdominal parts. Then, the body was cut into two halves, to be taken afterwards to the Meat Market. The heads and feet were also collected to sell to the restaurants or to some people who used to cook them.

The butcher also slaughtered animals for others against a fee amounting to one Rupee and a half. Slaughtered animals were limited in the past in view of the expensive price of the meat and inability of most Kuwaitis to eat meat as a

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Fahed Al Khalifa.

main meal. The number of slaughtered animals increased in the 1930s and 1940s, especially after the improvement of the economic conditions following World War II. The number of animals slaughtered daily reached around 200 heads. Sheep represented the biggest part of such slaughtered animals, while few numbers of goats and fewer numbers of camels and cows barely reached seven or eight heads were slaughtered per week at that time.

The government- since the reign of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah- taxed 3 Annas per head of sheep at the slaughterhouse and one Rupee and two Annas on the head of cow, and a similar amount per camel. The late Ahmad Al A'skar used to daily register the number of sheep, cows and camels required to be slaughtered in order to collect the taxes imposed on them. He used to go since early morning to Safat old slaughterhouse to accomplish his task. As for the health inspection and ensuring the safety of the slaughtered animal, it has also started since an early period. The government's representative, the late Mohammed Al O'ujairi, used to stand at the entrance of the old Meat Market overlooking the China Market (Al Gharabally Market afterwards) allocated for entering the slaughtered animals coming from the slaughterhouse in Safat to check them. He also used to inspect some of the animals before slaughtering them by hitting them lightly on their chests to ensure that they were not sick. If they coughed, he would prevent such slaughtering and place a certain sign or stamp on their ears. Some butchers used to take their sheep early in the morning before the slaughtering time to the house of the late al O'ujairi for checking them<sup>(1)</sup>.

Upon founding Kuwait Municipality in the year 1929, health supervision over slaughtered animals was its responsibility. A specialized doctor was hired to check the slaughtered animals before permitting the selling of their meat. The doctor checked the meat and stamped the edible meat with the government stamp. The unedible meat was disposed off, causing loss to the butcher. Meats were sold on the same day of the slaughtering due to the absence of chillers. This forced the butcher to sell the meat at cheaper prices in the evening before closing his shop. During the noon break period, the butcher covered the meat with wet material to reduce its temperature and keep it for the longest possible period. The prices of meat fluctuated according to the availability of sheep in the market and according to the season. This forced the Municipality to interfere to determine the prices. In some instances, the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.

Municipality bought sheep from Safat- especially during the Eid seasons- slaughtered them and priced their meat in order to balance the market price<sup>(1)</sup>. The prices of slaughtered animals during the 1940s did not exceed three to four Rupees per slaughtered animal, while one oqiya of meat was sold for less than half Rupee. As for the meats of cows and camels, they were sold for almost half this price.

There were different customers of the butcher, each of whom purchased a specific part of the slaughtered animal. Consumers bought meat with or without bones, while the butcher is forced to add a little fat with the meat to get rid of it. Many Kuwaitis melted the fat to use it for frying, while others ate the remains of fat with bread. Some people liked to eat fat with the meal, especially workers. As for the limbs and hands of the animals and their heads, they were bought by owners of «*bacha*» restaurants who were spread in the «*Khababeez*» Market to sell their meals to the merchants and other visitors coming from the neighboring countries to Kuwait and always roaming in the markets. Other restaurants and barbecue shops in Safat used to buy livers, kidneys, fat and some meat to offer to their customers, especially during noon and evening time when people gathered at the coffee shops areas in Safat. Ships coming to Kuwait from other countries whose numbers dramatically increased starting from the 1930s- were among the most significant buyers of meat, as their agents bought big numbers of slaughtered animals daily from the butchers in order to take there with other remaining supply materials. The government also purchased slaughtered animals from the butchers in big quantities to feed the army and police members, and afterwards the information and health departments, before it established special centers for preparing the meats for such authorities<sup>(2)</sup>.

Butchers sold the skin to the tannery, brokers and other persons for a half Rupee each<sup>(3)</sup>. They dried and sold them. A number of Syrian leather merchants were also active during the 1940s who used to buy the skins from butchers to export to their country. Afterwards, those merchants were active and competition increased among them and they used to pay the value of skins in advance to the butchers. As for the intestines, they were bought by

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Fahed Al Khalifa.

(2) An interview with Mr. Khalid Fahed Al Khalifa.

(3) It is known that the first tannery workshop was established in Kuwait in Murqab in 1910 . It continued working till the mid forties, 1940s till it was closed down after increase of competition to buy leathers.

a Kuwaiti merchant who opened a factory in Safat for treatment of intestines to export them<sup>(1)</sup>.

The butcher used simple tools in his work, consisting of a number of knives of different sizes and types, chopper, sharpener and a strong wooden table called «*al maksar*» on which he placed meat while cutting it, in addition to the hooks on which the slaughtered animals were hung. The butcher used a special scale hung at the front of the shop with chains and the meat was sold in oqiya and pounds.

Among the families which were famous in slaughtering and selling meats in Kuwait since old times were Al Khalifa family, who included the late Abdullatif al Khalifa, Ibrahim Al Khalifa and Abdurrahman Al Khalifa, Al Wuhaib, Al Hashash, Al Rujaiba, Al Dakheel, Al A'yyar and Al Uthman families, as well as others.

### **The Khabbaz (Baker)**

Not a single old Kuwaiti house was free of the oven where the bread was baked as well as grilling fish and cooking big meals. Some women from limited income families used to bake bread for rich families against certain amounts of money or for displaying it for sale at some markets or on the roads. There was also a market for bakers in which bread was sold, starting from dawn till late night hours. Most customers of those bakeries were merchants and visitors coming from neighboring countries. A limited number of Kuwaitis also used to buy their needs of bread from the bakers. The numbers of local buyers increased with the lapse of time and the increase of the responsibilities of families, in addition to the desire to avoid hardship and the consequences of baking bread at home. Buyers used to go to the bakeries three times



The baker while preparing the dough

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(1) This factory was owned by the late Mohammed Bu Shehri who also established the first tannery workshop during the same period.

a day to buy their needs of bread shortly before the meal time. The family head used to go immediately to the baker after dawn to buy his bread for breakfast, as well as upon his return from work at noon time, and on his way back home in the evening. As for the baker, he used to prepare his bakery with the dough at a late night hour and get up at dawn to prepare the dough and cut it into small pieces for making the bread<sup>(1)</sup> to satisfy the customers needs.

The baking process consists of several steps starting with preparing the flour, mixing it with water, and adding yeast (or soula) to the dough for fermentation and be ready for baking. As for the second step, it is preparing the dough and cutting it into small pieces, and arranging big numbers of them on a flat wooden boards in preparation of baking them. The baker would ignite the oven prior to dawn to heat its walls. The final step is thinning the dough on a small piece of wood to form the loaf prior to placing it on «*al malzaqa*» held by the baker with his hand, and hit it to the oven wall where it will stay for seconds. Then, it is taken out of the oven with «*al mengash*» to deliver it to the customer.



The baker ready to enter the flattened dough inside the oven

Normally, five persons usually work in the bakery, each of them has a certain role in delivering the bread to the hands of the customers and receiving the value. The first one prepares the flour, adds the water and yeast and little mashed dates and salt. This process is normally carried late in the night. As for the second worker, he cuts the dough and arranges the pieces on big wooden boards, each of which takes around 200 pieces. This is done before dawn. The pieces of dough are covered with flour so that they are not stuck to each other, while a layer of flour to be placed on the surface of the wooden board to prevent the sticking of the dough with the board. As for the third person, he forms the dough pieces into round shape, while the fourth worker - the baker- puts them inside the oven. The baker stretches the dough on a round piece of wood covered

(1) From interview with the late Ibrahim Hassan Al Damkhi.

with fiber and canvas called «al malzaqah». Al malzaqah is wrapped with a piece of (cloth) placed on the canvas in order to put the bread on it before placing it into the oven. This piece of cloth may be removed and cleaned of any sticking dough. Al malzaqah resembles the pillow and has an opening in its lower part through which the baker puts his hand inside before hitting it with the oven wall to make the bread adhere to it and be exposed to the fire for a short time before bringing it out with «al menqash»<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for the fifth person, he receives the value of the bread from the customers and cleans «al malzaqah», continuously washing it to remove the dough pieces sticking to the external material while placing the ready round dough on it. The baker works three shifts a day; the first at dawn, the second at noon and the third before sunset in order to satisfy the needs of customers who come to him before the time of each meal. Each shift takes around three hours of work.

The baker used to sell the piece of bread for one paisa (Rupee is equivalent to 64 paisas) to the regular customers, while he offers wholesale customers such as owners of restaurants, some additional breads for free. When the owner of the restaurant bought bread at one Rupee, he would give him six free breads, so the total he got would reach seventy



The loaf ready for selling

breads instead of sixty four. The prices of bread gradually increased in the forties and fifties of the past century to reach two paisas, then one Anna and two Annas per loaf. The baker usually sells the average of 750 to 1000 bread per day, i.e. the value of around 12 to 15 Rupees (during the 1930s). One oqiya of flour was sufficient to make approximately 15 to 20 loaves. There were different types of bread including regular, «al mesamsam», «al hanoh», «al tabdoon», «al doubl», sweet bread and other types. Also, there are «special» types in which eggs, natural ghee and sugar are used, and each one of these types has its own price and customers<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with the late Ibrahim Hassan Al Damkhi.

(2) An interview with the late Ibrahim Hassan Al Damkhi.

The baker uses al gorm, al karab and al yella<sup>(1)</sup> as fuel for igniting the oven. He buys al gorm and al karab from the boats coming to «al Fordhah» from A'badan and Basra, and yella was sold in Safat or packed locally in canvas sacks for the price of two or three paisas per sack. The bread baked on al gorm is considered among the best types in terms of taste. The baker buys wheat from al Fordhah for approximately two Rupees per sack at quantities which may reach one hundred and fifty sacks, the weight of each is thirty oqiya (ounce). Every once in a while, he sends a number of wheat sacks to the grinding machines. Many bakeries rented stores or old houses near their bakeries to store the materials they were using in their work there such as wheat and flour sacks, al gorm, al karab and so forth.

Bakers worked in a special market located south of Al Gharabally Market called «Souk al Khababeez». That market contained around twenty-five bakeries, and was one of the eldest markets in Kuwait. It was built during the reign of Sheikh Mohammed Al Sabah, the 6th Ruler of Kuwait, to provide merchants and other expatriates coming to Kuwait from neighboring countries with bread and meals which the nearby restaurants and shops used to prepare. That market also comprised milk, bacha, kidneys and liver which the shoppers from nearby countries used to eat with bread at noon or evening time. As for the resident citizens, most of them used to bake their needs of bread at their homes, while a number of them used to buy their needs from the Bakers Market while on their way home at noon or evening time from the markets area. It was not permitted in the past to open bakeries in residential districts. Nevertheless, with the increase of the trend of people to buy ready-made bread from the bakeries, the government permitted at the end of the 1930s the opening of bakeries in residential areas, which encouraged many people to buy bread from those bakeries and reduced the dependence on home-made bread.

One of the well experienced bakers<sup>(2)</sup>, who worked in that trade for almost thirty years said the income which the baker used to receive barely sustained him, compared with the great effort he exerted and the hardship he suffered while facing the hot temperature of the oven, especially during summer. The baker was not luckier than those who worked in diving, traveling or other difficult trades, such as transporting sand to the boats or doubas going to A'badan, or al kandari who used to carry water on his shoulders for long distances in return for few annas which barely satisfied the need of their children. The baker might

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(1) Al gorm are the stems of some types of plants used for fuel; al karab, singular is «karba», is the rear part of the palm tree branch; and al yella is the waste of camels.

(2) The late Hijji Ibrahim Hassan Al Damkhi, born in 1922, had a bakery at the Bakers' Market since 1934, till the mid 1960s.



remain indebted for long periods to the wheat merchant or owner of the flour mills or others, despite his effort throughout the day while placing the loaves of bread hundreds of times inside the oven and taking them out. Making one thousand loaves of bread daily for him, meant two thousand encounters within the opening of the blazing oven.

It is said that selling bread witnessed - like other trades- ups and downs as a result of the conditions prevailing the country. The demand for bread dramatically increased during the festivals, feasts and before diving trips, while it decreased clearly when a big number of men went to diving during the season. When the expatriate merchants came during the spring to buy their needs from Kuwait and the Bedouins displayed their products in the city the market prospered. The visits of some kings and rulers of adjacent countries, accompanied by hundreds of companions and guards, also made bakers work day and night to produce thousands of loaves of bread. The hunting season, when a number of Sheikhs and merchants was one of the best seasons for the bakers, as special types of bread were ordered for several weeks, at a rewarding price.

The baker benefited from some materials resulting from the baking process, such as the ash resulting from burning «al gorm» and «al yallah». He collected the ash in sacks to sell to owners of building in order to spread on the roofs of their houses to prevent the leakage of rainwater to the rooms. It is known that such ash was frequently used for this purpose in the past. A layer ranging between 10 to 15 centimeters of ash was spread on the roofs. The ash was taken from the oven through a small opening in its bottom, and the baker used to collect between two to three sacks daily to sell for three or four paisas<sup>(1)</sup>.

Bakers' ovens continued to operate by al gorm and al yallah till the mid-forties, when some of them started using kerosene in a primitive manner. This was carried by fixing a small metal tank above the oven, filled with kerosene, and connected to the oven through a pipe at the end of which was a small hole to allow strong flow of kerosene to pass through to generate strong heat in the oven when ignited. When this idea succeeded, its use spread among bakeries and the demand for such process increased and led most bakeries to use kerosene<sup>(2)</sup>. It is said that the first one to introduce kerosene oven in his bakery was Hajji Ibrahim Hassan Al Damkhi, followed by the remaining

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(1) An interview with the late Ibrahim Hassan Al Damkhi.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mahdi Al Sayed Ahmad.

bakers who benefited from his experience. They transformed the majority of their bakeries from using al qorm to kerosene during the 1940s and 1950s. Also, another person, Mr. Mahdi Al Sayed Ahmad, transferred a number of bakeries' ovens to using kerosene instead of al qorm in the 1940s, as well. Al Sayed Mahdi worked as a mechanic in Jamal Mill, where he transferred the process of grinding sesame using the mills operated by mules to machines by the end of the forties.

### **The Cook**

In the past in Kuwait, the owner of a restaurant was called the «cook». Most cooks worked in *Al Khababeez Market* in small shops to cook simple meals for expatriates coming to Kuwait from the neighboring countries for trading, in addition to Bedouins who used to come to the city to sell their products and buy their needs. Workers and some passersby and shoppers were also considered among the significant clients of the cooks at noon.

The cook prepared a meal of rice and fried fish or gravy that contains small pieces of meat with potato or vegetables in big vessels to sell to his customers. Customers used to buy bread from the bakers in the same market and then go to the cook who supplied them with the required meal, poured in plate metal to eat while standing in front of the shop. Some might sit on the ground near the female buttermilk (leban) seller who also used to sit on the ground and her container of butter milk in front of her in the same market, with a number of «*magharif*», the plural of «*migraph*» or ladle for the customers to drink from them. Other cooks sold fried liver and kidneys either with onion and tomatoes or barbecued.

Other shops used to cook «*bacha*», a meal made of the heads and legs of sheep, cooked with onion and spices, preferred by some customers for breakfast, while others eat it for dinner. Bacha was poured into a big plate with a quantity of soup and the required pieces by the customer, who usually cut his loaf of bread into small pieces and put them into the plate to prepare «*al tashreeb*», to be eaten with some types of vegetables like green onions and radish, normally sold by a number of women. They used to bring with them to the market the products of their farms in the villages of Kuwait to Al Khababeez (Bakers) Market or Al Tababeekh (Cooks) Market, as called by some people, to sell them.

It is mentioned that one of the Indians who came to Kuwait in the 1930s - called Abdulmotalib Al Hindi- opened a big restaurant in Al Harass Market (Guards Market), adjacent to the Cooks Market, as he brought from India a big number of tables and chairs and decorated the shop with mirrors and wooden

décor. He started offering different meals, which attracted many customers to him and was very famous due to the quality of his meals which dominated many of the adjacent small shops. However, that shop did not last for long, as the owner was charged with using cats' meat which made the Municipality investigate with him, especially after finding a skinned cat in the garbage. Such event increased doubts on the shop owner, and hence the shop was closed and he was deported<sup>(1)</sup>. Some persons who were aware of those matters said the charge was not true, but was fabricated by some competitors.

### **Al Halwaji (Confectioner)**

Al Halwaji is the confectioner; the person who makes and sells sweets, the « halwa» maker, which is a special type of sweets made of sugar, starch and natural ghee which is cooked frequently in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf countries, especially in Muscat. In many instances, it is known as «Muscat Sweet». It is mostly of red color, due to adding a special kind of colors to it. There was a special market where sweets or candies were sold and known as «Al Halwa Market», branching off of the Vegetables Market. The mixtures of such sweet and its preparation methods differ from one country to the other, as well as its taste. Some confection (*halwa*) makers used to add cardamom and saffron while others sufficed by adding the red color, giving the halwa an attractive look. The prices of halwa differed according to its quality and type of materials added to it. A number of Kuwaiti families were famous in the past for making such sweet, and people distinguished the sweet made by a certain person and knew the maker once seen.

Most halwa makers made their products inside the houses, and then carried them by boys on trays on top of their heads or through bicycles afterwards to take to the shops in the Sweets Market to sell. Halwa was cooked in medium-sized vessels made of copper with wide base and narrow opening, made specially for cooking it.

The narrow opening helped to keep temperature and prevented the scattering of the mixture which should be continuously stirred with a long melas (ladle) while being cooked. Making halwa starts by dissolving sugar in water and cooking it for a certain time to form «syrup», then added starch dissolved in water slowly. The sweet maker would continue stirring until the mixture is solid, and then starts pouring the natural ghee on it gradually and mixing it

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Bu Shehri.

while still on the fire. When cooking is complete, a certain amount of cardamom and saffron were added, and then poured in copper trays with a long ladle. Al gorm was used as fuel for cooking halwa, which equally distributes temperature to the base of the vessel. Usually, one batch of halwa weighed around twenty oqiyas, poured into two copper trays, each of which would be sufficient for ten oqiyas. The sweets were displayed in the market on trays and sold by oqiya, at a price ranging from half Rupee for regular type to one Rupee and quarter for the good quality made by famous sweet makers<sup>(1)</sup>. Halwa would also be packed into tin containers called «gawati» made by the tin makers, each of which had the capacity for a half to one oqiya. Kuwaitis eat halwa throughout the year, whether for breakfast or during the day. Some prefer to eat it with bread, while others to eat it as it is. The demand for halwa increases during Ramadhan, feasts and other occasions. The ship captains used to buy big quantities of halwa to take with them while traveling and diving, which was packed in tin containers in order to be eaten by sailors during breakfast with bread and tea. Kuwaiti halwa is considered the best in the Gulf due to its good taste and high-quality ingredients. It is cooked over fire for a longer time than halwa made in Bahrain, Oman or Iraq, which results in making it qualified to stay for longer period without drying or changing taste<sup>(2)</sup>. It is known that Omanis were the first to make that type of sweet, which came to be known as «Muscati Halawa». Each type of halwa made in one country had its own taste and flavor. The tastes of people differed with respect to preferring a certain type of halwa over the other. However, the type made in Kuwait during the 1940s and before differed from its counterparts in such countries, especially when made by those specialized who became famous all over the Gulf. The production of that remarkable type stopped in Kuwait by the end of the 1950s and Omani halwa made at present have become the best available halwa, due to the attention and encouragement received by those making them<sup>(3)</sup>. Of the oldest and most famous confectioners was the late Khalaf Abbas al-Halwaji (d1938 of 100 years). He was a wholesaler. A number of young apprenticed to him and be famous confectioners.

Among the famous Kuwaitis who were prominent in this field in the past also were the late Hajj Ali Al Naqi and his sons Abdul Hussein, Yusuf and Abdulrahim Ali al Naqi, as well as Hajji Abbas Maqamis, Shishter, Al Halawji, Abu Al Hassan, Mulla Juma'a and Al Koot families.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Bader Yusuf Al Naqi.

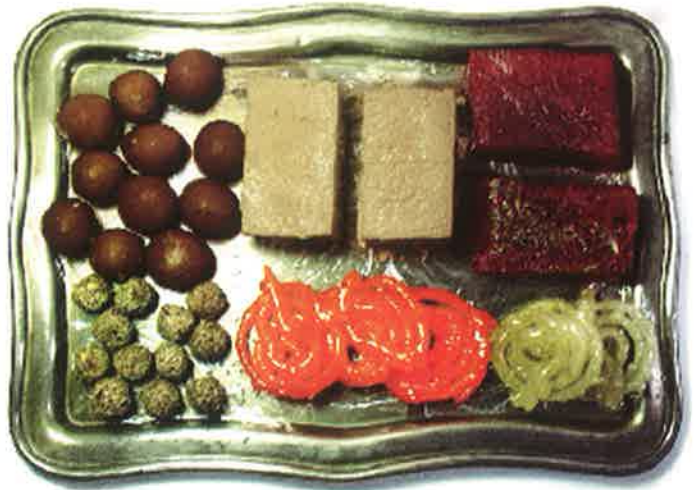
(2) An interview with the late Ja'far Mulla Juma'a.

(3) An interview with Hajji Mousa Abdulhussein Al Naqi.

## Other Products Made By Al Halwaji (Confectioner)

### 1. Rahash And Al Qubbait

Al rahash is «*al tahiniyyah*» sweet or halvah, made of sesame oil or *extract*, «*debss*» (dates syrup) and sugar syrup. It is among the Kuwaiti famous sweets during winter, which Kuwait is famous for making and distinguished by its quality from other countries in the region. Al rahash is made in all Gulf countries, in addition to Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Jordan. However, it differs from one country to the other in the method



Al halwa, al rahash, al logymat, al semsemiya and al zalabya.

of preparation and taste. The Kuwaiti rahash is distinguished from other countries by using «*al debss*», which is dates juice. Al rahash making starts by heating a mixture of water and sugar in a copper vessel on a low fire to make syrup. The mixture is stirred with a wooden spoon and «*al gorm*» or «*al arfag*» or «*palm tree branches*» is used as fuel. Also, an equivalent quantity of dates honey is heated in the same manner until it turns to white color. Then, it is poured on the syrup and mixed together away from fire until they completely mix. Then, an equivalent quantity of hot tahina, is added. The mixing process continues until the mixture is solid and consistent. Hence, al rahash is produced which is poured into copper trays, each has a capacity for ten oqiyas. Normally, a quantity of dates honey and syrup is taken before adding sesame extract to make «*al qubbait*» for children. Al qubbait is formed into small circles which are cut and sold to children. Also, sesame is added to some of al qubbait pieces before drying to make another type. Among the most famous makers of al rahash in Kuwait were the families of Jamal, al Shamali, Abdulrahim, al Koot, Abbas Maqames and a number of other sweet makers mentioned earlier<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is said that the late Hajji Ali Naqi Abdulrahim - one of the most famous makers of sweets and rahash in Kuwait at the end of the 19th century- was the one who developed rahash industry and produced it in the current quality which suits the taste of Kuwaitis.

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(1) An interview with the late Abdulhadi Mohammed Jamal.

He went to Basra, then Baghdad about the year 1880 and learned the making of sweets and al rahash there on the hands of skilled masters in this field. Then, he returned to Kuwait after few years and started producing sweets and rahash in a method different from that he saw in Iraq, until he reached the mixture known in Kuwait. The making of al rahash and sweets of high quality was famous for tens of years under his name and the names of his sons<sup>(1)</sup>. He opened a shop for selling sweets and rahash at the beginning of the last century at the northern entrance of Dakhli Market - opposite to al Souk al Kabir mosque. This trade later transferred to his sons, the most famous of whom were the late Abdulrahim, Yusuf and Abdul Hussein, who moved the shop to the Vegetable Market in the 1930s, followed by their sons who discontinued this trade at the beginning of the 1950s, after working for tens of years<sup>(2)</sup>. It is known about al rahash industry in other Arab countries like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt that they added to the mixture the branches of some green plants called «erg al halawa» to make the sugar and sesame extract held together. This branch resembles «al meswak» sticks. As in Kuwait, «erg al halawa» is not added, as the dates honey added to the mixture leads to the cohesion of the sugar and sesame mixture, from which Kuwaiti rahash is made.

Many Gulf citizens like that Kuwaiti rahash due to its good taste and used to take it back with them in metal cans when they returned to their countries, as gifts for their families and friends. A considerable quantity was also exported to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

## **2. Zalabya<sup>(3)</sup>**

This is a type of sweets made of fine flour, sugar, ghee and color. It is made in a small rounded shapes, slightly bigger than the palm of the hand, while others make smaller sizes. The yeast is added to the mixture and left for almost twelve hours before making. Zalabya is made by pouring the soft dough containing a big quantity of water into the funnel, which in turns pours the dough into the pan placed on fire while oil is boiling. If the boiling process is completed, zalabya will be carried from the pan with a ladle and then dipped in syrup for a short period, after which it is ready for eating.

Zalabya is considered among the most important sweets in winter and the holy month of Ramadhan. Kuwaitis consume it frequently during Ramadhan nights and at the diwanias. Most sweet makers make zalabya, which is sold by weight at the Sweets Market, where it is displayed in big trays and arranged in an attractive pyramid shape for the passersby and shoppers who did not have many sweet varieties in old days, as the types of available

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(1) An interview with the late Abdulhadi Mohammed Jamal.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mousa Abdulhussein Al Naqi.

(3) Ans interview with the late Hassan Naseer A'wad Behbehani.

sweets were limited. The oqiya of a good type was sold at approximately one Rupee, while the types made of cheap raw materials were sold at six Annas or less. It is said that among the first of those famous in making distinguished types of zalabya in the past were the late Yusuf Al Naqi, the late Naseer A'wad Behbehani and a number of sweet makers mentioned earlier. The majority of Kuwaiti zalabya makers discontinued such work at the beginning of the 1950s, after cheap commercial types spread at the shops which opened at that time in Al Duaij Market and other markets.

### 3. Al Baksam

These are small pieces of rectangular shape cookies, with sharp edges, made of flour, eaten by Kuwaitis during breakfast with tea. It is also taken while traveling and diving as it stays for a long time without being affected or spoiled. *Al baksam* (baqsum) is made of fine «*walayaiti*» flour of high quality, after being sieved and cleaned of residues. Then, a quantity of chick-pea water, «*soula*» and ghee is added, plus very small quantities of water while kneading the dough. The chick pea water helps fermentation of the dough, while «*soula*» leads to the expansion and inflation of al baksam. Then, the worker starts kneading it with his hands, and adds small quantities of sugar. Then, it is left for a period of time to ferment the dough. Then, the dough is cut and formed with the hands in the shape of small pieces, arranged in copper trays. Then, it is placed in the oven for a certain period. The trays are placed in the oven after extinguishing the fire, and al gorm and the wood pieces are transferred into live coal. Al arfaj, al karab and gorm have been used for setting the oven on fire for baking al baksam.

Al baksam is sold by oqiya and the baksam maker - or al baksami- sells his products to the sweets shops. The demand for this type prospers during the diving and travel seasons and feasts, and before the travel of pilgrims to the holy lands where it is sold in big quantities while packed in empty tea boxes made of light woods, which reached Kuwait from India and Ceylon packed with tea. Those boxes were sold empty to pack with different local products exported to the neighboring countries, or taken as food supply with the travel and diving ships. A number of Saudi merchants also used to buy big quantities of al baksam for Saudi Arabia, packed for them in the empty tea boxes, which protected it from breaking and humidity<sup>(1)</sup>.

The family of Al Baksami was the first to introduce al baksam industry in Kuwait during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah. They had a workshop in Al Saba'an Square opposite Al Bahr Mosque, managed by the late Salman Al Baksami, followed by his son, the late Ahmad Al Baksami.

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(1) An interview with the late Hassan Naseer A'wad Behbehani.

#### 4. Al Logymat And Other Sweets

The sweet maker «halwaji» also made other types of sweets such as «*al logymat*», «*al bamia*», cake, «*al yawama*» and other types. Al logymat and al bamia are made of almost the same mixture as zalabya, but the first is made in the shape of small balls, while the second is made into big fingers, and both are made in the method of zalabya. Al bamia dough is passed through a small hole made in a piece of cardboard or thick paper funnel in which the dough is placed. Then, it is pressed to extract it from the opening in the required shape.

As for «*al -yawama*» it resembles the Indian «*samboosek*», which is a thin dough made in the shape of triangle and stuffed with almonds and nuts. Al yawamas are boiled in ghee then dipped in syrup or sprinkled with fine sugar, before being displayed for sale.

There is another type of sweets made in Kuwait which is «*al ghoraiba*» made of flour mixed with ghee and sugar without using water. The best types of «*ghoraiba*» is that made from chick pea flour, to which sugar and ghee is added. It is considered among the most difficult products to make, as the ghee and sugar do not mix with chick pea flour. Al ghoraibas are formed with the hands.

As for the cakes, they are made from flour, sugar, ghee and water, to which eggs are added. Whenever the quantity of eggs increased, the cake becomes tastier and of better quality. Cakes are poured in moulds after kneading, and placed in the oven to cook. In Kuwait, cakes are called *Ageeli disc dough* or *khanfaroosh*.



Al darabeel, al kalija, al ghorayeba and al yawama.



It is known that all those types of products were made of one dough of high quality flour imported from Australia, known as «walayati flour». As for the standard flour used for baking, it was locally milled at special workshops, each of which was called «*madar*», where donkeys or mules rotate the grinding mill for grinding the grains, before the grinding machines were brought at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## 5. Candies

Among the most important kinds of candies made in Kuwait in the past were droplets and different other types carrying local names such as al gargari, *al qobait*, *al semasmiya*, *al koshat* and *al nareel* (coconut), horse liver (*al halgoom*), *al saao* eggs, *al a'roos fingers*, *sha'ar al banat*, *halawat el deek*, *al dajaja* and many others. Droplets is the best of these candies, and it is of two types, *cashew droplets* and chick peas droplets. In the past, droplets were made by placing cashew or chick peas in a cooper utensil, at the sides of which steel rods (rings) are fixed. It is hung to two poles and exposed to low fire of al gorm, after transferring into live coal. Then, the cooked syrup is added slowly on the cashew or chick peas and the utensil will be stirred slowly, so the syrup will cover it gradually, until it is covered with the required thickness. Then, it is cooled and becomes ready for selling. Droplets are usually distributed at weddings ceremonies and on the occasion of circumcision of children and in the middle of the month of Sha'aban, which Kuwaitis celebrated in the past as being one of the blessed days called «*al nawafel*»<sup>(1)</sup>.

A big number of Kuwaitis were famous for making this type of sweets, especially in Sharq area, where many of them made it at their homes and then brought to the market in trays to sell at their shops. Among the most famous of these were few members of Abu Al Hassan family, Naseer A'wad Behbehani, Shishter family and Ibrahim Mohammed Jamal, as well as others.

### Chick Peas And Beans Seller

Chick peas and beans - al homos and al fool (called bajella locally)- are among the popular meals which Kuwaitis like- and eat for breakfast or dinner. Big quantities of them were brought by boats coming from Basra and A'badan in big canvas sacs, which were unloaded at al «Fordhah». Some families prepared this meal at their homes but most Kuwaitis depended on the chick peas and beans seller who used to prepare this meal at his house at night, to take in the early morning in big vessels placed in front of him, while sitting near his house or at any of «al a'wayer»<sup>(2)</sup> or in the narrow streets,

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(1) An interview with the late Hamza Abbas Al Kout.

(1) Plural of «ayer» which is a corner on the road.

or in main streets where passersby are in large numbers, or at some markets. Chick peas and beans are cooked in big copper utensils filled with water, to which salt, red pepper and «shinan», which is a type of herbs which helps expediting the cooking process of beans are added thereto.

The sellers of spices and incense sell «al shinan», along with other types of herbs and seeds which are displayed at their shops. Al shinan is also added to yogurt to give it a special flavor. The chick peas and beans seller sells his product by «al kail», which is the ladle used to scoop a special quantity placed either in a small plate for the customer to eat while sitting next to him, or to place in the utensils and vessels brought by housewives or boys to take to their homes. The «bajella» seller sold the accustomed quantity filling the ladle for one paisa (i.e. quarter Anna). Normally, he placed two small plates next to him filled with salt and pepper, for the customer's use, and a big plate (pan) for washing the small plates and spoons, after the customer finished eating the chick peas and beans. The bajella seller covered his utensils with a piece of canvas or fabric in order to maintain their temperature, and sat on another piece of canvas, under which he normally used to keep his income of Paisas and Annas.

### **Ice Cream (*Bouzah*) Seller**

Ice cream industry - called locally «*dendormah*» or «*barid*»- started in Kuwait at the beginning of the 1930s. The first one to introduce it to Kuwait was an Iraqi person called «Abu Iskander». The ice cream was

manually made from a mixture of water, sugar and «*dye*» (a color with special flavor) placed in a medium-sized barrel made of tin, of diameter of approximately 40 cm and depth of 60 to 70 cm, which was closed and dipped into another bigger barrel made of wood and lined inside with a layer of metal sheets. A quantity of ice and salt are placed in the external big barrel and then the worker would start rotating the small barrel with hand inside the big barrel for a period of time, for the purpose of exposing the mixture to the low temperature. Salt helps to retain low temperature and prevent ice from melting



Ice cream making machine

Source: Kuwait National Museum

in the external barrel, leading to the cooling of the mixture and then its freezing and transformation into ice cream. Ice cream was sold at a number of coffee shops and placed for the buyer in a small plate with a spoon. The plate was called «*badiya*» and made of metal polished with a special type of thick dye called «*mlabbas*».

A number of Kuwaitis opened shops for selling ice cream at some markets by the end of the 1930s, including the late Abdul Noor Al A'wadi and Mohammed Bu Shehri. The late Hussein and Abbas Shishter were famous for producing the best types of ice cream during the 1930s and 1940s. They opened their shop at the Tin Market to sell ice cream. After the expansion of their business and acquiring reputation, they relocated the shop to the New Street by the end of the 1940s. They were the first to make ice cream of milk in Kuwait. The late Sh'abaaan Ghadanfari and his brother Ghulum Ghadanfari also opened a workshop for ice cream in the mid forties, which used to supply their own coffee shops with that product<sup>(1)</sup>. There was also a number of ice cream hawkers who roamed the alleys and markets. Each one of them carried a thermos containing small pieces of ice cream fixed to sticks, to sell to children. The ice cream seller used to call loudly «*barrid... barrid*». Then, children would gather around him to buy «*dendarma*» of different flavors, the most famous of which was lemon, orange, banana and berry.

## **Other Miscellaneous Crafts**

### **Watch Repairer**

A number of citizens worked in repairing watches, and their shops were in the old Wajef Market (New Street afterwards) and the Scrap Market and the Watches Alley, branching off the Dakhli Market during the 1930s and 1940s. The watches used at that time were wall clocks, pocket watches and alarm clocks placed in «*al roshna*». They were simple and easily repaired operating by a winding key, keeping in motion for a full day (24 hours). The horologist sat in his shop on the ground, with a small table in front of him, on which he placed the watch being repaired, while the other watches, whether already repaired or waiting for their turn, were kept on a wooden shelf.

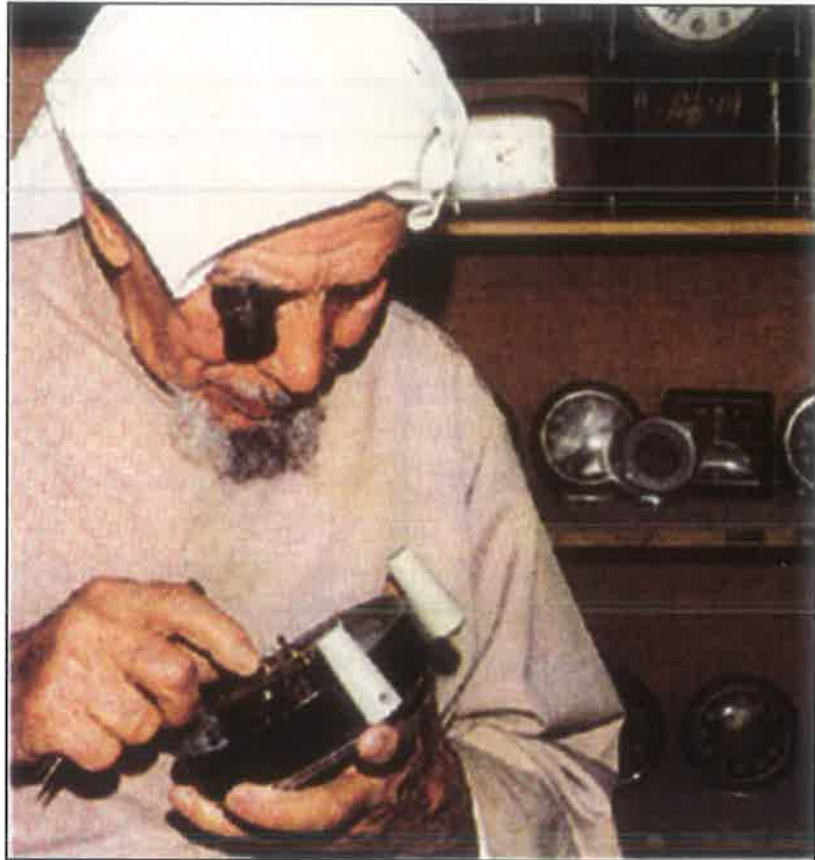
The horologist used simple tools, through which he cleaned or disassembled the watch or replace some of its parts which were out of work with new parts. The repairer's tools basically consisted of<sup>(2)</sup>:

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(1) An interview with the late Ghulum Hajji Ali Ghadanfari.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Ibrahim Bu Shehri.

1. Tweezers or (mingash), which is a very small tweezer with sharp edges through which the horologist holds the small parts of the watch.
2. A small screwdriver of several sizes for removing the screws and opening the watch rear cover in order to repair it.
3. The magnifier (or small darbeel) used to magnify the small parts of the watch.
4. Small brush which is made of hair or thin nylon threads to clean the internal parts of the watch out of the dust and dirt.



Watch maker repairing a watch

*Source: Kuwaiti-Gulf Joint Traditional Crafts, Hind Yehya Saleh Al Yehya-1997*

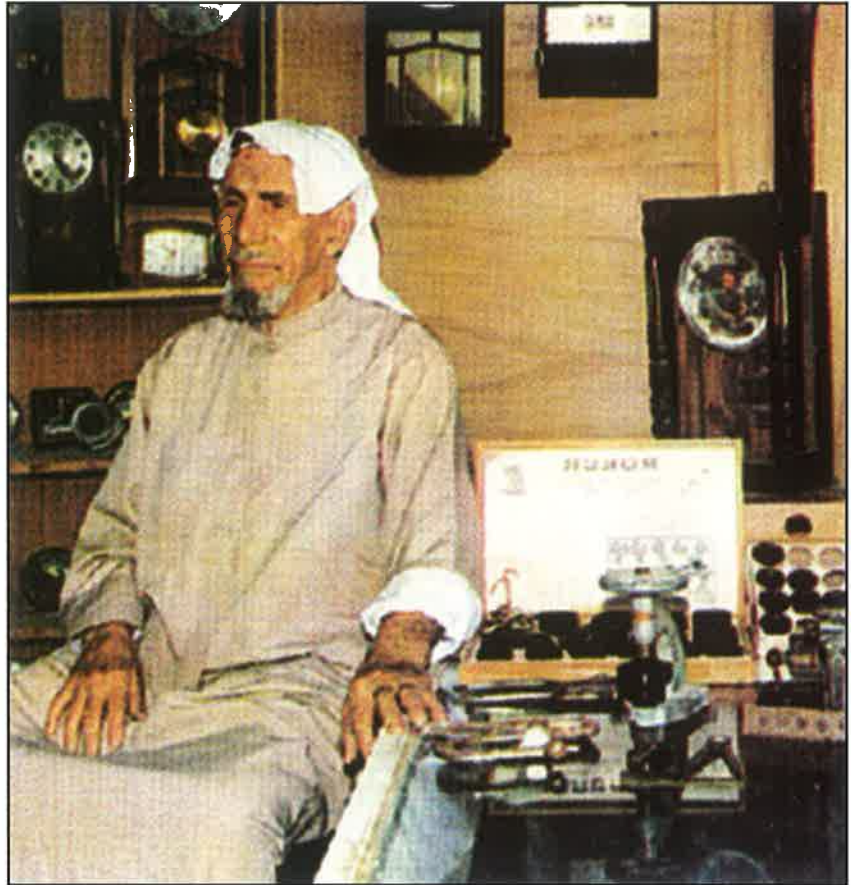
5. Compressor which is a small device used to compress and fix the glass lid of the watch.
6. The lubrication and cleaning tools. The watchmaker uses benzene to clean the watch dirty parts or to remove rust.
7. A small file, of different sizes to be suitable with the size of the part required to be repaired. The file is used to soften some parts or for reducing the size of the watch glass if it does not fit the watch size and the required size is not available.

Among the prevailing types of failures or break downs were the leakage of water or dirt inside the watch, which required cleaning and lubrication, as well as the cutting of the pendulum, or breaking of the glass which he used to replace. Among the common break downs is also the delay or advance of time in the

watch, which required adjustment of the time control system.

The horologist charged two to three Rupees for repairing and cleaning the watch.

As for the spare parts, the horologist bought them from the watch agents or from some specialized sellers or «brokers» who used to visit him daily to sell the required parts, including the glass lids, watch arms or (a'krab) as called locally- pendulum, oil and other tools and equipment.



Watchmaker sitting at his shop waiting for customers

*Source: Kuwaiti-Gulf Joint Traditional Crafts, Hind Yehya Saleh Al Yehya- 1997*

Among the most famous watches at that time were Stand, Westend and Rascop. Among those who worked in this craft during the 1930s and 1940s were the late Hamad Nasser Al Mehanna and Ibrahim Bu Shehri.

### **Al Mujanni**

Al Mujanni is the person who repairs utensils made of Chinaware, when broken, such as plates and tea cups, and so forth. Al mujanni first punctured the edges of the broken parts with a small device called «*magdah*», which is a nail fixed to a thread and stick for rotation. The nail edge has a very small piece of diamond for puncturing the edges of the broken Chinaware. He made several small holes in the edge in order to insert a very thin wire for connecting the broken parts together. Al mujanni also used the albumen mixed with «al nora» to polish the sides of the broken parts in order to adhere together, therefore returning the cup or the plate to its original shape. It is said that this method was effective and led to reusing the china ware, without

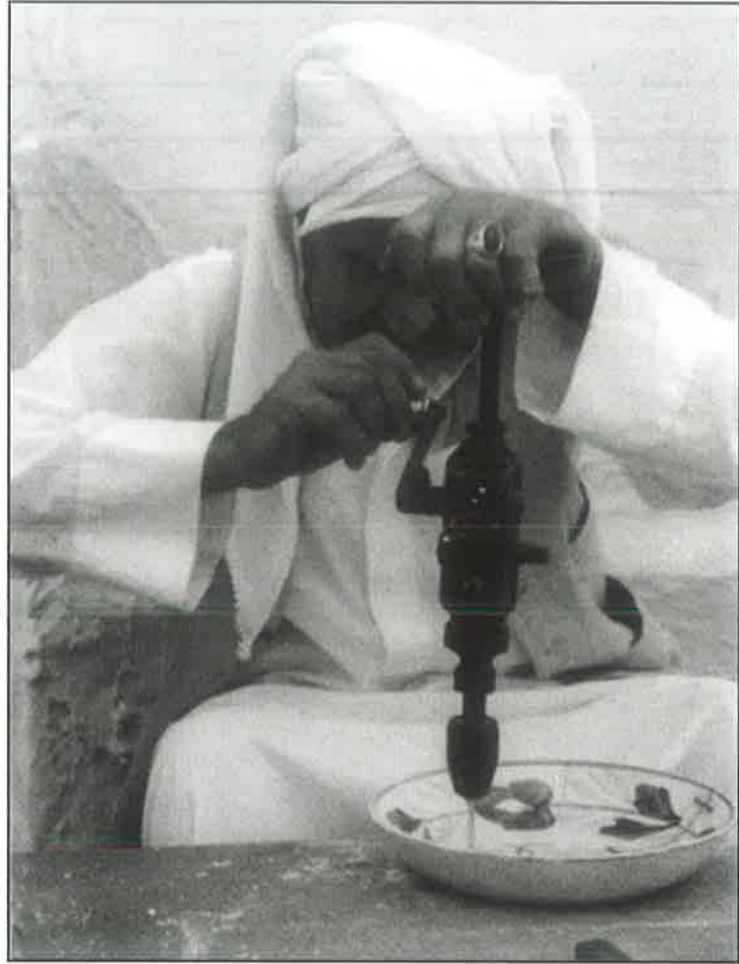
any problems.

Al mujanni craft was rife in the society prior to the discovery of oil, as limited income citizens used to go to him to repair their utensils against a small amount of money because they were unable to buy new utensils to replace those broken. A number of those who practiced that craft used to work at the entrance of Bin Duaij Market overlooking the Money Exchange Square. The view of the utensils which had been re-fixed was common also at some coffee shops in the past.

### **Al Nakkas**

Al nakkas is the person who used to repair the grinding stones and making them rough, when the surface becomes smooth due to frequent use, as the remains of ground grains and other materials accumulated gradually on the surface. This leads to filling the protrusions and small holes on the grinding stone. Al nakkas used a special «hammer» with two sharp edges, called «*minkasa*», a batter, and iron «pens» with sharp edges, as well as other tools placed in a small sack carried on his shoulder, while roaming the alleys and streets calling «*nakkas..nakkas*». The nakkas has no specific place to work, rather, he used to roughen the grinding stones at the houses or the places of grinding seeds and grains, which were called «*madarat*», or harda workshops, called «*karka*» where sesame were ground to turn to extract.

Most families in the past used to bake bread at homes, which required the presence of an oven and grinding stone in every house to grind grains in preparation of baking



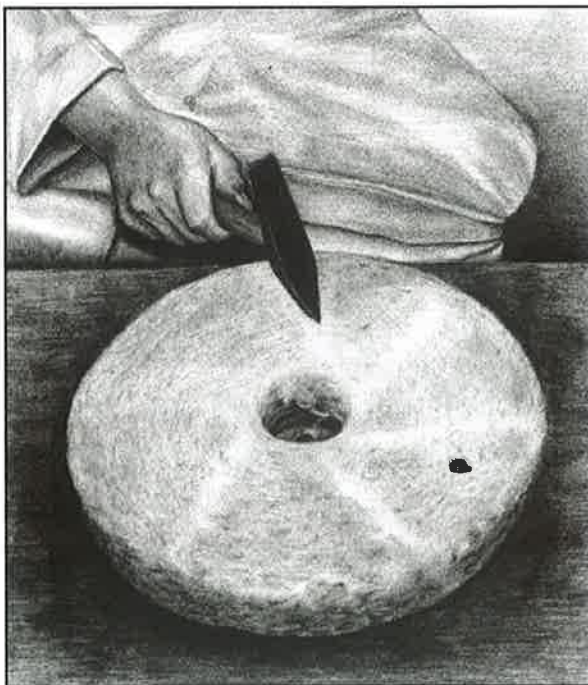
Al Mujanni while puncturing the China plate for repairing it  
*Source: Ancient Things, Khalil Ibrahim Al Shino, Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est. - Manama - Bahrain*

them. This constituted a good market for al nakkas to practice his work in roughening the grinding stones and earning a source of living<sup>(1)</sup>.

Al nakkas work flourishes before the month of Ramadhan, as people used to grind seeds in preparation for the holy month. They turned to al nakkas to repair the grinding stones and maintain them. His work was also needed by owners of workshops, especially those who grind sesame, prior to the beginning of the working season in September. Al nakkas charged four paisas against roughening one



Al mujanni with the tools used by him in repairing the broken utensils  
*Source: Kuwaiti-Gulf Joint Traditional Crafts, Hind Yehya Saleh Al Yehya- 1997*



Al nakkas hammer used to coarsen the grinding stone and removing the residues of flour which makes it smooth and inefficient for grinding.

*Source: Our Handicraft Heritage. Kuwaiti Traditional Handicraft Exhibition- National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters- 1997*

grinding stone, which took around half a day approximately.

### **Al Dammach (Al Fattal)**

The person who made ropes was called «*al dammach*» or «*al fattal*». Ropes were made in Kuwait in the past of palm trees fibers and the stems of «*al asawah*», the singular is «*essow*» (plural «*asawah*»), which is the palm tree branches, after removing the dates. They were also made of «*kimbar*», which is the fiber of the coconut. Most sailors worked in this craft, whether during the travel season while onboard of the ship or during their presence in Kuwait. The process of making ropes starts by burying the stems of «*essow*» under the sand near the sea coast for several days to be soaked into water and be easily dissembled using their tissues to

(1) An interview with the late Abdulrida Abdul Nabi Safar.

make the ropes. The stem of «al essow» is extracted after such a period from the ground, and then hit with big pieces of wood in order to dismantle it and turn it into fibers. This industry is divided up into two phases, the first consist of collecting and interlacing the fibers together manually, then wrapping them around each other. This process is called «al demmach». The second is wrapping a number of these semi-completed ropes around each other to form the rope of the required thickness. Al demmach starts by collecting a quantity of tissues or fibers gradually, and then interlace them together in a primary manner. Then, he would wrap two or more of these half-finished ropes around each other and pull them strongly to hold together, hence forming the rope. This process is called «al kassar»<sup>(1)</sup>. The half-finished rope is normally thin like the thickness of the thumb and different thicknesses can be made of any number of these half-finished ropes to be suitable with the required use in any of the different work fields, due to its strength and tolerance of any weights.

As for «kimbar» ropes, they usually came from India in bunches in different forms and thicknesses, each of which is called «beeta». They also came in the shape of «baloos» which is half finished rope, merged in India. The sailors make «kimbar» ropes either from old ropes after dismantling them and transforming them into fibers, or from «al baloos», which is merged into the required thickness. The thin rope is usually thickened with the hand, whereby the sailor connects one of its edges to a nail or fix it to his big toe and wraps its parts around each other until it is completed. As for the thick ropes consisting of three or four parts or more, a special device called «miksar» is used to merge them. It is made of a wooden board with a hole in the middle called «fahl», around which there are several holes, which «al demmach» can use any number of them according to the thickness of the rope required to be merged. The half-finished



Al demmach while making the ropes

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Dashti.



rope is inserted in the holes of «miksar» and then the sailor will rotate it to wrap the half-finished ropes around each other. Hence, the thickening process will be carried out and the rope is made to the required thickness. Kimbar rope is used in many house work, ships and different fields of works. The thickness of the rope differs according to the type of the required use<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for the ropes made of «*asawah*» stems, they are more soft than kimbar ropes, despite their strength. They are also cheaper than them. These types of ropes were used in the diving trips, as it was used by «*al sayib*» (seb) for «*al zabil*» rope, held by his hands to lower the «*diver*» into the water, to search for oysters in the seabed, and he moves this rope when he wants to come out from the water to give a sign to «*al sayib*» to pull him up<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Al Khassaf (Al Saffaf)**

Al Khassaf or al khawas is the person who arranges the fronds or palm leaves to make different products, such as straw mats, straw containers, dust removers, brooms and table covers. Al khassaf starts his work by separating the fronds from the branches before drying. Then, he soaks them into water for a certain time, after which he starts connecting them or stitching them together in a



Al- khassaf stitching the fronds to make straw mats, brooms, etc..

certain manner to make the said products. Al khassaf dyes a certain quantity of fronds with different colors such as green, red, blue and yellow to make decorations

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(1) An interview with Mr. Talha Mahmood Al Mesbah.

(2) Ibid.

in his products in order to attract customers.

Al khassaf's craft was not widely spread in Kuwait due to the low quantity of fronds, and the arrival of a big quantity of such products from Basra and Iranian coasts at low prices.

### **Al Raffai (Darner)**

Al raffai is the person who repairs carpets, bishts, cloaks or dresses which have holes or ruptured. Technical persons mended the material by passing long threads through them and weaving others across and between the material to fill in the hole. The darner uses a special needle and threads of the same color of the cloak or the damaged part of the carpet.

### **Al A'kkas (Photographer)**

*Al a'kkas* is the photographer. This trade is considered among the relatively-modern ones in Kuwait, as the first photographer arrived in Kuwait in 1935, called Ostta Badr, who was a Syrian, and turned his house located in Safat for his business<sup>(1)</sup>. Photographs started to be known and spread in Kuwait, after the British Consulate started sticking the photographs of citizens on temporary passports issued for those wishing to travel to adjacent countries. The passport issued was of one paper, valid for one trip only.



An old camera used by photographers

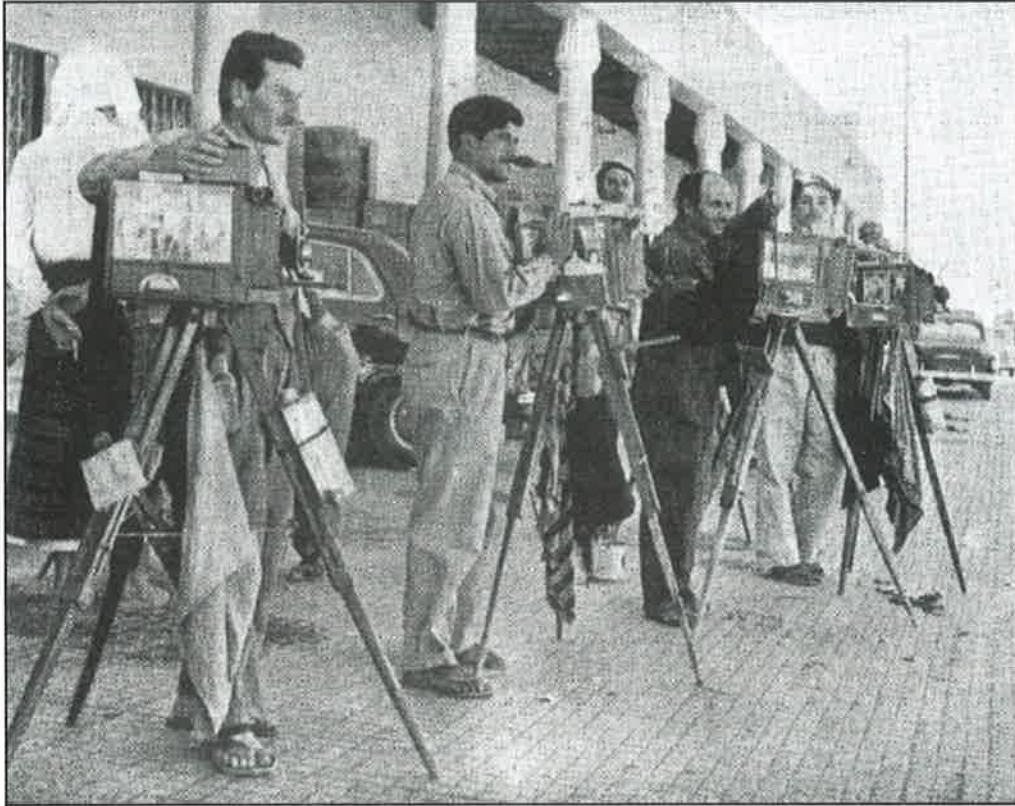
Source: Kuwait National Museum

### **Al Raqqa'a (Cobbler)**

Among the simple marginal crafts, in which some of those wishing to earn their living, was the repair of shoes, batching them and stitching the torn parts. A number of them used to sit on the ground at the market, while others used to rent a small shop to practice their work. *Al raqqa'a* (the cobbler) used simple tools consisting of a hammer, a sharp knife, a big needle and an iron seat to place

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem, 1980-p.105



A number of photographers at the beginning of the 1950s at one of the streets of Kuwait, awaiting for customers. Youths liked to take souvenir photographs, especially during the feasts.

*Source: Kuwait Register Today, 1956, Printing and Publishing Department*

the shoes on it while repairing them. *Al raqqa'a* charged few Annas for his work.

### **Al Charrakh**

Al charrakh is the person who used to sharpen knives and other sharp tools, as well as tools for slaughtering animals, through a machine called «*charkh*» consisting of two wheels, one of which is big and the other is small. The «*charkh*» is made of a special type of whetstone and al charrakh (the worker) used to rotate the wheel through a foot pedal then exposes the blade or other tools to the whetstone while rotating for the purpose of honing it and making it ready for use. He charged a simple fee not exceeding two paisas for sharpening one piece. Al charrakh was seen at some markets and alleys, with his machine, calling upon those wishing to sharpen their knives.

### **Al Habbach (Bookbinder)**

The word «al habbach» is given to the person who binds the holy Qur'an and books. This craft was rare and was not widespread in Kuwait. Perhaps some of them used to repair and stitch the Holy Qur'an copies when their covers were torn due to long use, and therefore this person was called «al habbach».

## **Al Zarra'a (Farmers)**

A number of Kuwait City inhabitants worked in farming, despite the scarcity of water and unfitness of the soil, as well as the harsh climatic conditions. Farms and farmed areas were spread at different parts of Kuwait City, especially at the outskirts in Sharq and Qibla areas, relatively far away from residential areas. Different types of vegetables, especially green leafy vegetables were cultivated. The agricultural season starts with the autumn, and prospers with the rainfall. and continues until the end of March and may extend till mid April. Those working in agriculture inside the city -especially farmers or owners of farms and framed areas- did not depend on that trade as a main source of income rather as a support trade in good seasons to get additional income.

Farm owners inside the city used to cultivate vegetables during the rainy seasons. For this purpose, they hired some temporary workers from other sectors, to care for their farms and irrigate them from the wells against a certain wage. A number of Sheikhs and merchants also used to cultivate vast areas outside Kuwait City with wheat and barely to satisfy the needs of their families and sheep. Among the nearby areas farmed with seeds, such as wheat and barely, were Adiliya, Abraaq Khaitan, Shamiya and Hawally.

The farmer used the wastes of cows and sheep, and in some cases human wastes, as fertilizers. The fertilizers are soaked in big drums left for a period which may extend to two weeks, before pouring them on the farming rectangular beds. After two or three days, the land is harvested and then the seeds are planted. The plants are irrigated once or twice a day from the wells, to reduce their temperature due to sun heat and compensate the water which leaks inside the sandy soil that does not keep water for a long time. The salinity of water inside the city differs from one area to the other, while the depth of wells ranges from two to four meters, according to the area. Farm owners built fences and hedges around their farms to prevent trespassing or entry of stray animals or livestock which may eat the crops. Among the most important areas farmed inside the city were Dasman, Bab Al Hawa and Al Sawaber in Sharq area, and Salhiya in Qibla area. Bneid Al Gar, Dasmah and Shamiya were also among the most significant farming areas around Kuwait City. Al A'wazim constituted most of those who worked in farming inside the City and the areas surrounding the city outside the wall. Also, a number of merchants and Sheikhs used to have farms at the outskirts of the city for farming certain types of vegetables and spending leisure time there.

Agriculture flourishes well during the heavy rainfalls, despite the long intervals between rainfalls during the season. Among the crops planted inside the city and

surrounding areas outside the walls were different types of vegetables, such as radish, coriander, lettuce, in addition to cucumber, tomatoes, melons, marsh melons and pumpkins. Some people also used to plant okra and clover in some areas which have abundant water such as Dasmah, Sawaber and Dasman.

Among the most important fruitful vegetables which grew in Kuwait was the nabk tree (nabq) which tolerates heat and thirst, and gained the attention of Kuwaitis since old times. It produces the jujube fruit which is among the most popular fruits desired by Kuwaitis, especially children who used to go to the farms and climb nabk trees to pick up jujubes.

Jujube fruits were abundant in spring and sold for cheap prices. Kuwait City included a considerable number of such trees. The quantity of jujubes which reached the city from the different villages of Kuwait was also great. Kuwaitis usually feel optimistic with the presence of nabk tree, and some of them warn against cutting it, as they feel pessimistic if this is done. There were a number of popular songs about the nabk tree, which is a symbol of goodness and affection. There is no surprise as it is almost the only tree which bears fruits and is not affected by climatic conditions and scarcity of water in a country where farming fruits was among the far-reaching dreams.



One of the old farms of Dasmah as imagined by Mr. Ayoub Hussein

*Source: Kuwait Heritage in the Drawings of Ayoub Hussein al Ayoub, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait-2002*



## *Part Two*

### *Trades Inside Kuwait City*

#### **Trading activities**

Trading is considered the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy since its origin till the present time. No one can address old Kuwait and its history, without emphasising the special position of commerce and its distinguished role in the Kuwaiti economy. For many years Kuwait directly or indirectly depended to a great extent on trading as a main source of income for a big segment of its population. Trading was an indivisible part of the activity of many Kuwaitis throughout the long years they lived on this land, inherited by sons from fathers, in which they were talented and knew its principles, and adhered to its ethics. Hence, they gained an incomparable reputation and honesty which is rarely found, as well as proficiency from which they benefited in the best manner.

The British traveler Buckingham said after a voyage to Kuwait in the year 1816 that Kuwait City had a great port and that the majority of its population were merchants who worked in the local and external trade fields. Their business was not limited to a certain type in their trade, rather, they traded in all types of prevailing or prosperous trades in the Gulf without exception<sup>(1)</sup>. Kuwait relied also since its beginning on transit trade to a great extent, as the merchants of Bahrain and Qatar during the eighteenth century used to unload their goods in Kuwait, in order to transfer them on the backs of camels to Aleppo and Baghdad, to avoid the high taxes which had been imposed on them in Basra<sup>(2)</sup>.

This sector is distinguished over others. It was a station for caravans by its financial significance and its comprehensive impact on the overall economic and political activity in Kuwait. Its dominance over the biggest percentage of the national income till the pre discovery of oil replaced it as a main source of income for the country by the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. Trading was basically represented in the activity of Kuwaiti sailing ships which sailed in the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, to carry the task of commercial exchanges

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(1) Kuwait's Modern History, Dr. Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakma, 1984, p.289.

(2) Ibid- p.282.

between a number of the Gulf countries on one side and India and East Africa on the other, as explained in the first chapters of this book.

The traditional trading activities since the very beginning till the period preceding the discovery of oil, as indicated in the previous chapters, were concentrated on the export of Iraqi dates in big quantities to India, and the import of different types of goods from India and East Africa to Kuwait, for local consumption and re-exporting the bigger percentage to the neighboring countries. Pearl trading was also one of the most important sources of income which was reflected on all the economic sectors in the country, as it was the main impeller of the economy, because of its direct effects on big numbers of citizens who worked in this sector. The economic activity increased its prosperity in the years which witnessed an abundant catch of pearls due to the relation of that sector and its impact on the majority of Kuwaitis of various classes, leading to the availability of funds, revival of the markets and the increase in the demand for various goods and commodities.

Furthermore, the export of some desert goods such as wool and ghee, by medium-sized ships to the ports of neighboring countries, was among the seasonal commercial activities. The trading in real estate and foreign currencies was among the significant activities in which a sector of citizens worked. Further, the activities which flourished in some periods was the export of logistic and non-logistic goods- such as gold and the different currencies- to a number of countries in an illegal manner (e.g. smuggling), whether through the desert or by merchant ships. Like any other economic or commercial activity, this sector witnessed periods of ups and downs which left their short-term impact on the living conditions in the country. Therefore, the population was negatively or positively affected by such conditions and interacted with them according to each of them and circumstances.

Among the periods, according to historians, witnessed commercial prosperity in Kuwait during the past three centuries was the reign of Sheikh Abdulla Bin Sabah, the second Ruler of Kuwait, who ruled during the period from AD. 1762 to 1812. That period is remarked by the occurrence of numerous regional conflicts, including that between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, as well as the conflicts between the British government and the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the regional wars diverted most of the commercial activities from some ports such as Basra and Bu Sheher to Kuwait. This resulted in the flourishing of maritime transport from India to Europe through Kuwait, and some European countries opened commercial offices in Kuwait City, as well as post offices.

Among the periods which witnessed significant commercial prosperity as well was the period following the signature of the protectorate agreement between Kuwait



and Britain in the year 1899, leading to the increase of stability and security from external invasions. The agreement had also provided the opportunity to ships to pass by Kuwait and bring various goods to it, resulting in increasing the significance of Kuwait as a center for re-exporting such goods to the neighboring countries. The goods transferred by ships previously were unloaded at Al Muhammarah, and then from there to Kuwait by sailing ships<sup>(1)</sup>.

Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah exerted great efforts to develop and expand Kuwait's trade. For this purpose, he concluded an agreement with the British Indian Steam Navigation Company in order to send to Kuwait one of its ships every week to transport passengers and load goods. In some instances, he used to pay for the charges of such ships while they docked opposite to Kuwait's coasts to encourage them to go to Kuwait. He also encouraged Kuwaitis to visit different countries and promote trading activity between Kuwait and countries of special commercial relation with Kuwait such as Iran, India and the ports of the Arabian Gulf. Such actions on the part of Sheikh Mubarak provoked the Ottoman Empire due to its fear of undermining the significance of Basra Port. Therefore, it protested to that company, which discontinued sending its ships to Kuwait temporarily, to satisfy the Ottoman Empire<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among the remarkable periods in the history of economic prosperity in Kuwait was the year 1912 and the following years, when the number of diving ships amounted to 1200, and the pearl diving income reached a record figure of approximately six million rupees<sup>(3)</sup>. Funds were abundant to the people and the economy greatly prospered, to the extent that it was said people were walking in the markets and their pockets were filled with silver rupees and golden liras. The economic condition also prospered in Kuwait during World War I, when the Kuwaiti commercial fleet played a significant role in transporting goods from India to the Arabian Gulf countries, as most steamships stopped sailing to the Gulf region and the eastern African countries. These areas depended in most of their commercial exchanges on Kuwait's ships to a great extent<sup>(4)</sup>. The number of Kuwaiti trading ships reached in the first quarter of the last century around 150 ships, which increased before World War II to 250 ships, the load of each ranged between 100 to 400 tons<sup>(5)</sup>. It is said that Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah intended during one of the years of his reign to compete with foreign

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(1) Kuwait History, Abdulaziz Al Rashid- 1971-p.14.

(2) Kuwait's Political History, Part II, Hussein Khalaf Al Sheikh Khaza'al- p.297.

(3) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part I, 2nd Edition, Saif Marzouq Al Shamlaan, 1986-p.262-263.

(4) An interview with Mr. Andulla Mohammed Jamal.

(5) Kuwait Directory, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry- October 1965- p.186.

ships in the Gulf by establishing a commercial steamship fleet. However, he passed away and did not implement his project<sup>(1)</sup>.

The period which followed World War II is also among the best periods which witnessed good economic activity. This period of time witnessed a great commercial activity, promoted by the discovery of oil, which increased the significance of trade and re-export to neighboring countries. These big quantities of foodstuff, such as grains, sugar, tea and coffee, in addition to textiles, ready-made garments, household appliances, furniture and building materials, were quickly purchased by merchants from neighboring countries for re-export to their countries by big trailers and trucks.

These trailers roamed the roads day and night nonstop to transfer these materials to Saudi Arabia. Ships and boats also coming from Iran- with different types of vegetables, fruits and grains- were supplied with the different goods needed by the Irani market on their return trip. Merchants imported surplus quantities which exceeded Kuwait's need. Saudi Arabia and Iran were the backbone of this sector, due to the absence of such commercial facilities at that time in these countries. Most sailboats immediately carried out transport activities pre and post war. However, their activity declined gradually after the end of the war due to the competition of steamships, leading to the transfer of the business from maritime transport to operating capitals in trade<sup>(2)</sup>. Steamships started to transport big quantities of goods to Kuwait for re-export purposes.

History indicates -as well- that Kuwait witnessed several difficult economic crises, as a result of local, regional or international conditions or developments, leading to the shrinking of the trading activity which negatively affected the standard of living and economic conditions in general. Among the most prominent economic crises witnessed in the past century were three crises: the economic embargo imposed by Britain on its enemies in the Middle East during World War I (Uttoman Empire and its followers) in the year 1913 and afterwards. This reduced Kuwait's role as a re-export center. The second is the commercial crisis between Kuwait and Najed, which started in the year 1921 and continued till the mid thirties, leading to the imposing of a commercial embargo on Kuwait as a result of the dispute between King Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Sultan of Najd at that time, and Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber, in connection with imposing taxes on the transport of goods from Kuwait to Najd and Kuwait's refusal to collect taxes in favor of King Abdulaziz. This led

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(1) «Al Ba'atha» Kuwaiti magazine, published in Cairo, 9th issue, September 1947-p.50.

(2) Kuwait Directory, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, October 1965- p.187.

King Abdulaziz to prevent Saudi merchants from trading with Kuwait, which caused great losses to Kuwaiti merchants<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for the third crisis, it was a reflection of the international economic crisis during the 1930s, which coincided with the emergence of cultured pearls, leading to the decline of commercial activity in Kuwait and the increase of depression which hit the very core of the Kuwaiti economy.

Historically, merchants were the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy since olden times. In addition to the government's dependence on taxes imposed on the various imported goods- especially after Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah got the reins of power and imposed taxes which amounted to 10% in some periods- merchants played a significant role in supporting the government to confront its expenses which focused on maintaining security, managing living affairs and financing a number of social projects for such a small society which had modest sources.

This led to the increase of the importance of merchants and made them enjoy more vital position in managing the affairs of the country, as the ruler depended on their advice in many matters, especially that his Council included a number of them throughout the history of Kuwait.

Senior merchants owned numbers of big boats, navigated by Kuwaiti captains who were experienced in traveling overseas, commercial work and knowledge of the type of widely circulated goods. A number of merchants used to go personally to India to follow up their business, while a considerable number of them lived there in almost a permanent manner to manage their business and supervise the export of goods to Kuwait, as well as receive dates from boats and sell them. Among their most significant businesses were also continuing communication with agents and Indian merchants to agree with them on the types of the required goods and their prices. This is in addition to settling financial matters which were carried out in cash before banking transactions were known. Funds were transferred from Kuwait to India in cash and vice versa. Dealing was basically carried out in silver and golden currencies. A number of Kuwaiti merchants started by the beginning of the thirties to open bank credits for the Indian merchants and their companies through Al Shahi British Bank in Basra, which opened a branch there. This continued until the bank opened a branch in Kuwait in the year 1942, which resulted in facilitating commercial interaction with India and other countries from which they imported goods<sup>(2)</sup>. Those merchants were among the forefront of those who benefited from the sailing of steamships to Kuwait

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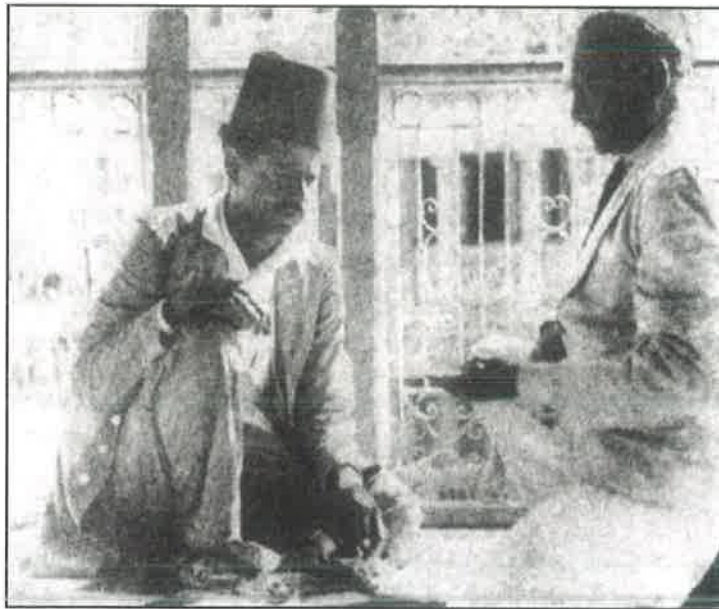
(1) Kuwait's Modern History, Dr. Ahmad Moustafa Abu Hakma- 1984- p.361.

(2) An interview with the late Khalid Mohammed Al Shaheen Alghanim.

to bring different types of goods, after their ships stopped sailing to India during the 1940s. They directly started importing consumer goods in big quantities from European countries and the USA by ships, to be re-exported to the neighboring countries. This is attributed to their long commercial experience.

Among the remarkable matters is that a number of Kuwaiti merchants went to a number of European countries at the beginning of the last century to follow up their businesses there. Mr. Saif Marzouq Al Shamlan says these merchants arrived in Marseilles City in France and Milan City in Italy at the beginning of the twenties (1920s) in order to carry out some commercial businesses over there. The late Saleh Bin Uttoman Al Rashid Al Hamidi traveled in the year 1923 to France and Italy to follow up his business and contact merchants in those countries. His father, the late Uttoman Al Rashed Al Hamidi, was one of the senior Kuwaiti merchants who had commercial caravans going to Syria and Egypt<sup>(1)</sup>. Mr. Saif Marzouq Al Shamlan explained that the late Saleh Uttoman Al Rashid Al Hamidi had written to the late Shamlan Bin Ali Bin Saif from over there about the pearls market in Paris and proposed to him to visit France to closely check and view the conditions over there.

His son, the late Mohammed Bin Shamlan Al Saif traveled to Paris after few



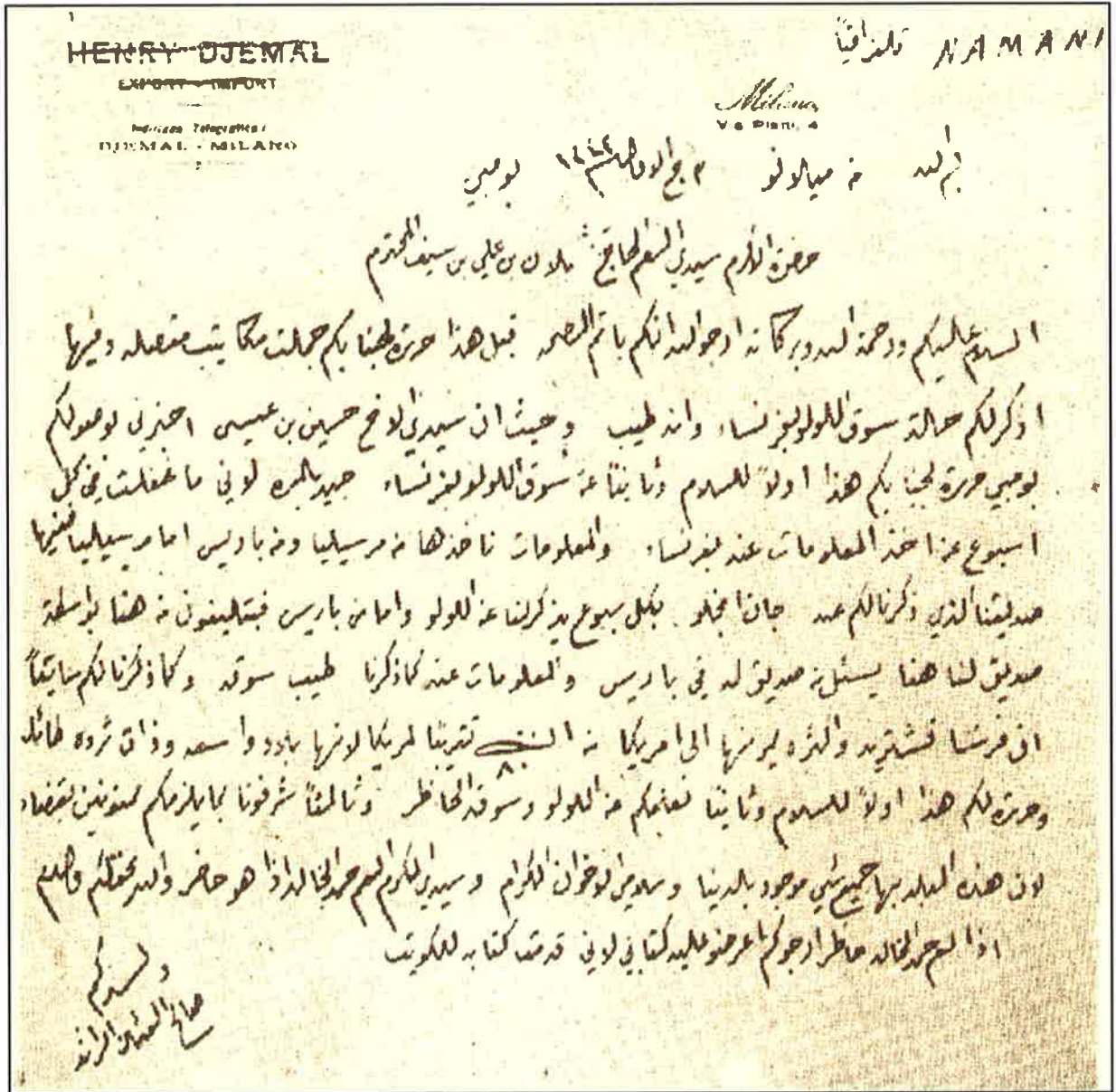
The late Eissa Al Saleh Al Qanai wearing Western dress and tarbush, displaying pearls to a European merchant in Paris in the year 1930.

*Source: Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Gulf, Saif Marzouq Al Shamlan- Part II.*

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(1) Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Part II, Saif Marzouq Al Shamlan, 1989- p.266.

years, in the year 1931, accompanied by the late Musaad Al Saleh Al Qanai<sup>(1)</sup>. Traveling to Europe was either through India, where they went by ships from Bombay to Genoa in Italy, and from there by train to Paris or through going to Basra overland, and then to Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and from there by ship to Marseilles in France, and from Marseilles to Paris by train.



A letter from the late Saleh Rashed Uthman Al Hamidi, sent from Paris to the late Shamlan Bin Ali Al Saif, in which he informed him about the pearls market and proposed to him to visit France.  
 Source: Pearl Diving History in Kuwait and the Gulf, Saif Marzouq Al Shamlan- 1989- p.268

(1) Ibid- p.269.

Most of the merchants managed their businesses from their offices in the «Merchants Market», extending from «Bahita» opposite to the fordhah, to the open area next to the Grand Market mosque in the south. Those shops or offices were called «hafizat», and the singular is «hafiz»<sup>(1)</sup>. The merchant would modestly sit at his office on a carpet and in front of him «al beshtakhta»-a teak wood box used as a desk- to follow up his work, write letters and telegrams to the different companies, and placed behind him in the shop corner an iron safe (iron chest) afterwards, to keep Austrian riyals or Indian rupees, before the British Bank for the Middle East opened its branch in Kuwait. During the working time, merchants exchanged visits to talk about the commercial status quo and exchange points of view on the economic and political affairs, and influence thereof on their work. There were big stores for those merchants located behind their offices, which were roofed yards. A number of them also had shops or buildings overlooking the sea next to the niq'a, at which their ships docked<sup>(2)</sup>.

The Merchants' Market is one of the most significant wholesale markets in Kuwait and the main supplier to owners of shops with their basic needs of foodstuff, such as rice, grains, tea, sugar, coffee, spices, dates and textiles. The merchants in this market also supplied the Bedouins coming to Kuwait with their supplies and logistics. They used to rest their camels at «Al Manakh» adjacent to the Merchants' Market, to load their goods on for the return journey.



Bedouin caravans resting with their camels at «al Manakh», while the Bedouins buy their needs from the city markets, such as rice, dates, coffee and other supplies.

(1) It seems that the word «hafiz» is derived from the English word «office».

(2) An interview with Mr. Khalid Fahed Al Rashid Al Bader.

In the following pages, we will briefly address the most prominent commercial activities undertaken by merchants in the different sectors of the Kuwaiti economy over the past years.

### **1. Maritime Shipping And Trading In Dates And Timbers**

This activity has been covered in the First Chapter of this Book in the section on traveling, trading and qata'a. However, it is worth noting here -even briefly- that the dates trading represented the cornerstone of maritime shipping and trade with India. This activity was the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy, which contributed to the welfare of the Kuwaitis and generally led to the flourishing of trade between the Arabian Gulf region, India and East Africa. Thousands of tons of dates were annually shipped from Basra by Kuwaiti ships to India and East Africa. From there, different types of timbers were brought, in addition to building materials, foodstuff and garments.

### **2. Pearl Trading (Tawashah)**

We have addressed this activity in the section on pearl diving in the First Chapter and indicated in part of it the nature of this activity, its important elements and role in activating the commercial and economic activity in the country.

### **3. Consumer Goods Trading**

We have pointed out in several parts of this book to the re-export activity to the neighboring countries, whether by land or sea, and the significant role played by Kuwait in supplying these countries with many of their consumer needs over the years. Kuwaiti merchants succeeded in attracting the merchants of adjacent countries to deal with them, gain their confidence and rely on them in supplying them with all their needs of different goods. It was the habit of Kuwaiti merchants to supply these merchants, especially merchants from Najd with their needs through payment on credit, or «al mosabala» as this activity was called. This system was suitable to the conditions of the people of Najd at that time, knowing that such area was one of the biggest importer of goods from Kuwait. Therefore, King Abdulaziz Al Saud could not prevent the merchants of Najd from buying from the Kuwaiti market and go instead to Al Aqeer, Al Jubail and Al Qateef markets in Al Ahssa area<sup>(1)</sup>. A dispute happened between him and Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah in the year 1921 because Sultan Abdulaziz insisted at that time to appoint a person in Kuwait to collect fees from Najd merchants on the goods they bought from Kuwait to Najd, or having the government of Kuwait collect such fees on his behalf, otherwise he would

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(1) Kuwaiti Commercial Ports, Dr. Zein Al A'bdeen Abdul Maqsood, Kuwait University, 1983- p.101.

prevent the merchants of Najd from trading with Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>.

#### 4. Horse Trading Activities

Kuwait was famous in the past for horse trade. Merchants used to go to Basra and other Iraqi cities to buy horses and then gather them at Al Zubair City, in preparation of sending them to Kuwait to ship them to India, where they were sold for racing or for the army. A number of Kuwaiti horse merchants had barns at Al Zubair to keep and gather horses there, in preparation of shipping them to India. Horse merchants relied also on brokers who went to the different villages and areas in Iraq to buy horses and gather them there, for exporting them. Iraq was considered as the main source for horse trading in Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>.

Horses also came from Najd to Kuwait in the 19th century, where they were gathered in Jahra, before sending them to Bombay in India. Colonel Pelly, the British Resident in the Gulf from the year 1863 to 1865, said in one of his reports that Kuwait used to export around 800 thorough-bred horses annually to India, of which 600 were sent directly from Kuwait and 200 from Basra. Kuwaiti horse merchants had agents of Shammar Arabs and other Najdi tribes<sup>(3)</sup>. That trade flourished between Kuwait and India at the beginning of the 19th century when the British built their empire in India, and fought their enemies in its north, for the first half of that century and for a long period of the second half.

Buchingham gives the figure of 1,500 for the number of Arabian horses exported from Basra and Kuwait to Bombay, Madras and Calcutta in 1816. The price of each horse at the port of export was 300 rupees, but by the time it reached its destination, the amount spent on fodder and transportation increased costs by 200 rupees.<sup>(4)</sup> In other words the total amount of one year's trade in horses was 750,000 rupees. In addition, a gift of fifty piastres was made to the mutasallin at Basra for each horse exported from there and 100 rupees per horse paid for miscellaneous expenses bringing the grand total to 900,000 rupees.

