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**The Impact of Economic Activities on the Social and  
Political Structures of Kuwait, (1896-1946)**

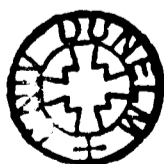
**By**

*Mostafa Ahmed Sagher*

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Institute for the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies**

**University of Durham**



OCT 2004

2004

## Abstract

The argument pursued in this study contends that the economic factor played a crucial role in determining the social formation of Kuwait and its subsequent political structure during 1896-1946. It is based on the belief that the social relations, which existed among the Kuwaiti people during that period, were greatly affected by the mode of production and its resultant relations of production in the pre-oil era.

This study, therefore, presupposes that the mode of production, its specific divisions of labour, patterns of ownership and relations of production significantly influenced the general development of the Kuwaiti social and political structures. Thus, it intends to investigate the nature of the prevalent modes of production, and to find out to what extent the demand to meet individual and social needs in the predominant modes of production in Kuwait determined the organization of production, propelled the development of the means of production, and thereby influenced social relations.

The thesis concludes that the components of the maritime and Bedouin economies in Kuwait represented essentially two modes of production embedded in one social formation. Kuwaiti social formation in the pre-oil era was structured by the combination of the semi-capitalist and the traditional modes of production in which the former was dominant in the sedentary community and the latter was prevalent in the desert. The most direct consequence of the predominance of these two modes of production was its contribution in providing the basis for a social structure characterized mainly by social stratification on an economic basis. These two modes of production formed a structure in which two unstable classes existed: 1) a dominant but not ruling class in the city (merchants and capital owners) and leading stratum in the desert (sheikhs and notables) and, 2) the mostly exploited stratum comprising the mass of the city dwellers and nomads. The existence of these economic classes which bear differential relationships to the means of production, however, did not dissolve the tribal, ethnical and sectarian framework of organization. On the contrary, it provided tribal, ethnical and sectarian patterns of organization to the labour and production in the society. Moreover, the existence of these classes did not provide the basis for class struggle or class conflict by which these classes could express their antagonism (which resulted from their differential relationships to the means of production) in political action.

## **Declaration**

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been previously offered in candidature for any other degree or qualification.

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## Dedication

*I dedicate this thesis to the affectionate memory of my father  
Ahmed Sagher (1938-1996)*

## Acknowledgement

I owe a great debt of appreciation to my supervisor Prof. Rodney Wilson for his insightful comments and positive suggestions during the course of my research. Prof Wilson's advice and guidance, indeed, helped to improve the quality of this study.

I am equally thankful to Dr. Philippa Martindale for her help in editing and proof-reading my thesis.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to those whose care and love enabled me to pursue my study: my mother, brothers and sisters for all their care and encouragement.

Finally my deepest, greatest and utmost appreciation and thanks are due to my wife, whose love and unlimited encouragement have helped me to finish this study.

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## Transliteration

The English transliteration system used in this thesis is a simplified version of the transliteration system used by Lorimer in the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (1915). The only exception is the letter (ع) which transliterated here as ('A) instead of ('). However, the consonants in this system are transliterated as shown below:

| Letter | Arabic | e.g.             | Letter | Arabic | e.g.              |
|--------|--------|------------------|--------|--------|-------------------|
| ا      | A      | <i>Azar</i>      | ض      | DH     | <i>Radhif</i>     |
| ب      | B      | <i>Badiya</i>    | ط      | T      | <i>Tawawish</i>   |
| ت      | T      | <i>Tabbah</i>    | ظ      | DH     | <i>Al-Nidham</i>  |
| ث      | TH     | <i>Mutalth</i>   | ع      | 'A     | <i>'Aqilat</i>    |
| ج      | J      | <i>Jammaleen</i> | غ      | GH     | <i>Al-Maghrib</i> |
| ح      | H      | <i>Ahmed</i>     | ف      | F      | <i>Fidawayeh</i>  |
| خ      | KH     | <i>Khalid</i>    | ق      | Q      | <i>Qaimmaqam</i>  |
| د      | D      | <i>Dirah</i>     | ك      | K      | <i>Katateeb</i>   |
| ذ      | DH     | <i>Al-Dhahab</i> | ل      | L      | <i>Dalul</i>      |
| ر      | R      | <i>Raddah</i>    | م      | M      | <i>Majlis</i>     |
| ز      | Z      | <i>Zanzibar</i>  | ن      | N      | <i>Nahham</i>     |
| س      | S      | <i>Salafiyya</i> | و      | W      | <i>Ghwas</i>      |
| ش      | SH     | <i>Shura</i>     | ه      | H      | <i>Heirfi</i>     |
| ص      | S      | <i>Subiyan</i>   | ي      | Y      | <i>Siyb</i>       |

It should be noted that there are some exceptions for well known names and terms which are left as they are and not subjected to this system (e.g. Ottoman Empire العثمانية Saudi Arabia العربية السعودية etc.).

## Glossary

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Akh</i>                         | Brother   |
| <i>Al-'Azaal</i>                   | A person who dives on his own and has his own puller on the pearling ships  |
| <i>Al-Brwah</i>                    | A written consent given by the diving ship's captain ( <i>nukhuda</i> ) whereby he allows his sailor to move to work for another <i>nukhuda</i> who in turn undertake to repay the sailor's debts |
| <i>Al-Darraboun or Al-Darareeb</i> | Beaters who fasten iron nails into the ship once the carpenters have finished their work  |
| <i>Al-Diyeen</i>                   | Small mesh of threads placed around the neck of the diver into which he collects oysters  |
| <i>Al-Fitam</i>                    | A clip the diver fixes on his nose to prevent the loss of air when under the water  |
| <i>Al-Ghwas</i>                    | Diver   |
| <i>Al-Khabat</i>                   | A piece of leather the diver places around his fingers while diving   |
| <i>Al-Khanchiyahh</i>              | The beginning of the diving season  |
| <i>Al-Khawah</i>                   | An insurance tribute given by inferior tribes and caravans to superior tribes in return for protection and safety of passage  |
| <i>Al-Kinah</i>                    | Hot summer  |
| <i>Al-Hajar</i>                    | A small piece of heavy lead which divers tie around their legs with ropes in order to help them dive deeper   |
| <i>Al-Hirat</i>                    | Pearl beds  |
| <i>Al-Galafah</i>                  | Building boats by connecting parts of the wood by using ropes   |
| <i>Al-Ghaws Al-Kabir</i>           | The main pearling season which lasted from June to September  |
| <i>Al-Idah</i>                     | A long rope used by the hauler to pull the diver  |
| <i>Al-Ja'adi</i>                   | Ship captain's deputy   |
| <i>Al-Jilban</i>                   | Water well  |
| <i>Al-Mazouri</i>                  | Coolies who carry wood for the boat builders  |
| <i>Al-Minda</i>                    | Pastures close to water sources   |
| <i>Al-Muqaddami</i>                | The sailor's chief  |

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Al-Nuq'a</i>                       | Shipyards  |
| <i>Al-Rafiq or Rafiq</i>              | Companion  |
| <i>Al-Shamshul</i>                    | The short that the diver wears during diving   |
| <i>Al-Salifa</i>                      | Diving courts  |
| <i>Al-Sifr</i>                        | Travelling by sailing ships  |
| <i>Al-Tartor</i>                      | A cap placed around the head of the diver  |
| <i>Al-Zaibal</i>                      | A rope used by the hauler in order to pull the lead after the arrival of the diver to the basin  |
| <i>Al-Wajeh</i>                       | (Literally face; honour) a sign given to a caravaner or a traveller meaning that he is under the protection of the tribe who gave him the sign |
| <i>Al-Waleed</i>                      | Apprentice or a small boy who serves boat builders   |
| <i>Al-Wasm or Al-Thagh</i>            | A mark used to distinguish the Bedouins' animals in the pastures   |
| <i>'Amayer</i>                        | Stores of shipbuilding raw materials   |
| <i>'Ardah or Al-'Aialah</i>           | Special dances performed by the Bedouin tribesmen  |
| <i>'Aqilat s. g 'aqial or 'aqialy</i> | A group of people specialized in buying animals from the Bedouins and selling them in the markets of the cities                                |
| <i>'Aulama</i>                        | Religious scholars   |
| <i>Azar</i>                           | A piece of cloth that was wrapped around the bottom half of the hauler's body.   |
| <i>Badiya</i>                         | Bedouin's homeland   |
| <i>Baharna</i>                        | People of Bahraini origin  |
| <i>Ba'aier</i>                        | A male baggage camel   |
| <i>Bani</i>                           | Sons of  |
| <i>Beisri or khadiri</i>              | Non-origin or descendant of non-known tribe  |
| <i>Bin or Ibn</i>                     | Son  |
| <i>Buda'aah</i>                       | A joint investment between a merchant and a cameleer   |
| <i>Dalul</i>                          | The best riding camel  |
| <i>Dirah</i>                          | Tribal territory   |
| <i>Diwaniyeh</i>                      | A place attached to the house and designed to be used as forum by men  |
| <i>Fukhd</i>                          | Subdivision of clan (group of families)  |
| <i>Fakhin</i>                         | An iron pickaxe  |
| <i>Fatayil</i>                        | Cotton used to fill spaces between the wooden boards of the  |



|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
|                               | ship   |
| <i>Fidawayeh: s.g.fidawi</i>  | Guards of the ruling family sheikhs  |
| <i>Gallaf: p. Galalif</i>     | Boat-builder   |
| <i>Grane or Grain</i>         | A diminutive form of the Arabic <i>qarn</i> meaning a small hill                         |
| <i>Heirfi</i>                 | The first trip of the Kuwaiti trading ships to Basra                                     |
| <i>Harim</i>                  | Women  |
| <i>Jammaleen</i>              | Cameleers, organizers of the trade caravans  |
| <i>Karah</i>                  | A unit of weight used for weighing dates   |
| <i>Katateeb</i>               | Religious circles  |
| <i>Khamamis</i>               | A system of funding in pearling (means fifths)   |
| <i>Kharajiya</i>              | An amount of money given to sailors when the ship arrives at one of the ports for rest   |
| <i>Khatabas</i>               | Marriage brokers   |
| <i>Kut</i>                    | A small fortress   |
| <i>Iqjimmah</i>               | Ten dives  |
| <i>Ifdan</i>                  | Plough   |
| <i>Majidiyyat</i>             | Ottoman currency   |
| <i>Majlis</i>                 | Council  |
| <i>Mann</i>                   | A unit of weight used in Kuwait  |
| <i>Masah</i>                  | Axe  |
| <i>Miflaq</i>                 | Metal tool to open oysters   |
| <i>Mu'allim</i>               | Shipwright who accompanied trading ships   |
| <i>Musaqqam</i>               | The financier of the pearling trip   |
| <i>Nabati</i>                 | The Kuwaiti vernacular literature  |
| <i>Nahham</i>                 | A singer on board the pearling ships   |
| <i>Nukhuda</i>                | Ship's captain   |
| <i>Raddah</i>                 | A small pearling season which lasted from 10 to 15 days after the end of the main season |
| <i>Radhif</i>                 | The hauler's assistant   |
| <i>Raes Al-Galalif</i>        | Boat builders' master  |
| <i>R'ai al-bel</i>            | Camel herdsman   |
| <i>Ramadan</i>                | Muslim's fasting month   |
| <i>Rudaydah</i>               | A small pearling season which lasted for few days after <i>raddah</i>                    |
| <i>Qabili, asil or sharif</i> | Noble or a descendant of a well known tribe  |

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Qadhi</i>                    | Judge   |
| <i>Qaimmaqam</i>                | District-governor   |
| <i>Qintarah</i>                 | Funding system in ship building industry  |
| <i>Salafiyya</i>                | A system of funding in pearling (means advances)  |
| <i>Shari'a</i>                  | Islamic law   |
| <i>Shawawi</i>                  | Sheep herders   |
| <i>Shonah</i> or <i>Al-Wadk</i> | Tallow  |
| <i>Shura</i>                    | Consultation  |
| <i>Sil</i>                      | A fish oil used for painting the bottom of boats  |
| <i>Sirdal</i>                   | The leader of the pearling ships known as the prince of diving  |
| <i>Siyb</i>                     | Hauler or puller  |
| <i>Subiyan</i>                  | A group of apprentices working for a cameleer and accompany the caravan   |
| <i>Suheil</i>                   | A star used by pastoralists as a sign to the end of summer  |
| <i>Sukkani</i>                  | Helmsman  |
| <i>Suq</i>                      | Market  |
| <i>Tabab</i>                    | A young boy of seven to ten years whose task was to offer services such as water, food and tea on board the pearling ship |
| <i>Tabbah</i>                   | Dive  |
| <i>Tawawish</i>                 | Pearl merchants   |
| <i>Tisqam</i>                   | Pocket money given to sailors, in anticipation of their diving for the same captain the following year                    |
| <i>Tiwashah ships</i>           | Special ships used by <i>tawawish</i> during the pearling season  |
| <i>Tujjar</i>                   | Very rich merchants   |
| <i>Ustadh</i>                   | Master-shipwright   |
| <i>Yaom Al-Rakbah</i>           | The first day of pearling   |
| <i>Yaom Al-Quffal</i>           | The return day from pearling  |
| <i>Zakat</i>                    | Alms  |
| <i>Zheiri</i>                   | The second trip of the Kuwaiti trading ships to Basra   |

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Studies concerning the economic history and social formation in Kuwait and other Gulf States, in the pre-oil era, are relatively new. There are, however, several studies which throw light on certain incidents that have a bearing on the question of economic and social history. These are concerned either with a specific period of time or with the whole area of the Arabian Gulf,<sup>1</sup> particularly after the discovery of oil, as the region is considered as one of the most productive areas for oil in the world.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the significance of this region to the contemporary world order, we understand little of the social dynamics and economic structures that have shaped and affected these societies. Most of the historical studies of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf region in general focus on its political history; in particular, with the history of ruling families and their political relations with Britain, and with the discovery of oil and the role of foreign powers in the area in the last century. Whatever the reasons for this fact, it is certainly true that to ignore the past of a society is to misunderstand the foundation on which the current reality rests. The recent urbanization and development of Kuwait and all the Arabian Gulf countries today is not just the result of the oil-based economy. It is also based on older traditional economies which had, and still have, their effects on different aspects of the inhabitants' lives.

It is, therefore, the intention of this work to turn away from the modern period and to look at the development of Kuwaiti society before the exploitation of oil, and to justify this emphasis by claiming that the particular nature of Kuwaiti and Arabian Gulf societies in general can only be fully realised by understanding their economic structures and social dynamics in the pre-oil. It is worth pointing out that history is not

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<sup>1</sup> The Arab states refer to the Gulf as the Arabian Gulf while Iran calls it the Persian Gulf. As this study is concentrating on Kuwait therefore, the term Arabian Gulf will be used in this research.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the study of Najat Al-Gina'ai, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait Bain Al-Harbain 1919-1939"[The Economic and Political Development of Kuwait in the Inter War Period, 1919-1939], Unpublished MA Thesis, (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University, 1972); the studies of Muhammed Ghanim Al-Rumeihi, *Al-Pitrol wa Tagheir Al-Ijtima' ai fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [Oil and Social Change in the Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Moassassat Al-Wahdah lil Nasher wa Al-Twazi'a, 1974), and *Qadhaia Al-Taghier Al-Saiysi wa Al-Ijtima' ai fi Al-Bahrian [Issues of Social and Political Change in Bahrain]* (Kuwait: Moassassat Al-Wahdah lil Nasher wa Al-Twazi'a, 1976).

only made by politicians but is rather an outcome of the movement of different social classes, and there is a continual historic movement that influences and effects the interaction among the economic, political and social systems of any society.

Hence, this study will concentrate on the economic activities in Kuwait before oil during the period 1896-1946 and their impact on the political and social life of Kuwaiti society. This study is based on the belief that the economic factor was the major pivot in the historic movement of the Kuwaiti society, and has played a crucial role in its social formation and its subsequent political and cultural structures.

The analysis used in this thesis is based on the belief that the social relations, which existed among the Kuwaiti people during that period, were strongly influenced by the mode of production which obtained in Kuwait before the discovery of oil. It contends that an understanding of that mode of production is essential to an understanding of the social, economic and political structures of the Kuwaiti society. It assumes that the developments of political and social structures of the Kuwaiti society must be rooted in shifts in modes of production.

