Spring 1994
(Special Issue)

DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH
A fragment of painted wood, Egypt, 8th century - Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah
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This special issue of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah's newsletter covers the period immediately before and after Liberation.

Cover: "May God Protect the State of Kuwait" (designed by Manuel Keene during the Iraqi occupation – see the interview on p. 36)
Foreword

The press conference in Washington in October 1990, held in preparation for the inauguration of the "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition, was an overwhelming experience for me. I was choked with emotions, with surging anger and deep sadness. For a moment I was unable to speak.

I was momentarily lost to the world as I weighed the contributions to the wealth of Islamic art, made by so many craftsmen and artists over such a long period of time, against the brief but irreversible actions of a group of men conducting a campaign of destruction.

Ten centuries of creativity and originality embraced by the Dar al-Atbar al-Islamiyyah were within a hair's breadth of being wiped out by the Iraqi invaders within a mere seven months.

The Dar al-Atbar al-Islamiyyah collection, covering a period from 8th to 18th centuries, evoked ten centuries of artistic endeavour through its lively, simple symbols, radiant with vivid brilliance even though their creators passed away long ago. It is their call that stimulates our human creativity, the harmony with our Muslim brethren, our shared innovative vision, our communication with our Western neighbours, who in turn contributed their own viewpoints and perspectives.

A ten-century old creation holds you in speculation even before you are aware of it, and modestly whispers to you. The collection contains a wide variety of items: jars, plates, braziers, ewers, carpets, bottles, rugs, bracelets, rings, necklaces, boxes, mirrors, pillars, manuscripts, astrolabes, niches, and even daggers and tombstones.

I remembered the development of the Dar al-Atbar al-Islamiyyah collection from the time we first went out to search for pieces. As I stood in front of the collection I was encompassed in centuries of achievement, spreading out like the pages of a massive volume, urging me to work more towards restoring confidence in the present than towards basking in the glorious achievements of our forefathers.

Those ten centuries are the creative product of sensitive fingertips playing upon the strings of the soul; they were over-run by seven months of trampling feet which crushed everything through envy and deceit. We recall the poet's words,

"More bitter is the mischief done by one's kin than a stab from a foreigner's sword."

God forbid that the invaders should be counted among one's relatives! Since it became deeply rooted in the human consciousness, Islam has turned the scales of fraternity towards justice and decrees that the Islamic nation should command good and interdict against evil, above oppressive blood brotherhood and the hostility of an aggressive neighbour.

Thanks be given to God that a review of the list of friends who backed Kuwait returns us to both our self-confidence and our assurance that goodness still prevails.

Seven Months Destroy Ten Centuries!

By Hussah al-Sabah,
Director of Dar al-Atbar al-Islamiyyah.
all over the globe, although its source may vary. Some of the people and organisations on that list, compiled during the events of the occupation, are mentioned below in gratitude and acknowledgment:

- The Russian Hermitage Museum at Saint Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), which shared with Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah the intent of inaugurating the exhibition on time, despite the invasion.

- The Trust for Museum Exhibitions in Washington, which helped to pinpoint the cultural character of Kuwait through its insistence on implementing the "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition.

- The Walters Art Gallery Museum, for hosting this exhibition and contributing towards turning a cultural event into a political demonstration on behalf of Kuwait.

- The United Nations Organisation, for the role played by its team in restoring the collection of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, as well as Mr. Richard Foran, for his role in ensuring its return to its rightful owners.

- The Embassy of the United States of America in Kuwait, represented by Mr. Edward Gnehm, American Ambassador to Kuwait.

- All other museums which hosted the "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition, as follows: Campbell Museum for Art, Fort Worth, Texas; Emory Museum of Art and Architecture, Atlanta, Georgia; Scottsdale Cultural Centre, Scottsdale, Arizona; Virginia Museum for Fine Arts, Richmond Virginia; St. Louis Museum, Saint Louis, Missouri; The Canadian Museum for Civilization, Hull, Quebec; and New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana; the "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition started its European tour at L'Institut du Monde Arabe.

- International Gulf Company and its Director, Mrs Katie Marsh, for the role she played in following up the "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition and relocating it from Russia to the United States of America.

- The Syrian Ministry of Culture and its Minister Dr Najah al Attar, for her kind invitation to us to participate in the "Bosra" festival.

- The British Council in Kuwait, for setting up the first reciprocal exhibition in cooperation with Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah immediately after the liberation of Kuwait.

- Added to the above is another list which cannot be strictly enumerated here but which is committed to memory and stored in one’s heart of hearts. That list throws clear light on the wide range of repercussions of the catastrophe.

The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait was, and indeed, remains a bitter experience by any scale of reckoning.

This is our living testimony unfolded in this issue of Hadith Al Dar/The Talk of the House.
Introduction

In ‘Histoire Generale des Arabes,’ published in 1851, L.A. Sedilot says, “It is time to draw attention to the history of this nation which lay unknown in a corner of Asia, then rose to the highest position with fame spreading all over the world for seven centuries.” The effect of the rediscovery of Islamic civilisation by Western Europe in the nineteenth century is reflected in this passage. It was a peculiar century in which the second half rejected the attitudes of the first, and, from this change, the Western view of Islamic culture became more favourable.

This revolution is expressed in ‘L’Art Arabe,’ published in 1877. Prisse D’Avennes says, “This book will save these treasures from oblivion as they are unknown to the majority of scholars and artists. It will clearly demonstrate before the public an art which will prove beyond doubt that it is one of the most important in the history of art. It will present to contemporary belles lettres and architecture simultaneously material that incites engineers and artists to reject vulgarity and lack of inventiveness; hence, they will rise to lofty summits only craved by noble spirits preaching the creed of aesthetics.”

Gustave Le Bon is also enthusiastic in his ‘La Civilisation des Arabes,’ published in 1884: “The Arabs opened before Europe the gates of the world of scientific, literary and philosophical knowledge which was still unknown to it. Thus, we have been indebted to them for six centuries.”

Misunderstanding of cultures other than one’s own is a normal and regular feature of history. No country or historical period is immune to it. The ethnocentrism of the twentieth century has its roots in concepts such as the imperial mandate of ‘Manifest Destiny’ in the nineteenth century, the absolutism of “divine right of kings” in the Renaissance, and the combination of Church and State that that was ‘Christendom’ in the mediaeval period. All of these were associated with geographic expansion. Likewise, the Crusades, the conquest of the ‘New World’ (an ethnocentric title in itself) by competing monarchs, and subsequent colonisation were connected with the philosophies of their times. Sometimes ideas were the inspiring force behind the movement, at others, they were used to justify policy. New ideas spring with uncanny regularity, however, from encounters with previously unavailable information and frequently are in opposition to the status quo. Both the twelfth century ‘Awakening’ and the eighteenth century ‘Enlightenment’ were radical responses to new horizons opened by widening frontiers.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the paradox of nineteenth century attitudes to non-occidental peoples occurred. The encounter with ‘new’ cultures overturned the prejudices of the early nineteenth century. They were intellectually and artistically countered by movements such as Romanticism. The myth of ‘the white man’s burden’ was replaced by that of ‘the noble savage,’ and eclectic attitudes supplanted missionary ones. The exciting new information that was flowing into the West through exploration, scientific investigation, and scholarly research stimulated a number of Western minds to study and re-explore Islamic civilisation. Simultaneously, a similar movement was taking place in the Islamic world itself. Through he persuasions of al-Afghani, Muhammed Abdu, al-Kawakibi, Sayed Khan, and Muhammed Ikhla, an Islamic cultural revival took place. This was augmented by journeys to the West by men such as al-Tahtawi, Khairuddin al-Tonsi, and Ahmed al-Faris al-Shediak, who sought to study and define what was to them a new civilisation.

The politicians’ view at the end of the nineteenth century did not differ much from that at its start. They naturally sought to attain raw materials as cheaply as possible. Whether this was justified by the philosophy of the time or whether it was in service of it was irrelevant to the non-Western peoples who initially bore the onus of development in the West towards eventual industrialisation. Nevertheless, the West was soon affected as well. Competition between different Western powers for hegemony created the need for superior military force. In the nineteenth century, the stage was set for the World Wars that broke out among Western nations in the twentieth century.

In this century, humanity did, in fact, endure this terrible ordeal. Then a new technological innovation occurred. A revolution in communications created the concept of ‘The Global Village.’ No longer was West separated from East nor North from South. What happened at one end of the world could be seen to be affecting the other. Rapid dissemination of information created a unification that was previously impossible.

Ironically, this made the concept of ‘World War’ at last a reality. In the Global Village, even the smallest war has worldwide ramifications. Any major war becomes truly a ‘World War,’ not confined merely to the inhabitants of the particular region involved.
Wars are not the only disasters affecting this small and vulnerable village. Matters such as environmental pollution and the hole in the ozone layer take on universal concern. A new spirit of cooperation and empathy is emerging through the rapid communication of information. More and more, the people of the world are beginning to realise that they are on the same boat.

Although the vessel seems in danger of sinking, distress calls for saving the ship are numerous. There was, for example, Roget Garoudi’s invitation, ‘The Debate of Civilisation,’ as well as the calling for a debate among religions issued by several conferences.

The danger lies in those who still remain oblivious to their interconnection to the rest of the world, who wrap themselves in a cocoon of ignorance, hoping to escape the enlightenment of current knowledge. In doing this, they hold fast to an outmoded concept of the nature of the world. They are the saboteurs who make holes in the ship’s timbers and cause the ship to sink. They forget that they will drown along with the rest of the people on board.

One such saboteur appeared recently in Iraq, supported by the ignorance, superficiality, and arrogance of his entourage. An opportunist, he vacillated between nationalistic, secular Arabism and Islamic creed according to his needs. He attacked Kuwait on August 2, 1990, brutally oppressing its people, coarsely looting their homes and plundering their institutions.

Yet, to his surprise — and that of his supporters and apologists — the world reacted against him, each country responding as if its own borders had been attacked. The whole world stood facing Saddam and forced him to respect the unanimous will of the ship’s passengers.

Never had technology triumphed over tyranny as it did in the restoration of Kuwait to its people. The military aspect, although perhaps the most spectacular, is only a part of the story. The Iraqi regime, in occupying Kuwait, inadvertently exposed its own people to new ideas conveyed by the sophisticated communications systems that existed in Kuwait. Just as exposure to exotic cultures created a chain effect which ultimately caused the second half of the nineteenth century to turn against the first half, the experience of the new world that the common Iraqi soldier found in Kuwait has planted a land mine inside the Iraqi mentality that may cause the undoing of the Iraqi regime. For the first time in his life, while he was in Kuwait, he, the ordinary man, could turn on a television or a radio and be in contact with the outside world.

It is at this point that several questions must be posed. Does this new world order, based as it is upon Western communications systems, mean that the Western model of civilisation has triumphed? Has the philosophy of the early nineteenth century prevailed?

The extremists have certainly given the opportunity to the detractors of Islam to feel vindicated. The self-serving use of Islamic slogans and other trappings by the Iraqi regime reinforced the misconception of many that Islam is a religion of violence and destruction, of intolerance and ignorance.

There have already been literary reactions in the West against this negative image of Islam. A few years ago, Anthony Burgess, the late English writer, wrote a parallel to George Orwell’s ‘1984’. He called it ‘1985,’ and in it he warned against Islam as a threat to Western civilisation.

It is our lot, at the end of this century, to shoulder doubly the burdens that our grandfathers carried at the end of the nineteenth, i.e., to realise a healthy, positive dialogue between the West and the Islamic world.

It is our duty to face all the saboteurs, old and new, whether they are insane heads of state or extremist individuals.

It is also our duty to rectify the image of Islam in the West and in the whole world. It is our obligation to continue the march of development with quick steps in an attempt to keep pace with the science of the future.

This special issue of ‘Hadeeth ad-Dar,’ or ‘News of the Dar,’ begins with a page about the destruction that the Dar experienced during the period of the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The opposite page is the challenge that the Dar called for to carry on, in exile, its cultural mission, emphasizing that culture is the firm foundation for human activities in the face of fleeting politics. Soon, God willing, the page about construction will be inaugurated when the Dar is reconstructed and resumes its share in correcting the concept of Islamic civilisation through its positive creativity.
THE COLLECTION OF DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH AROUSES THE AFFECTION OF THE WORLD

From the time when Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, the Director of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) first thought of holding an exhibition at the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg), and throughout the preparations, nobody ever thought that the exhibition, due to start on August 6th, just four days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, would change its nature and become a major media vehicle to illustrate and elucidate the historical and cultural aspects of Kuwait at a time of calamity and distress for the country. The exhibition of “Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait” has become an eloquent messenger, travelling to countries in order to gain the world’s affections and sympathy for its cause.

The exhibition travelled from Leningrad to the U.S.A., then on to France and other countries in Europe. In each country it became a cultural festival and a daily demonstration of solidarity; it was expressive, evocative of the glorious past, and a reminder of the painful and agonizing present that
Kuwait was living through, under the forced and offensive occupation.

After the remarkable success realized by the Hermitage exhibition of 120 Islamic art objects, shown in Kuwait in May 1990, in a single exhibition outside the USSR for the first time, the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah decided to hold its own exhibition at the Hermitage in August 1990, within the framework of the agreement on the exchange of art exhibitions between Kuwait and the former Soviet Union.