The prices for which these horses were sold varied from one city to the other and also from one horse to another. At Bombay the horse was sold for 800 rupees, giving the merchant 100 rupees in net profit.<sup>(5)</sup> Horses sold in Bengal were more expensive because they were always the best among the shipment. These sold for 1,000 rupees each. If other expenses were added, each horse would be sold for 2,500 rupees although the average price was usually 2,000 rupees or L 200. It should also be mentioned in relation to this trade that vessels especially equipped for this type of shipment were capable of carrying between eighty and one hundred horses each. The late Sheikh Yousef Al Qanai<sup>(6)</sup> said Kuwaitis were regarding from horse trading and

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(1) Kuwait's History, Abdulaziz Al Rashid, 1971 - p.68, 282.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Abdulatif Al Abduljalil.

(3) Kuwait's Modern History, Dr. Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakma, 1984- p.296.

(4) Ibid- p.298.

(5) An interview with Mr. Salem Al Shaheen Alghanim.

(6) Pages from Kuwait's History, Yousef Bin Eissa Al Qanai'- p.67.



believed that it would vanish quickly, perhaps because of the risk undertaken by the merchant. He also said that among the most important horse merchants in the past were the late Yousef Al Bader, who passed away in the year 1297 AH, and Ali Al A'mer, Mohammed Bin Fayed, Mohammed Al Mudaires, Ahmad Al A'dwani and Sulaiman Al Jassim. However, horse trading declined after the World War II, until it completely stopped as there was no need for it, unless in very rare cases.

## **5. Smuggling Trade**

Most of the ruling authorities in the region imposed high taxes on various imported products as a source of income. There were also banned goods, such as weapons and gold. In view of the opening of the navigation lines in the Gulf between the different Arab countries, Iran and India, the sailing ships played a big role in promoting trade in these goods which yielded big income for a number of merchants and adventurers . This led to the creation of communication networks between these countries for smuggling these goods by several means and methods, and avoiding all inspection and control systems dedicated by the authorities of these countries to ban such trade.

Each country had abundance of some materials and goods which the other countries lacked. Therefore, there was a motivation to smuggle such materials of high price from one country to the other. For example, foodstuffs were available in Kuwait during World War I and World War II, contrary to many neighboring countries. This led to multiply their prices there and attract merchants to trade in these goods . Gold during those periods was absolutely prohibited from entering or leaving India. This led to soar its price and attracted merchants to trade in this commodity there. Weapons were also among the widely spread goods of which big quantities reached Muscat, coming from Germany, Holland and England, for redistribution by illegal means to the countries of the region. Big numbers of merchants from the different countries benefited from trading in those goods and formed massive wealth as a result. Kuwait's geographical location, free of trade and lack of restrictions on the transfer of goods from and to Kuwait helped flourishing smuggling trade, by transporting goods to a number of countries through several means, away from the control of the official authorities represented in the customs and security authorities, tax evasion. Among the smuggled goods were weapons, gold, currencies and some consumer goods.

## **(A) Smuggling Weapon**

Trading in weapons flourished in Kuwait for a long period, extending from the 19th century - and probably earlier- till pre World War II. Kuwait's Customs Commissioner used to collect two dollars on each rifle as a customs duties. Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah also taxed four Sterling on each piece<sup>(1)</sup>. The tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, southern Iraq and the coastal cities of Iran, turned to Kuwait to buy weapons. A number of specialized merchants used to transport weapons directly from the main distribution centers in Muscat to a number of ports, especially in Iran. The reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah witnessed a prohibition of importing, selling or exporting weapons pursuant to the agreement signed in May 1900, after approximately two years of signing the protectorate agreement with Britain. Britain feared the spread of weapons among the tribes and its opponent forces in the region, thus creating problems for it<sup>(2)</sup>. This forced prices of weapons up and trading in them was attractive.

In the past, weapons were brought from Europe to Muscat in big quantities by German, British and Belgian companies to be re-exported to neighboring countries. A number of specialized merchants were active in bringing weapons from Muscat to Kuwait by sailboats on the hands of experienced captains who succeeded for long years in misleading the British and Belgian authorities spread in the Gulf waters, which primarily aimed at stopping this trade. Weapons were brought in most cases to Kuwait to be kept in special stores, for sale<sup>(3)</sup>. Small sailboats coming from the remote Iranian ports with limited customs control were the best means to deliver these weapons there after hiding them through different means between the goods going there. The packages of consumer materials, such as textiles, tea boxes and sugar bags, re-exported there, included many weapons which once reaching there at night, were received by the local merchants and loaded on donkeys backs and mules to distribute to buyers in the villages and remote areas there. Fao, Khor Abdulla, Umm Qaser and Al Zubair areas also witnessed a considerable part of business in weapon at the beginning of the last century. Tribes and tribal communities -at the outskirts of Iraq and Iran- strived to get the biggest possible quantities of weapons in their custody for maintaining tribal balance or to resist the governments in the event of the eruption of armed conflicts, insurrection or opposing the government authorities, which were stooges of the European and the Ottoman authorities. Weapons were transported on the backs of camels from Kuwait to south Iraq, as well as to the extremity of the Arabian Peninsula<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) Kuwait in the Gulf Directory, JG Lorimer, Part I, Historical Traveling, 1981, Khalid Sa'ud Al Zayed, p.262.

(2) Ibid.

(3) An interview with the late Eissa Haider Al Rashid.

(4) An interview with the late Hajj Ismail Ali Jamal.

جناب الرشيد الحاج نجف بن غالب المحترم سلامه تعالى  
 بعد السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته بعدة قبل هذا ارسلنا لك كتاب عرفناك بهيوزم  
 وفيه الكفاية حاله وردنا كتابكم المورخ ٥ شوال وما ذكره صار معلوم عرفه انكم الان  
 متوقفين عن التحميل بواسطة الكتيبة الذي نصيب على السلاح وتنتظر امرنا في هذا الخصوص  
 نحن برغبة الدفع كتبنا الى حفظة كرنيل كوكس والى محبنا ميجرناكس امبايوزر انت  
 انشاءه تراجع المؤمن اليه ورواياتنا امثل عرفه انك اشترية من الحاج علي  
 خان ٥٠٠ نفقة موزر راجس وانه بعد سفر الليل نواجه حفظة محبنا ميجرناكس  
 نطلبون منه الرخصة في تحميلها بدون رسم لا يمس انشاءه واجهته وامرك  
 في تميم ذلك بدون رسم المحزن وقد علم ارسالها وانت انشاءه مباشر  
 مشرأ تكميل حاجتنا ٦٠٠٠ نفقة مع كل نفقة ٤٠٠ نفقة وزيادته  
 لاجل الاسلام القديم عشر لك نفقة نصف موزر ونصف مارتين وروم  
 على تجار سفك عن المطال وزيادة المصاريف عرفه مخيرة ام اصبع  
 جنسين طويل وقصير اخذ لنا من كل جنس مائتين عن ٤٠٠ ومع كل  
 نفقة ٤٠٠ نفقة ونحن مثلما عرفناك عرضنا الى حفظة الكرنيل والى محبنا  
 ميجرناكس عن الكتيبة الذي على الاتفاق وان وسمي يقين اذا سمعوا الكتيبة  
 واللا تسبع امرهم وارادتهم هذا ما له ودم الما بيني  
 اخذ عشرين الف نفقة ام صبع من جنس  
 المشر لك لاجل اعذنا منهم من قديم

مبارك  
 الضياح

A letter from the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah to the weapon merchant, the late Najaf Bin Ghalib, dated 7 Thul Q'idda 1330 AH (1911 AD) related to the loading of weapons (6500 rifles) Mozer, from Muscat to Iran and buying ammunition to bring to Kuwait.

It is said that British inspection ships which patrolled the Gulf at the outset of the last century did not focus to a great extent on Kuwaiti ships. Rather, many of the weapon boxes used to reach Sheikh Mubarak's warehouses through them. They used to arrive at the rate of 1000 rifle per month through local ships and the Sheikh used to annually get 50,000 dollars out of this trade. Further, Ibn Saud relied on Kuwait for arming his forces in Najd. Therefore, suspending weapons trade would have necessarily affected the course of events in the Arabian Peninsula<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Kuwaiti and Muscat merchants used to import weapons from Europe, and receive them in Muscat, most of which were rifles called Marteen of one shot, that was called *fashkah* and was of a big size. The weapon merchants had their own ships to transport the weapons between Gulf ports through large size booms.

### **(B) Smuggling Gold And Currencies**

The prices of gold and currencies - as is the case now- varied according to the economic and political conditions in each country. Therefore, smuggling of gold and currencies was active from and to India and the Gulf countries during the last periods, especially during and after World War II. Ship captains and sailors were creative in hiding such currencies in secret hiding places, whether inside the ship, their boxes, sail masts, or between their luggage or cloth. It was difficult for the customs officers in India to detect those places<sup>(2)</sup>. The *nukhudha* was usually the mediator between the Indian merchant receiving the goods and the other merchant at the other station. The gold was usually unloaded by seamen who used to hide the golden liras or jewelry among their cloths, their shoes or in the luggage they carried by hands to take to the port. As for the relatively big quantities, they were delivered by other means to the representatives of the Indian merchants, who used to send a small boat (*hori*) at night to the docking place of the ship to receive the quantity, after ensuring compliance with the arrangements agreed upon. The ships remained docked in some cases at the Indian ports for few days, waiting for the inspection procedures which were strict during and after World War II at the Indian ports. This forced the ship captain to use many methods to hide the gold in the event of the arrival of customs officers. Sailors were forced in some instances - when they felt the intention of the customs officers or security men to inspect the ship- to place the golden liras in big canvas sacks and throw them into the sea at places far away from the ship, marked by their own means

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(1) Kuwait in the Gulf Directory, JG Lorimer, Part I, Historical Traveling, 1981, Mr. Khalid Sa'ud Al Zayed, p.262.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Khalifa Al Fadhala.

to prevent customs officers from finding them. In many instances, they avoided the inspection procedures through such methods or by other means, or deception, although the Indian customs officers discovered most of the smuggling means. The Indian authorities used to confiscate the funds and the ship when they discovered any smuggling process<sup>(1)</sup>. Golden liras were smuggled to or from India according to their traded price there, in comparison with their price in the Gulf countries. If the gold price increased in India, the gold liras would be smuggled to India, on the contrary when the price dropped, the gold would be taken out of India. It is said that there were ship captains who used to agree with one of the sailors to impersonate the captain's role if the Indian authorities discovered the smuggling process, against a certain amount of money to the sailor for impersonating the captain, and the real captain would escape from punishment<sup>(2)</sup>. In that way, the sailor gains a certain amount of money for undertaking such risk. If the smuggling process succeeded, he would win and if the matter was discovered, he and his family would get some compensation against his imprisonment or inability to travel again, while the *nukhudha*, the real captain, would escape in order to carry out other operations.

The quantities smuggled by most sailors and captains were small compared with the senior dealers in that commodity- whether from Kuwait or other countries- who used to agree with a number of employees of the Indian authorities to smuggle big quantities. Most of the ships carrying those goods sailed from Muscat to India, where they docked at the middle of the sea, away from the Indian coasts. Then, small sailboats of the Indian fishermen would come at night to receive the golden bars packed in baskets against signing the receipt documents. Those ships would return to the Indian coasts after placing the gold in «*zeblan*»<sup>(3)</sup>- each of which contained around 5,000 tolas- side by side with the fish baskets. Fishermen went to the remote areas in the forests, in agreement with the police departments that collaborated with them or disregarded that issue against amounts of money agreed upon and distributed between them. When the smuggled consignments arrived there, the camel shepherds would be waiting for them against signing the receipt documents. Those shepherds were usually armed, and escorted on the way by some policemen for protection and ensuring the arrival of the goods at the place agreed upon. When the consignments arrived, they would be received by the Indian merchant's representative who supervised the loading of the gold at night in special cars going to the headquarters. The merchant receiving the goods would

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Khalil Al Aswad.

(2) An interview with Mr. Saqer Abdulwahab Al Qatami

(3) «*Zeblan*» is the plural of «*zebeel*» which is the basket

send a telegraph on the next day to the other party, advising it of the arrival of the goods by using certain symbols such as «dates arrived from Basra». In this way, the smuggling process of gold to India was completed<sup>(1)</sup>.

Gold was smuggled to India at later periods by airplanes. A number of pilots of certain foreign airlines used to hide the golden pieces in the jackets worn by pilots, in order to hand over to the representative of the Indian merchant when they arrived at the airport. The clothes of bishops were also used to hide golden liras, as that class was not checked by the Indian customs officers. Travelers wearing bishops' clothes, used to take with them sweet boxes filled with golden liras, to mislead the customs officers.

The value of smuggled gold found its way outside India through means which were not less intelligent than those used to smuggle gold there. Big denominations of Indian rupees (100 rupees and 1000 rupees bank-notes) were placed inside the leather covers of books, stitched by technicians in that craft, in order to send by registered mail to the smuggling merchants outside India. Some persons also used to place them in cotton pallets sent abroad, in addition to many other means<sup>(2)</sup>.

The process of smuggling money (dollars, Sterlings, Iranian Tomans and other currencies) was also active to Al Muhammarah and A'badan in Iran, in view of their high prices there, compared with their prices in Kuwait. When the dollar or sterling pound price in Kuwait dropped for example, and its price did not change in Iran, a contact was made between the currency smugglers on both sides by camouflaged telegraphs to send a quantity of currencies there. The sailors would receive the funds from the merchant in Kuwait and transfer them along with the goods there, in order to deliver to the customer on the other side-Bank notes and golden liras were placed in secret hiding places inside some parts of the ship or between goods, so that once the ship arrived at Al Muhammarah or A'badan, they would be received by representatives of Iranian merchants there and carried them by their own means. Smuggling of currency was also active for certain periods - especially during World War II- from Muscat to Kuwait. Muscat used the Indian rupees side by side with the Austrian riyals at that time and the Austrian riyal was exchanged for one Indian rupee in Muscat, while it was sold for one rupee and a half in Kuwait. Some ships used to bring secretly big quantities of Austrian riyals to sell in Kuwait at a price equivalent to one and a half their value there<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with the late Abdulrasul Karam Ahmad.

(2) An interview with Mr. Bader Sultan Al Eissa.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ali Karam Jawher.

### (C) Smuggling Consumer Goods

Consumer goods such as textiles, sugar and tea were imported during ordinary periods from India by boats without any remarkable restrictions. The situation became more difficult during World War II. However, the British government was lenient sometimes and did not object to shipping of some goods to Kuwait to fulfil its needs. The neighboring countries, like Iran and Iraq suffered from the scarcity of consumer goods, and the difficulty of obtaining them. Most of those materials and goods were imported from India to Kuwait, whether of Indian origin or from the different European countries like Britain, Germany and France. The availability of those materials in Kuwait encouraged merchants from adjacent countries to obtain the biggest quantity of such products, regardless of the prices which multiplied tens of times in their countries<sup>(1)</sup>. This led to encouraging smuggling goods to the Iranian small ports spread along the Gulf, as well as some border areas with Iraq.

Monitoring on part of the government in charge of taxation was almost non-existent there. Those goods were smuggled either by boats or by al qata'a boats which docked away from the coasts in order to let small Iranian boats sail to them inside the sea at night and receive the goods sent to the merchants there, after they had received a note of the arrival of the goods. The goods as a result would enter without paying any tax. Some shu'i and jalbut boats directly unloaded their goods at the Iranian coasts, which were received by representatives of their merchants and transported them inside. Textiles, in addition to tea and sugar were among the most important goods smuggled to such destinations<sup>(2)</sup>.

Caravans of «al makhkarah» also coming from Iraq, and consisting of hundreds of donkeys, used to buy big quantities of consumer goods from Kuwait and carry them inside Iraq at locations away from the borders authorities. Al Zubair and Umm Qaser areas were among the most important areas for handing over and receiving goods transported by «al makhkarah» there. Horses used to carry those goods inside the country and most of such goods were taken to Nasriya City where they were distributed. Some «makhkarah» caravans came to Kuwait carrying wild herbs and simple foodstuffs, such as dairy products and eggs, in from to sell in Kuwait but in spirit to buy different consumer goods to smuggle inside Iraq<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) The price of one sack of sugar increased from 10 rupees to 1000 rupees in a short period, while the price of tea increased from three rupees to fifty rupees per oqiya, and the roll of «merikan» material increased from two rupees to 70 rupees.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ali Karam Jawher.

(3) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Al Sagheer.

It is mentioned that «makhkarah» used to buy big quantities of tea which arrived from India to Kuwait packed in big light wooden boxes. They used to empty the boxes from their contents into canvas bags they placed atop donkeys to Iraq. Empty tea boxes were accumulated at the markets during their arrival in spring, which indicated the volume of that trade. Makhkarah used to take tea and smuggled wrapping cigarettes paper to Nasriya city in southern Iraq. They rested on the way at three places, where they pitched their tents for spending the night and resting, in order to leave on the following day. The first point was at Qoday area, the second behind Al Mutla'a where they rested their second night, and then to the third point in A'bdali. From there, they went to Nasriya<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of Iraqi merchants also hired camels to transport goods from Kuwait City to Jahra against five Iraqi dinars per camel, through which they transported cigarettes, tobacco, wrapping cigarettes paper, shoes, textiles like silk, las, and merikan from there to Iraq. Most of such goods paper, were scarce there during World War II, which led to the flourishing of that trade.

The smuggling trade - whether from India or to India or to the Iranian ports and Iraq- increased during the war periods, turmoil and economic crises which used to



«Makhkarah» coming from south Iraq, gathering around the land customs building in Safat. Makhkarah formed a big purchasing power for the Kuwaiti market, as they used to transport big quantities of goods from Kuwait to Iraq. Among the most important goods were sugar, tea, cigarettes and different types of textiles.

*Source: old Kuwait: Memories in Photographs, 3rd Edition, 2004 CRSK, Kuwait*

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(1) Ibid.



take place in those countries. Smuggling was encouraged because of taxation rules imposed by Customs Authorities in those countries amounting to double the goods' value.

The smuggling trade relatively declined at the beginning of the 1950s due to the spread of the armies and armed forces at many points of the borders and building border posts and stations equipped with smuggling combating means in those countries.

## **6. Commission Trade (Import For Commission) During The 1930s And Beyond**

The import and re-export trade expanded in Kuwait at the beginning of the last century, after steamships started to dock next to the Kuwaiti coasts. Diverse good by sailboats (booms) increased. Most steamships sailing to Kuwait before World War I were British. Their agent in Kuwait was the British «Krimkenzi» company. That trade flourished in the 1920s and 1930s to a great extent that many European companies began to export their goods to Kuwait and looked for local agents who enjoyed good reputation and long experience in trading. Those companies used to contact the steamship companies which docked at Kuwait in order to inquire from them about the names of merchants who could be appointed as their agents in Kuwait. The steamships companies used to nominate their authorized agents in Kuwait at that time, in order to become the agents for those commercial companies.

In view of the few number of steamships which docked next to Kuwait's shores at that time, the number of authorized agents for those ships was few, and did not exceed hand fingers. During that period, a few number of merchants who started to import different types of goods from Europe emerged. Those merchants became the biggest import merchants from European companies at that time<sup>(1)</sup>. The import circuits expanded afterwards from European countries, USA, and Japan, especially after the end of World War II, and the increase in the number of steamships coming to Kuwait. Other merchants joined and were active in such field, and became agents for many foreign companies, after they corresponded with the chambers of commerce in those various countries in order to obtain the names of companies and the types of their goods for infortation.

At the end of the forties, a number of Kuwaiti youths were active in importing different goods for their own account or for the account of wholesale merchants, against a simple commission ranging between 2% to 5%, which encouraged many

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(1) An interview with the late Hajj Eissa Haider Al Rashid.

merchants to benefit from such service which saved a lot of efforts for them against simple amounts of money.

Those young men who learned English at private schools during the 1930s and the early 1940s and became fluent in this language, in addition to the advent of the oil, got commercial opportunities in an unprecedented manner. Import trade, as well as contracting, were among the most profitable commercial activities at that time. Those young people opened offices for them which were active in commission import, most of which centered in Al Awadhi Qaisariya near the Merchants Market. Within few years, their activity acquired a big part of the import business, and became in fact the main drivers of the market at that time<sup>(1)</sup>.

The activities of that group basically consisted of importing textiles, shoes, blankets and readymade garments. However, they expanded afterwards to involve numerous other goods, including building materials such as iron and cement, utensils and household appliances, in addition to foodstuffs such as sugar, tea, rice and ghee and most of the other consumer goods traded earlier by senior merchants. They established strong business relations with the chambers of commerce in various countries, agents and export companies. To enhance such contacts made them acquire experience, knowledge and good reputation qualifying them to develop their activity, increase flexibility and easily get the best offers for many of the goods imported by merchants. Also, they gained the confidence of local banks, whether the British Bank for the Middle East, which was the only bank in Kuwait till the year 1952, or the National Bank of Kuwait afterwards, which started its activity by the end of that year. They started opening bank credits to import huge quantities of goods. The import licenses at that time were issued through the British Commissioner in Kuwait, who used to issue the import license to the merchants and determine the amounts allocated for each of them.

Britain at that time divided the world into two commercial areas, the sterling, and the non-sterling. Kuwait, by virtue of the British Protectorate Agreement, was considered among the Sterling area, which meant enjoying additional facilities and freedom of import from the countries of that region without restriction. As for import outside this area, it required obtaining an import license from the British Political Commissioner in Kuwait, in the absence of any ministry or chamber of commerce to regulate trading activities. Kuwaiti importers used to present such license issued by the British Consulate with the documentary credit presented to the British Bank for the Middle East in

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulhamid Mansur Al Mazeedi.

order to open the credit by the bank. That system started to vanish with the beginning of the 1950s<sup>(1)</sup>.

The commission trader used to make the required communications with the foreign companies through telegrams, which were the only way for fast communication to inquire about the prices and quantity and quality of goods and the best offers in order to submit an order afterwards. That activity expanded in the 1950s and the early merchants in that sector started to import huge quantities of goods, which encouraged many of them to appoint employees to follow up administrative works, such as typing letters and orders, following up the transmission and receipt of cables which they used to do by themselves at the beginning. They also started getting agencies of major international companies which increased their exports to Kuwait, and exported quantities of goods which reached daily hundreds of thousands of rupees<sup>(2)</sup>.

Most of the goods once reached Kuwait were taken by merchants from neighboring countries, especially Saudi Arabia, and Iraq in order to re-export them to their countries. A number of senior merchants also started to prefer importing many of the goods through brokers or import merchants for saving time and effort, against payment of simple amounts of money, despite the availability of financial means and facilities with them to do that work. This led brokers or commission merchants to hold significant positions, making them form a considerable commercial weight in the Kuwaiti market, particularly for consumer goods, which they re-exported to neighboring countries or distributed to owners of shops and stores in Kuwait's markets. As for traditional senior merchants and importers of basic goods, who constituted the main weight of the commercial activity in Kuwait, they continued practicing their main business through their offices, which continued carrying on importation of big quantities of goods that were now being transported by steamships, instead of sail boats they owned in the old days.

## **7. Real Estate Trade**

Real estate trade was not prestigious in the past, as the people's resources were limited and the regular citizen was confined to owning a house to shelter him inside the city, which had vast unoccupied lands inside the City Wall. There were lands for farming, mud areas, and many gypsum making areas which were granted for free to those who wanted to exploit them. This continued till the mid forties. The rulers of Kuwait were famous for distributing lands

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulhamid Al Mazeedi.

(2) Ibid.

for free for those who wished to build them, since the early rule of Al Sabah's family. Meanwhile the government encouraged citizens to possess lands and set up sieges around them against payment of nominal fees of 5 rupees per each 10,000 square arms (100 yard length x 100 yard width) at areas outside the city which were relatively close, such as Hawally, Nugra and Rumaithiya. The only condition for ownership was walling up the granted lands. It is said that the late Sultan Al Kulaib used to encourage people to possess lands through that way, when he was the director of the Municipality at the beginning of the 1940s<sup>(1)</sup>.

During certain periods, the government taxed houses and lands, but this did not last long, as the people objected. Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah imposed a tax which amounted to one third of the value of each house whose owner got the land for free during the reign of rulers preceding him. That forced a big number of people to sell their houses in order to refund such taxes. Sheikh Jaber Al Mubarak Al Sabah cancelled that law when he assumed the rule after the demise of his father<sup>(2)</sup>. Also, the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah imposed a tax known as «*sharafiya*» on the houses overlooking the street, as a result of removing the houses adjacent to them. The government taxed the owners of those houses on demolishing and rebuilding them by shifting the foundation of the new building one yard to expand the street at the expense of the house<sup>(3)</sup>. This process was Known «*qalbasas*».

The prices of houses inside the city ranged from 100 to 1000 rupees till the mid 1930s, pursuant to the location, area and quality of building. Plots of land in the central area near the market and mosques were the most expensive areas. Cheap areas like Murqab and the far edge of Sharq, as well remote parts of Qibla and Dehla areas, had houses sold for 100 to 150 rupees. As for the court yards and unused plots of land and farms, they were sold at very cheap prices, especially outside the City Wall. The price per cubic feet in some areas like Khaitan and Jaleeb Al Shouykh ranged between two paisas and one Anna. However, buyers used to refrain from doing so<sup>(4)</sup>. The process of selling and buying was carried out easily. The buyer and seller only had to agree on the transaction in the presence of one or two witnesses if required, and then go to the late Abdulla Bin Mohammed Al A'dasani, who was followed by his son,

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(1) An interview with the late Abdulsatar Agha Ali

(2) An interview with Mr. Hussein Ali Al Wazzan.

(3) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Hadi Abdulla Al A'wadhi.

(4) An interview with Mr. Karam Ahmad Ali.



الحمد لله بحانه

هذا كان كبره يدورنا العبد الفاني  
محمد بن عبد الله العزساني



السبب الداعي الى تحرير هذه الاعرف الشرعية هو ان قد  
باع علي بن خلف الدرامي بوكالتدعي طيب بن المصطفى  
الثابت وكالتد بشهادة حسني ابو عريكي وسعد ولد  
عيسى المقهورين عن حامل هذا الكتاب محمد بن ابراهيم  
مراعي الكارقد وهو ايضا قد اشترى منه ما هو مذكور  
مؤكته وهو الث الذي بعدة قبلكا الكارقد وشمالا الطر  
يق النافذ وشرقا الطريق النافذ وكان ملكا للمشرك  
وقد وثقنا ببيت سليمان بن علي بن نصيب بن محمد بن محمد  
ثلاثهما يدروا بالوالم المشي بقامه وكالتد المشرك محمد  
المذكور سيد البايغ الوكيل علي المذكور بيضا صحبا  
شرعيا فموجب ما ذكره في البيع وتلخيص المشي صار اليك  
البيع المذكور ما ذكره ملكا للمشرك محمد المذكور بتصرف  
فقد تبين اننا اصدقنا بغيره في هذا ما ذكره الثاني  
للاستدلال

Another «A'dasani» house ownership deed dated 1327 AH (1909 AD)  
Signed by the late Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al A'dasani.

Real estate trade started to flourish in the forties, when the demand for housing increased, the markets expanded and the number of foreigners increased as a result of the discovery of oil. That led some merchants during that period to buy areas of land inside the city and in the external areas, like Hawally, Nugra, Jabriya, Khaitan, as well as Fahaheel. A number of merchants who had surplus funds and a far reaching future outlook worked in that trade. Some of them used to buy lands and old houses inside the city in order to build markets «*qaisariya*», as well as outside the city, and at some villages to build small adjacent houses to rent out to expatriate employees who worked for the government and newly-formed companies<sup>(1)</sup>. Some merchants also used to buy complete areas, such as Surra and Salwa, in order to divide them up into plots and sell them to citizens wishing to live there, which yielded great profits to them.

The «evaluations» carried on by the government - i.e. ownership by the State of the lands by buying them against high prices, which took place at the beginning of the 1950s, benefited the owners of land plots and properties inside the city, as their prices doubled up tens of times. The documents issued by the government in the early days for the ownership of lands and real estates were called «*A'dasaniya*», after Al A'dasnai family, who had among them judges and government agents for issuing legal documents related to the ownership of lands and houses.

### **Al Dallal (The Auctioneer)**

The broker is the mediator who endeavors to complete the business transaction of selling and buying goods between the seller and buyer, whether the transaction is for buying a property or for any commercial transaction of any other type. The broker is usually well-versed in marketing and attracting the buyer to pay the required amount, as well as encouraging the seller to give up part of the offered price for the purpose of concluding the transaction in question and getting his commission or brokerage. The broker - as is the case now - registers the transaction at the government authorities, if required, and follows up and completes the official procedures, as well as receives his share after completing the deal. A number of land brokers were prominent at the beginning of the last century, of whom some were famous for their activity and ability to quickly and efficiently complete the selling transaction. They included the late Ahmad Al Mawwash, Ali Al Mawwash, Bin Dakhil, Bin Tami, Abdul Mohsen Al Khubaizi and Mohammed Abdul Ilah Al Qanai who was specialized in selling shops, Abdulsamad Al Faraj, Abbas Al Rawaf, and Mandani Qamber A'bdeen. It is mentioned that the late Abdul Ilah Al Qanai followed a special method for advertising the shops he was entrusted to sell, and

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(1) An interview with Dr. Abdulrahman Abdulla Al A'wadhi.

used to organize some verses to publicize them. For example, when he was passing at the markets area, he used to praise a shop displayed for sale at Bu Rubian Alley (located at the entrance of Bin Duijaj Market) by saying:

**The shop located at Bu Rubian Alley... has weighing units and scales.. peaches and pomegranates the buyer is the winner; the seller is the loser and so on<sup>(1)</sup>.**

There were brokers spread all over the markets to sell different types of goods which their owners preferred to sell through them to guarantee completion of the process fully, in which the broker might be considered a witness. There were different types of brokers and their activity ranged from completing real estate transactions, to selling and buying foodstuff, sheep, livestock, or vegetables displayed on wholesale at «*Al Haraj*» market at the Fordha and Bahr Yard, or selling cloaks and carpets, and cars afterwards.

### **Settlement Of Commercial Disputes**

The Kuwaiti merchants were famous since ancient times for good reputation, honesty, and sincerity in dealing, as well as confidence exchanged among them, to the extent that most commercial transactions were carried out without written agreements. However, this does not mean that disputes or commercial disagreements did not occur which should emerge from time to time in a society that depended mainly on trade. In the absence of a specialized commercial institution at that time- such as the Chamber of Commerce- to decide on disputes, the government established in the year 1920 a Commercial Committee under the supervision of the Amir of Kuwait to decide on commercial disputes. The Amir used to entrust senior officials with forming the committee when needed, whose members were experts in the problems raised by the disputing parties. If the problem was related to pearl trading for example, a committee of those who were experienced in such commodity was formed, and if the dispute was around foodstuffs or construction material, a committee of those working in this field would be formed. That committee was known by the name of «*the people of the brand*». This was before the establishment of courts in Kuwait, whose chairmen were later responsible for such matters<sup>(2)</sup>. The late Sheikh Abdulla Al Jaber Al Sabah chaired the Courts Department upon its establishment in the year 1930 and for a long time, he decided on disputes and delivered his verdicts according to the Islamic laws and the then prevailing commercial customs and practices, after negotiating and consulting with the senior merchants and experts. He referred many cases to the concerned commercial committees formed when needed for this purpose. He entrusted a number of merchants with the task of contributing to those committees in order to assist in searching for

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(1) An interview with the late A'shour Yousef Al Sabagh.

(2) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammed Al Saidan- p.260.



fair solutions to the disputes which used to occur between the merchants from time to time. The disputes settlement committees were formed of three to four merchants, selected by the disputing parties themselves from a list of merchants concerned with the raised issue. Members of the committee were selected according to their experience and dealing with the type of goods disagreed upon, the country of origin and extent of the committee member's dealing with this country. At the forefront of specialized merchants were Khalid Al Zaid Al Khalid, Yousef Abdullaziz Al Fulajj and Hamad Abdulaziz Al Meshari, being assisted by other numbers of merchants according to their specialization<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for simple disputes between commission merchants and their clients, which were prosperous during the 1940s and 1950s, a committee called «Commission Merchants Committee» was formed, consisting of three members: Mr. Abdulla Al Ali Al Mutawa'a, as the chairman, Mr. Meshari Mohammed Al Jassim as the deputy chairman, and Mr. Abdulhamid Mansur Al Mazeedi, as the committee secretary. This was at the beginning of the 1950s, after the expansion of this activity.

## **Kuwaiti Merchants Abroad**

A number of Kuwaiti merchants have taken few countries that had commercial relations with Kuwait as their headquarters, in order to facilitate the management of their businesses and follow them up directly. These merchants adapted, with the lapse of time, with the nature of living in those countries, and learned their local languages, as well as built strong social relations with the social strata with whom they dealt. A number of them married from those countries and lived there with their children. India, particularly Bombay, was among the most significant cities where Kuwaiti merchants established their headquarters. Many merchants also lived in Basra in Iraq on permanent basis to follow up their properties of palm trees and cultivable areas there, while others lived for long periods in Yemen and South East Asia, such as Singapore. The majority of them returned to Kuwait with the beginning of the 1950s, after the economic conditions improved in the country.

### **1. Kuwaiti Community In India**

Numbers of Kuwaiti families lived in India for long years during the period extending from the mid 19th century till after the mid 20th century, subsequent to expanding their trade with this country and needed continuous follow-up and direct supervision throughout the year. Most of them have taken Bombay, the commercial city, as their headquarters, where Kuwaiti ships used to go to sell dates, load timbers and trade in pearls and different other goods. Merchants used to rent flats for living with their families at locations near

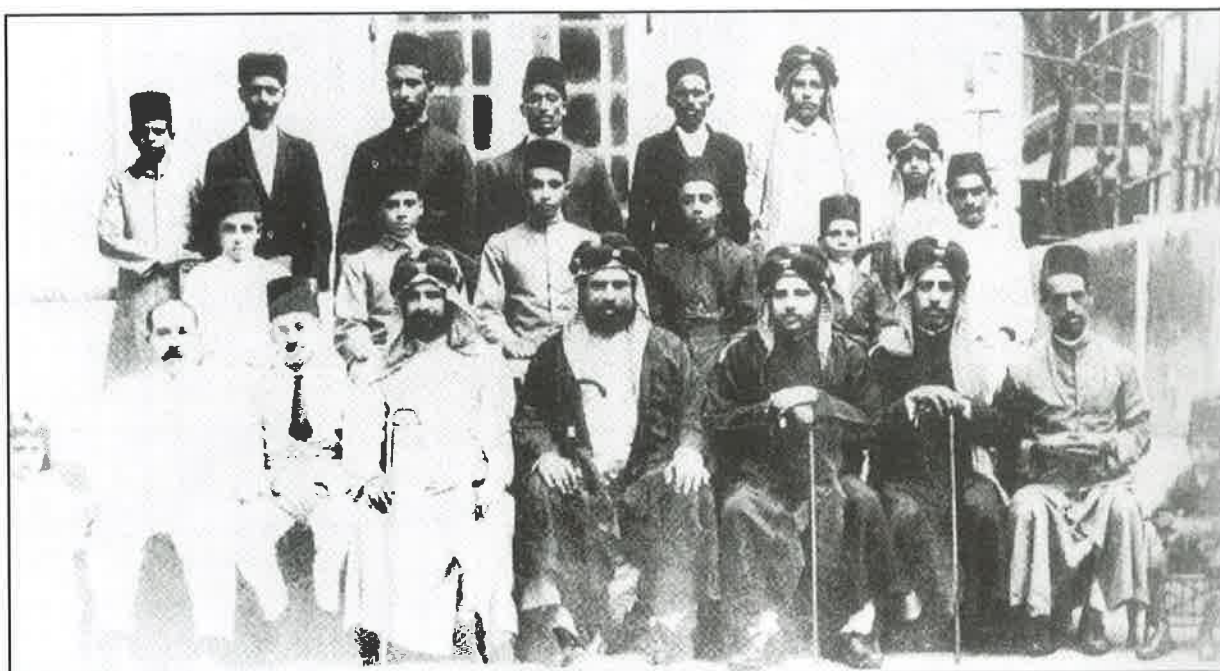
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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulhamid Mansur Al Mazeedi.



from three to four months, after which they returned with the ships to Kuwait by the end of the season<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of Kuwaiti merchants working in the importation from India against a certain percentage also used to receive orders at their offices in Kuwait from owners of shops and retailers in Kuwait. They sent them to their commercial agencies in India, which were managed by their relatives or Kuwaiti partners there, to buy the requested items and ship them to Kuwait. They were sent by steamships which started sailing to Kuwait from India at the beginning of the last century. Among the most famous steamships transporting goods from Bombay to Kuwait were two ships called «Damrah» and «Dwarkah», which were the only two ships sailing to Kuwait, as they remained serving this line for a long period, till approximately pre-World War II<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among Kuwaiti families whose members lived in India to follow up their interests there, were Al Saqer, Al Hamad, Al Marzouq, Al Shay'a, Al Qadhi and Al Qena'at. In Bombay, for instance, there were offices and stores for a number of Kuwaiti merchants.



A number of Kuwaiti merchants in Bombay<sup>(3)</sup>, India, in the year 1921. In the first row of the photograph from right: the late Salem Al Sederwai, Abdulla Al A'mer, Abdulaziz Ahmad Al Sobaih, Mohammed Al Sederawi, Saleh Al Houmaidhi, Sayed Hashim Al Gharabally and their brothers, and Abdulrazzaq al Hosan. In the second row from left to right: Khalid Hamad Al Meshari, Jassim Mohammed Al Sederawi, Abdulla Al Sederawi, Mohammed Saleh Al Houmaidhi and Waleed Mohammed Al Sederawi. At the back of the photo in the middle O'baid Al Yamani, and to his right Mohammed Al Abhool, Abdulla Al Mazrou'i, Abdulla Al A'wadh and others.

*Source: Photographs from Kuwaiti Memoirs, Mr. Adel Mohammed Al Abdulghani- 2003*

(1) An interview with the late Khalid Mohmamed Al Shaheen Alghanim.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Al Sagheer.

(3) Bombay is renamed Mombay.



The late Sheikh Abdulla Al Salem Al Sabah having lunch, at the invitation of a number of Kuwaiti merchants in Bombay in the year 1942, the late Abdulatif Al Abdulrazzaq, Mohammed Al Kharafi and Saleh Al Shaya'.

*Source: From the Past of Kuwait, Yousef Al Shehab.*

Among the first of those who opened offices there were the late Sulaiman Ibrahim Al Abduljalil who had several offices in Bombay and other Indian cities at the beginning of the last century. Among the owners of offices in Bombay were also the late Ali Al Shay'a, Mohammed Ali Al Bassam, Hamad Sultan Bin Eissa, Abdulaziz bin A'rfaj, Hamad Al Qadhi, Abdulrahman Al Shaheen Alghanim, Hussein Bin Eissa and his brothers and Sulaiman Al Harun<sup>(1)</sup>. Mr. Abdulaziz Al Saqer had also an office in Khormiyan in Bombay. In Karachi, there were offices and stores for each of the late Hussein Bin Eissa Al Qanai, Mohammed Fahed Al Marzouq, Yousef Al Marzouq, Mohammed Dawood Al Marzouq, and Yousef Al Majed. As for Nibar, it had offices for the late Yousef Al Saqer, while the late Mohammed Thunayan Alghanim had an office in Brawah. The late Yousef Bin Saif, also owned a coffee shop in Karachi, which was visited by Kuwaitis and had another Kuwaiti working with him, called Ahmad Sha'aban<sup>(2)</sup>.

It is said that among the oldest Kuwaiti commercial offices in India was the office of late Hussein Bin Eissa Al Qanai' and his brothers, located in Mohammed Ali Street in Bombay, which included a number of offices and some rooms located at the upper floor of a building in that street. Kuwaitis used to go to this office to meet each other and

(1) An interview with Mr. Eissa Abdulla Al Uttman.

(2) An interview with Mr. Salem Al Shaheen Alghanim.

conclude their commercial transactions, as well as reside there, as they were the guests to the owners of the office. In that place, there was a courtyard surrounded by lawaween and had a number of big wooden chairs on which the visitors sat to exchange talks and news<sup>(1)</sup>. Children of Kuwaitis in India used to study at private schools which taught them the Holy Koran, reading and writing, and the Arabic language. One of the immigrants from Saudi Arabia opened a school for teaching children of the Arab community in Bombay, at the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>(2)</sup>. The then Kuwait Education Department built the School, provided it with curricula similar to Kuwait ones except those relating to the Indian environment, and provided a budget to teach students free. Teachers were sent to teach Arabic and Islamic religion to 60 male and female students aged 5-9 years old. Two Egyptian teachers with their wife - teachers were delegated to help its director.

Afterwards, the school expanded and began teaching adults the Arabic language, which was missing in the Indian and foreign schools there. The school also, was a cultural centre, ie, it was a school, a mosque, and a public library.<sup>(3)</sup>

## **2. Kuwaiti Merchants In Basrah**

A number of Kuwaitis were based in Basra to practice their commercial business or follow up the production of palm trees, and export their products to India and other countries. Many of them owned areas of palm trees at Al Fao, Abu Al Khaseeb and Basra, while others planted these lands with fruit bearing trees from which they exported big quantities of their products to India. Large areas extending from Al Fao to Abu Al Khaseeb were owned by a number of Kuwaiti merchants who reclaimed those poor lands known for their salinity, and planted them with palm trees, which helped to flourish the Iraqi economy and increase the income of local farmers. Some of them owned thousands of palm trees, to which each one hundred were referred to as «*al yareeb*» and therefore when it was said that a person owned fifty «*yareeb*», they meant that he had five thousand palm trees. There were two systems for working at the palm trees farms, the first was called «*al ta'aba*», according to which farmers harvested and reclaimed the lands, then cared for the palm trees, cleaned, fertilized, cut the fruits for packing into containers in preparation of selling them. The farmers received half the income in return for their work under this system. As for the other system, it was based on payment of monthly wages to the farmers against their work. The owner's agent supervised and followed up the work of the farmers and payment of their wages<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Bader Sultan Al Eissa.

(2) An interview with Mr. Bader Khalid Al Bader.

(3) Kuwait and india, Center for Research & Studies on Kuwait, 2006.

(4) An interview with Mr. Bader Khalid Al Bader.



Mr. Yousef Al Nisf mentioned in his book «*Your Palm Tree*» that among the Kuwaiti families who owned palm trees gardens in Basra were Al Sabah, Al Ibrahim, Al Saqer, Al Nisf, Hilal Al Mutairi, Al Hamad, Al Khalid, Al Marzouq, Al Houmaidhi, Al Abdul Razzaq, Al A'dasani, Al Mudhaf and Al Sayer families, as well as others. It was mentioned in the writings of the famous Iraqi palm trees expert, Abdul-Jabbar Al Baker, that the total lands owned by Kuwaitis in Basra amounted to approximately 73 million square meters, in which they planted around one million and 865 thousand palm trees<sup>(1)</sup>. As for other merchants, they considered Basra as their headquarters for supervising their trade and performing the matters of other Kuwaiti merchants there, including the late Thunayan Alghanim, Ahmad Abdulatif Al Hamad, Mohammed Ahmad Alghanim, Sheikh Mohammed Al Ahmad Al Sabah, Mohammed Al Matrook, Abdulwahab Eissa Al Qatami and Mohammed Thunayan Alghanim<sup>(2)</sup>. A number of Kuwaiti merchants in Basra also worked as agents for land owners there to follow up the works of farmers and hand over their wages. It is said that a number of Kuwaiti merchants, including the late Al Sayed Hashem Behbehani, extended their trade to Baghdad and a number of Iraqi cities by the end of the 1940s, where they owned big areas of land and built a big number of commercial buildings which greatly contributed to the construction development there.

## **Accounting And Money Exchange Work**

### **Al Karrani**

The word «*karrani*» is given to a person who works as an accountant for one of the merchants, and ship owners or ship captains. His task is summarized in recording every trading transaction, including selling and buying. This process is also called «*bookkeeping*». Usually, al karrani works for a merchant to register the daily business work, whether in cash or on credit. He registers every operation in the journal in which all the commercial transactions carried out during the day been recorded. At the end of the day, al karrani transfers the accounts of buyers on credit to the ledger, called «*al jari*», where each customer has a page at that register to record his credit purchases, after being endorsed in the journal. This means transferring them from this register and recording them in the ledger or «*al jari*» as a debt owed by the buyer<sup>(3)</sup>.

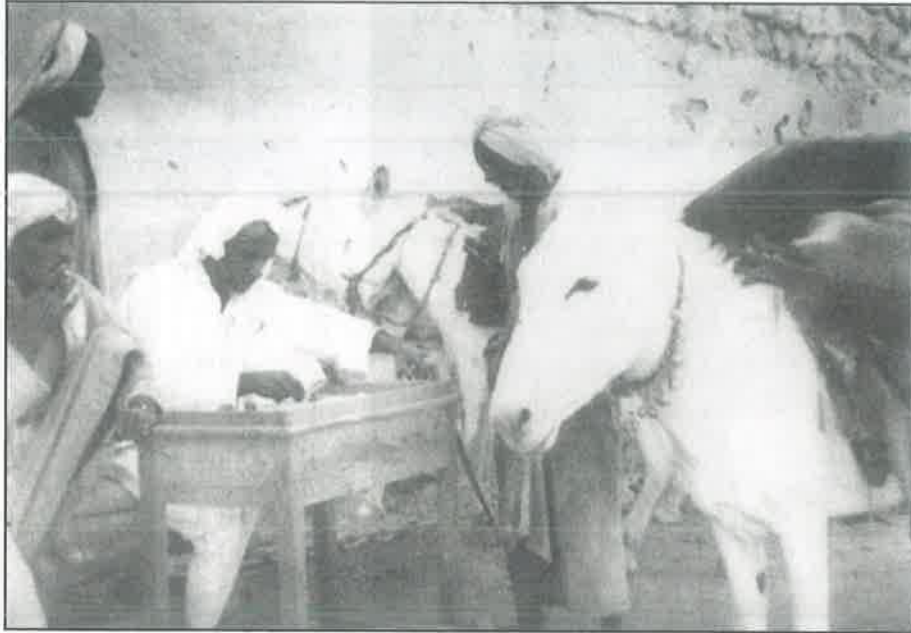
The wholesale merchants concerned themselves about employing a karrani who should have good experience in bookkeeping, in order also to collect money from their customers in the markets, and he or his assistant used to visit them on Saturdays to collect part of the debt called «*mus'abala*». Ship owners and nukhudhas also

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(1) Your Palm Tree, Mr. Yousef Bin Mohammed Al Nisf.

(2) An interview with Mr. Salem Al Shaheen Alghanim.

(3) An interview with Mr. Elias Khaddada Safar.



A karrani receiving the value of water from the donkey owner who filled his sacks from the pool.

*Source: From Ancient Kuwait, Yusuf Al Shihab*

used to employ «karranis» to keep their accounts and record the sale and purchase operations, like any other commercial activity. Among the most important activities carried by al karrani in this field were recording the expenses of the ships of different activities, and the income of selling operations or shipping fees, to calculate the shares of sailors therefrom. He used to work normally at a number of dhow yards to record and receive the value of water sales from the boats coming from Shatt Al Arab for donkey owners and water carriers who used to buy water to sell to houses. The coolies or water carrier «kandari» used to go towards al karrani- based in the dhow yard after filling the sacks or tanks with water from the ship, in order to register them on credit or pay the amount due. Al karrani used to receive the value of the sold water or record it in the register. Al karrani also used to deliver the amounts collected from the customers to the boom nukhudha at the end of the day. Among the duties of al karrani also in travel or diving boats is registering all the purchases and supplies bought by the nukhudha prior to the travel or diving trips, in preparation of deducting them from the income prior to its distribution to workers on the ship, according to the share of each one agreed upon. Therefore, the significance of the role of karrani is clear in commercial transactions carried out, despite their simplicity.

Many Mutawa's and katateeb; simple type of schools, taught their students the bookkeeping practice providing opportunity for them to work accountants for merchants or ship owners when they would finish their study. Some old schools were famous for paying attention to that subject. Among those who were taught



this subject was Mulla Sinan in Qibla, Mulla A'bdeen, El Sayed Hashim Al Badr in Sharq, as well as Mulla Zakariya Al Ansari, Mohammad Zakariya Al Ansari, Mulla Abdulwahhab Al A'sfour, Hamadah School, Mulla Murshed School, Al Sa'adah School, as well as other schools.

It is said that the best known karrains for his accuracy and talent was during the 1940s was the late Abdulla Umar Al Yaqoot who was accountant for the late Hamad Al Meshari during the 1940s, and used to receive a monthly salary amounting to 1000 Rupees. Such amount during that period was considered a huge sum, rare to be received by any employee whatsoever his responsibility included<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Bookkeeping And Accounts**

Modern accounting methods were not available or well known to merchants or those of old professions for the purpose of preparing budgets or regulating accounts according to the currently-known methods. However, they followed simple but accurate accounting methods which achieved the required function and served the main objective, which basically was to balance the accounts, monitor the inventory, estimate the costs and identify the profits. Off course, modern accounting means such as calculators and the like were not available. However, many merchants and money exchangers used wooden calculators, each consisting of a wooden, rectangular shape frame of approximately 30 cm long and 15 cm wide, with six lines of wires inside. A number of small-rounded shapes punctured wooden pieces were fixed to each wire, to enable the person to move them to any side of the wire to execute the accounting operation. That tool was used for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division operations.



Ancient calculator

Each group of small wooden pieces had a certain color and giving a certain digital number.

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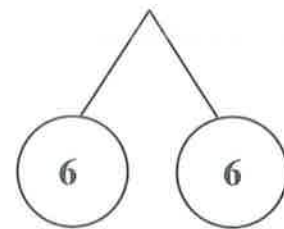
(1) An interview with Mr. Elias Khaddada Safar.

Merchants also used a fast and easy method to ensure the validity of the accounting operations, such as multiplication, addition, subtraction and division, known as the balance or «*balango*», which is an Indian word. This method gives the shop owner- regardless of his commodities - an assurance of the correctness of the accounting operations he performed. We will explain this method and how to use it through the following examples, to give the reader a quick hint on the accounting activities followed by the forefathers in the absence of any modern means used for accounting.

**Example No.(1)**

Assuming that a merchant sold a quantity of commodities to four of his clients and wanted to know the value of these commodities and check it. The following is the method of ensuring the correctness of the addition operation:

1. sales to first customer	324	Rupees
2. sales to second customer	1120	Rupees
3. sales to third customer	815	Rupees
4. sales to fourth customer	519	Rupees
<b>Total</b>	<b>2778</b>	<b>Rupees</b>



Addition process balance

To ensure the correctness of the addition product, the merchant fixes the balance as follows:

**First Step:**

1. the numbers making up each amount in the addition process are added to each other and then the number (9) and its multipliers are deducted from the total product, and so on. The following is an explanation.

Amounts included in the addition process:

The First number: 324 Rupees, the total of its numbers is  $3+2+4=9$ , when number 9 is cancelled then zero (0) remains = (0)

The Second number: 1120 Rupees and the total of its numbers is  $1+1+2+0=(4)$

The Third number: 815 Rupees and the total of its numbers is  $8+1+5=14$ , and after deduction of the 9, the number 5 remains = (5)

The Fourth number: 519 Rupees and the total of its numbers is  $5+1+9=15$ , and after deduction of 9, then the number 6 remains = (6)

2. The total resulting from the four operations is collected which is  $0+4+5+6 = 15$  also, the number 9 is deducted from this product ( $15-9$ ), so the number 6 remains. This number is placed in one of the two sides of the balance.

The two sides of the balance should be equivalent when the addition is correct. Therefore, the numbers making up the other amount, which is the production of the addition of the four numbers (2778) Rupees. If the total is (6), then the

addition product is correct, as shown below:

**The Second Step:**

The addition result of the amount numbers: 2778 Rupees (the total of the sales operations) i.e.:  $2+7+7+8= 24$ .

When the nines are deducted (multipliers of the number 9) from this number, then the product is as follows:  $24-18= (6)$

This way, it is confirmed that the addition product is correct, i.e. «the equivalence of both balance sides».

This balance can be applied on any number of amounts added together, including decimals. As for ensuring the correctness of the multiplication product, it is as follows:

**Example No.(2)**

Assuming that the merchant sold 124 sacks of sugar, the value of each sack is 12 Rupees, and wanted to check the correctness of the multiplication process, he follows the following method in fixing the multiplication balance:

Multiplication process: 124 sacks x 12 Rupees = 1488 Rupees

To check the correctness of the multiplication total product, the following steps are followed:

**The First Step:** the numbers or the figures making up the first amount (124) are added together:  $1+2+4= (7)$

The number is placed on top of the balance

**The Second Step:** the numbers making the next amount are added (12):  $1+2=(3)$

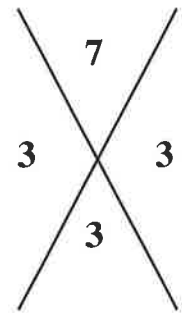
The number is placed at the bottom of the balance.

**The Third Step:** the lower number in the balance is to be multiplied by the upper number:

$$3 \times 7 = 21$$

Then, the nines are deducted from number 21 and the total product is placed on the right side of «the balance» ( $21- 18 =3$ )

**The Fourth Step:** the numbers making the multiplication product which



is 1488 are added together as follows:  $(1+4+8+8=21)$ . Then, the nines are deducted therfrom  $(21-18=3)$ . The product is placed on the left of «the balance». If the two numbers at the two sides of the balance are equivalent, then the multiplication product is correct. In this way, the two sides of the balance are equivalent.

This method is used also to check the multiplication of the decimal numbers, knowing that decimals were written as follows:

Half  $\frac{1}{2}$  (8 annas) —┘

Fourth  $\frac{1}{4}$  (4 annas) —

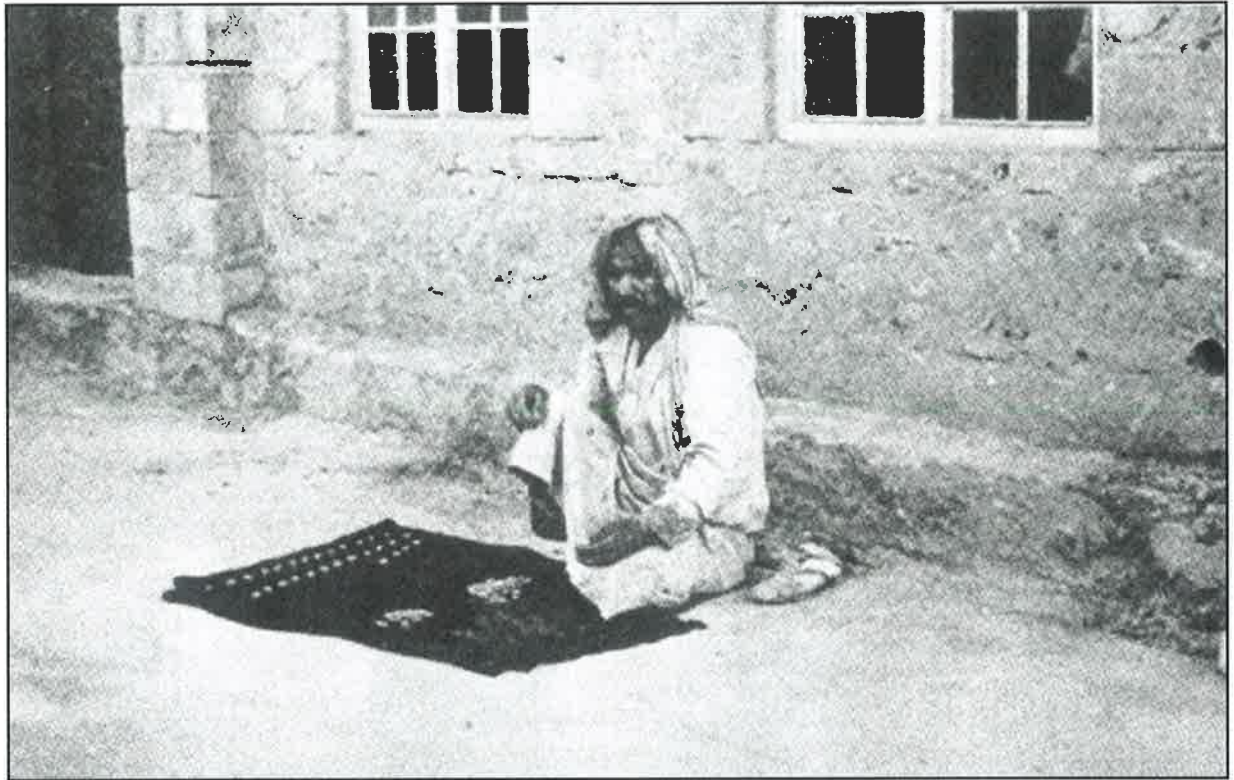
Eight  $\frac{1}{8}$  (2 annas) ^

As for checking the product of subtraction and division, the subtraction product is checked by adding the product with the subtracted number, and the total would be equivalent to the number from which it is subtracted. As for division, the product of the division is multiplied by the number on which it was divided.

### **The Money Exchanger**

Money Exchange was one of the old professions in Kuwait because Kuwaitis used to travel from time to time looking for their livelyhood, which made them in need of foreign currencies. The repeated visits of Bedouins from the Arabian Peninsula and South Iraq to Kuwait for selling and buying also required to exchange different currencies which they brought with them. Therefore, Kuwait, prior to the end of the nineteenth century had a number of money exchange shops opened at the Money Exchangers' Square, which was a center where a big number of markets started from, and a significant passage for shoppers- in their way to or from those markets. That square also constituted a significant center at that time where the Bedouins and city settlers met to swap commodities. Most of the shops were «*a'mmariyas*» fixed at the middle of the square, and the exchanger used to sit on the ground to practice his business, placing the currencies inside a small wooden box of a length not exceeding one meter, half meter width and 30 cm height, called «*takhtah*» placed in front of the exchanger. That box had a glass cover with a wooden frame to display the currencies. The traded currencies at that time were only coins before the introduction of banknotes to the market at the approximately end of the 1920s. Among the most significant currencies traded at that time were the Saudi Riyal, Austrian Riyal, Iraqi Dinar and Iranian Toman. Exchange

of Sterling Pounds and the US Dollars was in a very limited manner, as those currencies were not needed at that time. The exchanger bought the various currencies from the merchants flocking to Kuwait from the neighboring



Money-Exchanger sitting on the ground at the market having silver currencies in front of him at the beginning of the last century.

*Source: The Modern History of Kuwait, Dr. A. Abu Hakma, 1943.*

countries to buy their needs. Exchange operations increased in winter with the coming of the Bedouins to the city to sell the natural ghee and other products, while the market is passive to a large extent during summer. The Bedouins - who were among the most important clients of the exchangers- used to go to the market, carrying big quantities of Saudi and Austrian silver Riyals with them. The Austrian Maria Teresa Silver Riyal was in circulation in all Gulf countries until the beginning of the past century and was referred to as the «French Riyal». Riyals were placed in the «portmanteaus» large travelling bags or the saddle- bags on the backs of camels and donkeys, very tightly tied with ropes and then locked with a special lock at their mouth. The Bedouin used to sell directly his carriage of Riyals to one of the money exchangers or deliver them to one of his clients who counted them, then displayed them to a number of money exchangers in something resembling the limited



Indian Rupees used as the only official currency in Kuwait at the beginning of the past century. In the photograph, Indian Rupees carrying the miniature of British kings are seen, starting from King William IV to King George V. The metal currency was widely used until the end of the twentieth century, when banknotes were introduced to Kuwait.



Change of Indian Rupees of the denomination of two Annas, one Anna and half Anna.



Banknotes of Indian Rupees of King George V and King George VI.

open auction, in order to be purchased by one of the money exchangers at a wholesale price, prevailing in the market. When they are sold, the owner of the Riyals receive their value in Rupees, and place them in the saddle-bag, then goes to the market to buy his needs<sup>(1)</sup>.

The number of money exchange shops in that market increased to approximately ten shops by the mid-forties, especially after World War II, as the business boomed and money exchangers started dealing with merchants and traders in the same business in neighboring countries.



An Exchanger at his shop at the Money Exchangers' Market.

They used to receive daily orders by telegram from Baghdad and Basra to buy and sell different currencies, in order to be shipped or brought in by taxicabs, which were driven on the road daily from Kuwait to Basrah. Silver Riyals and Rupees were placed in special bags. As for big quantities, they used to be packed in canvas sacks. The money exchangers used to calculate the big quantities of silver currencies by their own method, as they used rectangular wooden trays, each of which called «*dorj*». The Rupees or silver Riyals were placed in the «*dorj*» to know their numbers, as each tray can take

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Al Sagheer.



a certain number of Rupees. The length of the «dorj» was approximately 50 to 60 cm, its width 30 to 35 cm and height between 3 to 5 cm. The Rupees were arranged in the dorj in lines of equivalent height and the number of Rupees lined on top of each other was from 10 to 15 Rupees. Each group of Rupees lined up on top of each other was called «*khanah*». Normally, the dorj had a capacity for 50 to 100 *khanahs* and if the dorj of 50 *khanahs* is filled with Rupees, the number of Rupees in it will be 500 Rupees, if the number of Rupees in each *khanah* was ten, and so on. In one side of «al dorj», there was an opening to take out the Rupees to the bag. The sizes of the dorj differed, as some of them had the capacity for 125 Rupees and called quarter dorj, while the other had the capacity for 250 Rupees and called half dorj, and as for the full dorj, it has the capacity for 500 Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of money exchangers used to count big quantities of Rupees manually without the need for «al dorj», as they used to count thousand of Rupees in few minutes without any mistake, and distinguish the fake pieces at the same time. Among the well-known of those persons was the late Abdulla Jassim Al Sarraf and another person called «Bu Maryoum».



Money Exchangers mostly traded in silver currencies which included the Austrian Riyal (Maria Teresa), Iranian Toman and Saudi Riyal at the beginning of the past century.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Mohammad Hasan Al Attar.

## Replacement Of Currencies And Adjustment Of Their Prices And their Effect On Money Exchange And Business

Money Exchange activity prospered when a number of foreign currencies were replaced or cancelled by the government authorities. A number of currencies such as the Rupee and the Austrian Riyal witnessed a number of adjustments- either in shape, size or quantity of silver in them- which led to the inconsistency in their money exchange prices at certain period and generated a new trade, from which many traders benefited.

After the end of World War I, for instance, dealings in Kuwait in the Austrian Riyal decreased gradually and people started to get rid of it and replace it by the Indian Rupee. Despite the adoption of the British authorities of a low money exchange rate, people were anxious to replace their Riyals by Indian Rupees. The British authorities decided to replace the Austrian Riyal by one Rupee only, although the weight of silver in the Riyal equaled more than double its quantity in the Rupee. However, people - without any consideration of the true value of the Riyals- got rid of them and replaced them by Rupees, even though the exchange value of the Austrian Riyal dropped at certain stages to a half Rupee (i.e. approximately 20% of its real value).



Silver Rupee replaced by metal Rupee (made of zink).

Such event however, benefited a big number of those who were knowledgeable of that fact<sup>(1)</sup>.

Also, metal Rupee was introduced in the mid-forties during the reign of King George VI, instead of the former silver Rupee which was replaced gradually until it was withdrawn fully from circulation.

Big quantities of silver Rupees came from the desert and neighboring areas and were channeled

(1) Refer to «The History of Currency and Money in the State of Kuwait» by the author, p.75.



Banknotes started to be circulated during the mid-thirties which facilitated the Money Exchange process, and led to the selling, buying and transfer of currencies to neighboring countries in huge quantities easily and conveniently. Here, we see Iraqi, Iranian and Saudi banknotes which were circulated during that period.

to the money exchangers market, used to buy the Rupee for 15 Annas instead of 16 and deliver to their owners new metal Rupees instead. Silver Rupees were delivered to the bank for replacement.

The British Bank for the Middle East cautiously took notice of such fact, and it was the only bank in Kuwait during that time. So, it did not accept to receive big quantities of Rupees from money exchangers. Therefore, they were forced to turn to another method, which was collecting big quantities of rupees amounting to 50,000 to 100,000 silver Rupees and then take them to Bahrain or India to replace them there or buy commodities for their value and send them to Kuwait. Rupees were placed in canvas sacks, each of which carried 2000 Rupees to be shipped on boats. Merchants and money exchangers used to buy Rupees from the market like any other commodities in order to resell at better prices in the Gulf countries without intervention of the government as the market was open for any type of trade, and currencies poured to Kuwait from every location<sup>(1)</sup>.

Trading in currencies also flourished during World War II when dealings in Sterling (golden) Pounds and a number of other currencies prospered. The money exchangers market was crowded with dealers every day evening and transferred into something similar to the Stock Exchange. A big number of dealers and traders used to go there, after the end of work in their shops, to buy currencies and golden liras for trading or speculation. The unit of dealing was equivalent to one thousand liras and referred to as «*qalam*»<sup>(2)</sup>. If a merchant sold 1000 liras for example, he used to receive a receipt called «*chatti*» with which he would go to the exchanger's shop in the following day to receive its value. Big merchants used to place orders with money exchangers - who worked as brokers - to buy some currencies for them in order to resell to them later when the price increased, in return for which the money exchanger would get his commission when the selling or buying occurred. Dealers in currencies used to send their representatives to one of the famous coffee shops in Safat called «*Ra'eis*» coffee shop, located near the parking of cars coming from Basrah - (called *Al Serah*)<sup>(3)</sup>, waiting for the arrival of those cars, which reached before mid night to bring the latest news for the prices of Sterling and other currencies in Basrah when the market was about to close there at sunset. Hence, the dealers would know who lost and who won in the operations carried

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdullrahman Ali Al Sagheer.

(2)The buying unit in Kuwait was referred to with the word «*qalam*», whether for shares or other goods, and meant a certain number of certain quantity of certain goods.

(3) Al Serah is the parking place of taxi cabs. Cars coming from Basrah during the 1940s used to park at a special location near the Ford Car Showroom located at the north west of Safat. One or two cars used to come daily from Basrah to Kuwait at that time.

out that day. Basrah was a significant money exchange center during that period for trading in different currencies<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the big money exchangers at the market at that time was Hajj Hussein Al Sarraf, then his son Taleb Hussein Al Sarraf, Hajj Abdul Hussein Al Sarraf, Jassim Abdul Hussein Al Sarraf, Abdulla Ali Al Sarraf, Meshah'an Al Meshah'an, Sulaiman Bu Kaheel, Tahir Al Mutawa'a, Hayder Bu Khudair, Al Arifan, and Khaja sons. At the forefront of currency traders at that time was Hajj Yusuf Al Fulaij, Sebeeh Al Barrak, Ahmad Al Hashim, Abdulla Al Wazzan, Mansur Al Mazed, Ahmad Al Fahed, Sulaiman Al Musalam, Ya'qub Yusuf Behbehani, Saleh Al Zamel, Ahmad Al Gharabally and Ahmad Abul.

### **Al Bazzaz (Fabric Seller)**

*Al bazzaz* is the seller of «*al baz*» or «*kham*» as called locally for fabrics. Khalil Al Qattan market - or the Jews market as was known- was among the most important locations for selling fabrics or cloth in Kuwait until the mid 1920s. The fabrics sellers then moved to Bin Rashdan market, branching off the Internal Market during the 1930s.



A number of fabrics shops «bazzazeen» at Al M'ejel Market

*Source: Kuwait Registry Today, 1956, Printing and Publishing Department*

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Ali al Sagheer.

The merchants imported fabrics or cloth in big wooden boxes or «*fardat*» (big bunches) which came by boats or «*marakeb*»<sup>(1)</sup> while wrapped with humidity-resistant paper and covered with canvas tied with rings or tapes of light steel. The bunches of fabrics were lined inside such *fardat*. Usually, the pallet is tied with five or six rings. As for boxes, they were made of lightwood, surrounded by wooden frames, inside which the fabrics bundles were placed. Fabrics in the past were imported from India, including those made in Europe. However, they started reaching by steamships from Europe directly at the beginning of the 1940s, and mostly from England, Germany and France.

Fabrics started to arrive from Japan by the end of the 1940s after the end of World War II, when the Japanese started to imitate English fabrics. Al bazzazeen used to buy fabrics from wholesale merchants and then sell them in their shops by yard, which was the measuring unit prevailing in Kuwait until approximately the mid-sixties, when it was replaced by meter. Fabrics were a significant commodity for re-exporting to neighboring countries. Big quantities were re-exported to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran<sup>(2)</sup>.

Fabrics are divided into two types, for men and women. There are types for winter and others for summer. Among the most prominent winter fabrics for men was Kashmir wool used by a limited number of wealthy people. Most of it came from England through India. As for the great majority of people, they used to wear thick cotton fabric and wear a coat for warming up during the winter season. Some also used to wear «*rayon*» which is artificial wool of medium price, made in America and Japan. One yard of rayon was two Rupees and one yard of English wool was ten Rupees.

Among the summer fabrics for men was «*jit*» which is cotton fabric brought from India, and «*las*» brought from China, and «*bafta*», brought from Japan which has many types including «*bu tofaha*», «*bu dab*» - carrying the logo of a crocodile. There was also «*bubleen*» from England, and «*al malmal*» which is very light, and al kaimri. All those types were imported through India, which were of close colors, ranging between white, beige and light yellow. The rich used to wear English *bubleen*, al kaimri, and *las*, which was expensive artificial silk, the price of which amounted to five Rupees per yard, while the price of one yard of kaimri reached four Rupees, *bubleen* two Rupees and *merikan* one Rupee<sup>(3)</sup> At the beginning of the past century, one

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(1) The word «*marakeb*» is given to steamships in Kuwait and the Gulf.

(2) An interview with Dr. Abdulrahman Al A'wadhi.

(3) An interview with Mr. Abdulkarim Abdulla Abu al Hassan.

type of light white fabric called «reeza» was also famous, and it was made in Syria and worn by rich merchants. One roll was sold for two French Riyals (around four Rupees). As for the common people, they used to wear bafta, bu dab and malmal, *bu abd brand* made in Japan and merikan, which were both cheap-priced fabrics<sup>(1)</sup>.

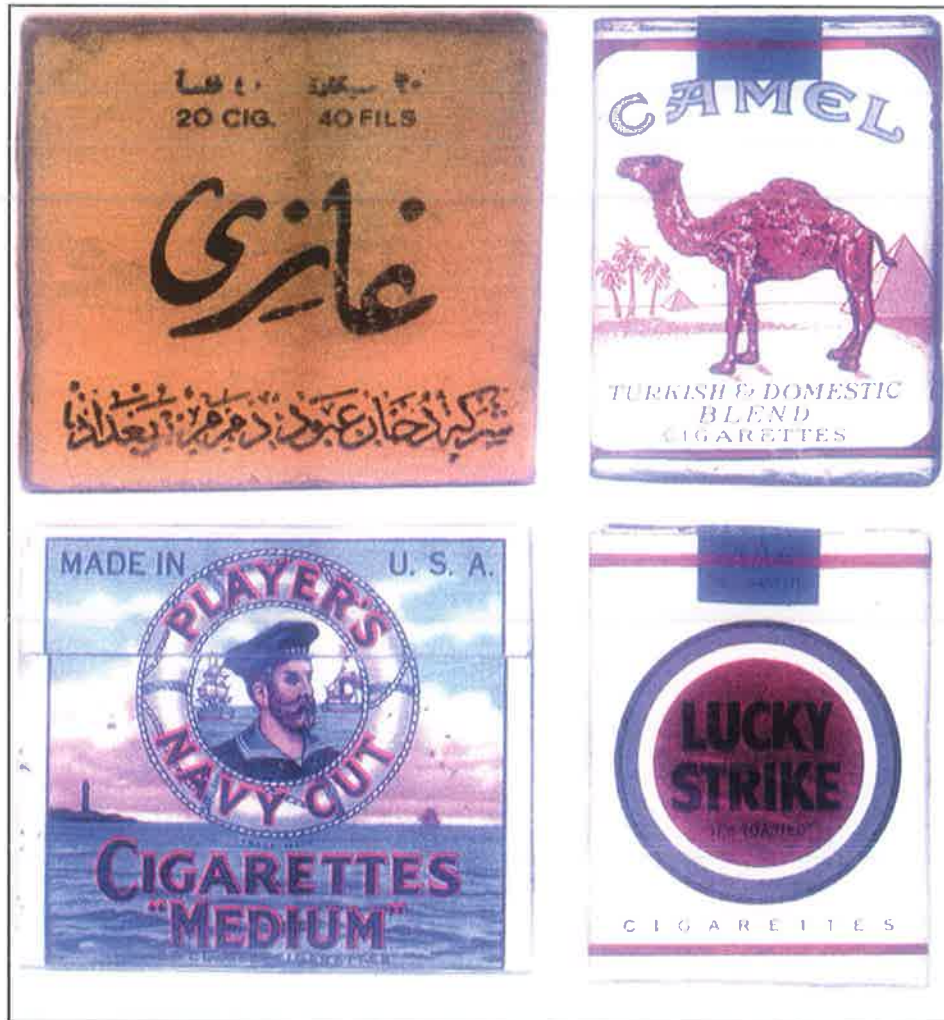
As for women fabrics, the most important types were *craib*, and *jit* which is printed cotton fabric, *al wail*, and *nisf al wail*, which is light cotton fabric of different colors and can be plain or afforested, and used for baggy dresses. Al wail was more smooth than nisf al wail. There was also a fabric called «*khashm al balbool*», with chequered prints and used for head scarves. There was also a type called «*al shail*» and another called «*al kraisha*», which is a rough crinkled fabric. Fabrics included «*al jalsa*» which is a shinny soft fabric and has several braids, including the stripped, chequered and flowery. There was also a type called «*al habbar*», which is a shinning fabric used for dresses, especially for feasts and other occasions such as weddings. «*Al jaz*» was used for dresses and scarves. The prices of women fabrics ranged from 4 to 8 Annas per yard during the 1930s and increased afterwards to approximately one Rupee per yard. *Craib* was the most expensive type of fabrics.

Several brands emerged in the past and were famous for many years. People demanded such brands, especially during the improvement of economic conditions. After the end of World War II, for instance, brands were famous and started to be pointed out. People, especially those with good incomes, were longing for buying them. A number of fabrics Merchants started to display their own local brands, which were printed for them in Europe on some fabrics imported by them. Among those famous names were «*Hawally*» brand, which became a desirable brand and acquired big fame after the discovery of fresh water in that area at the beginning of the past century. The late Jassim Boodai introduced that name to one of the fabrics and requested Mulla A'bdeen Bin Baqer, who was a remarkable calligrapher, to engrave that name in order to be sent to England to be printed on fabric rolls as a «registered mark or brand»<sup>(2)</sup>. Shark Skin and (555) became famous among fabrics in the 1930s and 1940s they included After the end of World War II, several brands also arrived from Germany, Japan, South East Asia and the USA. It is note worthy that the prices of fabrics increased greatly during World War II, after

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(1) An interview with the late Hajji Ismail Ali Jamal.

(2) An interview with the late Hajji Ismail Ali Jamal.



Cigarettes packed in paper packets were commonly spread during the 1930s and 1940s

Source: From the Possessions of Mr. Jassim Al Mezyen.

from outside with tar to prevent leakage of humidity to the tobacco. The basket contained a number of small bags filled with certain quantities of tobacco sold at specialized shops at a number of markets such as Al Gharabally Market, Bin Duaij, Money Exchangers, and Wajef Markets. As for kaghad, it was imported from India. There were other types imported from Baghdad and Damascus. A special type of kaghad was manufactured in Damascus called «*al shorbaji*», while the paper made in Baghdad was called «*al Rashid paper*». Also, another famous type was brought from India called «*bafrah*».

In the 1940s, imported cigarettes from Europe and other countries started to circulation. It is said that the first brand of European cigarettes, which reached Kuwait, was English made called «*Gold Flake*», and its agent was the late Al Sayed Hashim Al Gharabally. It was used to coming sealed in



rounded yellow- shaped metal packets. Among the widely-spread cigarettes at that time also was the «Bu Walad», «Bu Bint» Miss Blanch, Al Jamal, Bu Qawan, Lucky Strike, Players Navy Cut, Ghazi and a number of other brands. The late Abdurrahman Al O'ujan and Al Sayed Hashim Al Gharabally were among the biggest merchants and agents of cigarettes in Kuwait in the past. Al O'ujan was the agent of Players Navy Cut, Miss Blanch, Bu Jamal «Camel», Chesterfield, Lucky Strike, Gold Flake and 333 brands. As for Al Sayed Hashim Al Gharabally and after him Ahmad Sayed Hashim Al Gharabally and his brothers, they were the agents of Nelson, Black & White, Abdulla Cigarettes and other types most of which were made in England. The late Mahdi Habeeb, the tobacco seller, was the agent of Dunhill and Craven A cigarettes, while the late Abdulsalam Shua'ib was the agent of Rothmans, and Towell Company the agent of Bu Jamal. There were also other brands including 555 and 999 whose agent was Mr. Mohammad Abdulrahman Al Baher.

Such cigarettes came from Europe and the USA. Cigarettes from Iraq also reached Kuwait including Turki, Ghazi and Lux, and from Iran «Ashno and Homa». Some imported cigarettes came packed in paper packets, while others came in metal boxes. Most packets contained 20 cigarettes while others contained 50 cigarettes. Among the publicity means at that time was writing some poetic verses or prose to publicize and promote certain types of cigarettes. Among the popular poetic verses said for promoting cigarettes and common among the youths at that time, were the verses written by the late Fahed Bouresly where he said:

*You the people of the country (al blad)      You the people of Kuwait  
smoke cigarettes Bu Walad      smoke cigarettes Coronette*

Such words were commonly repeated by the young people due to their simplicity and easy memorization, which led to the promotion of such cigarettes in a society which was not used to modern publicity means.

A cigarette factory was established in Kuwait in the 1940s by the late Abdulla Al Mulla Saleh, who used to make cigarettes called «Coronette». That factory was located in Sharq area, near the current location of the Dental Center of the Amiri Hospital. Such cigarettes were packed in paper packets on which a pillow and a crown were drawn. The word «coronette» was derived from the English word «crown»<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) For more information about this factory, see Chapter Three of this book. Origin: late Middle English: from Old French coronete, small crown or garland diminutive of corone. (new Oxford Dictionary) of English, P.411, Oxford, 2001



Cigarettes packed in (square and round) metal cans which were common during the 1940s and 1950s.  
*Source: From the Possessions of Mr. Jassim Al Mezyen.*

## 2. Hubble Bubble /Tobacco (Sheesha)

As for the tobacco used for the (gidow), it is of two types, «green» brought from Oman and «yellow» brought from Iran. Most smokers preferred the green type due to its good smell, compared with the yellow tobacco. Tobacco imported from Oman came in big canvas sacks called «*shilfan*», the length of each sheleef amounts to two meters and weighted around 60 kilograms. The branches of that plant were packed with the leaves in the sheleefs. That type of tobacco was sold by oqiya, which consisted of five pounds.

The tobacco to be used for the (gidow) or hubble-bubble is wetted before placing in a small plate on top of the sheesha or hubble-bubble (called hubble-bubble head), on which live coal is placed for smoking. That type of tobacco was smoked by coffee shop customers, sailors and a large number of citizens. It was widely believed that that type of tobacco was effective for protecting woolen garments - such as dishdashas and cloaks- from mites, an insect damaging winter clothes. Fine tobacco was placed among the garments to protect them during



Tobacco and hubble-bubble seller

*Source: Kuwait National Museum*

the summer season. Tobacco branches were also used to fill al zabayen, after mincing, sieving and mixing with other types of tobacco.

## **Al Attar (Al Hawwaj) Spice Dealer**

Al Attar - also called al Hawwaj- is the person who sells different types of wild herbs, grains and dried fruits and the crusts or skins of some vegetables like pomegranates and oranges, as well as other materials basically used in the composition of medicines. He also sells some other needs such as spices, seeds and materials used in dyes and the like. Al Attar is usually an expert in composing medicines and the remaining mixtures used in different fields of the materials he sells in his shop. Such materials sold by al attar (or spice dealer) basically came from Iran, India, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and some came from the desert of Kuwait. Among the materials sold by him and used for medicine are oregano, al braihoh or the ox's tongue, al haliliya, al morrah, al sabr, Samghat-reeh, khishkhash, khakshier, gum, al ya'ada, al momian, black ointment, white ointment, al eshrej (al haloul), arsenic, al zomotah, al shabiyosh and al gorooof, used for medication and in making dyes also. Al Attar used to place such materials in big glass utensils or in wooden drawers fixed to the shop walls<sup>(1)</sup>.



Al A'ttar (spice dealer) selling drugs, herbs and different seeds

Al Attar used to place such materials in big glass utensils or in wooden drawers fixed to the shop walls<sup>(1)</sup>.

Al Attar also used to sell seeds of plants and vegetables used by farmers, including coriander, del, chard, celery, radish, (rayhan) basit, mashmum, barber,

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(1) An Interview with Mr. Ahmad Y'aqub Abdal.

celery (parsley), tomato, torouh, cucumber, eggplant, marsh melons and melons. Also, he sells different types of spices, most of which came from India, including turmeric, ginger, cardamom, cardamom leaves, cinnamon, saffron, safflower, black and red pepper, dried pomegranate seeds, al hlailej and al sanamaki. Also, he sold household needs such as henna, sidr and al ghesel and materials used in some works such as honey wax, «al yaft», and «al dayer» used in dyeing cloaks and threads.

Most spice dealers' shops at the beginning of the past century were located near the old market's mosque, next to «al kharor» opposite to Bunashi coffee shop. A number of spice dealers' shops were also opened during the 1930's east of the Money Exchangers' square at the entrance of the Dakhli, Bin Dua'ij, and Al Gharabally Marketa.

Among the drugs commonly used by many Kuwaitis was «*al eshraj*», which is a certain mixture of several numbers of herbs cooked and drunk in the morning for purging and purifying the abdomen. Many people used to drink «*eshrij*», annually during the spring season. As for drugs used for abdomen pains some are boiled in water or consumed as they are and they include «*al braihoh*», «*lesan al thour* - ox tongue», and «*elk leban-gum*». Also, there was a fluid called «*zommota*» used for stomach ache, which came to Kuwait packed in «*qarrabeyat*» (big glass containers), which are then rebottled in small bottles for selling. Al attar sold pollination water and rosewater which also came in big glass containers and rebottled in bottles for selling. Other types of drugs were also used for liver and gallbladder pains, including «*al ya'ada*», while cardamom leaves were used for chest pains and cough<sup>(1)</sup>.

A substance called «*momyan*» was used for treating fractures and relieving their pains, after cooking and dissolving it and then rubbing the fractured location with it. Some persons called such substance «*fracture medication*». The drugs dealer also sold the black ointment and white ointment, used to treat pimples, as the first is applied to soften the pimple and prepare it for rupture, and then the second was placed to absorb the pus from the pimple opening after softening, leading to drying up and healing of the pimple. The drugs dealer also sold ghee extracted from the camel hump, to which the powder of some desert flowers are added and placed on the patient's navel. The doctor used to press hard the navel with his fingers, to treat colonic problems. This type of ghee is kept in a small container and covered by a thin skin from the sheep tail. The spices dealer has a substance called «*la'atah*» which is a fine powder made of the body of

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Mohammad Hasan Al A'ttar.



Al A'ttar products, some of which are placed in canvas sacks and others placed in bottles, metal cans and wooden «khanas».

