Although the core of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah is an extensive and comprehensive collection of Islamic art ranging from Early Islam to the 18th century, a variety of scholarly and artistic activities revolve around this collection, each requiring a broad and intensive background in Islamic history. The collection itself is organized according to both historical period and geographical region. The reference library and the publications of the Dar are closely related to the collection. The Dar has sponsored archaeological excavations in Upper Egypt that date to the Fatimid period. The art school associated with the Dar promoted (before the invasion) skills in the various artistic genres that are represented in the collection. The yearly lecture series, which has been revived, is a focal point for historians and other specialists, since it features talks by prominent international scholars on various topics of Islamic history, culture, and art.
Islamic Arts and Patronage: 
Treasures from Kuwait, the travelling exhibition of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, moved to Italy in March 1994. Under the Italian translation of its title, Arte islamica e mecenatismo: tesori del Kuwait, the exhibition was opened at the Sala d’Arme in the historic Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. March 18, the day of the official opening, was a beautiful Spring afternoon. It was attended by many dignitaries from the Commune of Florence and the Kuwait Embassy to Italy. The Mayor of Florence, Dr. Giorgio Morales, the advisor of cultural affairs, Prof. Pierluigi Ballini, and the Head of the Department of Cultural Affairs, Dr. ssa Sandra Buyet were prominent among the representatives of the Commune. From the Kuwait Embassy, attendees included H.E. Mr. Qasim al-Yaqout, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Italy, Sheikh Fawaz al-Sabah (from the Kuwaiti Embassy in London), Mr. Ahmed al-Rouzouki, and other members of the Embassy, as well as Mr. Fayhaa Madi, from the Kuwait News Agency. Many friends of the Dar also attended, such as Mr. and Mrs. Fawaz Hamed al-Sultan from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Senoras Elda and Elena Pecci, the owners of the Pecci Museum in Prato, and many supportive friends from the Kuwait Italian Friendship Association were in the USA arranged by the Trust for Museum Exhibitions in Washington. Islamic Art and Patronage left Kuwait only a week prior to the Iraqi occupation. It opened, as planned, in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) on 6 August and then moved to North America, starting in Baltimore, Maryland at the Walters Gallery in December 1990, followed by a succession of shows beginning in Fort Worth, Texas at the Campbell Museum for Art, then on to the Emory Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, the Scottsdale
This tour has been extended indefinitely as a result of the Iraqi aggression on Kuwait, which totally destroyed by fire the building housing the collection of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. After success in North America, Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait began its European tour in Paris at L’Institut du Monde Arabe in February, 1993, followed by an opening in The Netherlands at the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague in June of the same year.

The Italian press gave the exhibition wide and enthusiastic coverage. Massimo Jevelotto, in “Gemme del Kuwait” (Sole 24 Ore, 17 April) traced the fortunate departure of the exhibition to St. Petersburg, mentioned above, in the summer of 1990 and refers to the sacking of the Kuwait National Museum and the transportation of the DAJ collection to Baghdad.
Letizia Cini, writing in Il Tempo ("Schegge preziose d’Oriente in mostra a Palazzo Vecchio", 8 April, 1994) discussed the 107 objects from the Al-Sabah Collection which constitute Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait with special emphasis on their rich historical and educational value. Representing Islamic art in the Kuwait collection, they celebrate the development of the artistic traditions of Islam in its numerous regions, techniques, and styles, from the early Umayyad empire to the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughul dynasties.

Almost all the journalists seem to have been dazzled by the gold, silver, glass ceramics, and precious gems in which so many of the pieces were worked. Nicoletta Avenadro’s article, in the March 19 edition of La Nazione praised the quality of workmanship, as "Islam splendente", saying that it is of the highest value and that these works are examples of the development of Islamic art from its rise to later epochs.

The theme from which the exhibition derives its name, the link between art and patronage, is a topic also mentioned in several of the newspapers. Building a collection is an art form in itself since a patron’s interest and knowledge is reflected in the worth and importance of the pieces collected. The Muslim patrons who throughout the ages have encouraged the production of the kind of objects found in Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait have been the unsung heroes of an enlightened age. The collection of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah contains some of the rarest and most important examples in the world.

The objects in this exhibition have been depicted and discussed by prominent scholars in the field of Islamic art in the catalogue, translated so far into Arabic, English, Russian, French, Dutch, Italian, and German, that accompanies the exhibition and includes studies by Oleg Grabar, Esin Atli, Marilyn Jenkins, Estelle Wheelan, Jonathan M. Bloom, Sheila Blair, Walter Denny and Manuel Keene. One of the predominant topics in this work is the impact of patronage on the Islamic arts exemplified in Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.

On Monday 21 March Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, the Director of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah gave a lecture, entitled "The Story of a Door", at Accademia Delle Arti Del Disegno. A summary of that lecture was published in the DAI magazine, Hadeeth ad-Dar (Vol. 2-Winter 94/95). The Salone delle Rappresentanze dell’Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, which houses some of Michaelangelo’s works, was specially opened for the occasion under the patronage of the President of that institution, Enzo Ferroni and the head of the Department of Architecture, Mariello Zoppi.

Prof. Luigi Zangheri, Dean of the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence, also gave a lecture, Report On Cultural Relations Between Florence And Islam [see P4].

Sheikha Hussah was nominated by the Class of Human Disciplines for the title of ‘Honorary Academic’. She was notified by letter from Prof. Francesco Adorno of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Facolta di Architettura, that this nomination has been confirmed in October, 1994.

The Dar would like to extend special thanks to Dr. Pierandrea Vanni, the President of Associazione Nazionale Per La Solidarietà Con Il Kuwait and to all members of the association for their support of the Kuwaiti cause during the occupation and their continued interest as exhibited by their assistance in organizing the Florence exhibition.

Ahmed and Petra al-Awdhi deserve special mention for introducing Dar al-Athar to the cultural scene in Florence, which had culminated in the hosting of the DAI exhibition in the Palazzo Vecchio and the DAI Director’s lecture at the Academy. Mr. Giovani Bardazzi, and Dr. Antonella Pollozi, all dedicated friends of the Dar are to be commended for all the help they extended to make the event a success.
REPORT ON CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN FLORENCE AND ISLAM

Text: Prof. LUIGI ZANGHERI
Translation: Dott.ssa ANTONELLA POLLAZZI

This lecture was delivered on Monday 21 March at Accademia Delle Arti Del Disegno by Prof. Luigi Zangheri, Dean of the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence.

The Salone delle Rappresentanze dell'Accademia delle Arti Del Disegno, which houses some of the splendid works of Michelangelo (as shown above), was specially opened in honour of Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, who also gave a lecture together with Prof. Zangheri. That lecture, entitled "The Story of a Door", has been published in Hadeeth ad-Dar (Vol. 2, Winter 1994 - 95).

Unfortunately, cultural relations between Florence, Tuscany and Islam have not been entirely analysed and restored until today. All past and contemporary historians spoke about this subject, but they have never taken the initiative in producing an exhaustive work on it. The reason of this failing is evident: such a goal is unattainable for a single scholar. There would be the necessity of a working team, made of art, science and economics historians in collaboration with politics and customs experts.

For the moment we can only be satisfied with a knowledge based on fragments, remarkable events to be examined, which we can only take note of. Continuous and qualitative relations are perceived behind these fragments and these sporadic events, which would really require to be investigated to appreciate our cultural roots better.

In order to clarify my thought I will give a concise outline of the above-mentioned events.