The opening of the exhibition was 3rd August, but it was postponed to 6th August to allow preparation of complementary exhibits illustrating Kuwait’s marine, land and urban heritage, and modern Kuwait. A seminar was also organized to inform the public about the history of Kuwait and Islamic civilization, and this saw the participation of Kuwaiti specialists and professors in history and civilization together with their Soviet counterparts. These additional exhibits, film shows and talks were to be held both inside and outside the location of the main exhibition, in the famous Georgeffish Hall.

A military aircraft piloted by Major Ahmed Al-Bloushi and carrying the possessions of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah landed at Bolkovo airport in Leningrad at 15.30 local time on Wednesday 25th July, 1990 and unloaded its cargo in the presence of Hermitage officials and under the supervision of a technical team from Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. The team of experts was headed by Abdul Kareem Al-Ghadhan and Abdel Rahman Al-Ajami.

A Unique Collection

The exhibition consisted of 107 rare artistic pieces characterising the splendidous of Islamic art in pottery, metal, crystal, ivory, arms, carpets, textiles manuscripts and miniatures, and stemming from the vast areas of Persia, Syria, Tunisia, Morocco, India, Turkey, Afghanistan, Bukhara and Islamic Spain. The period illustrated was that from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries A.D. The items were miraculously saved from the Iraqi occupation which wreaked its wrath on the cultural antiquities of Kuwait plundered its cultural acquisitions and the contents of its museums, and burnt the buildings, leaving them in ruins. The Soviet Information delegation which visited Kuwait immediately after liberation was shocked by the contrast between the condition of the museum during the Hermitage exhibition at DAI and its subsequent state. The delegation made its findings public on its return to Moscow.

Two days after the arrival of the exhibition in July 1990, the mass circulation Soviet magazine “Agoniok” published a long article on Kuwait. The Chief Editor of the magazine had the honour of having an interview with His Highness the Amir, and his article focused on the occasion of Kuwait’s National Day in February 1990, describing Ku...
wait and its achievements and featuring eight large colour photographs, which included pictures of His Highness the Amir and the Crown Prince with Kuwait’s emblem between them, the Kuwait towers and examples of Kuwaiti art. As the magazine was published to correspond with the timing of Dar al-‘Athar al-Islamiyyah’s exhibition in the Hermitage, Kuwait’s Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Mr. Abdel Mohsen Yosef Al-De‘aij, bought up five thousand copies of the publication for distribution amongst visitors to the exhibition. Under his leadership, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Moscow became a work cell for the service of the Kuwaiti exhibition.

The Embassy arranged for a large information delegation, of around 50 persons from Kuwait and England, to participate in the opening of the exhibition, and it was due to arrive in Moscow on 3rd August. Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, the Director of the Dar al-‘Athar al-Islamiyyah informed the Ambassador that Sheikh Nasser Mohammed al-Ahmad al-Sabah, the State Minister for Foreign Affairs at that time, would preside over the opening of the exhibition at Leningrad on 6th August. The Embassy prepared an abundant pro-

gramme for the visit to Moscow and Leningrad, including visits to the Kremlin State Diamond Museum, historical museums, Red Square, the Bolshoi Ballet and sightseeing tours.

The vicious Iraqi aggression took place before dawn on August 2nd, and communications with Kuwait were cut. The question in the minds of all concerned was, what should be done? Would the exhibition open in such circumstances? Al-De‘aij had a decisive reply. He ordered that the exhibition would be held on time. Mr. Abdul Kareem Al-Ghadban would open it on the Ambassador’s behalf.

The next day the Kuwaiti and Soviet officials held a press conference, in the building of the Hermitage at Leningrad, devoted to the opening of the exhibition and attended by reporters of the main Soviet media: the official news agency TASS, the radio, the television and the Pravda newspaper. Mr Vitali Sosolov, the Deputy Director of the Hermitage, spoke on behalf of the Soviets and Mr. Abdul Kareem Al-Ghadibian spoke for the Kuwaiti party and Dar al-‘Athar al-Islamiyyah.

Mr Sosolov deplored the Iraqi military invasion of Kuwait and
read the Soviet government's statement, which had been issued on 2nd August and which denounced the Iraqi aggression strongly and decisively, and declared the Soviet people's solidarity with the people of Kuwait.

Mr Soloslov assured the press of the importance of the exhibition, the first of its kind in the Soviet Union and drew attention to the rarity of its exhibits, which added much of value and splendour to the possessions of the Hermitage. He also referred to the role played by the exhibition at such a time of crisis for the State of Kuwait.

The speakers at the press conference condemned the barbarian Iraqi invasion. Mr Al-Ghadban expressed his confidence that the aggressors would be expelled and gave his thanks for the Soviet people's solidarity and sympathy for the Kuwaiti people in their affliction.

Wide Echo

On August 6th, 1990, Solosov and Al-Ghadban cut the ribbon and opened the exhibition. The Soviet media transmitted news of the opening. TASS, the official Soviet news agency broadcasted it on August 8th, and the local newspapers covered it accordingly. Leningrad Television telecasted the opening incidents in a news programme called "Fact".

The public came to see the exhibition in great numbers and found there a chance to express their solidarity and sympathy with civilisation, and their depreciation and Tass And The Hermitage Exhibition

A Kuwaiti Exhibition In The Hermitage Museum

Leningrad 8/8/90 Tass

As war breaks out in Kuwait, the Islamic arts exhibition, the exhibited articles of which have been brought from the National Museum of Kuwait, opened Monday in one of the most beautiful halls of the Hermitage Museum, the Georgiufski Hall.

In his speech during the exhibition's opening ceremony, Mr Vitali Soloslov, the deputy Manager of the Hermitage said, "In these tragic days for Kuwait, we confirm the statement of the Soviet government which has stood firm against the occupation of this sovereign state. We hope the international community may reach a fair determination for the dispute."

"Today's exhibition gives evidence to the fact that only peaceful life can give people the chance to exchange artistic values and to know each other in a better way."

The agreement to hold the exhibition was discussed a long time before the launching of Iraq's aggression. It includes more than one hundred exhibited articles which are very rare, and their ages range between the ninth and eighteenth centuries.

The Distinction of the Museum's Exhibited articles:

One of the largest collections of Islamic art in the world is kept in the Hermitage. However, in the Kuwait exhibition, we view many antiquities which largely integrate with the Hermitage collection. They are, first of all, pottery and ceramics, which originated in the ninth and tenth centuries, pieces of manuscripts with splendid miniatures, Kufic calligraphy of text from the Holy Koran, and pieces of ivory, crystal, arms and carpet. Another characteristic of the items on show is that they represent a large area encompassing Persia, Egypt, Syria, Tunis, India, Turkey and Islamic Spain (Andalus).

The exhibited articles are from Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah and their owner is Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, the famous custodian of Islamic and Kuwaiti art. They have been transported for the first time outside the state borders for this exhibition, which is reciprocal. In last May an exhibition was held in Kuwait for gems of Islamic art from the Hermitage collection.

After the end of the exhibition's run in Leningrad, its articles will be sent on a tour of several months' duration, to the cities of the U.S.A., Canada and France.
The inauguration of the "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition was a great event in terms of its time, place and significance. It took place on 7 December 1990, that is, only four months after the inauspicious Iraqi invasion, and was held at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, U.S.A., where the call for liberating Kuwait has been given prominence. The exhibition's importance lies in being a symbol of Kuwait's advocacy of goodness, beauty and the preservation of art, as opposed to the invaders' stance in support of evil, ugliness, and the annihilation of all aspects of life.
The story of the Exhibition goes back to May 1st 1990, when the Russian Hermitage Museum at St Petersburg, formerly known as Leningrad, exhibited a selection of 120 pieces from an Islamic collection at Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. The sixth day of August of the same year was fixed for a reciprocal exhibition at the Hermitage of 107 pieces of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection, pursuant to the cultural exchange agreement between the two museums. The selection of these 107 pieces was made by Dr. Esin Atil of the Freer Art Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., for a touring exhibition which was originally prompted by two ladies who visited Kuwait in 1989 with the prospect in mind; Mrs. Ann Dewaner Townsend, the President of the Trust for Museum Exhibition, and Dr. Ellen Reeder, the Curator of Ancient Art at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

A week before the invasion, the collection arrived in St Petersburg, false to exile in Russia, a member of the international coalition and a pillar of the new peaceful world order. The collection turned its ‘exile’ into an opportunity for a cultural breakthrough that was deeper and more durable than propagandist bickering. It effectively established the fact that art is above politics and also elicited the world’s sincere sympathy for Kuwait’s cause.

The exhibition was inaugurated on August 6th, and moved on to the United States, its second home in exile and another pillar of the peaceful international coalition. It stressed the politico-cultural role attached to the exhibition, and the implementation of an agreement reached in the pre-invasion period between the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah and the Trust for Museum Exhibitions.
Exhibition in Washington, pertaining to exhibiting the 107 pieces in a number of American states under the title, "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait".

The inauguration of the Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait exhibition

In the middle of October 1990, Sheikha Hussah Al-Sabah, director of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, held a press conference at the Meridian House in Washington and gained the admiration and appreciation of all present. She raised the issue of Kuwait and its right to exist as a state, and its leading cultural role in the light of the groundless allegations and vandalism of the Iraqi regime.

The "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait" exhibition opened at Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore on the 7th December 1990, a unique event which was attended by
His Excellency Sheikh Saud Nasser al-Sabah, then Ambassador of Kuwait to the United States of America, and now the Minister of Information, The Honourable Edward Gnehm, American Ambassador to Kuwait, delivered a poem entitled “Kuwait... Kuwait” out of admiration and reverence for Kuwait and her resistance in the face of the invaders. President George Bush also sent words of greeting dedicated to Kuwait as well as to the exhibition.

The audience at the exhibition included many specialists, diplomats, educated people and artists, and was composed both of those who enthusiastically supported Kuwait’s rights and admirers of Islamic art.

The “Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait” exhibition on tour

The exhibition followed its scheduled tour, moving from Walters Art Gallery to the Campbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, where it opened on March 16th, 1991. It subsequently moved to the Emory University of Art and the Archaeology Museum, Atlanta,
Ceramic Dish - Turkey - first quarter of 16th c.

One of the exhibition halls in St. Louis

Painting - India - 1st quarter of 17th c.

Cylindrical Box - Egypt or Syria - second half of 14th c.
I am delighted to extend warm greetings to everyone gathered for the opening of the exhibition of Islamic art at the Walters Art Gallery.

This exhibition, "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait," features a priceless array of works from throughout the Islamic world. These works, dating as far back as the ninth century and as recently as the 19th century, have both artistic and historical significance. Indeed, they constitute one of the most important private collections of Islamic art in the world, and we are fortunate, given the terrible circumstances of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, to have the opportunity to see it.

In addition to its aesthetic and historic value, this exhibition holds another kind of merit. Because art conveys the emotions, experience, and ideas of man in a timeless and universal language, this collection not only has the potential to promote greater understanding between peoples from different cultures but also provides tangible reminders of our debt to past generations and our obligation toward generations to come.

I join all of you in thanking Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his wife, Sheikha Hussah Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, for generously sharing their collection; I am sure it will provide enjoyment and inspiration for all those who attend this exhibition.

Barbara joins me in sending our best wishes to everyone gathered for this gala opening.
It was the face of a friend
The sound of a foe.
A north wind blowing from a dark north sky
With flashing light and furious sound;
A waterless storm of metal and fire
That scorched the earth and seared the soul;
A black night that brought terror;
A mailed might that brought death;
That made God in Heaven tremble and weep
That brother mete on brother such wrath ....
such grief,
It was the face of a friend
The sound of a foe.
A wave of darkness and despair;
Black evil that ripped like a sword
The fabric of family .... the heart of the land;
That consumed all good; that devoured all life.
And time stood still ...
A black night that brought terror;
A mailed might that brought death;
That made God in Heaven tremble and weep
That brother mete on brother such wrath....such grief.
It was the face of a friend, the sound of a foe.
But from wretched grief and deep despair
Come piercing cries from souls yet alive.
Rays of life ....breaths of air
From peoples unbent who still defy
A black night that brought terror;
A mailed might that brought death;
That made God in Heaven tremble and weep
That brother mete on brother such wrath....such grief.
It is the soul of its people
the spirit of its land
That stands with defiance to rise up and say, "This nation will not die; this people
will not fall.
Our soul is alive. Our dream is here now."
A black night that brought terror;
A mailed might that brought death;
That made God in Heaven cry out and shout
That brother mete on brother such wrath....such grief.
It is the soul of its people the spirit of its land
That from the darkest hour comes a new day.
A sun bursting forth on a land wrecked by man
Is the fire of new spirit...the rebirth of the soul;
Tomorrow is today and today is now.
A black night that brought terror;
A mailed might that brought death;
That made Heaven and Earth cry out and shout;
Kuwait is alive and its people shall be. Kuwa
t, Kuwait, you shall be free.
The Three Chapters of The Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah Tragedy in Relation To The Iraqi invasion

Katie Marsh is the head of the DAI mission assigned, under the supervision of the United Nations, to take the collections of both the Kuwait National Museum and Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) from the Iraqi regime that seized them following its invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990.