Source: *Folkloric Heritage*, January 1987, Publication of the GCC Folkloric Heritage- Doha- Qatar.

a certain type of desert iguanas, which is the stripped type of the same size of the gecko. It is dried after killing it, then ground and some honey added to it in order to be consumed by the patient suffering from tuberculosis or yellow fever. A number of attars were also popular doctors who used to prescribe medicines and mix herbs to make medicines out of them, and advised the patients of the method of consuming them<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for the materials used for cleaning and decoration, they include cedar, which is the ground leaves powder of the cedar tree used for bathing before soap was known. Another substance is also used for the same purpose and called «*al ghesel*», also made from tree leaves. The druggist also sells «*al wasma*» and *henna*, used to dye hair or decorate the hands and feet, especially the bride and the newly married. The elderly men and women also dye hair and beard. The attar also sells arsenic which is mixed with water and used to remove hair from the body. Among the substances sold by him is the honey wax used to polish «*al zari*» threads used in stitching cloaks to soften them and help keeping «*al ziri*» from breaking and separating from the thread when stitching. Among the materials used for dyeing is «*al rita*» and *al gorooof* (dried pomegranates peels) which is ground and mixed with water and then used to dye clothes and threads. Al gorooof is also used in the composition of some medicines used to treat mouth and throat inflammations.

Among the owners of spice shops at the beginning of the past century at the old market- near the big market mosque- were the late Hajji Mohammad Abdullah

(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Mohammad Hasan Al A'ttar.

Jamal, Hajj Murad Behbehani and Hajji Hussein Ibrahim. As for owners of shops at the entrance of Al Dua'ij Market and surrounding shops overlooking the Money Exchangers' Square, they included few members of Al Rubia'an, Al Faraj, Abdall, Al Jazzaf, Al Ansari and Al A'ttar families. Hajj Murad Behbehani was one of the most famous drug sellers who used to prescribe medicine to the patients, compose it and give instructions to the patient for the method of usage. It is said that the house of the late Hajji Murad near Al Haddad mosque- was like a pharmacy or drugs store working 24-hours for treatment, especially for children, old people and Bedouins who used to gather around his house most of the day hours, while those with emergency conditions used to come to his house even at night for treatment<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Perfume Seller**

This commodity was among the luxuries used by a small stratum of people who included the Sheikhs and the rich classes, while common people used it during occasions such as weddings, feasts and upon receiving guests. Therefore, the number of those selling perfumes was very limited and did not exceed the hand fingers. However, a number of them acquired big reputation and were famous among Kuwait citizens. Perfumes or «al teeb aromatic essence» as mostly referred to - were made of «*al oud*» and rose oil, as well as incense. Those materials were basically brought from India. Among the well-known persons who worked in this trade at the beginning of the past century was the late Yusuf Al Mutawa' Al Qana'i, who practiced this trade at his shop in Al Badr market opposite to the big market's mosque. Also, the late Sulaiman Al Rashoud who was famous at a later period namely the 1930s, was also famous and his shop was located near the shop of the late Yusuf Al Mutawa'. He learned such trade from him as a result of the friendship between both of them<sup>(2)</sup>. The late Yusuf Al Mutawa' used to travel to Bombay to buy wholesale, perfumes and incense. He also had a number of Indian friends working in that trade who used to send to him his needs of expensive types. Big quantities of perfumes were re-exported to Saudi Arabia, especially for the royal family and big merchants. They had great confidence in Kuwaiti merchants working in such field who imported that expensive commodity which required extensive experience and precise knowledge of the types of perfumes before buying them. The perfume merchants distinguished between fragrances quality once they smelt them, even before using them, due to their knowledge and long experience in such trade.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Mohammad Jamal.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Mohammad Jamal.

Some jungles in India had several types of trees, the internal parts of their stems had different types of aromatics. Bombay city was considered an important center for receiving the best types of perfumes from different areas in India due to its remarkable commercial status. Few rare perfumes were also brought from Africa to India in the form of big trunks of trees producing such type of commodity, which were tied to each other in big bunches with iron rings, in order to be whole-sold to perfume merchants there. That raw material was sold in auctions in Bombay and big wholesale merchants came to offer their prices, and the one who bid the highest price used to get them, and then his workers break them down to extract the bulb containing the incense sticks<sup>(1)</sup>. Incense merchants in the Gulf- especially Kuwait- used to buy their needs of incense from Indian wholesale merchants, who used to sell them in the form of small bunches called «*Sayr*», each weighing two pounds. The incense was shipped from India to Kuwait in round-shaped containers made of straw, resembling the dates' basket, which are tightly closed from inside to prevent exposure to humidity each of which is called «*parcel*», shipped by steamships<sup>(2)</sup>.



The late Sulaiman Al Marhood was one of the most prominent essence and aromatic plants dealers in Kuwait.  
*Source: Kuwaiti Jewels in Handicraft Industries, Public Authority for Industry 2002.*

(1) Ibid.

(2) An interview with Mr. Nasser Sulaiman Al Marhood.



The perfume shop owner in Kuwait sells his commodities in « tola»<sup>(1)</sup>, which is a small weighing unit. Each type of perfumes - whether incense sticks, essential oils, al oud oil or rose oil- has a certain price according to its quality. There are excellent, medium and standard types, each of which had certain customers. Some of the merchants or rulers were prepared to pay huge amounts of money to buy a certain type of perfume, while the common people sufficed with a quality satisfying the purpose without exposing their budget to any tremors.

The best types of perfumes were sold at the beginning of the past century for one Rupee and half per tola<sup>(2)</sup>, which is a minor amount according to the current standard, but at that time it equaled the daily income of six workers<sup>(3)</sup>.



Nasser Sulaiman Al Marshood at his shop selling the best types of perfumes, as he inherited this trade from his father, the late Sulaiman Al Marshood.

(1) Tola is a small Indian weighing unit. One pound is 40 tolas and a tola is equivalent to the weight of the old Indian Rupee (11.66 grams). This unit of weight is used to weigh precious goods such as gold, saffron and incense.

(2) The Rupee price equaled 75 fils. This means that the price per tola of the best types of perfumes was around 113 fils, while the same perfume is sold today for 20 dinar per tola, as stated by Mr. Nasser Sulaiman Al Marshood in our interview with him.

(3) The worker used to receive 4 annas daily during this period (i.e. around 19 fils per day).

Among the key importers of perfumes and essences from India at the beginning of the past century was the late Sultan Bin Eisa Al Qana'i who imported big quantities of high quality perfumes, which were purchased from him by the late Sulaiman Al Marshood who used to pay their value after selling them. Among his most prominent customers were the merchants of Najd and Riyadh who came to him personally for buying choice or deluxe perfumes<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Selah Seller (Weapons Seller)**

Hunting-rifles trade flourished in Kuwait in the past in view of the spread of birds and wild animal hunting among Kuwaitis. There was a special market for selling rifles and repairing them and displaying the relevant parts and tools. That market was known as «Al Selah Market», which is one of the most ancient markets in Kuwait. This market was comprised of ten to fifteen shops in which different types of guns were sold. Rifles were brought from Europe, especially Britain, Belgium,



Selah shop selling (weapons). Types of rifles are seen on display, while some buyers are examining such weapons.

*Source: Kuwait, Memories in Photographs, Dr. Yacoub Yusuf Al-Hijji.*

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(1) An interview with Mr. Nasser Suliman Al Marshoud.

Germany and Austria. At the beginning of the past century, they were brought from Turkey<sup>(1)</sup>. Such operations were carried out by specialized merchants who supplied shop owners with them on credit. The shop owner used to pay weekly a part of the value of such arms or swords purchased from the merchant, known as «al mosaba'ah».

Huntsmen, who included Sheikhs and merchants, bought the rifles and their accessories at the beginning of the migration of birds to Kuwait in September and October, as well as their return to their original homes in April and May. The market also flourished during the «*al moraba'aniya*» period in December and January, during which «*al gata*» birds are present in big numbers. Among the most important migrating birds during such seasons were bustards, pigeons, ducks and different spring birds. The desert also contained different types of deer, rabbits, wolves and foxes which attracted such fans to practice their favorite hobby. Special type of bullets are used to hunt each type of birds and animals.

The Bedouins and those coming from southern Iraq to Kuwait during autumn and spring were the main customers of the weapon sellers. That stratum made up a significant part of the market for this commodity. Many of them brought their old rifles to replace them by new ones and used to pay the difference to the shop owner. A number of shop owners at the Selah Market used to repair the old rifles and renew them in order to resell to those wishing to buy used or old rifles. That activity was a profitable business and used to yield good income to the shop owner who bought the old rifle for a small value amounting to 100 Rupees for example, in order to resell for an amount of 300 Rupees after repairing and replacing few simple parts. Therefore, some shop owners used to repair weapons by employing one or two technicians



Some brands of old rifles

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ali Zaid Suwayed Al-Sanie.

to carry out such work. Those persons replaced some parts of the rifle such as the needle and the spiral spring or repaired them manually by using simple tools consisting of a compressor, manual drill, a small emery machine, clamp, hammer, file, a special saw and small oven for fire<sup>(1)</sup>. These persons also used to repair or make the rifles butts (handles) and most of the rifle parts exposed to damage. The handle was made of «sesame» wood by the shop owner and resembled the original piece. It used to be fixed temporarily on the rifle to try it, and then carry out the remaining required repairs such as making the openings for fixing it to the rifle, prior to fixing it permanently.

A number of shop owners used to remanufacture old shots by simple manual means in order to be resold to those wishing to buy such cheap types of shots. The concerned person would remove the rear funnel of the shot and replace it by another new one, then put the shot in a special compressor in order to be filled with gunpowder according to the shot caliber. Then, he would place a small piece of wool or cardboard and compress it manually before placing the shots and then close the shot with a piece of leather before placing it in the compressor to close it and make it ready for use. The funnel is considered as the most important part of the shot, and it is the one leading to its detonation when the needle collides with it. This leads to the inflammation of the gunpowder and the release of the shot towards the target. Among the types of old rifles is a type called «mozer» and «Umm- khabar», made in Turkey, as well as «al sharfa», «al sama'a» and «martini, made in England. These types are of a single shot<sup>(2)</sup>. At the end of the 1940s, the market came to know «shosen» and «Umm sachmah». Gunpowder and shots were used in the past to fill the rifles. Then, rifles or guns with a single shot were used before «Umm khams» was known, which is a rifle carrying five shots. Rifles were sold and purchased in the past without the need for a license. Most Bedouins carried their weapons with them all the time whether for hunting or for protection. Also, big quantities of rifles or guns were smuggled to neighboring countries like Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia which did not have places for selling weapons, or because their governments imposed high taxes on imported rifles. That had encouraged many merchants coming to Kuwait from those countries to buy such rifles and smuggle them through different means to their countries<sup>(3)</sup>.

Among the owners of the Selah oldest shops in the Weapons Market during the first half of the last century were the late Naif al Jalil, Sulaiman Al Rashdan, Khalid al Jasser al Rajhi, Khalil Al Mozayen, Ahmad al Khoudairi, Sulaiman Al O'uwaish,

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(1) An interview with Mr. Fahed Khalil Al Mozayen.

(2) Ibid.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ali Zaid Suwayed Al Sanie.

Khalid Al Abdulla Al Khalid, Zayed Al Sane'a, Sultan Al Rafie and Sulaiman Al O'uwaid. The late Khalil Al Mozayen, Muzyid Al Mo'shourji, Zaid Al Sane'a and Zayed Al Sharida were famous in the market for repairing rifles, as well as Khalil Bu Jarid who used to remake shots.

As for merchants importing rifles or guns, they were headed by the late Abdulaziz Al Rashid and Yusuf Al Marzoog who supplied owners of shops with their needs and supplies of hunting rifles, shots and other parts.

### **Al Saqqar (Falcon Seller) Falconer**

Huntsman in the past depended on falcons to hunt bustards, deer, rabbits and other wild animals and birds which were abundant in Kuwait's desert. They went there on camels, with their falcons, and the remaining hunting tools. When cars were introduced in the first half of the past century, the fans used to drive to remote areas, as



Al-Saqqar holding the falcon while covering its eyes

*Source: Snap Shots from Kuwait in the Past and Present, Ministry of Information*



A hunter carrying a number of bustards caught with the help of the falcons

*Source: Snap Shots from Kuwait in the Past and Present, Ministry of Information*

well as neighboring countries to practice their hobby.

Hunters relied heavily on falcons which enjoy extraordinary eyesight that assist them to spot the prey from several kilometers. There are different types of falcons, some of which are distinguished by their far eyesight, speed and body strength. There are types of falcons whose value can reach great amounts of money, which the fans do not hesitate to buy regardless of their expensive cost. falcons are trained to carry out their

task, and once training completed, they are taken for hunting trips.

Falcon sellers or Saqqars used to bring their falcons to the market to sell, especially on Fridays. They were based at the edge of the old Tin Market overlooking the Money Exchangers Square, where they gathered there to display their commodities for sale. The falcon eyes are covered with small round pieces of leather to ban vision.

### **Al Tarrah**

Al Tarrahs are the vegetable and fruit sellers. They are divided up into two main types: wholesale merchants and shop owners called also «*al khaddar*» or retailer. The wholesale tarrahs got the products from several local and external sources almost all the year around. At the forefront of local sources for supplying Kuwait with vegetables were the farms of Al Fintas, Al Fahaheel, as well as other coastal villages in the southern part of the country, called «*al Qosoor*» (palaces) area, in addition to al Jahra, the farms inside the City Wall and villages near Kuwait City such as al- Nugra and Hawally. Certain types of vegetables also came from Failka Island. As for the bigger part of vegetables and fruits, they came by sea from Iranian and Iraqi cities and ports spread along Shatt Al Arab and the north of the Arabian Gulf. These types of commodities were seasonal, as the local vegetables increase in the spring and autumn, while imported commodities increase during summer and a short period of winter.

Big vegetable and fruit merchants could be divided up into three types: the first type were those dealing with boats coming from Iraq and Iran, bringing different types of vegetables and fruits with them. Those merchants were the majority, and they had taken the Fordha as their headquarters where they received their commodities through sailboats and then sold them either by auction, or transported them to their shops at the Vegetable Market to sell at retail.

As for the second type, they were the vegetable and fruit sellers who received their commodities from the Kuwaiti villages. They were based at Al Saba'an Square (Bin Baher Court), which was reached by camels and donkeys at dawn, carrying different types of products from the villages, in order to put them in auction at the same place.

There was also a number of vegetable and fruit sellers (tarrahs) who used to receive products from Failka island carried to them by fishing boats coming from there.

We will address below in detail the wholesale vegetable dealers and the nature of their work according to the type of their activity:

## 1. Wholesale Tarrah (Importer)

A big number of tarrahs- or tarrah merchants - dealt with Ahwazi Iranian balam owners or Iraqis (from Basrah) and bought from them the vegetables and fruits brought by their boats. Also, a considerable number of the tarrahs owned their balams or (balam: cargo dhows) which transported the products from such areas to Kuwait on their own account. Others used to rent ablam or cargo boats at their account and supply the captain with a certain amount of capital called «*mayah*» to buy products from there and bring to Kuwait. Each one of such activities had a certain method of dealing and distribution of income to the parties participating in the process.

A big number of ablam sailed to Kuwait from Iranian and Iraqi ports, especially during the vegetables and fruits season, carrying those products with them to sell in Kuwait. Such boats docked at a side of the Fordha, located at the west of the Customs Department and called (*Niq'ah Al Cholan*) to unload their commodities



The Fordha crowded with balam (small sailing vessels) coming with different types of commodities brought by al tarrahs.

*Source: From Ancient Kuwait, Yusuf Al Shehab*

there. Boats docked parallel to the pier at that area in long lines while unloading their commodities. Wooden boards were placed between each boat and the other for porters and sailors to pass while transferring commodities to the Fordha. Big numbers of boats docked in such way while unloading their commodities. Each boat owner usually had a local agent from al tarrahs who bought his entire commodities after agreement on the price, in order to unload at the Fordha and sold in public auction for the account of al tarrah to the person who would offer the highest price from the shop owners or merchants. The balam owner would then go back to his country to bring other commodities as soon as he received the value of his shipments, and so on. A number of tarrahs also used to auction on the commodities of boat owners at the Fordha if they wished, against a commission amounting to 2% of the sale value, which al tarrah would receive. Some merchants used to buy the boat full load through one of the brokers, and al tarrah and the broker shared the margin and each of them would get 1% of the sale value. A number of tarrahs used to rent some boats to bring their needs of fruits and vegetables on their account. Al tarrah provided the boat captain with an amount of money called (*maya*) to buy commodities from there. When commodities were sold, the profits were divided into three equivalent shares; one for al tarrah; one for the boat owner; and the third for the sea captain, who used to divide the share with his sailors as agreed among them.

After selling each shipment and obtaining its profit, both al-tarrah and the boat owner settle their account. The boat returns to its country to repeat the same trip. The trip back and forth including the loading of commodities usually took around 3 to 4 days.

If al tarrah was the owner of the boat, then he would get two shares. His share as the owner of the boat and the second was his share as a merchant. The third share goes to the captain and sailors. In case of loss or damage of commodities, al tarrah would bear the loss alone and he would again supply the ship captain with a new capital to start working. The captain, his sailors and the boat owner - if the boat was owned by another person other than al tarrah- would also receive their fees agreed upon even if al tarrah lost<sup>(2)</sup>.

Each tarrah usually had between 500 to 1000 «rak»<sup>(3)</sup> or crates for packing the products reaching from Basrah. The captain supplied the boat with around 200 raks per trip. Once the boat reached Kuwait and the commodities delivered, he

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(1) An interview with Hajji Mousa Abdul Hussein Al Naqi.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Rak is a container made of palm tree sticks, resembling the crate with a strong base and wide upper opening.





Al- Fordha was crowded with different commodities and products coming by the ablam. Here, we see the sellers of these products including the seeds, vegetable and fruits, poultry and other birds and pottery sellers.

*Photos: Ministry of Information, Artifacts and Museums Department- 1986.*

would receive the same number of empty raks and returns to A'badan or Basrah for packing them with fruits once again, and so on. Special signs and marks were placed on the raks of each tarrah so that they would not mix with other raks or get lost. The owners of boats and porters distinguished between the raks of each merchant from the signs marked or written on them. Among the most significant products reaching Kuwait by boats were dates, grapes, apples, apricots, peaches and oranges. In addition, they brought livestock fodder, the most important of which is «*jat*» and «*choulan*», in addition to other various vegetables. A number of tarrahs used to bring big quantities of dates from Basrah, ranging to 2000 maan, in order to sell to the merchants who used to store them in their stores to resell when the price would increase after the season, or to ship them directly from Kuwait to India, Dubai, Bahrain or Muscat, instead of sending their ships to Basrah to buy dates from there directly.

There were commodities brought by ablam owners at their expense to sell at retail to buyers among shop owners or the people, whether inside the boat or after unloading them at the sea-coast near the Fordha. Such commodities included onions, salt, palm tree branches, choulan and poultry (chickens). Also, qorm, which are the branches of some trees brought from O'man were sold through the same method. The unsold quantities of such commodities were placed in «*al kobarah*»<sup>(1)</sup> in the Fordha to sell at later periods. The Fordha contained a number of tap-rooms (*arbours*) to store such products and protect them from sun and rain.

Most wholesale tarrahs owned a number of donkeys to transport their sold commodities in auction to the shop owners in the Vegetable Market.

Each type of fruits and vegetables was packed in special containers, suitable for protecting it against damage during the transfer process. For example, black dates and grapes were packed in «*raks*», while pomegranates were packed in «*al louth*» - singular is «*loutha*», a big crate made of bamboo wood. As for soft dates, they are packed in «*gallah* or *qallah*», which is a container made of palm tree leaves, while unmaturing dates and similar dates came in «*othoq*», and every 10 or 15 othoqs were placed in a group called «*ezla*». One «*ezla*» weights between one and a half to two «*maans*».

Among the biggest tarrah merchants who worked in the Fordha were the late Abdul Hussein al Naqi and his son Mousa Al Naqi, who dealt with more than

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(1) «*Al kobarah*» is the plural of «*kobar*», which is a room with ceilings made of tree branches, straws or «*bawari*» which were used for storing purposes at the Fordha at the beginning of the past century, before building steel trusses.

40 ablam during the 1940s. Such boats worked between Kuwait, Basrah, and ports in Iran and around 7 to 8 boats of them reached the Fordha daily, while loaded with vegetables and fruits. Important tarrahs also included Hajji Turki Al Turki, Abdulrahman Bu Abbas, Abdulaziz Al Ma'dan, Ahmad Bu Ftain, Hasan Al Wazzan, Abbas Mukames, Musa'ed Al A'dwani, Sulaiman Al A'dwani, Khalil Safar, Hajji Ghulum, Abdullah Al Basri, Jassim Machaki and Humud Ali Khan. Those merchants used to go to the Vegetable Market in the evening to collect the value of their wholesale operations executed in the morning to shop owners who usually sold them to consumers on the same day<sup>(1)</sup>.

## **2. Wholesale Tarrah For Local Products (From Al Qosoor Area)**

Big quantities of vegetables arrived from southern Kuwaiti villages such as Fintas, Funaites, Abu Hlaifa and Fahaheel, which were called *al Qosoor* area. This was in addition to products from Rumaithya, Salmiya, Nugra and Hawally. At the forefront of such products were cantaloupe, water melons, tomatoes, cucumbers, different leafy vegetables such as radish, parsley, leek and celery. Farmers from those areas used to leave them at night on the backs of camels and donkeys loaded with products, to reach Kuwait before dawn, where the camels would be seated at Al Saba'an Square located at the southern inlet of the Vegetable Market. A public auction would be carried on those products in the early morning. The vegetables were packed in big baskets carried on donkeys backs or camels. The different vegetables were packed in straw baskets, while tomatoes were packed in tins to protect them from damage<sup>(2)</sup>. Among the farmers who brought such goods and commodities from there were Bin Jari, Al Hashan and others. Among tarrahs who received those commodities and auctioned them, were the late Abdullah Bin Ayoub, Ibrahim Bin Al Sheikh, Mohammad Bu Rowayeh, Abdullah Bu Rowayeh, Saleh Bu Rowayeh, Humud Ali Khan, Abdullateef Ali Khan, Bin Sarhan, Sa'ad Al Jerewi, Khalifa Al Ghamdi, Uthman Al Sadah, Humud Al Jassar, Abdullah A Jassar, Musa'ed Al A'dwani, Abdulaziz Al Mehareb and others. Tarrahs and shop owners at the Vegetable Market used to buy those products from the auction in order to sell in their shops.

## **3. Tarrahs Dealing With Jahra And Failaka Farmers**

Jahra village was famous for farming jat (clover) and other vegetables, in addition to dates and kenar (sidr). Farmers, headed by the late Abdullah Al Khalf, Mubarak Al A'yyar and Mohammad Al Ameer, sent products to Kuwait on the backs of camels, which were received by their clients who sold

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(1) An interview with Mr. Fadel Abbas Mukames.

(2) An interview with the late Mohammad Ali Khan.

them either in auction or at their shops. Vegetables coming from Jahra were delivered on camels backs to Al Saba'an square, while camels carrying clover headed to the Money Exchangers Market Square where the Clover Market was located on its southern side. Shop owners there received them to sell to their customers. As for limited quantities of dates and soft dates coming from Jahra (Sama'ran and Halawi type-) as well as sidr, they were delivered to a certain number of shop owners at the market who were full time clients of Jahra farm owners<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for vegetables coming from Failka- the most of which were carrots and cucumbers- they reached the Fordha by fishing boats to a certain number of tarrahs, headed by the late Jassim Machaki and Abdul-Nabi Machaki, who directly sold them to the consumers. Most tarrahs rented stores around the Vegetable Market to use as stores for keeping vegetables such as onions, garlic and potatoes, as well as legumes and seeds. Each store had a certain number of rooms in which those materials were kept.

### **Al Khaddar (Vegetable Retailer)**

Most vegetable and fruits sellers - also called as khaddara or tarrahs- were centered in the Vegetable Markets, The Vegetable Market was one of the oldest and biggest markets. The shops selling dates and jat (clover) were located in its eastern third side overlooking the Money Exchangers' Square. Meanwhile, grocery shops were numerous on the western side overlooking Al Saba'an Square. The number of vegetable shops at that market ranged between 40 to 50. The auction was usually held in the early morning at Al Saba'an Square, while being held at the Fordha when the boats coming from Iraq and Iran landed, according to the ebb and flow times, in order to hold the auction once the commodities were unloaded. The types of fruits which reached Kuwait were limited, the most important of which were grapes, apples, pomegranates and black dates, which all reached in the summer season<sup>(2)</sup>.

The vegetable sellers compete in displaying their commodities to the buyers by repeating some songs and folklore verses which each of them compiled to attract customers to his commodities. Those songs and verses focussed sed on the quality of commodities and being fresh and the best in the market, and other songs which add an environment of entertainment among the buyers. For example, some used to sing «the good we have, the bad around us», which

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Ali Al Naqi.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulaziz Al A'mmar.



A shop at the old vegetable market. Buyers are seen examining the fruits before buying.

*Source: Ministry of Information*

means that they have the best in the market. Others would sing, describing the type of apples they have, and sing « we have nadhi (mature) apples... and we have apples for achar (pickles)»<sup>(1)</sup>. These calls are considered a type of publicity, which modern ones were not known at that time, whether with respect to good display, attractive packing or promotions to increase sales such as gifts and the like. Therefore, the vegetable seller used that simple method to attract buyers. Al tarrah would offer his commodities of vegetables and fruits normally in «qofef» and the singular is «qoffa» and «atbaq,» (dishes) and the singular is «tobaq» (dish)<sup>(2)</sup>.

The vegetables sellers used to earn very low income, as their profits were simple and did not bring to most of them more than half Rupee to 12 annas per day, in return for going to the Fordha in the early morning to buy vegetables and fruits from the auction and stay in the shop from early morning till night prayer, except

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(1) «Nadi» means ripe, and «achar» means pickles.

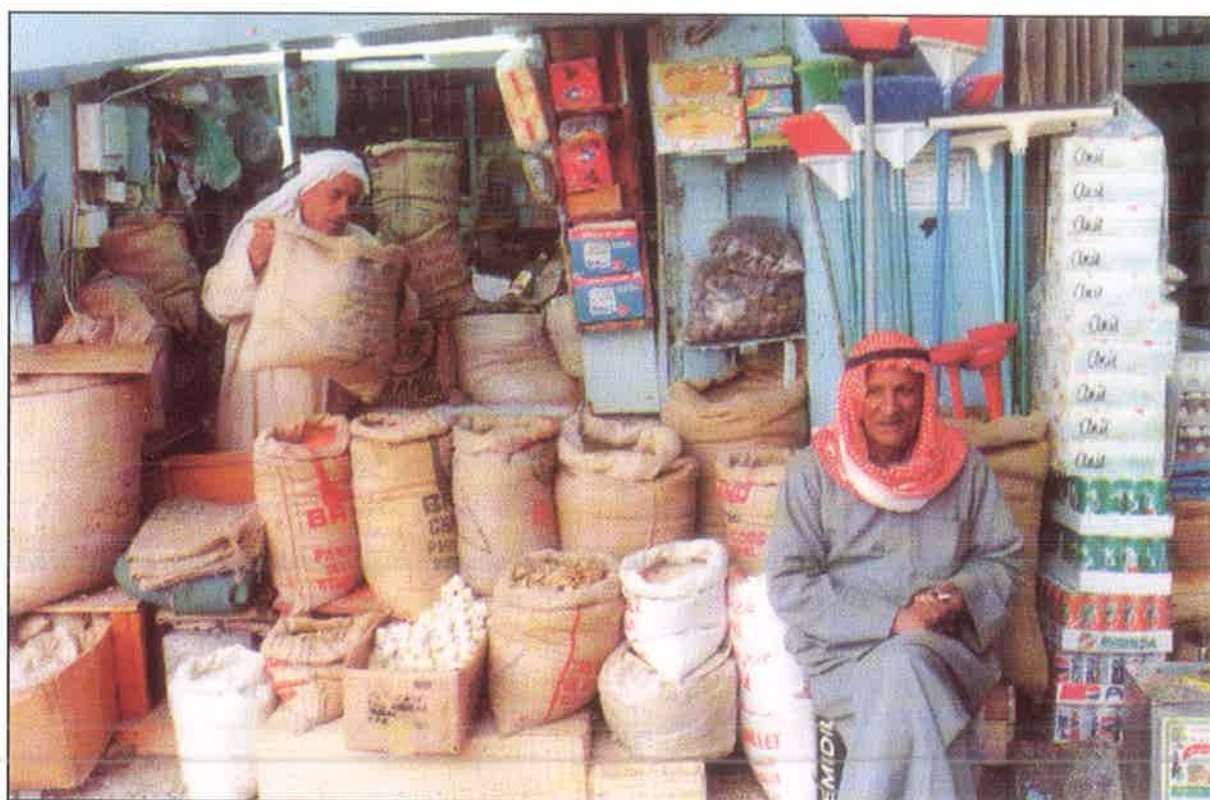
(2) «Qoffa» is a round basket made of palm tree branches, of a diameter ranging between 50 to 70 cm, and resembling the basket but a little deeper. As for «tabaq», it resembled the tray in shape, but also made of palm tree branches.

the noon time during which they went to their houses for rest<sup>(1)</sup>. Selling was active in spring and summer, when vegetables and fruits come in big quantities from Iran, Iraq and Kuwait's villages and other neighbouring countries. As for winter, the market is weak and some shops close down their doors, while business is stagnant in the market due to the slow and sluggish movement<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Al Baqqal (The Grocer)**

Al baqqal is the seller of dry foodstuff such as legumes (including lentils, mash, beans, chick peas, black eye beans) and grains cereals such as (rice, wheat and barely), flour, as well as tea, sugar, spices, dried shrimps, dried lemon, tamarind, rosewater, pollen water, kerosene and canned food which started reaching Kuwait at the beginning of the 1940s, including tomato paste, cream, vegetable oil, and many other types of foodstuffs used in cooking.

The grocer displayed the legumes and cereals in canvas sacs in front of the



The grocer sells different types of cereals, grains, legumes, spices, sugar, tea and canned food at his shop

*Source: Photos from Kuwait, Ministry of Information*

(1)The price of materials were very low. For example, the price of selling one «oqiyah» of berhi dates was around two annas and one oqiyah of black dates 3 annas. The oqiyah is approximately equivalent to 2.25 KG.

(2) An interview with Mr. Badr Yusuf Al Naqi.

entrance of his shop, while canned food arranged on wooden shelves inside the shop or also at the entrance. The grocer packs the materials he sells to his clients in locally made paper bags. A number of women earned money from doing these paper bags.

The grocer buys most of his commodities from wholesale merchants at the Merchants' Market or directly from the Fordha from the boats which reach there daily from the neighboring countries. The grocer buys these materials while packed in canvas sacs and sells them by ounces or oqiyahs, and adds a simple margin to cover his expenses and make some profit. He benefits from selling some empty packing materials such as canvas sacs and wooden tea boxes which were bought by some brokers who roamed the markets to buy these materials. The grocer relies in his work on the common people with limited income who buy their daily needs of foodstuff by ounce or oqiyah because they are unable to store big quantities of these materials. The grocer normally had in his shop several types of goods and commodities to satisfy the need of every client: he has different types of rice, such as «*al rashti*» and «*al sadri*» coming from Iran, «*al zira*» coming from India and «*al anbar*» coming from Iraq. Providing different types of flour of different prices, including the cheap type coming from northern Iraq and «*welayati*» of high quality coming from Australia. He had English sugar as well as red sugar coming from India called «*gora*» which is a cheap type.

Those commodities reached Kuwait in containers of different weights, due to the difference in the weighing units in each country. For example, the weighing unit in Kuwait was «*maan*» which weighs 75 kilograms, while the Iraqi «*maan*» weighs 90 kilograms, Iranian «*maan*» 100 kilograms, India used a unit called «*hander*» weighing 112 Pounds (50 kilograms)<sup>(1)</sup>. Therefore, the grocer was forced to go to the «*Government Center*» called (*Khan*) in the Merchants Market to weigh the commodities while in their bags, against simple fees, before buying them from wholesalers to check their weights. Some people also used to examine the cereals and sugar while in their bags by a thin metal tube with a sharp edge called «*bamboo*» inserted into the bag to take a simple quantity for examination.

Most groceries were located in the western part of the Vegetable Market, while no market was free of these shops. Groceries existed in most old districts to serve their residents. They weekly paid the commodities installment account to the wholesale merchants.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Elias Khaddada Safar.

## Ghee Seller

Kuwaitis did not use vegetable oil in the past. Rather, they relied basically on the natural ghee coming from the desert on camels' back through the Bedouins and «Al Mea'dan» (tribes from southern Iraq) in the spring. Safat was crowded with them while carrying big quantities of ghee in big skin sacs to sell to the city dwellers. The Ghee Market occupied a central position due its significance- which the Kuwaitis called «*a'dani ghee*»- in the Kuwaiti meal in the past. That market had approximately 20 shops specialized in selling *a'dani ghee*,. Each camel carried 4 big sacs, each called «*nehw*». Other types of ghee were also made by «al Mea'dan», the Bedouins of Iraq. Such type of ghee was not desirable in Kuwait as its taste differed from the Kuwaiti *a'dani ghee* made by the Kuwaiti Bedouins and distinguished by its quality and good taste<sup>(1)</sup>.

Owners of shops purchased their needs of *a'dani ghee* from the Bedouins at Al Safat. The skin sacs were unloaded into big tin cans welded at the tin market in order to store ghee for the longest possible period. It was stored in the shop for selling throughout the year. Some Bedouin *a'dani ghee* sellers also used to sell them the ghee they brought with them, which was unloaded from «*al a'kkah*» (i.e. skin sac) into the tin cans after weighing it at the Municipality center located near the Ghee Market<sup>(2)</sup>. Also, some wealthy big families, used to directly buy their needs of natural ghee from Al Safat and stored it in tin cans for their annual use, while most of the population bought their need of ghee from the market. The ghee seller displayed his commodities in tin cans which he placed before his shop, and next to them the scale and weighing units. Ghee is sold by ounce. The tin can weighs from 15 to 20 ounces (34-45 kilograms) of ghee and approximately sold at 5 Rupees. Most buyers prefer to buy small quantities of ghee ranging from one quarter to half ounces for consumption for several days, as is the case for most of the consumer commodities. Most of the people could not store big quantities of foodstuffs. Consumers used to go to the Ghee Market, carrying with them the ghee pan or tin to put the of ghee purchased inside it. The ghee seller used a long spoon to scoop out ghee from the tin can in order to display it to the buyer who usually asks to see and inspect the ghee and sometime tries to taste it, to check its quality before buying. It is noteworthy here that many

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.

(2) An interview with the late Saleh Abbas Al Salman.



Kuwaiti families- especially those with limited income- made their needs of ghee at their homes by melting fats, in order to use for cooking.

It is of importance that the government prohibited the export of a'dani ghee abroad during the 1940s- especially during World War II- in view of its concern to make it available in the country and to evade its appreciation. It is known that naming this type of ghee with «al a'dani» is attributed to Al A'dan area, which extends to the south of Kuwait from Benid Al Gar area into al Khafji, where several types of herbs of good smell and high nutritional value grow, on which the sheep of Al A'wazim, Al Rashida and Al Mutran tribes, grazed. Most of these sheep were of the «al Arab» type, known for their high production of milk. They were of black color and bigger size than the other types.

Vegetable ghee was introduced in Kuwait in the mid-forties. The first importers of that type of ghee was the late Ahmad Al Ayoub, who became the agent of «Bu Warda» ghee and the late Jassim Al Wazzan, who became the agent of «Clara».

### **Al Tammar (Dates Seller)**

Kuwaitis consume dates throughout the year, and have it with butter, milk, yoghurt and sesame paste (tahina). They made types of recipes by mixing it with flour, oil and nuts. Due to the significance of dates for Kuwaitis, there is a special market for dates at the eastern entrance of the Vegetable Market overlooking the Money Exchangers' Market.

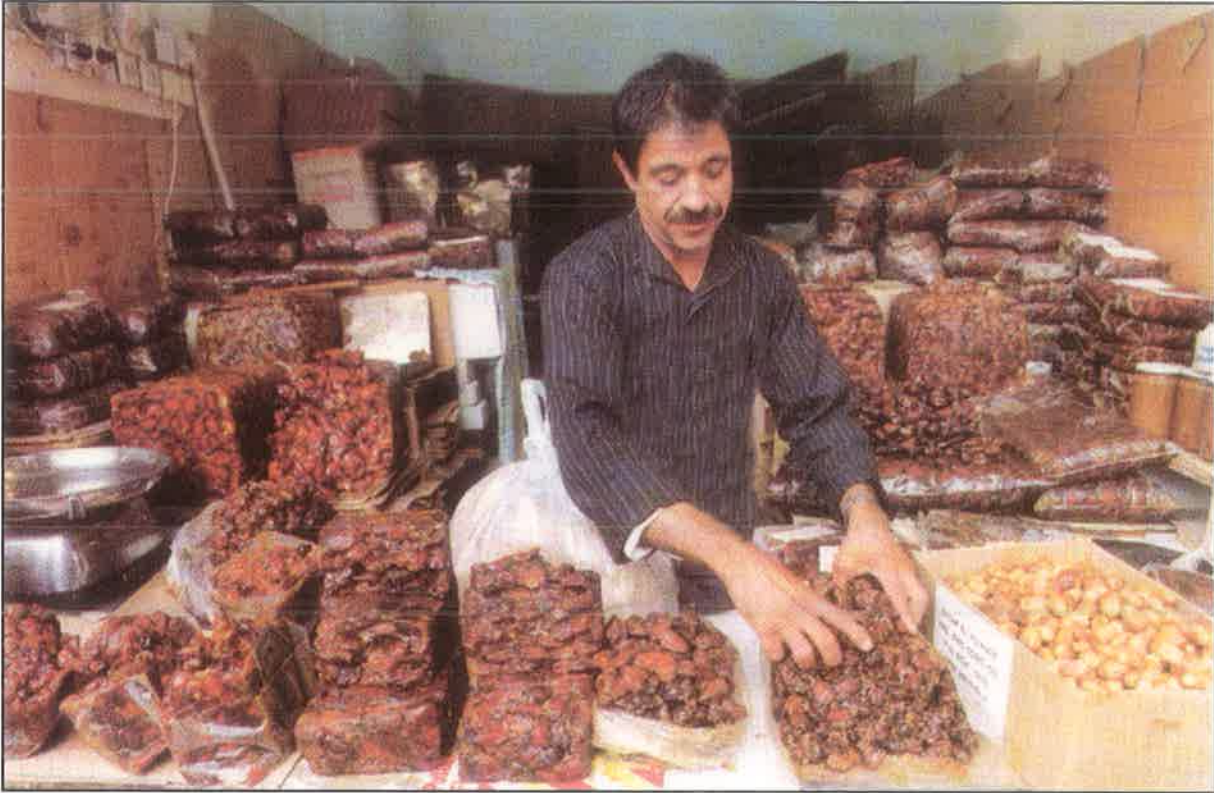
Dates were basically brought to Kuwait from Basrah in the ablams (cargo dhows) of the retail sale merchants, as well as smaller boats.

Dates are of several types, the most important of which are *Al Sa'maran*, *Al Khadrawi*, *Al Qintar*, *Al Helawi*, *Al Braim*, *Al Fersi* and *Al Berhi*, which is the best and most expensive. Small quantities reached the market from Jahra from Al Sa'maran and al Helawi types. Dates arrive packed in «gallah» (baskets) made of palm tree branches. The «gallah» weighs half «maan».

The dates seller sat on the ground, while placing the dates baskets on wooden boxes, with their mouth open to allow the buyer to see and taste the dates quality before buying. The dates seller uses a small serrated knife to open the basket or cut the «*shamareekh*» of the dates<sup>(1)</sup>. He also uses the «*menkath*» to cut and remove the

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(1) «Shamareekh» is the plural of «shamrookh», one of the thin sticks forming the palm tree branch, in which the dates grow in the shape of rows.



Dates seller (al-Tammar)

Source: Photos from Kuwait, Ministry of Information

dates from the «gallah». The «*menkath*»<sup>(1)</sup> is a strong stick of a length of around one feet, and thickness of around 3 cm, held by the dates seller from one of its edges while the other edge is sharp. The «*menkath*» is made of «*al nogol*» plant stems, a type of nuts resembling almonds but of a smaller size. The dates seller used to place the *menkath* in a bucket full of water when it is not in use in order to remove any dates residues stuck on it while cutting. Among the significant customers of dates sellers are ship captains and ship owners who bought huge quantities of dates whether for travel ships or diving ships using big quantities of dates while traveling to India or going pearling. Date was the main meal for sailors, especially during the diving trips. Date was also offered to masons while working at the houses for breakfast, along with butter milk and bread. Among the important customers of dates sellers as well are Bedouins, who purchased big quantities of dates and packed them in «*al o'doul*», the plural of «*e'del*» or «*al mezwadah*», which are the saddle bags placed on the backs of camels while traveling<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) «*meshla*» or «*menkath*» means the sling.

(2) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.

## **Al Jazzaf & Al Sammak (Fish Sellers)**

Al Jazzaf is the person buying fish from fishermen in order to sell by wholesale to shop owners at the Fish Market or display it at the auction to sell for the fishermen's account against a certain commission. As for Al Sammak, he is the person who runs a shop in the Fish Market to sell fish by retail sale to the buyers. Each jazzaf used to send a number of big jelil<sup>(1)</sup> to the neq'a where the fishing boats docked to unload their cargoes in al jelil of their clients of jazzafs. Each jazzaf writes or imprints his name on his jelil or puts a certain sign in order to recognize them.

Al jelil are carried on donkeys backs to the Fish Market where they will be received by al- jazzafs who sells them through the method agreed upon with the fishermen. Al jazzaf settles his account with the fisherman after selling the fish. Each jazzaf has a number of fishermen and ship owners clients, whether they are owners of «hodhoo», nets or other persons. He used to sell their fishes by the method suitable with the market condition, after which each one of them received his share. Al jazzaf may sell the entire commodities at his shop, whether to the ordinary customers if the quantity is small, or to owners of other shops in the market if the quantity is more than his needs, or in the auction market if the quantities are big, where the remaining shop owners in the market, other jazzafs or people would compete to buy them<sup>(2)</sup>.

Al Jazzaf or al sammak displayed his commodities at his shop above a piece of straw mat or tray for selling, and used to sit on top of a piece of canvas material, under which he placed the sales revenue of annas and Rupees, in order to collect at the end of the day to pay the value of his purchase of fish from al jazzaf. The area of the shop normally did not exceed two to three square meters. Afterwards, benches were built for the shops in order to put fish on them for display. Al sammak sells most types by «oqiyah», while some are sold by number. The weight of the «oqiyah» of fish was usually counted double the weight of the ordinary «Oqiyah» of other commodities, and therefore the weight of one «oqiyah» of fish was of ten ounces, while the accustomed oqiyah for selling the remaining goods is only of five ounces. Al sammak usually cuts up the fish and removes its husks according to the request of the customer. Usually, al sammak tools consisted of a number of knives of different sizes, a small axe, and a scale of straw, and weighing units made locally, as well as a wooden box to place his tools inside them to be lockd after ending the work period. Al sammak gets rid of the remaining fishes which

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(1) Al jelil- is the plural of jila or gellah which, is a big drum made of straw which has a capacity for a big quantity of fish or other materials packed inside it in order to be carried by porters to the required location or placed on the backs of donkeys in order to deliver them at the required destinations.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mohammad Abdulatif Idrees.

have not been sold by offering them for cheap prices or distributing them to the needy who come to the market at this period to take them for free, as no fridges were available at that time to store them for the next day<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Al Mogahwi (Coffee Shop Owner)**

Old Kuwait City embraced many popular coffee-shops or coffee-houses spread at different parts of the city, starting from the Fordha at the north, passing by the markets and then Al Safat. A certain category of citizens used to visit the coffee-shops to spend their spare time, chatting and exchanging news. The old coffee-shops used to offer only cups of Arabic coffee to their visitors, while the owners of some coffee shops used to roam the nearby markets carrying their coffee pots to pour coffee for their customers of neighboring merchants and shop owners. A number of such coffee shops had a number of wooden chairs each holds three or four persons at a time, used to offer tea and gedow<sup>(2)</sup> to their visitors. Such coffee houses contained a small kitchen with a stove called in some instances «*seridan*» with a flame for making coffee or tea. Additional chairs were placed outside some coffee shops for the clients. Among the places at which coffee shops were spread since old times were the Fordha, the Merchants' Market, the Money Exchangers' Square, the Guards Market and Al Safat. Each coffee shop had its customers who spent their break there to drink coffee, tea and smoke hubble-bubble with their friends or colleagues at work. The owner used to serve his clients by himself and offer tea or coffee to them, and employed some workers when the work increased and activities expanded. Among the work carried out by the coffee shop owner or his workers prior its opening in the early morning is to prepare the hubble-bubble, light up the fire, arrange the chairs, sprinkle water on the ground to cool the atmosphere and prevent the raising of dust. The coffee shop owner is referred to as the «coffee shop man» or «*al mogahwi*», while the coffee shop is referred to as «*gahwah*» or «*al chikhana*».

In some instances, each coffee shop was famous for a certain feature such as the type of its customers or quality of coffee or tea offered, or the activity practiced there such as playing cards or dominos.

Many persons of different trades spent their evenings at the coffee shops for relaxation and forgetting the tiredness of daily work. Sailors, ship captains and tawaweesh also used to wear their best clothes after the end of the diving or travel seasons and spend their times- in the afternoon or sometimes at night- at the coffee shops, either for relaxation, exchanging talks or listening to news or completing commercial transactions among themselves.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Badr Yusuf Al Naqi.

(2) Al gidow is hubble-bubble, or narjeelah.



Al mogahwi holding the coffee jar and serving coffee for the customers.

*Source: Modern History of Kuwait, Dr. Ahmad Abu Hakema- 1984.*

Talking about old coffee shops in Kuwait is a very interesting subject and a unique story, which attracts the interested and concerned parties and deserves to stop at its details. In fact, it is a subject that deserves studying and investigating its various aspects which reflected the concerns and worries of the old Kuwaiti society. At that time, coffee shops were like social forums to which people went and longed to spend their spare time to talk with their friends of the same social class or their colleagues in the same trade. On the next pages, we will point to the old coffee shops in Kuwait and events and activities took place there, which really reflected the concerns of the Kuwaiti citizens, their aspirations, interests and hopes of their different social classes at that time. We will mention the names of the famous coffee shops, their locations and the levels and characteristics of their visitors, and will cover the various

activities which represented different aspects of the social life in the past.

## **Old Coffee Shops In Kuwait**

Coffee shops were common in Kuwait since old times and formed an important aspect of the social and economic activity in the country. Most markets were full of coffee shops to which citizens went during their spare time to exchange talks related to their interests and concerns for long hours. Coffee shops used to open their doors at 7:00 a.m. till 10:00 p.m., and most of them were shelters for shading from the sun in the summer and for protection from the rain and the cold weather in the winter.



An old coffee shop at the market. Utensils made of pottery are on sale next to the coffee shop.

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers, William Facey and Jillian Grant- 1998*

Each coffee shop was distinguished by the presence of an economic, social homogeneous society. Coffee shops were also famous for their customers from the same trade such as ship captains, tawaweesh, sailors, merchants, brokers, donkey owners or tarrahs. One of the coffee shops was famous for having the rulers of Kuwait visiting it from time to time. It was called «Bu Nashi» coffee shop where the Ruler, his advisors, and the merchants who formed the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy used to offer their advice and consultations on all matters. According to the late Kuwaiti historian Abdullah Khaled Al-Hatem, that tradition started during the reign of Sheikh Abdullah Bin Sabah I, and continued till the end of the reign of Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah in the year 1950. That coffee shop was considered as the oldest and most famous coffee shop in Kuwait, and located at the entrance of the Merchants Market near Al Souk Al Kabir Mosque.

At the very beginning, coffee shops offered Arabic coffee only, but some of them started to offer tea after its introduction in Kuwait for the first time at the beginning of the previous century. In addition, syrups and other soft drinks and hubble-bubble were offered. The service of coffee shops expanded later and a number of coffee

shops started to offer «*namlet bu teela*»<sup>(1)</sup> in the twenties, which was the only soft drink in Kuwait at that time. Ice cream during the forties was also one of the iced materials offered there, after its production spread in Kuwait and some citizens were specialized in producing it.

The number of coffee shops increased during the 1930s and 1940s, especially in Al Safat which acquired a big significance afterwards, following the economic prosperity and increase in the number of visitors coming from the desert to exchange commodities with the city dwellers and the spread of trusses and a'mariyas<sup>(2)</sup>, and the number of vehicles for transporting passengers from the city to the villages, as well as the increase in the taxi cabs coming to and from Basrah. Such events increased the number of visitors of these coffee shops which started to compete among themselves in putting «*beshtakhta*»<sup>(3)</sup> to listen to songs from the records or discs in addition to introducing radios, as



A famous old coffee shop during the 1930s, known as Nuwaidar Coffee Shop, located at the Guards Market near the old Guards Department building.

(1) Namlait is a soft drink with different flavors, brought from Basrah, and then started to be produced in Kuwait during the 1920s.

(2) A'mariyas are small trusses in which sellers used to sit inside at Safat and other squares in order to display their goods for sale.

(3) Bashtakhta is the gramophone.

part of the attractions for visitors. Some visitors also used to smoke hubble-bubble or play dominos, dama, cards and al «nazel», which encouraged the coffee shop owners to supply their coffee shops with the tools for such games, such as cards (*jenjefah*), wooden pieces for dominos, dama and other games.<sup>(1)</sup> Before the spread of ice, coffee shop owners used to put «*namlait bu teela*» bottles in a copper utensil or wooden barrel filled with cold water extracted from the wells existing at some markets, which was used to spray the ground to cool the air and prevent the raising of dust. «*Namlait*» bottles submerged in cold water were covered with wet canvas, leading to increases of their coolness. The coffee shop worker used to open the *namlait* bottle with a round wooden key in the middle of which there is a protrusion «*tongue*» caused a high whistle when it presses against the «*teelah*»<sup>(2)</sup> which falls inside the bottle. This noise leads to attracting the attention of passersby and those sitting in the coffee shop, as one of the publicity means for promoting such product. By the end of the 1930's, coffee shops started to use ice to cool *namlait*, after Alghanim icemaker plant started to produce it. Bottles were placed between the ice cubes in big wooden boxes covered with canvas to cool down<sup>(3)</sup>.



Hubble-bubble or Narjeelahs were always ready at the coffee shop for use by the visitors.

*Source: Folkloric Heritage, October 1987, GCC Folkloric Heritage Center - Doha- Qatar.*

### **The Most Significant Old Coffee Shops In Kuwait**

The following are the most important old coffee-shops in Kuwait with brief information on each of them:

1. Bu Nashi Coffee Shop: located at the entrance of the Merchants' Market,

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(1) *Jenjefah* is the playing cards, dominos, dama, koot, nozl and other games for entertainment.

(2) A small glass ball used to close the soft drink bottle opening. To open the bottle, the small glass ball used to be pressed inside the bottle by a special «*key*».

(3) An interview with Mr. Hussain Hassan Boland.



opposite Al Souk Al Kabir mosque. It only served coffee. Bu Nashi also opened another two coffee shops at later periods, one at Al Badr Market and the other in Al Safat, opposite the old Ford car showroom.

2. Bu Abbas Coffee Shop: located at Al Choulan Fordha, one of the eldest coffee shops in Kuwait, visited by captains and sailors. Breakfast of bread, tea and milk was served there.
3. Mulla Abbas Al Beloushi Coffee Shop: located opposite the Fordha, near Gray Mackenzie Company<sup>(1)</sup>, one of the old coffee shops, visited by sailors and diving captains. They used to exchange talks on selling and buying various commodities. That coffee shop was located opposite the street leading to Al Bahr Square (the New Street afterwards) which was known as al Hammara Road earlier.
4. Al Tawaweesh Coffee Shop: located at Al Badr Market which was at the beginning a big courtyard covered with truss, and considered as the headquarters and meeting place of pearl merchants. That market was crowded with dealers and traders during the



Namlait bu teelah bottle

Source: From the belongings of Mr. Jassim Al Mozayen.



A wooden key for opening namlait bu teelah bottle

Source: from the belongings of Mr. Jassim Al Mezayyen

(1) Gray Mackenzie Company was a British used to work as agent for steamships since starting to dock opposite Kuwait's beaches at the beginning of the past century. The premises of that company was located opposite the old port.

peal season. Bu Nashi purchased it from its owner, Mohammad Hayder, known as «Bu Hamza», during the 1930s.

5. Al Rayes Coffee Shop: located near the Camels Parking Place called «Al Manakh» west of the Merchants Market. It was one of the old coffee shops, attended by a number of merchants.
6. Al Dehen Coffee Shop: located at the entrance of the old Ghee Market, opposite Al Sanqar and it was the headquarters of brokers. In the middle of this coffee shop, there was an old canon, and it seemed that it was fixed there when the second Wall of Kuwait was being built, for which «Al Sanqar» was one of its gates<sup>(1)</sup>.
7. The Jews Coffee Shop: that coffee shop was located in the middle of the Dakhli Market, and most of its customers were Jews during the period between the beginning of the 1920s till end of the 1930s when most of the Jews emigrated to Palestine<sup>(2)</sup>.
8. Nukhudhas Coffee Shop (also called Abdurrahman coffee shop) located west of the entrance of the Dakhli Market near Al Souk Al Kabir Mosque, where travel ship captains gathered, and only Arabic coffee was served there.
9. Ma-Redha (Bu Ali) Coffee Shop: located near the Fordha, west of Mulla Abbas Coffee Shop, attended by ship captains, sailors and owners of boats who worked in transporting rocks from O'sherij area to the city.
10. Merza Hadi Coffee Shop: located at the square opposite the old guards center and the Bishoot (Cloaks) Market, attended by market shoppers and owners of shops.
11. Hussein Al Raqa' Coffee Shop - located at the western corner of Al Gharabally Market, overlooking the New Street now (that location until the end of the forties was known as Wajef market). It is parallel to the entrance of the Boxes Market. It served tea, coffee, namlait and ice cream afterwards. A number of its clients played «al meheebes', a famous Kuwaiti game in which two teams of players competed in hiding al mahbas (the ring). The opposite team would exert effort to search for the ring. such game was remarked for passing a long time and hours without the players feeling that, as they could reach mid night without knowing.
12. Hussein Al Raq'a second Coffee Shop - located at the Money Exchange Market, consisting of a small coffee shop offering coffee, tea and namlait. Its clients were merchants and owners of adjacent shops.

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(1) An interview with Hajj Yusuf Ali Jamal.

(2) Ibid.

13. Nuwaider Coffee Shop: named after its owner, located at the Guards Market branching off Al Gharabally Market, adjacent to the headquarters of the old guards department, and its clients were market shoppers and visitors.
14. Juwaider Coffee Shop: located at the entrance of the Tin Market, leading to Al Gharabally Market. That coffee shop was visited by a number of brokers and owners of adjacent shops.
15. Abdulrahim Al A'wadhi Coffee Shop: located near Alghanim flourmill at the corner of the New Street, overlooking Al Safat, which also contained namlait workshop.
16. Jami'e Al Somali Coffee Shop: located at the Guard Market, one of the big coffee shops visited by different classes.
17. Naser (Bu Nashi) Al Mogahwi Coffee Shop: located near Al Nabhan mosque opposite al Kharariz Market, branching off the Money Exchangers Square at a location known as Bu Rabia'an Market, at the entrance of Al Dua'ij Market. its clients were brokers.
18. Shaba'an Coffee Shop: located at the Money Exchangers Square, where several markets meet. It was west of the Water Market, and one of the first coffee shops to introduce the radio.
19. Ali A'skar Coffee Shop in Safat near the old Public Security, attended by a number of merchants at night to exchange talks, drink coffee and tea, smoke hubble-bubble and play «al meheebes».
20. Ghulum Al Baloushi Coffee Shop: located near Ali A'skar Coffee Shop opposite the old Public Security, which served coffee, tea and hubble-bubble. It was attended by lorry drivers from Hijaz who transported commodities from Kuwait to Saudi Arabia during the 1930s. Also, taxi drivers used to sit there during the 1940's.
21. Khudair Coffee Shop at Al Safat - visited by the young men and «al zgert»<sup>(1)</sup> who sat there each holding an expensive rosary. Each one of the attendants used to look proud of himself in front of others, and smoked hubble-bubble. Each person smoked hubble-bubble, in common with another person.
22. Bin Guhayem Coffee Shop: located behind «Al Sanqar» in the Money Exchangers Square, attended by the markets visitors and shop owners.

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(1) «Al zgert» and the singular is «zgerti», means the person who is well-dressed and financially stable, who does not have problem in spending for himself, whether for cloth or entertainment.



The late Karam's coffee shop in the 1940s, the photo reveals his son making tea to his clients. Notice the photo of the late Sheikh Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah on the wall.

23. Karam Coffee Shop: located near the old Manakh (behind Bu Nashi coffee shop) near Al Souq Al Kabir mosque, attended by merchants and shop owners of that market.
24. Boland Coffee Shop located in the middle of the Tin Market at the road separating the two main parts of that market, attended by brokers, and owners of shops in the near markets.
25. Bin Hayder Coffee Shop: located also at the Tin Market.
26. Eissa Al Boloushi Coffee Shop
27. Bu A'shour Coffee Shop
28. Abdulghaffar Coffee Shop located at the eastern Guards Market in the Bakers Market, which had a small workshop for making namlait. The owner of that coffee shop supplied a number of coffee shops with namlait, in addition to his coffee shop. He used to display namlait bottles in a big utensil made of wood, and covered with ice pieces for cooling. The bottle was sold for two annas, which later increased to four annas. Abdulghaffar later opened another coffee shop near Sheikh Abdullah Al Khalifa building (Jawharat Al Khalij now) where

he sold different kinds of syrup.

29. Zamoon & Abbas Coffee Shop located at Al Safat at the entrance of the New Street, opposite Ford cars old showroom, owned by Al Houmaidhi, which was one of the most famous coffee shops serving hubble-bubble and best types of tea.
30. Bin Eqab Coffee Shop: located near the old guards center south Al Gharabally Market. There was a well used by the Municipality near that coffee shop to sprinkle the markets with water, and was also used by the safafeer to clean the vessels when polishing them. Bin Eqab was responsible for operating the Iftar (un-breakfast) cannon during the holy month of Ramadhan, as the boys and children during the 1930s and 1940s used to gather before sunset near his coffee shop and follow him as he was going before Iftar from the coffee shop to «seif al tob» which comprised the old canon. used to fill it with paper and different wastes in preparation of shooting it as a sign for «iftar».
31. Bu Safar Coffee Shop, near the old Public Security in Al Safat.
32. Al Hammara Coffee Shop, located at the southern entrance of the Cloaks Market overlooking Safat, which was visited by donkey drivers and carriage owners- that transported commodities from the Fordha to the markets- during their spare time, especially in the evening after the end of the working shift. They used to sit there to exchange talks, drink tea and rest from work.
33. Brazilian Coffee Shop located in the Dhakhli Market: It was famous with that name because it served Brazilian coffee which started reaching Kuwait during the 1940s. That coffee shop was attended by the rich and senior merchants.
34. Bin Zannan Coffee Shop, located in the middle of the Dakhli Market. During the 1930s and 1940s, it was called «Al Shabiba headquarters» and it was like a forum for a number of merchants and young men to exchange talks and news during World War II.
35. Sultan Coffee Shop located at one of the yards behind the old Municipality building, near the location of selling gas of Alghanim Company in Qibla.
36. Hajji Coffee Shop located west of the old Public Security, in which tea, coffee, namlait and hubble-bubble were served.

To become familiar with the environment prevailed at the old coffee shops, we will address with details a number of them as models, to highlight the activities which went there and reflected the interests and concerns of each segment of the society at that time.

## **Models Of Old Coffee Shops:**

### **1. Bu Nashi Coffee Shop (Merchants' Market)**

Bu Nashi coffee shop was the oldest in Kuwait. It was located west of the Merchants' Market entrance opposite Al Souq Al Kabir mosque, and bordered at the north side by the old Manakh. That coffee shop was visited by the Sheikhs, the merchants and the outstanding men. Among its most prominent visitors was the ruler of the country who used to go there daily with his advisors to spend some time to drink coffee, receive the citizens, listen to their complaints and solve their problems and disputes. The late Khalid Abdullah Al Hatem, a famous Kuwaiti historian indicated in his book «From Here Kuwait Started» that the person who founded that coffee shop was a man from Al Ahsa' known as Abu Nashi, during the reign of Sheikh Abdullah Bin Sabah I, the second ruler of Kuwait. It was more like a public forum where the Amir met with his people in the morning and evening. It was almost the official headquarters for the Amirs of Kuwait since the reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al Sabah until Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. Between its walls, disputes were solved as well as problems, and verdicts were delivered<sup>(1)</sup>. Later, the name of Bu Nashi prevailed in that coffee shop and continued with everyone who came after its founder and worked there. Its first owner did not have relatives, and therefore it was managed after him by a person who worked with him known as Khalifa Bin Sheridah, and he also, as well as his sons and their relatives who worked in the coffee shop were called with the same name<sup>(2)</sup>.

Bu Nashi coffee shop was famous for the good Arabic coffee served to the guests. Nothing else other than coffee was served and the coffee shop guests used to sit on mud benches adjacent to the coffee shop walls, in addition to a number of rectangular wooden sofas, each had the capacity for 3 to 4 persons. The owner of that coffee shop used to visit merchants at their shops to serve coffee to them and their guests during their working hours. Later, the owner opened several coffee shops at some other markets which were also given the same name, including al tawaweesh coffee shop at Al Badr Market and another one in Al Safat <sup>(3)</sup>.

Bu Nashi coffee shop witnessed the first negotiations between Sheikh Salem Al Sabah and the delegation of Ibn Rasheed after Jahra battle in 1920, when Sheikh Salem did not approve the conditions of Ibn Rasheed<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Khalid Abdulla Al Hatem - p.128

(2) Ibid - p.128

(3) An interview with Mr. Bader Yusuf Al Naqi.

(4) An Ancient Kuwait, Yusuf Shehab- Al Qabas 9/6/1996.

## 2. Al Tawaweesh Coffee Shop (Al Bader Market)

That coffee shop was located in Al Bader Market, consisting of a truss, which had a number of chairs on which the guests sat to drink coffee and tea, and later namlait, in addition to smoking hubble-bubble. Al Bader Market was famous since its establishment at the beginning of the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah for being the gathering place of the pearl merchants. Al Bader Market contained a number of shops in which beshoots (cloaks) and carpets were sold. It also contained a number of gold jewelers. That market consisted of a yard surrounded by shops and benches built of mud. The coffee shop was located in the middle of that yard, and was covered with straw mats and the main customers were owners of shops at this market. However, its most significant guests were tawaweesh, i.e. the pearl merchants, who spent their time there to buy and sell that precious commodity from each other in order to export it to international markets, headed by India and Europe. The beginning of the autumn season-upon return of the diving ships from their annual diving trips- was considered as the prosperity period of the pearls market, and therefore tawaweesh gathered at that coffee shop to exchange news on the pearl markets, selling and buying prices, and talk about diving and related matters. Therefore, Tawaweesh Coffee Shop and its adjacent shops were crowded with merchants and brokers who had pearls to sell or those wishing to buy. It continued opening its doors until late night hours<sup>(1)</sup> and a number of elderly persons remembered that they used to go during their childhood to that coffee shop when it was vacant of guests to search for «sahtit»<sup>(2)</sup> on the ground, which might have dropped from tawaweesh. They used to sell them to the jewelers for several paisas or annas.

## 3. Bu Abbas Coffee Shop<sup>(3)</sup>

That coffee shop was located at the edge of Al Choulan Fordha, owned by the late Ridha Taqqi Ashkanani who was known as Bu Abbas, and the coffee shop was named after him. That coffee shop was considered as one of the oldest and biggest coffee shops in Kuwait. It consisted of a very big truss made of «*bawari*» to which ship captains, sailors, workers and porters went for rest and drinking tea during their break time. That coffee shop was located at the edge of the sea, and was bordered from the east by the old Customs Department, and the west by Al Choulan Fordha. The seawater during that period used to

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(1) An interview with Mr. Bader Yusuf Al Naqi

(2) Small-sized pearls.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ghulum Taqqi Ashkanani.

encroach the coffee shop during the flow period.

The coffee shop opened its doors immediately after dawn prayer, when its owner went there after buying milk from one of the houses near the coffee shop - the house of Bin Saleem- who had cows from which they sold milk and laban or sour milk. Bu Abbas started his work by lighting up the fire from «*al qorm*» and coal, making tea, heating the milk and preparing the hubble-bubble, as well making other preparations to readily meet the customers. The owner of that coffee shop had a camel, which brought water to him every morning, from the wells of Shamiya, or other wells located outside the city in Al Sad area, for the use of the coffee shop.

That coffee shop served breakfast to its guests in the early morning, consisting of bread, milk and tea, as workers and sailors used to come there before they went to work at the Fordha. Namlait was sold at that coffee shop after opening the namlait workshop of Abdulghaffar Bu Shehri during the 1930s. Namlait «*bu teelah*» bottle was sold for one anna at this coffee shop, while a cup of tea was sold for one paisa. As for hubble-bubble, the cost of smoking it was one paisa if the customer brought his tobacco with him. If the tobacco was on the account of the coffee shop, the cost of smoking hubble-bubble was one anna (four paisas). The attendents of that coffee shop included some of the Customs officials who spent the evening there playing «*al meheebes*», where two teams were formed to compete in that game. The losing team used to buy a tea pot at their expense for the coffee shop guests at the end of the game. Bu Abbas coffee shop used to close its doors at a late hour.

Among the matters remembered about Bu Abbas - the coffee shop owner- was that he was mandated by the late Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah, the Ruler of Kuwait during the period from 1917 to 1921- to collect «*al a'shour*» the 10% tax for the clover and choulan reaching Kuwait from the owners of boats coming from Iran and Iraq, as his shop overlooked Choulan Fordha and could see all the sailboats coming from the other side of the Gulf while loaded with different types of commodities. The word «*a'shour*» is given to the tax amounting to 10%, which was imposed on some commodities coming to Kuwait since the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, which included among other commodities, jat (clover), choulan, palm tree branches and karab. The late Ridha Ashkanani (coffee shop owner) was mandated with collecting al «*a'shour*» for clover and choulan, while the late Eissa Bin O'un collected al



«a'shour» for palm tree branches and karab. The taxes were taken (in kind), i.e., from the same kind of commodities. For example, if «al mahmal» delivered two hundred medwars (bundles) of jat or choulan, twenty medwars would be taken as tax. If it brought one hundred «kara»<sup>(1)</sup> of fronds, then ten karas would be taken as taxes. The person in charge of collecting «al a'shour» would deliver them to the houses or barns of the Sheikhs or their trusses overlooking the Fordha, for which a person known as Hajji Basheer was responsible, who used to work for the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber.

### **Al Chaiji (Tea Seller)**

Tea was known in Kuwait since the beginning of the twentieth century, and was only known before that to those who traveled to India for trading who used to drink it at the coffee shops there. It is said that the first person to bring tea to Kuwait was the late nukhudha Eisa Al Abduljalil<sup>(2)</sup>. It was spread among Kuwaiti people, after having reservation against drinking it, as they did not know it before. However, it was spread afterwards, and became one of the most important necessities of breakfast in the morning.

A number of Kuwaitis were specialized in selling tea in the past and they prepared it in small kiosks or corners of the markets. Afterwards several «*chaikhanat*» specialized in selling tea to their visitors or delivered tea to the adjacent shops against a weekly or monthly amount collected by the owner of «*chaikhanah*» from those customers. A number of «*chaikhanat*» owners used also to send one of their workers while carrying a number of tea cups amounting to seven on his arm, and roam the market while calling repeatedly «tea...tea» in order to sell to passersby and shop owners. *Al chaiji* working tools consisted of the stove and a number of tea pots and cups. He started his work in the early morning until closing the shops in the market. The tea making shops scattered at most markets in view of the increasing demand for drinking tea. A number of tea markers were considered as talented in their work and some of the customers, shop owners and merchants who have high taste only drank tea prepared by such persons, in view of its remarkable taste and the special method of preparation thereof.

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(1) «Al mahmal» is the sailboat, and «al medwar» is the big bunch of clover, and «kara» is the bunch of fronds or palm tree branches containing 25 branches.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mansur Al Hajjri with Mr. Naser Hamad Alghanim for Al Rai Al Am newspaper dated 2/10/1998.

## Cold Water Seller

A number of Kuwaitis practiced selling cold water in small «gharsha» (jar) to the passersby in the market and to shop owners. The water seller placed before his shop a number of big «borma» (a big jar of pottery) to have the water cooled in them<sup>(1)</sup>, and they were placed on top of wooden stand for that purpose, surrounded by a number of small gharsha which each was sold while filled with water for one «ardi», grashes which equals one-third paisa. After drinking the water the buyer returns the «gharsha» to the seller who would fill it again with cold water from the big «heb». Among the water sellers known in the market were the late Alghannam, Ahmad Al Mahmeed, and a person called A'shour. It is said that the late Alghannam was one of the most famous water sellers and used to place in front of his shop overlooking the Money Exchangers' Market a number of «habobs» on top of their chairs, and more than 100 small gharsha filled with cold water next to them. Alghannam sold in the same shop the spears or arcs which were used for several purposes whether at homes or at various work locations. A number of boys or workers worked for Alghannam who used to roam the market and each of them carrying a number of ghrashes filled with cold water while calling «Alghannam water...



A shop for selling cold water to the market visitors. «al borma» is seen with al-gharsha around it. The water inside al-gharsha was sold for one paisa.

*Source: The Kuwait heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2002.*

(1) «Ghrash» is the plural of «gharsha», a small pottery jar and «al habob» is the plural of «heb» which is a big cylindrical- shaped pottery jar filled with drinking water for cooling.

cold water». They sold it to the passersby and shop owners to get one or two paisas per day for their work. Al ghannam shop was located at the eastern entrance of Al Gharabally Market overlooking the Money Exchangers Square, opposite to the Southern kiosk of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah. The shop of Ahmad Al Mahmeed was located at the entrance of the Flour Market overlooking the Vegetables Market<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for A'shour, his shop was located near al tawaweesh coffee shop at Al Bader Market, in which he placed a number of «habobs» and ghrashes for selling water to the neighboring shops. Also, he was known for carrying a big gharsha filled with cold water, which he hung to his shoulder by a rope and holding it with his hand, while passing by the shops to pour cold water for them. He used to carry with him yellow copper utensils called «toos» or «joom»<sup>(2)</sup> from which the shop owners and merchants drank. A'shour was famous for the cleanliness of his utensils which he washed after each round, cleaned carefully and covered the openings of the ghrashes with clean pieces of cloth to prevent entry of dust and insects inside, as he was dealing with the merchants' class who used to give him good amounts and paid the account weekly. When A'shour passed by the market, he would hit the copper utensils together to make certain tones, attracting the attention of shop owners and passersby and added an atmosphere of entertainment, and perhaps increased their desire to drink cold water<sup>(3)</sup>.

## Ice Seller

This is the person who used to buy big bars of ice from the ice plant in order to resell to the people by weight. Alghanim ice plant was the only one supplying the Kuwaiti market with ice for a long period of time which extended till the end of the 1950s.

The ice seller occupied a location at cross roads in the alleys in residential areas or the places where passersby are accustomed to pass through on their way to and from the markets, where he placed in front of him the ice bars wrapped with canvas to prevent melting thereof. Ice was sold either by part of the bar-one quarter or half bar for example - or by weight (by oqiyyah). The ice seller used a hammer and «mefras»<sup>(4)</sup> to break the ice bar or divide it into two halves or into quarters. The buyers usually brought with them thermos to keep the ice from melting, which the seller filled with ice after weighing and breaking down into smaller pieces.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Bader Yusuf Al Naqi.

(2) Toos is the plural of tasa which is a small utensil made of copper for drinking water. As for «joom» is a wide yellow copper utensil. An aluminum ladle was also used for drinking water.

(3) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.

(4) Mefras is a tool similar to screwdriver but with a pointed sharp head.

## **Al Grodhat Seller (Nuts Seller)**

A number of shop owners- especially at the entrance of Bin Dua'ij Market were famous for selling nuts, in addition to a number of dried and wrapped sweets- which were known as «*chaklait*», «*toffees*» and «*bonbon*». The seller displayed his grodhat products in canvas sacks placed at the entrance of his shop, which were basically «*nogl*» (a type of nuts), *nakhi* (chick peas of small size), *baithan* (almond) and *sebal* (peanuts), marsh melon seeds, melon seeds and pumpkin seeds, in addition to candy, dried berries (called *tekki*), dried figs and kishmish (raisins). The customers bought such materials on different occasions like weddings, circumcision of boys, afternoon tea for women, in addition to mid Ramadhan occasion called (*gergai'an*), newborn babies and feasts. Grodhat shop used to buy his products from wholesale merchants at the Government Khan located in the Merchants' Market, including the wholesale merchants of such products which basically came from Iran by sailboats. Nuts were sold by *oqiyah*, with or without external crust, like peanuts and almonds. Nuts sales increased in «*gergai'an*» season, as the children passed by the houses to get nuts, candies and other sweets. Grodhat shop owners prepared for that occasion - which was on the fifteenth day of Ramadhan- from the beginning of the month by buying big quantities of nuts and roast them in preparation of receiving the customers who buy them in big quantities. Also, sellers got rid of the old nuts they held by selling them in that season, as people would buy everything displayed without checking.

## **Al Kobbah Seller**

Among the customary scenes in the old markets of Kuwait was the roaming of several sellers of different types of food, which they prepared at their houses in order to sell to passersby or shop owners at the markets. The seller would place his product in a small carriage which he pushed by his hands and used to loudly call for announcing his product to attract the attention of those wishing to buy. The buyer used to eat those foods while standing next to the seller who would pour them in a special utensil. Among such sellers was the seller of «*Al Kobbah*» which he prepared at his home and then placed it in a big pot and roamed the markets with his carriage, while lighting a small fire under the vessel to keep *al kobbah* hot. Al kobbah seller used to provide the buyer with salt and pepper, if wished, as he placed a quantity of both in a small plate on top of his carriage. He also kept a number of small plates and forks to be used by the buyers. He used to wash them in a special vessel filled with water after the buyer had finished eating the kobbah. Al kobbah seller used to shout loudly while roaming the markets «hot kobbah...hot

kobbah» or «kobbah kabab...the youth food» so, the customers who were mostly young men and children came to buy with few paisas, and later annas. Kobbah sellers were active in the feasts and holidays, as their numbers increased in the markets, squares and places where people gathered, especially in Al Safat, where some A'rdha bands used to celebrate such occasions there.

## **Rose And Cardamom**

Among those who were famous for roaming the markets in the past was a person who had a small carriage in which he placed different kinds of sweets like sesame candy, qobait, al nareel (coconut) sweets and the like, while calling «rose and cardamom... rose and cardamom» while pushing his carriage. That person placed his products in a glass box on top of the carriage to protect them from flies and dust. he was famous for the cleanliness of his products and his concern for their good quality, as he added a considerable quantity of cardamom, rosewater and saffron, to give them a remarkable taste. Children and women liked to buy the products of «rose and cardamom» and his presence in the markets was one of the remarkable features during the 1940s - 1960s.



The famous «Rose and Cardamom» man who used to roam the markets with his carriage.

## Zababeet Seller (Sea Shells Seller)

The entrances of some certain markets and squares witnessed the presence of some sellers who placed in front of them cooking pots or vessels containing boiled seashells (zababeet) for selling to the passersby. Those people used to head for the sea beaches to remove seashells and collect them, then cook them at their homes. They used to occupy specific locations in the market. Zababeet comprise small marine animals, which were desirable by many young men and children, especially at noon or in the evening.

Zababeet seller usually called for his products with a special call to attract customers by saying «big and well - done zababeet... big zababeet and fresh zababeet».

## Hunting And Selling Birds

Birds multiply in Kuwait during spring, especially at planted areas which contain trees and farms, encouraging their owners to hunt birds for selling. Owners of farms and surrounded areas spreading throughout the city used nets (*salyah*) placed on top of the trees to hunt a big quantity of birds in order to sell. Some people also used traps to hunt birds. There are different types of traps, including the big ones for hunting big birds like «*tremmah*» and medium-sized traps for hunting spring birds. Children used «*al ghobbi*» and «*al zehewi*»<sup>(1)</sup> as a bait on in the trap. The birds which flew to Kuwait in the spring season included *al hammami*, *al ashwal*, *al rommani*, *al gahafi*, *al goffossi*, *al hussini*, *al merdam*, *umm doqi*, *al sheryas*, *homairah jenah*, *swoyaidah ras*, *hamaroush*, *al salahi*, *al yakyaki*, in addition to many other types.

Birds are sold either live placed in cages, or slaughtered placed in frond plates. The selling process was either by weight or number. The price per ounce was ten annas, while live birds were sold at different rates according to their species. The bird sellers occupied special locations to display their commodities for sale, called the Spring Birds Market, located at the south east area of the Money Exchangers Market.

Considerable numbers of birds hunted by net do not live if bred at homes, except *al hammami*. They do not lay eggs in Kuwait as they are migrant birds returning to their original habitats for reproduction.

There are other simple tools for hunting birds, including «*nabbata*» and «*al shebch*» used by children at the farms, walled areas, graveyards, outside the City Wall and above

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(1) Alghubi is a type of worms and «*al zehewi*» is cockroach.

the roofs. Moreover, those persons used at later periods hunting rifles like «*shosen*», «*umm sachma*» and other simple rifles.

## Hunting And Selling Locusts

Locusts reproduce in spring, and its flocks coming from East Africa through the Arabian Peninsula covering the sky of Kuwait and neighboring countries. People felt optimistic with the coming of locusts as they represented a cheap food for the citizens, and because they did not represent a serious danger due to the lack of considerable agricultural crops which might be adversely affected by the coming of the locusts. Certain years in the past witnessed the coming of huge flocks of locusts which filled the desert areas and the city, covering the sky and shielded the sun like heavy clouds. Therefore, people collected and gathered them in canvas sacks. Families usually became busy for several days during locusts season cooking them and drying huge quantities in order to consume throughout the year. Locusts are divided into two species ; «*al asfour*», the male, and «*al mokna*», the female. People preferred to eat «*al mokna*» due to its good taste and eggs it contained. Owners of camels and donkeys - and later cars - used to go to the desert areas when they would hear about the coming of the locusts to fetch the same to the city in canvas sacks for sale. Safat Square, Al Abdulrazzak Square and al barayeh (plural of baraha, a courtyard) were crowded sometimes with locusts sellers. One sack filled with locusts was sold for approximately one Rupee and a half to two Rupees, when it was abundant. Its price increased to approximately 4 Rupees per sack when the quantities decreased. Shop owners displayed locusts in vessels and trays after cooking, in order to sell the same by weight. One ounce was sold for four Annas up to half Rupee, according to its availability.

Locusts fly during day time and land on the agricultural ground and near grass in the evening. Huge quantities of locusts gathered around Al A'rfag trees and other desert plants to feed themselves. They formed big piles on such trees, piling on top of each other. Locust hunters start hunting locusts before dawn as the cold climate would lead to difficulty in locust movement. Therefore, hunters collect locusts from these trees or cut the plants and put them inside the sacks. Others also used to sweep them - either by their hands or by spades «*sakhakheen*»<sup>(1)</sup> inside sacks. Other people used to dig a big hole each of which called groove «*khadad*» of a length of almost two meter, width of one meter, and depth of almost a half meter. The locusts are compressed inside the groove at night and then packed in sacks. Many people always found snakes and scorpions in the

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(1) «*Sakhakheen*» the plural of *sakheen* which is the sweeper.

sacks with the locusts, as hunting process in big quantities through such methods did not provide the hunter with opportunity to sift out the locusts .

Flocks of locusts passing through the city - which have not been caught - go towards the sea side, where they fall there and pile on the sea surface to form layers on top of each and hence eaten by fish.

Locusts came once per year and upon their arrival, people used to see after a while «*al debah*» and then «*al yakhakh*» which are young locusts coming out from the ground as the locusts laid their eggs inside the ground when landed. The color, shape and size of the young locusts differ from the adult locusts. They are not eaten due to their bad taste, and as they do not contain nutritional value. The young locusts, like the grown up locust, were considered very dangerous insects which eat the green and dry grass and crops when they pass by the farming areas. They feed on all species of tree leaves and crops of every type, which they leave as stems only without any leaves. Moreover, the young locusts are more dangerous than the grown up and feed on plants with extraordinarily gluttonous appetite, and can demolish such plants in a short time. So, «*al debah*», the small locusts, grow fast and need big quantities of food for its growth.

### **Jat Seller**

Jat (clover) is considered one of the wide range merchandise commodities, indispensable to any house in old Kuwait. Most shoppers used to go back to their homes from the markets with one bunch or «*medwar*» of clover for feeding their sheep, which were mostly bred inside the houses. A special market existed in the past containing about twenty shops for selling clover, which reflected the significance of that commodity. Clover came daily in big quantities from Iraq and Iran by sail boats which brought it to the Fordha in the form of big bunches, each one called «*medwar*», weighing between 4 to 5 oqiyyahs. Clover is purchased by shop owners from the auction or the central market and then taken to their shops in sacks by donkeys. The sack - a big canvas sack - had the capacity for 8 to 10 bunches medawer, delivered for two to three Annas. Other quantities of clover also came from Jahra on camels which directly delivered to shop owners. Clover is farmed in big quantities in Al Manyouhi and Al Qasba in Iran, and Al Fao and Al Mekhraq in Iraq. It is mowed when its length reaches from 30 to 40 cm<sup>(1)</sup>.

Boats usually arrive within a period not exceeding 12 hours from departing

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Ali Al Naqi.



the Iraqi and Iranian ports in case of north winds, and may be delayed for one or two the days when the «*khwahar*» winds stop blowing, causing the jat damage, because of humidity increases. Such events forced al tarrahs to get rid of it and throw it away, thus bearing the loss. Boats coming from such areas normally carry other types of fodder such as «*choulan*»<sup>(1)</sup> which grows in Al Mamer and Al Fao in Iraq - and «*al qeseel*» - (barely) - which is as an alternative to jat. Al choulan and al qeseel or barely were directly sold at al-neq'a to owners of livestock and a number of people, as well. Shop owners do not deal with them at the Clover Market. Clover is sold at the market by oka or oqiyyah, and is weighed in a manual scale made of straw. The scale was coated with tar to strengthen it and elongate the period of its use<sup>(2)</sup>.

The jat (clover) seller does not make a good income due to the cheap price of his commodity and its availability in big quantities. The sale price for one oqiyyah or oka did not exceed two paisas or one anna, which increased during the 1940s to two then to four annas. The jat seller was usually forced to get rid of his commodities at the end of the day as boats come on the next day morning with fresh jat. The shop owner sold around 50 to 100 medawer or bunches per day, hence making little profit not exceeding one Rupee per day at the best case. Among the clients of jat seller were barns owners, donkey owners, livestock breeders and most of the people whose houses were not free of goats and sheep<sup>(3)</sup>.

Jat is planted in Kuwait - basically in Jahra - at the beginning of autumn - in beds of around eight meters long and of four meters wide, irrigated by water wells. Al qeseel or barely is also farmed at these farms. Jat is mowed every once and then in a while to strengthen its stems and give plentiful production, especially with the increase of irrigation and fertility of the soil. As for al qeseel, its quantities became less after mowing for three to four times, or it stops growing and then gets dry. The quantities of jat increase in the spring and summer, and decrease greatly in the winter due to the drop in temperature which affects its growth<sup>(4)</sup>.