FRAGMENTS FROM THE EXCAVATIONS IN THE ANCIENT PALAZZO DEI VESCOVI IN PISTOIA

During the excavations campaign carried out from 1973 to 1980, they discovered several findings of the Late Middle Ages. One of these consists of a ground glass cup imported from Egypt in the Fatimid dynasty. It can be ascribed to the Alexandrian manufactures of the XII century, and it is named as the glass of "San Edvige di Slesia". With this there were fragments of Hispano-Moresque majolica with metallic luster decorations of the late XIV century. Perhaps it was manufactured on the eastern Spanish coast in Valencia; however it could also have its origin in Malaga.

THE "CASULA" OF S. MARCO PAPA IN S. SALVATORE ABBEY ON MOUNT AMIATA

* (Casula is a word which comes from Latin used to denominate a kind of cloak with a hood worn by the clergy from the VI century).

It was recently restored and it was possible to take it to pieces and study its component fabrics with extraordinary results. The relief on the "simung" of the casula has circles with a diameter of 40 cm. (similar to other circles in the Reims Cathedral of the IX century). It presents Sassanian motifs. The hem is formed by strips of fabrics taken from another precious restored "sciamito" (a kind of silk cloth, generally red amaranth) with polychrome wefts. It pre-
seats circular modules standing out in contrast with the ground and formed by vegetable shoots where you can recognize the stylized subjects of the lote and of the “mezza-palmetta” (ancient vegetable decoration with stylized petals always in odd numbers). Within the circle there are two female figures leant against a grapevine which separates the space in two semi-circles filled up with bunches of grapes and shoots. The ornament is completed by a couple of running hunters woven in the blanks formed by the sequence of the wheels. The two fabrics are coeval.

GIOTTO AND THE KUFIC
INSRIPTIONS

In Giotto’s Crucifixion placed in Scrovegni’s Chapel in Padua, amongst many images you can observe some kufic inscription, studied by Prof. Hidemiichi Tanaka. Similar inscriptions appear in the frescoes of the Basilica in Assisi, representing Saint Francis who is instituting the feast of the Nativity at Greccio.

MASACCIO AND THE MADONNA OF S. GIOVENALE

This Madonna is attributed to Masaccio. On her halo, according to Prof. Boskovits, there is inscribed, in kufic letters, that there is only one God and Muhammed is his Prophet. Some scholars of the Cairo University deny this hypothesis. However the fact is that these inscriptions are kufic. Nobody can tell if it was an artist’s joke or if there are other motivations.

POLYCHROME IN ARCHITECTURE

The Florence Cathedral is covered by a three-colours marble: white, red and green. This polychrome was surely influenced by Oriental art and came to Florence through Pisa. You can see some Seljuk examples, such as at Konia in the Ala Mosque and in others, similar to those of St. Paul Church on Ripa d’Arno in Pisa. If you suppose a polychrome with a structural image for the facade of S. Miniatu in Florence, you should read an arch shaped like a horseshoe with a Spanish-Moresque pattern on the windows of the Cathedral. The later Gothic decorations of the windows’ tympana undoubtedly appear to have Islamic schemes.

BRUNELLESCHI AND THE MAUSOLEUM OF SULTANIEH

Prof. Sanpaolo has already noticed close links between the Mausoleum of Sultanieh built by Ilkhan Ulghaiatu in Persia and the cupola of our Cathedral.

The Mausoleum dates from 1304 and 1312 and is constituted by an octagon with an interior diameter of 25 metres. The cupola in Florence was built between 1420 and 1436 and has a diameter of 44 metres. There are similarities between the two cupolas, such as the two parallel brick shells, one internal and load-bearing, and the other external and protective; therefore they have double cover designed to protect the bearing structure from the thermic variations. Both were built without ribs, or rather without a framework. However there are also some ribs with the function of defining the main skeleton. Sultanieh lacks the use of the herringbone. Yet it is the same period the herringbone was spread over the East. An example is the cupola built by Mansur bin Yakup in 1224 at Malatya; in Florence you can refer to the cupola of the Sala d’Armi at the Fortezza da Basso built by Antonio da Sangallo in 1534, inspired by Brunelleschi’s patterns and experiences.
Another analogy between Brunelleschi's culture and the Oriental culture can be found in the small cupola belonging to Han of Rustem, Pasha at Edirne (XVI century).

FLORENTINE KNOWLEDGE OF THE EAST

Traces of this knowledge cannot only be found in objects and architecture, but also in several manuscripts, now preserved in the Biblioteca Laurenziana. Amongst these you can find the Treaty by Leonardo Dati Opus de Sphaera of the XV century, with images and descriptions of Damascus, Mecca, Cairo, Alexandria and Istanbul. Eastern markets were open to the Florentines and their riches, were considered marvelous.

MEDICIS' COLLECTIONS

In Piero il Gotti’s inventory, between 1456 and 1453, there figure a Turkish cup and other 36 pieces which include basins, candle-holders, jugs and perfume bottles in Turkish or Damascus’ style. Lorenzo il Magnifico was also a keen collector of Islamic pieces, and was given a large celadon plate and some glass lamps of a mosque by an Egyptian Sultan. The perfume bottles, now at Bargello Museum, belonged to him.

Though relations between Florence and Islam were formally broken off when Cosimo I (Medici) founded the Military Order of St. Stephen, in Florence they still continued to welcome ambassadors and to keep in touch with the East in order to obtain precious materials from there. In particular Francesco I distinguished himself by his interest in botany and his introduction of the first tulips and horse-chestnuts from Pera, that he himself had planted at Pratolino. The caves of the villa at Pratolino were all paved with “Levant clay”.

In the meanwhile the Cardinal Ferdinando tried to establish a Medicean-Oriental Typography and had sent Giovan Battista and Gerolamo Vecchietti to the East in order to look for new manuscripts. Hundreds of these are kept at the Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana. They are about history, geography, astronomy, religion, poetry and literature.

The presence of so many Oriental pieces in Medicean collections interested the court artists. At the Uffizi Gallery they put portraits of Turkish Sultans, and Ferdinando II had his portrait painted dressed like Turk from Susterman. In 1619 they even staged a tragedy entitled “Il Solymano”, and had the guide-booklet illustrations carved by Callot.

RELATIONS WITH INDIA DURING THE MOGUL PERIOD

The Medici wanted to establish relations with India of Moguls to purchase agate in Goa to be used for their semi-precious stones mosaics. They tried to send a working team between 1608 and 1612 stopped by the Portuguese in Lisbon. Later Agostino from Bordeaux, who had already been working in the semi-precious stonemill in Florence, may have brought a series of mosaics to Delhi, which were placed in the Diwan-i-Hamm of Forte Rosso by the Emperor Jahangir. It seems that Agostino also carried out the decorations of the Taj Mahal. It is certain that in the second half of the century, Cosimo III sent the magnificent silver-and-semiprecious-stones altar to Goa, to hold S. Francesco Saverio’s mortal remains.

NINETEENTH CENTURY ECLECTICISM

The study of the Moresque could not be excluded by the academic studies. In Florence Ferdinando Panciatichi Ximenes from Aragon distinguished himself by the building of San Mezzano villa near Reggello. In the meanwhile at the Cascine they erected the monument consecrated to the Indian Prince dead in Florence; moreover the academicin Stefano Ussi painted the big picture “Surre”, representing a caravan going on the annual pilgrimage to Makka, for the Sultan’s Palace in Dolmabahce.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Arts Terminology: A Case Study

by Ahmed Mohammed Essa

The necessity for compiling a modern dictionary of the applied arts was the theme of a lecture delivered by Ahmed Essa, Former General Manager of Cairo University Libraries, and Vice President of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Arts and Culture (IRCICA), Istanbul.