Katie Marsh’s assignment was not only official but also humanitarian and personal. She has been involved with the growth and accumulation of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection over a twenty year period, closely witnessing its development from a small collection to a large one that spans eras of creative harmony.

Her fingertips have become familiar with the touch of ages through the feel of the surface of the works of art. She speaks of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection fondly, as if its individual pieces are old friends. Her mission to restore these old friends to their rightful home after their bleak exile in Baghdad cannot be considered to be merely an official duty.

We have conducted the following interview with Katie Marsh, DAI representative and the Managing Director of Gulf international (U.K.) Ltd., in which she explains the events of the Iraqi invasion as they affected the collection of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. She describes the anxious moments experienced by all devotees of Islamic Art across the world on hearing that the Islamic world’s most comprehensive collection had been taken.

She also describes the lucky escape of 107 pieces from the collection which were on show at the Hermitage Museum in Russia, and afterwards exhibited in several states of the U.S.A. under a previous agreement with The Trust for Museum Exhibitions in Washington, under the title “Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait.” Finally, she describes her relief after the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection was returned to Kuwait from Baghdad.
The Hermitage and the Iraqi invasion

Firstly, can you elaborate on the connection between the Hermitage and Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah?

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait took place on August 2, 1990. By good fortune, the 107 pieces selected from the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection for participation in the DAI Hermitage exhibition had already left Kuwait a week earlier. The brave decision was taken to open the exhibition on the scheduled date, despite the shock of the invasion. The inauguration of the exhibition was accompanied by a major information campaign, in the press of Russia (at that time, the Soviet Union), contrasting the tragedy of the Iraqi invasion with the peaceful and cultural intentions of Kuwait, as represented by the exhibition.

In the United States

Can you describe the inauguration of the exhibition in the United States?

The inauguration of the “Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait,” exhibition at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, in December 1990 attracted a mass audience not only of art lovers but also of diplomats, politicians, and military personnel from nearby Washington as well as a large turnout from radio, television, and the press.

The opening had been preceded by considerable coverage of the exhibition in the American and international press, focusing on the artistic and cultural aspects of the exhibition as well as upon its political role throughout the critical circumstances in Kuwait.

This was largely due to the courage of Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, Director of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, who held a dramatically touching press conference at the Meridien House, Washington D.C. in mid-October 1990.

She spoke of the driving force behind her insistence upon opening the exhibition as scheduled. She carried the American audience, one which is not usually swayed, with her. It was something of a novelty for them to see a Kuwaiti woman speak so courageously and confidently, introducing both her country and the exhibition in such a powerful and eloquent manner.

Her speech removed the common misconception that Kuwait is little more than desert and oil and gave instead a picture of Kuwait as an enlightened and civilised country even in such difficult political circumstances.

Please tell us about the information campaign that preceded the exhibition.

It was not a campaign in the usual sense of the word. Although the world was preoccupied by the major political event, that is, by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, it did not mean that a great many of those interested in antiquities and the arts were unconcerned with the fate of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection and whether it had been stolen or damaged. Periodicals like the “Eastern Art Review” as well as the Independent, the Times, the Guardian, and many other British and American newspapers carried articles concerned with that issue. Similarly, the American media covered the Kuwaiti loss in depth.

Conflicting reports about Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah

Katie Marsh, head of the mission to accomplish the return of the stolen artefacts from Baghdad.

The courage of Sheikha Hussah in delivering her speech in Washington after the invasion of Kuwait and the seizure of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.
How did you happen to get news of what happened to Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah after the invasion?

In September, Susan al-Mutawwa, a researcher at DAI, contacted me in London immediately after she escaped from occupied Kuwait. She informed me that she had witnessed some Iraqi civilians at Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah and that they were moving some of its contents. I was terribly frightened lest a non-specialist might move the works of art in such a way that would damage them. It was also quite possible that Iraqi soldiers might steal some of the pieces. We also received news from a witness who escaped to Cairo that the Iraqi soldiers had fired their machine guns at the collection after breaking into the building. Out of respect for the works of art themselves, Sheikha Hussah would have preferred to know that the pieces had been stolen rather than they had been damaged or destroyed.

It was also rumoured among the international art markets that some pieces from the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection had been offered for sale. In October 1990, the Iraqi representative at UNESCO delivered a speech in which he alleged that the Iraqis had moved the works of art and antiquities from Kuwait to keep them from being destroyed as a result of war, and that they were implementing the Hague Convention of 1954, which decrees that states at war may move works of art from areas of conflict.

What was the first step taken by the United Nations in search of the collection?

Immediately after liberation Kuwait requested the UN to facilitate restitution of its property in compliance with UN resolution 687. In May 1991, Mr. Richard Foran, Assistant Secretary General, at that time, and General Coordinator of the return of Kuwaiti property from Iraq, went to Baghdad to investigate the issue. Upon his return to Kuwait, Mr. Foran confirmed that the collection was in the possession of Iraq. From May to August, negotiations were conducted between the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by Mr. Khalid al-Dowaisan, at that time the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Netherlands, and the UN. These negotiations concerned the restitution of Kuwaiti property.
including the contents of both the National Museum and Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. During this period, the UN requested Sheikh Nasser to submit details of his collection. In August 1991, accompanied by Manuel Keene, the first Curator for Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, I went to Baghdad to ascertain the true state of the collection.

We visited the Iraq Museum in Baghdad and met its Director of the Department of Antiquities, Dr. Muaid Saeed, in the presence of a UN envoy. We discussed the details and fixed September 14 for initiating the restitution of the property of both the Kuwait National Museum and Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. Once we returned we submitted a proposal on the requirements of the delegation that would receive the works of art on behalf of Kuwait.

Commission for Property Restitution

Were any Kuwaiti officials included in the delegation assigned to receive the collections?

The government of Kuwait decided not to send any Kuwaiti officials to Baghdad in order to avoid giving the Iraqis any pretext for further offence and to emphasize the boycott imposed upon the Baghdad regime. The delegation was headed by myself and Manuel Keene, formerly of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He had been the first visiting Curator of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah from 1982-84, returned in 1988, and remained in Kuwait throughout the entire Iraqi occupation.

The delegation also included Robert Skelton, a former Curator of the Indian Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. He had already been to Kuwait several times and lectured on Indo-Islamic Art.

Another member of the team was Kirsty Norman, an art conservator who previously worked at the British Museum. She has been an advisor on conservation at Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah since 1988. She was in Kuwait at the time of the invasion and was arrested by the Iraqis, thus becoming one of the Western hostages during the occupation.

Simon Robertson, a professional photographer specialising in fine art photography accompanied the group. He had photographed much of the collection during his ten year association with Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.

David Jackson, Director of Artworld Shipping, a packing company which specialises in packing
works of art and three assistants participated in the mission. Mr. Jackson has been responsible for the packing of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah art objects for many years.

On September 13, 1991, we departed to Baghdad, taking with us conservation and packaging materials as well as other equipment. We found the contents of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah piled in the Assyrian Hall at the Iraq Museum. They chose an adjacent room for conducting the return of the pieces and allocated a further two rooms for wrapping and packing.

The Handover and Return to Kuwait

Had the collection been kept there since being taken from Kuwait?

While we were in Baghdad, we inferred that the Iraqis had executed an incomplete inventory of the pieces. They had put the small pieces into metal trunks with minimal wrapping, and the larger pieces without wrappings of any kind. The contents were carried from Kuwait to Baghdad in open lorries. We believe that the Iraqis moved the Kuwaiti collections as well as much of their own out of Baghdad in December 1990 when war appeared likely.

In March 1991, the collection returned to Baghdad where the Iraqis carried out an inventory of the pieces, a process that took six weeks. They opened the trunks and recorded the contents. The jewels had been kept in the Central Bank in Baghdad.

Recording and retrieving (from right to left, Kuwait, U.N., Iraq)

What was the procedure of the delivery?

The delegation representing Kuwait sat at a large table opposite the Iraqi delegation with the UN intermediaries between. Each object was handed over individually by the Iraqis to the Kuwait delegation for identification, inspection and the assessment of any damage, if necessary by comparing the object with pre-invasion photographs and records. Each object was also recorded individually by the UN together with details of any damage. The UN produced an official handover form for each group of objects and these were signed by the UN, the Iraqis and the Kuwaiti delegation. Thereafter any damage was recorded photographically and
the objects were then packed. Every few days a consignment of packed objects was taken by truck and UN escort to the airport and flown back to Kuwait by UN aircraft.

Non-stop Efforts and Losses
How long did this take?

The delegations representing both the UN and Kuwait left Kuwait on September 13, 1991, and the handover started on September 14th with the last piece handed over on October 20th. The last group left Baghdad on 26 October. Work was hard during that period, usually starting at nine o’clock in the morning and continuing until nine o’clock in the evening or later. It took 16 separate UN flights to transport all the collections back to Kuwait.

Was there any danger or loss?

About 60 pieces from DAI collection are missing, including a sixteenth century (Mughal India) carved emerald weighing 234 carats. Nearly 200 pieces were damaged to a greater or lesser extent. In addition, a rare pair of fourteenth century wooden doors from Morocco, almost 4.5 metres high, is known to have been left in DAI and completely destroyed when the Iraqis set fire to the interior of the museum before they retreated from Kuwait at the end of February 1991. Some of the archives, all the computers, the library catalogue, the conservation laboratory, and other equipment were also not returned.

The Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah Collection

Setting aside these tragic events and coming back to the collection, what appeals to your taste aesthetically?

There are so many pieces belonging to various periods, but a few favorites are Turkish carpets, ceramics of the tenth and twelfth centuries from Egypt and Iran and from Ottoman Turkey in the sixteenth century, a unique lustre jar from thirteenth century Syria, and a very large Qur’an from fourteenth century. This last piece was with me in London during the invasion and was deposited in a bank until it could be brought back to Kuwait after liberation.
Fair was strong during the long days of occupation. As intolerable as the severity of its ordeal, Kuwait’s will to prevail in the arena of international mass media and diplomacy was steadfast. Despite the violence and damage of the invasion, Kuwait chose mass media as its weapon. Kuwait had long experienced a positive relationship with the Arab people and was confident of their recognition of the right of the Kuwaitis to live in the freedom and dignity ensured them by the reality of their existence as citizens of a legitimate state governed by a free and just system.

It was imperative for Kuwait to confront misinformation. Right and truth are readily accessible means to deal with perversion and falsity. The foundation of Kuwait information centres was vital. It was a serious and decisive step on the right track, with centres in main cities of the world, both Arab and Western. The Damascus-based Information Centre functioned as Kuwait’s podium. From Syria to Lebanon and Jordan, Kuwait’s voice was heard. The Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria supported Kuwait’s information efforts by organising lectures and demonstrating solidarity with the Kuwaiti people.

KUWAIT FOREVER

The Damascus-based Kuwaiti Information Centre initiated its practical activities with Sheikha Hussah al-Salim al-Sabah assuming her duties as the Centre’s Director. A group of Kuwait young men and women were chosen to work at the Centre and organised into goal-oriented committees. The persevering communication with the political body in respect to both Syria and the Palestinian faction was extremely effective in giving rise to the national emotional coalition supporting Kuwait’s crucial cause. The result of the location of informative, political, and cultural work in Syria produced fresh and effective results; the Information Centre set out to mobilise all possible ways and means necessary for raising the issue of Kuwait, with Syria firmly backing it up with all its might.

The available channels of mass communication were optimally sorted out by the Centre’s administration. Consequently, a film was produced, “Kuwait Forever.” It was a well-studied piece, sincerely, honestly, and sensitively co-supervised by the leading Syrian artist, Mr. Dureid Laham, with both Mr. Yasser al-Maleh and Mr. Usama al-Rumani acting as assistants. The Centre set up an information campaign through the Syrian press that focused upon presenting the ABC’s of the destructive aftermath of the Iraqi invasion on life in Kuwait, both on the Kuwaiti citizens and on the other residents of the city, innocent victims of the invasion.

The Centre produced a film under the title, “Days of Terror,” with Kuwait and Syrian actors performing its leading role. The artistic and technical thrust was achieved as needed for the embodiment of the Kuwaiti people’s tragedy under the yoke of the oppressive Iraqi occupation.

OH, KUWAIT! HERE WE ARE! AT THY BECK AND CALL!

In keeping with this simple, yet effective, informative approach, Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, Director of the Centre, initiated a project entitled, “Oh, Kuwait! Here We Are! At Thy Beck and Call!” as a heading for Kuwait Information Week (20-26 February). The week was highlighted by interesting activities including the presentation of a political drama, the holding of the “Tabbakh al-Kheir” (“The Charity Dish”) festival – the proceeds of which were allocated for a Syrian charity association, and carrying out a football tournament among Syrian clubs. A poetical forum was also held and attended by Dr. Suad al-Sabah and Abdul-Rahman al-Najjar from Kuwait, Muhammed Khalid al-Qattama and Muhammed al-Ya’agosby from Syria. A drawing competition for children, which revolved around the Iraqi aggression bore wonderful fruits, with thousands of children from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Kuwait participating in the event. A religious service was organised immediately after the liberation of Kuwait at al-Uthman mosque to thank God for the liberation. This mosque occupied a prominent place in the informative activities on behalf of Kuwait’s rights and freedom. The performance reached its climax with the lyrical theatre show, “Kuwait! Our Beloved Kuwait!” which deeply touched the emotions of the audience in Aleppo and Beirut.