There were many clover farms in Jahra village owned by a number of farmers who brought most of their product to the Clover and Vegetable Market in the city, headed by the late Abdullah Al Khalaf and his brother Mutter Al Khalaf, Mubarak Al A'yyar, Abdurrahman Shereem, Mohammad Al Thabet, Mohammad

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(1) Choulan is a green plant with long stem, with triangle shape.

(2) Ibid

(3) An interview with the late Mohammad Ali Khan

(4) Ibid.

Al Ameer, the families of Al Ku'a, Al Hada, Fraih and Suwailem. Clover is transported in nets from Jahra to Kuwait by camels. Two big bunches, each consisting of 18 - bunch «medwar» (i.e. big bunch) on each side, i.e. the total is 36 bunches or medwar, weighing around two «maans» (i.e. 150 kilograms), and called «*heml*» (load). The jat is harvested in the evening and camels leave Jahra at midnight to reach the market at dawn. So, shop owners receive the cargo in order to sell at the market starting the early morning. The route takes around eight hours<sup>(1)</sup>.

With the introduction of cars, the quantities of jat were transported by lorries, which moved daily from Jahra to Kuwait, carrying in addition to jat, vegetables and passengers. Among the first owners of lorries in Jahra were the late Abdullah Al Khalaf, Mutter Al Khalaf and Mubarak Al A'yyar.

### **Al Shraiti (Broker)<sup>(2)</sup>**

Al Shraiti is the person who deals in purchasing commodities from their original sources at low prices, and then gathers them in order to resell the same to merchants or shop owners for the purpose of gaining some profit. The word «shraiti» means «musharata» or bargaining in the price, as the person tries as much as possible to get the minimum price upon buying the commodity and the highest possible price upon selling it. Among the commodities in which brokers dealt in the past were natural ghee, animal skins (leathers), wool, as well as sheep. The broker used to visit the Bedouins pavilions where they used to stay to buy such required goods in order to resell the same in the city. Moreover, there was a number of brokers who used to buy animal skins and wools from the slaughtering houses for collection and treatment thereof in preparation of export outside Kuwait. In addition, a number of brokers used to collect canvas sacks from shop owners and houses, repair those which need mending, in order to sell the same to export merchants. A number of brokers used to agree with a number of persons for collecting those commodities for their account at special locations prepared for that purpose, in order to export them in big quantities abroad.

There were brokers having bussiness in many other fields, whether as mediators or for their own account. A number of well off brokers used to buy real estate units for the purpose of reselling them and gaining profits from such transactions. The brokers may be roaming in the markets or have their own shop for managing

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abbas Ali Al Naqi.

(2) Al shraiti is also called as «tawleef merchant», i.e. collecting goods from different locations in order to resell.

business. We will illustrate on the next pages with more details the role played by the broker in some fields in which he worked such as trading activities in livestock, leathers, wool and canvas sacks.

### 1. Trading In Sheep, Livestock And Other Animals

Sheep and goats were among the basic «commodities» in Kuwait. The best sheep species are «*al Erb*» and «*al Nijd*», coming basically from the Arabian Peninsula. There are also other types like *al D'aiya* (a mixture between *Al Erb* and *al Nijd*), *al khakriya*, *al na'imiya*, and *al hamsiya* (with light hair). As for goats, there are also many types like *al a'rdiya*, *al habashiya*, *al hindiya*, and *al shamiya*, which are of different breeds. Many Kuwaitis used to call the red goat «*shamiya*», but in fact it was not. They also used to prescribe its milk for patients and many of them believed that it might help to heal the patient. The price per goat ranged from 5 to 10 Rupees for the good species. However, the prices increased tremendously afterwards<sup>(1)</sup>. Sheep sellers were called «*shraitiya*», and each one of them used to go outside the city to Sulaibikhat, Jahra or other villages to receive Bedouin sheep owners coming from the different parts of the desert and adjacent countries with their sheep for sale in Kuwait. The broker used to buy sheep by hundreds and called each 100 head of sheep as «*qalam*» (i. e. unit). Around 200 to 300 heads of sheep were bought in one transaction. The broker would offer an amount of money as down payment to the shepherd. Once the broker sells the sheep, he will reimburse the remaining amount to the owner. The broker always buys the goat for three to four Rupees and then sells it with a profit ranging between half to one Rupee. The prices of sheep or goats differ according to their quality<sup>(2)</sup>. People preferred «*al mudra'a*», or «*al dafe'a*» whose delivery date approached, in order to get milk and would pay rewarding amount to the seller or broker who usually collected the sheep. The broker keeps the sheep in barns allocated for sheltering, breeding and reproducing them. Once the delivery date is near or there was a certain occasion such as Eid Al Adha, he would take them to the market. Sheep are fed from the desert grass, jat, «*shwar*»<sup>(3)</sup> and tamr al haweel (old dates). Big quantities of date stones (seeds), especially al helawi and al samaran dates, were brought by boats from Iraq and Iran to feed cows and sheep.

Most houses in Kuwait had between two to three goats per each house. A number of people used to breed goats, sheep and barbariyat (a species of

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.

(2) An interview with the late Mutref Mohammad Al Munayes.

(3) Shwar is the remains of sieving cereals like wheat.

goats) to provide them with milk and sour milk, or collect them as a hobby. A number of families also depended on selling the products of sheep such as cheese, butter, in addition to yoghurt. Sour milk was one of the important drinks consumed by Kuwaitis, almost with each meal. Lunch meal eaten by masons consisted of bread soaked in sour milk, known as «*tashreeb laban*». In the event of the absence of sour milk, some people used to dissolve «yogot», i.e., dried yoghurt in water - after grinding it by the grinder and transforming it into fine powder - to make sour milk either for drinking or making «*tashreeb*». Also, many people drank sour milk and yoghurt with dates.

A number of brokers also engaged in the business of selling cows, camels and donkeys. There were special markets and places for selling and buying such animals. In Safat for example, there was a market for selling camels, their prices ranged from 15 to 50 Rupees at the beginning of the past century, according to quality. As for donkeys, their prices ranged from 15 to 25 Rupees as per their quality. Al Ahsa' donkeys were the best due to their big size and tolerance for hard work. Donkeys were also brought from Al Zubair, and those brought by «*al mokhokrah*» were sold for cheap price due to their small size and non tolerance of work. Among the most famous brokers who worked in selling donkeys and camels at the first half of the previous century were the late Abu Marzouk Al A'jmi, Bin Eidan, Zaid Al Harbash, Al Randi and Ali Al Tobaikh. The government levied taxes on sheep and camels upon their entry to the city. Twelve annas were collected for each camel and three annas per sheep.

The late Marzouk al Tahaih and Bin Shitan used to collect these taxes from their work headquarters at the old overland customs building located in Safat, while the late A'jran - an employee of the overland customs - used to receive the sheep entering the country at «Shamiya Gate» to count them while entering from the gate to calculate the tax (wadi) value<sup>(1)</sup>.

## **2. Trading In Leather For Local Use**

A number of brokers collected the skins of slaughtered animals and primitively tanned them, then sold them to the leather makers. Those persons bought the animal skin from the slaughterhouse or places where sheep were slaughtered, in order to take them to the large surrounded areas allocated for tanning them, where specialized workers used to tan and clean such leather for a certain charge.

The sheep or goat's skin intended to be used in making leather products was soaked in water mixed with mashed dates known as (*al merees*) and salt, which

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(1) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.

would lead to disengage the hair from the skin after almost two weeks. Afterwards, the skin is cleaned of the remaining hair and grinded «*qarf*» (dried pomegranate skin) is added to it. Then, the skin is painted with *wadak* (oil made of coconut) and in this way, the skin becomes soft and smooth. Al wadak or wadach helps to prevent skin running dry. Upon completion of the tanning process, the skin is ready for use. The broker would sell the skin to the leather product-maker who makes different leather products, especially sacks and certain types of slippers. As for high quality leather, it was imported from Najd to make good Najdi slippers in Kuwait.

A number of brokers also worked in exporting leather to India and Europe after expanding their field of bussiness. They used to finance some persons to buy sheep skins for them from butchers in order to clean, dry, salt and place them in big drums in preparation of exporting them by ships to India. Among the merchants exporting the leather were the late Fahed Al Tukhaim, Abdulmohsen Al Tukhaim, Mutlaq Al Zayed, Salem Al Hareesh and Abdulaziz Al Sallal.

### 3. Trading In Wool

Wool was at the forefront of materials reaching Kuwait from the desert. The major quantities of wool were sold in Safat where it was purchased by brokers to export abroad. As for the small quantities, they were sold at the Wool Street, and purchased by women who used to weave and transform them into threads to make bishoot (cloaks), dresses, carpets and the like.

Big quantities of wool come at the beginning of spring from the desert to Kuwait in large sacks (*shilfan*), the length of each was approximately three meters or more, and is sold by «*jiyasah*», a weighing unit equivalent to 6 oqiyahs or okas. The wool is separated from sheep body by knives or special cutter and this process is carried out at the end of winter. Then, it is packed in big sacks and sent to Kuwait from the desert. The one *sheleef* (sack) contained around 20 to 50 oqiyahs of wool, depending on its size. The sheleef is weighed at *al Sanqer*, which was the headquarters of the government scale, to check the weight before buying it by the broker or merchant, whereby the number of «*jiyasat*» are calculated and price paid. The quantities bought by the broker from the wool seller ranged from 100 to 200 jiyasah (i.e. 600 to 1200 pound) in some instances. Wool was shipped to Iran or India<sup>(1)</sup>. The types of wool and their colors were separated and sorted out, in preparation of placing each color and type in a separate container before exporting. The wool prices differ according to their colors and types, including the regular type which is of a cheap price, the good type known as «*al rafia'at*», which is excellent and obtained from the sheep of «*Al Muntafij*» tribes in southern Iraq.

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(1) An interview with the late Mutref Mohammad Al Munayes.

The broker - or merchant - hires a number of workers for cleaning and refining the wool, placing it in big shilfans or sacks and compressing it for the purpose of packing the biggest possible quantity. In doing so, the worker opens the sack top opening and fix it between two long vertical columns tied to a third horizontal column in order to place the wool inside it. The worker would stand while placing his feet inside the sack and would jump over the wool several times while holding the horizontal column in order to compress the wool inside the sack. Whenever he compresses a quantity of wool, he would place another quantity and compresses it with his feet and so on, until the bag is full. Then, the worker would weigh the sack and stitch it in preparation of export. In this way, one sack would take around 80 to 100 oqiyahs of wool (200 to 250 kilograms), which is normally bigger than the sacks coming from the desert<sup>(1)</sup>.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the late Yusuf Sherin Behbahani brought a simple machine for compressing wool, which was fixed in his shop located at one of the alleys branching off the Merchants Market near Bhaitah. He employed two workers to compress the quantities of wool received from the brokers or which he purchased to export to India. The wool was compressed by placing it inside the allocated unit of the machine and the worker used his feet to press the pedal of the machine to compress the wool and transform it into a big pallet or bunch, which was tied by a thin metal tap (iron ring) to be ready for exporting after weighing the same.

#### **4. Selling Young Arabian Sheep Skins (Telian)**

At the beginning of the past century, the process of selling the skins of young Arabian sheep of black color of «*al Erb* or *A'rb*» type, flourished. Their price increased and people were in big demand for slaughtering these sheep in order to sell their skins to some merchants or brokers who were active in this trade. Big quantities of these types of sheep also came to Kuwait for selling purposes from the different surrounding desert areas.

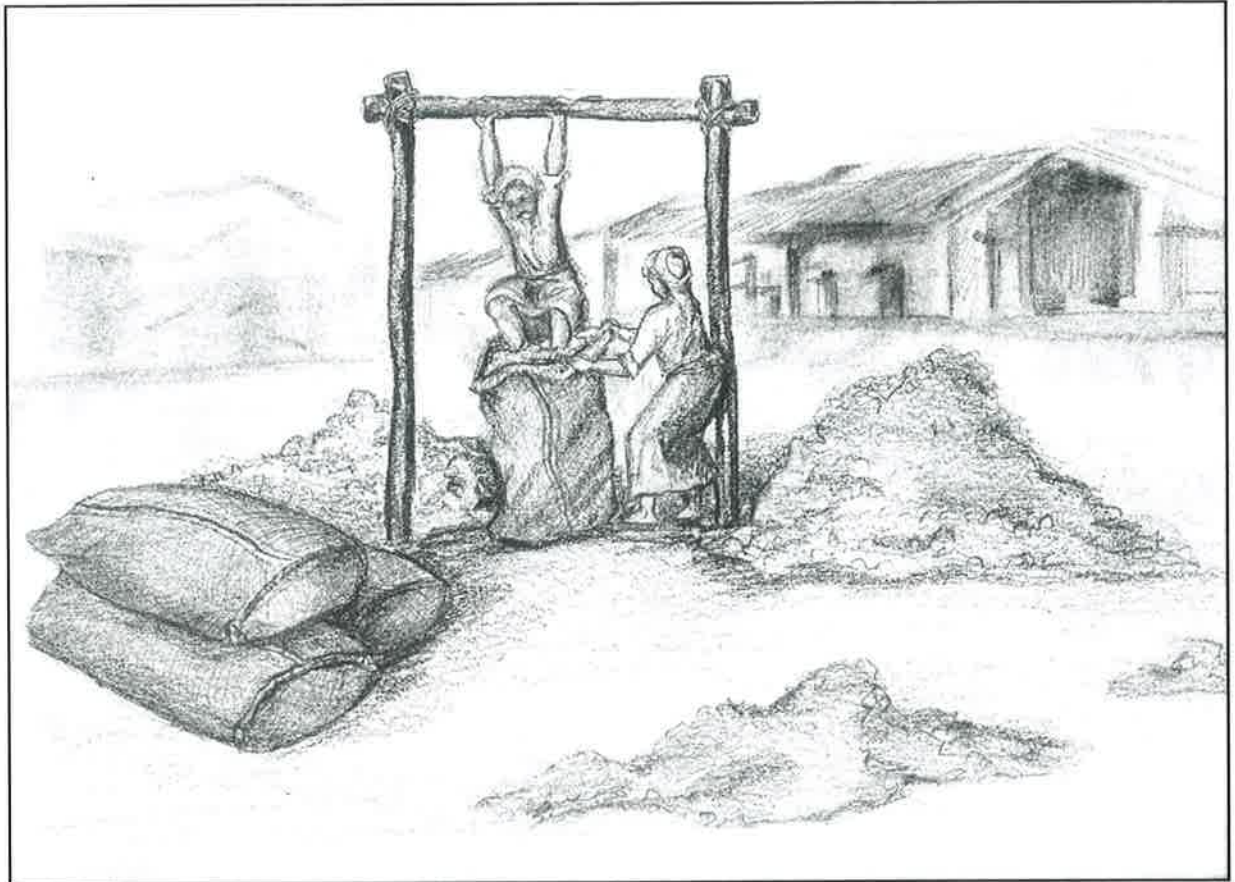
These skins were basically exported to Russia to make hats, which were distinguished by their bright black color and their unique shapes due to the quality of such leathers and wools which helped give them such special look. The black «curly» wool, which was not yet affected by any pollutants due to the young age of the sheep, added a beautiful and unique look to the hat<sup>(2)</sup>.

Young sheep hardly reached their second or third week of age when they, were slaughtered and their skins sold to the concerned merchants (brokers) who collected them for one of the Jewish merchants who used to export them. The value of sheep was priced according to its skin, not its flesh. Many brokers used

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(1) Ibid.

(2) An interview with Mr. Khalid Saleh Al A'skar.



Compressing wool in the shilfans, which are big size canvas bags, in preparation of exporting them abroad.  
*Drawing by Nadin Mohamad Jamal.*

to buy small sheep to have them slaughtered by butchers in return for taking their flesh instead of the relevant charge. Among the customary scenes at the market at that time was seeing butchers - after slaughtering lambs - roaming the markets placing on their shoulders an arc and tied to its edges a number of small-sized slaughtered lambs to offer to shop owners and shoppers at cheap prices not exceeding half Rupee while calling «ghozi....ghozi»<sup>(1)</sup>.

A Jewish merchant called Yehya was famous for buying these skins at prices ranging from 5 Rupees to 15 Rupees per one skin according to color and quality. Black color of curly hair was preferred, while there were other colors but they were not equally desirable. The famous Yehya the Jew had a shop near the Markets Guards Center located at the Guards Market to receive those wishing to sell Arabian lamb skins. Also, he used to deal with some brokers who used to collect the skins for him from the Bedouins and others.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Bader Yousuf Al -Naqi.

It is said that the number of skins he used to buy reached around 200 to 300 pieces per day at a certain period. «Yehya the Jew» agreed with a number of persons to tan those skins, clean and wrap them in preparation of exporting them, against payment of 25 Rupees per 100 pieces. He used to supply those people with the materials used for tanning like salt and starch at his account. Those persons built pools at their houses or in some court yards, where the skins were cleaned and placed in the pools for one week before drying and preparing them for export. Among those who worked in that trade were Saleh Al Ajeel and Hassan Ghareeb Al Dashti<sup>(1)</sup>.

The process of tanning the skin of lambs starts by cleaning them and rubbing the skins well with a mixture of salt, water, starch and barley powder then placing them in pools full of salty water mixed with flour and barley powder for one week. The skins are then taken to the sea for washing, then drying in the sun where they are spread over pieces of merikan cloth throughout the day. Then, each four pieces are tied together and placed in bunches, each bunch comprising of 500 pieces of skin packed in canvas sacks which are stitched in order to be exported by steamships. Those skins were exported at the beginning to Russia, but there after began to be exported to Britain. The Government of Kuwait was consciously alerted in the 1930s of such phenomenon and banned slaughtering and selling the skins of small lambs, as such action would lead to the elimination of such wealth from the country<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **5. Al Bardan (Trading In Canvas Sacks)**

Al khiyash, the plural of khaisha, is a big sack made of canvas, in which foodstuff like rice, sugar, cereals and other materials such as coal and tobacco, and the like are packed. The empty canvas sacks prepared for sale were called «*al bardan*». Huge quantities of empty canvas sacks were available after the unloading and selling the materials they contained, which encouraged many to trade in the same, especially in the presence of a great demand for them in neighboring countries, headed by Basrah. A number of individuals used to buy canvas sacks from grocery shops and sellers of consumed materials, and then collect them for selling to small merchants or brokers, who classified them into two types: old and new. The old sacks are fixed and sold locally to pack some products like coal and fodder. The process of stitching the old canvas sack is called «*rafi*», and is carried out by «*al rafay*»<sup>(3)</sup>. As for the new canvas sacks, they were collected in bunches and sold

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hasan Gharib Al Dashti.

(2) Ibid.

(3) The person who repaired carpets and re-stitched the torn parts is also called «*al rafai*».



to the small merchants and brokers who collected them in thousands to re-sell for the merchants to ship by boats to Basrah.

Women sitting at Wajif Market or the Wool Street to sell their commodities also used to buy new and used canvas sacks from those wishing to sell them, in order to resell to brokers who visited the market to buy the canvas sacks in order to collect, sort and sell to merchants as well<sup>(1)</sup>.

«Al Ma'adan», the Bedouins of Iraq, who used to come to Kuwait to buy their needs of goods, used to buy old sacks after repairing and patching them in order to fill with «jallah» (camel wastes), which they sold in the city to be used as fuel for bakers. They also used the sacks to fill with the commodities they bought from the city, especially tea which they bought packed in big wooden boxes and then unloaded inside the sacks and porting to Iraq. As for the new sacks, they were traded in by specialized merchants who bought big quantities of them to resell to exporting merchants. Among the most important brokers - or small merchants in that field- was the late Abdullah Al Jawahri, who bought big quantities of canvas sacks to sell to big exporting merchants, headed by the late Hajji Lari and Ali Khaja, who shipped huge quantities of them to Basrah. A number of boats coming from Basrah were loaded on their way back with big quantities, as one cargo reached from 30,000 to 50,000 canvas sacks. Some of the quantities sent to Basrah reached the equivalent of the cargo of four to five boats in one transaction, i.e. around 200,000 sacks or more<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Al Fahham (Coal Seller)**

Al fahham is the seller of coal, which was one of the necessities in each house. It is known that coal constituted a main source of energy and was used for fuel, heating, and cooking some foodstuff. Coal came to Kuwait packed in big canvas sacks from Iran and India by sailboats, and no house was free of coal. Coal was sold by oqiyah or sack, and displayed in big ziblan or open sacks, bought by the ordinary citizens, owners of coffee shops, restaurants and craftsmen, like blacksmiths, copper utensil makers and jewelers. Most coal sellers also sold other commodities such as gidow or narjeelah and its accessories, in addition to some pottery products like *ghrash*, and «managel» to make tea and milk, manageesh, mahageen and the like<sup>(3)</sup>. There was a special market for selling coal

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulrahman Al Saghir.

(2) Ibid.

(3) «Al managel» is the plural of «mangla or mangal», a utensil to place live coal to use for heating tea, coffee or for heating. Al mengash is the tweezers used to pick live coal, while mahageen is the plural of mehgan which is the funnel used to fill the bottles with kerosene.

located in Al Dehlah area, including many shops in which many commodities were sold, and coal, which the market took its name was within.

## **Breeding Cows**

A number of families depended on breeding or owning cows in order to sell their milk, laban or sour milk and butter to the neighbors and nearby areas. Others specialized in that work started renting old houses or barns for breeding cows and oxen for trading in. Fodders were provided to cows at certain times, which were basically «dates stones» brought by boats from Basrah and Iran in big quantities in addition to horse beans. There was a prevailing belief that this will increase the quantity of milk. Dates' stones are soaked in water in a big pot - called *Jahlah* - and left for several days, then cooked before offering as fodder to cows, known as «*fakhara*». Moreover, cows eat choulan, jat and remains of vegetables collected from the markets as well as the skins of fruits and barley. Cows are milked in the early morning, at noon and before sunset. Cows were sold at their market for prices ranging from 50 Rupees to 70 Rupees, according to their race.

Among major cow breeders were Bin Hay in Salhiya, Abdullateef al Musallam, Ahmad al Musallam and Mahsain in Sharq, Al Haggan in al Matabbah<sup>(1)</sup>, as well as Sa'ad Al Shawi and Mohammad Al Rumaih.

Cow breeders used to sell laban to some women in the evening who sold it to the passersby and shoppers at the bakers' market. Each one of those women used to sit near a bakery shop and put a vessel filled with laban and some plates and cups for the buyer to drink it. Yoghourt was among the most important drinks consumed by the Kuwaitis with meals before the spread of soft drinks and juices.

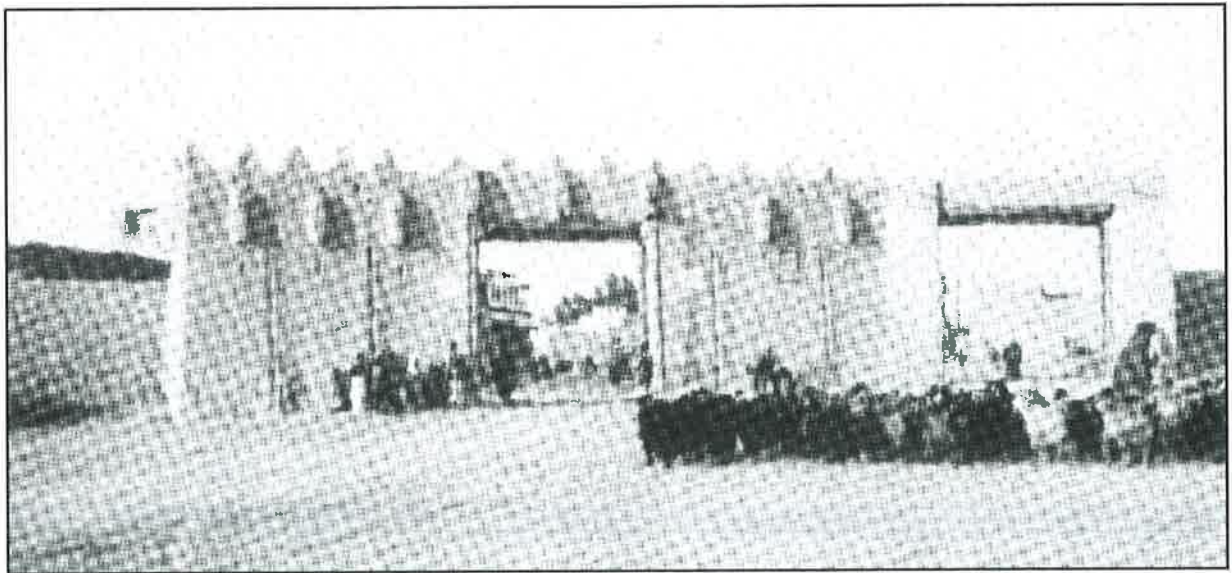
## **Al Shawi (Shepherd)**

The word «shawi» is given to the sheep shepherd who grazes them in the desert. Kuwaitis relied in the past on goats and sheep to provide them with milk, driving many families to keep them at their houses. People were accustomed to taking their sheep to the shepherd every morning for grazing. This helps the people to get rid of the sheep during the day to avoid the dirt and reduce expenses of feeding them, as well as keeping them away, even for shorte time, from their narrow houses barely sufficient for residents. Normally, the shepherd kept a yard or surrounded area (or barn) to receive sheep and taking them for

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulsattar Agha Ali.

grazing outside the City Wall. A considerable number of these barns increased in Kuwait City. Every group of adjacent districts had their shawi (shepherd). The house owner or his children used to take the sheep in the early morning to the shepherd's barn who collected the sheep in order to take them for grazing outside the city wall. The shepherd usually had a donkey with him to carry his needs which he placed inside the saddle fixed on the donkey's back, which was also used to keep newly born lambs. The donkey is also used for riding when the shepherd feels exhausted from walking. He also had one or more male goat. Sheep were grazing in the open land, where there were various abundant herbs, especially in spring, then returns after sunset while their breasts are full of milk. Al Shawi used to let his sheep graze near the water wells spread at numerous areas outside Kuwait's Wall so that by mid day he would extract water by bucket or «*farrashiyah*» and pour it in a big utensil in order for the sheep to drink. Shepherds in Sharq Area used to take their sheep behind Al Bure'esi Gate in the area, known presently as Mansouriya. As for shepherds in Qibla area, they used to go to Shamiya. Among the herbs growing in Kuwait's desert was al a'rfaj, al homd and al rebla, which would help to increase the quantity of milk and give more butter and natural ghee as well as giving a special flavor to the milk which people desire. Herbs are less usually in summer, but do not disappear, and sheep eat them while dry and called «*hamees*». The number of sheep with one grazier ranges between 150 to 250 sheep, mostly goats. Most people preferred to breed goats rather than sheep at homes due to relative



The shepherd while returning in the evening to the city after spending his day taking sheep for grazing outside the City Wall.

cleanliness. The grazier received around 4 to 6 annas a month for each head of sheep he grazes. The amount increased there after to half Rupee then to one Rupee in the 1950s. The shepherd used also to get one Rupee for each goat that impregnates. The shepherd knows all the sheep he grazes and the sheep know him as well and follow him wherever he goes and do not mix with other herds in the desert or city. When the sheep return in the evening to the city, their owners go to the shepherd to take them. However some sheep go directly to the houses of their owners because they know the way. The shepherd is responsible for the loss or missing of any sheep or goat in his herd. Among those famous for working in that trade was Zuwaid in Abdulrazzak Square, Shawi Bin Salama, Khlaif and Rashid al A'zmi, Bu Raja in Al Motabbah, Shawi Abeed in Sawaber, Shawi Musleh in Aleewa alley, Shawi Dhabyah in Qibla and Shawi Mazyed in Alghunaim Suburb.

### **Al Mulla And Al Mutawa'a**

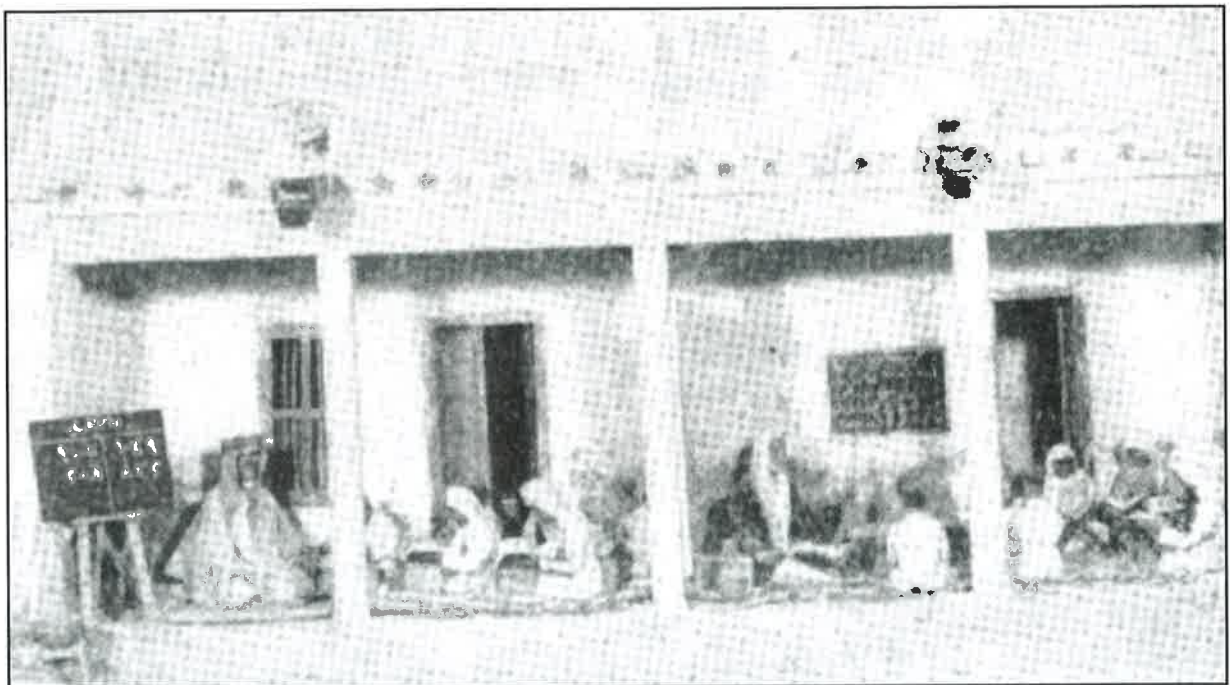
The word «*al mulla*» is given to the teacher, the mosque's imam, Qur'an reciter and the religious person who leads prayer in the mosques. The word



Al Mulla while teaching his students

*Source: From Here Kuwait Started - Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem.*

«mutawa'a» was given to the woman who taught girls reading and reciting Qur'an. Kuwait before the establishment of Al Mubarakiyah School in 1912- did not have schools as known now. Rather, there were persons who carried out that task on individual basis as a source of income or earning living and to serve the community. The person wishing to work in the teaching profession used to receive students at his house or diwaniya in order to teach them the Holy Qur'an and the principles of Arabic language through primitive means, during a period which extended from two to three years. Some persons also used to teach principles of arithmetic and bookkeeping. Such type of schooling was usually called «katateeb». As for the Mutawa'a, her work focused on teaching girls how to read and memorize Qur'an. Some Malalwa - plural of Mulla- used boards for teaching students, while a number of students brought their own small boards, papers or notebooks with them to write the lessons taught to them by the Mulla. People look at the Mulla and Mutawa'a with respect for the honorable work they do, and due to the academic, social, and religious position of the Mulla, as well as the integrity of his behavior<sup>(1)</sup>.



Another form of old schools; Al Mulla is seen teaching his students

*Source: Kuwait Museum Director, Ministry of Guidance and News, Artifacts and Museums Department, prepared by Mr. Ibrahim Taher Al Baghli- 1970*

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(1) An interview with the late Ja'afar Mulla Jouma' Ahmad Baqer.

The student pays at the end of each week some money to the Mulla called «*khamisiyah*» of one or two, paisas as well as on religious occasions and events such as the new Islamic year and the Prophet birthday. Also, the Mulla used to receive an amount of money and clothing from the student's father when the student completes memorization of the Holy Qur'an. When a student graduates, the children celebrated - «Whe this occasion by walking with him in alleys of al fereej or district<sup>(1)</sup> to announce his graduation and to collect donations for the Mulla. One of them reads «*al tahmida*» and his colleagues would say «*amen*» after reading each verse. Al tahmida consists of several verses in which he thanks God and glorifies the Mulla and parents and the poetry verses differ from one school to the other.

### **Al Tahmeedah<sup>(2)</sup>**

The Mulla used harsh disciplinary means with his students if they are absent from the school or did not memorize the lesson, or did not abide by the rules. Among the

*Praise be to God who guides us  
 Glory be to God the Creator  
 We praise Him and it is His right  
 Then we pray on the messenger  
 Praise be to God the Almighty  
 A bird from India's birds comes to you  
 This is a boy who has read and written  
 You the son of the most honorable Arabs be generous  
 And let not be yourself in agony and anger  
 The teacher has taught me  
 I learned the big book so that  
 May God reward you my father with heaven  
 And my grandfather and grandmother do not forget them*

*To religion and Islam  
 With His blessing, we learned Koran  
 To be praised all the time and everywhere  
 Who brought the guidance, Mohammad  
 The bird in the sky and the thunder praised Him  
 Full of feathers, of good stature  
 And who has learned letters and speeches  
 And put on the board dirhams and gold  
 God gives, then grants and bestows  
 And let me repeat in his lesson  
 I can read like him as he did  
 And build you a big house there  
 And my God has the reward for them*

*In the heaven with the fathers*

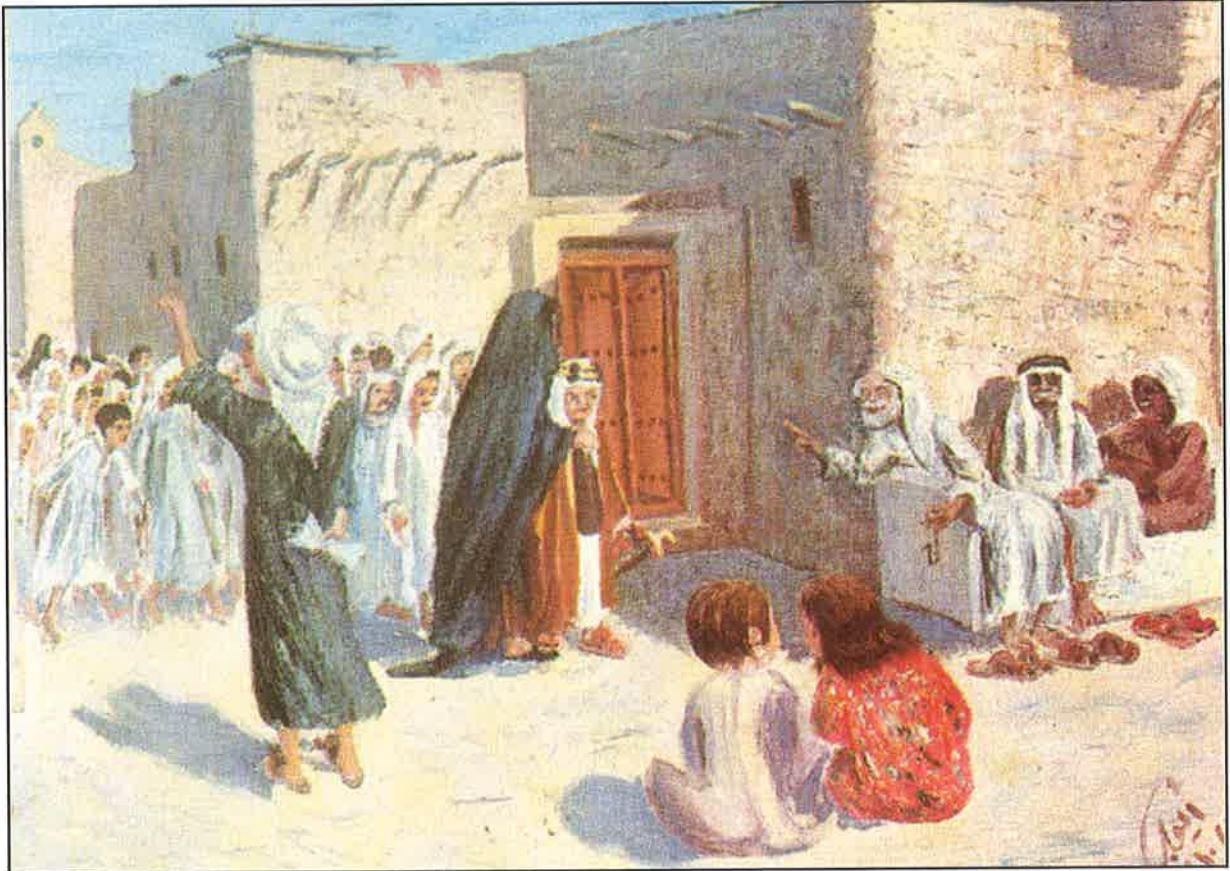
*Give the teacher his great right  
 Go by the name of God then walk*

*Because he was merciful on us  
 On the soft material and silk*

means he used were locking up, «*falaka*» bastinado, hitting by stick on the hand and the like. Some teachers also prevented their students from swimming in the sea and stamped their feet with ink to make sure that they adhered with the instructions. This led some naughty students to cover the ink location with a layer of oil so that

(1) District alleys.

(2) An interview with Hajji Mohammad Saleh Mohammad Al Saleh.



The Processing of the Boy who learnt the Qur'an by Heart: in the past, it was a habit to honour the boy who learnt the Qur'an by heart. The school ordered its pupils to serve him and accompany him while roaming - with his mother or one of his relatives - the western and eastern houses of the rich people and collecting money which would be given to the Sheikh as a remuneration for teaching him the Qur'an.

**Source: Kuwaiti Heritage in the paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub- Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait - 2008**

it would not be removed when they go to the sea. The students sat on the ground on straw mats (*bawari*) and the student would place the book, if any, or notebook in his lap to read or write the teacher's instructions, while the teacher would sit on a wooden bench next to his students. Such type of education widely spread, so that there was a «mutawa» or «school» almost in every neighborhood to which boys, and sometimes girls, went to receive lessons. The increase of the commercial dealings with India and a number of European countries led to the improvement of the teaching process as the need emerged for bookkeeping and controlling accounts, encouraging some teachers to present these lessons. The number of students wishing to learn this subject also increased in the hope that this may help them to get an accounting job with a merchant to secure rewarding income for them and raise their standard of living, or perhaps the circumstances would help them enter the trading world in their own, after being equipped with a sufficient amount of education.



Al-Yihsha: (The Bastinado) The painting shows the Mulla (teacher) putting the bastinado around the legs of one of his troublesome pupils; helped by two other ones, he began beating him with his stick; the other pupils watched; interested and terrified.

*Source: Kuwaiti Heritage in the paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub- Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait - 2008*

It is mentioned that bookkeeping lessons were divided up into three parts or sections, taught in detail for everyone who wishes to specialize in one part or section. The first part emphasizes on the business activity, income accounts, warehouses, selling and buying, and the like and is called «bookkeeping». As for the second part, it is called «the ship accounting» and is related to everything concerned with accounts of sailing ships to India such as assessment of expenses and determining the share of each person of the ship crew from the income. As for the third part, it is called «shu'i account», and is related to the accounts of diving ships, calculation method of expenses and income for this type of activity and the advance offered by the ship captain to the sailors. There were also mutawa's and teachers specialized in these accounts, including Mulla Murshed and Mulla Hamadah.

Many people were alerted by the significance of the English language at the beginning of the past century, when the American Missionary Hospital opened,



followed by its English school, affiliated as a number of people started sending their children to such school.

The late Abdulaziz al Rasheed the Kuwaiti historian mentioned in his book «Kuwait's History» that the number of schools (*katateeb*) in Kuwait in the year 1926 was more than seventeen for boys and eight for girls. Other than Mubarakiyah School, Ahmadiyah School and Sa'adah School, the remaining *katateeb* were confined to writing, reading and arithmetic.

The late Saleh Shehab pointed in his book «History of Teaching in Kuwait and the Gulf» to a number of old «*katateeb*», including:

1. Al Mulla Zakariya Al Ansari and his sons Mohammad, Abdullah and Yehya who helped him in teaching. Such school was located in Dua'ij market. The late Mohammad Zakariya Al Ansari opened thereafter a school which he named Al Falah School, being an extension of his father's school, at which he taught the Holy Qur'an, reading, and arithmetic which focused on diving and travel accounts. Among those who taught at that school were his brothers Abdullah and Yehya in addition to a number of other teachers such as Fahed Al Sara'wai, Saud Al Kharji, Abdullah Al Nouri, Mulla Idris, Mulla Nasser, and Abdurrahman Al Ruwayih.
2. Abdullah Abdulateef Al Uthman, assisted by his brothers Mulla Uthman, Mohammad and Abdulaziz. Such school was located at the southern entrance of Bin Dua'ij alley
3. Mulla Murshid Al Salman, assisted by his brother Sulaiman and some teachers who worked with him including Abdurrahman Al Ruwaih who was teaching English language, as well as Sulaiman Al Ruhaymani.
4. Sheikh Qassim Hamadah, and then his son Sheikh Abdulaziz Hamadah and his brothers and sons.
5. Mulla Abdulwahhab Al Hunyyan, whose school was located in Al Zaben district. Mulla Hashem Al Hunyyan replaced his father after his death.
6. Mulla Khalaf Bin Dahyian, then his son Abdullah al Khalaf Al Dahyian, who was teaching interpretation of Qur'an and Fiqh, jurisprudence books.
7. Abdulateef Abdullah Al Omar.
8. Mulla Ahmad Al Khamis, whose school was located in Qibla district.
9. Mulla Belal in Al Dabous square.

There were many other schools or *katateeb*, especially in Sharq area, which had

not been referred to by the late Saleh Shehab. We shall mention below what we could have obtained therefrom:

1. Al Sayed Sulaiman Sayed Rabi'a Al Mousawi school, one of the oldest katateeb in Sharq area, in which a large number of the first generation were taught at the end of the nineteenth century.
2. Mulla Abdul Baqi Bin Nasser Al Shirazi School, nicknamed by Mulla Baqi. A large number of the first generation was taught at that school, including a group of people who opened their own schools thereafter. His school was one of the important katateeb in Sharq area in the first and second decades of the last century.
3. Mulla Hamad Bin Abdurrahman Al Boodai school in Boodai alley of the middle area, where he was teaching Koran and arithmetic. Such school was closed down after the death of its owner at the beginning of the twentieth century.
4. Mulla Rashid Al Sharhan School, opened in 1887 in Qibla.
5. Mulla Sa'ad Rashid Al Sharhan School, opened in Qibla after he succeeded his father Mulla Rashid in education. He was assisted in teaching by his brother Mulla Uthman and his nephew Abdulmohsen Uthman Al Sharhan. The first premises of Mulla Sa'ad Al Sharhan school was in Al Sharhan house in Qibla area during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah. Then, it was relocated to a shop in the Merchants' Market near Seif Palace. Al Sharhan School continued teaching Holy Qur'an and the Islamic religion teachings until Mubarakiyah school was opened.
6. Mohammad Saleh Al A'dasani School.
7. Hashem Bin Abdurrahman School in Al Zaben district in Qibla.
8. Mulla Mohammad Bin Lutf al Beloushi School. His school was in Al Beloush district. It was teaching Holy Qur'an at the beginning of the last century.
9. Mulla Ridha Bin Ismail Al Beloushi School, who was working as chief of the guards for Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, who granted him a big plot of land in Sharq area to teach there. That was in the first decade of the past century. He continued teaching till the mid forties.
10. Mulla Ya'qub Bin Yusuf Maqseed School.
11. Mulla Hussein Bin Mulla Ali School.
12. Mulla Qorban Bin Ahmad School.

13. Mulla Eisa Mutter School. His school was located in Al Maas square in Sharq, where he was teaching the Holy Qur'an and writing.
14. Mulla Abdurrahman Al Dua'ij School, who opened a school after quitting teaching at Mubarakiyah School.
15. Mulla Musallam School, who was blind and taught the Holy Qur'an. His school was located near Al Matabbah in Sharq.
16. Mulla Ahmad Al Baseer School. His school was located in Sharq.
17. Mulla Ahmad Al Tarkait School in Sharq.
18. Mulla Abdullah Al Tarkait School in Sharq.
19. Mulla Mohammad Saleh Bin Mohammad School.
20. Mulla Hussein Al Mohammad Al Tarkait School, who had a big library comprising many books on religion and literature.
21. Mulla Eisa Al Jiran School. His school was located in Al Shamlan building in Sharq.
22. Mulla Abdeen Bin Hasan Bin Baqer School. He was a talented calligrapher and a praising poet of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, then of King Abdullaziz Al Saud. He was the one who advised Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah to write the sentence «If life lasted for others, then it would not have reached you» at the entrance of Seif Palace. He worked in teaching at his home located on the seacoast opposite Al Roudhan niq'a (shipyard) in a room on the roof. He was teaching the Holy Qur'an, Arabic language and arithmetic.
23. Mulla Jouma'a Bin Ahmad Bin Baqer, who was also a poet. His school was located in Ma'arafi alley. He was teaching the Holy Qur'an, Arabic, handwriting and arithmetic.
24. Al Sayed Hussein Al Sayed Baqer Al Tabtabai School. He was teaching the Holy Qur'an and arithmetic at the diwan of Hajji Najaf Al Ghaleb, located near the sea coast, opposite Seif Palace, which was known as «*al Jonainah*», the diminutive of *jana* «heaven», due to the beauty of its design and decorations engraved on its walls.
25. Mulla Abdulkarim Mulla Qassim Al Sarraf School, who was known for reciting the Holy Qur'an in a pleasing voice. His school was located in Sharq area.
26. Al Sayed Mohammad Atash School, who was teaching the Holy Qur'an. His school was located in Sharq area.

27. Mulla Ali Naqi School.
28. Al Sayed Hashem Al Badr School, who was teaching the Holy Qur'an, writing, and arithmetic, related especially to diving and travel accounts. Later, he taught English language at his school located in Safat.
29. Al Sayed Abdulaziz Al Rasheed School with Abdulmalek Al Saleh Al Mubayid, who opened a school in Al A'mer Diwan
30. Mulla Mohammad Saleh Al O'ujairi school in Qibla, who was teaching the Holy Qur'an, principles of reading, writing and handwriting. His school was located near Al Saqr dhow yard.
31. Sheikh Mohammad Al Yamani School, who was an imam in the mosque of Hilal al Mutairi in the 1920's.
32. Mulla Ahmad Al Farsi School, who was teaching Holy Qur'an, principles of the Arabic Language and arithmetic.
33. Abdurrahman Qassim Al Hijji. Among the subjects he taught were «The Science of the Responding Quarter».
34. Mulla Sulaiman Al Khenaini School. His school was located in Qibla behind the old Municipality building near Al Gharabally Mosque.
35. Sheikh Abdulwahhab Bin Abdullah Al Farsi School, who was teaching interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and Fiqh.
36. Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al Athari School, who was teaching Arabic language and Fiqh.
37. Sheikh Saleh Al Alji School, who was teaching the Holy Qur'an, Arabic language and fiqh.
38. Sheikh Mohammad Bin Sulaiman Al Jarrah School, who opened a school in Al Sohool Mosque to teach the Holy Qur'an, Fiqh and Arabic language.
39. Mulla Mohammad Eisa School in Qibla, who was teaching the Holy Qur'an, writing and arithmetic.
40. Mulla Hamad Al Hamaidi School.
41. Bin Balol School
42. Mulla Abdulaziz Al A'njari School. His school was located in Qibla area.
43. Mulla Mohammad Mulla Ahmad School. His school was located in Qibla area.

44. Mulla Majed Al Shama'a School.
45. Mulla Mohammad Al Houli School, where he was teaching Holy Qur'an and reading.
46. Mulla Abdullah Bu Belal School
47. Mulla Abdulawahhab Al Asfour School. His school was located in Sharq area. He was teaching Holy Qur'an, writing and arithmetic, including diving accounting and travel accounting.
48. Mulla Mohammad Humud Ibrahim Al Ibrahim School in Al Rumi alley. He was teaching Holy Qur'an, reading, writing and arithmetic.
49. Mulla Saleh Al Saway School. His school was located in Murqab. He was teaching Holy Qur'an.
50. Mulla Mohammad Al Mutter School. His school was located in Aleewah alley (near Al Maseel). He was teaching Holy Qur'an, Arabic language, writing and arithmetic.
51. Mulla Nasser Al Raghieb School in Al A'wazem alley. He was teaching Holy Qur'an, reading and writing. He was the imam of Al Dammak Mosque.
52. Mulla Jassim Al Dara'a School near Al Maseel.
53. Mulla Ibrahim Bin Mulla Ali Bin Hussein. His school was opposite Al Ghunaim shipyard at the beginning of the last century.

It is noteworthy that a number of volunteer teachers were teaching for free, headed by the late Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eissa Al Qanai, who opened a school at his diwan to teach jurisprudence for the young men. Sheikh Yusuf Al Qanai followed a special method for teaching his students Islamic laws, by memorizing poetic verses written by Imam Al Shafi addressing this subject, in a precise expression, which exceeded one thousand and hundred poetic verse, the students used to memorize in order to know Islamic laws (sharia) and answer any question related to any branch of jurisprudence. Among the matters addressed by those verses were the rules of pilgrimage, Zakat, marriage, divorce, ablution, Tayamum, (ablution without water) .i.e. with dust, washing and shrouding the dead, as well as other rules and interpretations. Among the verses memorized by students which addressed how to handle the dead, are the following poetry verses<sup>(1)</sup>:

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(1) An interview with Mr. Talha Mahmoud Al Mesbah.

*Washing, shrouding and prayer  
Sufficient, and a martyr killed in  
Or prayed upon, but on the person who Drowned  
And the aborted baby shall be shrouded  
It is a duty for every mature person to wash  
By aromatics in the first, and by  
Prayer is a must, say God is Great  
Then pray on Al Moqafa<sup>(1)</sup>  
Then, after saying God is Great  
Burying him towards the praying direction  
The condolences for the dead  
Crying is permitted without hitting*

*On him, then burial, are the duties  
The battle with the non believers is not washed  
whose stomach was opened and burned  
In any case if it had a soul, by washing  
And also to shroud  
Solid kafoor second  
Then read Praise be to God, and then God is Great again  
And third make appeal for the dead  
In a grave in a solid land  
Per sunna is three days after his buria  
Shedding tears is permissible without hitting  
The face, screaming or rupturing the dress*

As for the katateeb or the old schools for girls, they also increased in number with the lapse of time. Among the female teachers who taught in Sharq Area, was Mutawa'h Aminah Al Sayed Omar, Mutawa'h Salma, Mutawa'h Fatima Al Abdullah, Mutawa'h Latifa Al Barrak and Loulua al Barrak in Al Rumi alley, Mutawa'h Khadija Al Sultan, Mutawa'h Mariam Al Fadhala, Mutawa'h Fatima Al Mesbah, Mutawa'h Ghosna Al Haddad and Mekkiya Al Sati in Al Qarawya alley.

There were also female teachers in the Middle Area including Mutawa'h Saleha Al Shamali, Mutawa'h Latifa al Shamali, Mutawa'h A'sma Al Ramzi, Mutawa'h Mariam Al Safar, Mutawa'h Hashmiya Al Sayed Shubbar, Mutawa'h Aminah Al Zalzalah, Mrs. Fatima Bint Al Sayed Ali, Mrs. Zahra Bint Al Sayed Abdullah Al Alem, Mutawa'h Aliya Bint Ibrahim Edi, Mutawa'h Fatima Bint Ibrahim Edi in Al Faraj al-freeege, Mutawa'h Salima in Al Qana'at al-freeege. Mutawa'h Mariam Boodai was also teaching Al Shyoukh al-freeege, Mutawa'h A'ysha Bint Ibrahim in al Shyoukh al-freeege, Mutawa'h Hissah Bint Tawq in Mubarak square, Mutawa'h Moudhi in Al Qana'at alley, Mutawa'h Sheikha Al Jlaiby in Al Matabbah, Mutawa'h Sherifah Al Omar in Al Rumi al-freeege, Mutawa'h Loulwa Bin Noah in Sharq, Mutawa'h Moozah Bint Zayed in Al Shyoukh al-freeege, Mutawa'h Nora in Al A'dasani al-freeege, Mutawa'h Nora Al Fraih in Al Shyoukh al-freeege, and Mutawa'h Sarah Shtail in Al Maidan<sup>(2)</sup>. As for Al Qibla area, among those who worked as teachers were Mutawa'h Sheikha Al Nashmi in Saud al-freeege, Mutawa'h Mariam Al Omar

(1) Means the Prophet Peace and Blessing be Upon Him.

(2) An interview between the writer and many persons of the old generation, as well as interview by Mr. Mansur Al Hajri with Mrs. Nourah Ahmad Al Nashmi for Al Rai Al Aam Newspaper on 21/11/1997.

in Al Uthman al-fireege, Mutawa'h Sherifah Al Yaseen, Mutawa'h Badriyah Al Ateeqi, Mutawa'h Halimah in Al Badr al-fireege and Mutawa'h Fatima Al Mulla in Al Zanta al-fireege.

There were other large numbers of such schools spread at different districts of Kuwait which were difficult to recall or count. Such type of schooling started to close down at the 1950s when government schools opened and people started to prefer to enrol their children there due to the modern academic programs free of charge, in addition to distribution of books, notebooks and clothes to the students<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **The Beginnings Of Development Of Education, Techniques And Opening Public Schools**

The academic or educational condition in Kuwait continued as it was for decades which preceded the first attempts to open a modern school in which students are enrolled and be educated according to modern systems and techniques and under the directions of an official system. At the beginning of the second decade of the



Mubarakiyah school - the first official school opened in Kuwait in 1912. Students are seen in the school court yard.

*Photo by: captain Allan Vallers, 1939.*

*Source: Old Kuwait, Memories in photographs, Dr. Yacoub Yusuf Al-Hijji*

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(1) It is noteworthy here that great efforts were exerted over the past few years to estimate the katateeb and old schools in Kuwait. At the forefront of those who carried out this work is Dr. Abdulmohsen Abdulla Al Kharafi.

last century- around the year 1910 - several scholars, intellectuals and a number of merchants who visited the countries which were ahead of Kuwait in that field like India and Iraq- by virtue of their work- started seriously thinking and negotiating among themselves the possibility for establishing a model school for teaching children the principles of language, sciences and arithmetic. In the year 1912, Mubarakiyah School was opened, which was the fruit of the efforts of this class who financed the construction of the school. However, the teaching method at that school did not differ to a great extent from the teaching method at the katateeb. The School employed many owners of the old katateeb as teachers who continued following the same teaching techniques, as well as teaching the subjects taught at their primitive institutions, i.e. reading, writing, arithmetic and Holy Qur'an in addition to the same punishment means. The situation did not change at that school till the year 1937, when modern teaching techniques were introduced.

As for those who were responsible for the idea of establishing that school, they were headed by the late Al Sayed Yaseen Al Tabtabai, Sheikh Nasser Al Mubarak Al Sabah. and Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eisa Al Qan'ai who followed up the matter and urged the wealthy to donate, as well as initiated collection of donations. Most of Kuwait's merchants contributed to the donations, headed by the late Qassim Bin Mohammad Al Ibrahim and Abdurrahman Abdulaziz Al Ibrahim who donated fifty thousand Rupees, which was an amount exceeding sixty percent of the total donations that amounted to approximately eighty thousand Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>. The donors also included Hamad Khalid Al Khudair, Hilal Al Mutairi, Shamlan Bin Ali Bin Seif and Ibrahim Jassim Al Mudhaf. Amounts were also collected from ordinary citizens amounting to a total of 12,500 Rupees. The first principal of that school was Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eisa Al Q'anai followed by Sayed Omar A'ssem Al Azmiri. The first teaching staff included each of the late Yusuf Bin Eisa Al Q'anai, Sheikh Yusuf Bin Homoud, Sheikh Abdulaziz Al Rasheed, Sheikh Hafez Wahba Al Masri, Mr. Abdulaziz Bin Hamad Al Mubarak Al Ahsa'ai, Mr. Najm Eddin Al Hindi, Mr. Mahmoud Al Habti, Sheikh Mohammad Kharashi, Sheikh Nouri Al Mousli, Mr. Abdulkader Al Baghdadi and Mr. Abdulmalik Al Saleh Al Mobayid<sup>(2)</sup>, where the number of students enrolled Al Mubarakiyah School at the introductory year reached 288 students.

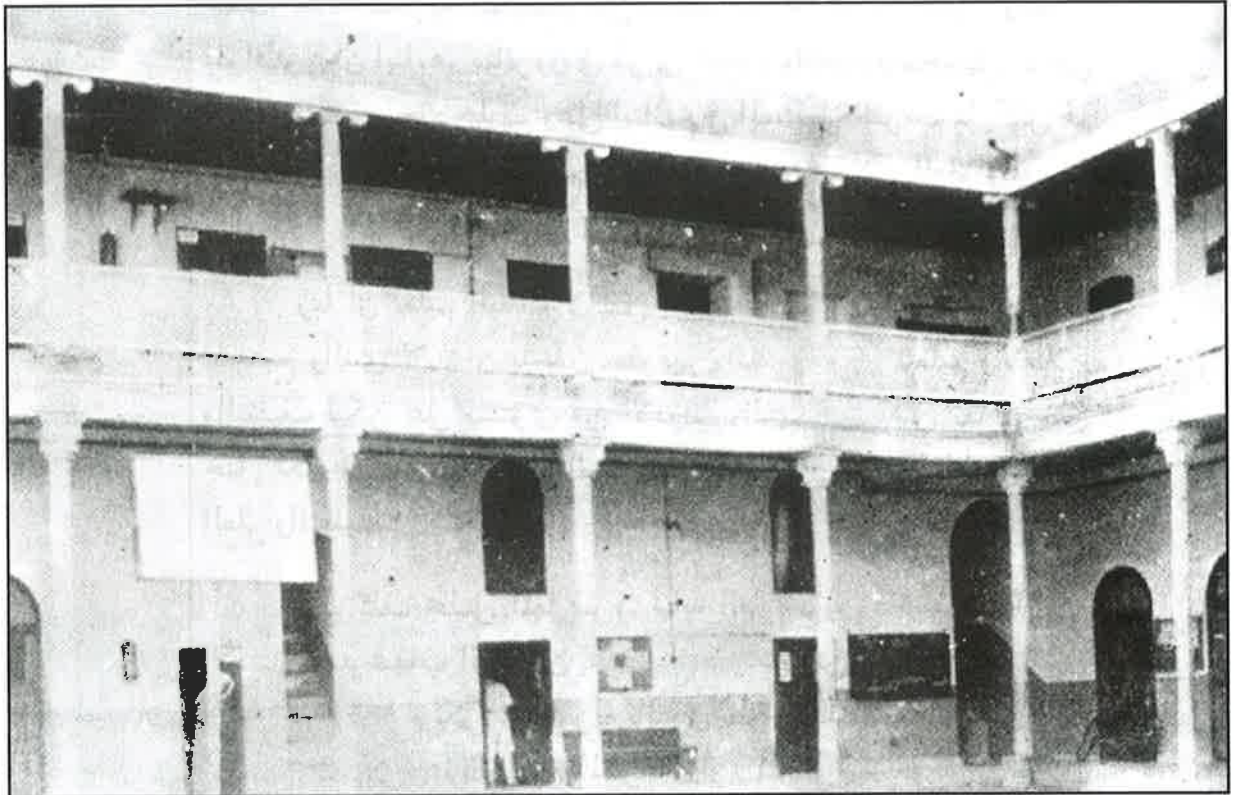
The old teaching method continued at Mubarakiyah School unchanged despite the numerous attempts to develop it. In the year 1920, Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait, proposed to Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eisa Al Q'anai to develop

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem- p.80.

(2) Ibid, p.81.





Al Mubarakiyah School after adding a second floor to the building.

*Source: History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past - Saleh Jassim Shehab.*

the curricula at Mubarakiyah School and introduce history, geography and English language subjects in view of the development of the country and its dire need for those sciences, especially with the expansion of commercial activities and the economic prosperity in the country. Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eisa met with a number of men in the country to discuss such matter. However, a number of them strongly objected the idea, which led Mr. Abdulaziz Al Rasheed - one of the proponents of the development idea- to propose the establishment of another school where those subjects could be taught. The attendees welcomed the proposal and it was also supported by Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, who donated a plot of land to build the school thereon in addition to the amount of 2000 Rupees which he monthly paid to that school<sup>(1)</sup>. In the year 1339 AH (1921 AD), Al Ahmadiyah School was opened in the western district of the City. The late Abdulmalek Al Saleh Al Mobayid was appointed as its principal.

Major donors to that school included the late Hamad Al Saqr, Hamad Khalid Al Khoudair, Nasser Al Badr, Khalaf Al Naqib, Ahmad Al Houmaidhi,

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(1) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past, Saleh Jassim Shehab- p.42.

Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eisa Al Q'anai, Abdurrahman Al Naqib, Ahmad Al Fahed Al Khalid, Mesh'a'an Al Khoudair, Marzouk Al Dawood, the families of Al Baher, Al Sayer, Al Zahem and Al Khalid<sup>(1)</sup>. During the same period, another school was opened under the name of the «Preparatory School» located in one of the houses near Al Ahmadiyah School to prepare young children entering the primary education at Al Ahmadiyah School. That school was like a nursery for teaching youngsters the first principles of education and acclimatize them to the school environment. Its principal was the late Abdulmohsen Al Bahr<sup>(2)</sup>.

As for Mubarakiyah School, it continued applying its old curricula till the year 1937 when old curricula was eradicated, and replaced by education according to modern methods and techniques by teachers summoned from abroad for this task. Thus, development gradually started<sup>(3)</sup>.



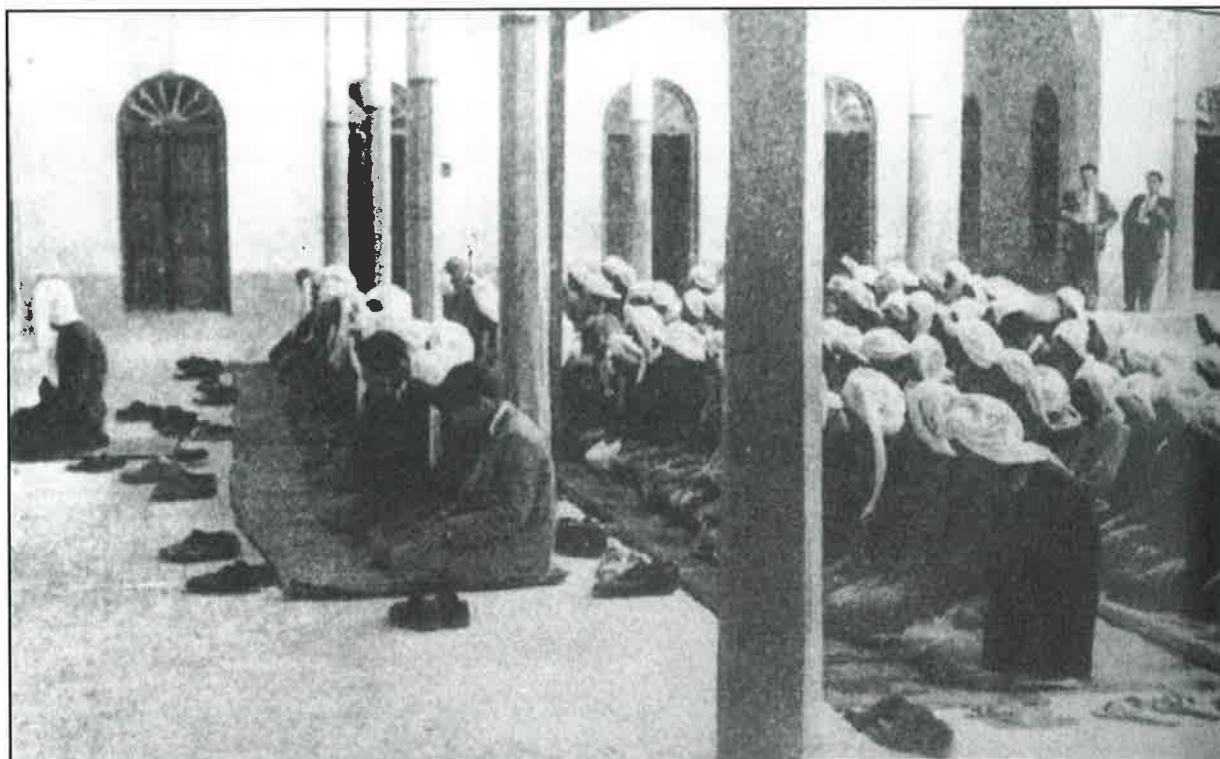
Students at one of the classrooms of Mubarakiyah School in 1939.

*Source: Old Kuwait- Memories in Photos- Dr. Yu'coub Yusuf Al-Hijji*

(1) An Kuwait's History, Seif Marzouk Al Shamlan- p.301

(2) An interview with the late Saud Fahed Al Sumait.

(3) From Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem - p.79.



Al A'sr (afternoon) prayer was among the features of Kuwait's old schools during the evening shift. A teacher is seen while leading pupils for praying at Mubarakiyah School.

*Source: Kuwait's Register today - 1956- Printing and Publishing Department*

During the 1930s, the demand for education increased and the number of students going to Mubarakiyah and Al Ahmadiya Schools increased, which led to the increase in the costs and the need to hire considerable numbers of teachers. Therefore, it was decided in 1936 to increase the Customs and Municipality duties by 0.5%, allocating the revenue of such increase to finance the expenses of schools and build new schools.

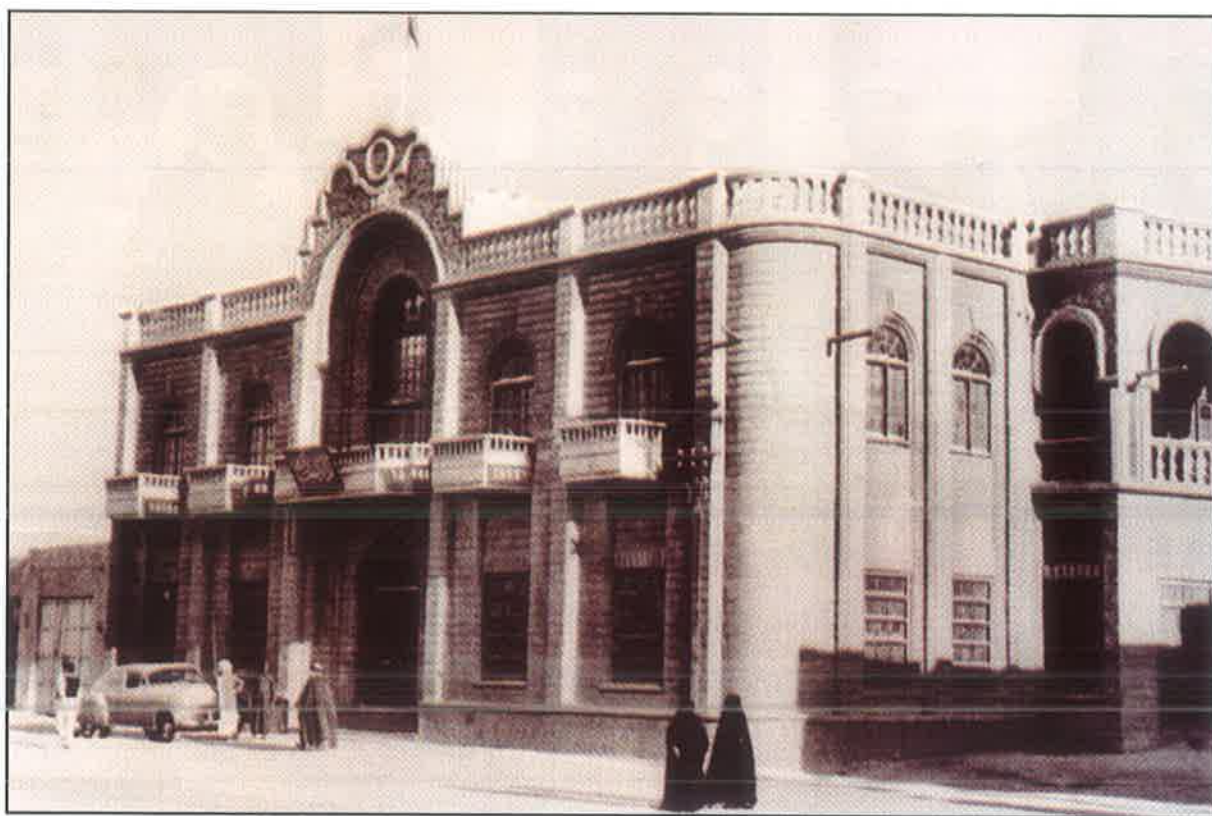
More than 60,000 Rupees were collected in three months from these fees for the «Education Fund» which encouraged the opening of new schools and forming the «Education Council» under the chairmanship of Sheikh Abdullah Al Jaber Al Sabah, with membership of twelve persons interested in education. Mubarakiyah School and Ahmadiya School were also placed under the supervision of this council. In 1937, the Education Department was established, assuming the responsibility for building schools and supplying them with stationary, hiring teachers and principals from Egypt and Palestine, printing school books, distributing clothes to learners, and offering meals to them<sup>(1)</sup>. In 1937-1938, two new schools were opened: Al Sharqiyah School,

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(1) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammad Al Sainen- Part III- p.1545, 3rd edition

which firstly, based in the diwan of Al Mudhaf family in Sharq, and Al Qebliyah School in Qibla area, in addition to a school for girls near Mubarakiyah School called Al Wostah School. In 1938-1939, the number of government schools for boys increased to eight after the opening of schools in some villages including Fintas, Abu Halifa, Jahra and Failaka Island. The number of students during that year increased to 1220 male students and 300 female students<sup>(1)</sup>. The number of schools increased in the following years with corresponding increase in demand for education among citizens as schools were spread all over the city districts as well as Kuwait's villages.

In the year 1948/1949, the commercial secondary education started to encourage youths to be involved into that field. The study span lasted for two years to teach the new generation the principles of commerce, accounting and bookkeeping. Many young people tended to study in that field, who became afterwards among the major personalities working in trade business. Most teachers at that institute were Egyptians and Palestinians.



Old building of the Education Department established in the year 1937.

*Source: Snapshots from Kuwait in the Past and the Present - Ministry of Information.*

(1) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past, Saleh Jassim Shehab- Part I- 1984- p.168.

## Models of Private Schools:

A number of private schools were opened in the first half of the past century. A number of them developed to approach government schools curricula. Despite their few number, they were famous for the subjects and diversity taught there. The following is a brief summary of the number of schools which were established during early periods, whose owners tried to develop their curricula.

### 1. Al Irshad School For Boys (Hamadah School)<sup>(1)</sup>

That school started by teaching a few number of boys in Qibla area. Then it expanded and developed overtime till it included more than 200 students prior to its suspension in 1950. That school was established at the end of the 19th century in the house of Hamadah family in Saud fireege. The late Rashid Hamadah and Jassim Hamadah were teaching in such school, where the Holy Qur'an was taught. When the number of students increased, they rented the house of the late Ibrahim Al Yaqut which was close to them. The study included Arabic, jurisprudence and bookkeeping. Another number of teachers joined that school after its expansion, including the late Ali Al Duwaysan, who was blind. After a short time, the late Abdulaziz Jassim Hamadah, Mulla Mohammad Bin Ali, Yusuf Al Saleh and Abdullah Al O'baid joined the school. The late Sheikh Abdulaziz Hamadah managed the school at a later period. Among the remarkable features of that school was its concern for providing the pupils with comfort and entertainment, as well as giving them a chance every once in a while to go away from the school environment to refresh their activity and return back in an active condition. Such school used to organize an annual trip (*kashta*) during the spring to Naif area which was almost vacant of buildings at that time and had a lot of green areas and spring flowers. Students went there daily for one full week to play and have lunch, then returned in the evening to their homes. That zeitgeist at that time was considered among the matters which would not come to the attention of most developed and cultured educators.

At a later period, the school was transferred to the diwan of the late Sheikh Humud Al Jarrah, to hold the increase in the number of students. Such diwan was located at Khalil Al Qattan market near Jamal family's «*Karega*», i.e. workshop for grinding sesame seeds to produce oil. The school comprised of two storeys and bestowed for Al Haddad mosque. Upon relocation, the school was named «Al Irshad School For Educating Boys» and posted a signboard on its gate carrying this name. Education was expanded and developed at this location,

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(1) An interview with Mr. Yusuf Rashid Hamadah.

and the number of classrooms reached seven; in each class had a certain level of lessons. The number of students increased to reach around 200 students. Another number of teachers joined the school including the late Sheikh Attiya Al Athari, Mohammad Saleh Bin Al Sheikh Ahmad Al Farsi, Mulla Musa'ed Al Najdi and Mohammad Bin Lahiyah.

In the year 1930, the late Sheikh Abdulaziz Hamadah shifted to the judiciary domain, and hence the school was managed by his brother the late Ali Hamadah, assisted by Ahmad Rashid Hamadah. Yusuf Rashid Hamadah also started teaching with a number of other teachers, including Abdulaziz Al Balol, Abdullah Al Balol, Rashid Alghanam and others. At a later period - approximately 1936- Yusuf Hamadah managed the school, which was relocated to Ma'arafi building, previously rented by the late Abdulaziz Al Hamar. After a short time, the school rented the building of Al Sa'adah School for Orphans, belonging to the late Shamlan Bin Ali, as its headquarters, after the earlier school closed its doors due to the inability of the late Shamlan Bin Ali to finance it, following the stagnation of the pearls trading. Upon the establishment of the Education Department in 1937, and the increase in the number of government schools, students started going there in view of the advantages offered to them such as free books and diversified academic curricula. The number of students started to decrease, so the school was relocated to Al Shyukh fireege at the diwan of Sheikh Dua'ij Al Salman, till it was closed down in the year 1371 AH (1950).

Hamadah school was one of the oldest schools in Kuwait which developed over time and its curricula expanded to keep abreast of the requirements of modern age. It started teaching the Holy Qur'an, Arabic, jurisprudence and then the school introduced bookkeeping, commercial shorthand, handwriting and English. The study - like other schools at that time- was on two shifts morning and evening. The school closed on Monday evening, Thursday evening and Friday. Students sat on the floor during study, but used chairs when they moved to the headquarters of Sa'adah School. English language was taught by the late Abdulhamid Al Tannak, Abdulatif Saleh Al Uthman and Merza Hassan Al Sherazi. Among the teachers who worked with Yusuf Hamadah were Mulla Fahed Al Mazyid, Saleh Al Abdullah, Meshah'an Al Rumi and Abdurrahman Al Abduljader. The teacher's salary, upon opening the school at the end of the 19th century, was 3 Rupees, which gradually increased to ten Rupees then 15 Rupees till it reached bigger amounts in the 1940s. The school's source of income was the tuition fees «*al khamisiyah*» paid by the students at the end of the week, which amounted to one or two annas, in addition to the amounts they paid to

the school principal during feasts and other occasions. Private schools did not stop teaching during summer. Rather, they remained open throughout the year which made many students of government schools go there during the summer holiday.

## **2. Mulla Marshad School**

Such school was founded in the year 1927. It was established by Mulla Marshad Mohammad Al Salman, and was one of the oldest private schools with respect to academic programs<sup>(1)</sup>. The premises of that school was at the house of Mulla Marshad in Mirqab area, where Mulla Marshad was teaching the Holy Qur'an and Arabic language. The programs of that school developed by the passing of time, and introduced teaching of English language, bookkeeping in addition to Holy Qur'an, Arabic, handwriting, dictation, arithmetic, jurisprudence and theology, where a number of teachers of those subjects joined that school<sup>(2)</sup>.

When the number of students increased at Mulla Murshid School, he sought the assistance of his brother Mulla Sulaiman. He organized study and divided levels into four classes. He succeeded in distributing academic subjects to the classes in such a way which allowed the student to progress in receiving his education. The number of students exceeded three hundred and the number doubled up in the summer as students of government schools went to his school during the holiday<sup>(3)</sup>. The teachers who worked with Mulla Marshad included Abbas al Haroun, Abdurrahman Al Ruwaih, Abdurrahman Abdulmoghani, Sa'ad Al Houti<sup>(4)</sup>, Naser Al Houti, Mohammad Al Sulaiman, Yusuf Al Shayji, Saleh Al Ojairy, and Mulla Fahed Bin Zaid Al Mazyid who opened a school of his own at his house in Mirqab area.

Mr. Abdullah Mohammad Saleh Al Ghadiri<sup>(5)</sup> describes Mulla Marshad school where he received his education as «in the 1930s, it was one of the biggest schools operating in Kuwait with respect to the curriculum, number of students and proper management. The school building consisted of two Arabic houses, one for beginners who were taught by Mulla Sulaiman Al Marshad and the other for the elder who were taught by Mulla Marshad with assistant teachers. Mulla Marshad was a competent teacher who always advised his pupils and presented new books to them. Due to his passion toward his pupils, he used to select those among them who were ready

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(1) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammad Al Saiden, p.1384.

(2) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past, Part I, Saleh Jassim Shehab, 1984-p.29.

(3) Educators from My Country, Dr. Abdulmosen Abdullah Al Kharafi, 1998, p.376.

(4) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past, Part I, Saleh Jassim Shehab, 1984, p.29.

(5) Educators from My Country, Dr. Abdulmosen Abdullah Al Kharafi, 1998, p.914.

to acquire other sciences than the school curricula, such as commercial sciences like bookkeeping (called blango), i.e. accounting, and other lessons which were elective for those who wanted to learn them. He also was concerned for teaching English language, and followed a modern educational system based on English books which were taught at well known institutes in a number of Arab countries such as Egypt and Lebanon.

He concentrated in his teaching for the special status of Kuwait of the commercial business, social needs and the like. He also taught accounts related to diving and the shares of each sailor, as well as the «*al Jas accounting*», which was interested in buildings and its details, as well as the Profit and Loss account of shop owners and merchants, also paid heed to the weighing units like pounds, maan and hander<sup>(1)</sup>. He was also keen to teaching his pupils the old decimal fractions (before the introduction of decimal fractions). Kuwaitis in the past were using the Indian arithmetic in diving, trading and pearl accounting processes<sup>(2)</sup>.

A big number of Kuwaitis graduated from Mulla Marshad School, who held later significant posts in the country. Mulla Marshad was born in the year 1322 AH (1907). He received his education at Mubarakiyah School under instruction of his first teachers the late Sheikh Yusuf Bin Eisa Al Q'anai, Mr. Abdulmalek Al Saleh Al Mobayid, judge Ahmad Al Khamis, Sheikh Yusuf Al Humud, Abdulaziz Al Rasheed, Sayed Omar A'ssem Al Azmiri and Mr. Hafez Wahba. Mulla Marshad passed away in 1971. He continued teaching for almost thirty years and his school was closed down in 1956.

### **3. Sa'adah School for Orphans**

That school was opened in the year 1343 AH (1924) at the expense of the late Shamlan Bin Ali Al Seif, for teaching orphans and children of the poor for free<sup>(3)</sup>. Its location was in Sharq area beside Al Khamees Mosque. A number of the first Kuwaiti teachers worked there, such as Mulla Ahmad Bin Khamis, who was the principal of the school, Yusuf Al Omar, Abdulwahhab Al Faris, Eisa Fanrat, Bin Idris, and a blind teacher who taught the blind whom he collected in the school courtyard in the form of a round circle. Both Mulla Ahmad Hamada and Mulla Ali Hamadah taught at the school. Students were receiving lessons in the Holy Qur'an, Arabic, arithmetic, and English<sup>(4)</sup>. There were six classroom and each class had between 25 to 30 pupils. It had of two floors, the first floor for the upper levels of

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(1) Educators from My Country, Dr. Abdulhmosen Abdullah Al Kharafi, 1998, p. 916.

(2) Ibid., 918.

(3) Kuwait's History, Abdulaziz Al Rasheed- p.375.

(4) An interview with Mr. Mohammad Abdulatif Idris.



education. The late Shamlan Al Seif used to pay the costs of such school and all its supplies. The said school continued its operations approximately till 1932 when the late Shamlan Al Seif was forced to close it due to the financial difficulties he faced as a result of the stagnation in pearl trading, when the Japanese culture or artificial pearls dominated the international markets<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is noteworthy that the number of the pupils at that school reached around 150 students, including ten blind students. The late Shamlan used to provide the orphans and the poor with an annual apparel or clothing. Teaching was carried out in two shifts; morning and evening.

Pupils used to sit on chairs in the classrooms and in front of each of them a wooden table with a drawer for keeping books and pens<sup>(2)</sup>. The teacher used a board and chalk to explain the lessons. Students in other private schools used to sit on the floor during the lesson.

#### **4. Ja'afariyah National School**

Founded in the year 1938 as a private school under the name of Ja'afriyah National School, the first premises of which was near Ma'arafi shipyard on the sea coast opposite Al Khalifa mosque. That school was founded by a number of merchants who made donations for that purpose. They established a council responsible for its management, chaired by the late Abdulkarim Abul. The donors for establishing that school were headed by the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah who donated 2000 Rupees and Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah and Sheikh Ali Al Khalifa who donated 500 Rupees. The inauguration of the school was attended by Sheikh Ali Al Khalifa Al Sabah and a big number of merchants and religious scholars<sup>(3)</sup>. The first principal of that school was an Iraqi called Mr. Mohammad Ali A'dli. He continued managing the school for a certain period, and then was followed by Mr. Jassim Ismail Ma'arafi for a short period, then Mr. Mohammad Hassan Al Jawahri Al Sherazi, who was an English language teacher at that school. Then, he was followed by Mr. Hassan Al Sayed Assad Al Mousawi who became the school director in 1942. He continued managing the school for almost 25 years. Mr. Mohammad Hassan Al Mousawi was famous for being strict, serious and admiring development and following up his pupils even outside the school<sup>(4)</sup>. He had ambitious ideas and hopes in different fields and believed in the significance of upbringing and raising up before education.

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(1) Mr. Saif Marzuq Al Shamlan

(2) An interview with Mr. Yusuf Rashid Hamadah.

(3) An interview with Mr. Ali Mulla Mohammad Bin Lutf.

(4) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Al Sayed Ismail Behbehani.

It is to be mentioned that the he used to place a monthly Honor Board at his school for the outstanding superior pupils in each class and distributed prizes to them. Weekly quizzes were given to the pupils of that school in order to assess their academic standards. Al Sayed Mohammad Hassan was the first to introduce volleyball to the schools of Kuwait, after seeing this sport while traveling abroad. Then, when he returned to Kuwait, he immediately went to the fish net makers and requested them to make a net for that sport which he introduced at his school.