Due to many ecological conditions —such as hot weather, scarcity of fresh water, low rainfall and poor soil— Kuwait, from its establishment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the discovery and export of oil in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, has practically no agriculture, and Kuwaiti people have had to make their living from other resources. The only resources available to them were maritime economic activities including pearling, the shipbuilding industry and seafaring, and herding and the caravan trade in the desert.

Accordingly, this study presupposes that these two different economic activities presented two different modes of production each having specific divisions of labour, patterns of ownership and relations of production. Naturally, each would have an effect on the general development of the Kuwaiti social and political structures.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The research problem centres on the economic factor's role in shaping the social formation and political structure of Kuwaiti society before oil production during 1896-1946. It is a study of how the most crucial aspects of social and political structures of

Kuwaiti society were determined. What is the role of economy in the Kuwaiti social and political developments? Were these developments affected by the predominant modes of production and their consequent relations of production? And on what basis were social differentiations and social strata in Kuwait formed? It is a study of how the social structure of Kuwait, which was characterised to some degree by division that had socio-cultural and sectarian roots,<sup>3</sup> was shaped further by economic factors and thus acquired an economic bases. And how were the Kuwaiti society's divisions gradually articulated along socio-economic lines?

The focus will be on how the predominant values, moral principles and social phenomena in Kuwait —during the period under investigation— were a result of the necessities imposed by the prevailing modes of production and their resultant relations; and to what extent the predominant modes of production had affected Kuwaiti's political and social life.

To carry out the task of investigating the research problem it is necessary to analyse closely the following aspects: the importance of the prevalent economic activities to different social groupings and divisions of Kuwaiti society during this period; the nature of the predominant modes of production; the division of labour and relations of production in these modes of production; and the impact of these modes of production on different aspects of Kuwaiti people's political and social life. Therefore, the main underlying themes of this study that will be an historical account based on the theory of modes of production and social formation.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The general purpose of this research is to study the prevalent economic activities in Kuwait during 1896-1946 in order to investigate how political and social structures of Kuwaiti society during this period were affected by the predominant modes of production and its resultant relations. This study presupposes that the dominant mode of production in a given society determines the nature of social relations to be found in that society. Therefore, this thesis intends to analyse and examine the nature of the predominant modes of production, and find out to what extent the demand to meet

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<sup>3</sup> The most important cleavages were: ethnic —between Arabs, Persian and slaves— tribal —between original (*sharif* or *asil* e.g. Utub, Bani Khalid) and non-original (*beisri* e.g. 'Awazim, Rashaidah,) and sectarian —between Sunni and Shi'aa.

individual and social needs in the predominant modes of production in Kuwait shaped the organization of production, propelled the development of the means of production, and thereby influenced social relations.

The study is concerned with the role of the economic factor in affecting different aspects of Kuwaitis' political and social life, and how this factor practically was the major one in shaping the Kuwaiti social structure. On this basis the research aims to analyse how the Kuwaiti society developed gradually from a simple social stratification to a hierarchical semi-class society along socio-economic lines.

The thesis, overall, proposes to explore the researcher's argument that, although the Kuwaiti society in the pre-oil era was characterised by divisions which had socio-cultural and sectarian roots, it developed gradually to a socio-economic division shaped by economic factors and acquired economic bases. On this basis, the study asks to what extent modes and relations of production affected the social, tribal and sectarian distinction that differentiated classes of producers and owners of means of production in Kuwait before the discovery of oil?

It is useful to mention at this point that the geography and natural environment of Kuwait outlines broadly the interplay of social forces that shaped the Kuwaiti society. The juxtaposition of arid desert and sea coast delineates two distinct lifestyles: nomadic and maritime; thus the desert and the sea come together to provide the stage and plot of the Kuwaiti society. In order to understand the social interplay between the nomads of the desert, who constitute an important part of Kuwait population, and the sedentary community in the city, an examination of the dynamical correlation between the productive forces within these two groups is crucial. The investigation will focus on questions whether or not Kuwait in the period 1896-1946 was a tribal society or a class-structured society that was based upon unequal relations of production; and if so what was the dynamic of class relations in the Kuwaiti society? Or did the Kuwaiti people remain attached to their tribal framework of organization despite the evolution that their lives had witnessed? And did their lives, in fact, become a mixture of urban features and a sense of belonging to the desert, with all its tribal customs and traditions? The analysis, then, will constitute the delineation of Kuwait's mode of production during the period under consideration.

### **1.3 Methodological Approach**

This study adopts an eclectic approach comprising several methodological and analytical tools.<sup>4</sup> Due to the nature of the research problem (which involves several aspects relating to traditional and semi-capitalist modes of production, transformation from one mode of production to another, and nomadic and sedentary social structures of Kuwait in a certain historical period), it is more appropriate to use a combination of analytical methods. But the overall theoretical framework is articulated from the perspective of economic history.

Historical, comparative, and class analyses are utilised in this study, but overall this thesis is based on investigations conducted by the mode of production approach. The mode of production approach stresses the importance of internal structures as the primary variable that explains socio-economic change and provides a set of conceptual tools by which the researcher attempts to reconstruct the modern history of Kuwait. The theoretical framework of this study lies in concepts of mode of production and class formation and it demonstrates that these concepts are susceptible to flexible and subtle applications. The use of mode of production, as a rigorously defined concept, together with the notion of social formation, as the empirical realization of social relations of production and social reproduction, is quite adequate to the task of analyzing the process of historical change. This study, thus, examines initially: can an analysis based on the mode of production and social formation be applied to the pre-oil Kuwait? Can it aid in understanding the historical process in the Kuwaiti society during the period studied?

This study is also based on investigations conducted by the historical method as it has evolved over the last half century. Before the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, history was written largely as a narrative and telling a story was all important; it is now written in an analytical way, where historians are concerned only with facts and not global generalization, questioning why did things happen as well as how and what were the consequences? Where historians were concerned to recall all that men did, they are now at pains to discuss the material basis of human existence, the limitation imposed by human geography, the mode of economic production, and distribution and accumulation

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<sup>4</sup> For more about the eclectic approach, see Jack C. Plano, Robert E. Giggs, and Helenan S. Robin, *The Dictionary of Political Analysis* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1980), p.42.

of capital. Equally, they are concerned with the functions and compositions of institutions, which have often led to unequal distribution of wealth, power and status. Besides the social institutions, there is a great interest in the social processes and social mobility.

Narrative remains the basis of history, an attempt to be impartial as far as possible in examining evidence without preconceived ideas of the judgements to be made, but the historian must be aware of the whole range of factors affecting change and pay attention to people of every class from nomads to sheikhs, from workers to aristocrats.

The historical approach is also used because the research analyses processes over time, the predominant economic activities, division of labour and relations of production within these economic activities and its accompanying political and social developments in Kuwait during the period 1896-1946.

A comparative approach is followed as a tool to identify agreements/disagreements between Arab and western historians, travellers and writers' points of view regarding different aspects of Kuwait's history. The point to be made here is that some western historians and writers were mistaken or influenced by western culture in interpreting some social aspects and religious principles of Kuwaiti and Arab society. Their lack of knowledge, in some cases, of the Arabic language and the incorrect translations were another reason for misunderstanding or misinterpreting some of the Kuwaiti words and terms. In this regard, and because the study involved Arabic resources, problems arose in both translation and transliteration of Arabic words and terms. Simplified systems of transliteration and glossary have been used in this thesis for written Arabic words; colloquial words have been spelt approximately as pronounced in Kuwait.

Class analyses is applied to investigate the nature of Kuwait social formation and class structure which emerged as a consequence of the prevalent modes and relations of production and which was also influenced and shaped by the role of economic factors.

The nature of this study, thus, necessitates the use of several methodological approaches and analytical tools as a means to understand all aspects of enquiry. These methodological tools will enable the researcher to carry out the tasks of providing sound



examination and explanation to the research problem and shedding some light on the economic and social history of the Kuwaiti society and its social values and phenomena.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

To the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first one to concentrate on the history of different social groupings of the Kuwaiti society in the pre-oil era and to investigate its social structure and political developments from an economic point of view.

This study is expected to contribute significantly in understanding the social, economic and political structures of the Kuwaiti society (and probably all the pre-oil Arabian Gulf societies in general, as they represent similar situations) by understanding the predominant modes and relations of production at that time. It will be more convenient to mention here that, although each sheikhdom of the Arabian Gulf sheikhdoms forms a separate political entity, they all share similar historical processes and their societies have some common social patterns. Thus, to study one sheikhdom one has to take into consideration the others. This study is also expected to provide the basis for a comparative study between Kuwait and Libya or even between Arabian Gulf region and North Africa in the pre-oil era as the inhabitants of these two areas had lived in a relatively similar geographical, environmental and economic situations where nomadism, caravan trade and some other handicrafts were widely practiced and resulting in similar social practices and phenomena.

The framework within which this study is situated is set by the belief that the mode of production in any society imposes a certain pattern of relations of production, and that these in turn provide the guidelines within which social and political relations develop.<sup>5</sup> By studying the mode and relations of production one, can identify the main components of the social structure, and many social values and moral principles can also be traced back to the necessities imposed by the mode of production and its resultant relations.

This study as whole, then, is a contribution to the historical and social studies of Kuwaiti society, emphasizing that history is not only made by politicians but is rather an outcome of the social interplay among different social classes of the society. So all the

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<sup>5</sup> This proposition is derived from the very valuable book of Muhammad Ghanim Al-Rumeihi, *Al-Pitrol wa Tagheir Al-Ijtima' ai fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [Oil and Social Change in the Arabian Gulf]*, p.18.

various social groupings of Kuwaiti society such as merchants, pearl divers, shipwrights, camel and sheep herders, and so on, have contributed in making the history of Kuwait and its development; a fact which has been generally neglected by many historical studies.

It is hoped, therefore, that a study of different economic activities, modes and relations of production in Kuwait during the period 1896-1946 will shed some light on the social phenomena, political and cultural developments of that society and the contribution of different social classes and groupings in its history and development during this period.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This thesis is both theoretical and empirical. At the theoretical level, it discusses only those theories, which analyse aspects of modes of production, articulation of modes of production, class and social formation.

At the empirical level, the relevant chapters discuss economic activities, modes of production and their impact on the political and social structures of Kuwait during the period 1896-1946. The focus will be on the role of the economic factor in the political and social developments of Kuwait.

With regard to the area of the study, it is important to note that the study will not be limited to the Kuwait State within its political boundaries but will include all social groupings within Kuwait city and all nomadic tribes that allied with Al-Sabah family and which were under their authority during the period under question. It should be born in mind that the boundaries of Kuwait were variable and use to increase and decrease, depending upon the strength of rulers of Kuwait and the prevailing regional situations. They expanded significantly during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (1896-1915) but subsequently contracted when Kuwait had lost two-third of its area in the 1920s.

These boundaries were finally demarcated in the famous conference of *Uqair* in 1922 with the participation of governments of Iraq and Najd.<sup>6</sup> The net effect was that Kuwait

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<sup>6</sup> Najd at that time was governed by Abdull Aziz Ibn Saud (usually known as Ibn Saud), who became the first king of the present Saudi Arabia. See the Arabic text of this conference in Mohammed Habib, *Al-'Alim Al-Arabi min Al-Muhit ila Al-Khalij [The Arab World from the Ocean to the Gulf]* (Cairo: Matba'at Al-Anglo-Al-Misria, 1971), p.10.

became smaller than it used to be in the time of Sheikh Mubarak and lost two-thirds of its area which has been added to the territory of Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, the governor of Najd at that time and the strongest ally of Britain in the region. More importantly is that, in spite of the demarcation of the boundaries between Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia in the *Uqair* conference in 1922, the three countries could not practically define the nationality of the nomadic tribes, which used to cross the boundaries according to the available rainfall and pasture, until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>7</sup> therefore the problem of to whom these tribes belonged was not determined by their staying within the political boundaries of the state but by their alliance with the ruler at war time and paying tribute (*zakah*) to him during peace time.

Hence, the study will not be concerned with the political boundaries of Kuwait but will concentrate on different social groupings that constituted the Kuwaiti society and were under the Al-Sabah authority, whether as a sedentary community in the city or nomadic tribes in the desert. It might be useful to mention here that the selection of Kuwait as an area of the study is justified because Kuwait is broadly typical of similar traditional societies in the area; therefore, understanding the historical development of the Kuwaiti society during the pre-oil era may help to understand other traditional societies in the region which represent similar situations. It might also form the basis for a comprehensive and comparative study for other similar societies in the Arab world.

The study will cover the most important period in the modern history of Kuwait from 1896 to 1946. During these fifty years Kuwait had witnessed great economic and political changes, which had in their turn greatly affected the social and cultural structures of the Kuwaiti society. The year 1896 is chosen as the starting point of the study because it represents the start of a new epoch in the modern history of Kuwait. In this year, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, who is widely regarded as the founder of modern Kuwait, seized power by assassinating his two half brothers Mohammed, the sheikh of Kuwait, and Jarrah, his assistant. This created a political opposition to his authority by the sons of his two assassinated brothers, together with the advisor of the former ruler, Yusif Al-Ibramim, who took refuge in Basra and asked for Ottoman's help to oust Sheikh Mubarak. Mubarak's fear of Ottoman's help to his opponents and his suspicion of Ottoman's desire to strengthen their influence in Kuwait made him turn to the British

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<sup>7</sup> Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.94.

for help; a decision which eventually brought Kuwait under British protection in 1899 and changed the history of Kuwait and the northern Gulf as a whole.

Regardless of the causes and reasons for this political development in Kuwait's modern history (which will be discussed in chapter three), it was the turning point in the historical development of the Kuwaiti society and widely influenced the dynamic of its economy as well as the nature of its social structure.

During the period under review, Kuwait had witnessed some important political events, which had their effects on the dynamic of its economic and social developments. These events were:

- A. The protection agreement between the British and Kuwait by which the sheikh of Kuwait receives an annually amount of money<sup>8</sup>. Hence, consequently, he had some financial independence from the dominant social forces. This fact practically affected the political/economic interdependence between the ruling family and the merchant class, which eventually resulted in this class leading the political opposition against the ruling family during the 1920s and 1930s, in spite of their political and economic alliance from the establishment of Kuwait in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- B. Kuwait entry into the British political protection linked it with the international mercantile capitalist system and made it possible for British steamers to arrive to the port of Kuwait. This greatly affected the shipbuilding and the commercial sea transportation by sailing ships and had a very great impact upon the development of these activities and different social groups who were dependant on them.
- C. During the reign of Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah (1917-21), the British imposed a naval blockade on Kuwait. Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah the second successor of Sheikh Mubarak showed more sympathy to the Ottomans during the First World War. He allowed the transport of supplies to the Turks and their supporters in Syria and Arabian Peninsula. As a result the British imposed a blockade on Kuwait to prevent the transport of supplies to their enemies.<sup>9</sup> This had a major impact on the economy of Kuwait, which negatively reflected on the economic

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<sup>8</sup> FO/371/149, 23rd January 1899. Also see *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961*, selected and edited by Ade L Bush, Internal Affairs, vol. 1 (London: British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1989), pp.116-17.

<sup>9</sup> Salah Al-'Aqqad, *Al-Tayarat Al-Siaysiah fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The Political Currents in the Arabian Gulf]* (Cairo: Matba'at Al-Anglo-Al-Misria, 1974), pp.226-27.

and social life of different social sedentary/nomadic groupings within Kuwaiti society.

- D. From 1921 to 1942 Kuwait had been under economic sanctions imposed by Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, (the governor of *Najd*) because of the customs problem between the two countries.<sup>10</sup> This, in its turn, had a great effect on the economy of Kuwait and different social classes of Kuwait.

In addition to the above events, the great depression of the 1929 and the emergence of the cultured pearl in Japan, which was the major reason for the decline of the pearling industry (the backbone of the Kuwait economy), had affected the economy of Kuwait, influencing and re-shaping different social aspects of the Kuwaiti society. This gives this period a special significance in the modern history of Kuwait and justifies its selection as particular period for the study.

The year 1946 substantially marks the beginning of Kuwait's entry into the era of the oil production and the end of the traditional economic activities. Thus, Kuwaiti society entered a new mode and relations of production; therefore the study will stop at this point.