During the time span of a few months, the Damascus-based Kuwaiti Information Centre turned out to be a Kuwait voice confronting misinformation and supporting right, auguring well for the return to the homeland. It helped crystallise the Kuwaiti vision in straightforward, concrete terms, showing how strong was the will-power of the Kuwaitis and how they were determined to sacrifice whatever was necessary for the fulfillment of their country.
Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah
Between the awareness of the developer and the ignorance of the destroyer

The early centuries of Islam were times of exploration and discovery, of scholarship and development. Islam united a dynamic civilisation. The vitality it generated propelled its geographers and travellers towards the ends of the world in a continuous quest for knowledge as is evidenced by the massive accounts they recorded.

In the ninth century the traveller Sulaiman al-Sirafi reported his voyage from the Arabian Gulf to Canton in China. In the tenth century Ibn Fadhlan discussed his journey to the land of the “Saqalibas”, al-Masoudi set out from the Arabian East, and, from Jerusalem, al-Maqqisi started his journeys. Similarly, al-Edreesi went out from Sabta, Ibn Jubaib from Balencia, and al-Gharnati from Grenada. The thirteenth century witnessed the voyages of al-Baghdadi and Yagout al-Hamawi. From Tanga in Morocco, in the fourteenth century, Ibn Battouta began his historic voyage, that consumed 28 years of his time and that covered 120 thousand kilometers.

These men were motivated to seek knowledge, regardless of the dangers inherent in travelling during their time. It is now safe to come and go between the two ends of the Islamic world, a universe complete with all its intrinsic facets, related in the terms in which that universe was perceived by those who lived in it. It is the move-
The Opening of the Museum and Its Contents
Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah was opened on the 23rd of February, 1983. It contained a rare collection which was diversified as to area and period, ranking with the collections of important museums such as the Metropolitan, the Victoria and Albert, the Hermitage, and others.

Dar al-ATHar al-Islamiyyah displayed 1200 objects, selected carefully by experts from the Metropolitan Museum, New York, in chronological order to demonstrate the continuity of different Islamic regions and historical periods. They are as follows:

* The Upper Floor
  * The First Hall contained possessions from the dawn of Islam to the Ummayyad and Abbasid periods. The exhibited objects range between the 8th and 9th centuries.
  * The Second Hall (the elevated one) included the Tulunid, Ikshidi and Fatimid periods during the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries.
  * Third Hall included the Samanid, Ghaznavid, and Seljuq periods during the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th centuries.

* The Fourth Hall represented Il-Khanid pieces of art from the 14th and 15th centuries.

* The Middle Floor
  * The First Hall displayed objects from the Ayyubid era during the 13th century, in addition to a rare, magnificent wooden door, the height of which was 443 cm., made in Fez, Morocco. This door dated from the fourteenth century and was decorated with inscriptions in both Kufic and Naskhi script, as well as floral and geometrical patterns. Sadly, this door did not survive the occupation. Its enormous size, heavy weight, and central location within the museum interior made it impossible for the invading troops to plunder. A few hours before their shameful flight from Kuwait, the Iraqi military spitefully set fire to the interior of the museum, hence, the door was lost forever.
  * The Second Hall included examples from the Nasrid and the Marinid periods with examples from the 15th and 16th centuries.

* The Ground Floor
  * The Large Hall contained possessions from the Timurid era during the 14th century, the Safavid era during the 16th and 17th centuries, a collection of carpets from the Ottoman, Safavid, and Turkmeni areas, and the Turkish pottery collection during the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries.
  * The Last Hall included the collection of precious stones and works of art from Mughul India in the 17th and 18th centuries.

* The Library
  * The library contained approximately eight thousand volumes, including many rare books,
copies of early European publications in Arabic and in classical and modern European languages; the earliest of these is Belon’s book, which was printed in 1555. “The Muslims” of Ibn al-Ameed, printed in 1625, and Niebuhr’s “The Description of the Arabian Peninsula,” printed in 1774, which contained a map of al-Qurain (al-Grande), the old name for Kuwait. There were also books written by such authors as Savary, Pocoké, Belzoni, Burckhardt, Lane, and D’Avenues. The collection included “The Description of Egypt.” Furthermore, there were manuscripts, books of voyages, folklore, arts, costumes, dictionaries, and more recent modern books in several languages.

On the 22 February, 1984, the Museum added 200 new pieces of art to the exhibited objects. Most of these pieces date back to the Umayyad and Il-Khanid periods.

The Activities of the Museum
Since its opening, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah started a wide cultural movement to exhibit its collection by means of publications, text panels, explanatory labels for each object and guide books to highlight the diversity and unity of Islamic art. It was the aim of the owners of the collection to enhance Islamic art in its originality and uniqueness by making it available to the public. This aim was achieved through exhibiting the aesthetic values as manifested in the objects displayed of everyday use as well as of objects of intellectual implications. The Museum, therefore, has set up an intensive cultural programme containing the following:

* Organising practical and theoretical courses in the technique of Islamic crafts.

* Participating in foreign exhibitions in each of the following:
  - Bahrain: The Bahrain Museum
  - France: Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris
  - Russia: The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
  - Sweden: The National Museum, Stockholm
  - Switzerland: RATH Museum, Geneva

A few days before the Iraqi invasion, a collection of selected pieces was conveyed from Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah to participate in an exhibition at the Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Accordingly, it was its destiny to be saved from the plunder and to perform an important cultural and political role by touring many museums in Russia, the U.S.A., Canada, France, Holland, and Italy.

* Hosting guest exhibitions from other museums at the Dar:
  - ‘Pictures from Old Jerusalem,’ 1989

What remains of DAI

The last exhibition in DAI: “Treasures from the Hermitage, May, 1990.”
- 'Islamic Coins in Sweden,' 1989
- 'Masterpieces of Islamic Art in the Hermitage Museum,' 1990.
- 'Daghestani Gold and Silver Works,' 1990.
- Special Exhibitions from Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah Collection, Kuwait:
  - 'Variety in Unity,' 1987.

Excavations:
In 1985, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah launched its first excavation expedition. By doing so it has become the first Arabian Mission for the Search of Antiquities in al-Bahnasa district, Upper Egypt, was chosen by Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah because it was considered an important centre for the production of pottery and ceramics during the Fatimid and Mamluk periods in Egypt, according to historical sources.
Experts from Kuwait, Egypt, Hungary, and the U.K. participated in the research.

Seminars and Lectures:
The Dar organised an integrated cultural season by providing many lectures on different subjects given by many scholars, from the universities of Kuwait,
King Saud, Cairo, Ein Shams, Khartoum, Harvard, the Sorbonne, Michigan, Munich, Frankfurt, Sussex, and Lund of Sweden, as well as from museums such as the Metropolitan, The British Museum, St. Louis, The Walters Gallery, Victoria and Albert, The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, Sana’a Museum, Ashmolean, Guttenberg, Hamburg, and the Alfred and Smart.

The following scientific and cultural seminars were also organised:
- 'The Restoration of Sana’a copies of the Holy Qur’an'
- 'Old Jerusalem'
- 'Excavations at al-Bahnasa'
- 'Most Recent Soviet Studies on Arab Islamic Civilisation'

The Publications
Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah provided, among its achievements, the following books and publications:

DAI publications

TREASURES FROM KUWAIT

The movement in Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah has stopped, and the rest is history, a procession of creativity that was broken by an unfaithful and ill disciplined hand. An Andalusian traveller, Tafour, discussed an era in which he metaphorically refers to the interference of a white string with a black one, i.e., about the sad dawn of changes. He walked the strained rope of history between the East and the West, in the hindrances to movement, the obstacles between the pioneers of thought and the privileged persons, between the avant garde and the general public, the impediments of ideological and racial disparities. He foresaw the political differences as well as tyrannical characteristics that are exemplified in the Iraqi regime.

Ernst Kuhnel, a western scholar to have insight into this particular problem in Islamic civilization, says in his book, "Islamic Art":

"The unity of religious tenet in the Islamic world has stronger effect than that in the Christian world because Islam eradicated the disparities resulting from the differences of races and traditions and directed the affairs of thought, literature, and conventions in different countries. The order has been to spread the Qur’anic instructions in its original Arabic language alone, which gave it and Qur’anic instructions absolute sovereignty in all the Islamic world. This was one of the first factors which led to the creation and flourishing of many of the arts."

The Iraqis, for all the pain and destruction they inflicted, were not innovative. It is well known that tyrants excel at the eradication of creativity. In making a separation between the faith of creative being and life, their only satisfaction lies in reducing other peoples to their level. Kuwait has passed through a sad and tragic period. It was not only a military invasion but also an anti-cultural onslaught against the artists whose accomplishments have been exhibited in the Dar.

The story of what happened to the Dar after the invasion is another disheartening and difficult line in the history of mankind’s ability to destroy. Nevertheless, the creative spirit in Kuwait has intensified, proving that the willpower of the developer is even more stimulated to build after devastation. As much as the destroying force is cursed and frustrated in its failure, the benevolent are blessed even more with the inspiration and the ability to overcome the damage and to nurture each seedling to fruition.
"Read" is the first word that the archangel Gabriel, dictated to the Prophet Muhammad [Peace be upon him]. Had it not been of such great significance, it would not have been the first word of the Holy Qur'an, the principal book in Arab libraries. From its early beginnings in the mosques and in the palaces of caliphs and princes, the book started to acquire an important status. As time went by, the idea of the public library crystallised, and its importance became impressed on the minds of Muslim rulers who worked towards its promotion; therefore, public libraries emerged in Baghdad, Cairo, Andalusia, and in other capitals of the Islamic world.

If history gave credit to al-Ma'mun, the Abbasid caliph in ninth century Baghdad, for his contribution to the enrichment of science, books, and libraries, Nasser al-Sabah will be equally remembered for his love of Arab and Islamic civilisation and for his determination to establish a museum in Kuwait, where the splendours of Islamic history as embodied in its arts are displayed. He was also convinced that a museum without a library was like a body without a lung; it was as a result of his firm belief in the importance of scholarship research that Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah started the library. The first reference book, "Arab and Islamic Arts," was acquired in 1975. During this time the artefacts that were to form the nucleus of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah were collected.

During the inauguration of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah in 1983, the annex library, containing, at that time, over five thousand volumes, was opened.

Since the opening of Dar al-

Athar al-Islamiyyah, Sheikha Husnab Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, the wife of Sheikh Nasser, was at the helm, running the museum with competence and sophistication. She has attracted the attention to the world to the Dar and its cultural activities and earned its admiration and appreciation.

Consecutive exhibitions for Islamic artefacts were organised in Kuwait and abroad; seminars and lectures were also held, making the library the focus of attention. Scholarly works, both contemporary and historical, were continuously finding their way into the library of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.

The Dar was provided, moreover, with the means to enable
scholars and researchers to pursue their studies. It was an abundant source of knowledge.

The Dar acquired a valuable collection of serious and scholarly books. They represented the museum’s antiquities, with elaborate analyses of historical, stylistic, sociological, and economical factors that influenced the artists and artisans of each particular period of Islamic civilization.

Among these books are:

1. ‘Les observations de plusiers singularites et choses memorables,’ by Pierre BELON DU MANS, 1555.
2. ‘Historia Saracenica,’ by IBN AL-AMID (Gergis al-Makine - author), 1625.
3. ‘The Koran,’ translated by George SALE, 1734.
4. ‘Description de l’Arabie,’ by Carsten NIEBUHR, 1774.

The Dar also produced literature that explained the intrinsic, multifaceted nature of Islamic art and culture. Some of these publications are cited below:

1. “Islamic Art in the Kuwait National Museum, al-Sabah Collection,” 1983. This book was issued in two languages, i.e., Arabic and English.
3. “Science in Islam.” 1985. In English and Arabic, this book was issued in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name.

7. “Kuwait-History and Civilization.” This was an exhibition of some of the objects from the Dar. It was organized by the Ministry of Information in Bahrain in 1987. Published in Arabic and English.
8. “Filters of Ceramic Jars in Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.” This was a study of a collection of filters from ceramic water vessels in the Dar, 1986.
12. “Masterpieces of Islamic Art in the Hermitage Museum, 1990.” Published in Arabic, English and Russian. The exhibition was held at Dar al-
Athar al-Islamiyyah in Kuwait for one hundred and twenty objects from the Hermitage collection in May 1990. All these publications were penned by scholars from Kuwait and abroad and contributed to a better understanding and appreciation of Islam as a culture.

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah previously issued a periodical containing important articles written by specialists as well as reviewed books. This Newsletter kept the public informed about cultural activities. It was published in Arabic and English.

It also reminded the public of new books and periodicals added to the library as well as subjects concerning Islamic arts and civilisation, in both English and in Arabic.

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah was thus a cultural centre and a lively museum which had the task to inform, educate, and attract the general public and scholar alike to enjoy and benefit from its collection.