As for the first teachers who were employed by Ja'afariyah National School in 1938, were Jassim Ismail Ma'arafi, Abdul Hussein Abdullah Al Khabbaz, Sayed Abdul Hussein Al Sayed Zahid and Sayed Mohammad Hassan Al Mousawi. The teacher's salary in the first year of its opening was 30 Rupees<sup>(1)</sup>. A big number of teachers taught at that school later, including Fahed Al Mousa, Dua'ij Al O'un, Mohammad Ahmad Al Nashmi, Abdulatif Al Omar, Abdulatif Al Falah, Khalid Al Masoud, Abdulaziz Al Dousari, Mujib Al Dousari, Abdulaziz Al Balol, Abdullah Al Balol, Saud Al Kharji, Abdullah Al Hindi, Mulla Ya'qub Mahmoud Al Naser, Sulaiman Al Bannai, Mohammad Saleh Taqi, Abdullah Yusuf, Mulla Eisa Al Muttar, Mulla Rashid Al Seif, Abdulwahhab Hashem Al Badr, Hayder Bin Nakhi, Sayed Mahmoud Behbahani, Jassim Al Abdullah, Al Sayed Hosam Mohammad Al Sherazi, Ibrahim Al Yusuf, Mohammad Ali Sadaqt Ashkanani and Mohammad Al Sabagha. It is to be mentioned that the curricula of that school were known for their high level and remarkable performance. Most of the books taught there were brought from Syria and Lebanon, while grammar, syntax and Arabic language rules came from Egypt. The school contained three academic levels: nursery, elementary and intermediate<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Teaching English Language**

The attention to teach English language in Kuwait - as we mentioned earlier - started at the beginning of the second decade of the past century, particularly after the opening of the American Hospital in Kuwait and the increase in the number of foreigners: Indians, English and others.

This is in addition to the increase in the activity of the British Consulate and the opening of an official Post Office under Indian management. All these developments encouraged the approach to learn that language which the people became aware of its significance, especially after flourishing of trade and increasing correspondence with commercial companies after World War I. In the year 1917, the American

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulhussein Abdullah Al Khabaz.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Al Sayed Ismail Behbehani.



The American Missionary School in 1930

*Source: History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past - Saleh Jassim Shehab.*

Missionary opened the first school in Kuwait to teach English language, which it has attached to the American hospital. The bishop Calverley was appointed as the principal and teacher in that school, assisted by a Christian from Al Mousil, called Girgis Eisa<sup>(1)</sup>. During that period, Kuwait witnessed the coming of a number of Arab Christians - whether through the American missionary or others- who were fluent in English language. A number of Kuwaiti youths wishing to learn this language joined that school, and became the first citizens who commanded the English language. This led to opening extensive fields of work for them.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Calverley - the first principal of the American Missionary School- stayed in Kuwait for a certain period then left in the 1920s. He was replaced by Mr. Girgis Eisa, who lived with his family in Al Shyoukh neighborhood in Sharq. Then, another person called Israel came to teach at the American Missionary School. He later opened his own small school in a room of a house he rented near Khalil Al Qattan Market east of the Merchants' Market to teach English language. A number of those teachers were sent to Kuwait by missionary organizations which aimed

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(1) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past, Saleh Jassim Shehab- p.47.



Calvarley's visit to Kuwait in 1955, and round him his students, headed by the late Sheikh Fahed Al Salem

*Source: From Here Kuwait Started - Khalid Abdullah Al Hatem.*

behind their work to spread or propagate Christianity in Kuwait. Some of them distributed missionary books for free without receiving any demand or response for their attempts to spread the Christian religion in Kuwait. It seems that their plans did not lead to any results, which led to the reduction of the missionary operation and discontinuation of this work. It is said that Mr. Calverley returned to Kuwait as a visitor after around 30 years of leaving Kuwait. Before his arrival, he sent several letters to some of his students, many of whom became important personalities and merchants and prestigious figures. One of his students who attended his arrival's celebration noticed that he was aged and looked very old.

Two of the first teachers at the American missionary school opened their own schools at a later period to teach English language in the evening and at night. They were Mr. Israel, who later changed his name to Ismail Kaddo, and Mr. Girgis Eisa. A number of young men went to these two schools in addition to the older generation who wished to learn this language to benefit from it in their private business. English language was also taught at later periods by a number of Kuwaiti teachers who learned that language at the American missionary school, Ismail Kaddo and Girgis Eisa schools. The following is a brief summary about the first two schools for teaching English language in Kuwait.



Ismail Kaddo school for teaching English.

*Source: History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past. Saleh Jassim Shehab.*

## 1. Ismail Kaddo School

Mr. Ismail Kaddo - or Israel the teacher - as known among the Kuwaitis, came to Kuwait in the year 1925 from Al Mousil in Iraq, when he was invited by the late Abdulatif Eisa Al Abduljalil to teach his children the English language. After a short period, he opened his small school in one of the houses in Anza alley to teach boys<sup>(1)</sup>. Later, he joined the American Missionary School, then worked in the British consulate in the morning. During this period, he started teaching English language at night at a location near Khalil Al Qattan Market opposite the «*Karka*» located east of the Merchants' Market. A number of young men and employees who wanted to strengthen their English language skills joined that school. The book Mr. Kaddo taught was called Oxford, and its method depended on translating the composition paragraphs. He received one Rupee per month from each learner. A big number of the old generation learned at that school<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Abdulatif Al Abduljalil.

(2) An interview with Mr. Eissa Hayder Al Rashid.

## **2. Girgis Eisa School<sup>(1)</sup>**

Mr. Girgis Eisa, a Christian also from Iraq, was a teacher at the American Missionary School then opened his school for teaching English language, which a number of those interested in learning that language joined. Many Kuwaitis from the old generation who learned the English language whether at the American Missionary School or under the guidance or at the hands of Mr. Ismail Kaddo or Mr. Girgis Eisa, benefited to a great extent. A number of them opened their own schools for teaching the English language for the generation who followed them, while a number of them held significant posts in Kuwait Oil Company since its establishment in the forties and others worked at the British consulates in the Gulf as translators. A number of them were also prominent in the political field and held remarkable posts in the State during the first years of independence. Some of them also succeeded in obtaining agencies of foreign companies in Kuwait, which led to their entry in the world business.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed prominent activities in the educational field, whether through the opening of private schools or through those experienced in teaching some subjects like arithmetics and English language at night, at their homes or at other places which they rented for this purpose. These schools were intended destinations by a considerable number of the second generation who were eager to learn English language despite the primitive methods used for teaching at that time and limited capabilities.

The late Saleh Shehab mentioned in his book «History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf» a number of teachers who worked in teaching English language at that time at their private schools. We have added to them others that Mr. Saleh Shehab did not mention. We came to know their names through the interviews with a number of their students. The following is a brief summary about each one of such schools.

### **1. Mulla Hashem Al Bader School**

This school was opened in Safat area near the former Public Security building at the beginning of the forties to teach English language, in which he introduced Arabic and English typewriting and bookkeeping. Big numbers of young men looking for learning these lessons, which acquired great significance in the local labor market<sup>(2)</sup>, went to this school. The late Hashem Al Bader was deeply interested in learning the English language since his youth. He possessed a lot of books teaching English

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(1) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past, Saleh Jassim Shehab- p.53.

(2) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past - Saleh Jassim Shehab - p.50.

language that he acquired from abroad. He traveled to India and joined a school specialized in teaching English language there. Then, he returned to Kuwait in 1933 where he opened a school specialized in teaching English language. It is noteworthy of mention that he was always developing teaching methodology at his school to the extent that he introduced a method for listening to the lessons on discs, in order to teach his students the correct pronunciation of the English words and activating the memory<sup>(1)</sup>. The number of students in Mr. Hashem Al Bader's school increased after a period of time when, and it started offering lessons in the morning and evening. The late Hashem Al Bader was summoned to teach in the commercial section of Mubarakiyah School at a later period, due to the few number of teachers<sup>(2)</sup>.

## **2. Sultan Al-Ajeel School <sup>(3)</sup>**

The late Sultan Al-Ajeel opened a school for teaching English language at his home. Then, he relocated it to another place and supplied it with desks and chairs. His school continued for almost two years.

## **3. Mr. Ahmad Al Sayed Omar Assem School<sup>(4)</sup>**

The late Ahmad Al Sayed Omar Assem opened a boys' school for teaching English language in 1947 at Bin Dua'ij alley, then relocated it to Dasman street where it continued operating for three years.

## **4. Mulla Mirza School<sup>(5)</sup>**

This school opened in the 1920s in Sharq area. Its owner was the late Mohammed Hassan Al Jawaheri Al Sherazi who was known as «Mulla Mirza». The premises of the school was in Mubarak square in Sharq area. and Mirza Mohammed Al Sherazi taught English language at night in the school, as it was joined by a number of merchants, sheikhs and youths of the nearby neighbourhoods. Among his students were the late Sheikh Abdulla Al Nassir Al Sabah, Sheikh Abdulla Al Jaber Al Sabah, Abdulla Al Mulla Saleh, Ya'qub Yusuf Behbehani and Hajj Eisa Al Rasheed. Mulla Mohammed Al Jawheri Al Sherazi was appointed at the beginning of the forties- after the close down of his school- as a principal of Ja'afariyah National School which was founded in 1938 in Sharq area<sup>(6)</sup>.

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(1) Educators From My Country, Dr. Abdulmohsen Abdullah Al-Khorafi, 1998 - P. 591.

(2) Ibid

(3) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past - Saleh Jassem Shehab - P.50.

(4) History of Education in Kuwait and the Gulf in the Past - Saleh Jassem Shehab - P. 50.

(5) Ibid.

(6) An interview with Mr.Jaafar Haider Al Rashid.

As for other schools, they included :

#### **5. Mr. Hashem Al Sayed Ahmad Al Refaai School**

This school was located in Midan area in Sharq. It was opened in the 1930s. The late Hashem Al Refaai was teaching his students English language at night. He joined Al Sharqiyah school after its opening as an English teacher.

#### **6. Mr. Abdulhussein Al Sayed Zahed Al Mousawi School**

This school was also opened in Sharq area near Mubarak square in a kiosk near the mosque of the late Hajj Murad Behbehani and teaching was conducted at night. When electricity was connected to the mosque in the 1930s, the kiosk of Mr. Zahed was lit with electricity. A big number of youth studied at that school.

It was known about Mr. Abdulhussein Al Sayed Zahed that he mastered the English language. He was extensively educated in this field and absorbed the different meanings of the words, their spellings, derivatives and Latin origins. Some of his students recall that when he was asked about the meaning of a word, he used to thoughtfully explain its meaning, Latin origin, synonyms and the words derived from them as well as the languages which benefited from such word. He was also fluent in the French language which he learned in Lebanon where he spent a period of time there for treatment. He utilized such period to learn the french language. Mr. Abdulhussein Al Sayed Zahed started translating the Holy Qur'an into English during the 1940s and accomplished a considerable part of this work. He said that he had two translations, one verbatim and the other detailed translation. However, after colliding with the precise meanings of the Qur'an verses and their various interpretations, he was hesitated in completing such work and became cautious in order not to fall in uncertainty of the meaning and interpretation of the verses in a manner which does not reflect the intention of each verse, and hence causing legal ambiguities which may bear a sin in his opinion. Therefore, he decided to discontinue this project after completing a considerable part, to avoid errors in translation and imprecise expression, thus bearing a sin for interpreting the verse other than what Almighty Allah intended<sup>(1)</sup>.

#### **7. Jassim Al Kazmawi School**

This teacher used to deliver lessons in English language at the early 1930s in limited manner. A number of merchants and sheikhs used to send their children to his school to learn English. Many of his students held important Governmental positions in the 1950s and 1960s. This teacher worked afterwards as an employee in the British commissioner's house in Bahrain during the 1940s<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Eassa Al-Rasheed.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulhussain Abdulla Al-Khabaz.



## Methods Of Teaching English Language At Private Schools In The Past

English methodology at the language teaching schools differed from a teacher to another. A number of teachers used to write compositions and ask their pupils to rewrite and translate them, while others preferred to memorize the meanings of the words written for the students in their notebooks in order to memorize their meanings the next day. Other teachers focussed on reading, dictation and grammar, while some teachers let the students themselves select the books which they wish to learn. All students were taught in one classroom, regardless of their academic level and the teacher used to go to each one of them to teach. The pupils- when selecting the book he wishes to study- used to go to Al Ruwaih library which was the only library in Kuwait for a long period- to buy the required books. Among the books taught by a number of teachers were Primer I, Primer II, Reader I, Reader II, which were referred to as McMillan who seems to be the publisher. Another book also entitled «Oxford» was taught at those schools.

Few persons of the first generation who studied at those schools indicated that the books and notebooks were imported from India and the covers of the notebooks carried the photo of King George V and Queen Mary. The notebook was sold for 10 Paisas at Mohammed Ahmad Al Ruawih bookstore. As for pens, most of them were made of sugar cane and brought from Shishter area in Iran. Ink was brought from India or locally manufactured by primitive means<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the teachers who were very concerned with developing teaching methodology were the late Hashem Al Bader who used discs to teach his students pronunciation of words.

A number of teachers equipped the class room with long chairs resembling those used at the coffee shops, each of which had the capacity to seat four to five persons. However, they did not contain drawers or desks for writing on them. The teacher gave his pupils homework to write at their homes for the next day, called «*wadhifah*», assignments.

## Sale of School Books And Stationary

Providing school books and stationary became a necessity after spread of education and science in Kuwait at the beginning of the past century. Many persons were also concerned to read educational books and magazines published in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The first one to respond with this trend was the late Mohammed Ahmad Al Ruwaih who opened at the early 1920s a bookstore called «The National Library», located at the Dakhli Market. Such is considered as the first bookshop established in Kuwait, and that was in 1921, after the opening of Ahmadiyah school which led to the increase in the demand for books, notebooks and other learning needs and aids.

The owner of this bookstore was active in importing various types of religious

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jaffar Haider al-Rasheed.

and academic books, stories and novels as well as school books, notebooks and various stationary. This bookstore continued to be the only one in Kuwait for a long period of time, till another one called «*The Student Bookstore*», owned by the late Abdulaziz Al Magahwi was opened at the Dakhli Market. Further, a third bookstore was opened in the same market by owner, the late Saud Al Kharji who named it «*Students Library*.»

The late Mohammed Ahmad Al Ruwaih was one of the activists who dedicated their time and effort for serving this profession and the educated class by traveling to the destinations of sources of information in the region at that time, to search for items which satisfy the interest of his customers who were readers of academic and other books. He traveled to Cairo and Baghdad to contact publishing houses and see the bookstores systems there. Then, he started bringing newspapers, magazines and other periodicals from Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Beirut <sup>(1)</sup>.



The Late Mohammed Al Ruwaih at his bookstore in the Internal Market (Dakhli)

*Source: A Meeting with the Past. Mr. Adel Mohammed Abdulghani.*

This bookstore contributed to spreading science and education in Kuwait. The intellects used to read such newspapers with big appetite. As some of them could not buy the books, the late Mohammed Al Ruwaikh used to rent the books for few days to some readers against a simple amount of money. Therefore, they started borrowing books to their houses to read and then returned them to the to benefit others. Most books were imported from Egypt and Iraq, while stationary like pens, ink, notebooks and papers were imported from India.

(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khaled Al-Hattam, P.71.

## Singing And Folklore Bands

A number of Kuwaiti singers - or chanters - emerged in Kuwait since an old time. Some of them used to write and compose the words, in addition to singing. Most of those persons performed their art as individuals in a limited scope among their friends, gatherings, occasions, and sessions held by some of the wealthy persons till the modern mass media spread, like broadcasting, at the beginning of the past century. Many singers entered the singing field and worked with the radio stations which were run by governments, recording songs on discs and other means later on. Among the famous old Kuwaiti singers were the late Yusuf Al Bakr, Khalid Al Bakr and Mulla Saud who was singing with the lute, in addition to talented singers such as the late Abdulatif Al Kuwaiti, Abdulla Al Fadhalah, Mohammed Bin Samhan, Saleh Abdulrazzak, Mahmoud Abdulrazzak (Al Kuwaiti), Saud Al Arouj, Abdulatif Al Arouj, Hamad Al Monis and Farhan Bu Shaya<sup>(1)</sup>. The singer used in his performance different local tools, primarily *lute*, *al -merwass*, *rebec*, *drums*, *tambourine*, *al danabek* and other musical instruments.

A number of Kuwaiti singers started to record their songs on discs, in order to be played on gramophones at the end of the past century. The late Abdulatif Al Kuwaiti was the first one who entered this field, as he recorded his first song on a disc in 1927 and traveled to India for this purpose. Then, he went to Baghdad, Bahrain and Cairo to record a number of other songs. He organized a number of parties there and met a number of poets including the Emir of Poetry Ahmad Bey Shawki. He also traveled to London to record his songs on discs. The late Abdulla Al Fadhalah followed him in recording his songs on discs, after a short period as he traveled to India and a number of Arab countries for this purpose. Another number of Kuwaiti singers started recording their songs in Baghdad at a later period through a Bahraini merchant and contractor who worked in this field, including the late Abdulla Al Fadhalah, Mahmoud Al Kuwaiti and Saleh Al Abdulrazzaq. The contractor used to agree with them on recording the song on a disc against a certain amount of money reached up to one hundred rupees. He used to accompany them there to stay for a period ranging from one to two months in order to complete the recording process. The contractor paid for their accommodation at the hotels, with other expenses in consideration for receiving the income from selling the discs. The song was recorded on a special master copy, then printed on the disc. Two Jewish singers who lived in Kuwait and then migrated afterwards to Baghdad and then to Palestine, Dawood Bin Ezra and his brother Saleh Bin Ezra who was nicknamed as Saleh Al Kuwaiti, used to play music for the Kuwaiti singers while singing.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Fadhel Abbas Maqames.

Kuwaiti singers selected some of their songs from the old Arabic poetry books or the verses written by Kuwaiti poets at that time, including Fahed Bouresly and Fahed al A'skar<sup>(1)</sup>.

As for folkloric bands, they emerged since old times and performed various types of group singing. Each band was specialized in performing a certain type of songs. The folkloric bands can be divided into two main ones: marine bands and land bands, which perform their arts at Kuwait city and the villages. Each of these bands performed their arts on certain occasions for which they are summoned by the requesting persons. So, people gathered around them to participate in the function and entertain themselves. Among the occasions celebrated by folkloric bands were diving and travel seasons, Prophet Mohammad Birthday, feasts, weddings, religious and national occasions. Few members of the marine bands accompanied sailing ships during their trips to India, Aden and East Africa to soothe the spirit of sailors and was paid a handsome fee.



The late Abdulatif Al Kuwaiti, the first Kuwaiti singer to record his songs on discs and tapes. He recorded his first songs - from the poetry of Abu Al Taib Al Matanbi - in Baghdad in 1927, recorded by Bidafone Company. Then he traveled to Cairo and recorded another 12 songs.

*Source: From Here Kuwait Started - Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem*



The late Abdulla Fadhalah a talented musician: wrote songs, composed and Sang them. He has around 500 songs.

(1) An interview with Mr. Fadhel Abbass Makames.

The bands also participated in bidding farewell and receiving diving and sailing ships, as celebrations were organized at the sea coast on these occasions.

Among those folkloric bands are women and men bands, which the people were interested to invite in order to celebrate their occasions. Some of the bands also performed their art at special locations, whether at the houses they lived in or at some yards and public areas. Therefore, people went to these locations for entertainment and participating in these occasions.

Among the most significant occasions celebrated by the bands were weddings. One or more of the women's or men's bands were usually invited to participate in the weddings and present their art to the invitees. The celebration and signing continued till a late hour of the night. Moreover, some women bands, called «*al tagagat*», went to the houses of wealthy families during the month of Shaban to sing while hitting the *al tiran*<sup>(1)</sup>. This is to encourage women who were hired by these families to mash wheat (*harees*) and prepare it for the month of Ramadhan. Among the habits of certain wealthy families was hiring a number of working women to carry out domestic work and preparations for the month of Ramadhan few weeks before its start. They used



The bagpipe was a type of old folkloric singing  
Source: Bu Shehry Studio

(1) Tiran is a special type of drums.

to buy quantities of wheat and call «*al tagagat*» to encourage those workers while performing their work, in an entertaining environment.

Some folkloric bands also used to perform their art at the houses of merchants and wealthy people during certain occasions. This custom was known as *talbeen al kareem*. At the beginning of the month of Shaban, «*tagagat*» bands used to go to the houses of these families with their drums and tambourine to sing and congratulate them on the occasion of approaching Ramadhan. They also used to praise the head of the family in their songs and wish him long life and success. These bands usually performed their work from morning till noon prayer. Thereafter, the band collects the money and foodstuff they got in order to divide among themselves. These bands also used to revisit the same families during the month of Ramadhan for congratulation, as well as on the second day of Eid Al Fitr.

There is another occasion called «*Al Aydo*» in which women bands went at the beginning of the month of Thul Hijja to some houses



Ardhah dance performed at feasts and occasions participated by folklor bands. Men stand in two apposire lines carrying swords and singing.

*Source: Kuwait past of present Ministry of Information.*



Another dance of «ardhah» at Safat and the late Sheikh Abdulla Al Jaber is seen among the participants.

*Source: Snap Shots from Kuwait, Past and Present - Ministry of Information.*

for congratulation on the occasion of Eid Al Adha. They used to praise the head of the family and then get some money or foodstuff.

Among the most important women's bands which were famous in the first half of the past century was «Al Jimaz band», headed by Khadija Al Jimaz and Umm Anter, followed by Eidah Bent Nasrah, Aminah Om Zayed, and Al Mehanna band, headed by Jawhara Al Mehanna, then Khadija Al Mehanna, then Suad Al Bariki and Ouda Al Mehanna.<sup>(1)</sup> Among those who were famous also were Traichiyah Al Bariki, Umm Younes, Wadha Al Tawfij and Saleha Bint Hamadah.

As for men's bands, they included Amer Sons band, Al Langawi band, sons of Bin Hussein band, Ma'youf, Ouf Al Mehanna, Al Randi, Al Ameeri and Al Jimaz. Most of these bands were marine bands<sup>(2)</sup>. Also, Al Obaidi band was a famous one<sup>(3)</sup>.



«Tagagat» a woman's band performing their art at one of the houses to encourage female workers in mashing wheat in preparation for the holy month of Ramadhan.

Source: Kuwait National Museum.



Women of old Kuwait were shrouded in black in the streets of the old city but they sang and danced freely at weddings and in private gatherings. Kuwait was influenced by Indian and African music as a result of trading activities

Source: Old Kuwait: Memories in Photographs. - Dr. Yacoub Yusuf Al Hijji

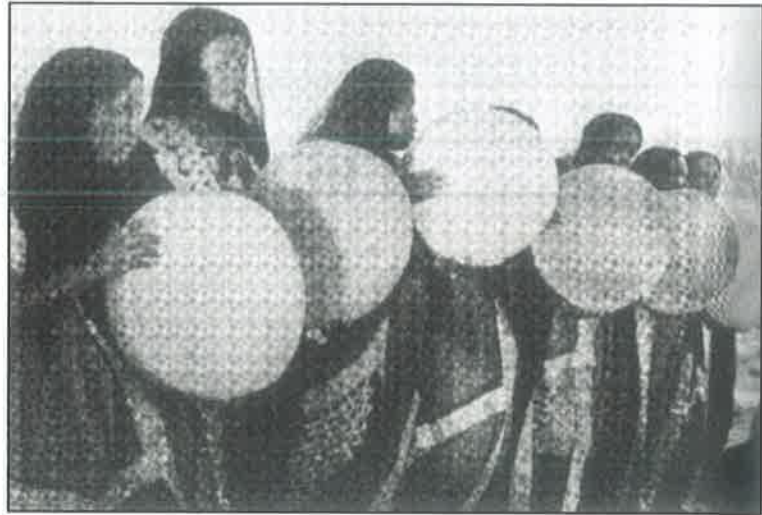
(1) With Our Kuwaiti Memories - Ayoub Hussein Al-Ayoub-1972, P.106.

(2) An interview with Amer Sons Band.

(3) With Our Kuwaiti Memories, Ayoub Hussein Al-Ayoub, 1972, P.106.

## The Vocalist

A number of vocalists were known in Kuwait who used to read religious songs, invocations and prophetic praise poems in religious festivals called «*al malad*» held on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday or on occasions of weddings or votive offerings. The reader or vocalist used to read in this celebration some Qur'anic verses, then the life of Prophet Mohammed and praising



Another «taggat» band celebrating an occasion such as weddings and feasts by playing tambourines.

Source: Ministry of Information.

words for him, as well as his miracles, morals and jihad. Then, the vocalist would read some poetic verses and prose on this occasion. The audience would repeat these verses after him as chorus in an environment of enchantment and happiness with the love of the master of all Prophets. Among the vocalists who were famous for celebrating those occasions were the late Ali al Doob, Eisa Al Doob, Mulla Abdulla Bu Belal, Mulla Jouma'a Bin Ahmad Baqer, Bin Senan, as well as Hajj Mohammed Al Hawaj.

## Folk Medicine

There was no «real» treatment in Kuwait before the opening of the American Missionary Hospital in 1912. People relied on folk doctors and spice dealers (druggists) to prescribe medicines for each class of diseases.

There was some people who used to put plaster on fractures and treat strains and the like. Cauterization and cupping were among the most common medications, especially for the diseases for which the therapist did not know treatment, causing great pain to the patient without result. The folk doctor used an iron rod exposed to fire till it reddened from the heat, and then iron the location of pain. Among the diseases treated by cauterization were «*sciatica*», *al saya*, *al wakeda*, *abu aduwain* and *tuberculosis*. Typhoid was also treated by cauterizing the head and neck in the shape of a cross. As for cupping, it is done by withdrawing the spoilt blood from the patient's body, in order to renew his blood and feel comfortable. Specialized persons used to perform the process, including hairdressers. The cupping was carried on by making a small opening in the skin with a razor behind the head or at



another location then, the therapist would withdraw blood from the body through this opening. To do this, he used a special small glass with small opening through which the therapist absorbs the air through his mouth or by burning a piece of paper near the opening which leads to the emptiness of the air. Therefore, the blood flows fast from the body inside the cup. Some powder would be placed on the wound after the completion of the operation for the wound to heal.

As for stomach diseases, they were treated by medicines available at the spice dealers (druggists), including aloe and dried colocynths which were mixed together. A quantity would be put in the patient's balm to swallow followed by a sip of water.

«Al Khaliban» was used for treatment of stomach ache as well as «*al tarthoth*»<sup>(1)</sup> which is dried, ground and added to milk, and then cooked with rice to be eaten by the patient.

Among the medicines which treated eye disease were «*al qoshm*» and «*zarqa*» which were small pieces dissolved in water and then rubbed to the eye by a date stone after dipping it in the solution. As for trachoma, it was treated by *qermez*, *halilia* and water. Halilia is ground and mixed with *qermez* and rosewater.



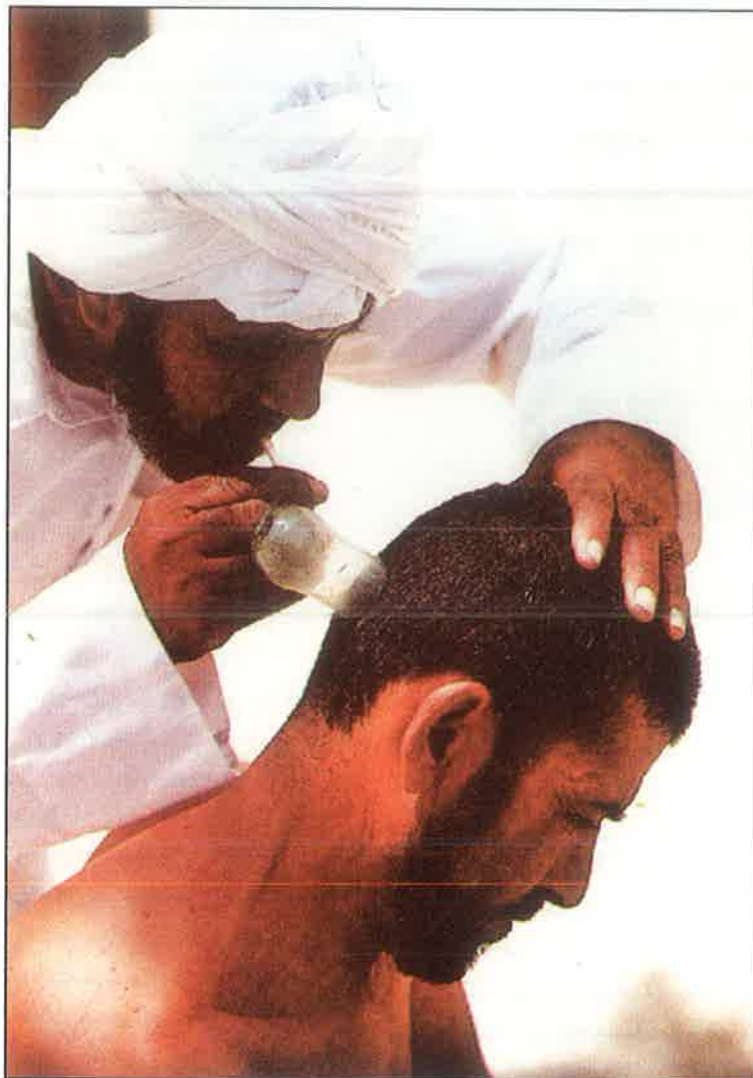
A folk doctor treating a patient.

Source: *Folkloric Heritage - January 1988 - Publication of GCC Folkloric Heritage - Doha - Qatar*

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(1) Tarthoth is a wild rectangular plant grows in the deserd.

Then the solution would be dripped into the eye by a piece of cloth dipped into the solution. Among the common treatment for eyes also was burning the wastes of donkeys and exposing the patient to its vapor. «*Bu Aduwain*» disease was treated by pressing the thumb on the patient's navel then rolling it several times. Malaria was treated by consuming «*al yaada*», while ear diseases were treated by pouring hot milk in them. Some ulcers were treated by placing the copper maker's dirt on them, which are the remains of materials of polishing copper utensils, consisting of the mixture of lead and ammonia taken from the copper makers' shops. Also, «*al hazzaza*»<sup>(1)</sup> was treated by placing ink on it. There was a special medicine for treating the scorpion bite. As for tonsillitis, it was treated by pressing fingers on the tonsillitis inside the throat and placing a powder called «*kath*».



Cupping is a traditional treatment common among the people  
 Source: *Folkloric Heritage* - April 1987 - Publication of GCC Folkloric Heritage - Doha - Qatar.

Among the common diseases was «*al baaj*» (ventral hernia), treated by wrapping the abdomen with a special belt brought from Basrah and known as «*marbat*.» Treatment of *piles* was done by taking them out and tying them strongly by the hair of the horse's tail till they are cut by time, while others used to cauterize it. They also used certain types of popular ointments such as «*mogl*» for treatment of *tumors* with ulcers, such as «*nogl*» being a big pimple affecting some parts of the body like the fingers and causes severe pain, forcing the surgeon nowadays to cut it open and remove the ulcer and dirt

(1) Al- hazzaza is a circular ulcer in feching the head.

gathered therein. In the past, they used «*al mogl*» which absorbs it in two or three days and thus it healed. As for serious diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis and the plague, such diseases caused the death of big numbers of people in the past without being able to do anything to stop these diseases. It is said in this respect that a Kuwaiti, the late Musa'ad Al Azmi, played a great role in the treatment of smallpox at the beginning of the previous century when he started vaccinating the people after his returning from Egypt where he spent several years during which he studied jurisprudence at Al Azhar Mosque and learned vaccination against smallpox. Therefore he returned to Kuwait and practiced this profession. He performed noble services to the citizens in Kuwait and few countries of the Arabian Gulf, and he gained big fame in the region.

Among the most important folk doctors in the past was the person treating minor fractures, called «*al mojaber*», who restored the broken bones to their location by massaging and rubbing with special oils, then wrapping the fracture with a piece of wood and cloth and then tying it with a rope to prevent the bones from moving. At the forefront of folk doctors was the late Ahmad Alghanim who treated fractures and patients by herbs and prescribed treatment for free. He used to sit at his truss overlooking the sea and received the patients there<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of spices dealers also used to prescribe medicines for each type of disease. They varied according to the science, knowledge and experience in diagnosing the disease, prescribing the right treatment and the ability to guide the patient. Among the famous folk doctors at the beginning of the past century were the late Murad Behbehani, Mulla Ridha Bin Isma'il Al Beloushi, Abdulla Jamal, Hajj Abdulla Al Bather, Abdulla Baqer, Mohammed al A'radi and a person called «Boss Kazem». The last three used also to mend fractures.

Among the stories told about recovery from diseases by folk medicine was that Dr. Millerley, a famous doctor of the American hospital, suffered the pile disease, and could not be healed by the modern medicine at that time. Therefore, he presented himself to the late Ahmad Alghanim, who confirmed to him that he has the treatment for his disease and prescribed a popular treatment for him, i.e. cauterization. Dr. Millerley accepted it warily and the late Ahmad Alghanim used the handle of the coffee roaster pot for cauterizing him. He recovered from the disease after three days, which made him grateful to the late Hajj Ahmad Alghanim pointing at him saying «you are the true doctor not me»<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among the folk doctors who were famous in the past was «Boss Kazem» who had a shop for selling seeds at the Merchants' Market. Among the interesting stories told about him is that a person from the desert was brought to him, whose leg was broken

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(1) An Interview with the late Saud Fahad Al-Sumait.

(2) An Interview with Mr. Mohamad Hassan Mohamad Al-Ali.

some time ago and had not been treated. The leg was hanging and seemed that it started to heal once again with the adjoining bone. So, after examining it, Boss Kazem hit it with a special hammer to break it once again and separate it from the adjoining bone in order to plaster it in the right way. When the patient's brother who accompanied him saw this, he pointed his rifle towards Al Boss Kazem and was about to shoot him, when those present intervened and convinced him that this is the right method for treating his brother. The patient continued visiting Boss Kazem who followed up his treatment till the bones returned to their location and healed. Then, his brother came to visit Boss Kazem with a fat sheep as a gift and apologized to him for his behavior.

### **Building The American Hospital And Subsequent Health Developments**

People continued to rely on folk medicine until the American Missionary Hospital was built in 1912 at the place previously allocated to people to gather to bid farewell to the pilgrims and receive them. It was a highland located in Qibla area opposite the seacoast<sup>(1)</sup>. The hospital had a section for men and another for women but many people hesitated to send women there to avoid mixing with men. This led the missionary to build another building for women in 1917. The treatment at the American Missionary Hospital was free of charge. However, people hesitated to receive treatment there especially in the first years till they accustomed themselves to



The American Hospital

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdul-Sattar Agha Ali.

this new hospital and started going there for treating all their diseases. This hospital played an important role in 1931 when Kuwait was exposed to the smallpox epidemic which caused the death of hundreds of citizens. The hospital offered treatment to huge numbers of citizens which led the Municipality Department- newly established at that time - to open a smallpox vaccination center. The American Hospital was the only one in Kuwait at that time. It had ten rooms and a very few number of doctors at its inception. Many of the patients spent the night in the open air outside the hospital on the seacoast, as everyone of them brought something to sleep on, and was accompanied by one of his relatives<sup>(1)</sup>.

At the end of the 1930s, the government started thinking seriously about offering health services to the people and in 1940 it hired a Syrian doctor, Dr. Yehya Al Hadidi, as the first Arab doctor to be employed in Kuwait.

The government has assigned to him a clinic at the house of Ma'arafi family in Sharq area for the treatment of patients. The citizens called such place the Syrian Clinic and started to go there for



Kuwaiti patients awaiting their turn for diagnosis at the American Hospital in 1942.

treatment. The Health Council was also established in 1940 under the chairmanship of Sheikh Fahed Al Salem Al Sabah, to supervise health activities and institutions and expand health services rendered to the people. In 1949, the Amiri Hospital was opened and hence Kuwait started a new era in the health services<sup>(2)</sup>.

It is worthy of note that a number of Kuwaitis who worked at the American hospital since its prime had been trained on simple nursing, injection, assisting the doctors, dispensing medicine and caring for the patients. Among those who worked in dressing were the late Mohammed Al Mutter, Abdulkarim

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ismael Qambar Baqer.

(2) From Old Kuwait - Mr. Yousef Shehab, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 29-6-1996.



The Amiri Hospital, inaugurated in 1949, was the first government hospital built in Kuwait.

*Source: Snapshots from Kuwait, Past and present, Ministry of Information.*

Faraj, Hamed Al Nasrallah, Qambr Baqer, Sulaiman Samaan and Hayder Ali. Each of them received a salary of 20 rupees, which was later increased to 50 rupees. Some of those Kuwaitis dressers who were relied upon for treatment of patients and offering first aid to them, were the late Qamber Baqer who was called «Qamber Al Hakim» or doctor. It is said that Dr. Millerley took him in one of his trips to Dubai for treatment of one of the sheikhs there where the operation was successful.

A number of women were also employed there, including Mrs. Elli Sa'aid Shammass and Farida Sa'aid Shammass who practiced nursing and treating patients at the women's section. Elli Shammass studied nursing in Iraq<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Opening The First Pharmacy**

Medicines started to be known in Kuwait after opening the American Hospital at the beginning of the twentieth century. People started circulating medicines after hesitation. At a later period, a number of drugstores opened which sold imported medicines to the patients. The late Abdulatif Al Duhaim was the first to open a private pharmacy in Kuwait in 1927. It was located at the southern entrance of the Dakhli Market leading to the Money Exchangers' Market, opposite to «Al Sanqer». This pharmacy was famous and many patients used the medicines sold there, which the pharmacy owner was prescribing to them in some instances. Another pharmacy

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ismael Qambar Baqer.

opened by the late Meshaan Al Meshaan and Khalid Al Meshaan in Al Gharabally Market at a later period. Afterwards, several pharmacies were opened and among the early ones, were Al Hajri and Alghanim Pharmacies.

## **Veterinary Medicine**

Animals, sheep, chicken and birds suffered from several diseases which few persons were specialized in treatment there of. Some of them inherited this profession from their fathers and forefathers or learned treatment by experiment. Cauterization was the most common treatment. Among the common diseases were *scabies* and ulcer, which appeared on the skins of animals and called «*al dabra*», as well as «*al nashter*» which was a tumor in the animal's body, *muscular laceration* resulting from work pressure, especially donkeys and mules. Ulcer was treated by cauterization whereby a big size nail was heated by fire and certain substances placed on it like «*raih tint*», «*zarga*» and soap. When the nail is reddened by heat, it is used to cauterize the affected part. Then the affected area is wrapped with a piece of cloth and left for two or three days. The donkey is thereafter taken to the sea to wash the wound. However, if the donkey is infected with *al nashter*, a big needle called «*meabar*» or «*messalah*» is inserted in several locations of the tumor, so the blood flows out or the pus gathered there, and therefore the donkey is healed<sup>(1)</sup>.

## **Denture Fixer**

The only treatment for teeth in Kuwait in the past was anesthesia or extraction. Hairdressers used to extract the teeth after patients got frustrated and found no way for treatment to avoid severe pain causing permanent suffering and insomnia.

The American Hospital used to treat teeth and extract them when it was opened at the beginning of the past century. A number of small clinics also opened at the beginning of the twenties, the first was owned by a person called Mustafa Al Mousawi, followed by another Armenian person called Dawood but they did not succeed in their business<sup>(2)</sup>. At the beginning of the twenties, two Kuwaiti youths, the late Hassan Al Zalzal and Abdulrazak Al Zalzal, went to Baghdad at the expense of their father the late Sayed Ali Sayed Saleh Al Zalzal, to study dentistry there. They stayed two years there, and returned afterwards to Kuwait to practice what they learned in Iraq. In approximately 1924, Mr. Mustafa Al Sayed Al Mousawi closed his clinic located at Khalil Al Qattan Market, or the Jews Market as was also known.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Heye Ibrahim Al-Shamali.

(2) From Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khaled Al-Hatem, P. 98.

The clinic was purchased by the brothers Hassan and Abdulrazaq Al Zalzal where they started their long path of dentistry. They were known for being the only two dentists at that time. Citizens started going to this clinic to receive teeth treatment. The brothers also used to go to some houses to treat elderly men and women as well as treating few members of the ruling family. Few doctors at the American Hospital headed by Dr. Eskader- also guided patients to seek treatment at Al Zalzal clinic<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the most significant tasks carried out at this clinic was extracting teeth, fixing dentures, bridges and filling teeth with cavities. Extracting one tooth cost two and a half rupees, later fees increased to five rupees in the forties. As for fixing a full set of dentures, cost 40 rupees. After the increase in the number of patients, the owners of the clinic purchased some equipment including a special chair on which the patient sat on during the treatment, and different tools such as the tweezers, clamps, and «al nashtar», a tool for cutting extra flesh surrounding the teeth<sup>(2)</sup>. They used to import dentures and raw materials used in the composition of medicines such as anesthesia, iodine and alcohol. However, they started to import those materials directly from Britain during the forties.

Sayed Hassan Al Zalzal used to formulate the medicines by himself. For example, the anesthesia was brought in small bottles and he used to dilute it at certain ratios by distilled boiled water placed it in the syringe in order to inject in the patient's gum at the two sides of the tooth required to be treated or extracted, (in preparation for the treatment which was either done by filling the teeth with cavities and covering them with a thin layer of gold or removing them). The quantity of substances used in the composition of medicines were measured by small spoons. The tooth was extracted by clamp and each kind of teeth had a certain clamp. After extracting the tooth, a white powder was placed to stop bleeding and iodine was placed on the wound; being a light brown color solution with a strong odor made of iodine tincture after adding some materials, like alcohol. Iodine solution was imported in the form of pills, and then alcohol was added to liquidate the iodine used for treatment of wounds. The clinic also had a full device for fixing golden bridges, including a system for melting and forging gold<sup>(3)</sup>.

This clinic expanded later and opened another door, and placed big wooden chairs

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(1) An interview with Mr. Taher Sayed Hasan Al-Zalzal.

(2) An interview with Mr. Taher Al-Sayed Hasan Al-Zalzal

(3) An interview with Mr. Taher Sayed Hasan Al-Zalzal.



as those used in the coffee shops, for patients to wait for their turn. A number of the clinic's permanent visitors, who were the owner's friends, used to sit there to chat.

Among the interesting stories narrated about this clinic is that one of «al mahari» (residents of Hadhramout in southern Yemen) came to treat his teeth. When he sat on the chair for removing teeth, Mr. Hasan Al Zalzal put his finger in his mouth to examine the affected tooth, Al Mahri bit the finger of Mr. Hasan before he started treating him. So, he started calling for help and screaming «leave me leave me» but in vain, as Al mahri's teeth closed tightly on the fingers, and did not open till those seated in the clinic came to rescue Mr. Hasan from Al Mahri's teeth.

Al Zalzal clinic remained till the beginning of the 1940s as the only dental clinic in Kuwait till another clinic was opened by a person called Abdulkarim Merza Hasan Al Sherazi, opposite the watches market branching off the internal market.

Other clinics were also opened during the same period, including the clinic of Mr. Hussain Foulathi, who worked earlier at the clinic of Mr. Hasan Al Zalzal.

## **The Hairdresser**

Many hairdressers in the past used to take some courtyards at the markets as their working places. So, they used to sit there waiting for clients wanted to cut their hair. A number of them used to roam the markets, in search for clients. The hairdresser carried a small wooden box in which he placed his tools while roaming. The tools consisted of a blade and a rectangular piece of skin to sharpen the blade, in addition to a small metal plate, a piece of soap, brush, towel or cloth, and a small mirror. The customer who wanted to cut his hair used to sit on the wooden box or on the ground, while the hairdresser used to sit next to him or behind him, while leaning on his toes and holding the blade to cut the hair, after wetting it with water and maybe soap also.

The hairdressing shop owners - who were very few - had more tools and provided better service. They were located at the Tin Market (the Clover Market afterwards). The hairdresser's shop contained a big mirror in front of which the customer sat on a wooden chair. The hairdresser did his job while standing. Some hairdressing shops had a fan, which was a big piece of thick cloth hung at the shop ceiling to a moving column. It is connected to a long rope held by a person who moves the cloth to direct the air towards the customer sitting on the seat to have his hair cut. Normally, the customer waiting for his turn to have his hair cut used to move the fan to bring cool air to the customer sitting on the chair for hairdressing.



The hairdresser. The fan or «mahafa» is seen hung to the ceiling and moved by one of those seated while waiting for his turn to cut his hair.

*Source: Kuwaiti Heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub- Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait - 2008.*

The cost for cutting hair was one to two paisas at the beginning of the past century, then it increased to one anna for hairdressing and two annas for cutting the hair and shaving the beard. Till recent time - perhaps the beginning of the 1950s- Kuwaitis were accustomed to shaving the head with the blade, as they were not accustomed to keep hair in a form of a certain style, which was later known as «twalait.» Most men were long bearded. Each one of them went to the hairdresser every week or twice to trim the beard and perhaps once every two or three months to shave the hair.

Most hairdressing shops were located at the Tin Market, the Bakers' Market and the Coats' Market, in addition to the area located west of Bhaitah, opposite «al Fordha» and some other markets. Few hairdressers performed other services including children circumcision, extracting teeth and treating certain wounds. Among the most famous hairdressers at the beginning of the past century were the late Hajj Hilal Al Hallak, Basheer Al Hallak, Safar Ali Bu Safar and his brother Hussein Ali Bu Safar.

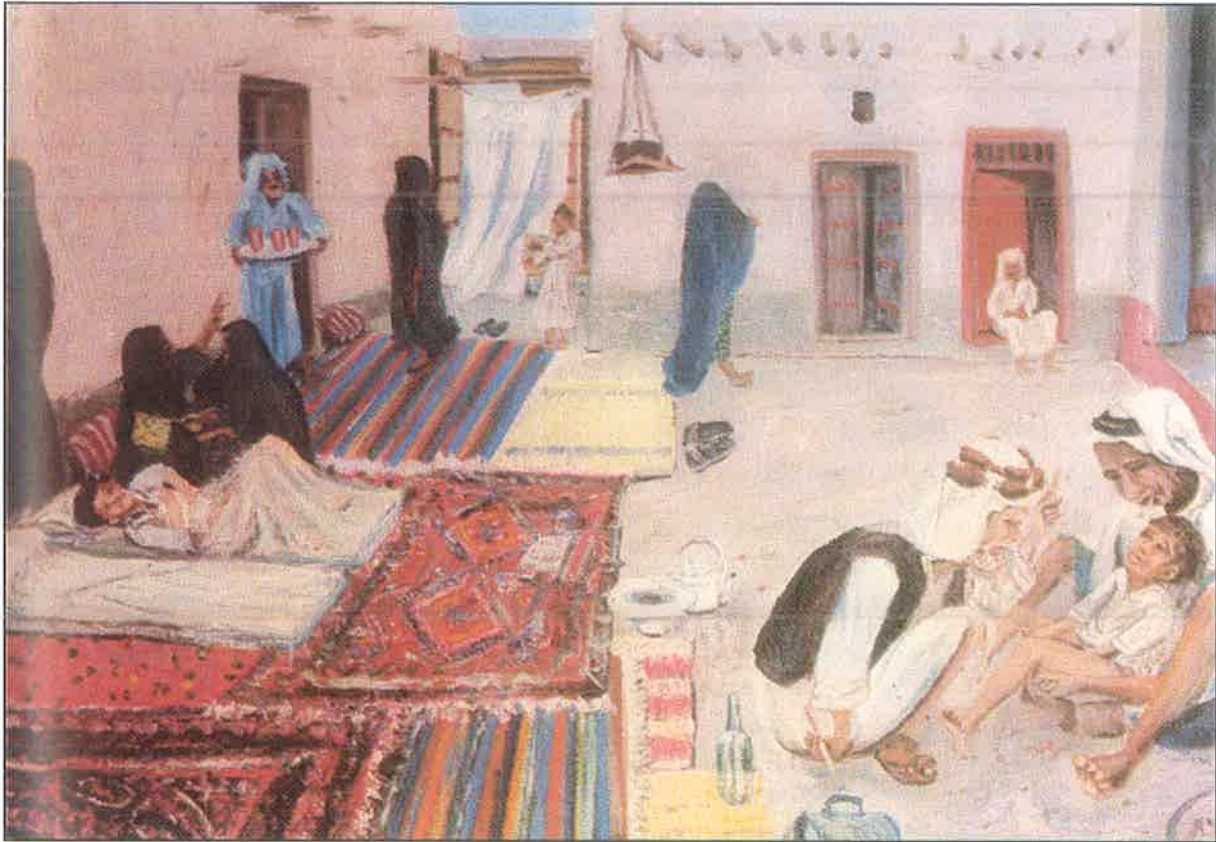
## The Circumciser

The hairdressers in the past were accustomed to circumcising boys. People used to celebrate this occasion by inviting friends of the circumcised boy - as well as the children of the neighbourhood and relatives. Therefore, the house was crowded with invitees who included women and children in the afternoon of that day. Syrup, mixed nuts and bonbon were distributed. It was a happy day for the boy's mother, while his friends gathered around him to assure him that the pain of the operation would not be more than the injection or ant bite. The circumciser came with his small wooden box containing a sharp blade, iodine, cloth and a wooden peg. The circumciser also carried with him a «Kindairy», which was a kerosene bulb used for lighting in order to heat the circumcision blade. This is a primitive but an effective means for disinfecting the blade. One of the relatives of the boy would hold him in preparation for the operation. The circumciser used a smart misleading method to attract the boy's attention to another location other than that of the operation, especially when the child feels afraid when he was hugged, and his hands and legs held tightly by one of his relatives or those present to prevent him from moving. The circumciser would talk to the boy in



Circumcision operation

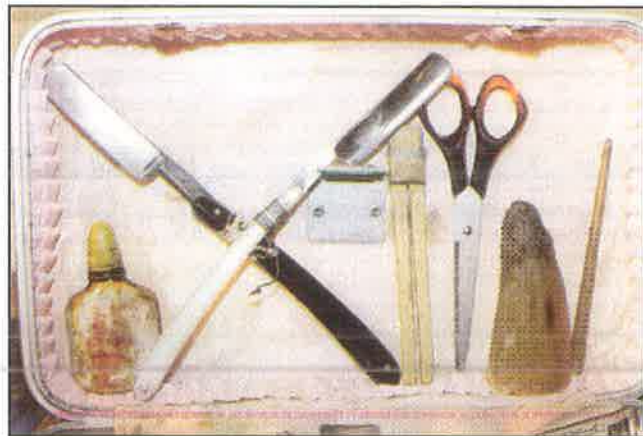
*Source: Folkloric Heritage - April 2001 - Publication of the GCC Folklore Heritage - Doha - Qatar*



**al-Motahhir:** (The Circumciser), Here we see the late Ahmad al- Hindi while circumcising a child whose father was holding him during the process while al-Hindi was asking him to look at a bird to distract his attention. Al- Hindi also circumcised the boy's brother who appears sleeping. The women were veiled in front of the circumciser.

*Source: The Kuwaiti Heritage in the paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub - Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait - 2008*

an attractive voice and ask him: look at the bird above your head, what is its species? Once the boy raises his head, the circumciser would have finished the operation which did not take more than few seconds, then the boy would scream of the sudden pain and everything would be over.



The circumciser's tools

*Source: Folkloric Heritage - April 2001 - Publication of the GCC Folklore Heritage - Doha - Qatar*

The boy would stay at home one or two days in bed, with his mother next to him to bring cold air towards him through the fan. Then, he would go to the sea the next day with his father to wash there for several days till the wound is healed. The seawater leads

to cleaning and disinfecting the wound. A number of circumcisers used Zinc ointment to treat the wound.

Among the famous circumcisers who were well-known in the first half of the past century was the late Ahmad Al Hindi who was known for the precision of his work, skill and fast completion of the operation. Most Kuwaitis were concerned for having him circumcise their boys as they had confidence in him and were assured of his work standard. The late Ahmad Al Hindi circumcised thousands of Kuwaiti boys during this period, as well as their children afterwards. He continued this profession for a long period which lasted more than forty years, till the 1950s. One of his sons, Oie Abdulwahhab Al Hindi, inherited this profession after him and worked for a long period in this trade, which he started during the lifetime of his father.

### **1. Al Hammar (The Coolie)**

The Coolie (Al Hammar) is the title normally given to the person who ports water by leather bags to the houses on the donkey back, as well as the person who uses a donkey to transport mud, rocks or other materials. Al Hammar fills the leather bags from fresh water wells known as «*akwat*», plural of «*koot*»,



Donkeys carrying goatskin bags of fresh water from the wells outside the city, hurry through the wall gate to their customers to sell the precious cargo to the city dwellers.

*Source: Old Kuwait - Memories in Photographs - Dr. Yacoub Yusuf Al Hijji*

existing outside the city at nearby areas such as Shamiya, Dasma, Nugra, Hawally, Sha'ab and Adeliyah, as well as Al Khabari, which were the swamps formed after rain falls and became an important source for fresh water during most of the winter season. Also, al hammarah, the plural of hammar, used to bring water from the boats coming from Shatt Al Arab by placing three water bags on atop the donkey, two on both sides of the back tied to each other, and then the third on top of them. The two side sacks were called «adail», and singular is «adila', while the upper sack was called «wasata».



The leather bags placed atop donkeys firmly to keep their balance and prevent them from falling. They are tied together with some thick ropes.

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers, William Facey and Julian Grant - 1998*

One bag can take around one tin and a half to two tins of water<sup>(1)</sup>. Normally, a



number of canvas bags stitched together were placed on the back of the donkey to protect it from friction with the water bags which may lead to their injury while walking.

Among the most important work of the donkey owner was to transport water from the wells and boats coming from Shatt Al Arab, and afterwards from the pools to the houses of his customers. With three bags of fresh water, this hard- working coolie hurries to a nearby house to unload his cargo. Many coolies made their living in old Kuwait by hawking water through the city.

*Source: Old Kuwait, in photographs and Memories, Dr. Yacoub Yusuf Al-Hijji.*

The donkey walks towards the houses of the clients and the Coolie behind it holding a thick stick in his hand to guide the donkey while calling «Shat... Shat...» i.e., water from Shatt Al Arab. Al Hammar usually adds a new dash to old one to count the trips he made to the house to deliver water on credit.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Eissa Al-Wazzan.

Therefore, there were dashes engraved by al hammar (the coolie) on the walls at the entrances of most old houses. Al hammar sells one route consisting of three sacks for one rupee, while he pays to the boat owner - and afterwards the water company- 9 annas. So, he makes a profit of 7 annas per route. Al hammar delivered from three to four routes per day and in some cases, two hammars would agree to work together, so one of them fills the sacks while his colleague is delivering the water to the customers. When he returns to the water pool, he will have filled the other sacks with him, in order to load them atop the donkeys to take to the remaining customers without delay. Therefore, around 10 to 12 routes are made per day. Two or more donkeys were Usually used for such process, to have more income<sup>(1)</sup>. Al hammar empties the water in medium-sized tanks made of clay called «yahla», placed in the houses, each of which has the capacity of 9 to 12 sacks. Some wealthy families started in the thirties of the past century building pools of cement in their houses to store bigger quantities of water after the use of cement in construction.



A number of coolies went with the water carriage to the water market to sell to the citizens. Donkeys with bags of fresh water on their back gathered at a busy section of the city market waiting for a buyer.

*Source: Old Kuwait: Memories in Photographs. Dr. Yacoub Al Hijji, Center for Research & Studies on Kuwait, 2004*

(1) An interview with Mr. Khalil Ibrahim Al-Ramzi.

It is mentioned that many sheikhs and merchants had their own camels to transport water from their wells outside the City, to take them to their houses. The camel carried from 4 to 6 sacks, each of which contained two to three tins or gallons. Fresh water was for drinking and cooking, while saline water was for showering and washing. Some coolies used to sell water at a special site called the Water Market located at the Money Exchangers Square, where donkeys stood there carrying leather bags filled with water, awaiting buyers returning from the markets to their houses.

Coolies or Hammara and water carriers (kandari) continued transporting water from the boat tanks directly, until the complaints increased from the citizens that the water was unclean as these persons went inside the tanks to fill the bags and tins, which caused water's pollution leading to health hazards. Such events led the Municipality to intervene and prevent al-hammara and water carriers from going down inside the tanks and impose penalties on the violators. In the year 1934, big cement pools were built near the seacoast to unload boats water inside them in order to facilitate the process of getting clean water. The Coolies and hammara started transporting water from the pools to their customers. One of the pools was built near Al Shamlan niq'a in Sharq area, a second one at Al Ghunaim niq'a, and a third at Al Abduljalil niq'a in Qibla. Two pools were built afterwards, one in Sharq and the second in Morqab. Big taps were fixed for the pools, a number of which were allocated for the donkey owners, and the others for the water carriers, and few for «mahara» who started transporting water to the houses by the mid-forties in small tank carriages. Also, a number of taps in every pool were allocated for the people who wanted to buy water directly from the pools<sup>(1)</sup>.

## 2. Al Kandari

Al Kandari is the person carrying water to deliver it to the houses, using two tin tanks hung with a rope at one edge of



Other coolies hawked the Shatt-al-Arab water in two kerosine tins. Energetic and hard-working, these men were a common sight in the streets of the old fireege.

*Source: Old Kuwait: Memories in Photographs. Dr. Yacoub Al Hijji, Center for Research & Studies on Kuwait, 2004*

(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Eissa Al-Wazzan.



a stick or column placed on Al Kandari shoulders. The tins were filled with water from the boats coming from Shatt Al Arab, which docked at a number of water niq'a spread along the coast. So, Al Kandari, donkey owners and other citizens went there to fill their utensils with water. Al Kandari used to go on board the ship to fill the tins with water from «*fintas*» which is a water tank made of wood inside the ship. Water was extracted from the tank by tins or buckets, if any. Al Kandari went to the residential districts after paying the water value to «*al karrani*», and walked between the alleys while carrying «*al kandar*» (the stick) from which the two tanks were hanging on his shoulder.

He used to call «Shat... Shat» till he sells the water to one of the houses, which is then poured in «*al yahla*» or «*al heb*». Then, he would return to the niq'a to fill the tanks with water once again. A number of kandaris sold water to certain customers, while others roamed the residential districts in search for water buyers.

The coolies and kandaries purchased the water tin (water selling unit) for one anna, and sold it for around two and a half to three annas, after delivering it to the houses of their customers. One tin of water had the capacity of around four gallons (18.5 liters.)

### **Al Hammali**

Al Hammali is the person carrying goods from one place to the other for a certain fee. Al hammali placed the big piece or canvas bag filled with seeds or other materials on his back or used «*al yehla*» - or big basket made of fronds - to fill it with the goods required to be transported. Al hammali wrapped the bunch or «*al yehla*» with a thick rope and tied its two edges to a wide belt with two eyes, made of cotton and hair and called «*sedar*», placed at his forehead while carrying «*al yehla*.» The rope can be elongated or shortened according to the volume and quantity of goods placed



Al Hammali carrying «*al yehla*» on his back to deliver goods to the houses.

Source: *Heritage Magazine*, 3rd edition- March/April 2000-Kuwait

in «yehla» or the bunch carried by al hammali on his back. Al hammalis used to roam the markets to carry the vegetables, other foodstuff and household needs bought by the people to their homes. Also, there were hammalis at the niq'a to transport foodstuff from there to the houses or shops at the markets. Al hammalis also carried the materials which reached Kuwait by ships to the niq'a stores and the merchants' shops. Al Hammali received from one to two annas per journey, according to the quantity of the materials carried and the route's distance.

### **Ra'ai Al Arabana (Cart Driver)**

Kuwaitis called the carts driven by mules or horses as «arabana», plural «arabeen.» The driver of the car is called «*ra'ai al arabana.*» Carts were not known in Kuwait in the past. However, Kuwaitis knew them after bringing two carts driven by horses from India for the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah at the beginning of the 20th century. The reason for not using the carts may be attributed to the short distance between the working locations and the narrow alleys in ancient Kuwait city, which made the process of transport depend on «al hammali» (the carrier) or placing weights on donkeys, mules and horses to deliver them to the required locations. However, with the increase and expansion of work, the necessity for using carts emerged, as it eased the transport of big numbers of containers, whether canvas bags for foodstuff or the pallets of cotton, textiles and other goods transferred from the niq'a to the merchants' stores. Al hammali could carry one canvas sack of rice, while three sacks were placed on the donkeys back. As for the cart, it could transport ten sacks of rice in one journey.

It seems that the use of cart in Kuwait started at the beginning of the twentieth century, after World War I, then extensively spread by the end of the 1930s and 1940s. Some said that Mhammad alSabr from alMidan area in Sharq was the first person who used carts pulled by horses. Another story says that the first one to bring cart to Kuwait was a person called Parwaiz Khalifa, who, after World War I, shipped a cart from A'badan on a boat, and transported dates, fronds and cereals through it from the Fordha to the markets. Parwaiz was previously working as a carrier. Many coolies and «al amlah»<sup>(1)</sup> used carts due to their speed in transport, increase of income and low expenses as it relied on a fewer number of animals. Carts carried foodstuff bags and other materials from the Fordha to the stores with relative ease, compared with the previous situation. The Municipality started regulating the transportation system and issued laws to protect animals from over exploitation.

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(1) «Al amla» are owners of donkeys and horses who maintain a number of these animals that can reach ten, to use them for transporting construction materials such as gypsum or mud.

The carts industry flourished as a result of this development and a number of carpenters became skilled in manufacturing and designing carts and their tyres. The tyres of the carts were first made of wood but later the dunker which was removed from the forefront of «Ford» lorries was used instead of wood in the tyre. The dunker contained ball bearing, which was technically installed, and helped the horse to pull the cart more conveniently, due to the existence of springs. A number of Kuwaitis became specialized in fixing and repairing the tyres of carts, the most prominent of whom was Mr. Taqqi Ashkanani. The cart continued working from ten to fifteen years without remarkable problems, in view of its durability and good production.

The cart in Kuwait was normally driven by one horse and among the first owners of carts were few members from Al Wuhaib, Al Shehab and Al Maiouf families.

### **Al Wazzan**

The government authorities in Kuwait paid great attention a long time ago to protect buyers from the crooks either in the weights of goods or their qualities. This drove the government to supervise the weighing of goods coming to the country by placing scales at several locations in the city, managed by government officials to carry out such work. It was accustomed to calling each one of these persons «wazzan.» Al Wazzan used to weigh foodstuff and other materials at the specified locations, including the Fordha and the Khans, and a number of markets. Among the materials weighed at the Fordha were grains, the most important of which were wheat and barely shipped unpacked to Kuwait. When a boat reached Kuwait, the carriers unloaded its cargo of grains at the Fordha yards, in the form of big piles, in preparation of weighing them and collecting the Customs Duties.

Crains were weighed by a big wooden scale called «*Gabban*», or *Qabban* consisting of three big wooden columns, with the height of around 3 meters, made either of special tree branches or thick wooden poles tied together with ropes from their upper side, in order to hang the scale arm on them through a big iron ring. Four ropes or chains were hanging from the scale arm, the lower edge of each was tied to one angle of the scale pan. The scale pan was made of wood, and was square-shaped, with a side length of almost one meter. The grains bag was placed on one of the two pans and the weighing units in the other pan in order to weigh them, then take them to the merchants' stores in Bahitah area and the Merchants' Market by the carriers. Al Wazzan family used to carry the weighing of grains at the Fordha since the reign of Sheikh Abdulla I Bin Sabah. The late Ahmad Al Wazzan started such work after Al Riqqa war and the last person to carry out such work was the



Al Wazzan weighs cereals and other goods against receiving simple fees from the buyer.

*Drawing by Nadin Mohamd Jamal*

late Taher Al Wazzan, when the weighing process at the Fordha stopped at the ship yard in the year 1951<sup>(1)</sup>. The late Sa'ud Bin Oun and Yusuf Al Joua'n indulged in that career with the late Taher Al Wazzan during the 1940s.

Also, there was another scale - or qabban at the truss of the late Saleh Mohammed Abdulaziz Al Mutawa Al Qana'i, located west of the Fordha for weighing fruits coming by boats from the Iraqi and Iranian ports. The packages, included grapes racks, pomegranates boxes and dates, before they were carried to al tarrahs' shops in the vegetable market for selling<sup>(2)</sup>. There were other scales placed by the government at the markets to weigh different goods bought by the shop owners from wholesale merchants to check their weight, one at the Ghee Market and the other at Al Saba'an Square. The government also placed two scales at the «Khan» located in the Merchants' Market, one big and the other

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hussain Ali Al-Wazzan.

(2) An interview with Mr. Khaled Al-Eissa Al-Saleh.

of a smaller size for weighing goods purchased from this market, which was considered as the main wholesale market at that time. The government collected two annas for weighing one maan. Cotton pallets, coal bags, wool and other heavy weight products such as sugar and rice bags and tea boxes were weighed there at the Khan, while the smaller size scale was for weighing light goods such as cardamom, coffee and A'dani ghee tins. The fees were collected at the Khan by the government employee against issuing a receipt or «barwa»-as known for the receipt - recording the type of goods, their weight and the value of fees. The Khan was a big Arab courtyard with rooms used as stores rented to the merchants, and had two doors, a small one called bukhokha (wicket door) for the entry of carriers and a big one for the entry of carts driven by horses, carrying goods. Al Nisf family were responsible for managing the Khan. The late Abdulhussein Al Faraj, followed by his son Abdulhadi Al Faraj in the 1940s was responsible for operating the scale. The Khan was closed in mid 1950s.

### **Jeleeb Nokhom (Cleaning Water Wells):**

Among the common scenes in the old residential districts in Kuwait City was the passing of two persons. They were usually either disabled or blind, calling «jeleeb nokhom jeleeb nokhom» offering to clean the wells at houses, whose water is polluted or contaminated either by the accumulation of dust and dirt with the passage of time or some birds, chicken or animals - like cats or mice - had fallen inside them. The two persons carried a bunch of ropes, a bucket, «malmsa» and «sakhin»<sup>(1)</sup>. These were the tools used by them in their work. The ancient Kuwaiti house always had a well as there was no means for water supply at that time and the people relied on well water for bathing and washing. Most water wells were very saline and therefore such water was only suitable for washing. The water was extracted from the well by a bucket tied to a rope hung on a device called «mahala.»

«Jeleeb Nokhom», or the well cleaners, were called when they pass by the alleys in order to clean the well and drain its water. One of them, usually the blind, would go down to the well bottom through a rope which is held by his colleague and start filling the bucket with water and dirt inside the well. The other person would pull the rope to take out the bucket and pour polluted water or «al seyana» - in the water duct, normally built near the well which channelled the contaminated water to the nearest pit or «sabkha», which was

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(1) «Malmas» is a metal instrument (hook) consisting of four fingers or more, used to hook the bucket or any other vessel which may fall in the well to take it out to the surface. As for sakhin, it is a manual sweeper, consisting of a stick with a squared small piece of metal sheet attached to one of its edges in order to sweep dirt and dust.



« Well Cleaner» «Jeleeb Nokhom» while cleaning the well.

*Source: The Kuwaiti Heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub - Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait - 2008.*

normally dug up to receive the water used in washing at the adjacent houses. Each old district had a big pit to receive rainwater and sewage water coming from the houses surrounding the pit. Upon the completion of cleaning the well, the two workers were given their fees, normally ranging from a half to one rupee.

### **Al Dreiwel (The Driver)**

The late Abdulla Al Hattam said in his book entitled «From Here Kuwait Started» that the first car known to Kuwait was that gifted by the late Qassim Bin Mohammed Al Ibrahim to the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah in 1330 AH (1912 AD). The car was «Monroe» brand, and was very rarely used as the roads were unpaved and narrow. The first driver of this car was an Indian person brought for this purpose. He taught a Kuwaiti young man, namely the late Ali Hussein Abu Khanfar to drive it<sup>(1)</sup>. Afterwards, a number of merchants bought cars for themselves, among them the late Hamad Al Khalid, and his car was

(1) From Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khaled Al-Hattam, P. 141.

Ford model 1927, driven by the late Mohammed Al Sayed Omar. Also, the late Shamlan Bin Ali Bin Saif and Hilal Al Mutairi owned Hudson, while the late Hamad Al- Sager and Al Mulla Saleh owned Overland cars. It was accustomed at that time that each car owner hires a driver to drive it, called «draiwel.» The number of drivers was very limited but gradually increased, with the increasing number of merchants and wealthy people who purchased cars. It is said that the first one to start teaching car driving in Kuwait was the late Mohammed Al Sayed Omar, who also used to examine learners before they received the license issued to them under his signature. The late Mohammed Al Sayed Omar continued to perform this function till Kuwait Municipality was established in 1929 and took over this responsibility<sup>(1)</sup>. Also, the late Ali Al Doob, Abdulla Al Tawari and Ahmad Al Mukhaizeem worked in teaching driving at that period of time. Many of those who learned driving at that time worked as taxi drivers which brought rewarding income to them.

### **Taxi Driver**

This trade is considered as one of the relatively new trades in Kuwait as it started by the end of 1920s approximately when cars were introduced to Kuwait and people used them to go to far distances inside the city and the adjacent villages, rather than using animals, especially when the sun heat is high during midday. A number of young men, who learned driving at that time, worked in this field to earn their living. They used to carry passengers to various areas in the city, in addition to the nearest villages such as Hawally and Nugra, as well as remote villages such as Shuaiba, Fahaheel, Fintas and others. The prevailing method at that time - during the 1930s- was to hire a car by a passenger against a half to one rupee for transporting him to anywhere he desires insides the city; one rupee to Nugra or Hawally and five rupees to the remote villages<sup>(2)</sup>. The taxi cabs parked at «Al Surah»<sup>(3)</sup> waiting for passengers to take them to the required destination. Most people used taxis to go to the American Hospital or near areas like Hawally, for example, as many people were accustomed to going to the farms there for «*kashta*», i.e. to spend leisure time. As for trips to the remote villages, they were very limited and some taxis carried passengers to Basrah, and each passenger used to pay 10 rupees for the journey<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khaled Al-Hattam, P.144.

(2) An interview with the late Yousuf Yaqoub Abu-Alhassan.

(3) «Surah» is the parking place for taxis.

(4) An interview with Mr. Karam Ahmad Ali.

When the use of cars widely spread, the Municipality took responsibility of traffic affairs and laid down laws for such new activities, issuing driving and testing licenses, distributed licence plates, determined their parking locations, and defined the fare from Kuwait City to the different areas in the city and also to the villages<sup>(1)</sup>. The taxi drivers used to gather at Safat square near the old Public Security Building opposite to Al Maseel, at a location called «Al surah.» The number of cars did not exceed fifteen cars at the beginning but the number greatly increased thereafter.



Taxi cabs parked at Safat square, waiting for passengers

*Source: IM AUTO NACH KOWEIT*

The car driver is called (draiwel) i.e. driver, while the car was called «motor.» Cars were operated by «handle» which is driven by hand. Most taxi cabs were of Dodge and Ford brands, while Chever brand occupied an advanced position among private cars.

Taxi cab drivers gathered at the coffee shops in Safat waiting for the passengers at Al Surah in order to take them to the required destination. Taxi cabs fare was not defined before 1944. Rather, there was a type of customs for the transport fare to each area. In 1944, the Municipality Department issued a list comprising the fare for each area starting with the American Hospital, which it had defined at three and a half rupees, and to Hawally, Al Demnah (Salmiya), Abu Halifa and Shua'iba, for which the fare was defined at 27 rupees<sup>(2)</sup>.

(1) Kuwait Municipality in Fifty Years, issued by Kuwait Municipality, Dr. Najat Abdul-Qader Al-Jassem - P.166.

(2) An Old Kuwait - Yousuf Shehab- Al-Qabas Newspaper. 19-2-1996.



## Lorries Heading To Saudi Arabia And Iraq

A number of Kuwaitis who learned driving and acquired mechanical experience to repair the breakdowns to which motors are exposed worked in the field of transporting goods to neighboring countries during the 1930s. Lorries started during this period to carry different types of goods and commodities from Kuwait to Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent to Iraq. Lorries were loaded with *bawari*, *bascheel*, woods, doors, rice, sugar, tea, flour, benzene, kerosene (fuel) and similar goods to Riyadh city all day round through a long sandy route.

The journey took from four to five days depending on the climatic conditions and the problems to which the drivers were exposed to on the road. It was difficult for the vehicle to exceed a specific speed as the roads were not paved and did not have defined boundaries, which led to easily deviate from the road<sup>(1)</sup>. The goods were transported for the account of Saudi merchants who came to Kuwait carrying with them «canvas sacks filled with Saudi or Austrian riyals to buy big quantities of goods which reached Kuwait. A number of local agents of Saudi Amirs and merchants, as well as the Saudi government, were also active in purchasing and shipping the goods ordered by the Saudi side in order to send the same by lorries. After a period of time, Saudi cars driven by Hijazi drivers started transporting goods there, when the demand increased as such Kuwaiti cars were unable to satisfy their demand. Drivers of lorries used to get their road needs from Kuwait. Big quantities of benzene, oil, tyres, rubber, metal sheets, ropes and lanterns were carried, in addition to water placed in sacks hung on both sides of the lorry, as well as foodstuff, especially flour, rice, cereals and dried fish. The road was free of almost any movement except some shepherds seen at far distances and tents scattered in the desert. The owners of these cars depended on themselves to repair the cars if they broke down on the road<sup>(2)</sup>.

As for Al Zubair and Basrah road, it was much closer than Riyadh, but not less rugged or easy, especially when the rain falls. This road was known for its hazards due to the presence of road burglars which made traffic at night an unsafe adventure. The drivers were forced to sleep inside Al Zubair city in their cars, especially when the rain falls. The way from Kuwait to Basrah took around eight to ten hours in normal conditions. A number of drivers were forced to carry weapons with them to protect themselves while amidst the desert. Among the most important goods carried by cars to Basrah were textiles and cigarettes.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Karam Ahmad Ali.

(2) An interview with Haj Gholoom Taki Ashkanani.

## Car Repair Garages

If cars broke down in the past, they were towed to Basrah as there was a number of mechanics to repair cars. Car spare parts were not available in Kuwait in the first years as their number was few and there were no repair mechanics or garages equipped with the required facilities. There were no stations to fuel cars. Rather, benzene and kerosene was sold in closed tanks brought by Alghanim Company from Abadan by boats, which used to transfer sand from Kuwait to Abadan and return back with kerosene and benzene tanks and car oils to sell some in Kuwait and export some quantities to Riyadh. Spare parts were completely scarce during World War II, which forced many car owners to stop their cars or sell them. The number of garage owners - of such cars did not exceed two or three - used to buy these cars at cheap prices in order to dismantle them and fix their parts to other cars for repair purposes<sup>(1)</sup>.

A number of small garages were opened in the mid 1930s, as well as shops for selling spare parts and oils. Among the first garages which were opened were the garage of Mohammed Bu Razihan, located behind «Cable and Wireless» building in Safat, followed by the garage of Rashid Sa'id (Al Akroka), Ali Al Sayigh, Hussein Rashid Boursely, Mohammed Al Nibari, Mohammed Al Baghdadi, Mohammed Bin Seri, Abdulla Al Saqobi, Abbas Gheragh (specialized in car body works), Yusuf Al Haddad, Mohammed Saleh Mulla Hassan Al Nassir, Nassirs Al Abdul Jalil Company and Gulum Ashkanani who were specialized in renovating the cars, and became agents of foreign establishments for selling oils, including «*bu manara*» (i.e. Empire State brand) oil, and *Abu Al Feel* oils<sup>(2)</sup>. The number of garages increased after World War II, in view of the increase of cars and the economic recovery. Among car owners of spare parts shops in 1940s were the late Fahed Al Nafisi, Abdulrazzek Al Maso'ud, Ahmad Al Sayer and Saleh Al Fahad.

## Pilgrimage Campaign Supervisor

It was one of the ancient trades in which a number of people were specialized, particularly those who had experience in the desert, its paths and driving for long distances whether for transporting pilgrims or delivering goods among the remote areas. Camels in the past were the only means for long distances before cars were introduced in this field. Pilgrimage Caravans were among the significant trades relied upon for transporting pilgrims to the Sacred House and returning them back as well

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(1) An interview with Haj Gholoom Taki Ashkanani.

(2) Ibid.

as caring for them and satisfying their needs during the long travel journey. This was carried by the owner of the Caravan who charged each pilgrim a certain amount of money against offering different types of services starting from taking them to the Holy Land, to offering meals, accommodation and performing the rituals.

### 1. Camel Campaigns

Till mid 1920s, pilgrims went from Kuwait to the Holy Land on camels backs. Their journey took not less than three months for the round up trip and most caravans consisted of hundreds of camels that went to Al Madina first, and then from there to Makkah, accompanying with them a number of those who were knowledgeable of the desert roads and places of water.

A number of caravans went directly to Makkah and passed on their way to Makkah through many areas including Al Hafr, Al Nasafa, Al Haba, Al Ratawya, Umm al Jamajem, Jiba and Al Qassim<sup>(1)</sup>. As for those going to Al Madina, they passed through other areas and reached there after almost three weeks, where they stayed for ten days up to two weeks, during which they visited the Prophet's Mosque and his grave and historical



Camels on the march in the desert with howdages carrying passengers.

Source: *The Arab of the Desert*, H.R.P. Dickson 1972 (first published in 1942. (p.224)

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(1) An interview with Mr. Nassir Sulaiman Al Marshood.

mosques there. Then, they went to Makkah which they reached after one week up to twelve days, depending on the road conditions. The camels were prepared before traveling and a « howdah» was fixed for women and a saddle for men. The howdah carries two women, each of whom sitting in a «*kawaja*», a crate made of bamboo or tree branches for this purpose, and covered with thick cloth or tarpaulins. As for men, each one of them rode a camel, on the saddle «*shadad*», i.e. a special cover placed on the camel's back, with two- side big pockets to keep the pilgrim's luggage, who held a perpendicular piece of wood fixed to the saddle from the front while the camel is walking<sup>(1)</sup>. Most pilgrimage caravans departed Kuwait at the beginning of the month of Thul Qidda, and returned by the end of Muharram. Each caravan consisted of around 50 to 60 camels, which the



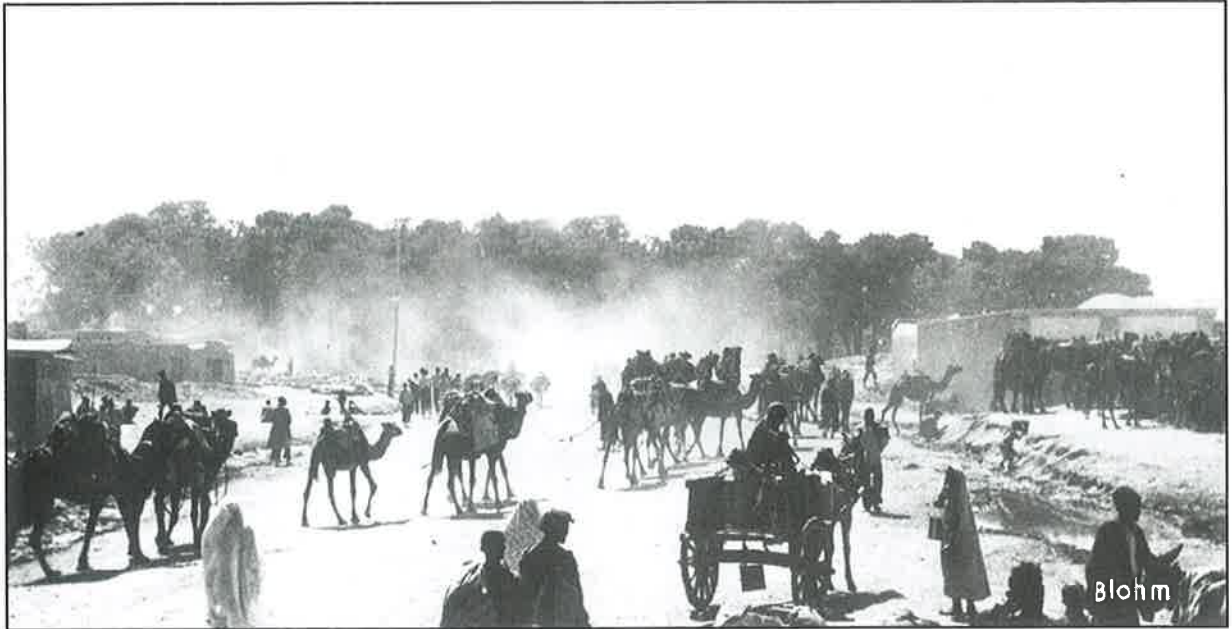
Square type of ladies litter, more commonly used and found among Shammar, Anizah and Dhafir tribes smaller than average Maksar

*Source: The Arab of the Desert, H.R.P. Dickson 1972 (first published in 1942).*

campaign owner purchased or hired. The caravan owner hired between 20 to 30 camel drivers from the Bedouins or residents of Najd who were experts of the desert roads in order to guide the camels while walking. Each one of them guided a camel carrying women, while walking on his feet all through the way. The caravans started their travel after dawn prayer till the mid day. Then, they stop for rest and eating some food and coffee. This break is called «*Mudha*»(i.e, mid-day rest). The camels are left during this period to graze in the desert, with their front feet tied so that they do not get away from the caravan. The caravan resumes its journey after such break till the afternoon, then it is stopped also for prayer and lunch and taking some rest. They continued walking till sunset. Then the camels are left to rest, having dinner and then sleep<sup>(2)</sup>. The caravans usually stopped for rest at safe places near the water wells, *al khabari* (small water pools formed by rain-falls) and the areas where grass is abundant for grazing their camels.

(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Ali Amer Al-Hussainan.

(2) An interview with Mr. Nasser Sulaiman Al-Marshood.



Camel caravans passing by a city while crossing the desert at the beginning of the previous century.

*Source: Postcard from the belongings of the author (Blohm, Grogan Photo Co.)*

When the caravan stops, upon the Maghrib prayer- they used to fix their tents, then each group or family start to prepare their food after Maghrib prayer for dinner then sleeping. They resumed walking at dawn, and so on till they reached the required location.

Pilgrims accompanied with them all their needs of food which was not available along the way, and a big number of water sacks. Also, each pilgrim took with him «*mezwedah*» which is a big bag made of wool in which foodstuff and «*zihab*» consisting of darabil, sweets, rahsh, ageeli dough, in addition to other needs. On the roads which they passed through, there were many wells, around which shepherds, passersby and residents of adjacent areas who were Bedouin nomads gathered in to get water from these wells.

The water of some of these wells was contaminated as a result of the falling of animals and their wastes in the water, while drinking. This is in addition to dust and dirt which fall in the water as a result of the blowing of winds and constant movement around the wells. Pilgrims used textiles or old cloth to purify the water of residues before using it for cooking or sometimes for drinking. The water was extracted by ropes, the depth of which was sometimes more than sixty meters<sup>(1)</sup>.