## **1.6 Sources of Data**

In carrying out the research enquiry a number of data sources are utilised. The major sources are the following:

- 1- Published and unpublished material, largely those records of the British Foreign Office, the India Office and the Government of India Agencies in the Arabian Gulf which survive in the United Kingdom archives.
- 2- Published and unpublished material of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait including correspondences between British Political Agents and rulers of Kuwait and between the latter and some of the Kuwaiti nobles and merchants regarding different political, economic and social aspects of Kuwaiti society.
- 3- Primary sources both in English and Arabic languages, which are based on personal observation and were written by those who witnessed the events or

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<sup>10</sup> Najat, Al-Gina'ai, op. cit., pp.84-98.

were directly involved in some aspects of Kuwait political, economic and social life during the period under question.

- 4- Interviews with some of Kuwaiti merchants, shipwrights, divers, poets, etc. who lived in Kuwait during the period of study and participated in some of the economic activities. These interviews were conducted by the Kuwaiti historian Saif Al-Shamlan and broadcasted in a series of documentary television programmes in Kuwait during 1964-1968 and are kept as an oral source in the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait.
- 5- Available published and unpublished studies, i.e. books, journals, articles, etc. both in Arabic and English.

## **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into four sections encompassing from two to three chapters each.

**Section I** comprises two chapters:

Chapter two is a theoretical investigation reviews theories of modes of production, articulation of modes of production, class and social formation. This chapter presents also a few working definitions of the main concepts which will be employed in this study; outlines a model for the study of modes of production and social formation which will be applied to the case of Kuwait.

Chapter three reviews the historical background of the Kuwaiti society and sheds some light on the early historical and political developments of the Kuwaiti society. It contains a detailed analysis of the major events that have influenced the development of Kuwait from its inception up to the 1946.

**Section II** represented the first part of the main body of the thesis. It is concerned with the maritime economic activities (the semi-capitalist mode of production) and discusses three major areas: pearling (chapter four); shipbuilding industry (chapter five); and commercial sea transportation (chapter six).

Chapter four reviews the pearling occupation as a key element of the semi-capitalist mode of production. It discusses the pearling process and its ways of funding, and provides a detailed analysis about the ownership of means of production and the

distribution of gains (form of appropriation of the economic surplus). It also examines the division of labour and relations of production within this occupation and their impact on the general social structure of Kuwaiti society.

Chapter five analyses the shipbuilding industry as an element of the semi-capitalist mode of production and its specific combination of forces and relations of production which typify it. It contains a very useful discussion about the shipbuilding workers, its funding system, means of production and organisation of work. This chapter also pays special attention to the pattern of relations of production and the form of ownership within this occupation and its impact on the social structure of Kuwaiti society.

Chapter six discusses and analyses the commercial sea transportation and long distance trade as the third element of the semi-capitalist mode of production. Although the discussion in this chapter is based on investigations conducted by the historical method concentrating, on the nature of this economic activity, its workers, and ways of finance and distribution of revenues, this chapter pays more attention to the form of ownership and the pattern of relations of production within this occupation and its impact on the social structure of Kuwaiti society.

In **section III**, chapters seven and eight represent the second part of the thesis. These chapters are mainly concerned with highlighting the nomadic economic activities (the traditional mode of production).

Chapter seven, reviews agriculture and pastoralism which represent the first and most important element of the traditional mode of production. Although agriculture was practiced on a very limited basis in the oases, this chapter pays a considerable attention to the nature of ownership of means of production and the form of division of labour in this occupation which represented a semi-feudal system. This chapter provides also a detailed analysis of pastoralism which was the way of life of a considerable part not only of Kuwait but of Arabian Peninsula as a whole. It examines the economic base of the pastoral nomadic society, means of production and its ownership in pastoralism. It also analyses the nature of relations of production and division of labour in pastoralism and its impact on the social structure of the society.

Chapter eight outlines the importance of caravan trade as the second element of the traditional mode of production. This chapter presents an ample historical analysis of the Kuwait's caravan trade and the economic interactions between the settled and nomadic communities of the Kuwaiti society. It examines the contribution of the caravan trade —as a critical element of the traditional nomadic mode of production with its specific patterns of ownership and relations of production— in determining and affecting the social structure of Kuwaiti society.

In **section IV** chapters nine and ten represent the third and last part of the thesis. Chapters nine and ten discuss and analyse the impacts of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production on the social and political structures of Kuwaiti society.

Chapter nine examines the effects of the maritime semi-capitalist and traditional modes of productions on the social structure of Kuwaiti society during the period under investigation. The main task of this chapter is to trace to what extent the predominant social relations, traditions, customs and norms in the Kuwaiti society were affected by the prevailing modes of production and its resultant relations. This chapter also focuses on the role of the economic factor in determining the social structure of Kuwaiti society and forming the basis for social stratification on economic basis. Furthermore, this chapter analyses the dynamics of social stratification and class relations in Kuwaiti society. It investigates the impacts of these two modes of production on the family, the status of women, and the cultural production in Kuwaiti society.

Chapter ten undertakes the task of analysing the effects of the economic activities on the political structure of Kuwait during the period 1896-1946. It examines the developments of the political system in Kuwait. This chapter addresses the dynamics of the Kuwaiti political system and the impact of economic factors on the decision-making process. The major objective of this chapter is to ask how far the most crucial aspects of the political structure of the Kuwaiti society were determined by the predominant modes and relations of production?

In chapter eleven, the conclusion contains the thesis' summary and findings, the theoretical implications of the study and the recommendations for further research.



**Section I**  
**Chapter Two**  
**Modes of Production and Social Formation**  
**Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis**

## **2.1 Introduction**

In order to achieve the central aim of the study, that is to adequately analyse the historical economic development of the Kuwaiti society during 1896-1946 and to examine the role of the economic factor in shaping and affecting the social formation and political structure of Kuwaiti society, the main theme of the study is based on the theory of modes of production and social formation.

This chapter, therefore, elucidates the theoretical framework of the study in which empirical data can be employed to support a specific line of argument. It aims first, to review theoretical works about modes of production and social formation and offer a few working definitions of the main concepts which will be employed; and, second, to outline a model for the study of modes of production and social formation which will be applied to the case of Kuwait.

## **2.2 Mode of Production and Social Formation**

The contemporary debates on the theory of modes of production come from a Marxist perspective. The concept mode of production which, was first introduced by Karl Marx, is the key concept in historical materialism. So to start off, it would be useful to summarize some basic ideas of Marxist theory. This outline of the main ideas of Marxism, however, will focus more on the theoretical aspects than on how that theory has been and is applicable to projects for social change.

Marxism is a set of theories or a system of thought and analysis, evolved by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engles in the 19th century in response to the Western industrial revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism as the predominant economic system.

As a theory, Marxism is quite complicated as it involves three disciplines: philosophy, history, and economics.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of being a kind of philosophy, Marxism is also a way to understand history. In this sense, Marxism belongs to a kind of historicism called historical materialism, which shows that history, or social change, occurs via “human forces”, and not because of any other unknown non-human force that shapes events (e.g. God, destiny, etc). Historical materialism is “materialist” because it is interested in how humans have created material culture, i.e. tools, objects, the material things that people use to live their lives every day, and in how this material culture has formed the basis for historical change.<sup>2</sup>

The historical materialist view of history, therefore, emphasizes that the moving forces of social organizations —the forces that make change, that make “history”— are people and their tools, and the work that people perform with these tools. The tools are often referred to as “instruments of production”, or as “forces of production”. Historical materialism also emphasizes that human labour (people and how they use their tools) always has a social character. People do not live in isolation, they live in social groups, and they always organize their social groups in some way (e.g. having some form of administration or organization). What every social group organizes, according to the historical materialist perspective, is how people work with their tools, or, in other words, how human labour and forces of production operate. The organizations that shape how people use their tools (the forces of production) are called the “relations of production”. *The relations of production* (how people relate to each other, and to their society as a whole, through their productive activity) and *the forces of production* (the

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1 Marxism is a philosophical movement, Marx's ideas about human nature and about how we know and function in the world come from traditions articulated by Hegel, Feuerbach, Kant, and other German philosophers. All of these thinkers, including Marx, are interested in the relation between materialist and idealist philosophy. As a philosopher, Marx helps create and define a branch of philosophy called Dialectical Materialism. Materialism in general is the branch of Western philosophy from which science (Aristotelian or Newtonian) comes. Materialist philosophy is based on empiricism, on the direct observation of measurable or observable phenomena; materialist philosophy is interested in studying how the human mind, via the senses, perceives external reality, and particularly with the idea of how we know things “objectively,” without the interference of emotions or preconceived ideas about things. Materialist philosophy often wants to ask how we know something is real, or, more specifically, how we know that what is real is real, and not the product of our mental processes (which are subjective). See Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1914), pp.2- 47.

2 Isaiah Berlin, “Historical Materialism”, in: *Karl Marx*, edited by Tom Bottomore, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1979), pp.56-60. Charles Sackrey & Geoff Schneider, *The Marxist System*, in: [URL:http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gschnedr/marxweb.htm](http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gschnedr/marxweb.htm) (6. 7. 2002).

tools, and methods for using tools, and the workers available to use these tools) together form what historical materialism calls a “*mode of production*”.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the contemporary debates on the theory of modes of production have their theoretical lineage in Marx’s works (in particular in volume 1 of *Capital*<sup>4</sup>), where Marx analysed in detail only one particular mode of production, the capitalist mode of production, but for the concepts of other modes of production he merely gave a series of brief and partial indications, which were mostly in the form of illustrative comparisons designed to highlight certain features of capitalism.

The starting point of Marx is that history is not a record of wars, monarchs or great statesmen, but that it is rather a record of how individuals organise themselves to satisfy their material needs for food, shelter and clothing, from the most simple hunting society to the most advanced industrial society. The materialist conception of history (of Marx) starts from the principle that production, and with production the exchange of its products, is the basis of every social order; that in every society in history the distribution of the products, and with it the division of society into classes or estates, is determined by what is produced and how it is produced, and how the product is exchanged. This economic base of society, or the “mode of production” as Marx called it, is therefore the most powerful force in determining the structure of human society<sup>5</sup>. The production of material goods is characterised by two key features: 1) *the means of production*, which include factories, land, capital, labour, machinery, scientific and technical knowledge etc, all of which are used in producing material goods, and 2) *relations of production*, which simply refers to the social relationships people enter into to produce goods.<sup>6</sup>

The means and relations of production are seen to make up a society’s particular mode of production. To a degree, the two criteria overlap, but it is the specific manner in which direct producers and means of production are combined that in Marx’s words,

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<sup>3</sup> Z. A. Jordan, *Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), pp. 225-27. Also S.H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.17-24.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp.914-30.

<sup>5</sup> Jordan, op. cit., pp.177-81. G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.63.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social philosophy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), pp.67-72. Rigby, op. cit., pp.17-23.

distinguishes the different economic epochs of the structure of society from one another. That is to say, which differentiates one mode of production from another.<sup>7</sup>

In his comprehensive study of human history as a historian, Marx found that the social activity of production took many different forms, depending on the prevailing forms of social organization and existing techniques of production. In his analysis of these various modes of production, Marx noted that European society passed through a number of different stages, including primitive communalism, slavery, and feudalism, on its way to capitalism, which is not the last economic system but will yield to some other mode of production in the future.<sup>8</sup>

Marx argues that means of production are the key element in the production process and the main factor in determining the form of any particular set of social relationships. Accordingly he divided societies as follows:

*Pre-industrial societies* (slavery and feudal societies) based on pre-agricultural forms of labour process or on agricultural land. In these societies “means of production” were land, peasant labour, simple technology and livestock and their resultant “relations of production” were between landlords and serfs/peasants.

*Capitalist society* based on industrial production. “Means of production” in this society are: capital, labour, factory, complex technology/knowledge and its “relations of production” are between bourgeoisies (capital owners) and proletariats (wage workers).

*Primitive community and socialism*, for Marx, these two societies are based on equality as no one owned anything in the primitive community and there was equality amongst its members, while socialism would be a utopian system when the class society will disappear and all the people will have an equal relationship to each other and to the means of production.<sup>9</sup>

Marx sees capitalism as a mode of production emerging from feudalism, which is how labour and life were organized during the medieval period in Europe. He focuses on capitalism as an unequal mode of production, which exploits workers, just as the slave state exploited slaves. According to Marx, this inequality is a fundamental aspect of capitalism, and needs to be changed (through dialectical struggle). Eventually, Marx

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<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol.2, pp.36-37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp.126-34 also Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Marx, *Selected Writings*, pp.67-72. Also Cohen, op. cit., pp.79-87.

says, the internal tensions and contradictions of capitalism will eventually destroy capitalism, and capitalism will evolve into socialism. Socialism, for Marx, is the end result of all this economic evolution (history). It would be a utopian mode of production, and would then just remain forever without evolving into something else.<sup>10</sup>

Marx's analysis of capitalism leads to a third dimension of Marxism, Marxism as an economic theory. This is the analysis of how capitalism, as an economic system, operates. It is based on an examination of how the forces and relations of production work. In a factory, for example, a worker performs labour on raw materials, and thus transforms those raw materials into an object; in this process, the labourer adds something to the raw materials so that the *object* (raw material and labour) is worth more than the original raw material. What the labourer adds is called "*surplus value*", in Marxist theory. While the labourer is paid for the work he does, that payment is figured in terms of "*reproduction*"; that is what the labourer will need in order to come back the next day (e.g. food, rest, shelter, clothes, etc.), and not in terms of what value the labourer added to the raw material. The goal of capitalist production is to sell the object made, with its surplus value, for more than the cost of the raw materials and the reproduction of the labourer. This excess in value (in price) comes from the surplus value added by the labourer, but it is "owned" by the capitalist; the factory owner gets the profit from selling the object, and the labourer gets only the cost of his "reproduction" in the wages he earns.<sup>11</sup>

These relations of production, where the labourer does the work and the owner gets the profit from the surplus value created by the labourer, create two social classes according to Marx: the proletariat,<sup>12</sup> which consists of the workers who have to sell their labour power in order to survive, and the owners of the means of production, or capitalists.<sup>13</sup>

Marx claims that the relations of production constitute the "*base*" of society, which, for Marx, is simply production —it is economics— (the forces and relations of production). By the way production is organised it shapes all other things in society and determines the nature of society's "*superstructure*" which is everything else in society not directly

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen, op. cit., pp.175-77.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp.181-85.

<sup>12</sup> The proletariat is an old German word meaning "worker". David Robertson, *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), p.112.

<sup>13</sup> John G. Taylor, *From Modernization to Modes of Production: A Critique of the Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p.109.

involved in production (e.g. the state, the family, education, religion, mass media, legal system, etc). These reflect the ideological interests of the ruling class and therefore legitimate the economic base. The *superstructure* of society is built on the *base* and therefore is shaped by it. From Marxist perspectives, the forces of production and the social relationships of production form the economic basis of society. The other aspect is known as superstructure. Thus, the political systems, education, beliefs and values are primarily determined by economic factor. A major change in the base will therefore produce a corresponding change in the superstructure. Putting it simply, the economic structure (forces and relations of production) determines the superstructure of society (culture, politics, consciousness, etc).<sup>14</sup>

Both the economic base and superstructure form the social formation of the society. The economic base denotes the unity of a particular mode of production and the relations of production corresponding to it. The superstructure is the dynamic reflection of the economic base. The organic nature of the social formation lies in the fact that human beings are both the carriers of social relations and the subjects of social relations.

### **2.3 The Concept of Mode of Production**

Returning to the mode of production concept, Marx himself and the classical Marxists who followed him never thought it necessary to construct a general concept of mode of production. Although Marx, in *Grundrisse*, did discuss pre-capitalist modes of production, and outlined some general differences,<sup>15</sup> he at no time presented a rigorous concept of mode of production in general and has never defined it in a distinct way. On the contrary, he used the term in at least two quite different ways. Firstly, he simply used the term “mode of production” as a manner of producing, the way in which production is carried out, when he referred to the Mongols’ mode of production as a cattle breeding.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, he used it as an organisation of the labour process when he referred to the constant and daily revolution in the mode of production under

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<sup>14</sup> Rigby, op. cit., pp.177-80. Also Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), p100.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp.540-42.

<sup>16</sup> Karl, Marx, a *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p.203.

capitalism.<sup>17</sup> In similar vein, Marx referred to the mode of production as an industrial stage and even as one sphere of industry.<sup>18</sup>

This, however, has raised a number of problems for latter-day analysts. Marxist theorists have engaged in dialogues in an attempt to conceptualise the term mode of production and distinguish between different modes of production and its combination in different social formations. The theory of modes of production has been elaborated by number of writers such as Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, Nicos Poulantzas, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, and Ernesto Laclau who, despite certain important similarities, defer to some extent in regard to both the concepts of mode of production and social formation employed and to the path by which they move from the former concept to the level of the social formation.