**The Fire of Hatred Burns the Books....**

Imam al-Shaafi said: "All kinds of enmities may be forgotten but not that which has been started from envy."

This typified the Iraqi regime headed by the dictator Saddam, one of the most evil powers of the contemporary period, totally saturated with envy. It was if a volcano of hatred and malice erupted on 2 August, 1990, pouring out its violent lava onto Kuwait, a peaceful country. A reign of terror ensued in which savage crimes were committed against Kuwait and its people. Among that long list was that of the looting and burning of the museums, libraries, and scientific institutions. Ironically, it was reminiscent of the Tatar invasion of Baghdad during the reign of al-Must 'asim, the Abbasid ruler, cruelly mocking Iraq's claim to a leading role in Islamic civilisation. As the Tatars 'blackened' the river in Baghdad with the ink of the books they dumped into it, the Iraqis blackened the skies over Kuwait City with the smoke from burning buildings and oilfields. Most of the priceless collection of art objects had been roughly carted off to a 'Babylonian Captivity' and remained so until United Nations Resolution No. 687 was enforced, stipulating the return of everything taken from Kuwait.

Words are insufficient to describe the severity and reprehensible nature of the Iraqi war crimes. Even if the waters of the Gulf were to be converted into ink, it would not be sufficient to record the story of aggression against knowledge, civilisation, and humanity that occurred.

With God's kindness Kuwait has been returned to its people; reconstruction began immediately, with determination stronger than ever. Finally, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah and its library were again restored to resume the course of its contribution. Hopefully, it will continue its participation, in defiant resistance to envy.
THE MUHTARAF OF DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH

by Abdelkareem al-Ghadhban

public participation in artistic creativity
In view of the rapid cultural and developmental processes in Kuwait, it is easy for an individual to forget the genuine traditions and deep-rooted heritage that has always characterised the people of this area and the crafts that they have practised. However, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah plays a principal and major role in preserving these authentic traditions and in the production of art objects within an integrated and constantly developing educational system.

Museums play a principal role in civilised communities, complementary to the school and the home as a source of culture and knowledge. This concept has been expanded, and museums now participate university programmes as well as forming their own educational institutions, frequently open to all people of different social and educational backgrounds, regardless of their professions or ages.

The concept of museum has changed from a mere storehouse for antiquities and works of art that are customarily displayed according to specific requisites to an institution constantly contributing to culture and education.

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah has followed this path since its opening in 1983 and has rightfully distinguished itself in the international art field due to the outstanding services it offers the community in the fields of culture and education, regardless of nationality, socioeconomic status, or age. It has established an ambitious educational programme for children that is considered unique in the area and distinct among international museums. Two special guidebooks have been designed and printed, one for the children and another for the parents. The child’s guidebook has been furnished with special creative pages for the child, after his visit to the museum, completes and then sends back to the museum. These pages are, in turn, organised into exhibitions by the museum to encourage the children to continue drawing and other creative activity. In addition to the constant flow of school visits, teachers are keen to accompany their students to the museum to teach the different syllabi, such as history, geography, and science, by observing the development of a certain art form or by simply enjoying the aesthetic experience to which the visitor is introduced. Taking a guided tour through the different galleries at DAI, a young visitor’s curiosity would be aroused by the multitude of visual implications of historical, geographical, and technical dimensions.

BEIT AL BADR COURSES AT DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH

The cultural activities of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah included numerous courses held in Beit al Badr, which is considered one of the oldest remaining houses in Kuwait, believed to be built around the first half of the 19th century for Mr. Yusuf Al Badr, a well-known merchant who dealt in horses and pearls. The house includes five courtyards and has two main entrances, the first overlooking the Arabian Gulf and leading to the Diwaniyyah courtyard, and the side entrance leading to the Harem courtyard. In addition, there is a back door which opens onto the Kuwait National Museum and the door to another smaller courtyard facing the Gulf.

Because most old houses in Kuwait belong to the Ministry of Information, the Ministry has carried out intrinsic restoration work on most of them, the last of which was Beit Al Badr.
* al-Muhtaraf
The Muhtaraf is the arts and crafts school. It had been, before the Iraqi invasion, supplied with the most modern equipment, materials, and systems used in learning crafts. A modern workshop, considered one of the best educational workshops for the art of making ceramics in Kuwait, was included in the many specialty workshops, which were the following:

* Pottery and Ceramics
This workshop was equipped with all the elements necessary for learning the art of making ceramics. Twelve electrical wheels were placed in a special hall. Three studios were equipped with the tools required for throwing, moulding, carving, and firing. The workshop also had a special room for storing and preparing the clay and a room for the kilns. The ceramic workshop was considered one of the most popular and attracted many artists to participate in the course.

* Jewellery
This workshop was among the unique and specialised facilities of the Muhtaraf. It allowed students to become acquainted with the various jewellery techniques, including moulding, casting, filigree work, granulation, and many other methods inspired by Islamic tradition.

* Woodwork
The Muhtaraf had a special workshop to teach carpentry. The student was offered the necessary tools and the know how to be able to construct simple furniture and to carve wooden sculptures.

* Weaving
This workshop was established to teach the art of textile-weaving and was furnished with the necessary equipment and looms required for this craft.

* Art of Calligraphy
Apart from the workshops specialised in practical Islamic arts, the Muhtaraf introduced workshops for plastic Islamic arts such as the art of Arabic calligraphy and the art of illuminating books. Photography and drawing were also offered, with a special workshop established with the machines necessary for teaching these arts.

* The Technical Library
The Muhtaraf was also furnished with a library that contained over three hundred art books specialised in teaching arts and crafts. It also included a collection of approximately three thousand and five hundred coloured slides used for teaching as well as other audio-visual aids and illustrations.

* The Art Gallery
A hall for exhibiting the production of the students had been added to the Muhtaraf and was equipped with special methods for exhibition such as ceramics, jewellery, textiles, calligraphic paintings, drawing and carved woodwork.

Since 1986, the Muhtaraf of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah continued to offer its courses and services to students. These courses were ten in number and have created a team of friends and enthusiasts for Islamic art in general as well as for the activities of the Dar in particular. However, the Iraqi invasion devastated all cultural activities and vandalised government institutions. The Iraqis first stole as much as time permitted them, then damaged as much of what was left as possible. The Muhtaraf was not spared. All of its equipment was stolen, and Beit Al Badr was ransacked and damaged, although it fortunately was not burned and gutted as so many other buildings, including that housing the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection. A historic Kuwaiti sailing vessel or boom, the Muhallib, which rested between the Dar and the Muhtaraf, also was burned by the Iraqis in one last spiteful act before they were forced out of Kuwait.
The American artist and Islamic art historian, Manuel Keene, the first curator of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, has long admired Islamic art and devoted his time to the study of its manifestations and aspects. He was first drawn to Islamic art by his interest in its geometric repertory, and his own work has long demonstrated the impact of his attention to Islamic art.

Working peacefully in Kuwait at the time of the Iraqi invasion on August 2, 1990, Keene repeatedly was brought face to face with the possibility of the loss of his lifelong work in the areas of artistic creation and of historical research. It was partly because of his fear of the loss of the large amount of such materials he had in Kuwait that he refused to flee and lived through the seven-month period of the invasion in the country.

The following is an interview wherein he recalls his experiences and activities during the period of the Occupation (including those with the Iraqi forces in Kuwait) and those with the Iraqi authorities in the post-liberation period in Baghdad when he accompanied the United Nations delegation for the restitution of the collections of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah and the Kuwait National Museum.
A "Cypriot" Painter
* How did you learn of the Iraqis breaking into Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah?
* In the month of September we heard that the Iraqis had brought lorries to the Museum. At the beginning of the Occupation, some of the staff of the Museum were mistreated, and others who tried to enter the Museum were thwarted. In the period prior to the Invasion, I was not working at the Museum per se, and of all this I saw nothing. Later I heard that they had taken the collection by trucks to Baghdad.
* Did you meet any Iraqi soldiers or officers in that period of time?
* Only once, after the order to round up Europeans, Americans and the like. The Iraqi troops used to close off whole quarters of the city and search house-to-house. As part of this practice, they came to the apartment of my friends, Usama Kanaugi and Salam Kanaugi, who were courageously sheltering me. Some Kuwaiti friends had prepared a Kuwaiti driving licence for me which stated my nationality as Cypriot and that I worked as an artist for advertising companies. I told them that all of my other documents had been lost and that the licence was the one and only thing I had remaining. I was detained for perhaps an hour of interrogation, but they apparently did not doubt that the licence was genuine, nor in the end that my whole story held together. Several factors seemed to weigh considerably in their decision to leave me, despite some uncertainty on their part as to whether or not Cypriots were subject to detention among the Occupiers, the fact that the licence gave my Muslim name; that I was actually currently working on "square Kufic" designs for the Mosque of

NEW YORK'S MOSQUE
"Mosque of the New York Islamic Cultural Center"

Under the Occupation: The painting: "Kuwait, Blessed by God", and scripts from the New York Mosque.

* The Iraqi army occupied his house from August 2nd; they camped in, pillaged and vandalized it, causing a great damage to the house itself, as well as irreparable losses with regard to the contents. It was of course impossible for me to go there to carry on work at my studio, which was in the compound. It, like the rest of the place, was an unbelievable wreck when I visited it on the first day after the Liberation.

Despite the Invasion, Studies and Painting Continued
* What are your memories of the months of occupation. How were you absorbed?

* The Name of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, Rendered in Square Kufic Script, Above the Entrance Gate to the Center"
I was developing research work and studies in Islamic art, particularly on my catalogue of the jewellery and on the history of Islamic geometric design, including in this Kufic, the continuing effort of mine since 1968. Additionally, I designed paintings, sculpture and jewellery and completed designs for the decoration of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York. These latter we were able to send abroad via friends who came and went, in spite of the existing circumstances.

Did you produce anything special in the way of creative efforts during this period?

I also completed some small paintings, one of which I presented to Sheikh Nasir and Sheikhah Hussah. It is square shape, and is composed of a repetition of "May God Protect the State of Kuwait" in square Kufic. I executed it on paper in close round dots of artist's colours. Later it was published by the kind efforts of Shaykhah Hussah in the form of a greeting card. I like to think it gave them a little lift during that dark time.

Did any soldiers notice it?

No! Actually, its content at that time would have been considered treason, and I had some concern that the wrong persons might be able to read it, but this was actually quite unlikely as it takes a person with some practice to be able to decipher such writing, even when they know what it's supposed to say! This was also sent out of Kuwait and reached Sheikhah Hussah through a friend who made the journey.

Did you have any other encounters with the Iraqis?

No, but we were constantly anxious that they would return, as we heard from time to time that they were again searching our quarter, as they had done in others; we were fearful that the next time, something could go wrong. We frequently heard of their methods and actions, and with the pronouncements of Baghdad that those who were even "foreigners" to the occupation were subject to the death penalty, this constituted my greatest fear. But despite my registering of these fears and expressed opinions that I should return to my own apartment, my hosts would hear nothing of it. I must say that I don't know whether in their position I would have been so brave and un-awarding as they had their children in the house. Of course, I used to avoid contact with the Iraqis, going out only on my hosts' premises, and only when I had to, with my identity hidden from presumably friendly visitors, with the exception of known friends.

The State of Panic and Chaos

How did you acquire supplies and provisions?

Well, you know, this was quite interesting. There were provisions in small markets, and the cooperative society, especially at first. There were impromptu markets which sprang up here and there. So people, including my hosts, were shopping, although the circumstances of this shopping were far from normal. And there were a great many good Saatariyas, prominent among whom were the Kuwaitis themselves: for example, some owners of large foodstuffs companies distributed the stocks of their warehouses free. They also distributed Iraqi currency, which was necessary for living under the Occupation. I am sure that we fared better than many during the Occupation, some of which was due to the extensive network of friends who helped us. But as I said, we benefited from the acts even of those we did not know; there was an atmosphere of cooperation and brotherhood prevailing at that time, and we knew, for example, of cases in which people took grave risks to deliver supplies to "foreigners".

What was the most difficult period of the occupation for you?

In a general sense, the early stage, when we were under the illusion that this was a highly organized occupation force with an organized plan not only for the invasion but for rounding up those who did not cooperate or who were otherwise on a "list". In retrospect, it is clear that it was unbelievably chaotic. For instance, we assumed at first that they would cut the telephone lines; when they didn't, there was the fear that the lines would be tapped, a fear which never left me. But people were using telephones to talk freely about everything, and I did not know of cases where people suffered consequences as a result. The "withdrawal" from Kuwait, of course, furnished an extreme case of disorganization, and I may add, one of the most shocking cases of cynicism (on the part of the Iraqi high command) for the lives of one's own troops of which I am aware.

And what was the best period you experienced?

When I was informed that liberation had begun.

Wasn't there any fear of destruction attendant upon the war to liberate Kuwait?

Not much on our part; we figured that the real war would be outside the perimeter of Kuwait City, as it turned out to be; of course, it was extremely fortunate that the Iraqis did not try to defend the city from the Allies in street fighting, which could have gotten nasty for the residents.

Were you afraid of the tension and terror of the Iraqi soldiers during withdrawal?