Mr. Essa's lecture was given for Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyah on 15 November, 1993 at Abdullah al-Salem Secondary School Auditorium. The following is a summary of that lecture.

Mr. Essa remarked on his long experience with Arabic dictionaries, seeking clear terms of reference within the context of idiomatic English terms used in the specialized vocabulary of books published in the English language on Islamic history and art, and he pointed out that Arabic vocabulary in this respect had stopped towards the second Hijri century. He gave credit to his antecedents at the Arabic Academy in Cairo: Ibrahim Mustafa, Ahmad Hassan Al-Zayyat, Ahmad Abd-al-Qadir, Muhammad Ali al-Najjar. In the Introduction to the first edition of the "Intermediate Dictionary" in 1960 they referred to this problem.

Investigating the impact of the Arabs' assimilation of the languages and civilizations of the nations which embraced Islam could cast light on the causes. Considering the diversity, both geographical and cultural, of these cultures, it is strange that the Arabic language stopped developing in this respect during the period from the fourth to fifteenth century of the Hijra.

Arab civilization quickly absorbed the arts of the conquered countries. However, while Arab princes and rulers, as well as ordinary believers in Islam were open-minded, the language itself seems to have rejected this stimulus and stopped absorbing the vocabulary of the very arts and industries which had changed so much of the life style of Arabic culture.

Investigating the meanings of some words invariably ends in either the obscure or with the absence of an Arabic equivalent for the foreign word. This is exemplified in the Introduction to 'Al-Muheet' Dictionary, which goes like this:

"Stick your 'muwanif' to the 'joboob', and take the 'mizbir' with your 'shanaatir', and turn your two 'handROOTA' towards my 'qaihal', so that I won't 'unghi' any 'mughyab' without me storing it in the 'homata' of your 'joljolaam'."

That means: "Stick your 'odnot' to the 'silih' and take the 'misur' with your 'abakhis', and turn your two 'hajmah' towards my 'otho baan' so that I won't utter an uttering without me storing it in the 'lumzah' of your 'ribat'".

Which means; "Stick your buttocks to the ground, and take the pen between your fingers, and fix your eyes upon my face, so that I won't pronounce a pronouncement without me storing it in the inner chamber of your heart".

Such abundance in literary meanings was contrasted by a deficiency in the vocabulary relating to applied arts. Resulting, for example, in inadequate descriptions of the facades of the Amr Palace, Al-Mashfa Palace, or the buildings of Baghdad and Samarra. The Islamic art historian faces numerous linguistic difficulties in describing carpets, pottery or glass, carved pieces of wood or stucco, or textiles decorated with animal or floral drawings that are not problematic in languages with a well-established terminology in the field. What is needed are dictionaries which establish and standardize these terms.

There are problems in this respect. Many of the words which have been assimilated standard Arabic are labeled as either "intrusive" or "arabized" or slang, despite the fact that they might be more exact in indicating the intended meaning. This issue should receive priority even over that of arabizing education. It seems impossible for us to succeed in the second before our success is accomplished in the first.

Dictionaries and Academies

While reading some sources preparation for this lecture, my attention was drawn to a recommendation, included in a book published in 1965 concerning a meeting of the Union of Arab Academies, for expanding arabization of scientific terminology. The outcome, however, was nil. Ancient dictionaries
no longer meet our needs. Rather they force us to seek modern specialized dictionaries. Despite clarity of method, ancient linguists did not approach even the aspects of their life from a cultural perspective. Abu Hilal Al-Askari (d. 395 H.), for instance, says in his Introduction to "Dictionary of the Rest of Things", published in 1934: "It is well-known that for each meaning there is an utterance which signifies it, and he who was ignorant of the utterance was deaf to the meaning. There is no doubt that for him who wishes to look into one of the sciences without looking into the utterances of its people will never grasp their meanings. And today we know of no science - whether dhahili [pre-Islamic] or Islamic - whose people are not either Arabs or Arabized and who write it in Arabic utterance and Arabic script".

Yet Abu Hilal did not move with his vocabulary outside his heritage and was aware of the cultural terms of his age, simply because he decided to address his book to a special group of literary rhetoricians, where he says: "It is well-known that for him who seeks letter rhetoric and versification and the composition of orations, there is the inevitable need for expanding specially in the science of language in order to increase his vocabulary, so he can act upon them the way he wishes and find enough space for his exploration, and know the sublime words to use and the colloquial and to avoid and shun". The concerns of this great linguist were literary, not scientific. When I searched his dictionary for the names and descriptions of utensils, I found only a few of the many I had already collected and heard it exchanged among people. For these utensils he had thirteen words, whereas my collection included forty eight.

This phenomenon is repeated when dealing with terminology used for clothes, styles, the shades of colours, decorative elements, or architectural plans, etc. Our hope is for these questions to preoccupy contemporary language academies and to be considered by the patrons of language and dictionary publishing.

This need not entail the use of slang. Rather, it calls for absorption of terms unknown to Arabic in the early ages but indispensable nowadays. The case for this is supported by scholars such as Professor Dr. Ibrahim Bayyoumi, President of the Cairo Language Academy and of the Union of Arab Academies, and Dr. Hussain Nassar. Three samples of three ancient dictionaries are appended to it, i.e., Al-Askari's dictionary, others 'The Science of Language' by Abu-Mansour al-Tha'alibi (d. 429H), and 'The Specifier' by Ibn Sayyedah (d. 458H), all of which illustrate the extent of the gap which separates these dictionaries from the linguistic requirements of contemporary life.

Many praise worthy efforts have been made in this sphere. They are the efforts exerted by capable people who, in their determination to investigate the vague, the exotic, the foreign, and the colloquial, have aimed at reaching significant terms, that are specific, direct, comprehensive, and correct. There can be no dispute that Arabic is currently facing linguistic innovations emerging from the European Renaissance, as well as those following the technologies of steam and electricity, information, and space aviation. It is essential that the Arabic language keep current with the contemporary situation.

The following lists chronologically some of the dictionaries used while preparing a new edition of the Terminology of Islamic Art dictionary.

1) 'The Origins of Slang' Words by Hassan Tawfiq
2) 'Explaining Exotic Words in Arabic' by Tobia Al-Onaissi
3) 'The Concise in the Origins of Slang Words' by Dr. Ahmad Issa Beg
4) 'The Games of the Arabs' by Ahmed Teimour Pasha
5) 'A Linguistic Dissertation on Egyptian Rank and Titles (Ep. Orders and T.)' by Ahmed Teimour Pasha
6) 'Dictionary of Archaeological Terminology' by Prince Yahia Al-Shihabi
7) 'Dictionary of Arts Terminology' by Dr. Afif Buhussi
8) 'Dictionary of the Vocabulary of Modern Civilization and Arts Terminology' by the Cairo Arabic Language Academy
9) 'A Project Dictionary of Archaeology Terminology'
10) 'Dictionary of Islamic Art Terminology'
11) 'Architectural Terminology in Mamluk Documents' co-edited by Dr. Muhammed Muhammed Armin and Mrs. Laila Ali Ibrahim

A New Enlarged Publication

Mr. Essa concluded his survey of the efforts of his predecessors in the field of terminology by referring to a new edition he has produced which includes nearly 1400 terms strictly pertinent to Islamic arts, published by the Research Centre in Istanbul this year in 1993. This enlarged publication contains, for the explanation of its terminology, specific illustrations done by engineer and artist Mahmoud Al-Tunkhi, the expert in recovering Islamic vestiges in the General Board of Vestiges in Cairo. There will also be an extended Introduction on terminology, terminology, and coinage, and our need for them, and a list of Arabic and foreign references from which this work was born. Mr. Essa recalled his having worked in the artistic terminology area since school days. The warm encouragement from Prof. Dr. Ekmelidin Ismail Ogilvi, General Manager of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Arts and Culture was duly acknowledged.
“Language structures the way we think about the world as well as influences the play of power in that world. We are learning to use language with greater care, particularly since the recent trend towards ‘political correctness.’ It often conceals reality rather than reveals it.”