For both Marxists and their critics, the debate has focused in particular on the question of how such concept is to be defined and employed, and what exactly its content is supposed to be. For historical materialist discussion, especially, the ways concepts such as mode of production can be invoked to understand complex historical societies has been a central issue. In what follows, is a review of the Marxists' definition, use and understanding of the concept mode of production, and whether or not the concept can be considered as having a universal applicability.

However, Marxists do not normally use the term mode of production simply to refer to the technical manner of producing. The term is more commonly used by Marxist to describe the wider "social character of production".<sup>19</sup> It is in this wider sense that Marx defines capitalism as a mode of production in which commodities are produced by means of the commodity of labour power and where the production of surplus value is the aim and determining motive of production. Surplus value is simply the difference between the value of what a worker produces and what he is paid. It is this social definition of capitalism, by which it can be distinguished from the pre-capitalist modes of production<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p.602.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.505, 617. Karl. Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol.6 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), pp.144, 166 and 486. Also Karl. Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), pp37-42.

<sup>19</sup> Rigby, *op. cit.*, p.24.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, the concept of a mode of production, for Marxists, refers to concrete historical relations and has a crucial role in explaining social structure and historical change of the society. The common starting point in this approach is the theoretical priority given to the combination of the relations and forces of production, but beyond that differences begin to appear. Yet, the concept mode of production, received little attention after Marx. It was the French philosopher Louis Althusser,<sup>21</sup> who reintroduced a structural reading of historical materialism rejecting forms of humanism and historicism that appeared in Marx's early works and were utilised by some later Marxists. In the Althusserian conceptualisation, a mode of production is a complex structure, doubly articulated by the production forces connexion and the relations of production connexion, and containing three elements: the labourer, the means of production (subdivided into object of labour and instrument of labour), and the non-labourer.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to remember that a mode of production as Engels stated schematically, is composed of different levels or instances (the economic, political, ideological and theoretical), in which social classes manifest themselves in the examination of this mode as the effect of its matrix on its supports. It is a commonplace among, at least, a certain school of Marxists to argue that any mode of production must be thought of in terms of not only economic, but also of political and ideological activity (relations). In the specifically Althusserian version of this line of thought it is put in terms of "levels or practices" which articulated with the economic being determinant in the last instance. These levels or practices are:<sup>23</sup> A) the economic practice: the transformation of nature by human labour into social products; B) political practice: the transformation of social relations into new social formations; C) ideological practice: the transformation of subjects' lived relations to the lived world into new relation by ideological struggle; and D) theoretical practice: the transformation of concepts existing within ideological discourses into a specific product and scientific knowledge with theory. The type of unity of these levels, which characterizes a mode of production, is that of a complex whole dominated, in the last instance, by the economic level.

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<sup>21</sup> Louis Althusser was a French Marxist philosopher, who became known for his break from some of the key features of traditional Marxism. For example, Althusser rejected the idea of economic determinism, the idea that a society's economic system determines that society's general structure and, hence, its political and social development. *Biography of Althusser, Louis - Marxist Philosopher of Structuralism* [http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/general/bldef\\_althusserlouis.htm?terms=LouisAlthusser](http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/general/bldef_althusserlouis.htm?terms=LouisAlthusser)(18.7.2002).

<sup>22</sup> Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Western Printing Services, 1970), p.317.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.316. Also Taylor, op. cit., pp.106-07.



Generally, it should be clear that the mode of production does not reflect the purely economic elements, rather it is a manifestation of a combination of these levels. In different historical conditions and as a response to the nature of the relations of production, one of these levels may have a more dominant role. Yet in any type of capitalist mode of production, the economic level is always the determinant in the last instance. This is because the economic level determines the relative domination of one of the other levels according to the nature of the relations of production.<sup>24</sup>

Althusser's structuralism conceptualises social reality as a "structured totality" in which there is neither essence or core (thus dismissing liberal functional-structuralism and deterministic conceptions of historical materialism), nor a pluralist of elements. Althusser's conception of social totality allows each level its own relative autonomy whilst denying that each is independent. The significance of each level is based on its articulation within the whole; on certain forms of dependence, which are fixed in the last instance, by the economic level<sup>25</sup>. So if the kinship rules or religious practices or laws of property, for example, are part of what constitute a particular mode of production, this does not mean that the ideological or the political are separate from the economic but also important. On the contrary, they constitute an essential part of the social relations of production, at the same level, as the economic.

Social totality is viewed as a structure in dominance; the economic level remains the predominant in the last instance, meaning that the ensemble of relations and forces of production create structural pressures toward articulation of certain political and ideological practices. These practices, in turn, have their own effect on the economic level and so forth. Moreover, within each social formation, one of the levels occupies the dominant position towards other levels wherein it becomes necessary to the functioning and reproduction of the mode of production.

It is this dialectic in dominance of structure which determines which of three levels is dominant, for example; the feudal mode of production is characterized by the dominance of political-ideological levels while, in the capitalist mode of production the economic level is dominant. In the feudal mode of production where the labourer works on his own plot to meet the subsistence requirements for the physical

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<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp.13-15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.223-24.

reproduction of labour force (feeding himself and his children, the future labourers), and works on his lord's land as a form of paying rent or tribute to him. In this mode, the extraction of surplus value requires the intervention of political power coupled with an ideological apparatus. In contrast, the workers' time in the capitalist mode of production is never divided so there is no distinction between meeting the subsistence requirements of the labourer and paying the surplus value to the capitalist. Consequently, in both cases, the economic level remains the over-determinant level in the last instance.

It has been argued that the relationships between the various levels of the social formation are not mechanical by which a certain level directly shapes or transforms the other levels; rather, the different levels are involved in a dialectical interrelationships which hold them together. The predominance of the economic level means, in Nicos Poulantzas's words, "that it attributes the dominant role to one instance or another, in so far as it regulates the shift of dominance which results from the decentralization of the instances".<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the relationship between the different levels is a type of relation inside, in which the structure dominance governs the very constitution (the nature) of the regional structures, by assigning them their place and by distributing function to them, and the dominance-subordination relationships between these levels is never static.<sup>27</sup> The dominant level may change over time according to the over-determination of the contradictions and their uneven development.

The concept of mode of production, thus, plays a crucial role in the Althusserian theoretical science, since it constitutes the basis of conceptualising the dialectical relationship between the different levels of any social formation and the periodization of history. History could be divided into stages associated with particular articulations of different modes of production within the pertinent social formations and alternation of domination of these modes in each of these ensembles.

Etienne Balibar defined a mode of production as a combination of a number of elements:<sup>28</sup> A) labourer, whose labour power is set to work in production; B) the non-labourer, whose role in the general process of production is that of owners of the means of production, but who do not feature in it as labourers since their labour power is not used in the production process; and C) means of production. Balibar believes that by

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<sup>26</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: NLB and S &W, 1973), pp.14 -15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>28</sup> Althusser and Balibar, *op. cit.*, p.215.

combining or inter-relating these different elements —labour power, direct labourers, masters who are not direct labourers, objects of production, instruments of production, etc— it is possible to reach a definition of the different modes of production which have existed and can exist in human history.<sup>29</sup> What differentiates modes of production, and consequently the epochs of the structure of any society, are the different combination or relations between these elements. Balibar identified two relations: “property connection”, which is the duality of possession (use and enjoyment), and property (property strictly speaking) and a real or material “appropriation connection”, which correspond respectively to the relations of production and the forces of production.<sup>30</sup> In the capitalist mode of production, both relations are characterized by separation: the separation of the worker from the property (property connection) where the means of production (except the labour power) are owned by the capitalist or non-labourer, and the separation of the worker from the control of these means.

It has been argued, however, that each social formation has two contradictions: A) between classes and B) within the economic level between the relations and forces of production, but not all these contradictions are antagonistic. Their antagonism or non-antagonism is determined by the effect of the contradiction in each economic, political and ideological level in the social formation. There are contradictions within the levels of social formation and between them. These contradictions, however, are to be found between the ideological level (or at least the dominant ideology in that level) and the economic level or even the dominant mode of production in the social formation.

Balibar has developed the concept of non-transitional mode of production, which contains only the conditions of its reproduction. According to Balibar, the mode of production as a combination of elements is a “static” concept, whereas the concept of reproduction is autonomous, continues and automatic. In Balibar’s words:

All social production is a reproduction,... all social production is subject to structural social relations. The ‘transition from one mode of production to another can, therefore, never appear in our understanding as an irrational hiatus between two ‘periods’ which are subject to the functioning of a structure, i.e., which have their specified concept. The transition cannot be a moment of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.176.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp.213-15.

destruction, however, brief. It is itself a moment subject to a structure which has to be discovered.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, it is not sufficient, for Balibar, merely to specify the variants of the combinations of the elements of the mode of production, a theory of transitions is required which involves a theory of reproduction, which its analysis shows “that every mode of production determines modes of circulation, distribution and consumption as so many of its unity”.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, transitional periods are modes of production with their own structured totalities, complexities, correspondences and contradictions. Therefore, according to Balibar, the transition from one mode of production to another is not a transformation of structure by functioning itself because this functioning is no more than the eternal reproduction of the mode’s relations of production rather the transition is a movement of a completely different kind. “It is not the old structure which has transformed itself, on the contrary, it has really ‘died out’ as such...”.<sup>33</sup> It takes the structure as its object.

On the other hand, Ernesto Laclau, Talal Asad and Harlod Wolpe argue that the concept mode of production must be conceived as containing neither the conditions of its reproduction nor the conditions of its destruction. They believe that such conditions must be located conceptually, in the conditions of the existence of the mode of production.

Laclau has defined the mode of production as:

The logical and mutually co-ordinated articulation of: a determinate type of ownership of the means of production; a determinate form of appropriation of the economic surplus; a determinate degree of development of the division of labour and a determinate level of development of the productive forces.<sup>34</sup> This is not merely a descriptive enumeration of isolated “factors” but a totality defined by its mutual interconnections.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.273.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.266.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.283.

<sup>34</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p.34.

In his argument, Laclau is led into inconsistent formulations of the concept of mode of production and into the conception of economic system. His discussion, however, was confined to an economic system as mutual relations between different sectors of the economy or between different productive units and, consequently, an economic system can include, as constitutive elements, different modes of production.<sup>35</sup> For Laclau, the economic level of the social formation is defined as the level of production, which he differentiated from the economic instance of the mode of production. However, the precise meaning of the level of production has not been clearly established.

Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst in their work on pre-capitalist modes of production, define a mode of production as an articulated combination of relations and forces of production structured by the dominance of the relations of production. This, therefore, means that there can be no definition of the relation or the forces of production independently of the mode of production in which they are combined. Within a broader context, Hindess and Hirst see that the relations of production define a specific mode of appropriation of surplus and a specific form of social distribution of the means of production corresponding to that mode of appropriation of surplus labour.<sup>36</sup> Hindess and Hirst argue that all modes of production must necessarily involve some form of extraction of a surplus from direct producers, over and above their immediate subsistence needs if social relations are to be reproduced day by day and generation by generation.

In conclusion, for Marxists, material conditions, namely the mode of production, shapes the social, political, intellectual and ideological life process. Yet the total of the relations of production within any mode of production constitutes the economic structure of society. It is possible to say that the overall result of these and other studies is that the form of the ownership is a critical aspect in defining the mode of production since it categorically determines the manner in which appropriation of the economic surplus occurs and the degree of control which the appropriator has over the productive activity of the producers. *Mode of production*, therefore, can be defined in general terms as *a systemic combination of relations and forces of production that entails a determinate*

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.34-35.

<sup>36</sup> Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.10-11.

*form of appropriation of the product or surplus product produced in the mode concerned*<sup>37</sup>.

## **2.4 The Articulation of Modes of Production**

Hindess and Hirst insist upon the notion that only one mode of production is possible in a determinate social formation. They argue that the conditions of existence of a determinate mode of production cannot be conditions of another mode of production at the same time. They concede that a determinate social formation can contain some elements from other modes, but not another full mode.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that in spite of Althusser and Balibar's anti-historicism and anti-empiricism they were unable to produce a general theory of modes of production without retreating into the empiricism and pragmatism.<sup>39</sup> However, Hindess and Hirst also were not particularly successful in this point. They argued that a social formation is constituted by the mode of production (conceived of as an articulated combination of relations and forces of production) and its economic, political and ideological conditions of existence. In their words:

The presence of a particular mode of production is not sufficient to secure the reproduction of its conditions of existence. To suppose otherwise, to suppose that the existence of a mode of production entails the reproduction of its conditions of existence, would mean that the transition from one mode of production to another could never take place.<sup>40</sup>

It is clear that in spite of Hindess and Hirst's extensive argument about the distinction between the mode of production and its conditions of existence, their answer to the question whether or not a social formation may contain more than one mode of production or, at least, a mode of production and the elements of other modes, is extremely unsatisfactory. In so far as Hindess and Hirst accept that a form of articulation is possible between a mode of production and elements of other modes, they simply add the assertion that this is possible only on the basis of the latter not contradicting the conditions of existence of the mode of production, but no grounds are

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<sup>37</sup>Pollock, Alex. "Sharecropping in the North Jordan Valley: Social Relations of Production and Reproduction." in: *The Rural Middle East*, edited by Kathy & Pandeli Glavanis (London: Zed Books, 1990), p.98.

<sup>38</sup>Laclau, op. cit., pp.51-79. also Althusser and Balibar, op. cit., p.307.

<sup>39</sup>Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Modes of Production and Social Formation: An Auto-Critique of Pre-capitalist modes of Production* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), p.34.

<sup>40</sup>Barry and Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, p.15.

put forward to justify this arbitrary limitation of articulation to non-contradictory relationships.<sup>41</sup>

It must be important to point out that the analysis of articulation<sup>42</sup> of more than one mode of production in one social formation is a relatively new theoretical and empirical field. Although some studies have been devoted to this subject, they were exclusively confined to the articulation of the capitalist mode of production in a pre-capitalist social formation. The object of such studies was generally to demonstrate the process by which the capitalist mode dominates and displaces the pre-capitalist modes. John Taylor argues that the contemporary Third World social formation is not unfamiliar: They are—in his words— “... dominated by an articulation of (at least) two modes of production—a capitalist and non-capitalist mode in which the former is, or is becoming, increasingly dominant over the other”.<sup>43</sup> Taylor, in this passage is referring to the articulation “produced largely as an effect of imperialist penetration”.<sup>44</sup> William Shaw, in this regard, states that:

More than one mode of production may subsist within any actual social formation (as witness the existence of slavery within the capitalist in United States), but according to Marx . . . in all forms of society there is one determinate kind of production which assigns ranks and influence to all the others.

For Marx, Shaw writes, the various modes “mark the general stages of socio-economic evolution as a whole . . .”<sup>45</sup>

Shaw believes that modes of production are not static; they are constantly developing and changing because, as Marx said, “in order to retain the fruits of civilization ‘people’ will change their way of producing”.<sup>46</sup> But the question arises as to how people get from one mode to another. Shaw states that the different modes of production “which have

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.263.

<sup>42</sup> By articulation I refer to the processes and mechanisms through which divergent modes of production become inserted into social formation. For a detailed account of the concept of articulation see. A. Foster-Carter, “Can We Articulate ‘Articulation?’” in: *The New Anthropology* edited by J. Clammer (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp.210-43.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, op. cit., p.101-02.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>45</sup> William H. Shaw, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, (London: 1978), p. 207.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.208.

characterized human history arise or fall as they enable or impede the expansion of society's productive capacity".<sup>47</sup> Or as Marx himself said:

At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or -what is but a legal expression for the same thin- with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters, then comes the period of social revolution.<sup>48</sup>

The concept of articulation of modes of production in the Middle East is immediately associated with the work of Nazih Ayubi. Ayubi has made an interesting contribution in this field by arguing that articulation may take the form of linkage not only among various modes of production, but also among (non-corresponding) 'instances' of structural power. Therefore, he argued that it is possible to imagine in a particular society an articulation between, for example, certain economic and technical elements of the capitalist mode of production and certain social and cultural elements of the pre-capitalist modes of coercion and persuasion<sup>49</sup>.

To sum up, it is possible to identify two alternative views of the general nature of social formations: A) the social formation which, may be structured by a single mode, or by a combination of modes none of which is dominant, or by a combination of modes one of which is dominant; and B) The social formation as constituted by a single mode of production together with conditions of existence of other modes.