Yes, and there was some last-minute theft and pillage, but their officer corps having sneaked out days before, the soldiers' overriding concern was to get out by any means and with all possible speed. Actually, one came to know during the occupation that, for example, they often were not provisioned at all, and even when they were at times reduced to begging from residents for food. Naturally, their morale was low, which made them poor servants of the Iraqi regime and worked to the benefit of the residents of Kuwait.

In Iraq

What do you recall of your experiences in Baghdad?

I went to Baghdad in late summer after the Liberation, in the company of Katie Marsh, coordinator of the Kuwait mission.

"Detail of One of the Gold on Glass panels Framing the Mihrab of the Mosque of the New York Islamic Cultural Center, with Inscriptions panels Designed by Keene"
Illusions quickly dispelled: Iraqi soldiers visibly vulnerable and frightened.

The New York Mosque designs
- Please tell us more about the designs you made during the Occupation for the Islamic Cultural Center of New York.
- The Islamic Cultural Center of New York is a multi-purpose Islamic centre, which in addition to the place of worship, the Mosque, is for instructive and cultural activities in general for Muslims of the New York area and those who go there. Kuwait has been the main driving force of the project, through its Mission there. It occupies a whole block on the Upper East Side, and one especially passes it on a taxi ride from Kennedy Airport to midtown Manhattan. In its location, it makes quite an impact.
- I was engaged in late 1987 to design square Kufic texts for a handful of the most important parts of the Mosque, as well as over the entrance gate to the grounds. In fact, this is the only form of decoration as discipline, which I find enjoyable. It is a very particular endeavor, since on the one hand all forms must be simple groupings of the squares of a grid, with "background" always being of the same width as the characters, and on the other, the letter forms must be respected and distinguishable one from the other, readable to the initiated. In the case we are discussing this is one of the most ambitious projects, with some of the most extensive texts, in all the history of square Kufic design, where the Kufic stretches back just shy of nine hundred years.
- How was the execution carried out?
- It was all hand work by American professionals. It is interesting to note that the granite was not carved by chisels or saws, but rather by sandblasting, using a rubber mask for areas not to be excavated. This required some experiments as there was some tendency to undercut and widen the line; since in square Kufic, as I have said, all lines, characters and spaces, must be of the same width, this was an unsuited design. In the end, though, the executed it properly, and did a good job.
- I had an interview with the French architect, Eecohard, who designed the Kuwait National Museum in 1983. He said that he had used a very influencing architectural form, whether it is Islamic, Coptic or the like. What do you say to that?
- The important thing for an architect is to love the earth and nature and space and buildings and his chosen material, and as good ones have always done. If he is to incorporate the lessons built into it and understand why this and that are thus and so. Of course, in my case, this is cut off from tradition and few are driven to acquire the wisdom and tools available in these fields of art and painting and jewellery, nearly everyone try-
ing to be totally original, with the result that no one gets anywhere much. The availability of new possibilities, especially in the way of materials, need not result in the obscenely sterile built environment we are mostly subjected to. Personally, I like decoration (I also like pure, undecorated forms!) and have spent the better part of my adult life in acquiring and internalizing the world’s most developed tradition of same, namely the Islamic. But as Islamic buildings (and objects) would be the first to demonstrate, architecture must be totally integrated, with decoration arising as a natural and unifying enhancement of the form and materials involved. This of course goes for the interior and exterior alike, with the whole contributing to the total effect.

**Geometric Art Forms**

* I have observed that much of your artistic work is essentially based on geometric forms; what is the reason behind that?

* The reason is that I find geometric forms and images meaningful, and they are rich in possibilities, two-dimensional as well as sculptural and architectural. I was not trained as an architect, but a lot of my work has run to architectural forms and the design of some rather interesting buildings, of pure geometric forms. Geometric forms are naturally suited to, indeed inextricably bound up with, architecture, which is the mother of the plastic arts. Thus the employment, for example, of geometric images to decorate architecture affords abundant natural possibility of a kind of overall artistic unity. This is an outlook which has been instinctive to me and which is in line with the approach of Islamic artists.

* Can the geometric trend in Islamic Art be related to a certain Islamic school of philosophy, whether rationalistic or mystic?

* There can be no doubt that geometric imagery, particularly of the types encountered in Islamic art, is consonant with the context of Islam, a Unity-oriented religion which stringently excludes any tendency to anthropomorphism. Put another way, contemplation of the perfection of geometric forms is a natural path to contemplation of Divine Perfection and Unity.

Beyond this it is difficult to go, particularly if one carefully surveys geometric usage over the centuries, indeed millennia, during which such images have been used in art. My work of documentation, analysis and interpretation of geometric patterns in Islamic art over the past two and one-half decades has confirmed and reconfirmed that the centers of greatest usage and creation of such have moved from region to region over time, and this does not seem to tie up with any special periods of piety or mysticism or the like. It is after all art, and an art which was always all most employed, vital and original in its usage on architecture; and the most clear pattern of correlation between creativity in geometric patterns is with areas where there was strong building activity. Of course, patrons and architects could be oriented toward this form or art or otherwise, so taste and patronage would have played a crucial role, as it does in all art.

What is absolutely clear to me is that there must have been a fairly wide and highly sophisticated public for this type of art in Islamic civilization, which is necessary to explain on the one hand its widespread usage and on the other the fact that for over a thousand years Islamic geometric artists continually developed new patterns, building upon previous accomplishments. These developments often constitute fundamental and highly original departures, but which to superficial observers could be indistinguishable from others they had seen. Therefore sophisticated patronage must have played a part in the vitality and originality which this amazing school of art displays.

* Does your preference for geometric decoration mean valuing the Mamluk school above the Ottoman School?

* Well, they both have their strengths, but yes, I personally prefer Mamluk architecture over Ottomans. I guess this question comes up because my initial exhaustive survey of geometric patterns in architecture was in Cairo, where both styles are present, with the buildings of the Mamluk style period being infinitely richer in geometric art. Actually, even if Mamluk architecture were devoid of geometric decoration, I would still prefer it to the Ottoman type.

* Is your preference for geometric art due to its being close to the spirit of modern art?

* Not exactly; I guess that would be to put the cart before the horse. What matters is that art should express one’s aspirations in a beautiful and digestible form, lifting the artist and those others to whom it speaks.

* Returning to the plunder of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyah collection by Iraq, were you particularly sad over the loss of a given piece of the collection?

* There are so many of them that is difficult to make a choice, but I guess that the biggest loss was of the 14th century Moroccan doors which the soldiers burnt when they set fire to the interior of the Museum during the last few days of the Occupations. In general, the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyah collection is unique and in many ways matchless. In the end, we that they for having the overwhelming majority of it safely back again.
Characteristic of the film

We started filming 107 art objects at Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah in the room adjacent to the vault that stored a part of these rare artefacts. Special problems presented us particular challenges. Sensitivity was required in the handling of the art objects which are usually fragile and are affected by mere touch or powerful light.

Cotton gloves were used in order to be able to touch and move the objects without harming them. Specialists from Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah assisted us. Their knowledge of the proper methods to move, prepare, and locate each object was essential for the success of the project.

Another problem encountered was the minute size of many of the objects of art, sometimes not exceeding three centimetres. These objects are covered with extremely fine inscriptions and drawings, requiring the use of special lenses like the Macro that are capable of picking up the smallest details.

Much of the necessary equipment was not available in Kuwait, and therefore it was necessary to bring in special lighting devices and other equipment, including tripods and backgrounds, from America. We established a miniature studio and used to shoot for at least ten hours daily. It was not unusual to work continuously for twelve hours, interrupted only by coffee breaks. This schedule extended for three full weeks.

Obstructions and Solutions

Another important point is that most of the objects are three dimensional, necessitating filming from several angles. If they were to appear as natural as possible to the viewer and be full of life and vitality, it was necessary to add movement. We were anxious for the safety of the art objects, fearing that the procedures we would have to use to produce this effect would expose them to damage. Again,
thanks to the experience and cooperation to the staff of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, we were able to overcome this hurdle.

Quite frequently we needed powerful, multi-angled lighting to shoot the minute objects in detail. Our problem was that this powerful lighting generates intense heat, causing a threat to the more delicate pieces such as the old Qur'ans and manuscripts as well as the textiles and paintings.

The gold, brass, and silver objects had their own problems. They reflect light in such a manner that the picture is affected, and, consequently, it is difficult to clearly delineate them three dimensionally. Moreover, it is also difficult to portray the fine inscriptions on such types as astrolabes, metal vessels, and some jewellery. Accuracy and care to achieve the best results required patience from us. It could take between two to four hours to shoot one peice. Washing pegs, tracing paper, reflectors, and umbrellas were used to control illumination and to properly present the objects in their natural shape, size, and color.

A New Experience

My experience with the film, "Islam: Civilization and its Arts", was useful on several levels, and I learned a great deal. Some of its was relevant to the art of cinematic photography; certain aspects are difficult to attain through academic education. Another is relevant to applied scientific practice in illumination and other fields. We gained more experience in the problems with which we were suddenly confronted, and which needed specific new solutions from us. We were driven by need, by desire of innovation, and by the pieces of the Dar being unique and unparalleled in beauty.

Integrity requires that I explain the role of the Director of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Sheikha Husah Sal-Sabah, not only in preserving these rare pieces by painstakingly following up the history, beauty and value of each piece but also in her care to encourage the production of this film that is new in its field. She continues to foster the stable continuation of our Islamic arts, helping to ensure their survival for posterity. A word of gratitude should also be expressed to Mrs. Jo Franklin Trout, who made the experience of filming a pleasurable and unforgettable one.

Interest in heritage varies between theory and practice. The former relies upon documents, the material of history, whereas the latter involves that which was bequeathed to us by our ancestors, the material of culture. It has been noted by many that Islamic civilisation projects itself best in the essence of life and creation of beauty. Mosque lamps, arches, rugs, textiles, tombs, stones, vases, bowls and plates, book bindings, inkpots, pens, and weapons are the everyday objects that have all formed an harmonious arrangement on which the eye falls, and this is integrated into architecture, both in the public life in town planning or the private life in an Arab house.

It may also not be new to state that this fruitful material which has occupied human imagination from the eighth till the eighteenth century has been subject sometimes to loss and most of the time to neglect, on the part of ourselves, the inmates of this epoch.

If we have realised this short-
Under the sponsorship of the former Minister of Information, Dr Bader Jassem Al-Yacoub, and with the attendance of the United Kingdom’s Ambassador to Kuwait and the Director of the British Council in Kuwait, Mr. A. Broderick, a joint exhibition was inaugurated on the 17th of February 1991.

This exhibition was held by the British Council in Kuwait and Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, in the National Museum of Kuwait, on the occasion of the anniversary of the National and Liberation days of Kuwait.

The British exhibits, under the title “The Art of Islamic Bookbinding”, were copies of a facsimile exhibition of the collection of Islamic binding from the Victoria and Albert museum in London. Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah exhibits were displayed under the title “The Voice of The Dar in Exile.”

The exhibits of the Art of Islamic bookbinding traces, through 26 facsimiles of Islamic bookbindings the history and development of this art. The first bound manuscripts or books were Coptic prints of the Bible. These were written during
the first six centuries of the Christian era on papyrus, and were covered in leather.

Arab craftsmen learned the methods of binding from these manuscripts, and added a unique Islamic touch of beauty, so that an Islamic book was distinguished from its counterpart in the West by the precise decorative units on its cover.

The Arabic bindings are marked by greater degree of simplicity and by less sophisticated designs than the Persian bindings, and there are three kinds of decoration on Arabic bindings: geometric patterns extending along the cover; geometric patterns enclosed in a central circle on the cover, and concentric intricate decorations. Among the exhibits, there were pictures of a group of leather and metal seals and craftsman’s tools, besides pictures of specimens from the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Syria, North Africa, Persia, Turkey and India.

The exhibition was organised by the British Council in association with the World of Islam Festival Trust, London. The idea of this exhibition was inspired by Dr. Duncan Haldane, who published a book entitled “Islamic Bookbinding” in 1983.

**The Voice of The Dar in Exile**

The photographic exhibition illustrates the tour of 107 pieces of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection which had left the country a week before the invasion it started a long tour covering six venues by the time of this exhibition.

In addition to the newspapers and magazine clippings, articles, and letters of support and enthusiasm for Kuwait, the “Voice of The Dar in Exile” exhibition also included a display of the photographs of the inauguration of the museums that hosted “Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait” exhibition.

The third axis of this exhibition was a film showing some of the pieces, and the tour of “The Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait” exhibition.
Until recently, most of what we knew on the early history of Kuwait came from later written sources that wrote down older oral tradition. The problems with oral tradition are that it lacks firmness especially in chronology and that it can not be verified. Recent events have shown that it is important that some firm written documentary evidence may become available concerning the early history of Kuwait, if possible in contemporary written documents. Unfortunately, contemporary documents concerning the early history of Kuwait have not been preserved in archives of Kuwait or of her Arab neighbours. This is not to say that such documents did not exist once: European sources show that the Sheiks of the Gulf in the 1700’s have written letters and even used rather advanced methods of international payment. Unfortunately, no correspondence of Kuwait of that time has been preserved.