Professor Francis C.R. Robinson discussed the role of language in forming and perpetuating stereotypes in a lecture delivered 3 April, in the auditorium of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) at Abdullah al-Salem Secondary School. The lecture, entitled “Western Stereotypes and Middle Eastern Facts; Some Voices of the ‘Voiceless’ in the Middle East,” was part of the lecture series sponsored by Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.

The speaker is Head of the Department of History at Royal Holloway, University of London, where he is also Professor of the History of South Asia. He has been Visiting Professor in the Near East Program at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, USA on several occasions and is the author of many books and articles in the field of his specialisation, modern South Asian and Islamic history. He was the General Editor of The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives, published in 1989.

The following is the full text of his lecture.

Over the past 20 years scholars in the West have become increasingly concerned about the ways in which they represent ‘others’. They are concerned with the representation of others in their own societies. They are coming to be no less concerned with how they represent others in societies or cultures apart from their own.

This concern over representation is derived, in part at least, from the growing realization that the language which we use structures the way in which we think about the world. Moreover, if language structures our thoughts about the world, it also structures the play of power in that world. A contemporary manifestation of this concern in the USA is the movement for what is termed political correctness or ‘pc’ for short. In many places, and in particular in universities, there is a linguistic thought police at work willing to pounce on those, and they are usually white Anglo-Saxon males, who by their language betray unacceptable assumptions. The word ‘nigger’ is unacceptable because it reveals a mindset that still thinks in terms of the inferiority, indeed the former slave status, of Americans of Afro-Caribbean origin. The word ‘chairman’ is unacceptable because it suggests a world in which a woman would not be expected to take the chair. Even the word ‘history’ offers problems to some who argue, disregarding its etymology, that it denies the possibility of ‘her-story’. We are learning to use language with greater care. We understand that often it conceals reality rather than reveals it.
We realize that it often carries a heavy freight of assumptions. When describing others the concern is increasingly to reach beyond these assumptions, these stereotypes, to the real, live human beings that lie behind them.

The problem of language, knowledge and power in relation to the Middle East was first raised in a notorious debate in the 1970s in the New York Review of Books between the Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, and the Princeton professor of Jewish and British extraction, Bernard Lewis. Said developed his position in three notable books: Orientalism, The Question of Palestine and Covering Islam. Said was concerned to demonstrate that knowledge about the Middle East was generated by scholars who, more often than not, were associated with government. These governments had a power relationship with the region. The questions the scholars tended to ask, the conclusions they reached, the attitudes and understanding they fostered were an outcome of that relationship. Said was also concerned to demonstrate that these scholars developed a language which embraced a series of stereotypes about the Middle East that bore little relationship to the facts. This language and these stereotypes formed the thoughts of governments in their dealings with the region, they formed the thoughts of the media, they formed the ways in which whole societies were brought up to think about the Middle Eastern world and the people who live in it.

What are the stereotypes we have in mind? [Remember a ' stereotype' is an image constantly reproduced without necessarily relating to reality]

Middle East is one. It was generated by Europe’s imperial experience. It is widely used. I am guilty of using it in the title of this lecture. It suggests the centrality of the West to History. Just a passing phase, as we all know. I would prefer the neutral term 'West Asia'.

Never-changing Islam is another. Islam for the Westerner carries with it a host of stereotypes bestowed upon it by the long history of Christian-Muslim relations and by Western orientalism. The stereotype is of a faith which has been observed in the same way throughout 1400 years of history and throughout the Muslim world. There is some truth in this, but it is an image that conceals more than it reveals.

Islam is a faith that oppresses women. This is a widely held stereotype in the West. It is derived from Islamic law re. divorce, inheritance and evidence and Islamic requirements re. modesty in dress.

Muslims are fanatics. This is a powerful image in the West. It was generated in Muslim resistance to C19 European colonialism. It has been sustained by Western media reporting of the 'Islamic revival' over the past fifteen years.

To these stereotypes we could add a whole range of others. They might deal not just with Muslims, but also with Arabs, and not all of them are very pleasant. You might say that the business of characterising the 'other' in stereotypes is not restricted to the West. The Middle East, West Asia, has its own stereotypes of the West and of Westerners - they are materialistic, power hungry, lacking in sincerity, without warmth and affection, distanced from religious values, sexually liberated - I am sure that there has been many a boy from the Middle East who on travelling to the West has discovered to his disappointment that not all Western girls live up to the stereotype.

I am concerned [however] with Western stereotypes of the Middle East. I am concerned because they have mingled with Western power; they help to channel it. They have had, and still have, the capacity to affect lives and fortunes in the region. I am going to look at four:

- The passive slave woman of the Muslim harem
- The mutual hatred of Arab and Jew
- Muslim societies as patriarchal societies
- The oil-rich Arab bent on material progress.
I intend to examine each of these stereotypes in the light of a brief biography of an ordinary Middle Easterner. We are not concerned with the great who make the pages of history books but with ordinary men and women who live unsung lives. These biographies are drawn from a splendid collection put together by Professor Edmund Burke of the University of California at Santa Cruz under the title *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*.

1. The passive slave woman of the Muslim harem

The harem, as you know, was an arena in which the European imagination loved to roam. It did so with ease not the least because European men were never likely to enter one. It was supposed to be a place of untold sensual possibilities, a place where women existed to serve men, a place in which a slave might be completely within a man’s power. The fevered imaginings of the European mind are represented, for instance, in that influential school of C19 orientalist painters led by men such as Jerome, Guericault, Ingres etc...

I propose to examine this stereotype of the passive woman without power through an episode in the life of a female slave in mid-C19 Cairo. This is the story of Shemsigul, meaning ‘flower of the sun’. Her story has been discovered in the police registers held in the Egyptian national archives. On the 30 June 1854 she appeared before police investigators to give testimony about her life over the previous two years.

Shemsigul was a slave from a poverty-stricken tribe in the Caucasus. She had been taken in her early teens to Istanbul for sale. There she had been bought but one Deli Mehmet, an Egyptian slave dealer, with the aim of selling her into a house of the Ottoman elite. In 1852 she joined the 15,000 or so slaves then in Cairo.

Shemsigul was giving testimony because Deli Mehmet had sold her to another slave dealer, Timur, under false pretenses. On the journey from Istanbul to Cairo, Deli Mehmet had forced her into sexual relations with him and then continued to sleep with her, which as her owner he was entitled to do. But Shemsigul had a baby. This transformed her situation under Islamic law; her child was legally free, any attempt to sell Shemsigul was unlawful, and she herself would be free when Deli Mehmet died.