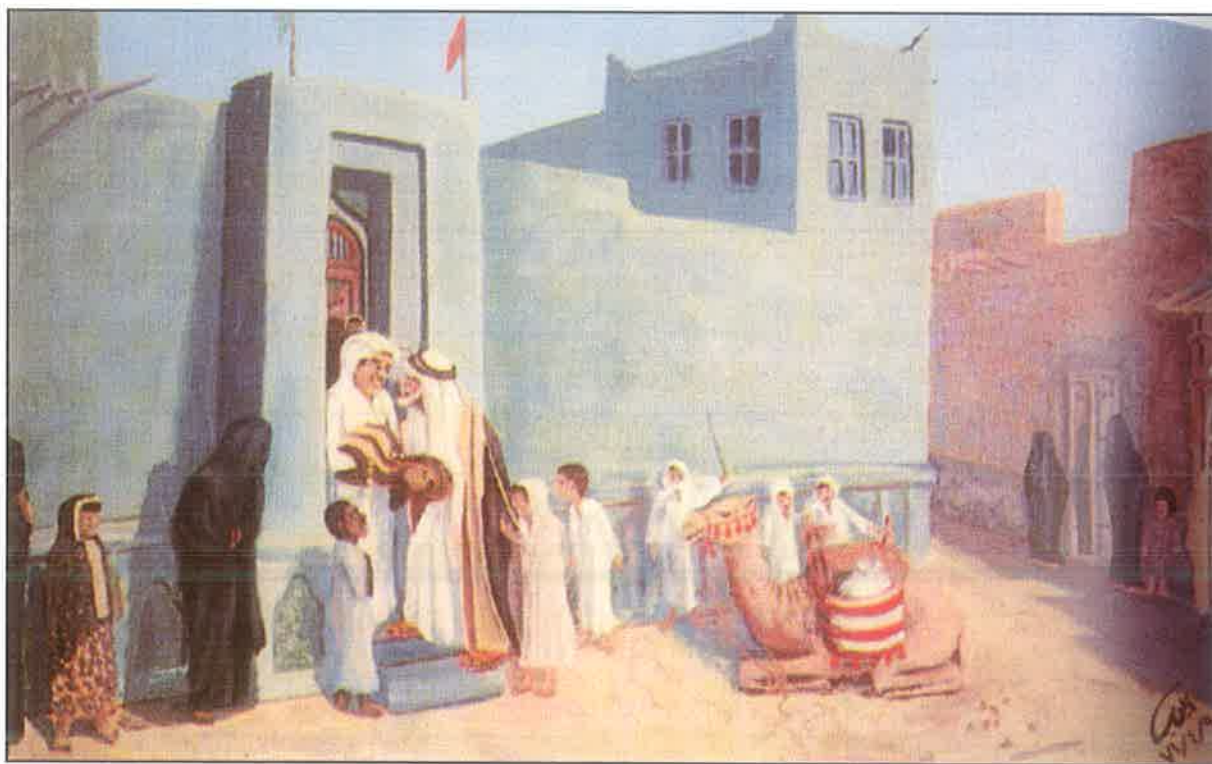
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(1) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussian Al Dashti.

A number of pilgrims - pitched camps at the outskirts of Makkah and Madina - as their accommodation. Others, especially the wealthy, stayed in houses especially prepared for pilgrims against a rent ranging from 50 to 80 Riyals for one house during the pilgrimage period. Each group of pilgrims prepared their needs of food while staying in Makkah and Madina, while the caravan supplied its pilgrims with basic meals consisted of rice, mashed wheat, in addition to dates and coffee. A number of caravans used to carry with them sweets, rahesh, kalija, and ageeli dough<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is said that the roads were filled with burglars who used to rob the pilgrims and take away their belongings by force, and may kill some of them to loot their money. However, this phenomenon disappeared after King Abdulaziz Al Saud assumed the throne<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among the habits which prevailed in Kuwait is that the families of the pilgrims accompanied the pilgrimage caravans when they departed Kuwait till their



Al-Besheer (The Harbinger): You see him standing in the front of a house of a rich man after kneeling his camel in the yard of the district. He announced that their pilgrims were in good condition and would safely arrive. The owner of the house presented him a cloak trimmed with gold which the harbinger put it on above the ones he previously wore.

**Source:** *The Kuwaiti Heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub - Center for Research & Studies on Kuwait - 2008.*

(1) An interview with Haj Makki Hussain Al-Juma.

(2) An interview with Mr. Nasser Sulaiman Al-Marshood.

gathering centers in order to bid them farewell. The ancient place for bidding farewell to the pilgrims was at the location of the American Hospital in Qibla, prior to its construction. This continued till the beginning of the twentieth century when the location was transferred to Jeleeb Al Shyoukh during the twenties of the previous century (1920s), then transferred to Shedadiyah when cars were used. Among the prevailing customs as well was a person from the caravan companions, called «al basher», used to go (the harbengar) to Kuwait City alone before the arrival of the pilgrims to inform their families of their imminent safe arrival. He used to knock the doors of families and announce good news, and get the tips for communicating this news, which could be a dress, or a cloak, head cover and band, or few rupees.

Camel caravan owners who used to go on a pilgrimage in the past included Uthman Al Rashid, Daham and Nabi Al Watri, the campaign of Sanad, Yusuf Al Mailam, A'wadh Bin Shanfa, Abdulhadi Bin Shanfa, Mohammed Al Hudaib, Hussein Al Haddad, Hajj Ali Al Momen, Sulaiman Al Marshoud, Abu Ajaj Al Raysh, Al Magahwi and al Kharif.

The pilgrim used to pay 150 rupees to the caravan owner, excluding food<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Al Jammal**

Al Jammal is the person who drives the camel, also known as (the Guide) «*al hadi*.» Al jammal would be the camel owner or a person hired for this work. This person drives the camel while carrying on its back different goods such as arfaj, yallah or water to deliver them to the locations where they were sold, or to accompany the caravans in the desert, either to deliver goods or to go on a pilgrimage and other journeys.

## **2. Car Campaigns**

For the first time, few cars started going on a pilgrimage to carry pilgrims there by the mid 1920s. Car owners used to accompany with them a guide from the Bedouins to guide them through the roads. The roads were dusty, unpaved, overlapped and of unclear milestones. However, the guide was fully aware - through his experience- of each part. Each car accompanied a cook and a boy to assist in performing the tasks and services required by the pilgrims. Cars in the past used to depart Kuwait at the middle of Thul Qidaa month. They departed from Al Shedadiyah - their gathering center- to Al Soq'abi at the Saudi borders, then they headed to Jariyah where they

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(1) Undoubtedly, there were many campaigns which we disregarded due to the lapse of many years since they stopped and the death of those who knew them or used to accompany them to the Holy Land. Therefore, we apologize to the reader and researcher for this shortcoming.

stayed all the day to finalize entry and customs procedures. Afterwards, they went to water wells locations, such as Maaqla, Al Ramah, Marat, Al Majma'a and Al Afeef, where the road branches off into two directions, one to Makkah where the pilgrims go from Al Afeef to Al Dawdmi, then to other areas ending with Al Ta'ef then to Mecca. As for those going to Al Madina, they go from Al Afeef to Kharis, and then other areas such as Suwaidra, Al Hankya, then Al- Madina<sup>(1)</sup>. The roads were either sandy, which caused many cars to be driven into the sand, or rocky filled with stones, leading to puncture of tyres, and cars sustaining great damages. The road from Kuwait to Makkah or Madina took approximately one week. A number of caravans used to go to Makkah only and then return to Kuwait after performing the rituals. A number of them went from Makkah to Al Madina, which took around three days. Pilgrims stayed there for around one week, then they returned to Kuwait. A number also went to Al Madina first, then to Makkah<sup>(2)</sup>. The journey period decreased to three or four days at later period, when paving the roads with asphalt.

During the 1940s, the number of car campaigns which operated pilgrimage journeys increased, and publicity means like distributing «publicity leaflets» started. This process consisted of distributing pamphlets in which the campaign owner mentioned the types of cars going there, the advantages offered by his campaign to the pilgrims, such as lighting and so forth. Most cars which transported pilgrims were lorries (Bu Aram) and cargo trucks called locally «mak» which were the remains of British military trucks used during World War II in Iraq, which were then purchased by the owners of caravans from there<sup>(3)</sup>. The pilgrims' luggage and items were placed in the lorry's body - crate - while the pilgrims sat on the luggage. The crate was covered with tarpaulin to protect pilgrims from sun, dust and wind. Among the responsibilities of the caravan owner was to provide the pilgrims with tents which they used for accommodation during the journey, as well as water transported in sacks. Each car carried ten sacks, each five hung on one of the two sides of the car. Each pilgrim paid two hundred rupees (around 15 dinars) to the caravan owner against traveling, accommodation, food and performing the religious rituals for which the guide (al mutawef) instruct pilgrims on how to perform them.

Car owners took certain measures to be ready for all emergencies as they accompanied with them big quantities of spare parts such as pistens, «springs», bumpers, in addition to wheels and additional tubes (tyres), and patches to use to repair the damaged tyres. Also, they took with them steel sheets «shinko»

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti

(2) An interview with Mr. Karam Ahmed Ali.

(3) An interview with Mr. Mohamad Sulaiman Al-Moqames.



and rocks to place under the car wheels to use when the car dives into the sand. These incidents occurred tens of times during the journey. They also used to fill number of barrels and tins with fuel, as well as lubrication oil as the road had no fuel stations<sup>(1)</sup>, except a number of centers where benzene barrels were sold. Among the most important problems facing pilgrimage caravans were the scarcity of water, blowing of strong winds which raised dusts and led to the lack of vision and being lost in the desert, in addition to the nonpresence of workshops to repair cars, and many instances of cars diving into the sand<sup>(2)</sup>. Pilgrims cooperate in installing the tents once they reach rest areas. They pushed the lorry and placed tins under its wheels when it dived in the sand. They also collected dry woods from the desert to use as fuel for cooking.

It is note worthy that a number of pilgrims used to go from Kuwait to Jeddah by steamships carrying goods, which passed through a number of Gulf ports, including Kuwait, to unload goods and transport passengers across the ports.

The sea voyage from Kuwait to Jeddah and vice versa took around twelve days. The elderly and some merchants who did not tolerate the hardship of camel riding, traveled by steamships to Jeddah, and then went from there by land to Mecca<sup>(3)</sup>.

In the late 1930s, a Syrian merchant called Abdel Razaq Al-Shamy, came to Kuwait and in 1941, the late Yusuf Shereen Bahbahani joined him in an enterprise to conduct pilgrim journies to the Holy Land. They bought a fleet of cars and hired drivers to drive the pilgrims in groups to Makkah. Al Shamy caravan operated for one year after which it stopped and sold all its cars and other equipment to the late Sulaiman Al Marshoud<sup>(4)</sup>. Car caravans an a pilgrimage tremendously increased later, specially after a huge number of Iranian pilgrimages came to Kuwait in order to hire cars driving them to Makkah (Transit). Among those who owned cars, drove pilgrimage caravans to Makkah whether with their cars or as drivers during the early 1920s were Mohammed Bin Ghadfan, Jassim Al Samhan, Salem Al A'wadh, Abdullah El Nazal, Mahmoud Al Aabd, Albedawi, Hassan Buksh, Saud Al Yusuf Al Motawa, Abdel Aziz Al Fahd, Saleh Al Fahd, Hajj Ghulom Malek, Karam Ahmad Ali, Al Nemash and Al Hadib. They were also famous for their ability of discerning roads and repairing any technical problems with the cars.

The pilgrims used to pay a tax of fifty silver Riyals to the Saudi government.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Karam Ahmad Ali.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussain Al-Dashti.

(3) An interview with Hajj Eassa Haider Al-Rasheed.

(4) An interview with Mr. Nasser Sulaiman Al-Marshood.





## إلى صحن بيت الله الحرام !

« وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَا تَوَكُّبًا لِرَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَىٰ كُلُّ ذَا مِرْيَةٍ يَأْتِيَنَّكَ مِنْ كُلِّ فُجٍّ عَمِيقٍ » . وآية كريم :

### شركة الطيران اللبناني

التي دُفعت في سفراتها حتى اليوم ٥١٤٣٩٣٦ ميل في الجو، ونقلت ٨١١٦٣٠١ سافرًا، تسترّف بإعلان استعدادها لنقل حجاج بيت الله على متن طائراتها الضخمة، بقودها ربانية ماهرة مشهود لهم بالخبرة والمقدرة، وتؤمّن راحتهم وسلامة وصولهم إلى بيت الله بإذن الله .

### راجعوا مكتب الشركة الرئيسي

بيروت - ساحة البرلمان - تلفون : ٦٠-٩٦ ، ٦١-٩٦ ، ٦٢-٩٦ ، ٦٣-٩٦ ، ٦٤-٩٦ ، ٦٥-٩٦ ، ٦٦-٩٦ .

[ المطار : ٦٦-٨٨ ، ٦٧-٨٨ ]

القدس - باب الشاهرة - تلفون : ٧٨

بغداد - تلفون : ٤٩٩٣

نيقوسيا - الوكلاء شركة هيل ونيلايث - تلفون : ٦٥٤ / ٥ / ٦

الكويت - السادة صالح جمال وشركاه - تلفون : ٤٤٥

الظهران - مكتب الشركة - تلفون : ١٦٨

دمشق - الوكلاء شركة الشبان أميركان، شارع الفردوس - تلفون : ١٢٥٠٠ ، ١٢٥٠١

بصر [ القاهرة ] مكتب شركة الطيران اللبناني ، لوكندة شيبك - تلفون : ٤٩٠٧

شعارنا : الخدمة ، السرعة ، الإقتان

A publicity leaflet for those wishing to go on a pilgrimage by airplanes at the end of the 1940s.  
Source: From the belongings of Mr. Ali Al Rayes.

It was the responsibility of the owner of the caravan to collect the tax from the pilgrims and pay it to Saudi Business Office in return for a receipt<sup>(1)</sup>.

In 1948, the first plane, a then Saudi military plane, began to take the pilgrims from Kuwait to Makkah. The seats of the plane were wooden fixed on both sides of the plane for pilgrims to sit opposite each other, said some of pilgrims who joined the campaign. Since then wealthy people began to use this means to travel to the Holy Land. Hence they avoided the suffering travels overland in addition to fatigue and a lot of problems encountering and straining them. Therefore, planes became more popular and gradually attracted pilgrims in the middle of the 1950s.

## **Simple Jobs Performed By Citizens**

### **The Woodcutter**

The woodcutter is the person who collects woods from the trees and grass from the desert and carries them to the city for sale to the citizens as a source of income. No one in old Kuwait could do without logs and wild grass to have fire and fuel in houses and bakeries until the beginning of 1950s. Kuwaiti desert is rich with numerous species of wild plants such as *Alhemd*, *Alarfaj*, *Elherm*, *Alsereem*, *Alsendah*, and *Althameem* specially during spring. It was a habit of the woodcutter to wake up in the early morning taking his donkey, heading to the desert and carrying his hammer and sickle to cut wood, logs and plants, collect and put them in his bag or tie them with ropes and finally load them on his donkey. During spring, as there are plenty of plants, most woodcutters took three to four donkeys to collect huge amounts of plants during their wandering in different areas of Kuwait such as Nugra, Hawally and Shamiya. Others went to remote areas such as Jeleeb Al Shyoukh and Osheirij where there were many plants. The woodcutters arrived early at nearby areas, but took longer time to reach remote areas. After arrival, they cut trees and plants, collect and tighten them in big packages called «Shokban». «Shokban» is an amount of wood tied by ropes made of sheep's hair. Those packages are carried by donkeys to the city. The woodcutter worked all day till the afternoon after which he returned to Safat which he reached in the evening where he could sell the collected wood. Most of the houses in the past contained special room for storing wood called «Fire wood chamber» which was used to collect different species of wood. This was due to the fact that a plenty of cheap wood is available in this season. The wood was used all year as fuel or fodder for animals. The cost

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(1) An interview with Hajj Gulum Malek Hussain.

of one package «*darb*», i.e. the amount carried by the donkey for one time, ranged from four Anna to half Rupee according to the quantity. It was one of the woodcutter's job to deliver the wood to his client's home. Wood and Al Arfaj were also brought by camel owners as well as by «*Al Mohkakra*» from the desert, and then sold it at Safat. Hawally, Shuwaikh, Kadhma and Subiyah were the best places where huge plants grew for fuel.

It was well known that the owners of middle-sized sail ships were bounding to Kadhema, Al Subiyah and Qudhay desert to collect wood and to bring it to the city for sale.

### **Al Hashash (The Mower)**

He is a person who collects wild plants and grass suitable for feeding sheep. He used a sickle and a hammer to cut and put them in the saddle of his donkey to carry them to the market for selling.

### **Key Maker And Seller**

Few number of Kuwaitis worked in the past in molding keys as well as mending and selling old ones. The key maker used to sit on the ground putting in front of him a small wooden box in which he placed the keys for sale. For those who want to copy or buy keys, they went to the key maker who in turn went to the house to know the lock model and took the measurements of the required key. Then the key maker had to make a clay mold for the required shape in which he melt the copper, then poured the melted copper in the mold to start forming it. To know whether the key is suitable for the lock or not, the key maker put his ear near the lock while trying to open it then he filed its notches to fit with the lock.

Many key makers were famous for their experience in making the suitable key and molding any of its models. The prominent Key makers were two persons known as Bu Sanad and Hassan Al Salbi.

### **Al Basta Owner**

Al basta are simple goods displayed by sellers who sat on the ground in the market place, putting in front of them certain commodities for sale, as they owned no shops to practice their business. Each one of them laid a straw mat or a piece of cloth to put his goods on waiting for the passersby to buy. Al basta owner may sell vegetables, clothes and sewing stuff and similar goods. Basta owners can be seen in markets and street corners in which many of the passersby prefer buying from them because of their cheap prices compared with shops.

## **Al Souaika Seller**

Some people occupied places in the market selling a commodity called «*Souaika*», a substance like tobacco. Souaika looked like coffee and most sellers sat on the ground selling such commodity in Al Gharabally and Sweets Markets. Souaika is made from fine tobacco, rose water and *Al hardak* «hard salts brought from East Africa», *habat helwa* and thyme. They all are mixed together for sale to the users<sup>(1)</sup>. Those addicted to this habit put al souaika in thier mouth between front teeth and the lower lips and suck its powder mixed with saliva until it runs out.

## **Raai Al Beya'a**

In the alleys, an array of sellers were seen in the old days wandering residential areas carrying a package of clothes ( *boksha* ) in which different sorts of clothes, sewing materials and other commodities were sold to women. Most women in the past were reluctant to go to the market as it was considered an undesirable social habit for many families. The seller used to shout loudly saying a Beya'a. Beya'a. (i.e. materials for sale). Called by the housewives, the seller used to sit in front of the door and showed them his goods to buy their needs. It was a habit for the housewives to haggle the sellers about the price. The Jews in the past till 1930s performed this work in the old city as they were selling clothes using the same means and shouting «kham», «kham». Al mahara, residents of Hadramout, began to practice the same activity from the mid of 1940s.

## **Al Fassam**

He is the person who separates the dates stones (seeds) in order to be collected and sold as a fodder for cattle. This job was rare in Kuwait as farmers used to occupy this work in places where palm trees are overabundant such as Basrah city where Al Fassams separate huge amount of stones from the dates. After the separation process, the dates were stuffed with almond and other mixed nuts and are put in cardboard boxes to be exported to India and Europe. The workshop in which this process was conducted is called «*Jerdagh*», and the seller of dates stones called *fassam*.

It is said that some of Kuwaiti sailors were occupying themselves in their spare time during the voyage to India by putting dates in small one-kilo boxes to be sold in India and earn some money. Each of them used to buy a package of dates, weighing about fifty kilograms - called «*galah*» - from Basra in order to remove the stone from the dates and pack them in boxes for sale.

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(1) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia - Hamad Mohammed Al Saiedan - P.463.

## **The Blower (Al Naffakh)**

Al-Naffakh is the person who operates the blower, a leather tool used to compress air. It was used by blacksmiths, copper makers and jewelers for the purpose of heating different metals to shape them as required. The person who undertook this work was called «Al Naffakh», and we pointed out to his work when we addressed the handicrafts in which he worked.

## **Letters And Petitions Writers**

He is the person who writes letters and petitions for the illiterates to submit to government bodies to process their transactions. They were also asked to write letters for their relatives abroad, the writer sat on a piece of mat in front of government body and in front of him a small wooden box, ink, a pen, and some papers to receive the customers' requests and fulfill them. The writer kept by heart the preludes of each letter and the wording of each petition presented to any government body, the court, Municipality, or any official person who is responsible for fulfilling citizens others' interests. The writer receives a small amount of money that can be four Annas for each letter.



Petition writer busy writing a letter for a woman.

*Source: Kuwait National Museum.*

## **The Clerk (Al Kaitab)**

He is the person who works as a clerk for merchants, ship owners or sea captains to follow up their business and accounts. The clerk learns the profession of writing registers and accounting, travel and diving accounts at a young age by his teacher. Very few teachers in old traditional schools taught their pupils the art of handling registers, as most of them were eager to teach them the holy Quran and writing.



A petition writer. The petition writer used to sit at the markets or opposite government bodies to write petitions and letters for a small fee.

*Source: Ancient Things- Khalil Ibrahim Al Sheno- Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Establishment- Manama - Bahrain.*

## **Calligraphers (Al Naggash Or Al Khattat)**

Kuwait was famous for few numbers of calligraphers who were called «naggash». They were few and among them at the beginning of the last century was the late Mullah Abdeen Bin Hassan Bin Baqer who runs his own private school for teaching Quran.

## **Ash Collector (Raaie Al Ramaad)**

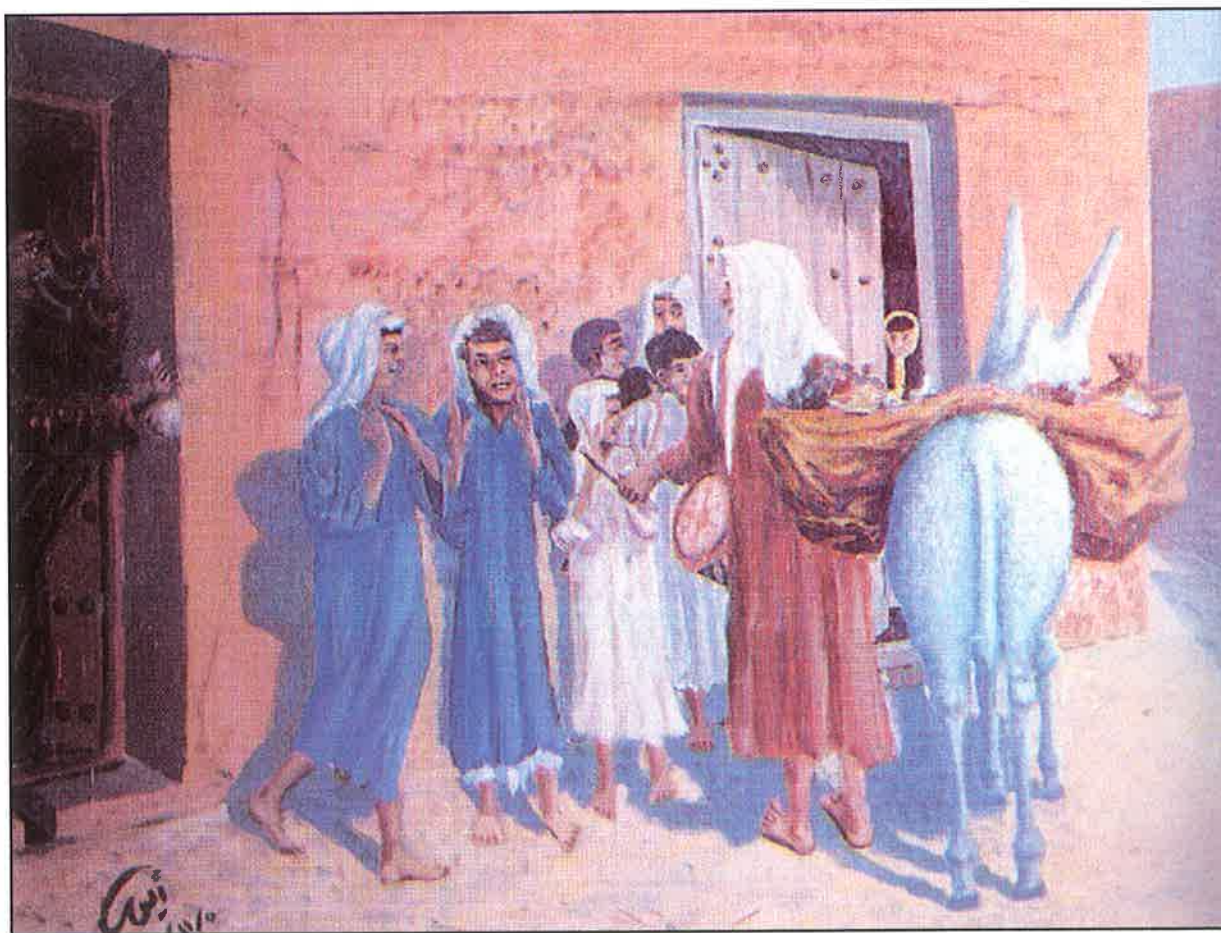
Raaie al-Ramaad used to wander in the alleys with his donkey searching for the remains of ashes while shouting and saying «who has ashes .....?» «who has ashes.....?».

Hearing him shouting, housewives call him to come to take the piled up ashes which he puts in a bag hung on his donkey. The ash collectors used to sell it to those building their houses in order to put it on the roofs to absorb humidity and prevent rain water from leaking into the buildings' rooms. People used to burn wood, qorm and fronds for cooking and as a result, ashes piled up in huge quantities which cause the houses owners to get rid of it and therefore, Raaie Al Ramad's job was created.



## Bu Tobaila

Bu Tobaila is the person who used to wander the streets in Ramadhan's nights to awaken people to have «sohoor», a meal in Islamic tradition that should be eaten before dawn. He used a drum as a means to awaken people and he hits it while shouting with some rhymes and invocations. He used to wander also in the streets during Eid Al-Fitr (end of Ramadan) accompanying his donkey, hitting the drum and greeting people on that occasion saying» adat aleekom wa alshar ma yejeekom (Happy Eid and may you be protected form evil). So people gave him some food like rice and dates and sometimes some money. He was accompanied by children following him applauding and repeating his sayings.



Butabailah (by day): That man appeared in the mid of Ramadhan and on holidays. He (accompanied by boys) roamed among houses clapping and singing. The people gave him money and food in return for awaking them to have the light meal before daybreak during Ramadhan (sohoor).

*Source: The Kuwaiti Heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub- Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait- 2008.*

## Al Motarreb

Al-Motarreb searches for lost things such as sheep, money, ornaments and young children. He wanders streets and alleys shouting loudly and saying «O those who have found that thing», mentioning the lost article and the reward that will be given to the person who finds it. He undertakes his work for certain payment of money. In addition, the owner of the lost item will give those who find it and bring them a reward as well. Al motarreb has to mention the reward to encourage people to inform about the lost things specially when the lost things are rare. As for those who can't afford paying back for getting the lost things, Al motarreb has to indicate that in his shouting and saying «O those who find and bring the lost things will be rewarded by God .....».

## The Conductor (Al Muwaddy)

He is the person who avails himself in the market offering people to deliver their purchased things to their homes. For example when a person buys a cow or a goat, Al Muwaddy will take it to the house without the owner bearing any hardship against a simple amount of money.



Al Muwaddy delivering a goat to the house of the buyer against a certain amount of money.

*Source: The Kuwaiti Heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub- Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait- 2008.*

## **Garbage Collector (Khumayem)**

The word Khumayem is given to the person who collects water and garbage. He passed - with one or more donkeys - by houses or waste disposal units in residential areas or markets to collect waste for sale to gypsum workshops to use as fuel to make gypsum against a simple amount of money.

## **Raai Al Wasokha**

A number of coolies (donkey owners) were accustomed to passing by the alleys to pick up human waste to sell to farmers. Each one of them used to call while passing by the alleys «wasokha ...wasokha», so whoever wants to remove the waste would call him in order to pick it up. Farmers in the past used human fertilizers for farming certain types of crops such as melon, cucumber and other products. The farms were spread at some uninhabited areas inside and outside the City Wall, around which a mud wall was usually built and a number of wells were dug up there.

## **The Assistant (Al Noker)**

«Noker» is given to the servant, guard or concierge doing any job to the his employer (al maazeb) such as guarding the stores or as a messenger «taresh», etc.

## **The Boy (Al Sabi)**

Al sabi (boy) is the person working as a servant or office boy for the shop owner to assist him in the shop or at home. The boy used to transfer goods, clean the shop and arrange the goods, as well as dealing with customers.

## **Al Coolie**

He is the worker who performs different tasks against a simple wage.

## **Al Mzoori**

Al mzoori is the worker performing simple tasks such as building, against a certain wage. The word «mzoori» is used sometimes to refer to the mason.

## **The Guard (Al- Natoor)**

Al Natoor is the market's guard who used to stay at important places and on the roofs of shops in old Kuwait as their working locations at night. The guard's work was divided into two shifts, the first starts at twilight «Maghrib» till dawn, and the second from dawn till twilight. Usually, the guard builds a small truss

for himself on top of shop roofs to shelter him from cold weather and rain. During the night shift, the guard would shout loudly «Sahi.. Sahi.. i.e, «awake.. awake» every once in a while to make sure that his colleague who is twenty or thirty meters away from him is not sleeping. His companion responds to him with the same shout. Hence the remaining guards in the market interact to make sure that all guards are alert for any emergency.

### **Al Fedawi**

Al Fedawi is the personal guard of the ruler and a number of senior members of the ruling family. The word is derived from «fedayee» Bodyguard. Al Fedawiya, plural of fedawi, Bodyguards formed in the past the main body for protection of the public order in the country before building the army. They accompanied and protected senior Sheikhs and guests of the country. Each one of them carried a rifle and bullets placed in a belt wrapped around their waists. The role of bodyguard gradually decreased until it completely vanished after independence.

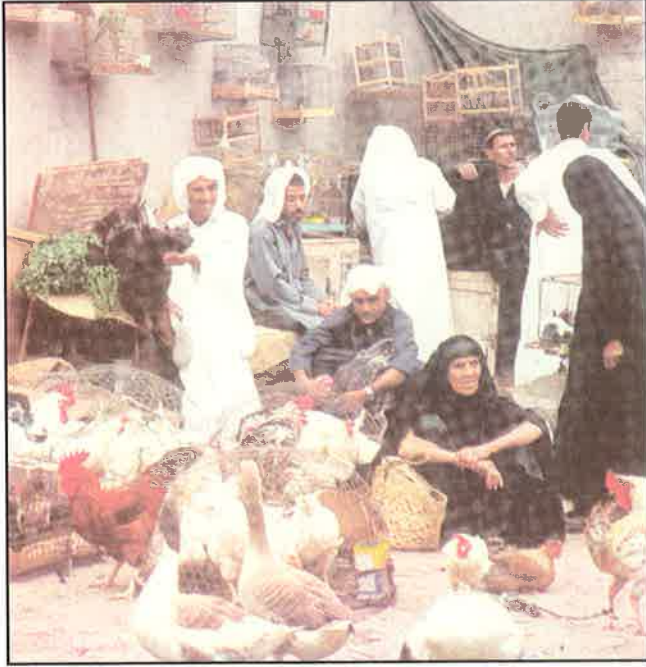


Fedawi (Bodyguard) holding his weapon

*Source: Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freethe- 1956*

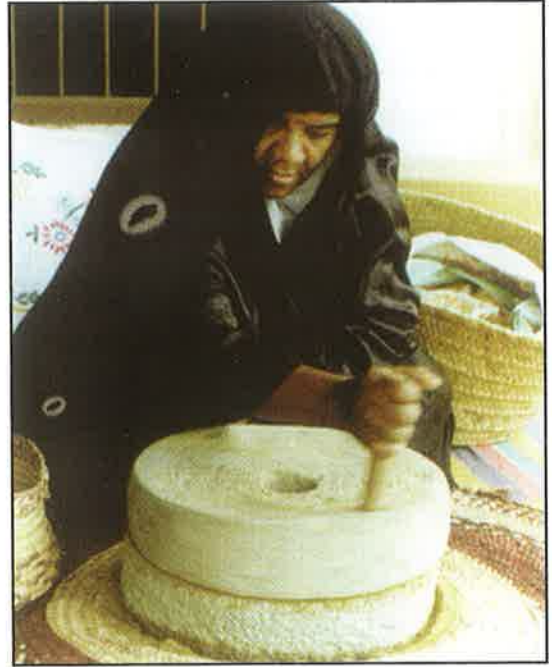
### **Miscellaneous jobs performed by some women**

Many women in the past performed miscellaneous work as a source of living, including selling, buying, producing a number of goods and household commodities and offering different services to the people. The work carried out by women differed according to the status of each one of them, her experience and residence. The opportunities were available for the needy to practice any honest work to provide income for whoever wants to work. A number of women, for example, used to grind cereals by the manual mill against a certain wage, while others used to sell the clothes they sewed or purchased.



A number of sellers placing chicken, ducks and pigeons in front of them in crates at the Chicken and Pigeons Market which was active on Fridays

*Source: Ministry of Information*



Grinding cereals by the hand mill was the trade of some families which yielded a modest income

*Source: Ancient Things- Khalil Ibrahim Al Shino- Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est- Manama- Bahrain*



A number of women lived with their dependants on selling different products such as different types of ready made garments.

*Source: Ancient Things- Khalil Ibrahim Al Shino- Al Ayam Press, Publishing and Distribution Est- Manama- Bahrain*

Other women sold hens, eggs and other simple goods at the Wool Market or at other place. There was a special market where women sold miscellaneous goods called «Women Market», while other women used to weave wool and stitch hand carpets «sadu». Another women used to offer their services during different occasions. We will address these crafts which represented a significant source of living for many families.

### **Sellers At Women Market**

This market is comprised of big number of female sellers each one used to sit on the ground placing her goods in front of her on top of a straw mat or a piece of cloth. The seller used to arrange her goods in an attractive manner. Customers either women, or men, used to go to her to buy their requirements. Most of the goods sold by female were cosmetics such as henna, kohl, perfume, deodrant, needles, scissors, threads and robes, veils and cloaks, as well as men garments like head cover, ready made «dishdasha», socks, shoes in addition to a number of household needs like knives and carpentry tools.



Sellers at the old Women Market

*Source: Center for Ressarch and Studies on Kuwait*

This is in addition to selling locks and cooking utensils. A number of women also used to sit there and sell some foodstuff like eggs and other items. The Women Market in the past was located near «Al Maseel», east to Safat Square. However, it was relocated during the mid of 1940s to Al Dehla where a market covered with metal sheets was built there and called «Wajef Market» or «Women Market».



Women Market or «Wajef Market» built at the late 1940s. A number of women are seen sitting on the ground to display their goods for sale, surrounded by buyers.

*Source: Kuwait Register Today- 1956- Printing and Publishing Department*



A seller at the Women Market displaying her goods «zari dress» to a buyer.

*Source: Al Arabi Magazine*

## **Greengrocer (Vegetable Seller)**

A number of Bedouin women were retailers of vegetables at settings near the vegetable Market. Each of them placed the vegetable bunches in front of her, either in a plate made of palm tree branches stripped of their leaves, or in a basket or on a small straw mat or piece of cloth. The women used to sell the crops grown in the farms owned by their husbands or relatives or used to buy them from the other farm lords inside the city, outside the City wall or from Kuwait's villages.

Among the products sold by vegetable sellers are radish, coriander, fenugreek, legumes and many others. These species were sold by «*shadda*» or small bunch. Each number of bunches were sold for a certain price. For example, every six bunches of legumes were sold for one or two Paisas and each 5 bunches of coriander for one Paisa, and so on.

## **Sellers Of Foodstuffs And Other Products**

A number of women also sold other foodstuffs. They used to sit at different places in the markets, according to their goods. For example, yoghurt, beans and chick peas seller used to sit at the Bakers Market to sell these products. As for the seller of woven threads, they used to go to the Wool Market to sell their woolen thread, which was bought by the weavers who sold them to the tailors to make cloaks and women dresses. Other women used to sell peanuts and zababeet (shell) at the entrances of the markets or some squares near the market.

## **The Matchmaker (Al Khattaba)**

A person or a woman who likes to arrange marriages. A number of women were engaged in this function, as they knew the families which have girls at the age of marriage. Al Khattaba used to mediate to make agreement between the families of the boy and the girl<sup>(1)</sup>. She would go to these houses to see the suitable girls of the same social level of the young man, and then informs the mother that this young man wishes to marry her daughter. So, the mother would ask for a certain period in order to negotiate with the father and know the status of the young man's family.

Al Khattaba used to describe the financial and social status of the family of the proposed groom to the bride's family. Then, she would go to the groom's family to describe the bride. If the engagement takes place, Al Khattaba would get a certain amount of money from both families of the boy and the family of the girl<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) The shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopaedia - Hamad Al-Saaidan - 1971-p.512.

(2) Ibid p.699.



## **Al Hawafah**

Al hawafa serves the bride during the marriage week and is entrusted by the bride's mother to make the recipes during the groom's stay at the bride's house during the first week of marriage, according to old marriage traditions<sup>(1)</sup>.

## **Daya (The Housemaid)**

She is the woman servant in a house who cleans rooms, and makes other services, washing clothes at sea for the family, serving the bride, caring for young children and feeding them, as well as cleaning them against a wage.

## **The Midwife**

A number of women were trained to assist women in having their babies, and cared for the baby and breastfeeding the baby during the forty days following delivery, especially the first ten days. During such period, the midwife used to clean the baby, taking him/her to sleep and guiding the mother on how to care for the baby and protect his/her health. The midwife may sleep several days with the new mother in order to care for the baby and spend the night with her to care for him/her in the event of occurrence of any emergency.

## **Phlebotomy (Al Hayyama)**

A number of women used to do «cupping» which is extracting «extra» or «spoilt» blood from the body by making small incisions below the neck between the shoulders to suck out blood. A special device resembling the tea cup is used in cupping, after emptying it of air by burning a match stick inside it to remove the air before placing it on the incisions to absorb the blood. Also, some of these cups had an opening at the bottom through which alhayyama sucked up the air, and then blood would flow out from the wound to the device.

## **Al Taggaga**

Al Taggaga is the woman contracting for organizing weddings<sup>(2)</sup> or is the owner of folkloric songs band. Also, this name is given to members of the folklore songs band. The folkloric songs band used drums and tambourine in their work, which is singing different songs and verses during wedding ceremonies, birthdays and different events.

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(1) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia - Hamad Al-Saiedan -1971-p.463.

(2) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia-Hamad Al-Saiedan-1971-p.1504.



# *Chapter Three*

## *Workshops and Miscellaneous Commercial Activities*

### **Introduction**

Kuwait witnessed at the mid 19th century a number of workshops for the production of some necessary commodities in business quantities to fulfil the demand of the population and correspond with the means of comfort witnessed in the countries they visited for trading purposes, such as India and East Asian countries.

With the advent of the twentieth century and subsequent developments, such business expanded and diversified, and satisfied the needs of bigger sectors of the population. However, their technical circulation was restricted in view of the small size of the market and the limited demand. That discouraged the expansion and development of the production process, and not benefiting from the mass production technologies, which reduces costs and the possibility of exporting to the outside markets. The foodstuff, building materials and services sectors were among the first economic sectors to witness the development of the production process.

We will address on the following pages the activities related to the production, followed by the services sectors.

## *Part one*

### *Workshops*

Some small workshops began operation in Kuwait in the second part of the 19th century. Such workshops were established to satisfy the basic needs of population. Among the most remarkable ones were food production workshops whose development took several stages that started from manual production, then the use of animals, to the accessibility of machines in some sectors in the beginning of the 1930s. On the onset of the twentieth century, an array of workshops was established for the purpose of satisfying the needs of exporting as it was the ultimate aspirations in that time. Among the established workshops during that era were the workshops of grinding wheat and producing sesame oil, ice and other products.

#### **Food Production Workshops**

##### **(1) Grinding Grains**

The majority of Kuwaiti families in the past relied on themselves to make most of materials used in preparing food production such as al taheen (flour) and granuled grains. The hand mill, «*menhaz*»<sup>(1)</sup>, mortar, «rolling stick», and furnace (oven) were among the main requirements and basic tools in the old Kuwaiti houses. For example, the hand mill was used by the Kuwaiti housewife to grind the wheat and turn it into flour. On the other hand, *al menhaz* was used to crush the wheat grains turning them into granules to cook the main meals especially in the holy month Ramadhan. For crushing wheat some wealthy families used to hire female workers in return for a certain pay, while others had some servants. For huge quantities of flour used by bakers, restaurants and confections workshops, that began to be rife by the end of the 19th century, they were set up in special places by some citizens to satisfy the rising needs of people.

Such places were called «al madar» which was a small workshop containing a big hand mill that was run by animals such as donkeys or mules to grind wheat.

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(1)«Al mehnaz» is a wooden container which looks like a middle-sized barrel. It is made of tree roots cavity in which grains are put and crushed by using a big piece of wood called al mehnaz's hand to turn grains into granules «gereesh».

From the outset of the 20th century, the process of grinding wheat was developed and a number of grinding machines running by diesel were brought into Kuwait.

### **A) Al Madar**

Al madar as -previously mentioned - was a small workshop used for producing flour from wheat. It comprised of a big hand mill whose diameter might reach two meters centered by a hole in which a big metal or wooden funnel was fixed in the upper place of the hand mill through which the wheat is poured. The hand mill ran by a blindfolded donkey or a mule. The funnel was filled with wheat every once in a while, and the wheat went down from the funnel through the hole made in the center of the hand mill to be ground and turned into flour.

The work at al madar begins from early morning as the workers empty the sack of the wheat and sieve it out to clean it from dust and stains. Then, the wheat is put through the funnel which pours it gradually into the mill to get it ground. The owner of al madar gets paid according to the quantity, as he takes about two annas for each oqiya brought to him from his clients such as bakers, owners of candy workshops and big families.

Work at al madarat (plural of al madar) flourished due to the great demand of bakeries and candy workshops in subsequent times as there was a trading boom after World War I. A number of merchants coming from other nearby countries to Kuwait caused the increase of numbers of restaurants and bakeries in al Khababeez Market branching from Al Gharabally Market. In subsequent times, al madarat owners were encouraged by that boom to buy amounts of wheat for their own accounts, to grind and sell them directly to the shops in the markets instead of completely depending on the earnings gained from grinding grains for others<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the most famous Madarat in the eastern region of the old City was Madar Al Shamaly established by the late Eisa Ali Al Shamaly in the year 1885 as it was near Derwazat Abd Al Razzaq. During the same period another madar was also established by Sayed Ali Al Sayed Ahmad Al Khabbaz Al Bahrani. Madar Al Shamaly continued its work for about seventy years in an alley near the late Eisa Al Shamaly house in Derwazat Abd Al Razzak. At the beginning, the madar had one hand mill but another one was added afterwards. Whenever he was in need for a new hand mill or in need for changing the old one, the late Eisa Al Shamaly

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(1) An interview with the late Abdul-Razzak H. Al Shamaly.

used to go with a number of his workers to «Al Watyah» region at Al Qibla with his tools to cut the rocks from the sea coast in that rocky district famous for its rocks. The stone used in the hand mill is different from the stone used in building process. Due to the heaviness of the mill which ranged from 200 to 300 kg, and because of the difficulty of carrying it by any available means at that time, its centre was drilled in order to put a thick piece of wood inside it in order that a number of workers could roll it to al madar's site<sup>(1)</sup>.

The owner of the mill used to mend it regularly by coarsening its surface - or «carving» it - cleaning its holes to remove away any flour sticking in it as a result of its long use. Used for a long time, the mill surface, became soft and inadequate for milling the grains. The surface of the mill, is coarsened -in contradiction to the mill used for milling sesame- by carving paralleled lines on its surface as the latter is coarsened by boring or drilling its surface to make small holes on it<sup>(2)</sup>. The mill usually lasts without damage for about 25 years if its rocks are solid.

Working in al madarat continued and flourished till the outset of the twentieth century when machinery for milling grains driven with diesel became popular in the country. The process of milling grains and turning them into flour using machines gradually became more popular as it was quicker, easier and also cheaper for the customer. As a result, demand on al madarat services was negatively affected and hence their income started to decline. Consequently, working in al madarat became extremely difficult and some madars closed down and others turned into sesame milling workshops. Among those madarat that turned into «karkah» i.e., a workshop for making «harda»<sup>(3)</sup>, was the one owned by the late Eisa Al Shamaly, that began to make «harda» since the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century.

## **B) The Machinery For Grinding Grains**

In his book titled «From Here Kuwait Started», the late Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem said, the first machine for crushing grains was brought to Kuwait in about the year 1917 during the reign of the late Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah. It was brought by the late Hamad Al Khalid. Other sources said, that the first person to bring a milling machine was the late Yusuf Boodai in the year 1914. Other reports mentioned that Saleh Mahaleb, one of the Jews who resided in Kuwait during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah and the other rulers who preceded him, brought a small wheat-milling machine in the year 1907.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Rashid Abdullah Al Shamaly.

(2) An interview with the late Abdul-Razzak H. Al-Shamaly.

(3) Hardah is the sesame seeds oil.

Failed to manage the work of such machine, he had to sell it<sup>(1)</sup>. Ma'arafi Family also owned, in the commencement of the last century, grains crushing machine located on the sea coast in al- Sharq area opposite Ma'arafi's diwaniyah. While Al Alghanim Family brought a giant grains grinding machine in the year 1915, it did not succeed due to its large production capability which could produce about 100 sacks per day, while Kuwait needs didn't exceed 30 sacks. So, they had to get it stopped for some years and had to turn it -after making some amendments- into a machine for producing ice. Unable to complete its business, it was sold to the late Agha Ali Muhammed Ridha in the mid 1930s who ran it for milling grains in Al Dehlah area on an estate owned by the late Sheikh Ali Al Khalifa Al Sabah, currently the site of Jowharat Al Khaleej building in Safat<sup>(2)</sup>. The number of milling machines increased later and two Indians working in Kuwait brought into the city two milling machines. Unable to attract customers, they were obliged to sell them to the late Agha Ali, who bought them for 1,000 rupee each. He was successful in managing and operating them. One of them was located in Fereej Al Midan in Sharq area, while the other was located in Al Safat square<sup>(3)</sup>. In this connection, the late Sheikh Abdel Aziz Hamadah had a machine in Al Dehlah area, while another one was owned by the late Abdullah Al Uthman in the same area. Another machine owned by the two brothers late Sh'abaan and Ghuloom Ghadanfary located in Al Midan square at the outset of the 1940s.

### **Description Of The Milling Machine And Method of Operation**

The grains milling machine consisted mainly of two rounded big rocks, which form the mill crushing the grains. Those two rocks were superimposed vertically opposite the ordinary mill. The two rocks were set on a hard frame of iron; in addition to that, they were attached to a wheel run by «qayish», (a belt), which was attached to a bigger wheel. That wheel was run by a machine, driven by diesel, set on a high concrete base and located about seven meters away from the mill. A chimney was fixed near the machine, connected to the ceiling where there was a hole to drive the smoke outside.

The two big pieces of the mill were made from a special kind of hard rock. One of the two pieces (wheel) was static while the other was dynamic. The diameter of the rock was 30 inches (about 80 cm). A conical funnel was put above the mill which was called «durgoman». Such funnel was filled with grains that were gradually poured downward between the wheels of the mill through a hole at the

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(1) An interview with the late Eissa Haider Al-Rasheed.

(2) An interview with the late Abdel Sattar Agha Ali.

(3) An interview with the late Abdel Sattar Agha Ali.

bottom of the funnel<sup>(1)</sup>. Three workers, headed by a technician, were assigned to operate the machine, follow it up, fix and maintain it. The machine was cleaned and coarsened once a week.

The machine operates from early morning till noon. Then, the work stopped for a break to be resumed after Al'Asr prayer till the evening. People came with the grains in «zeblan», i.e. sacks for milling for few paisas, the then circulated currency. Bakers used to bring the wheat in sacks carried by donkeys, then, they took the flour to their shops. The sack, weighed about 30 oqiyas (about 75 kg), costing about half rupee to grind. During certain occasions especially in the holy month of Ramadhan and during spring, the machines operated till late night when «al kashatah», (picnickers), started to go camping outside the city. Accordingly, the demand for bread, sweets, cakes and «baqsum» and similar items tremendously increased<sup>(2)</sup>.



1940s & 1930s Grinding machine

*Source: Ancient Things, Khalil Ibrahim al-Shino, al-Ayam Press, Publishing & Distribution Est, Manama - Bahrain.*

It is noteworthy that the number of grain-milling machines greatly increased by the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, specially after the Second World War when a huge amount of wheat, for the account of Saudi Arabia, used to be brought to Kuwait from Canada to be milled and freighted as flour in big lorries, stayed from the allied troops in Iraq. One order might reach 300 sacks so the machines used to work day and night to satisfy the needs of the increased orders at that time. Such business prosperity encouraged the rise in bringing more additional machines into the city. Some merchants specialized in exporting wheat and flour to Saudi Arabia among whom were late Mohammed Abdullah Al Rabi'ah, Abdul Aziz Al Wazzan, Al Zamel and Al Abdaly. By the end of the 1940s, competition among grain-milling machines massively increased, leading to business stagnation and market recession where the milling price declined. As a result of a decision made by the government in the onset of the 1950s to directly import flour from

(1) An interview with the late A'shour Al-Sabbagh.

(2) An interview with the late Abdel Sattar Agha Ali.



abroad for selling to the citizens, grain-milling workshops deteriorated, and many units closed doors due to the losses being incurred<sup>(1)</sup>.

The machines of Boodai and Agha Ali were the most famous milling machines that continued for more than forty years till the middle of the 1950s. A brief on each of them follows:

### **Boodai Machine**

The first location for Boodai machine brought by the late Yusuf Boodai was close to Al Rashdan Market located in the north east of Dakhli Market. It offered its services to families and bakeries. That machine continued working for more than forty years, until it became obsolete. Then, the late Mohammed Yusuf Boodai bought a new machine from Basrah, which was fixed at Al Faraj road near al- Abdulrazzak Square. The operation and maintenance of the machine were supervised by the late Saleh Al Yehya. That simple machine was easily operated, and was not exposed to big breakdowns throughout its operation period. It continued working there till the beginning of the fifties when the government imported ready-made flour from Australia at low prices for sale to the citizens<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Agha Ali Machine**

Agha Ali machine was famous for grinding grains and cereals in Sharq Area during the 1930s. The late Agha Ali Mohammed Ridha was a grain-merchant in the Merchants' Market, and had at one time three machines for grinding wheat, one in Al Midan area in Sharq, the second in Safat and the third in Dehla. He purchased the first machine in approximately the year 1932 from an Indian person who brought it to Kuwait, but was not successful in covering up the expenses of work. The machine was made in Lahore, India. Agha Ali moved the machine to Al Midan area to serve the residents of Sharq. He purchased another machine after some time and operated it at Safat area. In the mid 1930s, he purchased a flour machine owned by Alghanim family which he operated in Al Dehla area in order to provide the residents of that area with flour. In the year 1947, he brought an English-made machine of «Garnder» brand, which he fixed in Safat, behind the old building of the British Bank for the Middle East. He imported it directly from Britain. Its capacity was 40 hp. Agha Ali machines continued grinding the grains for a long period till they stopped their operation completely in the year 1370 AH, (1951 AD)<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with the late Ghuloom Hajji Ali Ghadanfari.

(2) An interview with the late Hamad Fahed Boodai.

(3) An interview with the late Abdul Sattar Agha Ali.

## (2) Ice Machine (Ice Workshop)

A number of elderly people say that the first person to bring an ice-making machine in Kuwait was the Jewish merchant Saleh Mahlab, at the beginning of the past century around the year 1912. He installed it at a location overlooking the sea near the old Customs Building under a wooden roof (arbor) to protect it from climatic conditions. The workshop supplied a number of ice sellers- who were shop owners or hawkers- with their needs, but did not satisfy the demand of the people due to its small size<sup>(1)</sup>. The workshop, or ice machine as called locally, faced numerous problems in selling its product. Under such circumstances, the owner got to be obliged for selling it. It was purchased from him by the late Mohammed Hussein Ma'arafi<sup>(2)</sup>. According to Mr. Hamad Mohammed Al Sa'aidan, he said that the first one to bring an ice maker was the late Mohammed Al Fouzan<sup>(3)</sup>. Ma'arafi family also brought a machine of big capacity during World War I (1914-1918) of 100 HP, made in UK, at the price of 8000 Rupees, which made ice and ground grains. It was installed at their building located on the seacoast, operated by a person from Al Muhmmarah and its production capacity was 150 bars of ice per day, while the Kuwaiti market at that time did not need more than half such capacity. Ma'arafi family formed a company among themselves to manage the machine, where the share value was one Sterling. However, the project did not succeed as the machine broke down, and they were forced to sell it to a merchant from Al Muhmmarah who purchased it for half the price and then moved it there<sup>(4)</sup>. At a later period, the late Ahmad Mohammed Alghanim brought a medium-sized machine approximately by the end of the 1930s, which he installed at the seacoast as well, near the building of Sheikh Ali Al Khalifa Al Sabah, and obtained a franchise from the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah to produce and sell ice in Kuwait against fees amounting to 800 rupees to be annually paid to the government. That agreement continued for a long period till the beginning of the fifties<sup>(5)</sup>. A number of merchants during that period tried to bring ice from Basrah in vehicles to grant the demand of citizens. However, the government prohibited such activity, due to its commitment with the late Ahmad Al-Ghanim. That situation continued until the government permitted other investors to build other workshops.

Alghanim ice workshop comprised of big pools which were filled with salty water, in which a substance known as «Freon» was placed which prevents

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(1) An interview with the late Essa Hadidar Al Rasheed.

(2) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdullah Khaled Al Hatem-1980-p.160.

(3) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Mohammed Al Sa'aidan-p.1152.

(4) An interview with the late Essa Haidar Al-Rasheed.

(5) Ibid.

freezing of pool water when cooled. Then, molds or forms made of thick metal sheets or tins of around 80 cm long and of approximately 20cm x 20 cm wide, filled with fresh water to make ice. The UK-made machine was from Ronson Company. The length of the cement pool was around 8 meters and its width was around 6 meters, with a depth of approximately two meters. It was divided up into approximately 30 divisions. Near its surface, there were iron bars or nooks. The length of each division was approximately 120 cm and its width was 80 cm. A certain number of molds (ranging between 10 to 15) were vertically submerged in each division, after filling the molds with fresh water. The pool had the capacity of 450 to 500 molds, which were hung and fixed to the pool by tying them with a network of iron bars to prevent them from moving. The opening of the mold was around 10 cm above the water surface, to prevent leakage of salty water inside. When the machine was operated, the pool divisions were covered with wooden lids, each one of them called «*Jali*» to prevent water from being exposed to heat. The process of making ice took around 10 to 12 hours approximately<sup>(1)</sup>. Inside the pool, there used to be a network of pipes through which gas used to pass. The compressor used to compress and cool the gas, then transform it to the pipes, which then was transferred to vapor after expanding. This creates extreme coldness which leads to a drop in the temperature of the salty water in the pool, and hence the coldness is transferred to the fresh water inside the molds. The gas existing in the pipes returns to the machine, which compresses it once again and transforms it into a liquid and sent to the pipe network in the pool, and so on. The process continues till the fresh water in the molds is frozen and transferred into ice, while the salty water in the pool remains unfrozen as a result of the low freezing point for salty water than fresh water, in addition to the presence of Freon in the pool.

When the clients wished to buy ice bars from the workshop, the workers used to lift the metal molds from the pool manually and pour some water of moderate temperature on its walls, then the ice bar would slip out and placed on a small wooden table fixed to one of the pool walls, sliding to the assigned location and delivered to the buyer. The length of the ice cube was 80 cm and its thickness 20 cm x 20 cm. It was sold for around 1/2 rupee to 12 annas<sup>(2)</sup>.

The workshop consisted of a big truss covered with metal sheets, which comprised a number of pools in addition to the machines and small areas for placing the tools, forms and the remaining equipment and machines.

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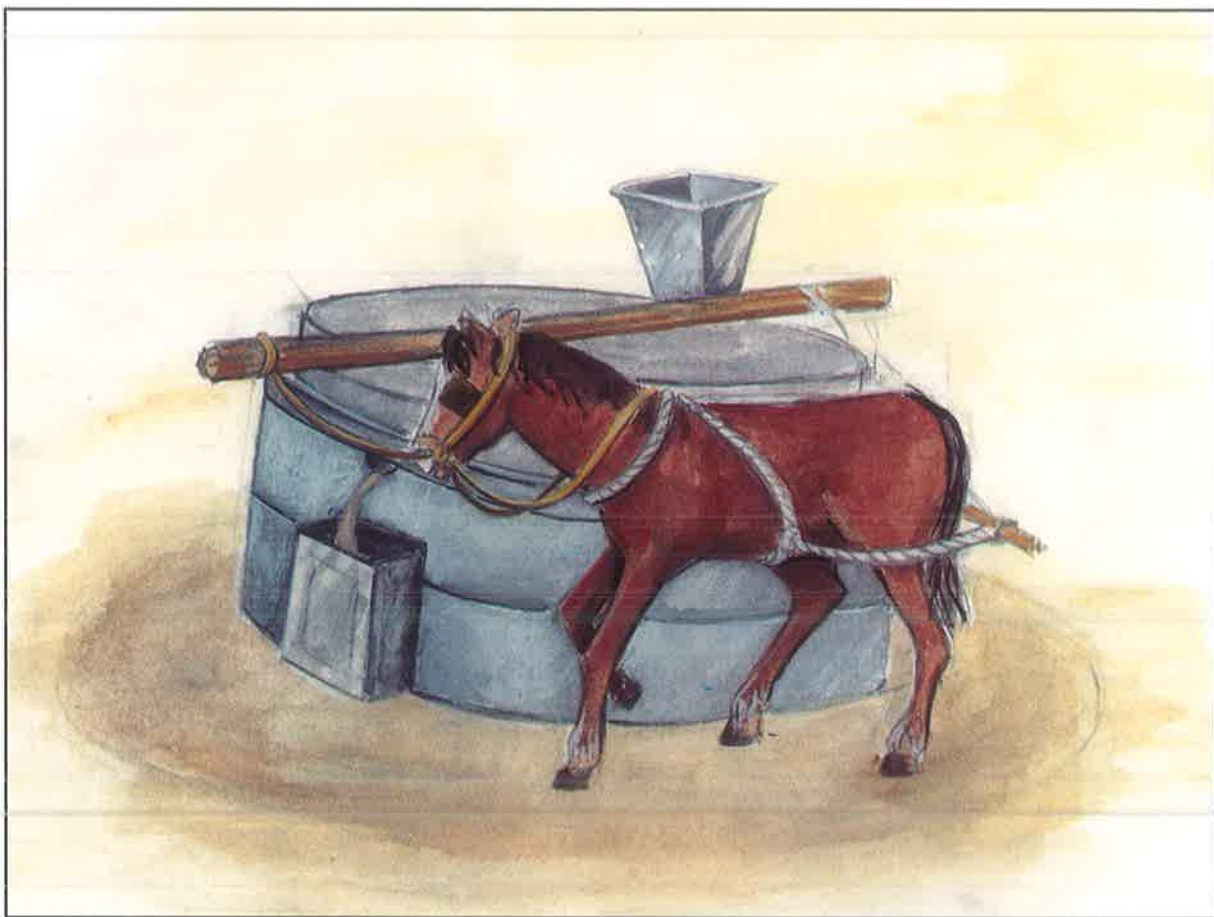
(1) An interview with the late Mohammad Zaman Eshkanani.

(2) Ibid.

At the forefront of ice workshop clients were coffee shops, fishermen and a few number of shops selling ice, in addition to Kuwaiti families.

### (3) «Al Karkah» Or Sesame Paste Workshop

The craft of grinding sesame and transforming it into hardah paste «*tahina*» is one of the oldest crafts in Kuwait.. Kuwaitis used to eat sesame paste (tahina) with dates after the lunch meal, especially during the winter season, as it has a high nutritional value and calories giving the body its need of energy and warmth. Sesame paste is also used in making rahash «*halawa tahiniya*», one of the main sweets known to Kuwaitis since old times, which they liked to eat with or without bread during breakfast and lunch and at diwanias, especially in the winter.



Sesame is ground by a mill rotated by mules or donkeys, to make tahina (hardah).

*Drawing by Nadin Mohamad Jamal*

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(2) Kargah is a Persian origin name for workshop.

Sesame is also considered among significant foodstuffs used in the production of a number of sweets such as sesame candy. It is also placed on the bread to give it a special flavor desirable by many people. In the past, Kuwaitis used sesame light oil called «*hall*» for lighting up lanterns and lamps before the availability of kerosene in Kuwait.

Hardah or Sesame paste industry is considered one of the eldest industries in Kuwait. Three workshops or «*karkahs*» were established in the 19th century, one of which was the *karkah* of Al Eidi family, the other for Al Abdulrazzak family and the third for Jamal family. The workshop of Al Shamaly was also transferred into a *karkah* during the 1920s. There was another *karkah* of Jamal family, established during the 1940s at a location near Al Abdulrazzak square. However, it did not continue for a long time. The *karkah* of the late Ibrahim Jamal is the oldest sesame paste or hardah workshop in Kuwait and operated for the a long period.

### **A Brief Historical Summary On The Kargah Of Jamal Family**

Jamal «*kargah*» was nearly established in 1265 AH (1848 AD), and was still positive at its old location till the year 1961. Those in charge of the *kargah* used to make sesame paste by the mill rotated by mules or donkeys. The *kargah* was established by the late Hajji Ibrahim Jamal at its first location in one of the alleys branching off the Merchants' Market, next to Al Haddad mosque. That location was known as «*kargah alley*». It occupied a big area of land surrounded by a mud wall where sesame got to be cleaned, sieved and washed. It contained several rooms. The late Hajji Ibrahim Jamal managed the *kargah* for around 37 years till his demise in the year 1303 AH (about 1885). It is noteworthy that the number of workers in the *kargah* was around 12 persons, most of them were from the same family<sup>(1)</sup>.

Management of the *kargah* was handled after the death of its founder by his son, the late Mohammed Ibrahim Jamal, who moved it to another site in the same area. He bought several small shops in one of the alleys branching off the Merchants Market near «the Government Khan», which he demolished and built a big workshop at their location. The late Hajji Mohammed Ibrahim Jamal worked in the *kargah* till he died in the year 1335 AH (approximately 1915 AD). The *karkah* closed following the death of Hajji Mohammed Jamal in 1915. Later after fifteen years, it was re-opened in 1930, by the late Haj Isma'il Ali Jamal - the grandson of its founder- and continued operation till the year 1961, when

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(1) An interview with the late Haj Ismael Jamal.

the State Domains Affairs Department assessed and demolished it from the old town<sup>(1)</sup>. The government granted a new workshop in Shuwaikh, which started production in the year 1968.

### **Steps For Making Al Hardah In The Past**

The hardah or sesame paste is made of sesame, after passing through several stages including cleaning, sieving, roasting and grinding. Raw sesame is imported from Iran and India and arrives in Kuwait packed in canvas bags weighing 50 kilograms. Work steps proceed as follows:

1. First, the sesame is sieved in sieves of very small holes to remove the dust.
2. Sesame is placed in the evening in pools filled with fresh water in order to soak over night for the purpose of facilitating the removing of the skin on the hull. The process of soaking takes around 12 hours. In the morning, it is carried from the pool and placed in baskets to separate the water.
3. Quantities of moist sesame are placed in a pit prepared for such a purpose and then hit by a big piece of wood resembling the hammer and known as «dink or ding» to separate the skin from the core. One of the ding edges is fixed to a base near the pit, while the other edge falls inside the pit strongly when one of the workers presses on the other edge by his foot to lift it up and then leaves it to fall in the pit. Two workers used to operate the ding. The first presses on its edge away from the pit by his foot to lift the other edge up, which is facing the pit and resembles the hammer head. Then, he leaves it to fall heavily in the pit filled with wet sesame. As for the other worker, he used to stir the sesame inside the pit by his hand while the ding is up. Such a process has to continue until the skin is removed from the sesame core.
4. Afterwards, sesame is removed from the ding in baskets (zeblan) to a pool with very saline water in order to separate the skin from the core. The skin precipitates at the bottom of the pool while sesame floats on the surface. Hence, the skin is removed permanently from the core.
5. Skinned sesame is scooped from the pool by baskets. Then, it is washed to remove salinity therefrom. This is done with submerging the baskets in a pool with water from the well to reduce salinity. Then, the sesame is washed afterwards by fresh water and left in baskets for about one hour for removal of water.

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(1) Ibid.

الحمد لله بحانه

صلى الله عليه وآله  
محمد بن عبد الله القاسمي



السبب الداعي الى تخرين هذه الاصفى الشرعية هو ان قد باع عبد الرسول  
ابن محمد بن عبد علي من حامل هذا الكتاب محمد بن ابراهيم وهو  
ايضا قد اشترا منده ما هو ملكه ومنقول اليه ارثا من اهلده وهو  
وهو الكاركة المشهورة مع دكان بنى تبعا لها بعد الكاركة قبلت بيت  
نوف العسيري وشمال الطريق النافذ وشرقا بيت الجوش و جنوبا  
بيت العسيري و بعد الدكان بنى ملكا دكان عمال معني وشمالا  
بيت عيسى ابني دخان و شرقا دكان المشرك محمد المذكور و اطراف  
تبعا للكاركة في البيع بثمن قدره و عدده ضمها يد اربال و سلم الثمن  
بثما مد و كماله المشرك محمد المذكور بيد الباي عبد الرسول المذكور  
ببعا صحيفا شرعيا جازيا بالطور والرضا والاختيار من غير كراهة  
ولدا جبار فموجب ما ذكره من البيع و تسليم الثمن و اقرار الباي  
بقبضه من المشرك صارة الكاركة البيعة مع الدكان بنى و اطراف  
المذكور بنى مالك و ملكا للمشرك محمد المذكور من ساير اهل ذلك يتصرف  
فيهم كيفما يشاء و يفتار حتى لا يخفى وقد عبر ان الذي وورف محضرا

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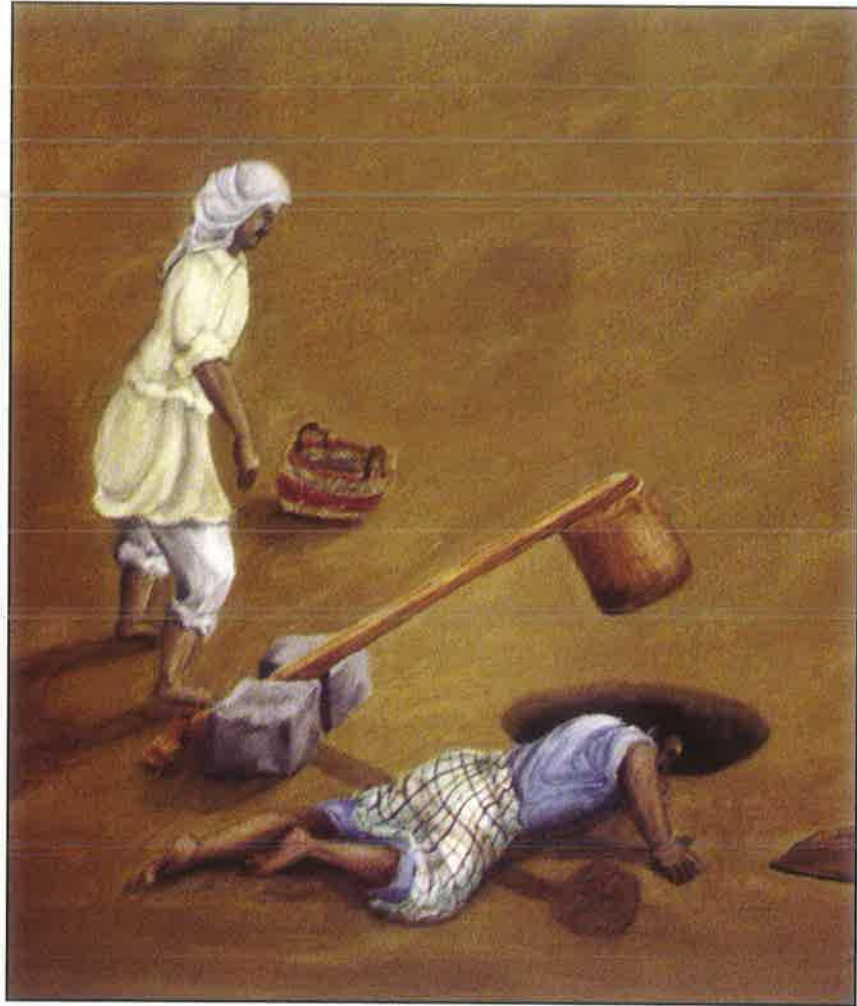
محمد بن ابراهيم  
القاسمي  
قاضي القضاة  
قاسم بن ابراهيم  
قاسم بن ابراهيم



Document of the new karkah in the year 1326 AH (1908 AD)

6. The sesame is carried to the surface of the «kargah» (up-stairs) and spread over straw mats or canvas to expose it to the sun for 5 to 6 hours to get dry.

7. After drying, sesame is roasted by «*tawa*»<sup>(1)</sup>. The roasting process was difficult and slow. *Al gorm* and *al karab* were used as fuel, which would lead to the emission of heavy smoke. A kerosene-operated oven was built to roast sesame in the kargah in the year 1947, which helped to increase production and reduce the difficulty of work to a certain extent.



Al ding, a pit in which sesame soaked in water is placed. The sesame inside the pit is hit by a big piece of wood to separate the sesame skin from the core.

*Drawing by Nadin Mohamad Jamal*

8. The sesame is sieved twice after roasting.

The first time in a soft sieve to remove dust and the second in another sieve with wide openings to separate sesame from sand particles. Sesame goes out through the openings of this sieve, leaving behind large particles. At this stage, the sesame is ready to be sold to the customers, owners of sweet workshops and bakers to use for sesame candy or for baking.

### **Al Harda «Sesame Paste» Industry**

Sesame is placed in the mill rotated by the mule or the donkey with covered eyes, in order to squeeze it and transform it into paste (*tahina*). The sesame is

(1) «Tawa» is a piece of metal sheet used to roast nuts and other foodstuffs like sesame, as well as for making thin layers of bread called «*regag*».





Making al halwa (sweets) and rahash. The production ingredients are placed in utensils on top of light fire. The worker stirs them by a wooden ladle till they are cooked.

*Drawing by Nadin Mohamad Jamal*

poured in the mill by a big funnel fixed on top of the mill, at the bottom of which there is an opening through which the sesame comes out in certain quantities in the mill opening. The paste is packed into big metal tins which came to Kuwait from Abadan while filled with kerosene. These tins are washed and the kerosene odor removed in order to use in packing foodstuffs like sesame paste, ghee, dates and the like.

### **Al Rahash Industry**

Al Rahash is made from al hardah or sesame paste, date honey and syrup. Such materials were separately cooked at certain ratios, then mixed together to produce «rahash»<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) An more information see «Al-Halwaji» in Chapter II, Part1 (Crafts).

## Development Of Work In The Kargah (Automation)

In the year 1942, the late Haj Isma'il Jamal, owner of the *kargah*, with the assistance of a mechanic, tried to automate the mill instead of using the mules. He purchased an old machine used previously for grinding wheat from the late Abdulla Al Uthman for the amount of 500 rupees. However, the idea did not succeed<sup>(1)</sup>. After two years of trial, Mr. Mahdi Al Sayed Ahmad- a skilled mechanic who previously used to work in the kargah- operated the machine after buying an old rear gear from scrap car market, which he fixed to the machine, and it was a success. Thus, the production doubled up several times as a result, and the mill produced ten tins of hardah sesame paste, instead of two per day since the old mill was no longer suitable with the power of the machine and its capacity, a new mill was imported from London in the year 1946 for the value of 2000 rupees. After the lapse of one year, a new machine was imported from London, having good quality and high speed. It continued working till the year 1961 when the kargah was closed down at its old location<sup>(2)</sup>.

### 4. Namlait Workshop

«Namlait» is a beverage with different flavors which was imported from Basrah at the beginning of the last century and sold at coffee shops. It seems that this word is derived from the English word «lemonade». The first plant in Kuwait for the production of «namlait' was established in the year 1936 by the late Mohammed Bu Shehri who worked in India at the beginning of the past century, like many Kuwaitis who went there seeking for job opportunity. Upon his return to Kuwait, he brought three machines for making namlait, the price of each was one hundred and fifty rupees. He also brought a big quantity of bottles which were placed in wooden boxes to protect them from breaking. Each had the capacity for 24 bottles,. The bottle was of the type known as «*bu teelah*»<sup>(3)</sup>. The Teelah is a small glass ball placed inside the namlait bottle. It is sucked up to the bottle opening by a certain technique after filling the bottle with the beverage, in order to settle inside a rubber ring fixed at the opening of the bottle in order to close it and prevent air from entering into the beverage.

The first location of the namlait workshop was in Al Gharabally Market opposite to the entrance of the old Fish Market opposite the Bakers' Market.

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(1) An interview with the late Abdul Sattar Agha Ali.

(2) An interview with Sayed Mahdi Sayed Ahmad.

(3) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Bu Shehri.

The late Mohammed Bu Shehri operated one machine and sold the other two to some owners of coffee shops who were making namlait for their customers (Abdulghaffar Mirza and Abdulrahim Al A'wadhi). As for Mohammed Bu Shehri, he sold the product by wholesale to the owners of coffee shops and restaurants. The essences giving the beverage its required flavor and color were brought from India. This consisted of a concentrated fluid brought in big special bottles and included the flavors of orange, lemon, pomegranate, banana and strawberry. These essences were made in Holland and exported to Kuwait through India. Types of aromatic sodas (carbon dioxide) were also brought in cylinders from Bombay in India so as to put inside the bottles after filling with the beverage<sup>(1)</sup>.

The production process started by making syrup, which is a mixture of water and sugar in big buckets, and then poured in the bottles by a funnel to fill almost half the bottle. The bottles are placed on a wooden table besides the machine to add the required essence to each bottle.



Beverages started spreading at the end of the 1940's and beginning of the 1950's which were manufactured in Kuwait

*Source: From the belongings of Mr. Jassim Al Mozayen.*

Every 6 bottles of one type were lined up on the table in order to put them in the machine to add water and steam<sup>(2)</sup> to fill it. The steam is directed from the cylinder - which is connected to the machine - inside the bottles after fixing them on a base and entering them (the bottles) inside the machine, and connecting the gas pipe with them. The quantity of steam entering the bottle is defined by a gauge fixed at a certain degree of temperature. When the steam enters the bottle, such mixture presses the small glass ball inside the bottle strongly, so it is raised to the top of the bottle and collides with the rubber ring surrounding its opening, and is fixed inside it. Hence the bottle is closed and the bottling process is completed.

(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Bu Shehri.

(2) The steam is consisted of CO2 mixed with water steam.

There were other types of beverages such as Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola which reached Kuwait from Basrah at the beginning of the 1940s. The late Mohammed Al A'dwani brought them in lorries with ice molds from there. At the beginning of the 1940s a relatively-modern factory was established for Sinalco beverage, by the late Khalifa Alghanim and Sayed Hameed Behbehani, followed by another factory for Pepsi Cola by Al Saqer family, then Coca Cola factory was established by Al Nisf family. Afterwards, Kuwait witnessed - especially at the beginning of the fifties- the establishment of another number of factories for beverages of different flavors and colors, including a factory for Williams beverage, another for «Zamzam», Al Sabah, Kiti Cola and Sinalco. The coffee shops started competing to sell them to their customers while cooled. They were placed between ice blocks in big barrels or wooden boxes covered with canvas to retain the low temperature.

## **5. Intestines Cleaning Workshop**

Among the old workshops established in Kuwait at the beginning of the last century was a workshop for cleaning and packing sheep intestines to export abroad. That workshop was established in the year 1910 during the reign of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah. Its location was near the current Municipality building in Safat Square. The workshop was established by brothers Ramadhan and Mohamed Bu Shehri. The idea of the workshop started among the two brothers while being in India looking for jobs in the year 1905. They stayed there for 5 years during which they worked in this industry, in addition to tanning skins into leather.

They mastered the Indian language and a part of the English language. Afterwards, they returned to Kuwait with the idea to establish two workshops; one of which for the purpose of cleaning the intestines and exporting them to America and the second for tanning skins into leather and exporting it to Germany<sup>(1)</sup>. They also brought three machines with them for making beverages (namlait)<sup>(2)</sup>.

Mohammed Bu Shehri agreed with Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah to have an exclusive franchise to buy the intestines from the butchers, treating and exporting them abroad against 1600 rupees to be paid annually to the government<sup>(3)</sup>. The workshop was established in the year 1910 and Bu Shehri agreed with the butchers to buy the intestines at certain price as he had to pay two annas for the

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammad Bushehri.

(2) Refer to Namlait Workshops.

(3) From Here Kuwait Started- Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem-p.161.

sheep intestines and one anna for the goat intestines. The work was limited in the beginning and it completely stopped during World War I but it flourished after the end of the War and became profitable. Mohammed Bu Shehri was very generous with the butchers and used to give them additional money, and supply them with clothes for the Eid and other occasions. Moreover, he paid them the value of the goods in advance before receiving them. He brought skilled workers from India and trained Kuwaiti workers on that work as well.

The intestines were cleaned and packed according to the European approved practices and methods at that time, and hence, this business attracted European importing companies. After being dried and salted, the intestines were packed in wooden boxes so as to be ready for exportation to America. He priced each item of intestines arriving to Chicago at one rupee<sup>(1)</sup>.

In the year 1934, after the workshop had flourished and its activity expanded, Bu Shehri faced competition from a Jewish merchant called Dawood who agreed with the late Abdullah Al Mulla Saleh who was one of the famous merchants at that time, to compete with Mohammed Bu Shehri. So, the said merchant agreed with the butchers to provide Dawood with the intestines at the same price agreed upon with Bu Shehri. The butchers began to provide Dawood with the intestines for which he prepared a special workshop at the same area. The purpose of that workshop was to treat the intestines in a way to make it suitable for exportation. The late Mohammad Bu Shehri complained to Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, who was the ruler at that time, without any result. The Jew continued in his business, cleaning and packaging the intestines. He exported the first consignment to the USA and upon receiving the consignment and checking it, they discovered that it was rotten and spoilt as a result of mishandling the process. The importing company therefore rejected the consignment and sent it back to Kuwait. Having known the matter, the Jew, Dawood, escaped from Kuwait with the workshop behind him. The American company contacted the late Mohammad Bu Shehri and agreed with him again to re-supply it with the intestines.

Among the terms of the agreement was that the late Mohammad Bu Shehri had to pay the company the cost of sending back the consignment sent by Dawood and compensate the American company with substitute goods. Even though the

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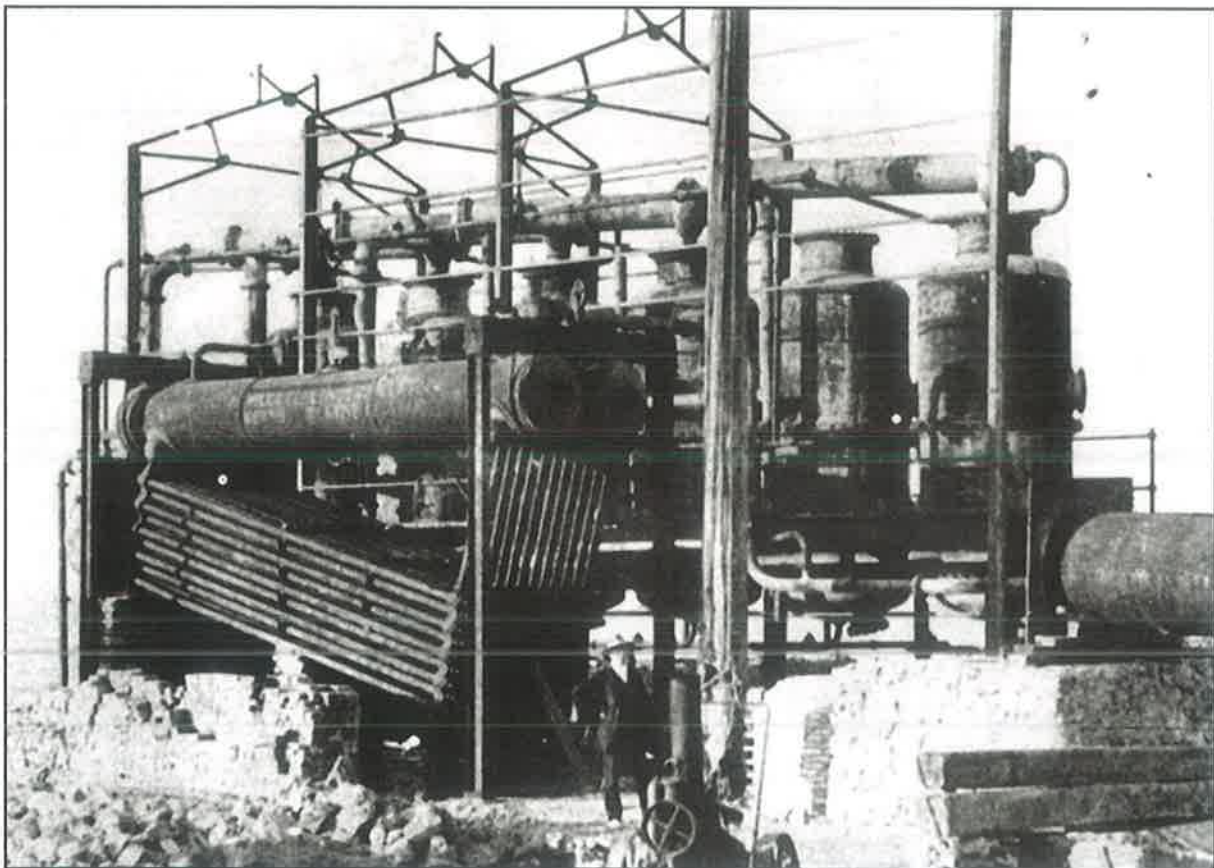
(1) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Mohammad Bu Shehri.

fault wasn't his, the late Mohammad Bu Shehri agreed upon the terms of the agreement and as a result of this agreement, his workshop reopened and the butchers, who promised Bu Shehri not to deliver the intestines to any one else, began to deliver the intestines to Bu Shehri's workshop again.

The late Bu Shehri continued his business in cleaning and packing the intestines till the year 1942 when his son the late Jassim Mohammed Bu Shehri inherited the workshop and operated it until it closed down at the outset of 1950s.

## **6. Water-Desalination Machine**

Kuwait suffered to a great extent in the past from the shortage of water especially during summer. Such shortage was due to the increasing number in the population, the dryness of wells and the dependence on water coming from Shatt Al Arab by boats, as well as the many problems facing this process due to the drop of winds in certain periods resulting in the inability of ships and boats to go to Shatt Al Arab to bring water, causing severe crises.