## **2.5 Social Classes**

Class analysis stands as one of the ancient and classic theoretical approaches to the study of politics and society. Stratification by class has been traditionally utilized by scholars and politicians to explain patterns of political conflict and processes of social change. The origin of the word class, however, is Roman, when the censors used the word classes to divide up the population for tax purposes. The classical Greek political

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.207.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, *Selected Writings*, pp.60-61

<sup>49</sup> Ayubi, Nazih. N, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, (London: Tauris, 1995), p.27.



theorists also had used the word and Aristotle is often seen as the champion of the society dominated by the middle class.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of the early origins of the use of the term “class” there has been no distinctive way of defining it. On the contrary, this led to a various definitions of the term. Class is used to describe groups ranked in hierarchical order. For example, the plebeians in ancient Rome and the system of feudal estates (lords, freemen, and serfs) were a structure in which different legal rights and formal inequalities were associated with particular groups in society (termed classes). This association with hierarchy has led to another use of the term that specifies social standing or prestige such as “upper class” and “lower class”, which are shorthand terms used to describe an individual’s social standing. Another meaning of class reflects structures of material inequalities. Unequally rewarded groups, therefore, are often termed classes, and this reflects the competition for resources in capitalist societies. Accordingly, classes may correspond to income groups. Classes are not used only to describe differing levels of material inequality; the term is also used to identify actual or potential social forces, which have the capacity to transform society.<sup>51</sup>

At present there are two main approaches to the concept of class: one is Marxist (Marxian mode of production) where social classes are determined by the ownership or non-ownership of the means of economic production and the other one is the Weberian approach (social classes and status groups). This section, therefore, aims to discuss the similarities and differences in the approaches taken to the concept of “class” by Karl Marx and Max Weber. It might be useful to mention here that Marx and Weber both attempted to understand the large structures and institutions that affect the lives of people, and how these changed over time and space. For Marx, these were primarily economic structures – involving factors such as the development of the productive forces and ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. For Weber, “the economic order was of paramount importance in determining the precise position of different communities” but other important structures such as religion, ideas, status, and bureaucracy “could influence people’s actions in ways not directly derivative from purely ‘economic’ interests”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Robertson, op. cit., p.45.

<sup>51</sup> *Is the concept of class war still valid?* [www.essaybank.co.uk](http://www.essaybank.co.uk) (18 May 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Richard W. Hadden, *Sociological Theory: an Introduction to the Classical Tradition* (Peterborough: Ontario, Broadview Press, 1997), pp.126-27.

### 2.5.1 Marxist Approach

The term class is immediately associated with work of Marx. Although Marx never made a complete formulation of what a class is, he wrote prolifically on the subject. According to him, the private ownership of economic resources is the key factor in defining social classes. Marxian theory essentially centres on how the relationships between men are shaped by their relative positions in regard to the means of production and by their differential access to scarce resources. Marx believes that all societies were split into two groups, according to the organisation and ownership of the means of production. These two groups are *the owners of the means of production*), and *the workers*. Each mode of production, according to the Marxist view point, involves two classes: the exploiting class, which is economically, politically and ideologically dominant, and the exploited class, which is economically, politically and ideologically dominated (masters and slaves in the slave mode of production, lords and serfs in the feudal mode of production, bourgeois and workers in the capitalist mode of production). There might be other social classes such as traditional petty bourgeoisie (craftsmen, small traders, etc.), but the two fundamental classes of any social formation are those of the dominant mode of production in that formation.<sup>53</sup>

Marxism, therefore, concentrates on the production process as the most fundamental of all social relationships. Thus, it is not the economy as such which interests Marx; it is the set of relationships within any society's production process. The pattern of the ownership of the tools and materials in a society mainly shapes the nature of the system of social classes in that society. Marx described the relationship between the two dominant classes as the "relations of production". It is these relations of production, which Marx defines as classes. So a class—in this sense—is a group of individuals who share the same type of relationship to the means of production. In other words, classes emerge when the relations of production involve an economically advantaged minority of individuals who control the means of production (scarce resources) and an economically disadvantaged majority of individuals who do not. Every mode of production in the category "class society" has two fundamental and characteristic classes and the differences between modes of production within this large category

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<sup>53</sup> Cohen, op. cit., pp.65-70.

consist primarily of the differences in the particular social form of the surplus extraction relationship, e.g. slavery, tribute, feudal dues, wage labour, etc.<sup>54</sup>

It is worth pointing out that the definition of social classes, which Lenin made widely known, comes from Marx. According to Lenin:

Social classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.<sup>55</sup>

It is possible to say, as Z. A. Jordan has remarked,<sup>56</sup> that there seems to be a considerable measure of agreement among those writers who dealt with this subject (social class<sup>57</sup>) that social class in the Marxian sense is defined by at least three different characteristics: A)-the place in the system of social production and/or the relation to the means of production: the possession of, or exclusion from, the proprietary rights to them; B)- the will to compete for political power and to use it for the protection of economic interest; and C)-class consciousness, which is the ideological awareness that at least some members of the class have of their relative position in society, as determined by their situation in the process of production, and a programme of collective action (ideology) to maintain and extend their share of social wealth and political power.

Societies, therefore, are distinguished by their class structures, by their specific forms and mechanisms of appropriation of surplus labour and by their particular modes of exploitation. It is society's relations of production, the specific form in which surplus labour is extracted from the producers, which distinguish the different economic formations of society.<sup>58</sup> Production, for Marx, is the fundamental element in historical

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<sup>54</sup> Coser, op. cit., pp.48-49.

<sup>55</sup> V.I. Lenin, *a Great Beginning, Collected Works*, vol. 2 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1947), p.492.

<sup>56</sup> Jordan, op. cit., p.25.

<sup>57</sup> See for example Tom B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), pp.17-19, and Raymond Aron, "Social Structure and Ruling Class" in: *Political Sociology: selected essays* edited by L. A. Coser (London: Harper Torch, 1966), p.56.

<sup>58</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p.209.

development because “men” must produce before they can make history and within their social production men enter into relations through which political, ideological and social structure of the society are developed. Accordingly, Marx says:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production, which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production, constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which rises the political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.<sup>59</sup>

For Marx, those who own the means of production use their ownership to exploit the labour of others through appropriation of surplus labour. A society is said to be exploitive where there is a mechanism whereby the producers are made to perform surplus labour for a class of non-producers.<sup>60</sup> In ancient society, this was obvious as it was done through slavery. However, in capitalist societies, labour is brought and sold at its market value so this exploitation is less obvious. The exploitation does occur because the worker is economically dependent on the owner, so class divisions are not found in all forms of society. They are a historical creation and only arise when a surplus is generated so that non-producers can live off the productive activity of others.

Class relations, thus, are necessarily exploitative, and this would inevitably lead to massive class conflict between the owners and the workers. Marxism assumes though that these classes are clearly definable; that the workers are distinct from the owners, and class struggle is the motor of historical development. In his study of history Marx came to believe that conflict between the classes was the source of most major changes in human society. His studies convinced him that in every mode of production, there has been a conflict between the owners of the means of production and the workers. Accordingly Marx says:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to

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<sup>59</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.20.

<sup>60</sup> Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, p.22.

one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.<sup>61</sup>

Exploitation process, therefore, is seen by Marx as an arena of struggle, in which the dominant used a combination of economic, political and ideological force to ensure their control over socially produced surplus, and in which the dominated resisted through overt means like organisation and rebellion and hidden means like reluctant compliance.<sup>62</sup>

It is, therefore, possible to argue that *class*, according to the Marxist viewpoint, consists of all the people who share a common relationship to the means of production, those who control the means of production (masters, landlords, capitalists) make up the dominant class or “the bourgeoisie”. Those who work for the dominant class (slaves, peasants, industrial labourers) are the subordinate class or “the proletariat”. This relationship is both unequal and exploitative in that the dominant class takes unfair advantage of the subordinate class.

### 2.5.2 The Weberian Approach (Social Classes and Status Groups)

Max Weber, the social action theorist, was influenced by Marx’s work and his writings however, critiqued and expanded on Marx’s conception of social class. While Marx maintained that social class (determined by ones relation to the means of production) was responsible for the hierarchical rankings and political, social and economic inequalities in a society, Weber agreed that class is an objective feature of economic relations founded on property but he argued that no single determinant could totally define a person’s position within the stratification system of the modern capitalist society.<sup>63</sup> Weber’s analysis of class was similar to Marx’s, but he discussed class in the context of social stratification more generally. He agreed that different classes exist but he selected as the significant thing here that those classes meet in a market, and come into it in different ways, as purchaser of labour power and as seller, as someone able to

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<sup>61</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), pp.45-46.

<sup>62</sup> Peet, op. cit., p.100.

<sup>63</sup> R. Schaefer, R. Lam, P. Biles, S. Wilson. *Sociology: An Introduction* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996), p.141. Also Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.163.

wait, not compelled to buy or sell merely to survive another day that is “the owner of the means of production or the capitalist” and as someone who must sell his services today or starve “the worker”. So Marx's two classes, in Weber's view, are distinguished essentially by their relation to a market and precisely by their bargaining power. Bargaining power is a matter of monopoly or lack of it.<sup>64</sup>

Weber saw *a class* as a category of men who:

- 1) have in common a specific causal component of their life chances in so far as
- 2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and 3) it is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour market.<sup>65</sup>

He admitted, with Marx that the ownership/non-ownership of property is the most important basis of class division but his conception of class takes its point of departure from his more generalised analysis of economic action (which, is a conduct that seeks, through peaceful means, to acquire a control of desired utilities) in a market. Classes, therefore, can only exist when a market, which may take numerous concrete forms, has come to existence, and this in turn presupposes the formation of a money economy<sup>66</sup>.

Class for Weber is determined by the economic situation or market situation, which indicates a common source of income consisting in power to trade something in a market. The way in which the disposition over material property is distributed among the plurality of people, meeting competitively in the market for the purpose of exchange creates specific life chance. This mode of distribution, for Weber, gives the owners a monopoly to acquire highly valued goods and excludes the non-owners from competing for such goods. It monopolizes the opportunities for profitable deals for all those who provided with goods and increases their power in price wars with those being property-less and have nothing to offer but their services in native form or goods in a form constituted through their labour and who above all are compelled to get rid of these products in order to subsist.<sup>67</sup> That is to say, those who own comparable objects of

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<sup>64</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol.2 (New York: 1968), pp. 927-28. Also *Marx and Weber: A Comparison of Views on Industrial Society* [www.prism.gatech.edu/~gte478k/marxweber.html](http://www.prism.gatech.edu/~gte478k/marxweber.html) (18 May 2001).

<sup>65</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Marx Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p.181.

<sup>66</sup> Giddens, *op. cit.*, p.163.

<sup>67</sup> Gerth and Mills, *op. cit.*, p.181-82.

exchange (both goods and services) share in common a specific casual component of their life chances. In other words, those who share the same market or “class situation” are all subject to similar economic exigencies, which casually influence both the material standards of their existence, and what sorts of personal life experiences they are able to enjoy.<sup>68</sup> Property and lack of property are, therefore, the basic categories of all “class situations”. Within these categories, class situations are further differentiated according to the kind of property and the kind of services that are traded in the market and the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment, which presents a common condition for the individual’s fate.<sup>69</sup>

Weber, however, agreed that different classes exist, and class, as for Marx, is an economic category but he thought that “status” or “social prestige and power” were the key factor in deciding which group each individual belongs to. Status and power were equally important and often interrelated components in the hierarchical rankings of groups and bases of social control.<sup>70</sup> Weber, in this regard, offered a multidimensional class model that incorporates three distinct entities:

A) Economic status (wealth): income, assets

B) Political status (power): the ability to see that one's will is acted upon. Powerful people are able to mobilize resources to achieve their goals despite resistance from others. Weber in this regard differs from Marx in believing that “the emergence of economic power may be the consequence of power existing on other grounds”<sup>71</sup>

C) Social status (prestige): which refers to the power to impress or influence. It differs from power in that it is based less on political position. Prestige correlates with charisma. A prestigious person has a reputation based on brilliance, achievements, or on character.<sup>72</sup> Status, therefore, refers to the amount of “social prestige” a group of individuals are given often as a result of their income, political positions, education and other socially evaluated characteristics.<sup>73</sup>

It may, therefore, be helpful at this point to note that whilst Marx split society into two distinct classes, Weber extended Marx’s idea and came up with two more classes. The

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<sup>68</sup> Giddens, op. cit., p.164.

<sup>69</sup> Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p.182.

<sup>70</sup> Giddens, op. cit., p.163. Also Irving M Zeitlin, *Ideology and Development of Sociological Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987), p.161.

<sup>71</sup> Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p.180.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp.159-60.

<sup>73</sup> Giddens, op. cit., p.166, also Zeitlin, op. cit., p.161.

four main strata he identified were the upper class, the middle class, the working class and the poor. However, within these groups, were other, more subtle divisions, which depended on a number of variables including differences in income, opportunities for upwards mobility, security of employment, language, lifestyle and social estimation of others. Weber emphasized that the “new middle class” such as managers, specialists and technicians is different from the working class, arguing that because these employees were property-less —if one was to use Marx’s conception alone— they should be absorbed into the one category of the working class.<sup>74</sup> It was clear to Weber, however, that the middle class and the working class did not see each other as equals, that in fact, there was a status and power distinction between the various types of workers distinctions other than the economic means of production that allowed some individuals to control and dominate others.<sup>75</sup> Thus, for Weber, Marx’s “proletariat term” is a general concept, which covers a range of occupational groups whose skills are priced very differently in the market.

Weber argued that a person’s position in societies “social stratification” is determined by life chances and styles, or by a person’s power to obtain goods, external living conditions and personal life experience. One’s life chances, he argued, are determined by the interrelationships of class, status and power.<sup>76</sup> In his words:

...With some over-simplification, one might say that *classes* are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas *status groups* are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special “styles of life”.<sup>77</sup>

Weber’s theory of stratification differs from that of Marx in that he identified three bases of stratification: class, status and party (or power), each being separate dimensions and possibly having an influence on each other and each being a strategic means of controlling and dominating other human beings.<sup>78</sup> He emphasized that classes, status groups and parties are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community and his discussion of them, establishes these as three dimensions of stratification. *Classes* make up the economic order, *status groups* the social order, and *parties* the

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<sup>74</sup> Zeitlin, op. cit., p.160.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.155, also Coser, op. cit., p229.

<sup>76</sup> Coser, op. cit., pp.228-29.

<sup>77</sup> Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p.193.

<sup>78</sup> Schaefer, Lam, et al, op. cit., p.141. Also Giddens, op. cit., p.163.



legal/political order. Each order affects and is affected by the other. While the social order is conditioned by the economic order —which is merely the way in which economic goods and services are distributed and used— to a high degree, and in its turn reacts upon it. The social and economic orders are similarly related to the legal order.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, *class*, for Weber, is simply an aggregate of people with similar life chances in labour and commodity markets. *Status group* is a number of individuals who share the same status situation and is determined by the distribution of social honour (prestige). The way in which social honour is distributed in the community is called the social order.<sup>80</sup> Although status groups are not necessarily property owners, members of a given group often have a certain lifestyle and can wield social power. The criteria for entry into a status group may take forms such as the sharing of kinship groups or certain levels of education, in addition to the economic elements, which can be a sort of honour as well. Those whose fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market, e.g. slaves, for Weber, are not a class in technical sense of the term, they are rather a status group. In contrast to classes, which may or may not be communal groupings, status groups are normally communities, which are held together by notions of proper lifestyles and by the social esteem and honour accorded to them by others.<sup>81</sup>

It is worth pointing out that class position, on one hand, does not necessitate similar status groups, and people from different economic classes may be members of the same status group, if they share the same specific style of life. On the other, people from different status groups can be found within any given class. The relative prestige accorded them may rest on the size and source of their income, their political positions in the community, their education, their specialized training, or other evaluated social characteristics. For example, while it is possible to find among the wealthy and propertied class both old and new rich and other distinctions based on the source of one's wealth, there is a possibility to find status gradations based on occupation, education, skill, size of income, etc., among the property-less class.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Gerth and, op. cit., pp.180-81, 194.

<sup>80</sup> Giddens, op. cit., pp.166-67.

<sup>81</sup> Coser, op. cit., p.229.

<sup>82</sup> Zeitlin, op. cit., p.162.