On discovering that he owned a slave who had borne a child to a free man, Timur informed the Shaykh of the slave dealers’ guild who, concerned to protect the reputation of his profession, turned the matter over to the police.

Shemsigul and her unborn child survived this and other assaults, in part through good fortune but in part too because of the compassion of other women who protect her, although ultimately they cannot prevent the slave dealer’s wife from taking control of her baby boy the moment he is born.

Shemsigul’s testimony illuminates this brief period in the life of a slave. She is treated like goods. She is sold to the palace of the son of Muhammad Ali Pasha (the late governor-general of Egypt); she is found to be pregnant and sent back. She is then moved on from slave dealer to slave dealer, put for sale at the Tantu fair, pawed by a prospective Indian buyer. Once her pregnancy is revealed she suffers the hostility of Deli Mehmet’s wife to whom she is clearly a threat. The wife tries to get a midwife to produce an abortion; the midwife refuses because it is too late but the wife’, Shemsigul’s testimony goes, ‘insisted saying: “I shall put an end to the pregnancy.” Later her husband, Deli Mehmet, came. She said to him, “Let us beat this slave and end her pregnancy.” [to which] Deli Mehmet stated: “I am not going to beat [her].” But the women would not stop. She fetched a clothespress, hit me with it several times on my stomach and back, and [then] beat me with a mincing rod.

Shemsigul’s evidence to the police which to judge from their records is clearly and confidently given is corroborated by that of other witnesses. Moreover, her evidence is supported by the police against that of the slave dealer, Deli Mehmet, whose story shifts this way and that as he strives to wriggle free of the accusations against him. We do not know the outcome of the case. But materials in the police file suggest that they recommended to the Grand Mufti that Shemsigul be set free. The odds are that this is what happened.
What do we learn from this?

That the female slave was not necessarily the passive figure of European imagination. A young woman with courage and a sense of her self-worth could use the system to seek justice and receive it. How representative Shemsigul was we do not know; we know very little of Middle Eastern women in the C19, let alone female slaves. What is clear, however, is that Shemsigul was far from being a passive downtrodden wretch. She was able to speak up and look after herself.

2. The mutual hatred of Arab and Jew

The tragic events surrounding Israel and Palestine have fixed this image firmly in Western minds. I shall approach this stereotype through the life of Naji a Jewish doctor in Iraq in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. His story was told to Dr. Sami Zubaida of the University of London in the 1980s; it has been checked with Iraqi contemporaries of Dr. Naji.

Naji was part of the Iraqi Jewish community which numbered nearly 120,000 in 1948. They were Arabic-speaking and well-integrated into Iraqi society (much better integrated than the Jews of Morocco). Naji’s father was a pharmacist by profession, who fought in the Ottoman army against the British in World War I as an officer. Naji was brought up in a predominantly Sunni quarter of Baghdad. His next door neighbour was a female teacher of the Qur’an. Under her tutelage as a child he memorized much of the Qur’an. He went to a Jewish primary school and then to al-Idadiya al-Markaziya, the famous government school in Baghdad where he was educated alongside the coming elite of Iraq.

Naji went on to Medical College. In the late 1930’s growing prejudice against Jews meant that he was unable to become a specialist and had to take the least desired position, that of a country doctor. [The Jewish country doctor was a regular feature of Iraqi life in the 1930s and 1940s]. His first post was in Hilla province south of Baghdad. There he mixed with local notables, not Jews. He was most warmly received by ulama and Sufis; he was a regular attender at Thursday night dhikrs. He experienced no discrimination in Hilla. Discrimination came only from the Iraqi Min. of Health, which was strongly penetrated by Arab nationalists and Nazi sympathizers.

Through much of World War II Naji was posted close to the Syrian frontier where Arab nationalist feelings were strong. Friends and servants protected Naji against the machinations of a strongly nationalist local school teacher and local police chief. After World War II things got worse. The period leading up to the emergence of the Israeli state in 1948 saw a campaign of arrests and persecution of Jews on charges of Zionism and Communism. Naji had to be hidden by friends; later, when the persecution had died down, another friend saved him from a remote posting in the Kurdish mountains.

In the early 1950’s Naji’s vulnerable status as a Jew was constantly exploited by officials: adverse reports were made against his work; unfair duties were heaped upon him; there were trumped up charges of holding Zionist and Communist meetings. He was only rescued from arrest by an honest official. In 1955 he was dismissed from his post as a political undesirables. But still he stayed in Iraq. In the late 1950s he developed a very popular private practice in Amara in SW Iraq. In the 1960s he did the same in Baghdad, until the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and the Baathist coup of 1968 combined to make life for Jews intolerable. There were mass arrests, torture and public hangings. In 1970 he left Iraq.

What do we learn from this?

- We learn how integrated Dr. Naji was into Iraqi society.
- We learn how committed he was to serving the community.
- We learn how officials and networks of Arab friends were concerned to save the Jewish doctor from persecution.
- We learn how he was so valued as a doctor by the Arabs of Amara and Baghdad that, despite the hostile atmosphere of the 1950s and 60s, he was able to conduct a thriving private practice.

Remove the politics from the situation and there was no reason for Jew not to be committed to serving Arab society and Arabs not to value the service and the company of Jews.

3. Muslim societies as patriarchal societies

That is societies in which women are at the mercy of their senior menfolk. We will explore this stereotype thought the life of Migdilm an elderly bedouin woman. Her story was told to Leila Abu-Lughod, a professor of anthropology at a New York university. It was told in the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

Migdilm belonged to the Awlad Ali nomads who lived in the region to the west of Alexandria in Egypt. By the second half of the 20th century they were no longer tent-dwelling nomads but had settled in villages along the coastal road to Libya. As in Kuwait transport was less likely to be a camel than a Toyota truck.

- One story told by Migdilm tells of how she resisted marriages her father tried to arrange for her. The first person arranged for her was her first cousin.

"He was my father’s brother’s son," she said, "and I didn’t want him. He was old and he lived with us. We ate of the
same bowl. His relatives came and slaughtered a sheep, and I started crying, I started screaming. My father had bought a new gun. He said, "if you don't shut up, I will send you flying with this gun".

Migdim fled the family encampment and sat by a ravine. She prayed that jins would possess her. She was there for days on end without food. After 12 days she returned to find her cousin's female relatives finishing her new tent. They were dying the black strip at the top. She grabbed the pot of dye and covered herself with it. Neither demonstration of resistance moved her father. So she ran away to her maternal uncle's family. His wife took her in and explained the problem to her husband. The maternal uncle sent her back the following day asking her father as a favour to postpone the wedding. Perhaps in time Migdim would come round. Six months later, the marriage to her father's brother's son was raised again. Migdim started screaming. The matter was dropped. Migdim resisted two further attempts to arrange marriages for her. It was only on the fourth attempt that she accepted that bread and salt were running between her and the man proposed for her.

- In a second story concerning the birth of her youngest son Migdim illustrates her independence and courage. She didn't like having people around her when she gave birth. As soon as she felt the first contractions, she left the tent with her husband, children and other women inside. After the sun went down, they called her in to have supper. She did not want any.

"I scooped out a hole in the sand and sent to sit by it," she said, "I brought out a straw mat and a donkey's pack-saddle, and I put them down and sat on them, outside by the corner of the tent. When the labour pains hit me, I'd hold onto the guy rope's tension bar. One hand between my legs and one holding on to the rope above. The sheep came home after sunset, close to the time of evening prayers, just as the child was coming out... When the child broke through I lifted myself up by the pole, lifted my clothes up until the child dropped."