Seawater desalination machine brought by the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah in the year 1914

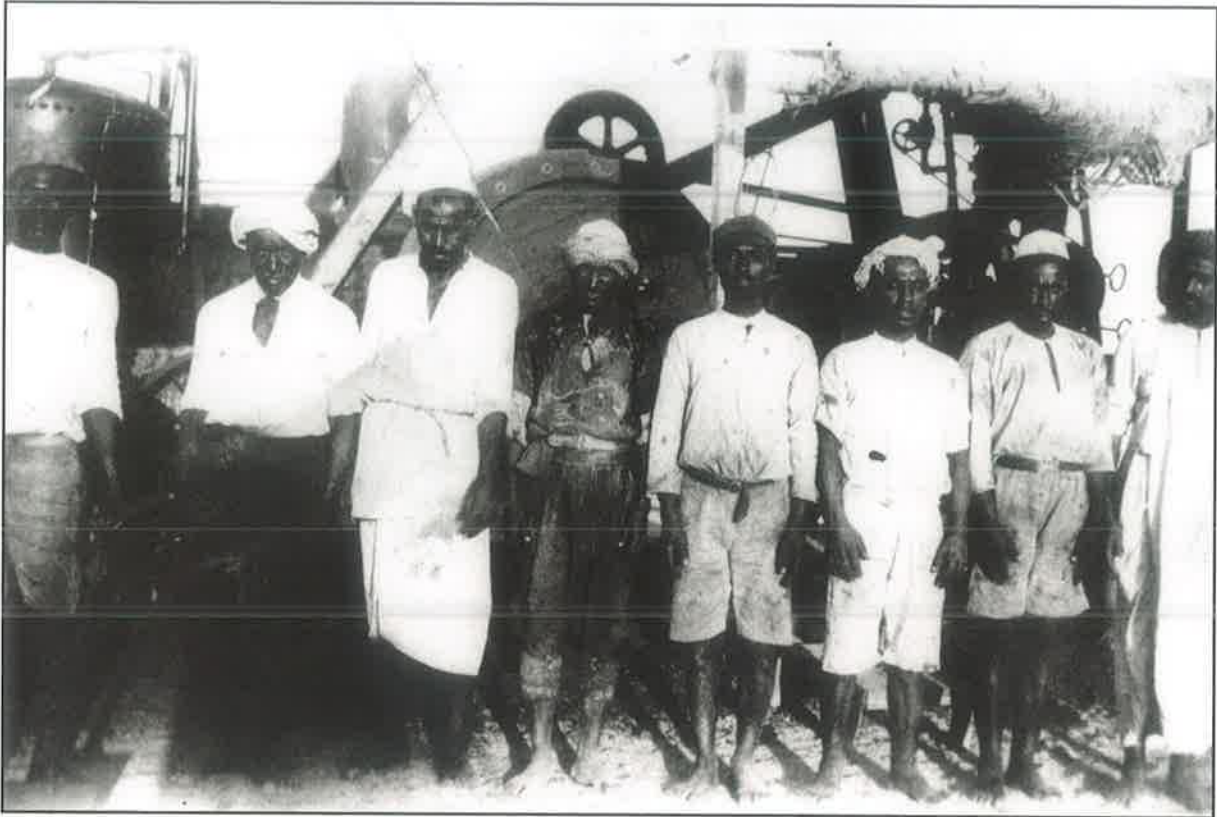
تفصيل اسماؤ المشركون في ماكينة الماي . ١٣٣٣

ناصر البدر سهم	٥٠٠	٥٥٠٠٠
فريه الخالد واخوته	١١١١	١٠٠٠٠
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عبدان بن علي بن سيف	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
هلال المطيري	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
براهيم بن مصطفى	٥٥٠٠٠	٥٥٠٠٠٠
ياسم بودري	١١٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
محمد بن محمد بن علي بن مصري	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
احمد الخبيص	٤٠٠٠٠	٤٠٠٠٠٠
ملا صالح الملا	٢٥٠٠٠	٢٥٠٠٠٠
عبد الله الرشيد البدر	٢٠٠٠٠	٢٠٠٠٠٠
عبد الله السابرا الشحنا	٢٠٠٠٠	٢٠٠٠٠٠
عثمان الرشيد	٢٠٠٠٠	٢٠٠٠٠٠
محمد السالم البدر براوي	٢٠٠٠٠	٢٠٠٠٠٠
سالم ابو قاسم	٤٠٠٠٠	٤٠٠٠٠٠
نزار احمد بن عثمان	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
عبد الرحمن بن نكي	٥٥٠٠٠	٥٥٠٠٠٠
يوسف الطويح	٢٠٠٠٠	٢٠٠٠٠٠
محمد قيس واولاده	٢٠٠٠٠	٢٠٠٠٠٠
ساهر الفانم وشركاه	١٥٠٠٠	١٥٠٠٠٠
يوسف بن مانع	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
عبد الرحمن بن سمر	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
فارس الوقبان	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
عبد الزبير الدهكري	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
حميد اولو والمزوي وشركاه	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
محمد بن مطير	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
عبد العزيز بن حميس	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
خالد بن سليمان البدر	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
فريد بن سليمان الحمد	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
جمعة الخواص	١٠٠٠٠	١٠٠٠٠٠
قيمة القيمة قدر النصف الاخير	١٠٩٠٠٠	١٠٩٠٠٠٠

١٩١٢

Names of shareholders in the company which established the first seawater desalination plant in Kuwait in the year 1914 AD (1333 AH).

Source: Al Qabas 21 September 2001- (An Article titled: Mubarak Al Sabah and Merchants who brought the first machine to desalinate water - Mr. Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al Shaibani).



Workers in the Desalination plant. The first from the right is the late Awad Al-Gaffass, and the third from the right is the late Awad al- Gaffass, and the third from the right is the late Yousuf Haj Ali Ustah Ahmad.

*Source: From the collection of Mr. Ali Yusuf Ustah Ahmad*



That problem preoccupied the mind of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah as he paid great efforts to search for a radical solution for that problem. In the year 1914 he bought water desalination machine from an English company called «*Streek*» for 250.000 rupees<sup>(1)</sup>. Concrete basins were built on the sea coast near the machine to supply it with continuous supply of water. This machine was called «*Al kendaisah*». The aim of buying such a machine was to eradicate the water shortage problem and to save people from diseases caused due to the dirty and contaminated water that was brought in buckets from Shatt Al-Arab. Water sellers used to go down to the water tanks inside the ships and fill their water skins and buckets. A company was established to implement the desalination plant project, where the government contributed approximately half of its capital while a number of merchants contributed the other half. The cost of each share was ten rupees. Thirty Kuwaiti merchants, whose shares reached 109,000 rupees, participated in the capital of the company, while the government paid the rest in order to complete implementation of the project<sup>(2)</sup>.

Some of the laborers working in the Desalination Plant in the early twentieth century. Among them were Mrs. Awadh Al-Gaffass(first from right), Yusuf Esta Ahmad (third from right).

«*Al kendaisah*» faced several problems which disabled it from providing water to the population, a matter that caused serious disappointment. After fixing and trying the machines for a long period, it did not give the desired result and the water produced was not drinkable which led to stopping the machine from operation. Without reaching any solution, an incessant dispute between Sheikh Mubarak and the company exacerbated. Such dispute continued even after the death of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, during the reign of Sheikh Jaber Al Mubarak, Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak, and finally Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. In the year 1922, Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber and the company agreed on dismantling the machine, and moving it outside Kuwait and paying back its total price to the Sheikh<sup>(3)</sup>. The company transported it to A'den.

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(1) From Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al-Hatem-p.157.

(2) From the papers of Khan Bahader Abdulla Bin Abdul Ellah Al Qanai, Mr. Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al Shaibani, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 21/9/2001 - p.6.

(3) From Here Kuwait Started, ob cit, p. 157.

## Workshops And Miscellaneous Industries

### 1) Tannery: Leather Tanning Workshop

Many primeval tanneries were established in Kuwait long time ago in order to satisfy the local demand for natural leather used in producing several kinds of sacks for different uses, in addition to leather slippers and other leather products. Most of these tanneries were located in «Al Murgab area». They were walled areas or old buildings in which pools or tanks were built for soaking leather to remove hair therefrom. The owners of the tanneries used to buy the skin of slain animals from the butchers or from those brokers who used to collect them for certain fees. The skins of goats were sold for half a rupee each, while the skins of cows and camels were sold for three rupees. Tanneries produced leather for those who made leather products such as sacks and certain kinds of shoes<sup>(1)</sup>.

The first big tannery was established in Kuwait at the beginning of the last century by the late Mohamed Bu Shehri, to export leather abroad. Based in «Al Murgab area» near the current headquarters of Kuwait Development Fund, that tannery used more sophisticated methods in producing leather than the other tanneries to attract European importing companies. The area on which the tannery was established reached 3,000 square meters. It was a walled area with 50 concrete round-shaped cement pools. The diameter of each pool was around 3 meters, depth one meter and each pool had the capacity for around fifty skin pieces<sup>(2)</sup>.

Being in India previously working at a tanning workshop there, the owner of the big tannery in Kuwait gained experience in this field. Returning to Kuwait in the year 1910, he established and prepared the tanning workshop with the necessary equipment. He reached an agreement with the butchers to buy the skins of sheep and goats as well as encouraging people to sell the skin of slaughtered animals instead of throwing them in their homes during feasts and other occasions. He used to buy the skin of sheep for a half rupee each. The owner of the tannery prepared special barrels for the purpose of collecting skins from citizens and assigned one person for each barrel to receive the skins and pay the price. At the beginning of the last century, about 100 animals were slaughtered each day and the number doubled gradually at the beginning of the 1930s.

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(1) Refer to «Skin Trade For Local Use» in Chapter II, part 2.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Bu Shehri.

The tanning process began with washing the skins, removing the blood and other substances attached to them. Then, they were soaked in pools filled with water and salt, where they were lined in lines, each line contained about 20 pieces. «Al groof», the dried peels of pomegranate, were added to the pool to help the fermentation process leading to removal of hair from the skins. Skins were left in the pools for about a week to remove the hair. That process used to take two weeks in the old tannaries. The skins had to be removed after that and treated, then exposed to the sun to get dry. Afterward, the ground powder of «al groof» was to be added to the skins that had to be coated or polished with «wadak or wadach» oil made from coconut that caused the skins to be soft and tender and protect them from dryness and cracking.

The skins were collected, sorted and tied in packages called «pallets» or «bunchs». Each «*pallet*» was put into a sack on which a number was given and specification of the product was written in English and then put in wooden boxes to be ready for exportation.

Those boxes were moved to «Al Fordha» to be carried by «*al tashasheel*» (cargo dhows) to steamships going to Europe. Most of those leathers were exported to Germany which were received by the agent of the late Mohammed Bu Shehri<sup>(1)</sup>.

In the year 1942, the late Bu Shehri retired and handed over the management of the tannery to his elder son Jassim Bu Shehri who devoted himself to and develop the work. He had also concluded several agreements with a number of the Gulf countries' merchants with Bahraini ahead in order to export leather to Europe. The tanning workshop closed at the beginning of the 1950s when the late Mohammed Bu Shehri retired.

## **2) Cigarettes Workshop<sup>(2)</sup>**

Kuwait witnessed the first and last cigarette workshop in the year 1945 when the late Abdullah Al Mullah Saleh established a plant called «Coronette» in Al Sharq area to produce cigarettes in accordance with an agreement between him and an Armenian person from Baghdad called «Dakran». The workshop was bought from England and contained two complete lines for producing cigarettes.

On a land owned by the late Abdullah Al Mullah Saleh and located in Al Sharq area near the current site of Amiri Hospital, the workshop was established.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Bu Shehri.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Hussain Maqseed.



The late Sheikh Ahmad Al- Jaber Al- Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait in a visit to the cigarette factory.



Laborers at the cigarette factory at work.

*Source: Collection of Sheikha Anthal Al- Ahmad Al- Jaber Al- Sabah, the Center of Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait.*

A giant workshop was established from concrete covered with metal sheets to shelter the machines. Mr. Dakran brought six technicians from Ghazi cigarette workshop which he owned in Baghdad in order to operate and maintain the new workshop. Moreover, he appointed an English engineer called Mr. Blair to manage and supervise the workshop. In addition, he appointed two technicians from Africa and 15 workers who included seven Kuwaitis and the rest from Iran. Mr. Abdulla Maqseed was appointed as their foreman in charge (*Tendail*). Each worker received 60 rupees per month, while the foreman received two hundred rupees.

### **The Production Process**

The workshop used to import tobacco from Turkey in one - ton - cylindrical-wooden barrels. The other raw materials and substances for wrapping were imported from England, such as light paper used in rolling the cigarettes printed light cardboard packets on which the name of the cigarettes was, transparent paper and aluminum paper in which the cigarettes are packaged.

The process began with opening the large wooden boxes and getting out the dried twigs of tobacco plant which were put in boxes like packages each one contained about four to five packages. The job of the workers was to loosen these packages and separate the hard tobacco from each other. Tobacco was put on the ground on big tarpaulin and was splashed with fresh water by using big pumps carried by one of the workers. Those pumps were directed to the blocs of tobacco spread over the tarpaulin. They were also splashed by special chemical material. When the tobacco was saturated with water it was covered by tarpaulin and was left for 24 hours to be soaked. On the next day, workers had to remove tarpaulin and began to loosen the clogs of tobacco which were placed on big wooden tables around which workers detached the leaves from the branches. On either sides of each table a big tarpaulin bag was hung there. The worker had to sift the twigs: put tobacco leaves in one of them and twigs sticks in the other. The fifteen workers had to do the same task. On finishing the detachment process, branches and leaves were roasted in a special roaster supervised by the two Zinzibarian African technicians. After drying, tobacco branches were put in special machine to break them, to turn them into small pieces and to mill them in order to combine them with tobacco leaves that had to be also milled in a special machine. Having combined the sticks with the leaves powders, workers sifted the combination in order to remove the sands, small stones and other dirt attached to it. Afterward, the foreman checked the tobacco and ensured its quality and its correspondence with the required specifications. In addition,

he had to sign a special paper before moving the mixture to cigarettes' making machine that automatically rolled and packaged the cigarettes.

The milled tobacco was put in a big and conical funnel, fixed on the upper part of the machine. This funnel was to pour automatically small quantity of tobacco in small debouchments and outlets for making cigarettes. In another part of the machine, «a roll»<sup>(1)</sup> of light paper used in packaging the cigarettes was fastened. On its operation, the machine directed the tobacco to small cells to form, prepare and roll it with light paper as well as sticking the ends together, after cutting the paper into the fixed measurements. The machine also collected each 20 cigarettes and put them in a square cardboard box centered by aluminum paper to prevent it from dryness during the packaging process. In two lines each contained 10. Cigarettes were put in the box which was wrapped by transparent paper. Workers handled the packet in which 20 cigarettes were placed in each one and five packets in one package, covered also by transparent paper. Each ten packages were put in a wooden box made in the workshop of the remains wood of boxes coming from Turkey carrying tobacco bundles. Three carpenters worked in the workshop to make these wooden boxes in which about 1000 cigarettes were packed<sup>(2)</sup>. The factory had two machines operating alternately, each of which worked for a week then stopped another week for maintenance.

### **Marketing**

The company exerted great efforts in marketing its products as it began to distribute huge quantities of its production free of charge, especially for guests of the coffee shops spread in Safat square and different markets at that time. A delegation from the company traveled to Bahrain and Dubai carrying huge amounts of its cigarettes products as free gifts to smokers, sheikhs and dignitaries. In addition to that, the Kuwaiti poet the late Fahad Buresly wrote a poem encouraging people to smoke this cigarette. He began his poem with these words:

### **O Kuwaiti people smoke Cornette cigarettes**

**Its taste removes venom its smell cures the ill**

Till the end of the verses<sup>(3)</sup>.

Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait at that time, visited the company, inspected its different divisions in such a manner to encourage its owners.

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(1) An an interview with late Ashour Yusuf Al Sabbagh.

(2) Refer to the whole poem on page 573.

(3) An interview with the late Ismael Ali Jamal.

## من سجائر كورنيت

قصيدة نبطية من نظم تاعر الكريت الشهير فهد ابو رسي  
دخنو يهل الكويت مزته تبرى الغليل  
فاتك الطعم الجميل للصدر شربه خفيف  
والسعر كله طفيف وذهب خالص تنن غايه  
لا تظن احكي دعايه فت من غيره سجارة  
سفن من شان التجارة تحيي هذي الشركه  
يطرح الله البركه التتن ليزاد حره  
جد شربته اودقت شره كورنيت احسن شراب  
يشربه جالن العذاب هل اوربويس اوريت  
من سجائر كورنيت اوريحته تشفي العليل  
وانت غافل ما دريت والتتن تنن نظيف  
جربه لو ما شريت والسلاسه فيه شايه  
انا في عيني رامت شوف عوده والقدارة  
صح والله مفتربت من شرب ما يتركه  
لو ما طيبه ما حكيت ما وراه الا المضرة  
فح صدري وانتهيت هذا مشروب الشباب  
هل اوربويس اوريت

\* مطبعة الكويت خلف دائرة التلفزيون \*

A Poem Written By The Popular Kuwaiti Poet Fahad Buresly

The company followed the modern methods of advertisement as it put bank-notes of five or ten rupees in some packets to encourage people to buy its products.

However, all those efforts were of no avail and people were not attracted to that new type of locally-made cigarettes as the Kuwaiti market was flooded with various European and American cigarettes, with several attractive packets.

Some of them were made from light metal with golden colors and attractive paintings, of which some contained ten cigarettes, others contained 20 or 50. Moreover, some companies offered boxes of matches and lighters and other presents for their clients with each order of cigarettes. Further, the markets witnessed severe competition in the prices of different brands. Certain types of European and American cigarettes were sold for half rupee (8 annas) or 6 annas per packet, compared to one rupee for Cornette cigarette packet. It seems that the high price of cornette cigarettes was the main reason for making people abstain from buying them.

The factory continued production till the year 1946 without success in marketing its products. In the year 1947, the company began to reduce gradually its production. By the end of that year one of the machine stopped working. Considering that the situation was discouraging and a pile up in expenses occurred, there was no hope in continuing that project. Some of the workers were laid off by the owners of the company. Mr. Dakran, Abdullah Al Mulla Saleh's partner, whose residency place was in Baghdad, visited the company many times to be acquainted with the marketing problems and attempted to find solutions. He tried all different methods of promotion without any results. In the year 1949, both decided to close down the factory and to move the machines with the remaining materials to Baghdad. With this, the story of establishing the first modern factory for producing cigarettes in Kuwait ended.

### **3) Electricity Machine**

Kuwait knew electricity for the first time during the reign of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah during the marriage of his son Hamad Al Mubarak in the year 1324 AH (1906 AD). At that time, he bought a small electricity generator and put it in his palace for lighting<sup>(1)</sup>. In the year 1933, a team of Kuwaiti traders established the first private company for supplying electricity to the public on commercial basis, known as Kuwait Electricity Company. It launched its work by establishing a small station for generating electricity in the year 1934 that contained two diesel generators with 30 kw and 400 volt each. Both worked on the basis of direct current

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(1) From interview with the late A'shour Al Sabbagh.



**شركة كهرباء الكويت المحدودة**

كويت التاريخ ١ فبراير ١٩٤٢ رقم القائمة ٤٩ جلد ٤٤

المطلوب من الحاج عبد السلام بن

رقم المقياس ٤٤٢

المدة من ١٠ شباط ١٩٤٢ الى ١ فبراير ١٩٤٢ التاريخ

ملاحظات	قراءة المقياس	السعر	المستهلكة عدد الوحدات	آنة روية
	من الى		٢٥	٩٦
			المجموع	٩٦

يجب تسديد هذه القائمة في دائرة شركة كهرباء الكويت المحدودة خلال اربعة ايام من تاريخه  
وبعكسه يقطع التيار الكهربائي ولا يعاد ابصاليه الا بعد دفع عشر روبيات.

A statement from Kuwait Electricity Company Limited for a subscriber in the year 1942.

(DC). They worked for two shifts. One of the generators worked from morning till evening then stopped and the other started its turn from the evening till the next day morning. The electricity was used just for lightening. As for the few number of fridges owned by a limited number of citizens, they were run by kerosene. The station was located on the sea coast in Sharq area opposite Ma'arafi building, between niq'as of both Ma'arafi and Al Khamis. In a shop owned by the late Abdullah Al Mulla Saleh and run by Mr. Yusuf Al Houmaizi, the company opened its office in the Merchants Market. The company appointed Mr. Sulaiman Al Sa'ud to collect

the revenues and other similar duties. Each unit cost six annas<sup>(1)</sup> and the electricity was installed in shops and homes for the first time on the first of April 1934<sup>(2)</sup>. By the end of that year the number of subscribers reached sixty one, increased to 400 subscribers after a number of years. Consumption of electricity was restricted for illumination with the exception of some families who used electric fans at their homes and small air conditioner in a room in the palace of the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. It is noteworthy that the late Abdullah Al Mulla Saleh used to go to the shops in the market reminding them of the necessity of rationalizing, saving and economizing in using electricity and not to exceed the proper limits and avoid high loads on the generators. He made use of visiting the diwanis and councils to advise them not to be extravagant in using electricity. He also used to wander the streets and suburbs with his assistants to observe and ensure that unsubscribed homes didn't have illegal supply from the main electric suppliers<sup>(3)</sup>.

Kuwait Municipality agreed with the company from the beginning in the year 1933 to light some markets and streets through fifty electric lamps of thirty watts each at night. The company was to get two rupees and a half per month for each electric lamp<sup>(4)</sup>.

The demand for electricity gradually increased and subscribers reached 700 in the year 1940 despite the slowdown economy the country witnessed during the World War II.

The company decided, after the end of the war, to gradually cancel the direct current system and replace it with the three- phase-alternate current (AC) with 220\380 volt and frequency 50 cycles. For that purpose, the company established a new station in Murgab area that contained two generators with 200 kw capacity. Both began their work in the year 1949. Afterwards, an additional third generator was introduced to the station with the capacity of 200 kw. The continuous current system stopped forever in the year 1950<sup>(5)</sup>.

Because of the rapid modernization and development which the country witnessed in many fields, the demand for electric power skyrocketed to the extent that the stations were no longer able to satisfy those demands. Considering that the time was ripe enough to intervene, the government decided to buy in the year 1951 the shares

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem - Second edition- p.105.

(2) An interview with the late A'shour Al Sabbagh.

(3) Kuwait Municipality in fifty years - Publication of Kuwait Municipality-1980-Dr. Najat Abdel Qader Al Jassim - p.151

(4) Ministry of Electricity and Water-Kuwait- Annual Census Book-1996-Part One- The Electric Power-p. 35

(5) Ibid, p.36.

of the Kuwait Electricity Company Limited and to establish the Public Electricity Department which the government entrusted the responsibility of distributing the electricity in a way that satisfied the demands of the whole country. In the year 1952, the Department established the first steam-generating electricity station in Shuwaikh area near the sea coast<sup>(1)</sup>.

#### **4) Soap Workshop**

The late Hashim Abdulrahman Al Badr, who started the business of making soap by establishing a small factory at his home, set up the first Kuwaiti soap workshop in the year 1935. He used to produce a small amount of soap and sell it to the shops and the hawkers. However, his products were not marketably owing to the competition of imported products, hence, he stopped his business as a result thereof.

The late Al Badr resumed his business during World War II as most of the goods, among which was soap, disappeared from the market, in addition to the hike in prices. Such a situation encouraged Mr. Hashim Al Badr to increase his production as the local market was in desperate need for his production. He also started exporting his products to the neighboring countries such as Bahrain, Dubai and Saudi Arabia, and later he moved his factory to one of the shops in the Tin Market near the western path leading to Al Gharbally Market. Encountering the problem of raw material shortage, he closed the factory thereupon<sup>(2)</sup>. Hashim Al Badr developed a special kind of soap that created foam in salty water. Due to the importation suspension of the caustic soda, the main substances for producing soap, as a result of the war, he tried to extract it from some desert rocks, but unfortunately his project did not continue operating for a long time<sup>(3)</sup>.

#### **5) Shoe Workshop**

The late Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem said in his book that a Turkish came to Kuwait in the year 1942 and established a shoe-making workshop based in Al Amir Street (the Internal Market) near Ibn Fares Mosque. He supplied it with all the necessary tools, equipments and leathers. He began his business with making high quality and attractive models of shoes for men that attracted people and gained their admiration, so they were eager to buy his products. But afterwards, people began to direct their attention to the imported products that competed with the

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem, Second Edition, p.101.

(2) Educators From My Country, Dr. Abdel Mohsen Abdulla Al Kharafi-1998-p.592.

(3) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem, Second Edition, p.108.

local products. Consequently, the owner of the company was forced to close his workshop and sell its contents in public auction<sup>(1)</sup>.

## 6) Tiles Workshop

The first workshop for producing tiles, (mosaic tiles) was established in Kuwait in the year 1935. Both the late Abdellateef Mohammed Al Thunayan Alghanim and the late Ahmad Al Ayoub Al Qena'i participated in establishing the workshop. Its machines were brought from Egypt and production was mainly hand-made. Most of the raw materials such as the broken marbles, white and black cement were imported from abroad. However, the tinctures were imported from London through (Hinder Ways) company in Basrah. The workshop was near the Vegetables Market. A Lebanese person called Ali Belaibel Ba'albaki was assigned to manage the workshop, with the assistance of some Kuwaiti workers<sup>(2)</sup>.

At that time Kuwaitis did not know tiles nor their uses due to the absence of modern styles of buildings owing to their limited income. In spite of the encouragement of the Municipality for the workshop through buying big quantities of its tiles, according to the order of the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah to support and to encourage the local workshop, the owners of the workshop had to close it down in the year 1942<sup>(3)</sup> because such efforts had no positive results.

In the year 1942, the late Musa'ed Al Saleh Al Qena'i brought a machine from Syria to produce tiles. Moreover, he rented an old store near the old Pigeon Market, where he started his business in producing tiles. He appointed an Iraqi technician to be in charge, assisted by two workers to produce the tiles. In addition, he appointed a number of Kuwaiti youths whom he trained to work in the workshop. The machine consisted of one meter and a half iron frame in its upper part where a square mold or matrix was fixed in order to put the raw material enough for one tile. The tile was made of two layers, upper and lower, the upper one consisted of tinctures or paints with special specifications which was formed according to the required decoration, while the lower layer consisted of a mixture of sand and cement.

The production process began with fixing the main mold in its place in the upper part of the machine. The mixture of sand, cement and little water is prepared in addition to the tinctures, special kind of powder brought in bags from India that was

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(1) Ibid-p.102.

(2) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem, Second Edition, p.102.

(3) An interview with Mr. Nouri Musa'ed Al Saleh.

mixed with water to form a thick combination. Such a combination was to be put in the mold or matrix to form the upper layer of the tile (*alkashiyah*). Color was chosen according to the desire of the client<sup>(1)</sup>. Before the start of production, the worker had to clean and oil the main mold with special kind of cleaning material and lubrications in order to prevent tinctures from sticking to the mold. Smaller four-part molds with the desired decoration was put into the main matrix in order to form the required shape and or namentation.

The first step of the production began with pouring the thick tinctures into the small block located in the main mold to form the demanded shape. After few minutes and ensuring that the tinctures took the demanded or the flower shape dried and became solid, the internal mold was lifted up. A subtle layer of a chemical powder was added after mixing it with little sand to cover the tinctures layer. This substance result in absorbing humidity from the lower layer of the tinctures and helped it adhere to the upper cement layer. Then, the mold was filled up with cement and sand mixture which form the shape of the tile. One of the workers had to cover the mold with a square metal cover that was compressed with hydraulic metal hand on the tile. This process leads to the consistency of its parts while still pliable. Afterwards, the technician moved the metal matrix vertically and remove the tile from it in a technical way. Watchfully, he had to use his hand and put it under the tile, extract it from the mold and put it vertically in line with each other. This was the most difficult step as the efforts paid by the worker could be in vain if the technical worker didn't take care while lifting the tiles, particularly because the worker was paid according to the number of the already-made tiles per day. After 24 hours of its production, the tiles had to be soaked in tanks of water for one day in order to be solid and gain the required hardness before it dries. The factory used to produce about 100 tiles per day<sup>(2)</sup>.

At the beginning, the demand for tiles was not sufficiently high as the government was the biggest client for that factory. The government bought some quantities during the time of building Amiri Hospital and paving the floors of some schools at the end of 1940s. In addition, some rich people bought the tiles to pave the entrance of their homes. The business boomed and the factory expanded, and as aresult an additional machine was bought. The factory moved in the year 1943 to another place near Al Maseel area east of Safat. By the end of the 1940s, another machine was bought and the factory moved to another site near Mubarkiya School. Then,

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(1) An interview with Mr. Nouri Musa'ed Al Saleh.

(2) Ibid.

it moved to Salhiyah area near Al Muthanna School in order to produce two kinds of tiles, the decorated tiles (upper layer consists of tinctures) and mosaic tiles<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **(7) Cement Brick Workshop**

Musa'ed Al Saleh Al Qana'i was the first Kuwaiti citizen to bring this workshop at the beginning of the 1940s (approximately in the year 1943 ). He bought a simple machine from Syria which consisted of a metal frame topped by an iron mold placed on a wooden flat board. This board was used to put the cement layer on it. Afterwards, the board and the wooden base moved to another place to dry. At the beginning, the site of the factory was in Bneid Al Gar area, at the same site of Kuwait Towers. The late Musa'ed Al-Saleh also brought three Kurdish technicians to operate the factory. He built for them a small hut near the workshop and provided them with cement and requested them to use the sea sand and the water to produce the cement bricks<sup>(2)</sup>. There was little demand for cement bricks at that time because people depended on sea rocks and mud bricks in their buildings, and they hardly used cement bricks for that purpose.

However, people gradually began to be aware of the cement bricks and their advantages, particularly their strength and resistance to rains, contrary to mud bricks which lose their consistency and collapse when exposed to rains.

The process of producing cement bricks started by preparing the metal mold and fixing it on a flat wooden board located on the upper part of the machine. Workers were to prepare the cement mixture from certain ratios of black cement, sand and little amount of water. Certain quantities of this mixture were poured in the mold to fill it. Then the cement was to be compressed inside the mold using handmade hydraulic handle in order to form the bricks. Afterwards, the mold and the matrix were to be lifted. Then the workers moved the pliable bricks with the wooden base to a near site to be exposed to the sun for 24 hours. Finally, the brick had to be splashed with water for a whole week to get the required strength. The production capacity of the factory was 100 bricks daily<sup>(3)</sup>.

The demand for cement bricks increased gradually in the mid 1940s with the increase of population and construction, as the government built schools and different government buildings. That demand encouraged the late Musa'ed Al Saleh to bring an additional machine with two matrixes, resulting in the increase of production and the reduction of cost.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Nouri Musa'ed Al Saleh.

(2) An interview with Mr. Nouri Musa'ed Al Saleh.

## *Part Two*

### ***Services And Miscellaneous Trading Activities***

#### **1- Transportation and Delivery Services**

The transportation and delivery activity is considered one of the main economic aspects in any country. The Gulf Countries in the past, till the beginning of the 1930s, relied on animals to transport and deliver their goods among themselves and on sailboats for marine transportation. In view of Kuwait's reliance on the sea port for receiving its needs of goods, whether for local consumption or for re-export, a significant business sector was established since old times for providing transportation and local delivery services, which developed with the passing of time to keep abreast the increasing demand for goods, transporting and delivering them to the various locations. The services of such sector included marine transportation of goods from big ships to the port and the land transportation from the port to the stores in addition to moving huge quantities of various products inside the town, the most important of which were building materials from their locations to the working sites. A number of workers in the transport field specialized in managing this activity - of both its marine and land sides- and developing it to efficiently perform its required job despite its dependence on human force and animals for a long time.

The following pages will address the different aspects of the two activities and their development with the passing of time.

#### **(A) Unloading And Delivery Of Goods At Al- Fordha**

It is essential to emphasize the role played by «al Fordha» in receiving the goods coming to Kuwait and to its different sections before speaking about the business of unloading and delivering goods. Till the beginning of the 1950s, Al Fordha was the only sea port in Kuwait that received goods coming through the sea. Its location was directly on the west side of Al Sief Palace. Al Fordha remained until the beginning of the twentieth century at the space overlooking the sea containing rocky anchorage on coastline where small and middle-sized ships anchored. The Fordha included a number of large yards and stores roofed with wood to shelter the goods from rain and the sun.

During the second half of 1930s, three jetties were constructed in Al Fordha to enable the mid-sized ships to anchor. Each anchor had its own use. The eastern one received goods coming to Kuwait through steam ships. These goods were moved from the steam ships to Al Fordha by «*al teshasheel*» (special cargo transporting dhows). The middle anchorage was allocated to «*al qata'a*» ships which used to sail to the Gulf ports to re-export most of goods from Kuwait to such ports. The last anchorage was devoted to receiving «*al ablam*» (small cargo dhows coming from Iraq and Iran bringing several and different consumption goods). The eastern anchorage adjacent to the Seif Palace and opposite the Customs Department represented the most crucial part of Al Fordha as it was used to receive goods coming from India by sail boats and latter from Europe, America and the other countries of the world. That business was the backbone of the trading sector in Kuwait. The water of Al Fordha was shallow and therefore, the big boats, and the steamships anchored in the middle of the sea off shore for «*al teshasheel*» and other medium- size boats to go to them to unload the goods and deliver them at Al Fordha. When addressing the business of unloading and delivering goods, there would be an emphasis on the activity of the eastern anchorage of Al Fordha. The process of transportation and delivery concerning that part used to follow a particular method and system which relied on «*al teshasheel*» and a number of very strong and tough workers and the leadership of a man called «*al tendail*», the foreman of the workers or the senior porter who used to guide them and organize their work to fulfill the assigned task<sup>(1)</sup>.

Explanation of the aspects of unloading and delivering goods business from the period in which the boums (large deep-sea cargo sail boats) were the main means of transporting goods would be tackled first. Then the first stages of steamships entering the transportation business in Kuwait would be explained so as to be in touch with the latest development witnessed by the Transportation and Delivery sector over the past years till the middle of the last century which witnessed changes in that sector. Before steamships sailed to Kuwait, «*saffar boums or boum saffar*»<sup>(2)</sup> were the only means as cargo-carrying vessels to deliver the various kinds of goods to Kuwait through India. which was the only and main trade outlet between Kuwait and other world countries. The process of unloading and delivering goods was tackled by having a number of tashasheel sail to the site where the big sail boats anchored inside the sea in a place called «*twaynah*» located opposite the western

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(1) An interview with Mr. Moosa Abdul-Hussain Al-Naqi.

(2) Saffar boums are typical kuwaiti lange deep-sea cargo vessels travelling from Kuwait to India and back, carrying goods.



the coastline of the city. Each «teshalah» included a number of porters «*hamameel*» who specialized in unloading the goods from the boum to al teshalah in order to be delivered to the Fordha. The goods, afterwards, were unloaded, counted and recorded by the Customs Clerk for tax return, then they were moved to the stores in Al Fordha, where the merchant would receive them. The Fordha stores were divided into certain areas, each of which belonged to a certain merchant. The porters placed the goods in each part belonging to every trader.

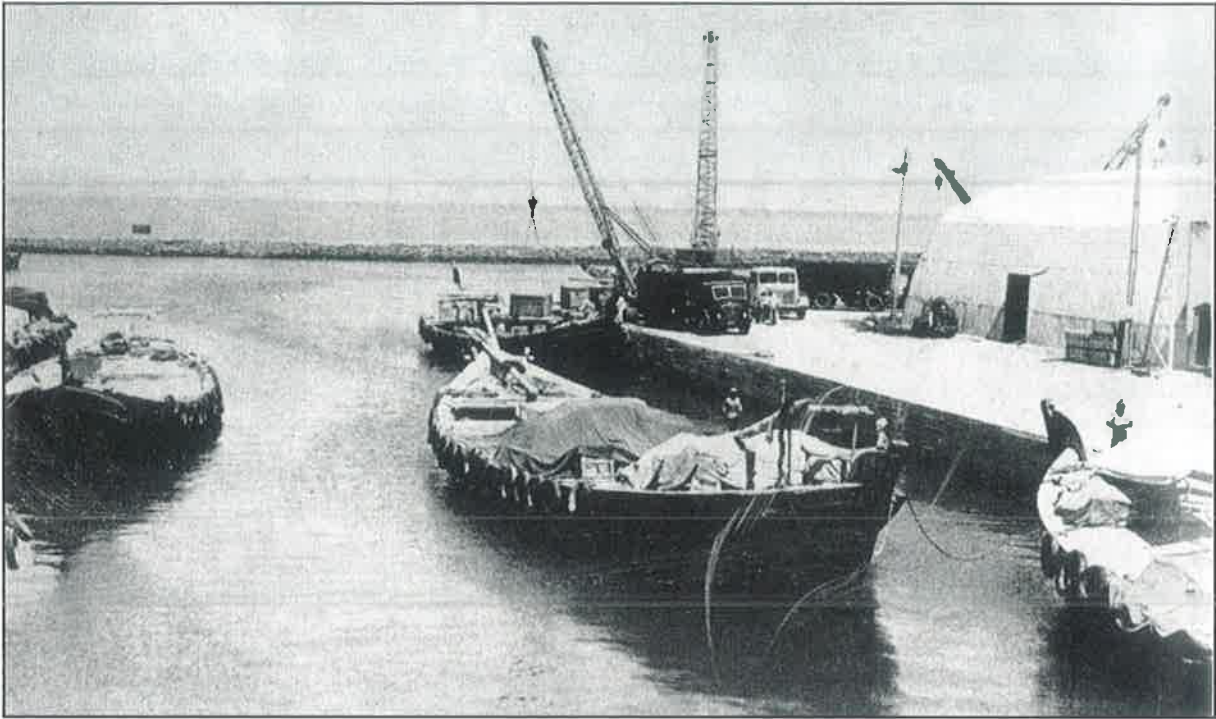
«Al teshasheel» used in transportation belonged to a number of ship captains who leased them to fulfill that task. Hassan A'shour, the porters' chief, was very famous in that sector, where he worked for about 50 years extending from the reign of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah to the end of the reign of the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah<sup>(1)</sup>. Under Hassan A'shour's leadership, about 200 porters worked and some of them were permanent workers while others worked temporarily when need arises. Through them, Hassan A'shour organized and managed transporting and unloading of goods. He also used to specify the work shifts among the porters who used to perform their tasks efficiently depending on their physical strength. He also used to agree with the traders on the fee of unloading and delivering each item of the goods. After knowing the type of goods, evaluating the number of porters needed and the time required for unloading the goods, the foreman specified the fee for unloading and delivering the goods from the ship to the Fordha. Specifying the fee depended on the size, weight and the kind of the item as the weight of sugar bag, for example, differs from the weight of tobacco bag, tea box or the pallet of cotton. The average fee of moving a pallet or canvas sack, ranged from two annas to three annas. The foreman had ordinary workers and workers specialized in handling particular goods such as cement bags that required special care<sup>(2)</sup>.

Work started by a number of al teshasheel sailing to the site of the big sailing boats- later to the steamships- to unload the goods from them. The number of teshasheel going to each steamship ranged from five to eight according to the quantity of the arriving goods. In cooperation with the sailors, the porters unload the goods from the boats to al teshalah, while the steamship used the carne, (a manual lifting machine). Electric lifting machine was introduced afterwards to unload each group of pallets or canvas bags, which each contained more than 10 to 15 items in each package inside al teshalah. The role of the porters, after that, was to line and sort them so as to be ready for transporting to the Fordha, then to the stores.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Abdul-Latif Al-Abdul Jalil.

(2) An interview with the Mr. Ahmad Abdulatif Al Abdul Jalil.



A teshalah belonging to the Ports' Department for transporting goods from the steamships to the Fordha.

*Source: Modern Kuwait, Mahmoud Qala'ji.*

Each teshalah had room for about 400 to 600 pallets or canvas bags. The number of porters working in al teshalah ranged from 10 to 15, but they were only about four porters for each teshalah when it goes to the steamship, as they didn't unload the goods from the steamship to al teshalah<sup>(1)</sup>. The unloading process of goods from the steamship to al teshasheel was performed by the crane, a manual or electric lifting machine. So the task of the porters working there was to just unload the goods from al teshasheel to the Fordha when the teshalah anchored near the Fordha jetty, and a long of wood extends between al- teshalah and the jetty to allow the porters walk through while moving the goods to the customs hall. The number of teshasheel going to each steamship increased when the giant steamships began to sail to Kuwait. This number sometimes reached 15 teshalah, each had the capacity of carrying between 500 to 600 bags of sugar or tea<sup>(2)</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the British Indian Navigation Company (BINC), a British subsidiary company of the East India Company was the only authority carrying goods from India to Kuwait since steamships started sailing to Kuwait till

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(1) An interview with the late Assad Haider Hussain.

(2) Ibid.

approximately the end of World War II. The company owned many steamships that sailed to the Arabian Gulf ports, including Kuwait. Among the famous steamships were «*Dawarkah*,» «*Damrah*», and «*Dara*» which frequently sailed to Kuwait. That company was represented in Kuwait by its agent, the Grey McKenzy Company, which was also responsible for unloading and delivering goods from the steamships to the Fordha till the middle of the 1930s. Owners of teshasheel used to agree with the company to deliver the goods from the steamships to the Fordha. Grey McKenzy Company was also the agent of Lloyds Insurance Company whose representative was based in the offices of Grey McKenzy overlooking the sea<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Hammal Bashi Company**

Owners of teshasheel and their porters continued their work in transporting goods for the account of the British Indian Navigation Company till the mid 1930s. With the increase in the number of steamships coming to Kuwait, the need emerged for organizing the transport and unloading process to keep abreast with that changing situation, especially with the arrival of other ships directly from the USA and European countries.

In the year 1935, the late Jassim Mohammed Boodai, who was one of the senior merchants at that time, proposed to the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah to establish a national company to undertake the services of transport and unloading of goods from the steamships to the Fordha. The Sheikh, welcoming that proposal, agreed to establish a joint stock company named *The Transport and Unloading Company (Ltd)* «Hammal Bashi» with a capital of 100,000 rupees, in which a number of Kuwait's merchants contributed to its ownership. The Board of Directors consisted of the following late persons<sup>(2)</sup>:

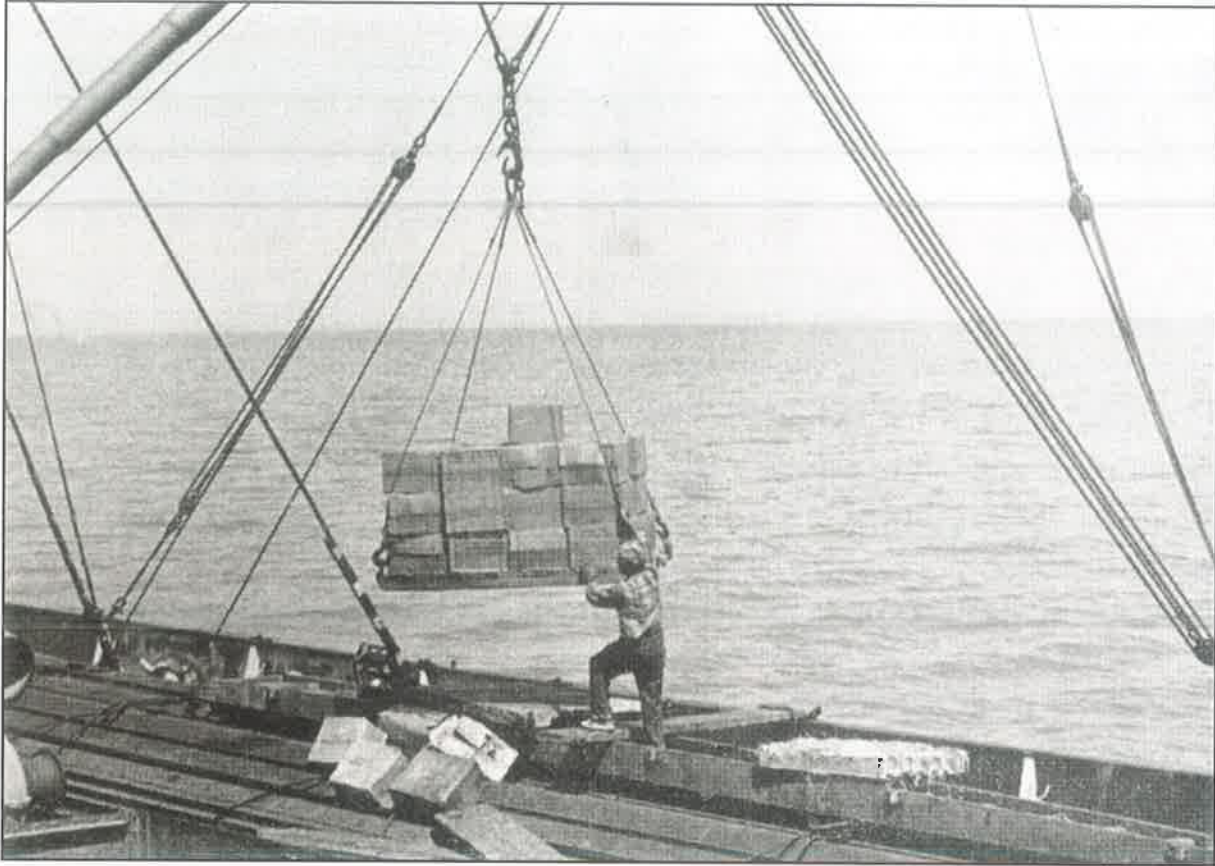
- Haj Abdulkarim Abul- Shareholder, and representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah
- Haj Abdurrahman Mohammed Al Bahr - Shareholder
- Mr. Khalid Al Zaid Al Khalid - Shareholder
- Mr. Abdulmohsen Al Kharafi - Shareholder

The late Khalid Al Zaid Al Khalid was appointed chairman of the company, and the late Sayed Yaseen Al Gharabally as its first Manager General.

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(1) An interview with the late Eissa Haider Al-Rasheed.

(2) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al-Hatem, Second Edition, p.183



Unloading goods from the steamship to the boat, in preparation of transporting them to the Fordha.

*Source: Modern Kuwait, Mahmoud Qala'ji*

Then, Mr. Eisa Al Abduljalil was appointed its manager in the year 1943, after the transfer of Mr. Yaseen Al Gharabally to the Supplies Company during World War II<sup>(1)</sup>.

Many big teshasheel were manufactured for the account of the company, the tonnage of each reached between 1500 to 2000 canvas bag or pallet. The company started delivering goods from the steamships to the Fordha during that year. The process of manual handling of the goods remained unchanged, as the Hammal Bashi Company agreed with the late Hassan A'shour to continue his work as before with his workers carrying out the loading process on the same previous principles according to which they agreed with the owners of teshasheel. A number of big doubts were also manufactured locally for the account of Hammal Bashi Company during the 1940s to cope with the big unwitnessed increase in the goods imported to Kuwait. The late Ahmad Salman Al Astad manufactured the teshasheel and doubts for the company.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Abdul-Latif Al Abdul Jalil.



of that group used to transport goods from the Fordha to the merchants stores in the markets. Such work was carried out by hundreds of porters who used to go from the Fordha to the stores carrying sugar, rice and cereals bags on their backs, as well as other big loads and goods, each one of which weighted around a hundred kilogram. They delivered them across «Bahaita» area to the stores of the merchants<sup>(1)</sup>. The leader of such group also used to agree with the merchants on a certain fee for transporting each piece from the Fordha to the store. The porters used to line up the canvas bags and pallets on top of each other at the allocated places inside the stores in the form of steps to ease their storing and transporting them again therefrom to the shops or houses. One of those who witnessed that activity described the porters while crossing «Bahaita» and then the Merchants' Market on their way to the merchants store while carrying the heavy bags and pieces on their backs like flocks of ants actively going on inside their underground nests and tunnels carrying their provisions<sup>(2)</sup>. This indicates the huge quantities of goods which reached Kuwait, the significance of Kuwait's port at that time, and its role in the transit trade which was the backbone for supplying neighboring countries with their needs of goods.

Animals were also used to transporting goods from the Fordha to the stores of merchants. Horses and mules used to carry three big pieces on their backs directly and were guided by their owner to the required locations.

Carriages towed by horses were introduced in that domain during the 1920s. This did not affect the role of porters but the groups continued their work till the end of the fifties when the transportation process developed and the quantity of goods imported to Kuwait extensively increased. Therefore, manual transport of goods was not feasible anymore.

### **Using Carriages For Transportation**

The use of carriages or hackneys (*arabayin*), the plural of (*arabanah*) increased in the 1930s and 1940s in the transport activity due their easy and quick transport, and keeping pace with the big quantities of goods which started reaching the Fordha during that era. The horse or «*kadish*» - the horse used for transport and as locally called - which could carry between two to three bags on its back, could tow a carriage carrying five times this quantity with more ease and speed. This led many horse owners to transform their activity from carrying goods directly atop horses' resorted to carriages drawn by horses.

To compare the two methods and the development of transport as a result of using carriages- as indicated to us by one of those who worked in that field- it

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(1) An an interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussein Al Dashti.

(2) The bag of sugar weights 100 kilograms.



A handmade cart fitted with two old wheels and driven by a horse was used to carrying all sorts of cargoes. Even the City garbage was hauled in such a cart.

*Source: Old Kuwait, Memories in Photographs, Yacoub al- Hijji. CRSK.*

may be said that a person who had five horses, for example, was not able to transport more than 100 bags of sugar per day from one place to another if each horse made ten trips while carrying two bags per trip directly on its back<sup>(1)</sup>. Each horse also required one guide, which increased the costs for the horse owner. As for the case of using the carriage, it is possible to transport 500 bags of sugar per day by four carriages and four workers only. The two carriages would be loaded at the beginning from the store by placing ten bags on each to go from the store to the destination of the sugar store. Each carriage is driven by one worker. The other two workers would load the other two carriages with sugar bags from the store, in order to be ready when the other two carriages returned, and so forth. Therefore, 500 bags would be delivered per day in 50 journeys and every horse would have made around 12 to 13 journeys and transferred 125 bags per day instead of 20 bags in the event of not using the carriage. Also, the horse normally walks faster while towing the carriage rather than when the bags are placed on its back<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hajji Ibrahim Al-Shamaly.

(2) Kuwait Municipality in Fifty Years, Kuwait Municipality Publication - Dr.Najat Abdul-Qader Al Jassim-p.158.

## Organizing Transport By Pack Animals

There were no rules or laws governing the methods of using animals and their traffic till the year 1930. In that year, the Municipality - one year after its establishment- interfered to organize the transport sector, which started to rely heavily on animals. The Municipality banned the traffic of carriages in certain roads, banned riding animals in public streets, or leaving them free in the streets. It had also banned using weak and sick animals in transport and specified a certain number of bags of each material which could be carried by the animals. For example, the Municipality passed an order for not loading the donkey with more than two bags of sugar or two sacks of rice or three maans of dates. It has also specified the maximum limit for loading horses with these materials, and prevented animal owners from walking fast in the roads while returning back after unloading their carriage, so as to avoid colliding with the passersby. It imposed fines on the violators. It has also regulated the traffic of carriages and specified the number of animals walking in one caravan for transport not to exceed four animals. In the year 1932, the Municipality requested animal drivers to register their names, and prevented practicing such activity without a license. At a later period - in the year 1938- the Municipality started placing license plates for carriages and specified the transport load at twelve «hunder»<sup>(1)</sup> (One hunder is equivalent to fifty kilograms).

## Methods Used To Unload And Transport Big Loads In The Past

It is appropriate in this regard to highlight the old methods followed for unloading and delivering bunches and big pieces from the ablam- and later from steamships- to the Fordha, and then transporting them from there to the stores. The travel boum saffar carried with them to Kuwait many types of goods packed in big bunches or heavy wooden boxes which were difficult to carry manually, regardless of the number of porters.

These boxes and pallets were unloaded from the boats to teshasheel using «*al biwar*», a thick rope tied to the ship mast (called degal *diqil*). «*Al biwar*» passed through a big wooden reel called «*gaffiyah*» fixed at the top of the mast used to facilitate its move. To unload big boxes or «bunches», they are tied by thick ropes (*al biwar*) passing through the reel, which is pulled down so the boxes go up, at which point they can be guided to the required direction of the teshalah to be unloaded there. Upon completing the loading of the teshalah, it sails towards the Fordha to unload its cargo there.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Mubarak Hussain Dashti.



The pallets and big pieces are unloaded from the teshashaeel to the Fordha by a big manual machine consisting of a manual crane fixed near the seaport. Such pieces were placed on big carriages made of thick square wood with iron wheels which the porters towed from the front and another number pushed them from the back to deliver them to the required location. That method was also used to unload cars from the teshasheel in the 1930s . It is known that cars used to come to Kuwait by steamships packed in big wooden boxes opened by the Customs Authorities and then re-assembled, fixing their tyres, then filled with fuel to be operated and driven to the agent's showroom. A number of porters also used to transport cars while in their boxes to the agent's stores by big wooden carriages with two wheels, which the porters towed from the Fordha to the stores. Another method was also used to move big pieces from one place to the other, through the use of what was known as «*al mantay*». The big box or pallet was placed on a big wooden base consisting of a number of big squared woods called «*mantay*». Such wooden pieces were lined on the ground next to each other, leaving gaps between them to allow space for placing other big wooden pieces in these gaps and then move them up to push the big pieces or wooden boxes to the front. A number of workers did this work to move the boxes from one place to the other through such method, which slipped on the wooden «bridges» until they are delivered to the required location<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **(C) Delivering And Transporting Inside The City**

Many Kuwaitis depended on animals to earn their living, the most important of which were donkeys which were cheap, easy for riding and could be subjugated for any purpose. They were used for transporting water, food, fodder such as barley and clover and building materials such as rocks, stones, clay, ashes, gypsum, buckets, timber, wild plants and human waste. It was a good means for transport to the distant areas, and also suitable to rotate the mill whether for milling grains to turn it into flour or for squeezing sesame and turning it into hardah paste. Donkeys were also used in feasts for children to entertain and ride. Horses and carts were also used but to a lesser extent as they were used to transport heavy items from Fordha to stores and to shops. Some people held a big number of donkeys for transportation purposes, they were called «*Al- amlah*» or «*Al Awamel*».

#### **«Al A'mlah», Or Owners Of Donkey Herds**

«Al a'mlah» used donkey herds for different jobs and hired workers for driving them. The great majority of donkey owners did not own more than one or two donkeys to earn their living through them, while each member of «al a'mlah» had from 8

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hejji Ibrahim Al Shamaly.

to 15 donkeys or more. Al a'mlah used big and good quality donkeys for their work. Donkeys in the past were classified into two main types, «*al hassawi*» and *al khikri*. Al hassawi donkey was known for its white color, beautiful appearance and tolerating hard work. It was brought from Bahrain or from Al Ahsa' and sold for high prices due to its big size and tolerance of heavy duties. Its price could reach 100 rupees in certain cases. «Al khikri» donkey was known for its small size and grey color and sometimes reddish brown color. It did not tolerate hard work and came from the northern areas, particularly from Iraq. It was cheap and undesirable as it was used for light works. There was a third middle-sized type of donkeys, which came from *Al Zubair*<sup>(1)</sup>.

Donkeys live for about 30 years and the first 15 years witness their ultimate strength and vigor. Male donkeys were used in hard and heavy work while females were used in light work such as transporting clover and water in addition to reproduction. The female gestation period is one year, after which its youngster remains with it for another year, which reduces depending on them during such period and make them unsuitable for hard work.

Donkeys were basically fed on barely and types of dates, in addition to clover, grass and other types of fodder.

### **Transporting Building Materials**

Al a'mlah or «al a'wamel» used their donkeys mainly to transport building materials. There was a special method to transport each kind of building material. For instance, stones, straw mats (*bawari*) and *bascheel* were tied with ropes to each others and put on the donkey's back to be moved from remote areas to the building sites. As for, the hay, clay, ashes, gypsum, and sand, they were packed in «*alwajir*», a bag made from canvas or from the hair of the sheep, placed on both sides of the donkey's back for transportation. Al wajir, made from the sheep's hair was used for transporting gypsum, while bags made from canvas were used to transport other types of building materials. For rocks and mud bricks, they were carried in «*al mangal*» a wooden cage consisting of two parts put on the donkey back<sup>(1)</sup>. Mud bricks and rocks were lined in «al mangal» using particular method and tied with «*sangal*», a middle sized iron chain, to prevent them from falling. Al mangal had room for 16 clay bricks, each brick weighing from 10 to 15 kg. Mud and mud bricks are moved from their workshops, called «*al matayin*» while gypsum was moved from its ditches called «*al majassat*». The rocks were moved from the dhow yards where al ablam unloaded their cargoes that were brought from quarries<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hejji Ibrahim Al Shamaly.

(2) An interview with Mr. Ahmad Eissa Al Wazzan.



Donkeys, mules and transporting horses (kedeesh) were seen in many places in the City as they were the main means of transport.

The price of transporting 1000 mud bricks from «al matyanah» to the building site in the mid 1940s was five rupees. The same price was also charged to transport the rocks from the dhow yards to the site. Some of «al matayin» and «al majassat» owners used to keep herds of donkeys to transport many items. They used to hire a number of workers to take care of the donkeys, feed and load them with building materials to the building sites. Their work started from early morning till sunset for a wage amounting to 15 rupees per month. Each worker commanded 4 to 6 donkeys according to the type of transported goods. The herd-or the fleet-owned by the owner of «al majas» ranged from 8 to 15 donkeys that were sheltered in barns at night<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the owners of «al majassat» and «al matayin» were the late Abdullah Al Shamali, Nasir, Khalid, Uthman, and Rashid Al Najdi, Yusuf Chabakooh, Abdurrahman Bu O'ufaan, Salem Al Harbi and a number of his relatives, Al Messabahy, Salem Al Shawi and some of his relatives, and Al O'mairi, Al Uthman and Al Musallam families.

Reliance on donkeys for transportation diminished gradually and completely disappeared in the mid 1950s as they were replaced completely by trucks or lorries. «Al a'mlah» began at that period to get rid of their donkeys and exporting them to the neighboring countries such as Bahrain and the Iran.

## **(D) Introduction Of Cars: Transporting And Delivery Services**

### **Historic Synopsis**

Donkeys were used in the past as a main means for transportation, in addition to carrying and moving heavy things. They were used mainly for close distances inside the city and neighboring villages. For remote areas, camels were the favorite and practical means for moving from one city to another. Some Sheikhs, merchants and dignitaries rode donkeys to move from one place to another in the city instead of walking on foot, representing a sign of wealth and notability like luxurious cars in our modern life. The donkey was decorated by putting an adorning-brocaded piece of cloth on its back and head as a sign of the social prestige of its rider. A ringing ball, called «*barasheem*» was also hung on the neck of the horses and donkeys to warn the passersby. However, traveling to remote areas such as Basrah or Al Zubair, horses were used.

Cars were introduced in Kuwait for the first time-as previously mentioned-during the reign of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah in the year 1912 when the late Qassim Bin Mohammed Al Ibrahim gifted him a car. The use of the vehicles

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(1) An interview with Mr. Rashid Abdulla Al Shamaly.



A number of citizens surrounding a car of the 1920s model

*Source: Kuwait's Modern History, Dr. Ahmad Abu Hakma- 1984.*

was still limited till the mid 1920s owing to narrow and unpaved roads. An elderly owner of a shop in Derwazat Abdul Razzag indicated that the owners of shops at that area used to leave their shops and the clients on hearing that there is a car passing in the street in order to watch it. The only car crossing that road in the 1920s was the car of Sheikh Khaza'al, the ruler of Al Muhammarah, who used to drive from his palace in the central area to Dasman palace through Al Derwaza. Some viewers used to tell the people around them that «this is the sign for the near coming of the Day of Judgment, when we see the iron box moving by itself».

In the year 1344 AH (1925 AD) a number of Sheikhs and traders started to buy their own cars. At the forefront were Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, Sheikh Ali Khalifa Al Sabah, Sheikh Salman Al Humud Al Sabah, Hilal Al Mutairi, Shamlan and Al Saif families. These were the only cars in Kuwait at that time<sup>(1)</sup>. Other number of traders got after a period of time their cars of «Ford» brand, whose agent was the late Sayed Hamid Al Naqeeb, and «Chevrolet», whose agent was the late Ali Al Kulaib. Both agencies were at Al Safat Square. Among

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(1) An interview with the late E'ssa Hayder Al Rasheed.



A car for transporting passengers from Kuwait to Basrah, parked at Safat awaiting for passengers.

other merchants who owned cars by the end of the 1920s were Hamad Al Khalid who owned Ford model 1927, Hamad Al Sager, Al Mulla Saleh, Abdul Kareem Abul and a number of other merchants. Afterwards, other people bought cars and hired drivers for them. The cars were taking them from their homes to their shops and vice versa with great difficulty, as the roads were too narrow, unpaved and with un-even ground.

Others used cars in a limited manner to go to the nearby villages such as Nugra and Hawally for a picnic. Then, the importance of cars gradually increased for transportation and people began to drive and use cars for going across long distances. By the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, few cars were used for local transportation against fees<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Automotive Company For Transporting Passengers**

In the year 1925, the first transport company in Kuwait, based in Al Safat, was established with six Ford cars. Most shares of that company were owned by the late Hamid Al Naqeeb, in addition to a number of merchants among whom were

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(1) An interview with the late Eassa Hayder Al Rasheed.

few members of Al Abdul Jalil and Al Houmaidhi families. The capital of the company was about 100,000 rupees and the value of each share was 100 rupees. The main purpose for establishing that company was to transport passengers from Kuwait to Al Zubair and Basrah and vice versa. The company had a management staff headed by the late Al Sayed Hamid Al Naqeeb who was granted a concession from the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber to operate cars between Kuwait and Basrah for 50 years.

The first car of the company took its way from Kuwait to Basrah on the fourth of Sha'baan 1344 AH, (1926 AD)<sup>(1)</sup>. Before that concession, most passengers used to go to Basrah by the sailboats or lanjs (ships equipped with engines that spread in the 1930s and 1940s and were called «*al matorat*»); a word derived from the word (motor) which means an engine. A passenger traveling from Kuwait to Basrah had to pay four rupees, while paying only two rupees when traveling by steamships and taking whatever luggage he wanted without having to pay extra charges<sup>(2)</sup>. The cars of the company used to receive passengers at its station in Al Safat- near Ford Car Exhibition- to transport them to Al Zubair and Basrah. Cars also used to go to the houses to pick up families to the same destinations in case of hiring a private car. They usually left for Basrah at dawn, and it took eight hours to arrive there. The road was sandy and dangerous as the cars sank in the sand several times. Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem had written in his book that the road to Basrah was dangerous as there were road gangsters, therefore each passenger had to have a gun before leaving Kuwait.

The activity of the automotive company diminished after World War II, due to the increased number of taxi cabs transporting passengers to Basrah. That led to competition with the company, forcing it to stop working after a period of time because its profits slumped.

### **Cars Agents**

At the beginning, Chevrolet and Ford cars were the most popular cars in Kuwait. Afterwards, other brands of cars were introduced such as «Monawra», «Overland» and «Hudson». The agent of Chevrolet was the late Ali Al Kulaib, while the late Yusuf Alghanim was the agent of Buick, Opel, Rover and Foxhole. The agent of Ford was the late Al Sayed Hamed Al Naqeeb, then the late Yusuf and Hamad Saleh Al Houmaidhi who became also the agents of Mercury, Imperial, Nash and Lincoln. The agent of Mercedes was an Iraqi from Baghdad called «Fayek

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(1) From Kuwait's History, Saif Marzook Al Shamlan - p.204 (in Arabic).

(2) Ibid-p.146.

O'baidah». Afterwards, the agent was Abdul Rahman Al Beshar and Zaid Al Kazmi Company who became the agent by the end of the 1940s. Abdullah Al Mulla Saleh was the agent of «Dodge», «Plymouth», «Desoto», «Chrysler», «Imperial», «Bakar», «Morris» and «International» which was called locally «A'ntar Nash». Afterwards, other agencies entered the market such as «Studi Baker» whose agent was the late Ezzat Ja'afar, «and Standard» whose agent was Ahmad Wahedi, «Rambler» whose agent was Ahmad Ameen Singer and «Hamper» whose agent was Sayed Ruzouqi.



The old Ford Showroom in Safat

Some agents sold their rights for others while other agencies for cars from different countries entered the market. For instance, the late Yusuf Ahmad Alghanim bought the agency of «Chevrolet» from the late Ali Al Kulaib in 1934-1935 while «Behbehani» bought the agency of «Desoto» from Ali Al Kulaib. Most of those agencies at that time were branches of the main agencies in Beirut and Basrah. Kuwait, at the outset of the last century till the end of the 1930s, didn't constitute an important market for the import of cars. The majority of car agents opened their own exhibitions in Safat and the showroom contained a handful number cars. The price of the cars ranged from 1,200 rupees to 1500 rupees (about KD. 90 -KD. 115). It was a great sum of money at that time by which a well-built house could be bought. Therefore, selling cars was limited, particularly because the roads were narrow and the distances were close. Most buyers were owners of taxicabs, who used to transport people to near distances or close areas such as the American Hospital, Nugra, Hawally and Shamiya. Cars reached Kuwait from their manufacturing countries packed inside wooden boxes while being in a disassembled state, where each box contained some parts of the car. The engine, the body and the tyres were delivered in separate boxes. Afterwards, the parts were assembled at the Fordha,



and then driven by a driver to the agent's showroom. Among the first of those who were famous for assembling car parts after getting them out of the boxes was a person called Abdul Wahid. Afterwards, a number of Kuwaitis gained experience in that field and performed the assembly by themselves. Among those people were No'man Ahmad Al Farsy, Abbas Ashkanani, Mohammed Saleh Mulla Hassan Al Nasir, Nasir Yusuf Abdul Jalil and a person from Failakah. The «mechanic» who carried out that task with some assistants used to receive an amount up to 100 rupees during the 1940s and it used to take two days to complete the assembly. At the beginning, all cars had open roofs called «*tantah*». After a period of time, sedans or saloon cars with iron roof arrived.

### **(E) Water Transport Company From Shatt Al Arab**

A company for transporting water from Shatt Al Arab to Kuwait was established in the year 1939. Its purpose was to organize the transportation and distribution of fresh water and to ensure better governmental supervision, especially after the exacerbated crisis of water during that period. The late Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah was appointed as its Chairman and ship captains and sailors were employed to drive the company ships. Other persons were employed to receive the value of the sold water, each one called «*Karrani*». About 20 boums were built to carry the water for the company account, the capacity of each ranged from 2,500 to 4,500 tanks. In addition to that, three pools were built for storing water in the three main suburbs of Kuwait City. One pool was erected in Al Shamlan niq'a in the East, the second in Al Ghunaim niq'a near Al Sief Palace and the third in Thuniyyan niq'a in Qibla.

The capacity of the three stored water tanks reached 8,500 gallons<sup>(1)</sup>. Big pipes were extended from areas where boats docked in the niq'a to the pools in order to supply them with water through special suction and compressing pumps placed in «*jalbut*» which stood near the boats in order to carry water from them to the pools. Taps were installed in the pools in order to be used by donkey owners and water carriers to fill their skin sacks and tins before going to the company's accountant to pay the value of the water. In the meantime, the Municipality played an important role in organizing the water distribution process in addition to supervising it. A committee from the Municipality and the company was established and was entitled to specify the fee for carrying water by donkey owners (*hammarah*) and *kandariyah* or *kanadrah* (water porters). The committee also paid attention to the cleanness of fresh water and it forced the water ship captain to clean the tanks after emptying

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(1) It is worth mentioning that the Municipality had built a pool of water on the sea coast which had the capacity of 2,000 tanks in 1934.

them from water and prevent donkey owners and water porters from getting inside the water tanks and fill the leather bags and tins with water as previously done which contaminated the water. The Municipality specified for the company the water selling price at not more than two paisas (half anna) per tank, and the price of transporting water by coolies or owners and water porters ranged from one to two paisas according to the distance<sup>(1)</sup>.

The establishment of the water company and the building of pools helped organize the process of selling water to donkey owners, and water porters beside the people, reduce intensity of crowds on water, and avoid the drop in water supply which frequently occurred. The entrance of the company in that field created a competitive atmosphere with the owners of water boats, especially when the company cut off the price of water. As a result, boum owners had later to sell their ships to the company. The number of ships owned by the company reached 34 in the year 1946 and average the quantity of water reached Kuwait daily amounted to 80,000 gallons of water<sup>(2)</sup>. Afterwards, many ship captains and sailors worked with the company after it had bought most of their boats. The company paid five rupees for each captain and two rupees and a half for each sailor per journey. That wage doubled later at the beginning of the 1950s. The average voyages sailed by ships were about 16 per month during the summer season while the number didn't exceed two voyages in winter as the demand for water in the winter was scarce in addition to the bad weather<sup>(3)</sup>. Winter was the season of maintenance when the ships of the company used to be cleaned and maintained. The cleaning process began with cleaning the tanks first and removing them from their places. That occurred by filling the ship with water making it submerge in the sea, and leaving the empty tank to float on the sea surface. The empty tanks then were pulled out for maintenance and repair. The company continued its work until the year 1950 when the first seawater desalination plant was established. Therefore, the company was liquidated and the money was returned to the shareholders after selling the ships to ship captains who used them to transport goods to the Gulf ports. It was mentioned that the value of each share in the company was 250 rupees and it did not distribute dividends during its life<sup>(4)</sup>. The two managers who assumed responsibilities of the company were the late Ahmad Al Khashti and Salem Bu Qammaz.

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(1) Kuwait Municipality in Fifty Years, Dr. Najat Al Jassim-p.144.

(2) Kuwait Municipality in Fifty Years, Dr. Najat Al Jassim-p.144.

(3) An interview with Mr. Abdul Rahman Al Sughair.

(4) An interview with the late Kasseb Hassan Al Farass.

## 2- Miscellaneous Trading Activities

### (A) The Public (Turkish) Bath

Kuwaitis were accustomed- before the period that witnessed economic boom in the middle of the 1950s- to having bath in salty water drawn out from wells which were among the necessities in the Kuwaiti houses. Some built small arbor around the well in which a bench was put to sit on during bathing and pouring water pulled out from the well on the body. Those who had a bath used a green powder called (cedr) made from buckthorn tree, after drying and crushing its leaves<sup>(1)</sup>.

In the year 1915 - in the last days of the reign of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah- as mentioned by Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem, a number of merchants from Ma'arafi, Murad Behbehani and Al Moqadem families contributed with Sheikh Khaza'l Bin Merdaw, the ruler of Al Muhammarah Emirate at that time, to building a public bath in «Mubarak square» near Al Maidan area in the eastern district of the city. Sheikh Khaza'l owned three shares or portions of the establishment and Ma'arafi owned two shares while Al Moqadem had one portion. The bath was built on a 200 square meter area. It was a two-storey roofed house which contained a basement and one floor. The late N'amat Allah Moqadem was the agent of the shareholders while the late Taher Al Shirazi was responsible for the management<sup>(2)</sup>.

The ground floor contained a small hall for receiving the guests and it contained wooden boxes for the guests to put in their clothes before entering the bath. The visitor used to give his valuable things and his counted rupees to the receptionist who provided the visitor with two towels, one to wrap his head and the other to fix around his body. Afterwards, the guest entered the main hall in the basement passing a small bathtub in order to wash his feet first. In the bottom hall of cement flooring, there was a big bathtub above the ground level, filled with well water. Its floor consisted of thick copper sheets that were above the ground level under which a burner was put to heat the water. Wood was put first into the burner to heat the water. The bathtub provided those who took a bath with hot water through the pipes. In addition, it helped provide the hall with steams to heat the weather. There were also small square and cement bathtubs inside the hall, each side was 70 cm long and 70 cm deep. These bathtubs were filled with hot water through pipes coming from the big bathtub.

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(1) An interview with the late E'ssa Hayder Al Rasheed.

(2) From Here Kuwait Started, Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem,p.320.

The guest taking the bath on the edge of the small bathtub and used, a pan with which he poured water on his body. The visitor was also provided with (cedr) and a brush if he desired.

Having had a bath, the visitor was provided with a bucket full of unsalted water in order to wash his body and to remove the remains of salted water. He was also provided with a towel to dry his body before going to the hall to receive his clothes and pay the charges which was 4 annas or half rupee. This bath didn't attract too many visitors so it earned little revenue. As a result, it closed its doors in the mid 1940s, especially after the Iranian government arrested its main owner, Sheikh Khaz'al bin Merdaw after the collapse of his Emirate in the 1920s. The place of the bath remained as it was deserted of visitors. It was turned into ruins till the Municipality removed it along with the adjacent houses in the year 1962 after the State Domains Department appropriated most of the old buildings in Kuwait City.

### **The Public Bath In Qibla, Another Attempt....**

A more modernized bath than the previous one was built in Wajef Market area at the beginning of the 1940s. Its owner was the late Ridha Al Sayigh who also failed in managing it. Therefore, it was bought by a relative of the owners of the old bath located in Sharq, the late Mahmoud Asa'ad Al Shishtari who appointed the late Taher Al Sherazi - who was the manager of the old bath - to manage it. The late Osta Ahmad Albanna, one of the old Kuwaiti professional builders, designed and built the bath. It consisted of a reception hall, containing 35 wooden closets, that led to an internal big hall containing two big bathtubs, one of which was for the hot water and the other for the cold water. The bath had two sections, a private and a public. The private one contained ten small baths while the public one was a big hall with 30 small bathtubs built on the sides of the walls. Each bathtub was provided with a tap delivering the hot water coming from the big bathtub. Unsalted water was used in that bath and the visitor was supplied with «cedr» or soap if he desired. There had also been masseurs, people who were appointed to massage bodies if guests desired. The charge for having a bath with only water was two rupees while bathing with the cedr or soap cost 3 rupees. Three additional rupees were added for massaging and the cost of bathing in the special bath was 10 rupees. Visitors of that bath - especially in the 1950s - were bachelors and workers who came to Kuwait during that time and lived in houses which didn't contain baths. That bath was removed by the end of the 1950s when the construction process increased in that area and a lot of buildings, cafes and shops were built.

## **(B) The Fisheries Company**

In the year 1945 a number of merchants established the first fishing company in Kuwait with a capital of 60,000 rupees. It was named «Fisheries Company» and the share value was one hundred rupees. The idea was of the late Abdulatif Al Musallam Al Qana'i who became the company manager, which appointed an administrative staff under his chairmanship and membership of the late Ali Al Banwan, Marzouk Al Tuhaih, Yusuf Abdulatif Al A'dasani, Abdulatif Tabatabai and Ya'qub Al Reffai<sup>(1)</sup>. The company purchased a number of lorries, lanjs, boats and fishing articles such as tools and other preparations. It had also employed a number of fishermen amounting to 15 and appointed a captain in order to supervise and organize the fishing activity. The company's fishing site started from the coast of Shua'iba village and extended south to Nuwayseeb. It decided later to expand its fishing area southwards towards Saudi Arabia waters in order to fish good types of fish. Therefore, they requested Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the then Amir of Kuwait, to permit them to sail such water and he gave the permission. The company continued performing its work there and the fishermen used to throw big fishing nets of length amounting to around two kilometers or more, whereby they fished huge quantities of fish. The fishermen started their work during the ebb period by spreading one edge of the net near the coast then go with the remaining net to spread it inside the sea to a distance of around 200 meters. Then, they returned with the other edge near the coast, to become in the shape of a semi circular arch. Upon completion of the flow period, the fishermen went to the nets inside the sea to fix them and support them with al maradi. One pole used to be fixed between every ten meters of the net approximately and the workers used to do this while swimming inside the sea, while others would lift the nets up by the poles, while they were on the boats. Therefore, an extensive area of the coast would be closed on huge quantities of fishes. This work was carried out by 6 to 8 fishermen. The fish were caught and loaded in the lorries awaiting to take them to the Fish Market. This way, the increasing demand for fish was satisfied and the market was replenished with its needs<sup>(2)</sup>. The company realized good profits at the beginning. However, it faced numerous difficulties afterwards as a result of the many break downs in the cars due to bad roads and the far distance, which increased the operation expenses and accumulation of losses. This forced the company owners to dissolve it in the year 1948<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Hassan Ghareeb Al Dashti.

(2) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem,p.320.

(3) An interview with the late Khalid Al Shaheen Al Ghanim.

### (C) The «Modern Hotel»

The visits of foreigners to Kuwait were very limited except for merchants from neighboring countries and the Bedouins who used to come to Kuwait during the spring season for selling and buying. A number of ship owners and merchants also came to Kuwait from countries to which Kuwaiti sailboats sailed such as Soor Port in Oman, Tankeseer, Kangoon and King ports in the eastern side of the Gulf in order to visit their colleagues in the trade for the purpose of trading or paying personal visits. These visitors stayed as guests in the diwans of their hosts or in their store buildings spread along the seacoast. The host used to assist his guest in completing his commercial tasks, repairing his ship in his niq'a if it needed, and guiding him to the appropriate shops to be supplied with goods, as well as facilitating his task of selling any goods which he may have brought with him<sup>(1)</sup>. Therefore, these visitors did not need hotels to shelter them during their stay in Kuwait.

As for Bedouins and workers who came to Kuwait from the Arabian Peninsula with their camels and from Iraq with their donkeys - as well as small merchants and brokers from the neighboring countries - they used to live in tents or temporary houses inside or outside the City Wall enjoying the breezing air and the good climate of the spring season. Most of the workers and a big number of Bedouins used to live in Safat as their temporary residence. So, they slept in the open air and enjoyed the quietness which prevailed in this very extensive square, free of building and constructions, except few trusses used as coffee shops. As for Iranian merchants who used to come to Kuwait to sell a number of consumer goods such as nuts, saffron, carpets and cloaks, and the like, they used to live on top of the roofs of the «Government Khan» located at the Merchants' Market or in their sailboats with which they sailed to Kuwait or in the diwans of their agents of traders dealing with them. Most of these comers were not prepared to bear the costs of being housed in hotels.

With the increase in the number of expatriates coming to Kuwait at the beginning of the 1930s, a person called Merza Hadi built a two-storey shop building «*Kaysariyah*» in the old Wajif Market (the Scrap Market) near the Boxes Market, which included a number of shops inside and outside, as well as a number of rooms in the upper floor for housing foreign merchants and visitors against a payment of simple amount of money<sup>(2)</sup>. This kaysariyah continued sheltering foreign visitors till approximately the mid-forties when a small hotel was built east of Safat near Al Maseel in the year 1947, following the big expansion witnessed by Kuwait in trade as a result of re-pumping

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Bu Shehri.

(2) An interview with Mr. Mohammed Saleh Yusuf Behbehani.

of oil at commercial quantities after its discontinuation during World War II, and the increase in the number of merchants, businessmen and visitors coming to Kuwait.

The late Yusuf Sherin Behbehani established the first hotel in Kuwait - in Safat area near the old building of the Ministry of Defense at a location behind the British Bank of the Middle East, which was built there during the 1940's. The hotel was given the name of «The Modern Hotel».<sup>(1)</sup> The hotel was not of high standard as it did not offer any remarkable services to its guests, except accomodation. It contained few numbers of rooms and was managed by an elderly man.

#### **(D) Kuwait Private Broadcasting Station**

The first broadcasting station in Kuwait was inaugurated in the year 1947, and was located in the eastern part of Safat Square behind the old Public Security building. This radio station belonged to Mr. Murad Yusuf Behbehani. It seems that the idea of opening a broadcast station came to promote radio sets and other electric appliances produced by RCA company, whose agent was Mr. Murad Behbehani. It was called Kuwait Private Radiobroadcast. It focused on transmitting local as well as Arabic songs, especially Egyptian and Iraqi which were widely spread at that time, in addition to simple programs and Qur'an. The radio had only one disc which contained «Surat Yusuf», transmitted every once in a while. Songs were transmitted from the discs operated at the radio, while a number of singers used to come to the site to sing at the location for live broadcast. Also, a number of rhymes were recorded for school students in order to be broadcast from there. The broadcasting period continued for two hours daily and confined to Kuwait. Among the most famous Kuwaiti singers whose songs were broadcast were the late Abdulla Al Fadhala, Abdulatif Al Kuwaiti, Mahmoud Al Kuwaiti and A'wadh Salem. Mr. Mohammed Ridha Yusuf Behbehani was the broadcaster, manager and the only person in charge of the radio station.

In the year 1950, Mr. Murad Yusuf Behbehani gifted the radio station to Sheikh Abdulla Al Mubarak Al Sabah who was the then Public Security Manager. So, the radio station was attached to that Department and then moved to Nayif Palace. Since then, the radio station witnessed a remarkable expansion in its performance and a number of Kuwaiti youths were employed, including the late Mubarak Al Mayyal and Hamad Al Mo'men, as program presenters, in addition to Mr. Ya'qub Al Rasheed, who worked as a teacher in the Education Department then. The radio continued broadcasting songs and a number of simple programs till it was expanded and developed at the end of the 1950s.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ismael Qambar Baqer.

## **(E) The British Bank Of The Middle East**

Kuwait came to know the first bank in the year 1942 when The British Bank of the Middle East opened its first headquarters during that year. Its official name at that time was the «The Imperial Iranian Bank Incorporated in England». That bank was founded in England and the founders obtained the concession to work in Iran and Iraq which were subjected to the British control at that time. In the year 1941, negotiations were held between the bank management and Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait, to open a branch for the bank in Kuwait. The bank management stipulated that the bank should be given a twenty-five year concession. Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, after reviewing the matter with his consultants, agreed to grant the bank a period of five years renewable for a further twenty years, after proving its merit and offering remarkable banking services to the citizens.

The first headquarters of the bank opened on 28 February 1942 was in the middle of the Merchants' Market after merging a number of commercial shops adjacent to the shop of the late Abdulla Al Mulla Saleh, and a number of the yards located



The British Bank of the Middle East building (right) opened in the year 1949 in Al Safat

*Source: Snapshots from Kuwait Past and Present, Ministry of Information.*





Employees of the British Bank of the Middle East in the year 1946.

*Source: From the archive of Mr. Ja'afar Hayder Al Rasheed.*

behind those shops, to form the headquarters of the new bank. A cement tightly-built strongbox was also constructed to keep the cash money. It consisted of a room with an iron door inside the building. In the year 1950, the bank's name was changed to the «British Bank of Iran and the Middle East». After almost three years, i.e. in 1953, the name was changed again to the «British Bank of the Middle East». That bank- based in London- had a main branch in Tehran, then it opened branches in Baghdad, Basrah and Mousil. Its first branch in the Arabian Gulf was opened in Kuwait, then in Muscat, followed by Bahrain Branch.

Among the most important activities carried out by that bank in the first years of operation was opening current accounts and receiving deposits from customers in the form of trusts. After a period of time, it started offering loans to merchants with an interest rate of 5%. The loans were offered to senior merchants without guarantees, while other borrowers deposited gold bars as a guarantee against the loans given to them, amounting to 100,000 rupees. Most borrowers used the loans for trading and currency- speculation<sup>(1)</sup>. Among the commercial activities which

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(1) An interview with the late Jassim Abdulla Al Abdullah.

The Imperial Bank of Iran.  
(Incorporated in England)

المصرف الامبراطوري اليراني  
(التؤس في انكلترا)

Kuwait, 20 SEP. 1944 19

السكوت في ١٩

To Muzuf Behbehani  
Kuwait

المحترم

حضرة

بمد التتجة

Dear Sir,

We beg to inform you that your Current Deposit Account with this Bank has been balanced with Interest to date and the sum of :

Rupees 185-4-3 carried to your Credit in a new Account.

We shall be much obliged by your certifying the correctness of the Account on the annexed form, which please return at your earliest convenience.

نود اعلامكم باننا قد اجرينا موازنة حساب الجاري المائد  
لبكم مع الفاضل لتاريخه  
وقد نقل مبلغ قدره  
روبيه  
لصالحنا/لصالحكم في حساب جديد .

وعلى ذلك فنسكون ممتين لو ايدتم صحة الحساب على  
الاستارة المرفقة طياً واعدتها الينا باقرب فرصة ممكنة ودمتم .