The third and final dimension in Weber's analysis of stratification systems was party or power. While Marx confined exercising political power —directly or indirectly— to those (or an extension of those) that owned the means of production, Weber claimed that power could exist on other grounds and may rest on a variety of bases, and can be of differing types. The basis from which such power can be exercised may vary considerably according to the social context, that is, historical and structural circumstance.<sup>83</sup> For Weber, power refers to the ability of a man or a group of men to “realize ones will in communal action even against the resistances of others”.<sup>84</sup> Weber did not deny that the control of economic resources is decisive, but that in itself, he argued, is insufficient for understanding of the structure of social power in general. He, therefore, elaborated Marx's theory emphasizing that control of means of political administration, means of violence, means of scientific research and so on, are also a major means of dominating men.<sup>85</sup>

To conclude then, it is evident from this study that Marx's conceptualisations of social class, was the basis upon which stratification systems rest on the relationships of people to the means of production. The resultant class division between the owners and workers, to Marx, was the most significant characteristic of modern society as all dimensions of social life religion, politics, education, and so on were affected by one's position in it. While Weber agreed with Marx that there was definitely an economic component in the stratification system (such as between those who did and did not own the means of production), he maintained that status and power were also instrumental in the arrangement of hierarchical rankings and subsequent inequalities in society.

It might be useful to mention here that class analysis as a theoretical approach to the study of politics and society in the Middle East entails referring to the works of James Bill<sup>86</sup>. Bill has made an important contribution by arguing that the dynamics of Middle Eastern social structure develop out of an integrated system of both vertical and horizontal stratification. He argued that social and political structures of the Middle East are largely shaped by the prevailing group-class structure. While group formations

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p.180. Also Coser, op. cit., p.230.

<sup>84</sup> Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p.180, Also. Zeitlin, op. cit., p.162, and Coser, op. cit., p.230.

<sup>85</sup> Zeitlin, op. cit., p.162.

<sup>86</sup> James A. Bill and Carl Leiden, *The Middle East: Politics and Power* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), James A. Bill, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York: HarperCollins College 1994). Also James A. Bill, “Class analysis and the dialectics of modernization in the Middle East”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.3 (October1972), pp.417-434.

(family, friendship, ethnic, religious, professional and political associations) dominate the vertical dimension of stratification class, refers to the horizontal stratification. Accordingly, the overall social structure might best be viewed as a divided grid or creased mosaic in which the intricate web of groups is partially partitioned by class lines. Both group and class structures relate to one another reciprocally, and it is this reciprocity that builds coherence into the socio-political system<sup>87</sup>. It is worthy of note that class for Bill, although it is most often defined according to one of three differing emphases; wealth, status or power, he defined class in the Middle East in terms of power. Power, for Bill, refers to one's ability to influence and control the behaviour of others. This ability may rest as much upon indirect personal manoeuvre and verbal persuasion as upon direct threat, coercive demand, or economic inducement. The source of power can be found in the political, economic, social, educational, religious or psychological systems<sup>88</sup>.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In their analysis of modes of production, Marx and Engels have referred to several modes of production in history: the primitive communal, the ancient (slave), the feudal and the capitalist. Those modes of production, which conceived as pure types, have occurred only in Western societies, and the sequence from primitive communal to capitalist was intended by Marx for West European society as a whole. It was true that Marx and Engels also discerned a fundamentally different socio-economic arrangement in the Far East, which they called the Asiatic mode of production considering Asiatic societies as very different from those of Western Europe. They argued that the absence of private property in land, state control over the producer and self-sufficiency of the village economy in the Orient meant the class divisions did not develop and hence the motor of history was absent in Asia.<sup>89</sup> So, can the theory of modes of production be applied for other non-Western societies, where, in most cases, feudal relations did not exist, or at least made little quantitative and qualitative difference? And can non-

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<sup>87</sup> James. A Bill and Carl Leiden, *The Middle East: Politics and Power*, pp.58-92.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp.75-76. Also James A Bill, "Class analysis and the dialectics of Modernization in the Middle East", pp. 442-425.

<sup>89</sup> George Lichtheim, "Marx and the Asiatic Mode of Production", in: *Karl Marx*, Edited by Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), pp.152-53.

Western societies and their historical change be analysed as a result of the mechanisms of their own structures without the interference of capitalism?<sup>90</sup>

This study is an attempt to satisfy both of these questions relying on Marx's historical materialism for the key conceptual unit of analysis, namely the mode of production and its inner mechanism. It concentrates on a specific theoretical problem, that is, how the concept mode of production can be understood and applied for non-capitalist and non-Western society, and on a specific historical question, namely, to what extent can the social formation of Kuwait in the pre-oil era, be described as dominated by semi-capitalist and tribal/nomadic relations of production? And concomitantly, what sort of social formation does it represent? The mode of production approach, therefore, is used in this study. This approach provides a set of conceptual tools by which the researcher will attempt to reconstruct the modern history of Kuwait and form a meaningful relationship among its important aspects.

It is worth mentioning here that although the works of Marx and Engels on Asiatic mode of production have particular significance in the study of modes of production and class formation, their model is probably not well suited to Arab societies. Firstly: Marx's Asiatic mode of production was only confined to India and China, the two Asian countries to which Marx and Engels had given some systematic attention and whose political, economic and social structures were completely different from that of the Middle East in general and Kuwait in particular. Secondly: Marx ascribed change in the Asiatic mode of production to the introduction of capitalism, stressing that the transformation of the economic basis of Asian society and the emergence of classes could come only from outside, as a consequence of the development of capitalism as a world economic system, but this viewpoint is rejected—in the case of Kuwait's pre-oil economy—because, historical change in Kuwait was not only affected by the dynamics of capitalist expansion. Many other factors had an impact on the process of its historical change and the capitalist mode of production was more or less out of picture as far as the formation and development of Kuwaiti society is concerned. Kuwait had no meaningful, economic links with capitalism—as the first world mode of production—

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<sup>90</sup> Dependency theorists based their arguments on the assumption that the dynamics of capitalist development in the West, necessarily and concomitantly, create underdevelopment in the third World. In other words the expansion of contradiction-ridden capitalism generates developments in the centre and, at the same time, underdevelopment in the periphery. Dependency theorists assume that the contradictions between the forces of production and the relations of production inherent in the capitalist mode of production are manifested internationally in the relations between developed and developing nations. See Andre G. Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), pp. xv, xvi and xxi.

before 1940s. So Marx and Engels's views about the Asiatic mode of production will not be considered in further detail and dependency models are not also applicable to the subject of this study.

The theory of modes of production will be tested on the case of Kuwait during the period 1896-1946. But before this is done, it will be fruitful to point out here that the Kuwaiti society, during this period, consisted of two distinct communities whose interests differed widely: 1) The town population (or sedentary community) whose lives economically depended on the maritime and mercantile activities; and 2) The nomadic Bedouin tribes whose lives economically depended on pastoralism and traditional economic activities. These two different economic activities were characterized by their different mechanisms, patterns of ownership and particular relations of production which and certainly would have their effects on the Kuwaiti social formation. It is believed that these two economic activities presented two different modes of production. Each of them had its specific patterns of ownership of means of production and particular forms of relations of production. For the purpose of this study these two modes are termed *semi-capitalist mode of production*<sup>91</sup> prevailed in the sedentary community and *traditional mode of production*<sup>92</sup> predominated in the Bedouin society.

It is hoped that through these semi-capitalist and traditional modes and relations of production, appropriation and distribution of surplus which typify them, the social structure and political evolution of Kuwait can be most clearly understood. It would be, therefore, a more adequate approach to study the Kuwaiti social formation as constituted by two overlapping modes of production. These two modes of production differ substantially from each other in their specific combination of forces and relations of production.

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<sup>91</sup> In the capitalist mode of production the owner of the means of production pays a wage to workers to carry out the process of production, and then the owner sells that product to appropriate the surplus – value or surplus-profit. The productive process in the maritime activities in Kuwait also rested upon a harsh exploitation of labour forces, as the mechanism for capital accumulation but it takes different form of appropriation of surplus. Most of those activities based on the credit system by which the owners of the means of production could impose a rate of interest on their capital at the beginning of the productive process and also hold a monopoly on the scale of produce at the end, whereas the workers—who were the backbone of these activities—were forced to repay these debts with the interest or accept the rules and norms put forward by the owners which force them to work with the same financier for the next seasons until they can repay all their debts. Therefore, because of its similarity in the exploitation process and diversity of the appropriation of surplus value from the capitalist mode of production, this mode will be called the *semi capitalist* mode of production.

<sup>92</sup> This mode is called traditional mode of production because the labour and mechanism of surplus extraction were determined by non-economic relationships and organized more precisely on traditional forms of organizations.

It is to be noted that although Poulantzas, Balibar, Hindess and Paul Hirst's concept of mode of production, its components and its inner mechanism are accepted in this research, *the definition of "mode of production"* which has been adopted in this study, after reviewing different theoretical perspectives, is that a complex structure, doubly articulated by the production forces connexion and the relations of production connexion, and containing three elements: the labourer, the means of production (subdivided into object of labour and instrument of labour), and the non-labourer.<sup>93</sup> "*Forces of production*" are taken to refer both to means of production and to technical levels or methods of production. "*Relations of production*" refer to the way in which the means of production (land, tools, livestock, etc.) are effectively controlled, and by whom; and the ways in which the direct producers are associated with those means of production and with their own labour-power. Modes of production, therefore, are the fundamental economic organisation of society including the existing state of development of the forces of production and the fundamental relations of production.

For the purposes of conceptual specification of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production, it will be veered most heavily towards the Althusserian position in modes of production's debate, since he offered some general definitions which are interpretable within a realist framework. Thus, his definition of a mode of production as composed of different levels or instances (the economic, political, ideological and theoretical) will be employed. Althusser's conception of social totality allows each level its own relative autonomy whilst denying that each is independent. The significance of each level is based on its articulation within the whole; on certain forms of dependence, which are fixed in the last instance, by the economic level<sup>94</sup>.

Althusserian definition encompasses the necessary conceptual elements for re-constituting the different modes of production in Marxist discourse: feudal, slave, capitalist modes of production etc. Furthermore, it should help in constructing the concept of modes of production not found in Marx's discourse, such as semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production.

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<sup>93</sup> Althusser and Balibar, op. cit., p.317.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.316.

With regard to the articulation of more than one mode of production in one social formation, while Balibar's transitional mode and his refusal to conceptualise the articulation of more than one mode of production in one social formation is rejected Taylor's and Shaw's views (that a multitude of modes of production can coexist in one social formation) is accepted. Nevertheless, this study adopts a broad concept of articulation similar to that of Nazih Ayubi in which it is regarded as a form of linkage not only among various modes of production, but also among (non-corresponding) 'instances' of structural power<sup>95</sup>.

Furthermore, since the theory of modes of production is adopted in this study, both the Marxist perspective of social classes and Weberian concept of status groups, however, are accepted. Therefore, social classes will be dealt with as economic categories or a set of persons, defined and determined by their relationships to the means of production, and who stand in similar positions with respect to some form of power, privilege or prestige. In other words, the definition of class that will be utilized in this study is as a concept that brings together in one social group power and prestige and a fundamental relationship to the means of social production which entails the exploitation of another such group which possesses a reciprocal lack of power and prestige.

In short this research will be a test case for the applicability and usefulness of the hypotheses of —Althusserian mode of production, Marx class, Weber class and status group and James Bill group-class structure — approaches for the socio-political structure of the per-oil Kuwait.

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<sup>95</sup> Ayubi, Nazih. N, op.cit., p27.

## Chapter Three

### Kuwait: Its Historical Background and Population

#### 3.1 Introduction

The main focus of this study is to analyse the historical economic development of Kuwait during the period 1896-1946 and the impact of such developments on the Kuwaitis' social and political life. It is necessary, however, to briefly examine the country's historical background and population. The purpose here is not to write the history of Kuwait; that has been written already.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the main aim is to shed some light on the early historical and political developments of Kuwaiti society in the hope that they would help to understand the modern history of Kuwait and clarify its political and social development. This will make it possible to understand many of the forces that shaped Kuwaiti society and its political and social systems during the period under investigation. Therefore, this chapter contains a detailed analysis of the major events that have influenced the development of Kuwait from its inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to 1946. Two major topics will be examined in this chapter: 1) The historical background of Kuwait including its rise, factors contributing to its development, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah and his role in the modern history of Kuwait and finally, Kuwait's political relations with Ottoman Empire and Britain, and 2) The society and population of Kuwait.

#### 3.2 Historical Background: The Rise of Kuwait

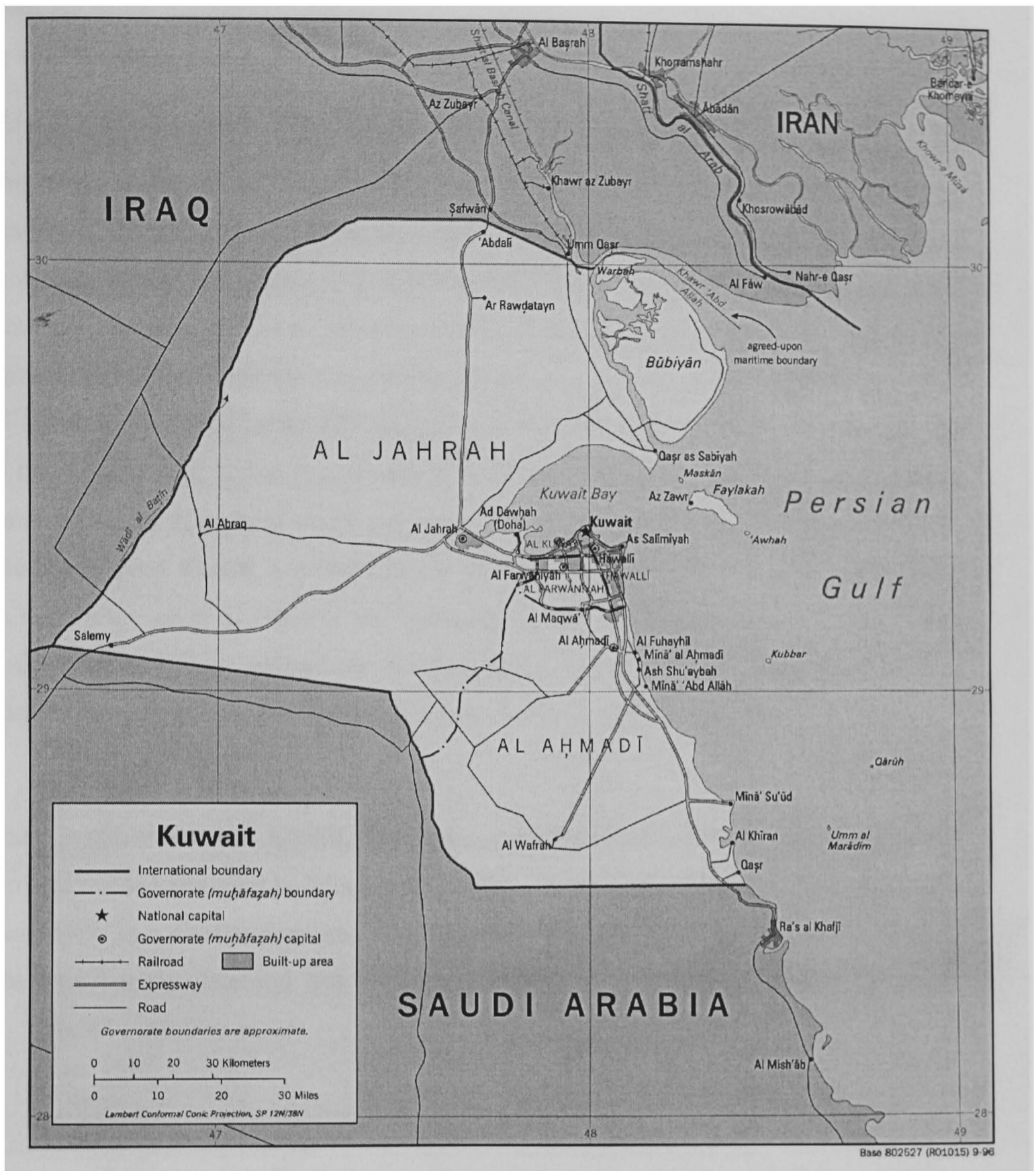
Kuwait is located at the north-western corner of the Arabian Gulf. It is bordered on the north and west by Iraq, on the south-west by Saudi Arabia and on the west by the Arabian Gulf with 290 kilometres of coast.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, *Tarikh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat, 1978), Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakima, *The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965* (London: Luzac & Company 1983), H. R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956) and Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1956).