- A third set of stories tell of the influence Migdim wielded in her family from middle age onwards. She was helped by the early death of her husband and other senior male relatives. After World War II the Awlad Ali made a living from the scrap metal of el-Alamein and other battles. Her brother-in-law was blown up by a mine; the shock killed her husband and her father-in-law. After this, her sons came to consult Migdim about most family affairs. The anthropologist tells of how they would often spend the evening with her, or drop by during the day. In this situation: she refused to support a daughter's marriage of which she disapproved; she hid her daughter when she ran away from her husband's family; soon there was a divorce - she attacked her sons when they took second or third wives.

"You idiot!" she told one. "Bringing together many women is no good, everything's a mess. That's because you have too many women. Each one says, "It's not my responsibility. I won't pick it up. Let someone else do it."

4. The oil-rich Arab dedicated to material progress.

As I am sure you know, different images of the Arab jostle for attention in confused European minds: there is the romantic Arab of deserts, dates and camels - an image much fostered by Western orientalism in the C19 and by the Western film industry in the C20; there is the Arab of Arab nationalism - the Arab of a thousand TV news bulletins, a Gamal Abdul Nasser or a Yassir Arafat; and there is the oil-rich
Arab - I fear that if you asked the average European about the ideas they associated with the word Arab, most would say oil, money and material possessions.

I will explore this stereotype in the context of Ahmad, a Kuwaiti pearl diver, who told his story in 1973 to Nels Johnson, an anthropologist at Richmond College, London.

At the turn of the century, pearl diving was a major industry in the Gulf. 800 boats sailed out of Kuwait; over 80,000 people were employed in the industry in the Gulf region. During the C20 it was steadily marginalized by the introduction of the cultured pearl and by the arrival of alternative ways of making a living with the emergence of Kuwait as a major oil economy.

Ahmad came from a poor clan of a major Kuwaiti tribe. Most of his relatives were nomads - herders or fishermen. Kuwait town before the oil-boom offered a limited range of occupations. Most of the crafts such as gunsmithing, metal-working, boatbuilding were run by families who guarded access to them. Only pearl fishing offered opportunities. Pearl fishing was a dangerous and unpleasant occupation in a variety of ways:
- it was a gamble; the only return was the profit from selling pearls; this was divided unequally between backer, ship owner, deckhand and diver; costs were removed before any profit was shared; at the end of a season all could find themselves in debt. The whole system was knitted together by debt, by a man's obligation under law to work until his debt was paid, and by his children's obligation to pay off any inherited debt.
- it was unpleasant work; it was undertaken at the hottest time of the year (June - Sept110 F); the boats were out for 4 months at a time; men were crowded up to fifty to a boat with lots of gear and only a bit of canvas for shelter from the sun; there was the ever-present stink of rotting oyster.
- it was dangerous work; Ahmad was a diver making 30-40 dives a day up to 100 feet under water and using the simplest equipment of a noseclip, a basket for oysters and a knife; he risked many dangers - loss of hearing, skin diseases, parasites, malnutrition, sharks, jelly fish etc.

Ahmad worked as a pearl fisher for 20 years, fished in the off-season and made enough money to marry, bring up 3 sons and pay off his debts. He claimed that he would have continued to dive even after his debts were discharged, but was prevented from doing so by loss of an eye. He liked the excitement of diving. But he also believed that there was nothing wrong with honest labour. He was strongly opposed to the oil-boom developments in post World War II Kuwait and other Gulf states. He was strongly opposed to the way in which the vast majority of people began to live in great and often subsidized comfort, while manual labour came to be performed by immigrant labour, and came to be despised. Ahmad's sons were rich; they had several cars each. That their father had been a pearl diver and still fished for a living was an embarrassment to them. When Ahmad was asked why he preferred the bad old days of the Kuwaiti pearl industry to the present, he replied that it had not been exploitative. All involved in the industry (backers, shipowners, divers) took risks and shared them. While debts were debts; it was a matter of honour that they were paid.

What do we learn from this?

Ahmad was caught between two worlds. He was suffering in cultural terms the equivalent of the 'bends', the illness divers suffer from when brought to the surface too quickly i.e. when forced to change environments too quickly. But equally he was a voice speaking in opposition to the stereotype of the oil-rich consumerist Arab.

Conclusion

Here we have four life-stories of ordinary people, that is people normally thought of as being without a voice in history. Their stories, and on occasion their voices, undermine and erode Middle Eastern stereotypes widely accepted in the West:
- the stereotype of the passive harem slave is given a sound knock by the feisty performance of Shensigull, the Circassian slave taken to Egypt.
- the stereotype of mutual hatred between Arab and Jew is countered by the life of Dr. Naji, the Jewish doctor in Iraq: he was a man committed to Iraqi society and one with many Arab friends and clients.
- the stereotype of a powerless woman in a patriarchal Muslim society is gainsaid by Migdim the bedouin. She was able to influence marriage choices and speak for the women of her family.
- the stereotype of the oil-rich Arab bent on material consumption is denied by Ahmad the Kuwaiti who hankered after the old days of pearl diving.

Among the many problems of stereotypes are that they simplify and dehumanize difference. They hide the infinite variety of human ways. They conceal the common humanity which we share. Moreover, they often come to have a life of their own quite unrelated to any reality. But, by engaging with the lives of real human beings we learn that matters are rather more complicated than stereotypes might suggest. Stereotypes tend to hinder rather than to help the advance of understanding between different societies and cultures.
The Architecture of Kuwait: Lost Identity is to be commended taking on the Herculean task of making an analytic film survey of Kuwait architecture, both early and modern. This film attempts, within the limits of time imposed by the genre, to examine the tradition of the architecture of Kuwait and to assess the failure of successive styles to meet the social, environmental, and aesthetic requirements of the country. It also discusses the various phases of experimentation and seeks a solution to the dilemma.

The following is a summary of the film:

Serious efforts were begun to preserve old buildings carrying the original architectural quality, as well as to find a modern form and style which was suitable to the Kuwaiti environment. The film begins, therefore, with a brief summary of traditional Kuwaiti architecture, noting Kuwait's historical commercial position, its harbours, and the network of roads which converged on al-Safat square, the main link between land and sea.

"The city derived its beauty from the simplicity of its nature and the uniformity of its architectural fabrics. Houses were comprised of one floor, which reflected the simplicity of life. The colour of natural mud prevailing in the houses, the painting of some houses with white gypsum and the rare use of decoration on some imported doors from India gave the city a uniform local outlook. Simplicity and uniformity of architecture catered, at the same time, to the climatic, commercial, and social needs of the people. Building materials, such as mud and sea rocks, were local, while wood, imported from Africa and used for building ceiling beams (chandeliers), contributed [by the basic uniformity of the length of the mangrove tree] to limiting the width of rooms and giving the same dimensions in most houses."

The relative uniformity that characterized old Kuwait was not, nevertheless, rigid. Architectural methods of adjacent countries, as well as those with strong commercial ties such as India, Britain, and the United States of America, made a marked influence.

Examples of this influence, such as the Dickson House, the buildings of the American Mission Hospital complex, and the British Embassy, reflect strong affinity with the local surroundings. Despite the various architectural methods applied in erecting these buildings, a sense of harmony with the surrounding buildings was created through use of colour and materials.