We remain, dear Sir,  
Yours faithfully  
For The Imperial Bank of Iran

عن المصرف الامبراطوري اليراني

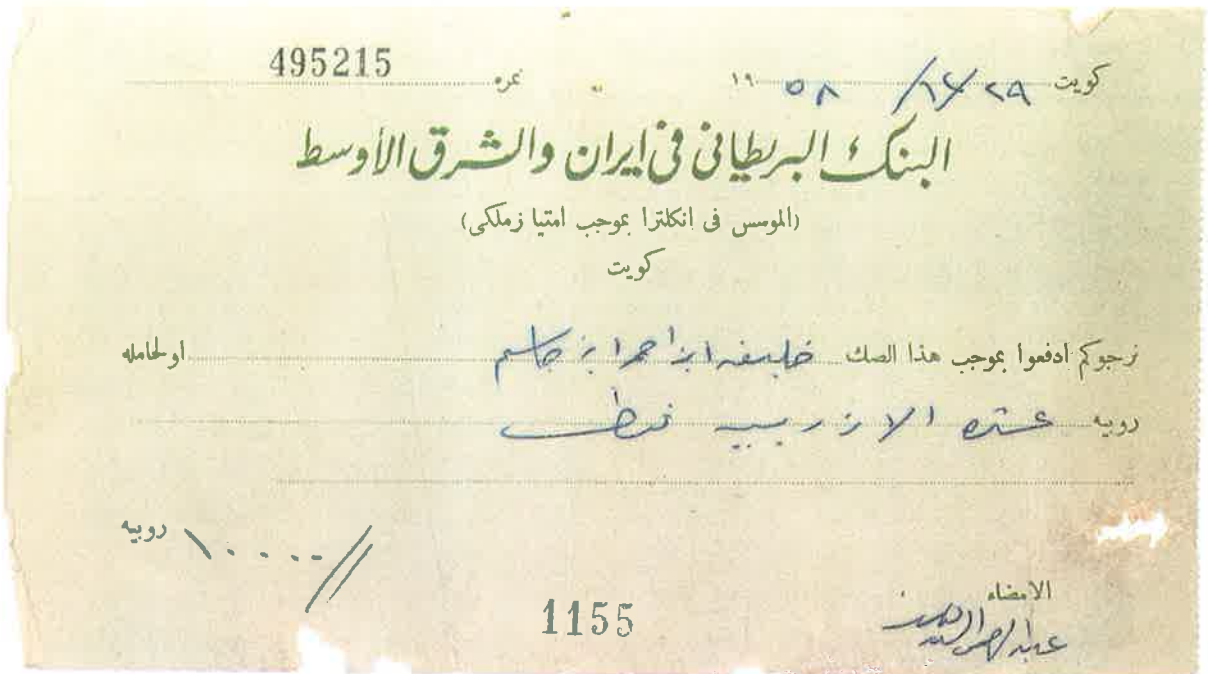


Form No. 209.

Sub Manager.

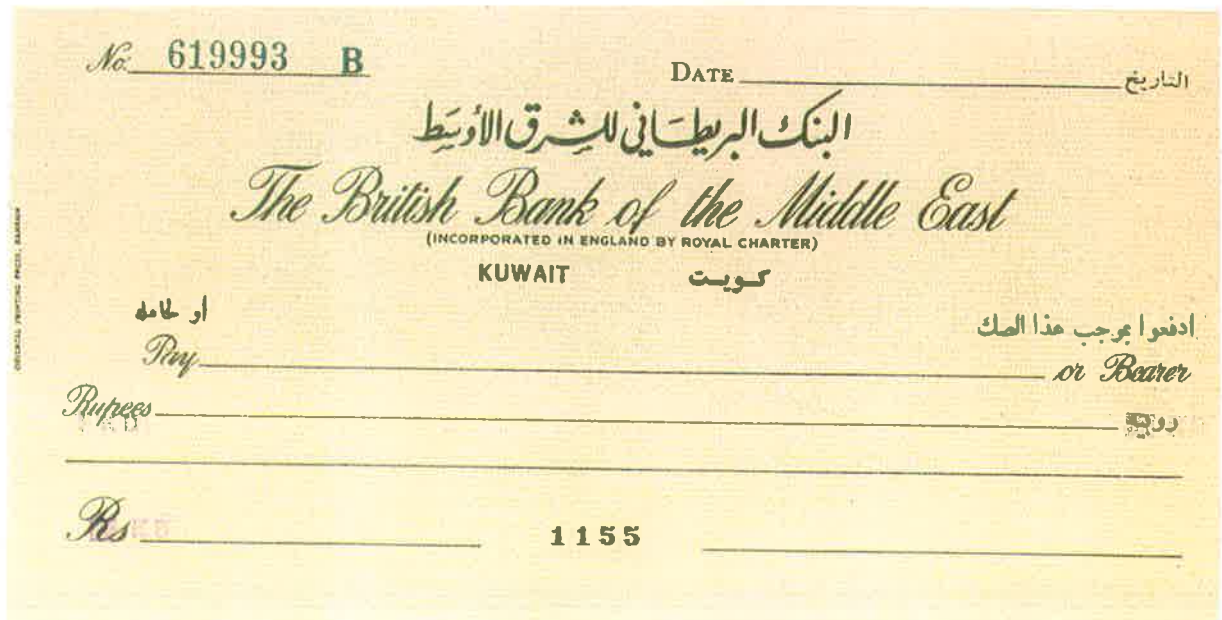
نائب المدير

Source: From the archive of Mr. Ali Al Rayes



Old check of «The British Bank of Iran and the Middle East».

Source: from the belongings of Mr. Ali Rayes



Old check of «The British Bank of The Middle East».

Source: from the archive of Mr. Ali Rayes

flourished during the first years of opening the bank was exchanging currencies. World War II was in its intensity and therefore the British armies were spread in the lands of Iraq and Iran, which led to the increase in the demand for the Iraqi Dinar and Iranian Toman to pay for the allied troops salaries there. There was no big demand for the Dollar or Sterling Pounds in Kuwait, as most of the goods were imported from India at that time. Also, documentary letters of credits (L/Cs) were not widely used for import at that time.

The business of opening documentary letters of credits started at the beginning of the year 1946 when merchants started importing goods directly from Europe and America, after being imported through India. It is worth noting that the first person to begin opening documentary letters of credits through the British Bank in Kuwait was the late Mohammed Humud Al Khalid in the year 1946. He, earlier, opened the (L/Cs) in the British Bank branch in Basrah during World War II. Afterwards, a number of merchants started opening bank credits after importing goods from Europe and America increased as well as postal and cable correspondences between commission traders and others to bring simple consumer goods such as pens, lighters, radios, perfumes and medicines. The British Consulate at that time used to issue the import licenses to such merchants and provide them with a letter to the British Bank requesting it to sell them Sterling Pounds in order to import goods from Britain, USA or other countries.

The bank's activity at that time did not include acceptance of deposits. Rather, the funds were placed as trusts for those who did not wish to open current accounts, in return of handing him a receipt voucher for such amount. If he wished to withdraw a certain amount of money, he would submit the voucher to pay him the required amount and then receive another voucher for the balance. As for most merchants, they had current accounts with the bank. The funds were kept in a vault as a big safebox built of concrete with two keys, one with the bank manager and the other with one of the tellers, Abdulla Mohammed Sanan, then Mansur Ali Al Sarraf.

The number of current accounts was limited and the accounts were recorded alphabetically according to the family name of the depositor. Current accounts were divided up into two parts, the first started from the letter «A» to the letter «L», and the second from the letter M to the letter Z. Such division was based on Latin letters and each part of these accounts was under the supervision of a teller. Mr. Ja'afar Al Rasheed - one of the first Kuwaiti employees who joined the British Bank in the year 1944- tells an interesting story which happened to him with the

account of Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait at that time, who was personally responsible for it.

One day, the Sheikh's representative came to the bank, the late Ibrahim Al Mozayen, with a cheque of 2000 rupees signed by the Sheikh in order to encash it. When Mr. Ja'afar Al Rasheed examined the signature, he noticed a difference and its incompatibility with the signature of Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber. Upon checking and referring to the checkbooks in the bank, it was revealed that the cheque is from the same checkbook of Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber. So, he referred to the British manager of the bank, who in turn compared the signature on the cheque with the approved signature in the bank, and agreed with him that there was a big difference between the two signatures. However, he requested him not to return the cheque so as not to cause any embarrassment or create a problem. He pointed out that such a matter could be a type of test for the bank's ability to distinguish between correct and fake signatures. Therefore, the bank manager decided to go immediately to the office of the late Abdulla Al Mulla Saleh, Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber's representative and the Government Secretary, to present the matter to him. The late Abdulla Al Mulla reviewed the signature and confirmed that it was not the signature of the Sheikh. He then called the Amir by phone and informed him of the story. Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber laughed and informed him that it was his signature, but he had signed it hurriedly by his left hand due to the injury of his right hand, while being in the car on his way to hunting. He requested him to instruct the bank to honor the cheque. The Sheikh also thanked the bank for its meticulous work and its professional efficiency. The bank manager returned and ordered payment of the cheque and thanked Mr. Ja'afar Al Rasheed for his careful observation. Mr. Ja'afar Al Rasheed said he has not seen a single forgery operation of cheques during his work which lasted for twenty-three years with the British Bank of the Middle East.

The bank continued offering its services to the citizens from its premises till November 1949 when it shifted to its new premises in Safat square, built on a land owned by Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. An agreement was held with the bank for not paying the rent for 25 years, after which the ownership of the building will be assigned to the Sheikh. The new premises was inaugurated in a big celebration attended by the late Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, the British Consul, Abdulla Al Mulla Saleh, Yusuf Ahmad Alghanim and a number of merchants. That building was the first centrally-air-conditioned in Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) From Here Kuwait Started, Abdullah Khalid Al Hatem, 1980, p.185.

## (F) The National Bank Of Kuwait

The National Bank of Kuwait was one of the most significant economic institutions established in Kuwait in the mid past century. The British Bank of the Middle East was the only bank till the year 1952, when a number of merchants observed the necessity of establishing a national bank to extend financial and banking services to the people and contribute to supporting the national economy and enhance the economic development, the features of which started to emerge after few years of Kuwait's joining the oil producing panel of countries. That led to the increase of the government and the people's income. A delegation of merchants met with the late Sheikh Abdulla Al Salem Al Sabah, the former Amir of Kuwait, to present the concept. He accepted the idea and encouraged them to go forward in following up the implementation of that project. It seems that the idea of establishing the National Bank faced an opposition from the British government and the British Commissioner in Kuwait at that time. However, the support of the late Sheikh Abdulla Al Salem



The first premises of the National Bank of Kuwait in the New Street (presently Abdulla Al Salem Street)



National Bank of Kuwait staff with the general manager Mr. Medlycott in the year 1953.

*Source: A Success Story, National Bank of Kuwait- 2002.*

Al Sabah led to the implementation of the project. Britain believed that the idea would not succeed in view of the little experience enjoyed by the Kuwaitis in the banking activity.

Those in charge of that idea convened and decided that the bank's capital should be fixed at eleven million rupees (around 850,000 dinar). They invited shareholders to meet in the Mubarakiyah School where the board of management was elected, which consisted of nine persons including Mr. Khalid Al Zaid Al Khalid, Mr. Khalid Al Abdulatif Al Hamad, Mr. Ali Al Sayed Sulaiman, Mr. Abdulaziz Hamad Al Saqr, Mr. Yusuf Ahmad Alghanim, Mr. Yusuf Abdulaziz Al Fulajj, Mr. Ahmad Sa'ud Al Khalid, Mr. Mohammed Abdulmohsen Al Kharafi and Mr. Khalifa Al Khalid Alghunaim<sup>(1)</sup>. On the 15th of May 1952, the Amiri Decree was issued for establishing the bank. The first premises of the bank was built in the New Street (Abdulla Al Salem Sreet at present), after merging a number of shops there. A contract was also concluded with a British manager who possessed extensive banking experience, called

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(1) An Here Kuwait Started, Abdulla Khalid Al Hatem, 1980, p.185.

Mr. Medlycott, to manage the bank which was inaugurated in December of 1952<sup>(1)</sup>. The bank started with a few number of employees. At the beginning, it conducted simple banking activities such as bank credits, exchange of currencies, bank transfers, deposits and withdrawals. The National Bank of Kuwait is the first national bank in the Arabian Gulf region.

The National Bank of Kuwait played an important role in the 1950s in the construction boom and offered support to individuals and national institutions to fund the infrastructure projects at that time. The first Chairman of the National Bank of Kuwait was the late Khalid Al Zaid Al Khalid, who continued in office till the year 1955. He was succeeded by Mr. Ahmad Sa'ud Al Khalid who became the Chairman during the period from 1956 to 1958, followed by Mr. Abdulaziz Al Saqr, for the period from 1959 to 1964.

### **(G) Insurance**

Insurance on sailboats or goods coming to Kuwait did not attract the attention of merchants and ship owners in the past as they did not appreciate its benefits. However, with the coming of steamships to Kuwait and the diversification of the sources of goods, merchants started to be aware of the significance of insurance and its role in protecting them from any risks which would cause loss of their wealth, and which might be preserved against bearing simple amounts of money to protect them. Tens of Kuwaiti ships were exposed in the past to many accidents, including the burning of some of them and sinking of others at the sea or near the Kuwaiti coasts due to storms and winds. A number of such ships were loaded with goods, which caused massive losses leading to the loss of the entire wealth of traders without any compensation therefor. It is said that a number of Kuwaiti families who owned many ships became without any source of income at the past century when they were exposed to such type of accidents.

With the arrival of steam ships to Kuwait and opening of «Kremkenzy Company» office as agent for ships, the costs of shipping goods sailing to Kuwait included insurance on goods «CIF».

Lloyds Company appointed an agent in Kuwait, who took the offices of Kremekenzy Company as its headquarters to follow up any claims or allegations made by merchants in the event of loss of their goods, against fees amounting to 25 rupees paid to the company in order to carry out the required procedures<sup>(1)</sup>. By the mid1940s, a number of foreign insurance companies started opening their

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(1) An interview with Mr. Ja'ffar Hayder Al Rasheed.





A photograph showing Mr. Khalid Zaid Al Khalid (Chairman of the bank) with Ahmad Sa'ud Al Khalid (Vice- Chairman) and Khalifa Khalid Alghunaim with the bank manager Mr. Meddlecot and few employees inside the bank building in the year 1953.

*Source: A Success Story, National Bank of Kuwait- 2002*

branches in Kuwait after the expansion of trade. At the forefront of these companies was «Royal Insurance Company», which opened its office around the year 1945 in Bahaita area in the Merchants' Market. Its agent was the late Mr. Ahmad Al Gharabally. The New India Insurance Company also opened its branch and its agent was Mr. Mohammed Saleh Behbehani. Then, the Lebanese Itehad Company opened its office in Kuwait during the same period. Those companies had small numbers of employees and insured the goods in coordination with the British Bank for the Middle East. A few number of Kuwaitis joined those companies which expanded their work gradually to include different insurance operations afterwards<sup>(1)</sup>. In the year 1960, the first national insurance company «Kuwait Insurance Company» was established to offer its services to merchants and other people in the different fields of life, contributing to the commercial and economic activity which could no longer do without such services.

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(1) An. interview with Mr. Yusuf Abdul Rasoul Bu Abbas.



# *Chapter Four*

## **Activities In Kuwait's Villages And Islands**

*Part One: Activities In Kuwait's Villages*

*Part Two: Activities In Failakah Island*

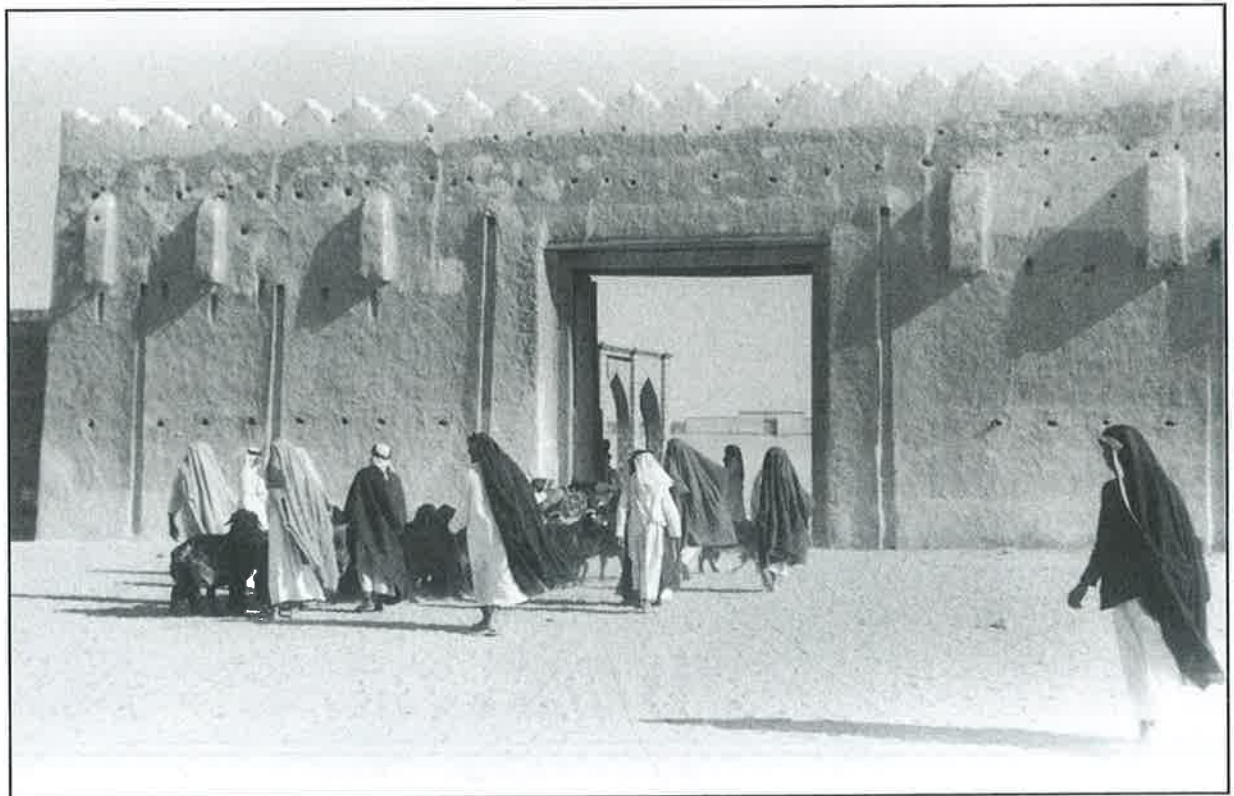


## *Part One*

### *Activities In Kuwait's Villages*

#### **Exchange Of Commodities and Goods Between Residents Of The Villages And Kuwait City**

Kuwait's villages and desert were the main source for supplying Kuwait City with its needs of a number of goods and commodities headed by dairy products, A'dani ghee, wool, vegetables and other agricultural products, and weeds used for fuel purposes and as fodder for animals. The villages and the adjacent deserts relied also on the city for supplying them with all their needs of foodstuffs, clothes and other miscellaneous requirements. Commodity exchange was carried out daily through the coming of the villagers on their camels and donkeys to Al Manakh, and Safat afterwards, to sell their materials and buy their needs from the city market almost all the year round.



A number of the Bedouin residents going to the city and entering through Al Shamiya Gate, with their sheep to sell in Al Safat where they could buy their needs of supplies.

They used to visit the city frequently during the spring season to sell or exchange their products for other materials. When their products became scarce during summer and autumn, and most of their foodstuffs ran out, some of them, whether merchants or individuals, would buy their supplies from shop owners such as sugar, rice, tea, coffee, textiles and the like on credit. In spring, the sheep reproduces and the market flourishes, they sell their products of milk, *cherthi* (*labnah*), ghee and wool and pay their debts. Some people point out to this activity as «ghee and fat», i.e. availability of money after selling the products under the economic prosperity<sup>(1)</sup>. There was mutual confidence between the two sides, as each one of them knew the other, as well as the long-standing good relationship between the villagers and the city dweller, especially that both went diving together in many instances, in addition to the family relationship connecting many of the villagers with the city dwellers.

Kuwait's villages were not in a better condition than the other villages scattered in the Arabian Peninsula, in terms of the available resources and type of attainable work for living. The scarcity of rain and high temperature almost prevailed over the entire region, causing difficulty for the growth of agricultural products, which were limited in their quality and quantity as a result. The advent or arrival of winter season usually gave hope to the people that the sky might be full of nimbuses that could provide abundant rainfall, leading to the growth of plants, in order for sheep and camels to graze and their breasts would be filled with milk. Therefore, the living conditions would flourish and the exchange processes with the city would be active and bring goodness and satisfaction to everyone.

As for the lean years which witness scarcity and dryness, their effect reflect negatively on the living conditions of the Bedouins and city dwellers, alike. The reliance of the city dwellers was great on the goods coming from the villages which lead to market flourish and income increase as a result of commodity exchange, and selling and buying with villagers. Many shop owners in the city also depended for an important part of their income on trading in materials coming from the desert which satisfied the demands of their city dweller customers and increased their income resulting from such process. They also relied on selling large quantities of various consumer goods coming from abroad to the Bedouins reaching to Kuwait to buy such materials. Throughout

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.



*Source:  
Ministry of  
Information*



*Photographs  
from Kuwait,  
Ministry of  
Information*

Kuwait's desert is distinguished by the multiplicity, diversity and quality of the grass and their high nutritional values. In the upper photograph, sheep are seen grazing in the desert during spring. Grass covered Kuwait's desert on which animals fed for several months, especially when the rainfall was abundant. In the lower photograph, camels are seen grazing and eating from the goodness of the desert in order to provide abundant milk to their owners.

those days, Kuwait was the main supplier of the desert regions with consumer goods and the receiver of desert products for local consumption or for export abroad. Therefore, a big part of their trade and income relied on the products supplied by the Bedouins throughout the year.

We will explain on the following pages the most significant work practiced by the villagers and Bedouins in Kuwait, and the type and nature of such work on which they depended on for living.

## **Grazing**

### **Breeding And Grazing Sheep<sup>(1)</sup>**

A big number of villagers and Bedouins - if not most of them- depended for their living on breeding sheep in order to sell their various products. In addition to the existence of goats and sheep in every lodging in the desert, some of them kept big numbers ranging from fifty to five hundred heads of sheep or more. The sheep owner employed some graziers to farm and care for sheep during the season against a certain amount of money. A number of shepherds worked with their families in grazing the sheep of merchants



Sheep are spread in the desert throughout the year for pasture eating different types of available plants.

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.



working in that sector. The father and his sons used to graze sheep by day and care for them, while the wife and the daughters used to milk them, collect the milk, shake it and separate the butter, and make various products. Usually, the sheep owner would agree with the shepherd for grazing and caring for the sheep during the period from the beginning of autumn till the end of spring against a certain amount of money. In some cases, the sheep owner would give part of the production to the shepherd against his work, in addition to the wage. For instance, when the shepherd's family prepared 3-4 buckets of milk per day, or fleece the wool of a number of sheep, the employer would allocate one bucket of milk or one cut of the wool to the shepherd and his family. The shepherd benefited by selling the wool share and making dried milk called «*Al Eqt*» to sell it as well.

The process of grazing sheep and goats during spring was easy and entertaining for the shepherd due to the availability of grass, moderate weather, reproduction of sheep and yielding big quantities of milk. The shepherd follows grass wherever it is located. No boundaries would limit him, as he goes with the herds of sheep anywhere he likes and in any direction. A number of shepherds used to pitch their tents or build trusses and dig up wells in the areas rich in grass to stay there during the grazing period. Among the places which had abundant grass quantities for grazing sheep during the spring in the south was Manageesh, Shua'i, Wafra, O'uirijan, A'rfajiyah, Warah, A'rifjan, and Qurain. As for the areas near the city, they included Hawally, Nugra, Rumaithiyah and Shamiyah. The north area of Jahrah was also rich in different types of plants, grass and big desert trees on which camels and sheep fed.

### «Wada'a»: Lodging Sheep During Summer<sup>(1)</sup>

A number of sheep owners used to keep their sheep with the shepherds who grazed and took care of them during the summer season, against a certain amount of money or a certain number of sheep, according to the number of the concerned herd. This type of grazing was called «wada'a». Its fee ranged between quarter to half rupee per head of sheep or a number of sheep which may reach two percent of the total number of sheep.

During summer, the shepherd used to go to remote areas, in search of grass and plants to feed the sheep and to water wells. Shepherds are accustomed to the heat of the environment and tolerating the difficult conditions of nature facing them in the desert while performing their work. As for the sheep, the conditions may be more difficult due to the scarcity of grass and water, which complicates the situation

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

and makes grazing difficult, while heat, disease and hunger contribute to killing a considerable number of them.

In certain cases, a number of shepherds agree to graze a herd of sheep alternatively among them, and each one of them would get an amount of money as well as rest extending for weeks which he would spend with his family during the grazing period. For example, if the number of shepherds is three, then two of them would go grazing the sheep, while the third stays with his family during this period - which may extend for one month. After the end of such period, this person would come back to work and one of the two would go to his family, and so on. Therefore, each one of them would get a period of rest while his colleagues performed this work.

Most of Kuwait's desert in the past contained grass throughout the year, including summer, especially in the rainy years, where a quantity of dry weeds would be available for feeding sheep, called «*al hamees*», which is a word derived from «*al hamsa*», i.e. the material exposed to fire which lead to its roasting. This of course reflects the state of the grass in the summer season as a result of being exposed to the sun heat. As for the years in which rainfall is scarce, shepherds may be forced to migrate with their sheep to remote areas such as Al Qateef, Al Ahsa and A'r'ar. Reaching these areas may sometime take one month or more, in search for grass and water. The water wells in the desert are available to sheep to drink for free. There were a big number of wells in some areas where shepherds go. The number of wells may amount to ten or more in one area. Shepherds usually take leather or skin sacks with them to draw out water from the wells, in addition to leather pools at the edges of which wooden pieces are fixed to act like water pools when opened for the sheep to drink from them<sup>(1)</sup>.

A number of shepherds used to graze in the summer «*wada'a*» around three hundred to four hundred sheep or more. Shepherds used to divide up the income among them after the end of the agreed period, which may extend up to four months (from June till the end of September). *Wada'a* fee ranged between a quarter to a half rupee per head of the sheep, while no fee was paid for milking sheep or goat or small sheep, as the shepherd benefited from the milk therefrom. A number of sheep owners would agree to give the shepherds a number of sheep instead of paying money as a fee in return for their work during *wada'a* period. Thereupon, the shepherd would receive 3 sheep against *wada'a* of two hundred heads of sheep. In case of death of a number of sheep during pasture, the shepherd used to cut the ears of the dead sheep, which

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

usually carried a certain mark or tattoo, and brings them to the herd owner to assure its death. The owner of each herd of sheep kept a certain sign which was marked or imprinted on his own sheep to distinguish them from other sheep. There are different types of marking, such as «*j'adah*», which is cutting a part of the ear, «*al matrag*», a sign burnt or tattooed on the sheep ear by a hot iron rod placed on the sheep's ear. There are other signs also like «*al khars*», «*al shaqra*», and «*al barthan*» which constitutes three lines tattooed on the sheep's ear, which resembles the marking of the pigeon's foot. «*Al barthan*» was the mark or tattoo of Al Sabah family's sheep. Usually, the sheep are tattooed while young during the spring season, when they are between three to four months of age, after separating them from mothers thereof<sup>(1)</sup>.

Ewes or female sheep usually give birth in September or October, while goats give birth during spring as their youngsters can not tolerate the cold environment. As for lambs, they are not affected by cold weather. Sheep owners usually accomodated males with females during the months of April and May, so that the females would give birth in the Autumn. As for goats, they are left with their males when «*Suhail*» star appears in the sky by the end of August, and throughout the month of September, in order to give birth during spring when grass quantities are abundant and the weather is moderate.

The gestation period in sheep lasts for five months. Among the most significant products obtained from sheep milk are, yoghurt, cherthi, cheese, *al eqt*, in addition to the wools, most of which being brought by them to the city during Spring to sell in Al Safat.

### **Camel Breeding**

Almost, no desert or village dweller could do away with camels, which they consider a significant source for many uses. Camel owners benefit from them in many fields, among the most important of which is milk and its products, meat, hair in addition to their wastes which are used as fuel. They are a source of income through reproduction and multiplication, as well as for transporting goods and traveling to remote distances. They are of great significance in raids, wars and guarding the outskirts of border areas for the rulers in the past, where al fedawiyya in the villages and the desert relied on camels for such work.

The camel reproduces every two years. Gestation period lasts for one full year, after which it gives birth and its offspring remains breastfeeding for one

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

full year, after which it returns to pregnancy. The small camel is called «*hawar*» in its first year. Its flesh is considered as one of the best types of meat and called «*mafrood*», after weaning, then called «*heg*», in its second year, then «*legi*», and then «*jaz'a*», «*theni*», «*raba'a*», «*sods*», then «*jales*» if it matures and reaches reproduction or fertilization age at the age of six or seven years<sup>(1)</sup>. The male is usually sold while young at the age of two years for slaughtering. Bedouins like its meat for weddings, banquets and other occasions.

As for females camels, (she - camels), they are bred for reproduction. There is a special mark or «tattoo» for camels, which is usually marked on their feet, neck, thigh or nose<sup>(2)</sup>. Each owner used his own mark or tattoo and a merchant's wealth is usually estimated by the number of camels owned.

Old female camels are sold to make use of their flesh, after discontinuing reproduction and are called «*hayil*». They are fattened during the autumn which starts in September and the spring season for sale. They are bought by merchants specialized in that trade who used to collect them from their owners to be sold to the butchers. Each camel was sold in the past for a price ranging from 50 to 150 rupees, according to its size.

It is known that there are different types of camels of different breeds, including the excellent breed, lesser quality breed and regular quality. Each one of them has its own uses, which

distinguish them from the others. Generally, they can be divided up into two types, the first is called «*al bel*» - *ibel*- basically used for reproduction and fattening to be eaten, and are not used for riding. As for the second type, it is used for riding, traveling, racing and wars. This second type is divided into three types: «*al batniyyah*,» and they are numerous in the Gulf region such as Oman,



Desert dwellers depend greatly on camels and give them special care as being their main source of income.

Source: *Kuwait Was My Home*, Zahra Freethe- 1956.

Abu Dhabi and Qatar, «*al harrah*», used in the northern area of the Arabian Peninsula and «*al o'maniyyah*» found in Kuwait. These types of camels are of smaller size and of more beautiful appearance and body than those used for eating. They can walk long distances without being exhausted. Camels are also distinguished by their different colors. Each color is given a certain name like



Camels drink water from the wells spread in the desert. In the picture, two women are seen filling sacks with water after the camels quenched their thirst from these wells in Sulaibiyah.

Source: *Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freethe- 1956*

«*wadha*», «*safra*», «*hamra*», «*sha'ala*», «*zarga*», «*malha*» and «*shaqha*»<sup>(1)</sup>.

## Dairy Products Industry

Village dwellers worked in dairy products industry, the most significant of which was milk, yoghurt, cherthi, butter, cheese, al eqt, and A'dani ghee. Products which deteriorate rapidly like milk and yoghurt were consumed locally due to the absence of refrigerating or chilling means, while other products like cherthi, al eqt and A'dani ghee were sent to Kuwait City for selling. The spring season was considered as the best season for producing such products and transporting them atop camels or donkeys to the City. The shepherd and his family usually milk the sheep in the morning, then, the women start making yoghurt out of milk, by adding a little yoghurt to the fresh milk and leaving it for a full day in a warm place to ferment and transform into yoghurt. On the following day, it is shaken to separate the butter and the yoghurt is placed in a sack called «*esga*» or «*samil*» with its opening tied with a thread. Then, it is hung to «*sabay*»<sup>(2)</sup> for the woman to shake it until butter is separated from milk. The woman usually makes two

(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

(2) «*Sabay*» is made from three small lances (or sticks) tied together from the upper part to lean on each other to which «*esga*» filled with milk is hung. The woman would shake the «*esga*» for a certain period, for the purpose of separating the butter from milk.

or three «shakes» or convulsions per day, to separate butter from milk and collect it in preparation of making A'dani ghee. As for daily surplus milk, it is transformed into other products such cherthi and al eqt. «Al Eqt» is made from yoghurt which is cooked, then separated from the water by «*shamla*», a piece of wool. Then, it is placed on straw mats or on trays to dry after being formed in small balls or dough. Usually, the fingerprints of the hand which kneaded and formed the dough are printed on it. Al eqt is considered among the most significant products brought from the villages and desert to the city in great quantities. People eat al eqt either as it is in its dry state, especially children, or by dissolving it in water to transfer it into sour milk to drink or into cherthi to eat with dates, or it is eaten by limited-income people with rice and tomatoes.

### **A'dani Ghee Industry**

A'dani ghee or (natural ghee) is made from butter extracted from sheep milk. Its best type is the butter of «Al Erb» sheep. Butter is collected after separation from milk and placed in a copper utensil to cook by using firewood as fuel. Onion, curcuma, cardamom, sweet seeds and little onion are added to the butter while cooking to remove the unfavorable smell or flavor. The butter is cooked for a certain period to evaporate the biggest possible amount of water. Then, a little boiled rice is added to absorb the remainder of the water. Rice leads to clogging of the remains of suspended hair in the butter around it which facilitates the process of removing it from the butter.

When the butter is cooked, it is left in utensils for a while to be cooled. Then, it is filtered through a piece of wool cloth called «*shamla*» to separate the rice, hair and remaining residues. Then, it is poured into special utensils, in preparation of placing it in «*a'keek*», plural of «*a'kkah*», a skin sack made specially for storing A'dani ghee<sup>(1)</sup>. Big quantities of A'dani ghee are sold in Kuwait City, to which it is carried by donkeys while packed in al a'keek. It is displayed at Safat, where brokers and shop owners buy most of it. A'dani ghee is stored after buying by shop owners in metal cans which are welded to keep it for the longest possible period without changing its taste. Some quantities of A'dani ghee were sent atop donkeys to be sold in Al Ahsa'a and Al Qateef. Also, limited quantities were exported to Iran, Iraq and Bahrain.

Al A'wazim tribe is famous for making the best type of A'dani ghee, in terms of high quality and good taste, due to following a special method for cooking

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

the butter and using a special spice mixture different from those used by others. They also cook the butter for the longest possible period, which leads to complete evaporation of water, although this leads to the reduction of its weight. The sheep also bred by them - of Al A'rb or Erb type- are remarked by their quality and producing milk with distinguished flavor. A'dani ghee gains its quality from the grass which grow in Al A'dan desert on which sheep feed, which are of remarkable quality and give the milk a special flavor favored by most buyers due to its good smell and the delicious taste of the ghee made from it. The quantity of milk produced by sheep during the Spring is also doubled up due to eating such grass which are of high nutritional value and lead to the increase in the quantity of milk<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is known that there are other types of sheep of high and medium quality, including *Najdiyyah*, *Daiyyah*, *Nai'miyyah* and *Khekriyyah*. However, their milk and the butter extracted are not of the quality of the products of *Al Erb* sheep, especially A'dani ghee. Different types of A'dani ghee usually reach the market, but buyers do not flock at them due to their preparation methods and the spice mixtures used. For example, «Al Ma'adan», the Bedouins of Iraq, used to bring with them to Kuwait their ghee in which different mixtures were used when cooking, which could not give the same flavour of the A'dani ghee. They also did not cook the butter for a sufficient period, which would lead to keeping water therein, and results in spoilage of ghee after a short period of time, and its smell would become undesirable.

Al Motran, Al A'jman and Al Rashaydah tribes used also to extract A'dani ghee from Erb sheep they owned, but the quantities produced by Al A'wazem were much bigger because they were the biggest tribe possessing Al A'rb or Erb sheep. Al Motran also owned big numbers of «Al Najd» sheep, each of which called «Najdiyyah», from which they produced A'dani ghee as well<sup>(2)</sup>.

A'dani ghee produced by Kuwait was usually sold at prices higher than the other types, as the price per oqiyah amounted to double the price of that brought by «Al Ma'adan» from Iraq. The A'dani ghee price was four rupees per ounce, while the price of one oqiyah of the ghee produced by Al Ma'adan was around two and a half rupees.

There are other types of ghee, some of which were extracted from goats, but they were few due to the low fat in the goat's milk. The quantity of A'dani ghee

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

(2) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

decreases in summer due to the low quantity of milk produced by sheep during such period as a result of the scarcity of grass. The quantity of butter which might be extracted from milk was also less in summer due to the increase of the milk's temperature and inability to extract big quantities of butter therefrom as it used to melt in the milk. In winter, the butter would freeze, facilitating the segregation process from milk.

Al Erb sheep are distinguished from other sheep in terms of shape and size. They are of big size and height, with thick curly black hair. If they become old, the white hair or grey hair grows on their bodies and mixes with the black hair. As for the Najdi sheep, their wool is long and not curly, and resembles the goat's wool, and of a bright black color while its head is covered with white hair<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Fleecing Wool And Stitching Some Leather Products**

Shepherds cut the wools of their sheep at the beginning of the spring season, when cold weather is gone. A special scissor is used to shear off the wool, after tying the sheep to prevent it from moving. After cutting its wool, the sheep becomes more active, besides helping to cool its body during the summer season. Wool is packed in big canvas bags to be sent to the city. Camels' hair also fall during this period, for new hair to grow, while a number of camel owners pluck out their camels' hair. Usually, the new hair starts growing during autumn, which becomes relatively long in spring. The quantity of camel hair is usually little, which increases its price, especially it is the best hair for making certain types of clothes such as cloaks, turbans and zarabeel<sup>(2)</sup>. Hair is sold either in the form of masses of wool or as threads, after the Bedouin women weave it or use it in making turbans and zarabeel out of it.

Also, a number of Bedouin men and women stitch a number of simple leather products such as water (skin) sacks and al *a'keek*, singular is a'kka, a skin sack to keep ghee, and al *samlan* (milk skin sacks), singular is samil. Those products were sold in the city or exchanged for dates or other products bought by the Bedouins from there such as sugar, rice, tea and coffee. Covers were made out of animal leathers and used for children to sit on, or to place under the children's sleeping mat to prevent humidity.

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(1) Al Zarabeel, singular is Zarbeel, a shoe made of sheep leather, covered inside with camel hair to make it warm.

(2) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad AL Mejren.



## Weaving<sup>(1)</sup>

After cutting the wools, sheep owners collect similar colors with each other in order to display them for sale in Al Safat or to use them by their women for weaving threads. Wool is washed and dried up before weaving. Women only carry out the weaving and stitching of Sadu, as this is not carried out by men. The woman would place a quantity of wool in front of her to start the weaving process. She would roll the threads around the weaving tool, and whenever she wove a quantity, she would take it to sell at the Wool Alley in the City or use it to stitch woolen products. The wool threads are rolled, after weaving, in the shape of big bunches of the size of small ball, each of which is called «*korah*» or «*washi'ah*», weighing around two to five pounds, and sold at a price ranging from twelve annas to one rupee, according to the weight and quality. The tailors and brokers buy wool balls to use in stitching cloaks, which are of several types, including the thick, the medium and the thin. The tailors got part of their needs from local textile, while other goods and high priced types were imported from abroad.

Most of the textiles made in Kuwait were of the medium size quality of thick thread used for cheap products. As for the hair and the thin threads used in making light cloaks, they were imported from some areas in Iran, which included Al Dourag, Hindian and Behbehan, which were famous for such type of textiles.



Straightening and weaving the wool

*Source: Folkloric Heritage 1986, GCC Folkloric Heritage Center- Doha- Qatar*

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

Among the habits of women in the villages was to gather while weaving wool at the house of one them to pass time in chatting and working. Weaving was active during summer after cutting of the wool came to an end and many men went for diving. So, women spent their time together weaving and stitching. A number of women used to dye woolen threads after preparing the special materials for that purpose and cooking them in big vessels. Those materials were usually bought from spice dealers in the city market. Among the preferred colors were red, yellow, green and blue. A number of women used to sell their wool products while others used to take wage against working for other women.

### Stitching (Sadu)

Goat's hair was used in making a number of products, including carpets, Sadu, tents and «*al mazwiyyah*», a cheap-priced cloak used by sailors and Bedouins during winter. Bedouin women were famous for their creativity in making Sadu used in tents and similar products, as they were creative in making beautiful drawings on it. Women used special devices for stitching «*sadu*» of goat's hair, where threads are fixed upright for the woman to stitch the required product.

Each group of women would cooperate sometimes in stitching products which require bigger efforts. Among those products were the roofs of hairy tents and their ceilings, and *al sayih* (plural of *saha*) which was the «wall» made of wool, established between the tents or «*beyout al-sha'ar*» to segregate men's tents from women's. Among the patterns used on «*al saha*» was the pattern known as «*o'uwirjan*» which resembles the pattern of carpets. Those products were



Wool weaving was among the most important work carried out by women in the desert.

Source: Photographs from Kuwait, Past and Present- Ministry of Information.



A tent «bait al sha'ar», the Bedouins home in the desert, stitched by women.

Source: «Al Kuwaiti» Magazine - Edition 208

stitched in the shape of «*filjan*», singular is «*faleej*», a long piece of cloth made of wool of a length ranging from 20 to 30 meters, and one meter width. Afterwards, those pieces were stitched together and different products were made out of them such as the roofs of tents and the like. The inside and the roofs of such tents were made of those pieces, extended in parallel form to each other. Women used to stitch them with the same type of threads until completed.

Then, «*tarayeg*» are placed, which are rectangular pieces of Sadu, of a length of approximately 20 cm, fixed to Sadu from the inside to strengthen it at the place of the poles. they are tied with rings through which ropes are placed to pull and build the tent, «*bait al sha'ar*»<sup>(1)</sup>.



«Sadu» is one of the most important desert products in which women are creatively innovative in stitching them and giving them their beautiful pattern distinguishing them from the remaining similar products.

(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

## Agriculture

A large number of villagers relied on agriculture for living, despite the scarcity of water. The villages, as well as the areas near and surrounding Kuwait City, included many farms in which different types of crops were planted to provide the residents with their needs. Among the close areas in which vegetables were planted were Bneid Al Gar, Dasmah, Da'eyah, Sha'ab, Nugra, Hawally, Rumaithyah and Al Demnah (Salmiya). Shamiya, Adailiyah and Khaitan areas were also among the important agricultural areas. People of the southern villages, such as Fintas, Mangaf, Bu Halifa, Fahaheel and Shua'iba were famous for planting vegetables and a number of other products such as melons<sup>(1)</sup>, tomatoes, nabk, in addition to water melon, cucumber, and eggplants to a lesser extent. Some people used to farm in other areas like Sabahiyah, Umm Al Hayman, A'rifjan, and Juidan (an area located near Warah). Jahrah was famous for farming a number of products, which included clover, nabk, certain types of palm trees, in addition to vegetables, the most important of which are del, coriander, legumes, fenugreek and radish. Farming was primitive and depended on rainfalls and water from wells spread at those areas. In many of those areas, water was found at a depth not exceeding two to two and half meters, especially during the winter when rain falls. That could assist the farming of many types of vegetables and legumes. Among the villages and areas where fresh water wells existed are Demnah, Fintas, Funaites, Bu Halifa, Mangaf, Shua'iba, Sabahiyah, Jahrah, Rumaithyah, Hawally, Nugra, Sha'ab and Shamiya. The heavy rainfall could lead to the formation of small lakes in which water would gather, bordered by dams, i.e. walls or hills surrounding the water gathering place to retain the water in preparation of using when the water would become scarce. Among those dams were «Salem Dam» in Demnah from which people used to drink water during the summer.

Many farmers used to build mud walls of the height of approximately one meter around their farms, to protect them from sheep. A number of wells were also dug up. Locusts and «debee», i.e. young locust- used to demolish all the plants if their swarms passed through the villages and the city. Farm owners used to light up fires and hit tin tanks with sticks to frighten the locusts and «debee» using such noises.

A number of Kuwaiti agricultural products are distinguished for their high quality. Cucumber, which was farmed in the southern villages was known for its good taste, smooth skin and containing big quantities of water, which was called «*balang*». It was different from ordinary cucumber in taste.

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(1) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.

As for tomatoes, their size was smaller than the regular ones, and its taste was distinguished by relative acidity, giving it a special flavor. Folk doctors used to prescribe tomatoes for patients to eat. A number of people used to take their patients during the spring season for recovery outside the city, especially to the southern villages to eat fresh vegetables, headed by tomatoes, and to change the atmosphere in the open air. The coastal villages in the south, called «*Al Gosoor*» or *Qosoor*, were famous for farming remarkable types of tomatoes, cucumber, melons, cantaloupe, and leafy products such as del, coriander, legumes and radish, which were all irrigated from the wells. Production of such products sometimes used to exceed the need of the population during the season, leading to exporting them by boats to neighboring countries. For example, tomatoes used to be exported to Basrah and A'badan, while melons (al faridoni) the best types for which Fintas area was famous, was exported to Bahrain<sup>(1)</sup>. A number of people also used to mash tomatoes and add salt to it, then expose it to the sun to dry, in preparation of placing them in big metal cans to use throughout the year.

### **Collecting Firewood, Tree Stems, Grass And Other Products For Selling In The City**

Many types of grass and trees grow in Kuwait's desert throughout winter, spring and the beginning of the summer season. Sheep shepherds in Kuwait's villages and desert, as well as City dwellers, depended on such grass and plants to feed their livestock and supply themselves with wood for fuel throughout the year, and some of which were used for medication. Among the most important plants were *al riblah*, *al qafa'a* (bride's fingers), *arfaj*, *khobaiz*, *o'uirjan*, *saidana*, *hawa*, *bisbasa*, *thanda*, *shagra*, *habsees*, *sanda'a*, *houzan*, *remth*, *sheri*, *shateela*, *shatial*, *thila*, *hombizana*, *bosail al mor*, *sofair*, *khozama*, *mesija*, *tarathith* and *faga'a*, in addition to many other countless types. As for trees, they included *adhras*, *jadada*, *thamam*, and *al sama'a*. A number of these plants grow at the beginning of winter, while most of them grow during spring and others at the beginning of summer, especially during late rainfalls like sarayat. Many of these plants re-grow after cutting them<sup>(2)</sup>.

The Bedouins used to transport big quantities of those plants, tree stems and firewood to Kuwait City to sell in Safat, where people buy them to feed their sheep and for fuel purposes. Usually, the City houses have special rooms for storing firewood and weeds to use throughout the year. Among the most

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(1) An interview with the late Haydar Ya'qub Al Wazzan.

(2) An interview with the late Musa'ed Hamad Al Mejren.



A camel coming from the desert while loaded with a'rfaj to be sold in Safat to the City dwellers who used it for fuel.

important grass which were carried to Kuwait City were a'rfaj, thamam, harm and hamdh. A'rfaj was brought to the City and sold at different prices, according to the required use and the method of cutting it. There was a type called «*ghafaj*»; the newly-grown branches cut from the trees and used as fodder for sheep, especially lambs. There was another type called «*bu al-yoroom*», which meant the entire a'rfaj tree plucked out of the ground with its roots. It was used as fuel for preparing coffee at the diwans and placed in the stoves, as well as «*al riyaq*» which was the stove dug up in the ground on which dallahs (coffee makers) be placed. A'rfaj roots give high temperature and transfer into coal, resembling live coal and continue burning for a long period, making it suitable for the coffee stoves. As for the third type of a'rfaj, it is called «*al bena*» which only includes the bottom stems of the tree and used for cooking at the houses. That type was also preferred by sweet makers<sup>(1)</sup>. A'rfaj is transferred in big bunches, each of which is called «*farda*.» Two big fardas were placed atop camel atop and the load was called «*bena*». As for the donkey, one farda of a small size was placed on its back, called «*bena*». The camel's cargo was sold for one

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(1) WAn interview with Haj Mousa Abdul Hussain Al Naqi.



Another group of desert dwellers seating their camels in Al Safat to sell their goods.

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the First Photographers, William Facey and Jullian Grant- 1998*

rupee to one and a quarter rupee in Safat, while the donkey's cargo was sold for approximately 6 annas to a half rupee (8 annas). Bena was wrapped by thick cotton grid and tied by ropes to fix atop camels or donkeys back to prevent it from falling while on its way to the City.

As for hemdh, it was also used as fodder for sheep giving their milk a special flavor and as fuel for making coffee and tea. A number of diwan owners usually made sure to have that type of fuel due to its good smell giving the place a distinguished odor desired by the visitors of those diwans. Hemdh stems are distinguished by their thickness and are transferred into live coal after lighting them up, and remain burning for a long period<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the products brought by the Bedouins to Kuwait City were *truffles* and al *taratheeth* packed in canvass bags. Truffles are brought during the period from February to April, and al taratheeth from November to January.

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(1) An interview with Haj Mousa Abdul Hussain Al Naqi.

## **Other Miscellaneous Activities**

Kuwait's villages and islands are deemed in general, to be a natural extension of the Kuwaiti society and acts and interacts as the part interacts with the whole. Therefore, the work practiced for living such as crafts and trades did not largely differ from those existing in the City. However, there were certain crafts that some villages were famous for. Therefore, the villages and the City were always exchanging the production of each other. There were many similar and common activities in which City dwellers worked to satisfy their needs or the need of the other party.

Below a number of activities practiced by villagers are introduced.

### **Al Hodhoo Industry**

Making al Hodhoo was one of the main crafts of the coastal villages of Kuwait. Many southern villagers worked in that industry, which were one of the most important means for fishing. Kuwait's coasts were full of those Hodhoo due to their easy use and the many and different types of fish caught by them. Al hadhrah is usually fixed in one place and remains so for long periods until it is used up and then replaced.

That craft was addressed in detail in the First Chapter of this book.

### **Fishing**

A big number of Kuwaiti villagers worked in fishing, especially by al hodhoo which were spread along Kuwait's coasts from Al Masayel in the south (opposite to the palace of the late Sheikh Fahed Al Salem Al Sabah) near Fintas, to «Al jazirat» area near Warbah Island, to the north. Al A'wazim constituted most of the fishermen by using al-hodhoo for catching fish, while many Rashaydah worked also in the same trade. Al A'wazim owned most of al hodhoo fixed on the coast from the south to the north. Most of their catch was sold in the City market or to the ship owners from neighboring countries, who used to go to the fishing areas where Kuwaiti fishermen ships gathered during the seasons. Such fish were also dried up and exported to these countries, basically Iraq and Iran<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Hunting Birds**

Due to the multiplicity of migrating birds in Kuwait City and the villages during the spring season, especially in areas where trees and plants were abundant - as was the case in Kuwait City- village dwellers were also active in hunting birds by their different means such as traps, «*salabah*» and «*saliyah*.»

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(1) For more information refer to chapter II-part II.



Hundreds of those birds were hunted daily, encouraging village dwellers to take them to Kuwait City to sell. Bird sellers used to go to Kuwait City at dawn, while birds were kept in locally-made crates of fronds. Birds were sold alive or slaughtered according to weight or number and according to their type and size in Al Saba'an Square or near Bin Dau'ij Market or at some of the alleys branching off the Money Exchangers Square, which was called the Spring Birds' Market.

### **Going For Pearl Diving**

Among the trades in which a big number of desert dwellers- especially from the southern villages- practised was diving. They used to go with their fellow citizens from the urban areas to the sea, to earn their living. That was usually better than the ordinary work they practiced during summer, such as grazing and farming which did not yield remarkable returns during that season. Therefore, many desert dwellers from the various tribes such as *Al A'wazem*, *Al A'jman*, *Al Motran*, *Al Rashaydah*, *Al Hawajer* and others went for diving during the season which lasted for four months starting from June and ending by the end of September. Many of the desert dwellers used to leave their sheep in Fintas, Finaitees or Jahrah, or keep them with shepherds while diving. Most of them dived for catching pearls. The «ghaws» pearl diver's work is more difficult and hazardous than «sib» who only holds the rope to which the diver holds to while diving at the sea bed, and then pulls it up while climbing to the ship. Many Bedouins regard «al sayed» job an easy one with modest return, and therefore consider it unfit for a capable man qualified to work in more difficult work with high return. However, a number of them were forced to work in that job (al sayed) especially those who returned from the «travel» voyages to India and were exhausted by the journey. Therefore, they had to choose that job instead of being idle or unemployed for several months. A number of Bedouins, however were famous skilled divers as well as diving captains. In addition, a number of Al A'wazim and individuals of other tribes- especially those who had residence inside Kuwait City- were famous for working as *mojademi*, *sukkoni* and *cook* in the pearl diving ships. Many Bedouins also went with the sailing ships going to India few days after returning from the diving trip.

### **Activities In The Main Villages**

In view of the different locations of Kuwait's villages in terms of their proximity or remoteness from the seacoast, a number of villages were distinguished over other ones by their special trades or craft. For instance,

the southern villages were famous for fishing and making Al hodhoor, while Al Jahrah was famous for farming clover and palm trees which was not a significant source of income in the southern villages. The main activities distinguishing each village are addressed on the next pages.

### **(1) Areas Near And Surrounding Kuwait City**

The areas near Kuwait City included walled areas and farms growing vegetables of different types. Among the most important of those areas were Bneid Al Gar, Dasmah, Da'iyah, Sha'ab, Nugra and Hawalli. A number of the City dwellers who included urban inhabitants and Al A'wazim were farmers in such areas.

Agriculture in those areas relied on wells, where leafy vegetables were basically planted, such as del, coriander, legume, parsley, mint, radish and basil. A number of residents also planted pumpkin and okra. Farming those crops flourished at the beginning of autumn and during spring. They were sold in big quantities at the City markets. «*Shorooob*» - rectangular beds - of three meters long and one and a half meter wide were made for growing vegetables, which were cut several times during the season.

These areas also included the tamarisk and lotus jujube trees which produced buckthorn in spring. A number of these areas such as Hawalli, Nugra and Sha'ab included dams built at the beginning of the previous century in order to retain rainwater for drinking. These dams were built by the late Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **(2) Rumaithiyah And Demnah (Salmiyah)**

Rumaithiyah and Demnah - currently Salmiyah- areas were among the significant agricultural areas due to the quality of their soil and humidity of their atmosphere. This assisted the growth of vegetables and a number of fruits. Many A'wazim used to keep farms and walled areas in those two areas which contained lotus jujube and tamarisk trees, in which they planted vegetables and melons during the season. Demnah residents also relied on fishing, making Al hodhoor, grazing sheep making A'dani ghee, making eqt and other dairy products, weaving and woolen products which were sent to Kuwait City to sell at Al Safat or in their specialized markets.

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(1) Hawally-Village of Entertainment-written by Ayoub Hussein Al Ayoub-1987-p.39-45.

### (3) Adiliyah, Abraha Khaitan And Jeleeb Al Shoyoukh

These areas were famous for farming wheat and barley, due to the quality of their soil and heavy rainfall during winter. This encouraged many of those interested in agriculture to farm grains, especially wheat. A number of Sheikhs and merchants from Kuwait City, in addition to the inhabitants of those areas, who were Bedouins, used to border some areas there and hire workers and animals for farming. The workers used to prepare the land before the rainy season and plow it using horses, mules or donkeys.

Wheat farming starts at the beginning of the season in the middle of October, when rain starts falling. During that period, workers started to spread seeds which were placed in baskets carried by their hands, while walking in the fields prepared for farming. Then, the seeds were covered by the plowing tool, towed by the donkeys. Plowing and seeding wheat, then covering the seeds were called «*krab*.» Wheat started to gradually grow with the falling of rain, until its growth was completed during the third month after the spikes used to grow. Workers used to go daily from Kuwait City to such areas to care for the crops, follow up the growth of plants, and to protect them throughout winter until the crop was completely grown and ready for harvesting. Spikes started to dry with the blowing of «*al-bawareh*» winds, therefore, the wheat was ready for harvesting. The workers manually cut the spikes, and reap the wheat.

Horses and donkeys were used to walk on the wheat spikes after spreading them on a flat land called «*bayder*» to separate the seeds from them. Afterwards, the workers threw them up during the blowing of the wind by «*shovels*» to (detach) the seeds from the hay. The seeds fall on the ground, while the winds throw the hay away. Afterwards, wheat is packed in big canvas bags to be transported by donkeys to the city. Wheat harvest was good most of the times at those areas. The harvest reached its height in 1923-1924 due to the heavy rainfall during that period. That led to the production of huge quantities of wheat. One of the workers in that area at that time said that they planted around four «*maans*» of wheat- for which eleven workers cared for during one of the seasons-leading to the production of approximately 125 «*maans*». They were distributed among the partners, while huge quantities of hay were taken to the City and stored in the barns of the Sheikhs located in Derwazat Abdul Razzag to feed

their horses. Each worker used to receive one rupee per day against his work, which started from mid-October and lasted for twenty days. Then, he would return again to work during the harvest period starting in April and extending for another twenty days<sup>(1)</sup>.

#### **(4) Al Qosoor And The Southern Villages**

A number of the coastal villages in southern Kuwait were called Al Qosoor area, which included Fintas, Finaitees, Fahaheel and Abu Halifa villages. These areas, along with the near villages such as Shua'iba were famous for farming most leafy and fruity vegetables, in addition to melons, which was considered the best produced in Kuwait and known as «*al foraidoni*», distinguished by its good smell and sweet taste.

Such products were planted twice a year, at the beginning of autumn and spring. The plants were irrigated from the wells and planted in big rectangular beds. Also, those areas were famous for the presence of lotus jujube trees. such areas supplied Kuwait City with its needs of those products during the season. Daily, donkeys carried the crops to Al Saba'an Square (Al Bahr Square) in the middle of the market. The vegetables were cut, melons plucked and other fruits in the evening. They were packed in «*jafir*» or «*yela*» atop donkeys to carry late at night to reach the City by dawn, where they were sold in the auction held in the early morning at that square neighbouring the Vegetable Market. Shop owners used to participate in the auction in order to supply their shops with such products. A number of farm owners also used to supply vegetable sellers with a number of products such as buckthorn, dates and black dates<sup>(2)</sup>.

Most inhabitants of those areas also worked in grazing and breeding sheep and camels in order to sell their various products in Kuwait City, which were transported on the backs of camels leaving those areas at night to reach the City in the early morning. The trip from there took around six hours.

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(1) An interview with Haj Hussain Ghareeb Al Dashti who worked there in that season with his father in Khaitan area for the late Sheikh Ali Al Khalifa Al Sabah and Sheikh Salem Al Homoud Al Sabah and Sheikh Salman Al Homoud Al Sabah and Abdul Hussain Al Naqi.

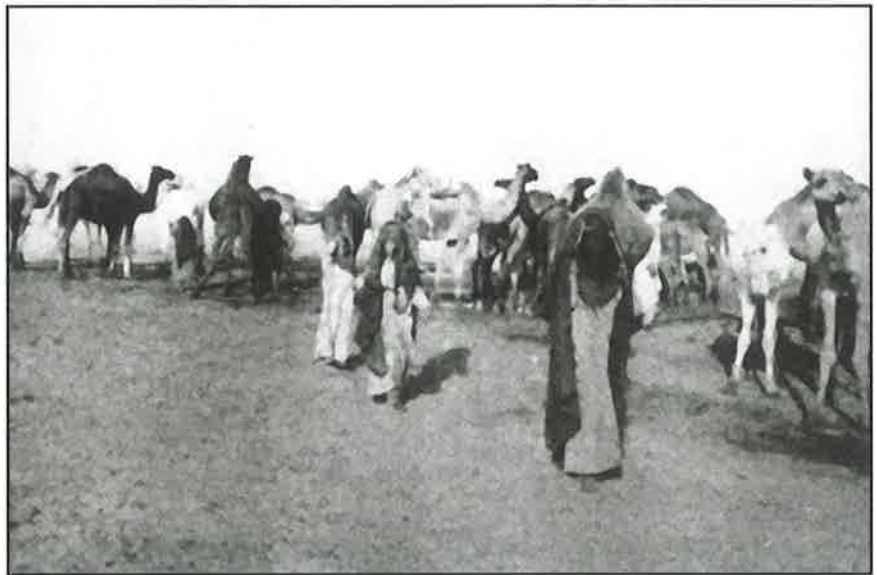
(2) An interview with Haj Mousa Abdul Hussain Al Naqi.

## (5) Al Jahrah

Old Jahrah was a small village surrounded with a wall or fence with two doors<sup>(1)</sup>. Families, who were mostly dependant on agriculture, lived inside the wall, while a big number of the city dwellers who relied on grazing and other related activities lived outside the wall. Jahrah residents owned many farms surrounding the city from the south, east and west, while northern Jahrah was free of farms. Sheep and camel were grazing there. Firewoods and weeds collection and hunting, were the crafts practiced by the Bedouins<sup>(2)</sup>.

Jahrah is considered among the most fertile areas in Kuwait which possessed the best soil, where many crops were planted, the most important of which were cantaloupes, melons, tomatoes, cucumber, pumpkin, in addition to clover, different types of vegetables and dates, especially Sa'maaran and buckthorn. Barley and wheat were also planted in vast areas outside the city<sup>(3)</sup>. Such grains were consumed by the residents of the village itself, as there were no adequate quantities to send to Kuwait City. North Jahrah area was famous for the growth of big desert plants, such as citrus trees. That area comprised several locations which included wells, some of which had fresh water like «*al jow*»

area, and others had low salinity water used for sheep and camels to drink, like «*Al moraibtah*» and «*al jathama*» wells. The depth of those wells ranged between one and a half meter (Al moraibtah wells) to five meters or more as is the case for «*Al Jow*» wells. Water is drawn out from the wells by buckets made of cow skin. In the past, residents of the area relied heavily on «*al jow*» wells for drinking<sup>(4)</sup>.



Camels with women around them, gathering near the water wells in Jahrah for the camels to quench their thirst.

Source: *Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freethe- 1956*

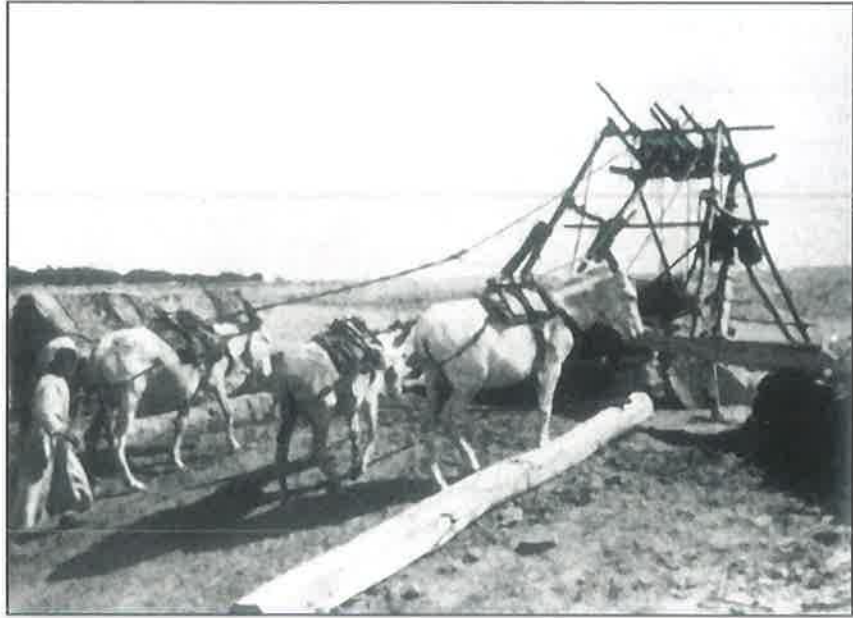
(1) Jahra Wall was built during the regin of Sheikh Salem Al Mubarak Al Sabah, after Hems Battle. Citizens of this city cooperated to build the wall.

(2) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Ali A'amer Al Hussainan.

(3) Ibid

(4) Ibid.

Jahrah farms were relatively big as their areas ranged between 5,000 to 15,000 square meters or more, as residents of village almost city relied completely for living in the past on agriculture, most crops of which were transported to Kuwait City daily. A number of crops like melons, cantaloupes, tomatoes and pumpkin were planted in rectangular beds irrigated from the wells existing in each farm. Donkeys and



A well in Jahrah. Donkeys are seen drawing water out from the well by buckets which pour into beds from which water branches off to go to the different parts of the farm.

*Source: Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freethe- 1956*

oxen were used to draw out water from the wells, the opening of which amounted to around four meters.

In certain cases, three donkeys pulled out water from one well using big buckets called «ghroob», singular is «gharb». These buckets were made of cow or camel leather. Ghroob pour into a small pool or bed built of mud and gypsum, with a capacity of around three meters in length and two meters in width, from which water branches off by waterwheels to the different parts of the farm. The openings of those waterwheels were closed by canvas material if the water direction was desired to be changed to another location<sup>(1)</sup>. Those crops were planted extensively in spring or autumn due to the moderate weather.

As for clover, it was planted in big rectangular beds, the length of each would range from six to eight meters, with a width of four to five meters. Such beds were irrigated from the wells, from which water was drawn out by «ghroob» as well, which poured into the waterwheels, from which it was distributed to the plants. Clover farming increases in autumn and spring, especially when rain starts falling. Its production decreases in the winter and summer. It requires big quantities of water to immerse the beds in which clover is planted.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Abdullah Ali A'amer Al Hussainan.

Jahrah was also famous for growing some types of dates especially Sa'maaran., It was almost the only area in Kuwait that contained fairly a huge number of palm trees providing the city with some ripe dates due to the availability of water wells. A lot of the inhabitants of Jahrah grew also lotus jujube, namely «kenar» or «buckthorn» that the Kuwaiti people liked eating. Those



Jahrah is one of the most fertile areas in Kuwait. The photograph shows, one of the old farms in Jahrah, planted with different types of vegetables.

Source; *Kuwait - Miracle on the Desert*, David C. Cooke- 1970

fruits were carried to Kuwait City along with the other crops in spring. Farming was carried out by the owners of the farms themselves but they used to get some boys of the city to help them during the season of irrigation, taking care of the plants or picking them and loading them onto the camels to send to the city<sup>(1)</sup>.

Among the owners of the farms in Jahrah were the late Abdullah Al-Khalaf,



One of the old farms in Jahrah covered with palm trees.

Source: *The Arab of the Desert*, H.R.P. Dickson 1972 (first published in 1942)

Furaih Al-Mahous, Abdullah Al-Lafi, Mubarak Al-A'yyar, Mohamed Al-A'yyar, Mutairian Al-Khalf, Abdurrahman Al-Amir, Al Sualaim family, Mohamed Al-Sabij and many others.

The inhabitants of Jahrah relied on breeding camels and sheep and other related work. Breeding camels was deemed one of the most

(1) An interview with Mr. Abdulla Ali A'amer Al Hussainan.



Jahrah was distinguished for the abundance of water got out of wells for the purpose of drinking and irrigation.  
In the picture, green farms whose wells give drinkable water are seen.

*Source: Kuwait in the Eyes of the Early Photographers, William Facey and Wegilian Ghrant, 1998*

important work of that area in which almost each individual possessed a number of camels and sheep used to graze daily. They grazed bran that were abundantly available such as A'rfaj, Themam, Hemd, Thanda and others. The late Mijbil Uraifan, one of the Jahrah inhabitants, was famous for purchasing the old camels from the inhabitants of the nearby desert to send them to Kuwait City to be sold to the butchers.

Among the work that Jahrah inhabitants practiced was sheep breeding. Such sheep was of the «Erb» or A'rb type; black in color and abundantly give milk. Most of Jahrah dwellers raised such kind of sheep for the purpose of selling their milk and making butter and cheese. The owners of those sheep used to alternate grazing the sheep where one of them used to graze the sheep for one day after gathering them in the morning to start grazing.



As for summer, the owners of such sheep used to deposit their sheep with one of the shepherds who looked after them for a period ranging from three to four months. Then, he would return them back to their owners in return for half a rupee for each head. The number of sheep maintained with the shepherds might range from 150 to 250 head of sheep. Each sheep is marked with a special mark so that it can be easily identified. The sheep are usually given to the shepherds in May to be returned to their owners in August. The habitants of this area also used to collect wood and grass such as A'rfaj, Themam and Hemdh and the like to transport them to Kuwait City on the backs of camels to be sold as firewood and animals fodders. The price of one camel load was ranging from one rupee to one and a half rupee by which the owner of the camel mostly purchase two qollas of dates to sell them on returning to Jahrah. Caravans of camels loaded with different kinds of products used to go down daily from Jahrah to Kuwait City before midnight to reach it at dawn. The road from Jahrah to Kuwait City took about 8 hours. As for cars, it took about one and a half hour or two hours to reach the city before building the road.



## *Part Two*

### *Activities In Failakah Island*

The inhabitants of Failakah Island practised a number of simple crafts and trades which constituted their living source and provided them with most of their commodities and services. This resulted in the semi-self sufficiency of that small community except some other requirements for living which they used to get through trade exchange with Kuwait City. Among the most important crafts were farming and fishery in addition to other work like manufacturing of fish net, carpentry, grazing and building. Furthermore, some of them worked in other simple crafts and trades to meet the necessary needs of the inhabitants.

Some of Failakah dwellers worked in diving for pearls and the travel to India by sailing vessels which belonged to the traders and the sailors of the island as well as by the vessels owned by the inhabitants of Kuwait City. Such activities will be dealt with in more detail in the following pages:

#### **Farming**

Most of the senior citizens of Kuwait City still remember the quality of the agricultural products brought from Failakah Island by sailing boats during spring and autumn. At the top of those products were the carrots and the cucumber. The carrots, which were distinguished by its sweet taste, and the cucumbers, which were famous for its softness and its easy biting were among the most famous products brought from there, in addition to the rest of the vegetables such as radish, leek, and mallow with branches more than one meter in length.

In addition to those products, the people of Failakah used to grow the sweet-potatoes, water melons, onion, basil and coriander to meet the islanders needs. They relied on the wells' sweet water. The island contained fourteen farms that were called «*Rekaya*». They were surrounded with reed rods or palm branches so as to be protected from animals.

Each farm contained a big well for irrigation and water was pulled out from those wells to be poured forth into ponds from which reefs-booklet-branch to take the water to the plants. Seeding started in winter and all types of vegetables and produces were grown in those *Rekayas* whilst barely and wheat were grown

outside the city because they relied on rain fall. At the beginning of the season, the landowners started plowing their lands by a tool called «Fadan», towed by the donkeys behind which the landowner seeded grain. With the falling of the rain, barley and wheat plants start to grow gradually, until growth is completed during the spring season and its harvest time is due after the drying of the spikes. The landowner used to hire a number of workers to cut the spikes and to take them to the «Baidar» where the spikes were run over by donkeys to reap the wheat or the barley from the hay<sup>(1)</sup>.

The agricultural lands and Rekayas were located at the south of the island and the vegetables and the crops covered the needs of Failakah people while the surplus was transported by the sailing boats to Kuwait City to be sold at the Vegetable Market. The products of



An old plow pulled by a donky and drawn by the farmer.

Failakah were carried, whilst placed in baskets and sacks daily during the season in small sail boats called «Shu'i» to be sold to grocers to sell them. Those vessels belonged to the fishermen of Failakah who took their catch of fish to Kuwait City for their customers of fish traders and carry with them agricultural products.

## **Fishery**

The fishermen of Failakah used the same fishing tools which were used in Kuwait. It is a well-known fact that each type of fishing has a specific season and its own specific tools and instruments. Fishery was carried out near the coasts of Failakah by nets such as saliya, taroof and «sharkh», a net set up in the shape of a big square whose side length was about forty meters and whose

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jassim Mansour Al Failakawi.

height was three meters whilst its four angles were fastened with ropes pulled in the form of tent rope. Then, each side of the rope was tied to a big rock<sup>(1)</sup>. An opening in the form of a door is put at the interior wall facing the coast. A rope is stretched from the «sharkh» where fish swim parallel to it until they enter inside it and cannot get out. Mulletts, Beyah, Sha'am, Maid, Sheem and soboor are caught by sharkh. Fishermen used to go to such nets to collect the fish caught during the tide period.

Fishermen of Failakah used to go to the northern and southern coasts of the island by sailing boats in March to fish Zubaidi. They used to go in the evening and return along with their fish in the next morning. In case they caught a lot of fish, they would sell them to the sailing vessels going to Kuwait City<sup>(2)</sup>. This season was preceded by the «*Qaid*» season during which they go to Boubyan island with the Kuwaiti vessels for the purpose of fishing Zubaidi in big quantities.

There was another season for the Failakah fishermen which began at the start of May and stopped by the end of September. That season was one of the most important and longest seasons there and Zubaidi could also be fished. «*Mashuwah*», a long boat with a capacity for one or two persons, can also be used during that season. Fishermen used to go to an area called «*Al weker*», opposite the inhabited part of the island, where there were a lot of fish during that period. Fishing is called «*Al-Hiyyal*» in that area and people used to depend on «*Al-Hiyyal*» for their living until the 1950s. Hiyyal was subject to the tide factors where the fishing place changed accordingly. The fishermen used to move to the area near Maskan island during the «*fassad*»<sup>(3)</sup> period at the beginning of the Hijri month while moving, during the yield period at the end of the month, south to an area called «*Dhahar Ta'an*». The fishermen used to sell their fish on the sailing vessels, lanjs or motorboats sailing at high seas which were waiting for their return to take the fish to Kuwait City arriving before sunrise so that fish could be transported to the Fish Market to be sold. The owners of the lanjs or motorboats used to return to Failakah before noon after receiving the price of the fish to deliver it to the fishermen after Asr prayer<sup>(4)</sup>. In winter, the fishermen of Failakah used to go to some Kuwaiti islands including Kubbar, Umm-Al-Mardem, Qarroh (or Garwah) and Auha

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(1) The Shorter Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Al Sa'idan, 1972, p. 799.

(2) My Memories in Failakah Island, Jassim Mansour Al Failakawi, p.58.

(3) «*Fassad*» in fishing terminology means a certain period in the Hijri month where the sea becomes very calm, with no waves which help fishermen to catch fish by hook.

(4) Pictures from Old Life in Failakah Island: Khalid Salem Mohamad-1985, p.93.

using their sailing vessels called «Shu'i» (Showi). They used threads and small mayadeer «hooks» to fish shari, hamra, caufar, a'ndaq, nahhash, nuaibi and sheem while the thick threads were used for catching big fish such as hamour, chan'ad and jarjour. In case the catch was abundant, they used to take it directly to Kuwait City to sell in the Fish Market<sup>(1)</sup>.

In summer, the fishermen of Failakah used to go to the nearby Miskan Island by small boats, during the periods when Zubaidi became abundant to be caught by «*Al-Alyakh*» the plural of «*leekh*», a net particularly used for that purpose. This period was called the «*fassad*» period which is from the 6th day to the 15th day of the Hijri month and also from the 18th day until the 28th day of the month. The period of fishing continues daily from afternoon till night where they go along with their fish to the sailing vessels going to Kuwait to sell them on that vessel. They also used to go to Miskan island in the season of fishing rubyan or shrimps by Shu'i and they used to take with them (*Kufa*) a type of nets used for catching prawn. When catching large quantities of them, they directly go to Kuwait City to sell them. Failakah fishermen also used to go to Boubyan Island to catch prawn and to Khor Abdullah to catch Zubaidi in the «*gaid*» season. Their voyage took 8 days to reach there. The vessel could carry 12 sailors and about forty nets and they used to catch fish daily, then, the fish to be taken to Kuwait City to be sold.

The sailors used to take with them sufficient quantities of food and quantities of salt for salting the fish caught that they could not sell in Kuwait City. Then, the sailors used to return to Failakah after 8 days for rest for five days after which they would go back again to Khor Abdullah to continue doing the same during the season in which they would carry out four fishing voyages. The numbers of Shu'i belonging to Failakah island was about forty. Some fishermen used to maintain the salted Zubaidi, which were not sold in their houses, till the time when the Kuwaiti vessels would travel to India where the sailors who were traveling there would purchase that salted Zubaidi to eat during their travel.

Failakah coasts also contained a number of al - hodhoors which belonged to Al-A'wazim tribe from which they used carry their fish to the Fish Market in Kuwait City through vessels belonging to them.

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(1) My Memories in Failakah Island, Jassim Mansour Al Failakawi, p.58.

## **Manufacturing Fish Net And Other Activities**

That craft was considered as one of the important crafts in Failakah island due to the existence of a large number of fishermen who used different kinds of nets for catching fish. The manufacturer of nets used to purchase thread «balls» for forging them to make different types of nets out of such threads. The same method was used in the other Kuwaiti areas for the purpose of making nets.

Carpentry was among other crafts in the island undertaken by some people to meet the population needs for doors, windows and other wooden furniture in addition to repair and maintenance of sailing vessels. Further, other people were engaged in transporting various materials atop donkeys for specific charges including building materials such as mud, rocks and bricks as well as other materials, e.g. palm branches, fronds and curb, from a place to another. There were also a number of builders to build and restore houses in addition to a number of shepherds (shawi) who took the sheep daily to the locations where grass and water wells were available. Most of Failakah people used to keep goats to utilize their milk.

Among the activities that characterized Failakah Island was the presence of shepherds who grazed them in natural grasslands after receiving such donkeys from their owners who head for the shepherds yard in the morning in order to graze throughout the day and get them back in the evening after spending the whole day grazing. The donkeys' shepherds used to work only during winter in order to collect the donkeys and take them to remote areas away from grains planting locations. The donkeys' shepherds received one Rupee per donkey every month while the sheep shepherds received four Annas per head.

Failakah Island was not void of scholars and teachers who taught the children the Holy Qura'n, Arabic language and arithmetics as well as other lessons until each learner could complete memorizing the Holy Qura'n and hence appropriate celebrations were set up for them, as the case in Kuwait City. Those teachers continued teaching until the government inaugurated the first school in the year 1935 and all teachers joined it after they had closed their private ones.

In the past, the island had no shops or stores to sell various products until the early 1940s, as the dwellers brought such products from Kuwait City via sailing boats. Some sellers offered the commodities for sale in their houses as well as a number of craftsmen, including a few numbers of carpenters, a barber and a person who practiced «cupping» in addition to a Jewish jeweler called



Fish-net in Failakah Island in the year 1932

*Source: Kuwait As Pictures By Early Photographers, William Facey: and Jilian Grant, 1998.*

Ezra who was repairing old jewelry<sup>(1)</sup>. Due to the fact that Failakah inhabitants depended on sail boats for carrying out a number of sea-based activities such as fishing, diving and travel, a number of niq'a were constructed for housing the vessels including Al-Khedr, Taher and Al-Boult Niqa's. Several buildings «A'marah» were also built as shops to sell the tools and spare parts of ships such as timbers, nails and construction materials. The island also contained «gypsum workshops» for manufacturing gypsum. It was a tradition followed by the vessel owners prior to departure to Kuwait to raise a flag called (Noaf) on the vessel bearing a big piece of cloth to notify those passengers willing to go to Kuwait in order to proceed to the vessel. The vessel owners used to transport the passengers from Failakah to Kuwait free of charge.

Failakah used to receive boats coming from Basrah which transported palm leaves, fronds, bawari, dates and other consumable goods. They stayed for a period that might extend to four days in order to sell their commodities and buy available commodities they would need such as sugar, tea and rice.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jassim Mansour Al Failakawi.



## **Diving, Travel And Fishing**

A number of Failakah men proceeded to pearl diving during the respective season on the vessels owned by local sailors or diving sailors in Kuwait. Those divers spent such period on the sea with other Kuwaiti ships which proceeded to hairat for pearl fishing. There were well-known diving sailors from Failakah including the late Shoua'ib Ali, Khalaf Al-Khawari, Mohamed Taleb, Khalid Hamdan, Ibrahim Abdullah, Hassan Ahmad Malallah, Salem Bourabie, Ahmad Isma'il, Eisa Janahi, Mohamed Taher Abdullah, Yousuf Malallah and Fahad Bourajeb<sup>(1)</sup>.

Some of those ship owners sailed to a number of Gulf countries, after the end of the diving season for trading purposes, as they transported various materials from certain Gulf ports to other ports including Basrah, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, Muscat and some Iranian ports. Among the fishing sailors were Mohamed Abdullah Ahmad, Ma'atouq Ramadhan and Hajji Bu Zobar.

There were also travel captains from Failakah, such as the late Mansur Ibrahim Al-Khaleel, Abdul Majeed Al-Mulla Ahmad, Rajab Ibrahim Al-Khaleel, Mansur Mahmoud Mohamed Faraj, Ya'qub Taher, Ahmad Mohamed Taher and Ali Mohamed Faraj. At the end of summer, those sailors headed for Basrah to load dates to India accompanied by their assistant sailors and other ship crew where each sailor selected his assistants from those people whom he knew and trusted. The sailors and fishermen spent travel season, as their colleagues from Kuwait City, on the sea bearing its risks and hazards to gain their living till the season ends, then each of them returned to their families after earning the income they could obtain for their work<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) An interview with Mr. Jassim Mansour Al-Failakawi

(2) Ibid.



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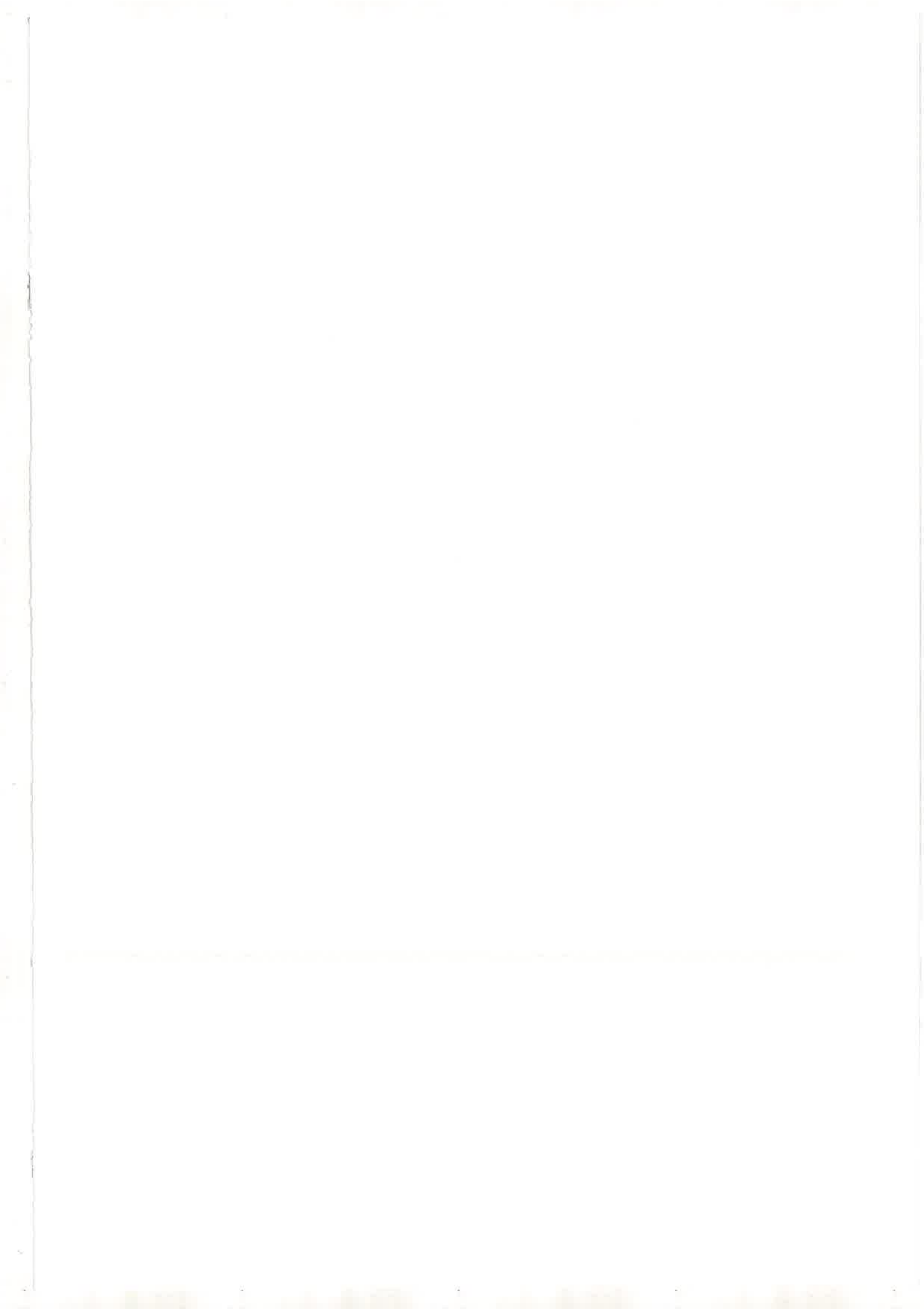
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