Figure 3.1 Kuwait Map<sup>2</sup>



Kuwait is a small country both geographically and demographically. The total area was 15 520 km, 15 000 sq km of mainland and 520 sq km of islands. Kuwait includes within its territory nine islands: Failakah, Bubian, Warba, Misskan, 'Auha, Kuper, Umm Al-Maradim and Qarrorah. In 1970 an area of 2 300 sq km was add to Kuwait, its portion

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/kuwait\\_pol96.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/kuwait_pol96.jpg) (20.12.2003).

from the neutral zone with Saudi Arabia, which was established by the Uqair treaty in 1922 between Britain, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud (the governor of Najd) and Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the Sheikh of Kuwait. Consequently, the area of Kuwait became 17 820 sq km.<sup>3</sup>

The name of Kuwait is not an ancient one but goes back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The place where Kuwait is situated is known to European travellers as *Grane* or *Grain*, which is a diminutive form of the Arabic *Qarn*<sup>5</sup>, meaning a small hill.<sup>6</sup> However, the starting date of using the name of Kuwait is a contested one. There is no agreement among historians whether the use of the name coincided with the arrival of Al-Sabah to the region in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or before that. It is most probable that the use of the name started before the advent of Al-Sabah because it was named after a small fortress (Arabic *Kut*: from which the name Kuwait is derived) was built by one of the Sheikhs of Bani Khalid, a powerful tribe which controlled all the eastern Arabia from Kuwait in the north to Qatar in the south during the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> The leader of Bani Khalid ordered the building of this site as a part of their sheikhdom of Eastern Arabia and in order to make it a store for food and ammunition.<sup>8</sup>

Many members of Bani Khalid, Bedouins, some Persians, and fishermen came to this fort and resided around it building some houses and market. When this fort collapsed, it was rebuilt in a smaller form and that was why they used the diminutive form of *Kut*.<sup>9</sup> The area was desolate and was not inhabited but by some of Bani Khalid followers.

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<sup>3</sup> Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Al-Tuhfa Al-Nabhania fi Tariekh Al-Jazera Al-Arabia [The History of Arabian Peninsula]*, vol.8 (Cairo: Al-Matba'aa Al-Mohamadia Al-Tijaria, 1949), p.14.

<sup>4</sup> Hussein, Abdul Aziz, *Muhadharat 'Ain Al-Mujtama'a Al-Arabi fi Al-Kuwait (Lectures about the Arab Society of Kuwait)* (Cairo: Arabic Studies Institution Press, 1960), p.23.

<sup>5</sup> Such as Carsten Niebuher who visited Kuwait in 1765, Forster and Stocqueler who visited Kuwait in 1831.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Nabhani, op. cit., p.105.

<sup>7</sup> Bani Khalid refers to Al-Qahtaniyeh who inhabited Al-Hijaz and made use of the weakening position of the Ottomans who were controlling Al-Hasa since 1520 Bani Khalid occupied it and expelled the Ottomans in 1669 and the area remained under their control until they were defeated by the Wahhabis in 1795. Amin Al-Rihani, *Tariekh Najd Al-Hadith [The Modern History of Najd]* 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1988), p.24.

<sup>8</sup> Saif Marzuq Al-Shamlan, *Min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [From the History of Kuwait]* 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1986), pp.101-02.

<sup>9</sup> Hussein Khalaf Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Siaysi [The Political History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hilal, 1962), p.37, Abu Hakimah, op. cit., p.22.

This place was the one that Al-Utub (to which Al-Sabah family belong)<sup>10</sup> immigrated to and was the nucleus of Kuwait.

The emergence of Kuwait as a coherent entity has not been clearly traced in recorded history. The country was said to have been established by a group of nomadic tribe called 'Aneizah in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the year 1710 is put forward as the year of foundation.

The tribe of 'Aneizah or Bani 'Anzah was from the Arab tribes, which lived in the north of the Arabian Peninsula, Najd, and the borders of Iraq and Syria. It was divided into several clans the biggest was Jamilah clan to which Al-Utub belong. Al-Utub in turn was divided into Al-Sabah (the rulers of Kuwait), Al-Khalifah (the rulers of Bahrain), and Al-Jalahimah who settled in Qatar but were not able to establish a sheikhdom. These three families had settled near the Bani Khlid's fortress (*Kut*) in *Grane*, after taking permission from their leaders who built it.<sup>11</sup>

Despite of what Al-Nabhani has mentioned in his book *Al-Tuhfa Al-Nabhania fi Tariekh Al-Jazera Al-Arabia* [The History of Arabian Peninsula] and others who cited him, such as Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, that Al-Utub emigrated from Najd into Qatar and Al-Hasa and then into Kuwait<sup>12</sup> this is not correct. An Ottoman document published later confirms that the old place of Al-Utub, during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was Bandar Kink and Dleimah on the eastern coast of the Arabian Gulf, near the port of Linjah. By the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, they moved into Bahrain and settled there for a while. In 1113 *hirji*, disputes between them and the Arab of Al-Hawlah—who were settling in those areas—erupted and encourage by the Shi'ai Persian leader of Bahrain. As a consequence, they had to move to another allied Arab tribe named as Al-Khleifat in Basra, which was under the rule of the Ottoman Sultan and under the direct command of Ali Basha the

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<sup>10</sup> Although many historian claims that Al-Utub was an adjective rather than a name that means the moving from one place to another, this claim is incorrect because the name Utbah is an Arabic name which was used for ages.

<sup>11</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and central Arabia*, vol.1, Historical (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p.1000. Also Al-Nabhani, op. cit., vol.8, pp.126-28.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Nabhani, op. cit, vol.8, p.126, Aziz, Al-Rashid, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat, 1978), p.33.

governor of Basra. They were allowed to settle in Basra and particularly in Um Qasr and Al-Subieh.<sup>13</sup>

These facts were also substantiated by Frances Warden, the representative of the British government in the Gulf, in his report on Al-Utub in 1819.<sup>14</sup> This indeed indicate that the immigration of Al-Utub from Najd was among the old immigration to Bandar Kink and Dleimah and after that to Bahrain and then to Kuwait and not as mentioned by Al-Nabhani that their move was from Najd to Kuwait via Qatar.

It might be useful to mention here that, in those years the Utub spent in the Eastern coast of Arabian Gulf before their settlement in Kuwait, they learned seafaring and shipbuilding industry, and therefore they became a maritime community.<sup>15</sup> These acquired skills have played a crucial role in shaping the future destiny of Kuwaiti Society.

Although historical sources do not concur with the original place of Al-Utub and the route they followed until they arrived in Kuwait, they at least agreed on that they settled after their arrival in the area of Um Qasr and Al-Sibeih, south of Basra. From there they headed toward the fortress (*Kut*) of Bani Khalid in *Grane*, where they resided after the approval of Bani Khalid.<sup>16</sup> The date this took place was 1716, as confirmed by historical resources.<sup>17</sup> This date is reasonable because the immigration of the Al-Utub from Bahrain to Um Qasr and Subeih was in 1700 or 1701 and the period up to 1716 was a period of a gradual evolvement of the *Kut* of Bani Khalid. Al-Utub moved there once they realized its importance, and probably in order to remain as far as possible from the direct Ottoman authority in Basra.

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<sup>13</sup> An Arabic translation of a letter from the ruler of Basra Ali Basha to the Ottoman Sultan on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Rajab 1113 *Hijri*, it was about the settlement of the Al-Utub in Bahrain near Dleimah and Bandar Kink before their arrival into Basra. The Archive of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait.

<sup>14</sup> Frances Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrain) 1716-1817", In: *History of Kuwait* edited by Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakima, (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1970), pp. 159-70.

<sup>15</sup> Nuriyah Mohammed Al-Salih, '*Alaqat Al-Kuwait Al-Siaysieh bi-Sharq Al-Jazera Al-Arabia wa Al-Iraq Al-Ottomani 1866-1902 [Kuwait Political Relations with Eastern Arabian Peninsula and Ottoman Iraq 1866-1902]* (Kuwait: Al-Matba'aah Al-'Asria, 1977), p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Nabhani, op. cit., p.656. Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit., vol.1, p.41.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Rashid,, op. cit., p.33.

As to Bani Khalid—who were in control of the Eastern Arabia and who were the neighbours of Al-Utub—after controlling Al-Hasa from the Ottomans in 1660,<sup>18</sup> they started their disputes with the Wahhabis movement which emerged in Najd. After the death of the leader of Bani Khalid, Sa‘adoun Bin Mohammed in 1723, there were differences among his followers of Bani Khalid rulers: they divided into groups and became involved in a bloody war. Furthermore, their dispute with the Wahhabis continued during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and led to their defeat by the Wahhabis in 1795.

The internal differences between Bani Khalid and their long dispute with the Wahhabis had helped Al-Utub in settling Kuwait and establishing a principality for themselves. The three clans of Al-Utub (Al-Sabah, Al-Khalifa, and Al-Jalahimah) had forged an alliance under the leadership of Al-Sabah’s leader, Sheikh Sabah bin Jaber. According to this alliance, Sheikh Sabah bin Jaber of Al-Sabah had leadership in the affairs of government, in consultation with the other two sheikhs of Al-Khalifa, and Al-Jalahimah. Sheikh Khalifa Bin Mohammad of Al-Khalifa had leadership of financial affairs in commerce, and Sheikh Jaber bin Utbah of Al-Jalahimah assumed the affairs of work at sea. They also agreed on the equal division of profits.<sup>19</sup>

It is obvious that this agreement was meant to take advantage of the prevailing conditions, to arrange and to organize their matters in a way to establish their independent entity from the then political entities. It is also clear that they were aware of the trade and seafaring business before their arrival in Kuwait which, in turn, impacted upon the rapid development and prosperity of Kuwait. This is confirmed by the letter sent by the Ottoman ruler of Basra Ali Basha to the Ottoman Sultan with regard to Al-Utub (in the document mentioned earlier). In this letter Ali Basha, mentioned that “they were [Al-Utub] two thousand families and they had 150 boats... they were always on their boats, and their work was transporting merchants and their funds from one place to another”.<sup>20</sup> Their divisions of these businesses were a result of their knowledge before their arrival to Kuwait. This was to have a great impact on the economic development of Kuwait and the resultant social and political developments. The point to be made here is

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<sup>18</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.29.

<sup>19</sup> Warden, op. cit., p.173.

<sup>20</sup> An Arabic translation of a letter from the ruler of Basra Ali Basha to the Ottoman Sultan on 2 Rajab 1113 *Hijri*, The Archive of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait.

that on their way to Kuwait Al-Utub were probably accompanied by segments of other nomadic and sedentary groups, attached to them in a vassal-tribal relationship. By accompanying those diverse cross-sections of economic groups and throughout the period of time they had spent along the eastern coast of Arabia, the Utub had moved significantly from nomadism as a mode of production to a settled life based on a new mode of production.

Because of the weakened influence of Bani Khalid and the settlement of Al-Utub in Kuwait and the development of their economic activities, the small village of Kuwait started to grow rapidly. People from neighbouring countries, especially Iraq, Iran and nomadic tribes from central Arabia, started to come to it and the village extended gradually. As a result, the population of Kuwait increased rapidly and the economic and commercial activities flourished to the extent that the inhabitants of Kuwait were in need of some sort of administration or a leader who would oversee their interests, enforce law, and put an end to disputes among them. They chose Sheikh Sabah Bin Jaber, the leader of Al-Sabah to be according to the agreement between the three families the ruler of Kuwait. They endorse his rule provided that he would consult them in matters concerning Kuwait.<sup>21</sup>

Although historical sources agreed on the election of Sheikh Sabah as the first Sheikh of Kuwait, they, however, disagree on the exact year that Sheikh Sabah had assumed power. Some sources mention 1718<sup>22</sup> but others believe that the year was 1756.<sup>23</sup> This could be justified by regarding the period between 1716—the year of the arrival of Al-Utub into Kuwait— until the death of Suleiman Bin Mohammed the Emir of Bani Khalid in 1752 that Kuwait was under the direct control of Bani Khalid and that the existence of Al-Utub was under the shadow of Bani Khalid. The period 1752-1756 could be considered as a transition period that paved the way for Al-Utub to govern Kuwait instead of Bani Khalid who entered into a dispute with the Wahhabis.

The election of Sheikh Sabah was forced by political pressure resulting from intertribal warfare. Sheikh Sabah I was chosen from among his people on the tribal basis as the

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Rashid, *op. cit.*, p.104.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, *op. cit.*, p.43.

<sup>23</sup> Lorimer, *op. cit.*, p.1001. Abu Hakimah, *op. cit.*, p.69.

position of sheikh was hereditary to his family and his father Sheikh Jaber had been the recognised leader of this immigrant section of the 'Aneizah tribe. Another decisive factor in the Utub's choice of Sheikh Sabah was his personal virtues, such as wisdom, strength, liberality, modesty, good luck and, not least, wealth. His wealth was measured by the size of his herds of livestock, and his wisdom by the keen judgment with he displayed in handling authoritatively the problems of the community.<sup>24</sup>

It should be noted that although the election of Sheikh Sabah and the succession became thereafter hereditary and ultimately confined to Al-Sabah lineage, the Al-Sabah family during this stage of Kuwait history was almost an administrative group more than a ruling family, in the strict sense of the word. Their authority was in a tribal framework in which a certain individual from certain family were elected to oversee the affairs of the town with the participation of the leading houses in the society who carried other tasks. The Sheikh's authority was relatively diffuse. He was a leader but not a true ruler. He practised the system of *shura* (consultation) and the town had a *majlis* (council) in which the notables (merchants) and 'aulama (religious scholars) played an influential role.

### **3.3 Factors Contributing to the Development of Kuwait**

The settlement of Al-Utub in Kuwait was in conjunction with other factors that played a role in the development of this city. The first factor was the geographical location of the city of Kuwait. This location contributed enormously to the activation of the sea trade between Basra and India, and the caravan trade between Kuwait on the one hand and Najd, Syria, and south of Iraq on the other hand. The political conditions in the region also had a role in the development of the city. The establishment of the city of Kuwait coincided with the eruption of political conflicts in the hinterland of Arabia between Bani Khalid, the rulers of the Eastern Arabia and the Wahhabis whose power started to emerge after Imam Mohammad Bin Abdul Wahhab sought asylum in Al-Dar'aiyah and his alliance with Mohammed bin Saud in 1745.<sup>25</sup> These disputes, mentioned above, continued during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and ended in the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.61, and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., p.24.

<sup>25</sup> Hussein Bin Ghannam, *Tareikh Najd [The History of Najd]* edited and verified by Nasir Al-Deen Al-Assad, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (Beirut: Dar Al-Sharq, 1985), pp.126-28.

disappearance of the rule of Bani Khalid in the east of the Arabian Peninsula in 1795.<sup>26</sup> They reflected on Kuwait in two aspects. These conflicts had kept the two sides (Bani Khalid and Wahhabis) preoccupied from Kuwait and consequently neither side thought of controlling Kuwait or annexing it. The second aspect was that these disputes led to the immigration of huge numbers of the inhabitants of the middle and eastern Arabia and areas adjacent to Kuwait and this in turn led to the increase of the population of Kuwait and consequently the economic activities increased.

In addition, the deterioration of the Basra commercial role resulted from the outbreak and spread of plague in 1773 which led to the death of many people and the immigration of others to neighbouring areas including Kuwait.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the siege imposed by the Persians and the consequent occupation of Basra by the Persians (1775-79) led to the immigration of people into Kuwait. This siege was caused by economic factors. Kareem Khan, the Shah of Iran was vindictive of the Basra trade prosperity following the move of the British East Indian Company from the Iranian port of Bandar 'Abbas, the collapse of the commercial centre of Bushire, and the resultant financial difficulties, pushing the Shah to attack Basra in an attempt to occupy it.<sup>28</sup> The deterioration of Basra's trade position led to the transferring of the bulk of Indian trade with Baghdad, Aleppo, Constantinople, Najd, and the middle of the Arabian Peninsula to Kuwait. Furthermore, this resulted in the flux of merchants with their funds to Kuwait, which in turn transformed Kuwait into a first class port on the Arabian Gulf.<sup>29</sup> Kuwait also became an important station for trade caravans to south of Iraq, Syria, middle and eastern Arabia and it witnessed a great economic and trade prosperity. The outcome was due to the following reasons:

- A. The weakness of the Ottomans and the Persian and the lack of their influence in the Gulf because of the internal problems of the Persians and the lack of naval force that would enable them to confront the fleet of Al-Utub and occupying Kuwait. This was added to their constant dispute with the Ottomans since the latter took over Iraq. The Ottomans themselves suffered from internal problems because of the interference of the central authority in Constantinople in appointing and sacking rulers to the extent that authority of the appointed ruler

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.170-71.