With the advent of oil, architecture in Kuwait entered a new phase. In the name of development, houses were demolished. Kuwaitis deserted their homes to live in new houses designed by architects unfamiliar with Kuwait's architectural identity and environment. Kuwait's architectural identity began to be lost.

The success and failure of various organizations in Kuwait to realize architectural aims and preserve the architectural tradition of Kuwait, as well as to conserve old historic buildings, was iterated. Much of modern Kuwait architecture was criticized as being architecturally poor and not reflective of Kuwaiti stylistic heritage. The buildings of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), the Kuwait Development Fund, and the Sabah al-Salim Foundation, however, received praise for their utilization of Kuwait's architectural qualities in a modern way.

The film closed with the difficult matter of solutions. Rather than accept chaos as normal, Kuwait should extend its many facilities towards developing an objective and clear architectural line which returns it to harmony with its environment. This film is a first attempt to address a persistent question of how architecture should reflect the cultural vernacular and historic composition of Kuwait.

The Architecture of Kuwait: Lost Identity: a production of KTV 1995
Research by the architects, Mohammed Abdulkadir and Sa'id al-Saghi
Music by Saleman al-Deg'an
Edited, filmed, and directed by Habib Hussein from Kuwait TV
“Early Sources on Kuwait”

Murtada b. ‘Ali b. ‘Alwan and Carsten Niebuhr

An Arab and a German Report from the Eighteenth Century

by

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Haarmann

Since reviving its lecture series after liberation, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah has been encouraging scholarship in the field of Kuwaiti history and related studies. The efforts of researchers have yielded promising results. Historical documentation that was thought not to exist is being uncovered. One of the most surprising of these findings was a pilgrimage report dating to the year 1709. This is the oldest known piece of written original source material confirming Kuwait’s existence as an important and thriving entity at least as early as the beginning of the 18th century. It was previously assumed that Carsten Niebuhr’s account in 1772 was the oldest.

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Haarmann of Christian-Albrechts University at Kiel in Germany visited Kuwait in April 1994 to give his paper based upon both these sources. “Early Sources on Kuwait: Murtada b. Ali b. Alwan and Carsten Niebuhr - an Arab and a German report from the eighteenth century,” was presented in a lecture for Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah in the auditorium of the Abdullah al-Salem Secondary School in Shuab. His Excellency, Dr. Gunter Mulack, Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait, attended, and special thanks were extended to him for facilitating the lecture.

The following is an abridged version of that lecture.

The oldest two reports in which the port city of Kuwait is mentioned with its actual name of Kuwait both have to do with Germany, in one way or the other; the first - to be true - only accidentally, the other, however, very directly. In the following I will present and portray these two sources, one Arabic, one German, which are significant for the history of Kuwait in the eighteenth century.

The first text is an early eighteenth-century travelogue by a Syrian hajj (on this text see my two brief communications: a. “Murtada b. ‘Ali b. ‘Alawan’s Journey Through Arabia in 1121/1709,” Studies in the History of Arabia, vol. I: Sources for the History of Arabia, Part 2, Riyadh: University Press 1399/1979, 247-51). This brief report of only fourteen folios has, to my knowledge, remained virtually unknown to this date even though it seems to be the far oldest text to mention Kuwait. The reason for this neglect by European and Arab researchers alike is patent. This inconspicuous text (Berlin collection of Arabic manuscripts, Ashwardt # 6137)
venerable tradition in this family of Sayyids.

Murtada b. ‘Ali undertook the pilgrimage to Makka in Shawwal 1120/1709 as a member of the pilgrims’ caravan of Aleppo (al-rukh al-halabi) in the company of two elder relatives of his, the brothers Zayn al-Abdin and Jamil al-Din, whom our author evidently held in great esteem (102b).

Murtada must have been born around 1660. He mentions a first pilgrimage to Makka he performed in 1088/1677, at a time, when he probably was roughly fifteen to twenty years old. We do not know the date of his death. His travelogue was written down during Nasuh’s governorship, on whom he refuses the eulogies of ruling dignitaries, i.e. before the end of 1713. The fact that Murtada expresses his hopes of making a third hajj at a later date may be interpreted as a sign of good health of the then roughly fifty-five year old man.

Certainly Murtada’s status as a Sayyid was source of constant awareness and unconcealed pride to him. Murtada’s eagerness in seeing the shrines of the noblest descendants of the Prophet is a blessing for us historians. This diligent search for as many atabat as possible led him from his home town of Damascus not only to the Holy Cities of Medina and Makka, but furthermore to the Iraqi pilgrimage route (Texts and Studies on the Historical Geography and Topography of Central and South Arabia. Collection and Reprinted) right across Najd in the Arabian peninsula to the Gulf and further on to the maskahid in Iraq and Iran. And it is along this route that our zealous traveler also come to Kuwaity. Having spent three and a half weeks in al-Hasa under the tutelage of his spiritual brethren to recover from an accident he had suffered in the desert, Murtada left his interesting and fertile town, on which he gives us numerous details, and reached Kuwaity fifteen days later on 19 Jumada I 1121/27 July 1709. Let me give you his momentous brief passage on Kuwait in translation (113a-b):

“Fifteen days after our departure (sc. from al-Hasa) we came to a town (balad) named al-Kuwait, in the diminutive form (of al-Kut). It is a sizable town that resembles al-Hasa. To be true, it is smaller than al-Hasa, but in its buildings and towers it is its like. We had pilgrims with us from Basra who parted with us here in Kuwait and continued their journey on a road (darb) called al-Jahra.

The distance from Kuwait to Basra is four days, by boat it is even only one day, since the harbour is in the immediate vicinity of Kuwait (li-an-nha min al-bahr ila katif lil-Kuwait). Fruit, melons, and other victuals are brought to Kuwait from Basra by boat every day, for it is a port city (iskidat al-bahr). We stayed there one day and two nights and then, on the 20th of the month, moved on with God’s blessing in the direction of al-Najaf al-Ashraf. This town of Kuwait is also called al-Qurain. Before we reached it we had traveled along the coast of the sea for three consecutive days with the ships accompanying us (musayiratuna).
The harbor is directly adjacent to the town, without anything in between. All the cereals, i.e. wheat and others, arrive by sea because [Kuwait’s] soil does not allow for agriculture; even date-palms do not grow there nor any other tree. Nevertheless prices are lower there than in al-Hasa because so much is transported here from Basra and elsewhere.