The Europeans and the Ottoman Turks tended to preserve cautiously all important documents as proof to serve at some possible future occasion. In the Netherlands, special officials responsible for the preserving of government papers were appointed as early as 1327. Legal documents had been preserved already for centuries, soon important correspondence would also be kept. Archival systems were developed as early as the 14th century to keep track of the data. The oldest documentation concerning Kuwait should be found in European documents.

The Dutch archivist, Dr. B.J. Slot gave this lecture during his visit to Kuwait in February 1992 under the title, ‘The History of Kuwait in European Sources.’

The Europeans had not many contacts with Kuwait in the early times. As a consequence, Kuwait was not well known, but the few early contacts that existed have indeed been recorded in contemporary documents.

The conclusions from these contemporary records are clear: Kuwait is one of the oldest independent states of the Gulf. The Dutch were the first Europeans to explore the coast of Kuwait, to visit it and to do some trade there, therefore it is not strange that a Dutch historian is speaking about the history of the origins of Kuwait, particularly about the early European documents about it. The most important documents concerning the subject are related to the activities of the Dutch East India Company in the area, as the archivist in charge of the Company’s archives, I had easy access to sift through the kilometers of shelving for the few sentences concerning Kuwait.

There are two kind of early documentary sources on Kuwait: written documents and maps. Map-making developed fully about the year 1500. At first the Portuguese were the leading producers of beautiful handmade maps that were really works of art. Since the 1570’s there are Portuguese maps that show one detail on the territory of Kuwait: an island called there Aguada, which is the present Faylaka. Mass circulation became possible when first in Italy, later especially in Holland, copper engraving was used from printing maps in large numbers. The earliest example of a printed map showing unambiguously details on Kuwait was printed in Holland in 1596.

The Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, extended its activities to the Gulf in 1623. Its first contact with Kuwait territory in 1645 was merely an incident, but was documented in the log-books of two Dutch ships. In that year, Dutch ships set out for Basra, but they found it impossible to enter the shallow Shatt al arab. Looking for another route, they turned SW and entered the Khor Abdullah, again finding no passage, and sailed a while along the coast of Bubiyan where they set out a sloop to explore the land. Finding no habitation in the mud they turned back. The expedition resulted in a secret manuscript map, now kept in Karlsruhe, Germany, that was never published, but contains the proof of the oldest exploration of the coast of Kuwait.

The next stage in the slow acquaintance of Europeans with Kuwait is what I should like to call the phase of the maps of Kazima.
Some old maps, the oldest dates back as far as 1652, show a place called Kazima outside the borders of the Ottoman province of Baghdad. This place becomes more markedly shown on later maps, later even as one of the largest towns on the Gulf.

There is here a connection between the European maps and the local historical tradition. According to this tradition, the Banu Khalid built a small fortress, halfway the seventeenth century, in the region of Kuwait. So the maps coincide with the local tradition. Probably, the building of a fortress at that time was connected with attempts of the Governor of Basra of that time to extend his power over the tribes in the desert. These attempts are mentioned in some European sources. This is in accordance with the evidence of the maps which show Kazima as a place outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

It should be mentioned that while most nautical charts show a straight coastline of the Arabian Gulf, without showing the Gulf of Kuwait, there are two that show rather clearly the Gulf of Kuwait. These are a Portuguese map now in South Africa of c. 1680 and a map pronted in Amsterdam for the Neptune Francois in 1690. There is no relation between these two maps, and it is as yet not clear how the mapmakers involved obtained their information.

An Ottoman document of the year 1701 contains the first clear contemporary reference to the Utub tribe. This tribe has played a significant part in the evolution of Kuwait into an independent entity and a prominent power in the Gulf in the eighteenth century. This document was first published in Bahrain, with some considerable errors in the interpretation. The document tells that the Utub and another tribe, the Khalifat, had been living in the area of Bahrain. They had been dislodged from their dwellings near the rich pearlbanks by the Huwala tribes. These events probably took place around the year 1670. Later, the Utub and the Khalifat settled near Bandar Daylam in Southern Persia, but still fearing Huwala attacks they moved towards Basra where they requested permission to stay in Basra as refugees. The Ottoman governor of Basra liked the idea: the Utub were a tribe of sailors and traders with many ships, but he submitted the matter to the Sultan for approval. No reaction came, but the matter is important because it shows that the Utub were no Ottoman subjects, otherwise they would have needed no permission to stay in the Ottoman Empire. From Basra, the Utub moved on to Kuwait, while the Khaleyfat have returned to Bandar Daylam. This may have happened shortly after 1705, when there was a considerable upheaval in the region of Basra and Basra became a very bad place to stay in, so the Utub left the regular Ottoman territory and settled in the independent tribal area controlled at that time by the Banu Khaled.

The Utub are mentioned again in a French book in 1740. From 1750 on, mentions occur of Kuwait in the papers of the establishments of the Dutch East India Company in the Gulf, always with the name of Grain. Also, for the first time, printing of detailed nautical charts of Asia became permitted (in order to preserve its trade secrets the Dutch East India Company had always kept its maps confidential and they were never printed). The rare nautical chart of the Gulf printed by van Keulen in 1753 shows Grian, Faylaka, Awba and Bubiyran. It also shows lines of figures, representing measurements of depths made by a ship of the Dutch East India Company visiting Kuwait, probably in 1750.

In the years that followed there was a friendly relationship between the Dutch, established on Kharg Island and Kuwait, ruled in 1756 by Sheikh Mubarak bin Sabah. In Dutch reports Kuwait is mentioned as a thriving place that was in the process of acquiring full independence from the tribal ruler of the desert (i.e. the Sheikh of the Banu Khaled). While Basra suffered from bad government by incompetent and greedy Ottoman governors, from wars between these governors and Arab tribes, and from wars between the Ottomans and Persia, trade of neutral Kuwait could expand rapidly. The Dutch report of 1756 and the observations of the Danish traveller Niebuhr of 1766 show a marked expansion. The Dutch experimented with trade in sulphur ore from the hills near Kuwait. The Dutch revisited Kuwait. The steamer Curaçao of the Dutch Royal Navy visited Kuwait to make some propaganda for Dutch trade. It surely was one of the first official visits made by a ship of a European navy to Kuwait. Sheikh Mubarak, brother of the Ruler, came on board and invited the Dutch to visit the Ruler. Later the Ruler came on board, and some demonstrations of artillery and machinery were made to the Kuwaitis. The Dutch were impressed with Kuwait, which they mentioned as the only really Arab trading town of the Gulf. They mean that its economy was Arab, not dominated by Indians, Europeans or Persians.

The conclusion from the contemporary documents must be that Kuwait is one of the oldest independent states of the Gulf. It was established without the interference of a European power or of the Ottomans. It was situated outside the borders of Ottoman Iraq as a consequence of the efforts of Arabs who wanted to trade freely and to have an independent existence.
Since the discovery of the world’s third largest oil reserves within its borders, Kuwait has achieved international political prominence far exceeding its physical size. Historically, the country played a significant role. Local sources go back to the beginning of the eighteenth century.

‘The Origins of Kuwait,’ by B.J. Slot, traces the history of Kuwait even earlier, using European sources. It includes anlayses and comparisons of maps from the sixteenth century onwards, of documents of the Dutch East India Company, and of British documents and early travel accounts.

The book is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the political position of Kuwait in history in respect to its neighbours, especially the Ottoman authorities in Basra.

Since his preliminary university studies, Dr. Slot has been engaged with the subjects of documentation and archiving. In his efforts searching for thousands of documents contained in the Dutch State Archives and the archives of the Dutch East India Company, his attention was drawn to the lack of focus on the geographical expansion of the West and by the cultural contact between the West and the Arabian East in the Arabian Gulf region. His studies are characterized by a practical and applied approach and are guided by documents and maps comparing the records in Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French reference books, and in that German, Turkish, and Ottoman sources. He completed his research with field visits, searching for documents in many of the Arabian gulf states.

Dr. Slot visited Kuwait before the invasion and recognised the vitality of the progress and the development the country has achieved based upon strong cultural foundations. Accordingly, it was a great shock to him when he visited it for a second time in February 1991, at the invitation of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information, and witnessed the degree of destruction the Iraqi regime had inflicted on Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. In his own words, this is a place which is dear to him and dear to all who have been engaged in culture.

We had the following interview with Dr. Slot, on the occasion of his visit:

The Origins of Kuwait

Could you please elaborate on the Archives of the Dutch State and its role?

The Archives of the Dutch State contain the papers and documents of the Dutch government since the twelfth century. They have kept written and recorded the activities of the Dutch State in the Gulf area since 1623. They contain reports about the situation and the internal events of the Dutch State at that time.

Your book, ‘The Origins of Kuwait,’ highlights important issues. What was your motivation for writing it?
INTERVIEW WITH

DR. SLOT ON THE ORIGINS
OF KUWAIT

What arouses my astonishment are those unestablished opinions of a number of "experts" in the West on the history of Kuwait who talk about the sub-ordination of Kuwait to Iraq. Throughout my studies and researches I ascertained the fallacy of this idea, and I found that the time had come to correct the misunderstanding and to amend the non-documented judgments.

Orientalism
What is your opinion of orientalism?
My specialisation is related to historical affairs and to the Dutch archives related to Western documents. As for the orientalist groups, they were originally linguists who moved to other fields associated with historical, religious, or legal aspects.

The research of the Western orientalists was used in the interests of Western governments, especially the Dutch, the British, and the French, in an attempt to establish commercial relations with the Islamic nations. This was a positive aspect which produced greater respect for Islam in the cultural sphere and the imperialist domain also.

After the disappearance of colonialism, the financial support to those studies stopped, and there was a dire need for oriental studies to be resumed.

Now, in my country, there are oriental studies, some of which, as I see, have developed a better understanding of the Muslim population resident in Europe. Some universities have even appointed Arabs as professors of Islamic studies.

Gulf Documents and Arabic Manuscripts
Are there any other documents in the Dutch State Archives related to the Gulf?
There are many such documents in the Dutch Archives. Not only in the Hague but also in the Indonesian National Archives. The quantity of documents is large. Other scholars must work to convey them to the Arabs in the Gulf. However, there is a language problem, as these documents were written in Dutch.

What about the Arabic manuscripts in the archives of Leiden University in Holland?
Leiden University has a collection of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman manuscripts which contain the history of relations between the Dutch government and Istanbul in the era of the Ottoman state from 1655 to 1665. This collection does not contain much information about the Arabian Gulf region. The Royal Dutch Library has a large treasure of the old collections, especially those which relate to journeys to many areas, including the Arabian Gulf region since 1580.

The Final Adventures and Deep sadness
What will be your next research project in the Arabian Gulf region?
Recently, I finished a book dealing with the general history of the "Arabs of the Gulf Coasts, (1602/1784)," in addition to the Arabian Peninsula region, based on Dutch, French, English, Italian, and Portuguese sources. I wish to publish it shortly. As for my next study, it will be about the non-Anglo activities there, i.e., those of the French and the Dutch. This is a thorough study of the Arabian Gulf region from 1784 to the end of the nineteenth century. It is costly in both effort and money, but it is important to consider points of view in addition to that of the British.

What are your impressions of the destruction that was done in Kuwait as a result of the Iraqi invasion, particularly to the cultural and scientific institution?
In general, I feel a great disgust and a deep sadness.
What Follows "Aziza Ya Kuwait"?

In Kuwait: A New Technology to Interpret an Old Tradition
Introduction

One of the reasons for the playwright’s unease in the Arab world has always been the question of the public’s interaction with the theatrical text or with the actor on the stage.

The position of the actor and the spectators, on what is effectively a box opening on one side to stacked rows of seats in front of it, creates a feeling of alienation. The physical orientation of the stage becomes a barrier in the rapport between audience and actors, an obstacle to a full participation in the experience. Previous solutions have been laid down to overcome this rigid constricting situation, as is exemplified by the return to the Greek amphitheatre.

Nevertheless, modern Arab writers are still not satisfied with the solutions. They are seeking previously neglected forms from their own cultural milieu as the basis for the innovations that will surmount the encumbrance of the traditional stage architecture mentioned above.

Dr. Yousef Idris has introduced innovations to enhance the interaction between the public and the actors in his two plays, ‘Afarafl’ (‘The Fickle Ones’) and ‘Almazala Alardia’ (‘The Earthly Comedy’). Saadallah Wannous presented a similar solution in the play, ‘An Evening with Abi Khalil Alkabbandi.’ Both writers use the concept of intervention, stemming from our Arabic heritage. This involves the familiar form of circles of folkloric recitation in cafes and evening chats rather than the cultural norms of Western traditional theatre. This rejuvenation of indigenous forms was catalytic and paved the way for successive experimentation in Arabic theatre genre. In the wider sense,
ones are emerging all the time. These, in turn, inspire further innovation and stimulate more experimentation, not only within their own cultures but also in the international sphere.

The first trial, "Aziza Ya Kuwait"

The presentation of "Aziza Ya Kuwait" wishes to moderate the gap or alienation between the receiver and what is presented before him through a new technology which combines live theatre with imaginary cinema.