A few comments on this brief text are appropriate. First and foremost, it is the oldest source altogether to give the name of your city and country. And this oldest reference is not to be found on a European map or in a European travel report, as has been believed until now (B.J.Slot, The Origins of Kuwait, Leiden: Brill 1991, 101, 105), but in an Arabic pilgrim’s report. The opinion given by previous historians of Kuwait, namely that there is no contemporary literature available in Arabic on the critical phase of Kuwaiti history (Abu Hakima, The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965, London 1983, ix, x) in the first half of the eighteenth century, has felicitously turned out to be premature. And there is an additional asset to Murtada’s travelogue. He actually visited Kuwait (in the hottest season of the year, incidentally) and stayed there for some thirty to forty hours. His remarks are therefore not from hearsay alone, but reflect his keen and personal observations. Kuwait appeared to him situated at an ideal geographical location at an important junction in the middle between al-Hasa in the south and Basra in the north. From Basra as well as other emporia in the region most of the food was imported to barren Kuwait because the traffic between the different harbours was so convenient. Twice Kuwait’s port (minat, iskilat) in the immediate vicinity to the town is praised as its most important asset. Also the village of al-Jahra is mentioned, or rather, to be more precise, the way to al-Jahra. Al-Hasa, on the other hand, seems to have been, at that time, some kind of big sister city to Kuwait. The architecture of the two towns was similar, and in a sense they both even shared their name. For in al-Hasa (modern Hufuf) the walled inner precinct of the city (dakhil al-balad) was called al-kut, as Murtada tells us in his lengthy report on al-Hasa (113a). One used to say there during his visits: “Someone goes into the inner city” (dakhala fulan ila l-kut) or “someone comes from down-town” (kharaja fulan min al-kut) (113a), thus using the word kut (whose diminutive is kwait) as a generic term for a fortified town or inner district. To Murtada, Kuwait, that is, seems to mean a “small, compact and walled town”. This interpretation slightly differs from Father Anastas al-Karmali’s rendering who, on the basis of the dialects of southern Mesopotamia, at the beginning of this century, read kut as a “fortified large house preferably on a waterfront” (“Fitasmiyat madinat al-Kuwait”, in Al-Mashriq 7 [1904], 450; the reference to this article is given in Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakima, History of Eastern Arabia 1750-1800 , Beirut 1965, pp. 47, note 5; idem, The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965, London 1983, page 1, note 4). The important question, however, whether the Banu Khalid, lords over al-Hasa, also controlled Kuwait in summer 1121/1709 is unfortunately not addressed by our traveller, perhaps because this was a given to him, not deemed worthy of special mentioning. One last remark. Murtada mentions that during the time of his visit, Kuwait was known under two names, both of which give forms in the diminutive. One, Kuwait, the other, Qurayn. This Qurayn, as a synonym of Kuwait, in not unknown to us and now takes us directly to our second author, the German Carsten Niebuhr.

Unlike Murtada b. ‘Ali b. ‘Alwan, Carsten Niebuhr has not been unknown to the historians of Kuwait. Of the famous two works, written by Niebuhr, his description of Arabia (Beschreibung von Arabien, Kopenhagen 1772) and his three volume travelogue (Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Landern, Kopenhagen 1774, 1779, 1837), it is the former that interests us here most because it contains a famous passage on Kuwait which, until the discovery of Murtada b. ‘Ali’s report, was supposed to be the oldest text to mention the modern name of the country. Again I shall cite the full text (in the English translation given by Slot, 107-8; cf. Beschreibung, 341-2); the German original was first published in 1772, five years after Niebuhr’s return from the Orient.

“ Kuwait is a town and harbour 3 days journey from Zobeir or old
Bassra and not far from Chor Abkilah, a long estuary to the west of the mouth of the Shatt al Arab. The Persians, and in general the foreigners in the Persian Gulf, are mentioned by Pliny (book VI, 80) and Strabo (book XV, 885) as having 500 ships. The inhabitants of the town of Bassra are commonly referred to as the Bahraini, and with their pear-shaped boats, they navigate the waters of the Gulf. In 1020, the number of the inhabitants was estimated to be 10,000. The town is located on the coast of the Arabian Gulf, and the number of its inhabitants is estimated to be less than 3,000. The population of the town has experienced fluctuations, and the number of inhabitants is estimated to be around 3,000.

The island of Kufa, which is located in the Persian Gulf, is the likely site of the ancient city of Kufa. It was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate from 763 to 892. The island was reunified with the town of Bassra in 1825.

What Nishiki has to say on the etiquette and other activities of the Kuwaitis (see also Kuwait, and in particular the Kuwaiti sheikhs) is not very reliable, although we cannot be sure about this for the time being (Sei 05).

The island of Bassra is also mentioned in the works of the Kuwaiti sheikhs, and it was reunified with the town in 1825.

As has been said before, this text is not the only source of information on Nishiki’s travels. Other contemporary Western sources such as contemporary European sources such as the British doctor Edward Ten (of the Shatt al Arab) provide additional information on the travels of Nishiki and his contemporaries.
Before the discovery of Murtada’s travelogue, the particular importance of Niebuhr’s quotation for the history of Kuwait had rested in the use of the name Kuwait and in the equation of Grän and Kuwait. In both respects Niebuhr has now lost his first place to our Syrian explorer of the beginning of the eighteenth century. Still, the judicious Niebuhr remains a unique and inspiring source to this day. His curiosity, his scholarly mind, his self-discipline and indefatigable industriousness, his wide erudition (which other source on eighteenth century Kuwait would have come up with a reference to Plinyus?), but also his common sense and almost terse sobriety, so often demonstrated during his year-long travels, enhance his reports and provide them with an immense wealth of information, with critical depth and scientific accuracy. Criticism was the essential part of his discourse on the exotic and alien world of the Islamic Orient. Improbable stories are dismissed as legends, rumors rejected unless verified. Understanding the patterns of behaviour of the native people was the first requirement for the successful travel to Niebuhr. This attitude left refreshingly little space for stereotypes imported from the west nor for condescending righteousness towards the Muslims.

Niebuhr was trained as a mathematician and land surveyor. One may only want to mention his nautical chart of the upper half of the Red Sea, his map of the Yemen, but also, as has been said before, his exact and painstaking renderings of the cuneiform inscriptions in the Royal Palace of Persepolis, or his work on the pyramid of Chephren. Niebuhr was not alone on his expedition. He was accompanied by a famous botanist, a linguist, a physician and draftsman and copperplate engraver, at least in the initial stage of the expedition. The other four all died of particularly vicious variant of the Malaria endemic in the Tihama of the Yemen. This many-pronged approach to a new, alien and unknown culture was typical of Enlightenment Europe. It is to the credit of the Danish King Frederick V and his advisers, especially his foreign minister Count Bernstorff, chief of the so-called German Chamber in Copenhagen, to have made this momentous and costly expedition possible. Inspired by a questionnaire circulating in Europe, in which the biblical scholar Michaelis of the University of Gottingen had formulated questions about the unknown Arab-Muslim East, Count Bernstorff and his king were ready to fund such an undertaking. Denmark was ideal country to take such an initiative at this time. It was not affected by the incessant European wars of the mid-eighteenth century, and had only moderate economic and strategic designs in the region. Niebuhr who was chosen as one member of this team, knew how much he owed to the munificence of his patron. His travelogue again and again reflects respect and gratitude towards his sovereign. It was tragic that he was to be the sole [member of the team] to return safely to Denmark and to record his discoveries. The party left Copenhagen in January 1761; Niebuhr returned to Denmark almost seven years later in November 1767. The itinerary took him to Constantinople, Egypt, Jidda, the Yemen, Bombay and Surat in India, then - as has been mentioned - to Muscat, Southern Iran, Iraq, Syria, Cyprus, Palestine, Turkey, Walachia, Poland and his native Germany. In some places, such as Cairo (almost two years) and Bombay he stayed for many consecutive months, others he visited only briefly like a modern tourist. 

Niebuhr’s books, when they appeared briefly after his return from the Middle East, immediately became bestsellers; his geography was soon translated from the original German into other languages, French, Dutch and Danish. Goethe humbly asked for an autograph of Carsten Niebuhr’s and received twelve folios of Niebuhr’s then still unpublished remarks on Abyssinia. They are still to be found in Goethe’s library in Weimar.

A more detailed version of this subject by the same author will be published as part of in the proceedings of the seminar, Kuwait: The Development of Historic Identity, in which Prof. Dr. Ulrich Haarmann has participated at Peterhouse Theatre, Cambridge on 19 May 1995.