The technology was prepared by a group of Czech experts from the "Space Films" organisation, led by the designer Genneuck Smittana and the producer Jiri Jezek. They prepared the film material before the invasion, filming the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection frames and scenes expressing footage, and the interaction between land and sea in the Kuwaiti environment. This included material showing the mosques, the spiritual dimension of the Kuwaiti heritage, the ancient shipbuilding and manufacture of dhows, the motion of camels and horses, the contrast between ancient houses and modern buildings, the folkloric dances and Kuwaiti wedding parties, the oil wells, the touristic enterprises and so on.

The second stage in preparing "Aziza Ya Kuwait" followed, despite of the shock of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the suspension of the vital and cultural life in favour of death and destruction. The executives of this work insisted on completing it, with the encouragement and coordination of Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, the Director of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. This work was ready for showing by the time of liberation, and amendments followed so that it ends with the tragedy of Iraq's invasion. Vivid touches were added to the show to enhance it. Examples of these were folkloric dances from the Kuwait Television group, dances which present the sea culture of Kuwait through the "Yamal" dance, and the land culture through the "Arda" dance.

The show is a mix between live dancing, folkloric singing and the film material which had previously been recorded. In its construction it depends on light aluminium posts and thin mirrors which can be dismantled and re-assembled with ease. The distribution of the mirrors suspends the actor's motion in the space of the set, providing the work with excitement and vitality and concentrates the quality of the dramatic work.

As a result of Kuwait's hardships after liberation and the lack of life's necessities in the country, the rehearsals were performed in Damascus, under the supervision of the Kuwait Information Centre.
The first performance of “Aziza Ya Kuwait” was presented in April 1991, and was received with enthusiasm by the public. Three performances were subsequently presented in Beirut in the presence of the wife of the President of the Republic of Lebanon.

The Second Trial - Lanterna Magica

The second trial was an attempt at reconciliation between the receiver and the theatre in what is known as the circular theatre.

This is a project which was laid down and presented once again by the Czech company Space Films, under the title Laterna Magica and Lanterna Animata. The structure of this theatre is based on two axes which are:

Firstly: Informing the spectator, receiver, or visitor through the artistic or dramatic work in a manner which retains the consciousness of heritage for the Arab spectator.

Secondly: The deletion of the partition between the spectator and the creative work, the matter which closes the creative performances to the spectator’s spirit.

A third contemporary axis is added to the Czech project, which is the possibility of showing universal creative arts such as calligraphy, music, dancing, and cinema.

The fourth axis complements the conception of universal art; the possibility of transporting this show from place to place by dismantling the components of the main frame and then assembling them somewhere else. A side benefit will be the opportunity to present the performances within Kuwait and abroad as required and the ability to participate in foreign celebrations.

The idea of the Czech show is based on a simple automatic matching between the internal and
external architecture. The external frame is shaped in the form of a circular metallic fabric which rises to the height of 21.1 metres, its internal axis is seven metres. It allows an audience of up to 199 spectators and is erected in the middle of four separated walls which are open on the top. This presents a cubic frame which is solid in the middle of the building, and centres around the cube, or formation trellis. Symbolically it also presents the idea that Kuwait is the assembling centre of successive generations replacing each other in a firm fixed location.

On the four hollow transparent walls with mist arising therein are projected views of Kuwait's heritage and the succession of events from its first pioneers to its resistance to the recent Iraqi aggression and its safe deliverance and rehabilitation. The spectator can watch this performance from these walls or outside them, namely by that which surrounds him or that which he sees upon a single screen. This is brought together with light projecting from the top of the building gradually via an aperture which widens like a camera's lens, and is accompanied by music inspired by ancient and contemporary Kuwait heritage.

**A New Asset for Kuwait**

In addition to providing a practical solution to the problem of interaction between the public and the theatre, this project achieves several other benefits, which may be summarised as follows:

1. The possibility of utilising the architectural formation not only in traditional theatrical shows within a new universal frame, but also in the presentation of monodrama, that is theatrical drama based on the efforts of a single actor, whose capabilities and the power of the script are made prominent by the space, light and colour of the movement of the location;

2. The possibility of presenting small musical shows (e.g. a chamber music concert) within a new framework wherein attention soars with the solitary player or the small group of players, to present anything from a Western symphony to Arabian music. Alternatively, limited scenes of universal operatic works may be presented;

3. The possibility of setting up a formative exhibition to overcome the conventional separation between the portrait and the sculpture, to demonstrate the moveable formative arts (optical art), or the arts which depend upon computer and laser capabilities;

4. The possibility of presenting shows which combine cinematic, theatrical, and musical aspects, in a high-technology framework.

The round theatre with these capabilities will be a welcome addition to modern Kuwaiti assets, not only in the fields of providing practical solutions for the dramatic plays which create equilibrium between the traditional and the contemporary, but will also become an expression of ourselves in our contemporary world, what we undergo, and our feelings of desolation, expatriation, or anxiety, through contemporary dramatic plays based on these new technical means. This will simplify such concepts and strengthen them in the public consciousness.
Introduction:

The book "Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait", the editing of which was supervised by Esin Atıl, the curator of Islamic art at the Freer Gallery, the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., and guest curator of the exhibition, was printed on the occasion of an exhibition of 107 pieces of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection. The exhibition bore the same title and was organised by the Trust for Museum Exhibitions in Washington D.C. to tour six American States, followed by Canada and France.

The book (in English and French) was constructed as follows;

Foreword
Hussah al-Sabah
Introduction
Esin Atıl
Gratitude
Ann Van Devanter Townsend
Introduction to the "al-Sabah Collection"
Marilyn Jenkins
Sponsorship in Islamic Art
Oleg Grabar
First Islamic Eras...
Estelle Wheelan
The Classical stage (1050/1250)
Jonathan M. Bloom
Post Classical stage
Sheila S. Blair
Late Islamic Eras... Empire (1500/1800)
Walter B. Denny
(A complete review in future issue.)

The introductions to the era classifications were undertaken by Ghada Qaddumi and Manuel Keene. The book also contains the margins, a table of the ruling dynasties, an alphabetical index, a reference list for further reading, and a general index. The book was designed by Alex Castro, Castro/Arts, Baltimore, who also designed the display cases for the exhibition itself.

An Obligation towards Islamic Civilisation

In her foreword, Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah states that artistic collections have won either religious or princely sponsorship over different historical epochs. Furthermore, whatever the function of any of these collections, it would be impossible for them to exist had it not been for the sponsor and the artist, for both of them have endeavoured to beautify and enrich the surrounding world.

She also states that the case of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah differs from others as regards the benefit facilitated by law in most countries where the private collections have been transferred to governmental authorities. This is true whether the benefits are an exemption from taxes or the granting of funds to public museums. Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah participates with other museums in the aim of sponsoring and exhibiting the collections, whereas simultaneously it aims at elevating the public's awareness through special programs such as conferences, lectures, tours, and educational classes.

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah starts from a belief in civilisation, and a strong sense of obligation towards Islamic civilisation. The objective is not one of charity as in similar cases, but is an expression of gratitude towards the state of Kuwait.

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah operates through the broader concept of the State's patronage of its citizens.

Art sponsors

In the book's introduction, Esin Atıl suggests that sponsorship was always a very important incentive to the development of the arts. All great moments in the history of civilisation bear the mark of prominent sponsors who endeavoured to distinguish production and creative expression. This created compatibility, and indeed bitter competition between the artists and drove them to excel in order to obtain recognition of their creative powers.

Atıl is of the opinion that another aspect of sponsorship was sometimes most important in creating new artistic trends and movements, that is, the role of the ambitious princes who endeavoured to attract and employ the most celebrated artists. Their artistic "workshops" reflected their taste and grace.

Atıl also argues that great sponsors of art were also great collectors. Their eagerness to possess precious and rare pieces drove them to urgently establish art treasures of unusual and valuable pieces, in addition to pieces which are distinguished by beauty and artistic elevation. Furthermore, emperors and princes have endeavoured to acquire unique and magnificent pieces, whether of local or foreign production. The process of collecting in itself was a kind of art.

The quality of the pieces which formed a certain collection reflects the extent of the sponsor's interest, knowledge, and taste. Asians and European kings and princes have established many collections, which were transferred into national museums for display to the public. Moreover, religious organisations undertook the same endeavours, and their collections became public property.

Atıl also says that the granting of private collections to public institutions is an American tradition, and that the names of those granting collections were bestowed on the museums.

As regards sponsoring Islamic
art, the roles of Sheikh Nasser and Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah are prominent, complementing the support of previous patrons, not only by supporting and encouraging the artists themselves but also by collecting extensive collections and placing them under the hands of the public. Thus Sheikh Nasser and Sheikha Hussah have undertaken the traditional Islamic role in patronising art.

Four Historical Periods

Attil also says that when the idea of introducing the Dar al-Atthar al-Islamiyyah collection to the U.S.A. was laid down, it was decided to concentrate on the pieces which reflect the development of a high and unique artistic character, together with an appreciation of the subtlety of the importance of patronage to Islamic civilisation, an area which has not yet received full study. She also states that notwithstanding donations from the royal dynasties and certain princes to encourage arts, this project has studied the influence of individual sponsors on the historical development of Islamic art.

The exhibited pieces are divided into four sections which cover four historical periods starting with the first era of Islam, then the classical era which witnessed a difference in the concept of patronage. This stage covers a vast area which extends from India to Spain. Then came the post-classical era which also witnessed activity in the palaces of the sultans and princes, in further exploration of the art of Islamic empires in all parts of the Islamic world. Finally comes the last stage, during which art activities concentrated in major cities, together with royal artistic creative workshops for the famous Ottoman, Safarid, and Mongol emperors, which influenced the neighbouring nations.

More Universal collections

Marilyn Jenkins reviews the steps in the formation of the collection and the founding of Dar al-Atthar al-Islamiyyah over a period of fifteen months from December 1981 until February 1983. This review serves those who wish to establish public or private collections. It is also of interest to those who may endeavour to establish museums in the future.

Jenkins says that within one decade the collection converted from a private collection to a universal collection of international stature. This was as a result of Sheikh Nasser’s inspired perception and of his modesty and enthusiasm in the service of history and the creation of Islamic art. The pieces were numbered and classified.

In America and Europe

Photographic records of all pieces were then compiled. When the classification process was concluded the tally amounted to 7500 pieces of art, thus they were divided into four main sections of historical sequence: the first Islamic eras: Seventh/Tenth centuries A.D.; the early Middle Ages: 11th/ middle 13th century A.D., the late Middle Ages: middle 13th/15th century A.D., and the late Islamic ages. A translator acquainted with historical terms was selected and illustrative labels were placed on the pieces in both Arabic and English languages. Furthermore, maps of the exhibits were drawn and coloured photographs prepared.

The Museum was inaugurated on February 25th, 1983 on the occasion of the National Day. Nearly 300 researchers, collectors, and fans of Islamic art were invited to see the inauguration of a new Islamic Museum in Kuwait, which contains a collection more universal than in its counterparts elsewhere in the Islamic world. It also reaches an artistic level which ranks with the great art collections existing in Berlin, Leningrad, London, New York, and Paris. After the inauguration of Dar al-Atthar al-Islamiyyah, Sheikh Nasser continued to develop and add to the collection.

Sponsor, artist, and artistic matter

Thereafter, Oleg Grabar, the Professor of Islamic Art at Harvard and Princeton, talks about the subject of patronage of Islamic art, indicating its importance to art through observing that there are European cities which are celebrated primarily for the role of the patrons who lived there, such as the Italian city of Florence. He then reviews the causes relevant to art and religion in Islam, displaying the opinions of Ibn Khaldoun in his Introduction, and the different functions of sponsorship in Islam, such as the role of the Khalifa or his deputy in the major cities and regions of the Islamic world. Thereafter he views the other side of patronage, the role of the art sponsor, and of the influential individuals in the urban regions. A third side relates to the aspect of faith to the development of art, as with Islamic architecture.

He divides his research into three parts:

Arts within Islamic civilization

Islamic art and the artist

Art and society

He talks about the conventional trends for studying the subject of patronage, deducing that the sponsor’s involvement was a major incentive which influenced the process of art and the artist himself. This concept changed after the 19th century revolutions. Grabar complains of the scarcity of available matter on the connection between the sponsor and the artist in the Islamic world.

In addition to the royal palaces’ requests for particular pieces, there were the indirect requirements of the rich. As regards the remaining population, direct information is virtually nonexistent. Nevertheless, it is probable that most of the earthware and glass pieces, or what remain of them, were used by the unknown majority although some of them, due to their high technology, indicate that they had a patron. It is also clear that what was made for the market shows the artist’s consciousness and his awareness of society’s taste.

On this subject Grabar says that the critique may have displayed the sponsor’s taste, and that the artist may have submitted what was required. Simultaneously, he was rendering a service to others. Patronage here takes the meaning of correlating the functions of the pieces, and transferring them to works of beauty. Grabar deems this side to be the most important aspect of conventional Islamic art, at least until the fourteenth century. Ceramics is the most outstanding example of this.

These lines on this important book, “Islamic art Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait”, are perhaps an incentive to refer to the book itself. In addition to its articles and studies, it has become an important document due to the Iraqi occupation and expresses the determination of Dar al-Atthar al-Islamiyyah, a major Kuwaiti cultural concern, to continue its role as a permanent symbol of the existence of the state of Kuwait and its civilisation.
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