<sup>27</sup> Abu Hakimah, op. cit., pp.73-75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp.77-80, Mohammed Hassan Al-'Adarous, *Tariekh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi Al-Hadit [The Modern History of the Arabian Gulf]*, (Cairo: Dar 'Ain Lil Dirasat wa Al-Bohouth, 1996), p 43.

<sup>29</sup> Abu Hakimah, op. cit., pp.80-111.



of Baghdad sometimes did not reach to Basra in south of Iraq.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the emergence of Arab sheikhdoms and emirates—such as the Bu Sa'adeyeen in Oman, Bani Khalid in Al-Hasa, the Wahhabis in Najd, and Al Qawasim in the Trucial coast of Oman—in the Gulf were able to finish the influence and authority of the Ottomans and the Persians.<sup>31</sup>

- B. The establishment of the sheikhdom of Kuwait and the extension of its authority at the expense of the Bani Khalid tribe, who was known for their inclination towards trade. Kuwait also benefited from the preoccupation of this tribe in a conflict with the Wahhabis in Najd.<sup>32</sup>
- C. The experience of the Kuwaitis and the availability of a big number of ships, which in turn led to the expansion of their trade movement.<sup>33</sup>
- D. The interests of the inhabitants of Kuwait in pearling and seafaring. This was associated with the immigration of many wealthy merchants to get these pearls.
- E. The situation of Kuwait —which made it the centre for caravan trade to Najd, Syria, south of Iraq and Al-Hasa— as a port on the northern west of the Gulf.
- F. The influx to Kuwait of many immigrants from Iraq, Iran and the middle of Arabian Peninsula as a result of political instability.<sup>34</sup> All of these factors had opened new horizons for Kuwait for development and political and economic prosperity. The population of Kuwait increased accordingly and so did its economic resources to the extent that it prompted a competition among Al-Utub themselves.

In 1766 the Al-Khalifa family, who had taken over the matters of finance and trade, desired to leave Kuwait and break its alliance with Al-Sabah and Al-Jalahimah. They left Kuwait for Qatar in 1766.<sup>35</sup> The reason for their leaving is a contested one. Some historical resources tried to suggest justifications for this immigration by ascribing it to the internal disputes between them and the sheikh of Kuwait over the management of

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<sup>30</sup> Badder Al-Deen Abbas Al-Khususi, *Tariekh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi Al-Hadith [The Modern History of the Arabian Gulf]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1984), pp.80-81.

<sup>31</sup> Abu Hakimah op. cit., pp.103-08.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Also Bin Ghannam, op. cit., pp.129-30.

<sup>33</sup> Carsten Niebuher *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries*, Part 2 (Edinburgh: Morison and Son, 1792), p.127.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Khususi, op. cit, pp.80-81.

<sup>35</sup> Warden, op. cit., p.159.

the town.<sup>36</sup> However, the main motive of this immigration, as Frances Warden emphasized was the desire of Al-Khalifa to be independent and make the financial gains from pearling only for them.

Frances Warden wrote:

In the course of fifty years (1716-1766), by a prudent and cautious policy the new settlement attained a very high degree of prosperity; the accumulation of wealth rendered the mercantile branch desirous of seceding from the original league that they might singly enjoy and add to their acquired riches.

He adds that the accumulation of wealth made the group responsible of trade—Al-Khalifa—to follow an un-straightforward way to achieve their goals. Their shrewd leader Khalifa bin Mohammed, promised them to achieve this.

He represented to the other two the prospects of wealth that presented themselves by proceeding to the shores of that part of the Persian Gulf the most productive of pearls and by forming a settlement on some contiguous spot, to conduct the fishery themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Sabah agreed on this proposal and then Al-Khalifa moved to Zubarah in Qatar in 1766.

Nevertheless, and despite these conflicting narratives, the fact remained that Al-Khalifa left Kuwait to Zubarah in Qatar in 1766. Zubarah was under the rule of Al-Muslim, one of the clans of Bani Khalid who was controlling the areas of the Eastern Arabia.<sup>38</sup> Because of the cordial relations between Bani Khalid and Al-Utub, Al-Khalifa did not face any problem in going to Zubarah and settling there.

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<sup>36</sup> Al-Nabhani, op. cit., vol.8, p.130, Warden, p.159, Yosif Bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, *Safahat min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [Pages from the History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968), p.12.

<sup>37</sup> Warden, op. cit., pp.158-59.

<sup>38</sup> Bin Ghannam op. cit., pp.123-24, Al-'Adarous, op. cit., p.80.

They were also followed by Al-Jalahimah<sup>39</sup> —the second part of the Al-Utub alliance— who left Kuwait due to the eruption of differences between them and Al-Sabah on their share of trade and pearling.<sup>40</sup> This difference, however, might have happened as a result of the absence of Al-Khalifa from this alliance and the resultant change of the financial and trade matters. The move of Al-Khalifa also led to the re-division of the distribution of revenues after the decrease of these revenues caused by the trade vacuum, which led to immigration of Al-Jalahimah.

After the departure of Al-Kalifa and Al-Jalahimah, Kuwait became the sheikhdom of Al-Sabah family who ruled it from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the present day. The following table indicates the first ten sheikhs of Al-Sabah family until 1950:

**Table 3.2**  
**The Al-Sabah Family Sheikhs of Kuwait, 1756-1950<sup>41</sup>**

| Sheikh      | Period of Reign |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Sabah I     | 1765-1762       |
| Abdullah I  | 1762-1812       |
| Jaber I     | 1812-1859       |
| Subah II    | 1859-1866       |
| Abdullah II | 1866-1892       |
| Mohammed    | 1892-1896       |
| Mubarak     | 1896-1915       |
| Jaber II    | 1915-1917       |
| Salem       | 1917-1921       |
| Ahmed       | 1921-1950       |

It is worth mentioning here that beside Al-Sabah family there were a number of merchant families such Al Ghanim, Al-Shamlan, Al Saleh, Al Qatami, Al Saqer, Al Roumi and Al Badr who shared with them common ancestral heritage as descendants from Anezah tribe or from other noble tribes. These families consider themselves as noble (*asil*) families who established Kuwait with Al-Sabah family. The senior

<sup>39</sup> Historical sources do not define the date of this migration. However, these sources mention that it happened after the migration of Al Khalifa.

<sup>40</sup> Warden op. cit., pp158-59.

<sup>41</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., Genealogical Trees, Table of the Ruling Al-Sabah Family, Pocket No. 11

members of these families were treated almost as equals by the senior members of Al-Sabah. It was a regular occurrence for the Al-Sabah to intermarry with these families. Sheikh Jaber Ahmed Jaber Al-Sabah, the sheikh of Kuwait (1921-1950), married one of the Al Ghanims. Thus, since the coming of Al-Sabah to power, these families had a close relationship with them and it has become a tradition that the sheikh of Kuwait is expected to consult their leaders before making a final decision on important matters.<sup>42</sup> The status of these families is totally dependent on their tribal background and their wealth which they accumulated in the early days of the rise of Kuwait. They represented the social and economic power within the Kuwaiti society through their enterprises and ownership of product aspects, such as capital, trade ships and pearling.

### **3.4 Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah and His Role in the Modern History of Kuwait**

In 1896 Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (1896-1915) took over the power in Kuwait. This was an event of great importance on Kuwait and its external relations with neighbouring countries. He assumed the leadership in Kuwait by force, the first time in the history of Kuwait as power had hitherto been transferred by heredity within Al-Sabah family since the reign of Sabah I.

The way Mubarak took over made a great impact on the volume of events and political developments, which influenced not only Kuwait but the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss in detail the reign of Sheikh Mubarak and his way of seizing power.

Since 1892, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Sabah —the elder half brother of Mubarak—governed Kuwait. He was very weak and had no interest in political matters. Accordingly, he entrusted one of his relatives to run the country. This man was Yousif bin Abdullah Al-Ibrahim, a wealthy merchant from Basra.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John Murry, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Arabia* (London: John Murry, 1984), p.194. Also Ahmed Abdullah Baz, *Political Elite and Political Development in Kuwait*, PhD Thesis. (George Washington University, 1981), p.5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Sheikh Mohammed who paid more attention to financial matters and accumulation of wealth than politics shared power with his full blood brother Jarrah. However, both Sheikh Mohammed and Sheikh Jarrah were incompetent allowing Yousif Al-Ibrahim, who was closely associated with the Ottoman governor of Basra, to have the first say in the county's matters and became, in reality, the ruler of Kuwait.<sup>44</sup>

Sheikh Mubarak, the third brother of Mohammed and Jarrah, was a very practical and ambitious person. His character was the very opposite of the effete ruler and he feared that the Al-Sabah family would lose their rightful place as rulers of Kuwait due to his brothers' incompetence. Disagreements soon arose between him and his brothers. To get rid of him, Sheikh Mohammed dealt with Mubarak by occupying him with affairs outside the city of Kuwait, sending him off to Al-Hasa with Ottoman forces, and out to the desert to restore order among the tribes, but providing him with no funds. Mubarak after repeatedly requesting financial support from his brothers, finally decided to assassinate them with the aid of his sons Jaber and Salem and some supporters. He killed them on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1896. In the following morning Mubarak announced that his brothers had died, and that he ruled in their stead.<sup>45</sup>

The way that Sheikh Mubarak assumed power in Kuwait led to the emergence of a political opposition headed by Yousif Al-Ibrahim and the sons of the two assassinated Sheikhs. Disputes between Sheikh Mubarak and his opponents led, in their turn, to the interference of foreign powers in Kuwait, a fact which directly affected and re-shaped the political map of Kuwait and Arabian Gulf region in general and indirectly influenced the social and economic structure of Kuwaiti.

### **3.5 Kuwaiti-Ottoman Relations**

Although, since the establishment of Al-Sabah rule in Kuwait, the Ottoman-Kuwaiti relations had been through ups and downs they were mainly good. The people of Kuwait acknowledged the Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait and they regarded

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<sup>44</sup> Amin Al-Rihani, *Muluk Al-Arab: Rihlah fi Al-Bilad Al-Arabia [Arab Kings: Trip in Arab Land]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, undated), p.658, and Lorimer, op. cit., p.1017.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'al, op. cit., vol.4, p.16. See also *A Brief History of Kuwait* at: <http://www.windsor-brooke.com/History.htm> (28.10.2001).

themselves, along with other Gulf inhabitants, as subjects of the Ottoman Sultan. However, the Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait was only nominal and Ottomans never exercised real power over Kuwait.

It was true that the sheikhs of Kuwait regarded themselves as part of the Ottoman Empire and hoisted the Ottoman flag and held the Ottoman title *Qaimmaqam* (District-Governor) which nominally refers to Kuwait as a part of Basra district,<sup>46</sup> but neither the Ottoman Sultan nor the governor of Basra practiced any political or administrative influence in Kuwait. The Kuwaiti sheikhs were responsible for the administration of customs and they themselves defined a percentage of fees to be paid to the Ottomans as an acceptance of the Ottoman sovereignty. This emphasizes their civil independence, although they took part in the Ottoman campaigns against Al-Hasa in 1871 and against Qatar in 1892<sup>47</sup> in the context of their nominal compliance with the Ottoman State.

However, relations with the Ottoman State fundamentally changed in the aftermath of the assumption of power by Sheikh Mubarak in Kuwait in 1896. This event, as pointed out earlier, had a great impact upon many political aspects regarding Kuwait. The first implication was the emergence of political opposition headed by Yousif Al-Ibrahim and the sons of the two killed sheikhs. They had resorted to Iraq and contacted the Ottoman ruler of Basra asking for the intervention of the Ottomans to restore them to Kuwait and expel Sheikh Mubarak.<sup>48</sup>

It seems that the Ottomans were neutral at the beginning towards the goings on in Kuwait. Sheikh Mubarak also made a great effort at the beginning of his rule to obstruct his opponents by maintaining good relations with the Ottomans. He strengthened his relations with Rajab Basha, the ruler of Baghdad, and acknowledged his allegiance to the Ottomans.<sup>49</sup> Fearing that the dispute between Sheikh Mubarak and his opponents might lead to the interference of foreign forces—especially Britain—the Ottomans informed their ruler for Basra, Muhsun Basha, in 1897 of the Sultan decree.

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<sup>46</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p. 1008, Al Rashid, op. cit., p.33.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.99.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'al , op. cit., vol.4, p.17, Lorimer, op. cit., p1017.

<sup>49</sup> Hussein, op. cit., p.27.

As a result Sheikh Mubarak was appointed as *Qaimmaqam* with a monthly salary of 150 *Karah* of Dates, which later became as £300 a year.<sup>50</sup>

However, Sheikh Mubarak never trusted the Ottomans and he was fearful of their possible military expansion. His fears were aggravated by the Ottomans' good relations with his enemies, Al Rashid—in central Arabia—and by the Ottomans' sending of a representative for health quarantine to Kuwait in 1897. This enhanced his fears that the Ottomans were looking to subdue his sheikhdom to their direct control. The attempts of Yousif Al Ibrahim and the sons of two assassinated sheikhs exceeded to contact the ruler of Basra were also expanded to appeal to Constantinople. When their efforts did not pay off they resorted to the British resident in Basra and asked him the help of Britain to resort the throne of Kuwait emphasizing their desire to implement all British demands in Kuwait.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of this and due to the fear the Ottomans might send military forces to Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak asked to meet the British Political Resident in the Gulf, Colonel Kemboll, or his deputy. In 1897, Mr. Gaskin arrived in Kuwait. Mubarak expressed his and his people desire to receive the British protection in order to averse a confrontation with the Ottomans.<sup>52</sup> After some correspondences between the government of the Indian and the British government in London, the British replied to Mubarak that there was no need to place Kuwait under the British protection or interfering too much in its affairs in order to achieve a general peace in the Gulf region.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the secrecy of Mubarak's contact with the British, the Ottomans were suspicious of the nature of the relations between the ruler of Kuwait and Britain. They were also sure that there were serious attempts on the part of Mubarak to link his country to the Britain. Their suspicions, coupled with his struggle with Ibn Rashid (the Emir of Hail in central Arabia), the ally of the Ottomans and the troubles of Yousif Al Ibrahim forced the Ottomans to issue a decree in 1898 that ordered the voluntary exile of Mubarak from Kuwait. He should either move to Constantinople and become a

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<sup>50</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.1019.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, op. cit., vol.2, p.20.

<sup>52</sup> Dickson, op. cit., p.137.

<sup>53</sup> Fuad Said Al 'Abid, *Siaysat Baritania fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi*, [British Policy in the Arabian Gulf], Part 2 (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, Undated), pp.169-70.

member of the Consultative Council for the Empire, or live in one of the countries of the Ottoman Empire while the government would give him a salary about 150 Lira monthly. The decree went on to say that if he rejected this offer he would be ejected by force.<sup>54</sup>

It is obvious that the Ottomans sought, by this Sultan's decree, to place Kuwait under their direct control in order to put an end to their fears of the possibility of the British influence. However, the results were exactly the opposite. Sheikh Mubarak re-established his contacts with the British Political Resident in the Gulf explaining to him the developments with the Ottoman government. The British Resident informed him that his government was willing to protect him and would prevent the implementation of the Sultan's decree. When the Ottomans sent a ship to the port of Kuwait with a delegation onboard to receive the opinion of Sheikh Mubarak, two British ships approached, ordering the Ottoman delegation to leave Kuwait.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, the Sultan's decree forced the British to give up on their old policy of keeping the status quo in Kuwait and to directly intervene in order to prevent the arrival of the Ottomans' influence on and threat to the British interests in the Gulf. Both sides signed an agreement in 1899 whereby Kuwait came under the British protection.<sup>56</sup> Both sides tried to keep the treaty secret but they had to announce it in 1900. This pushed the Ottoman government to officially protest through its ambassador in London. He announced that the conclusion of this treaty was regarded as a challenge to the sovereignty of the Ottoman State. He regarded the treaty as invalid since it was signed by someone who belonged to Ottoman State.<sup>57</sup> The British response was that it did not desire to change the status quo in Kuwait.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit., vol.2, p.57.

<sup>55</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., pp.1020-21, Hussein, op. cit., p.28.

<sup>56</sup> FO/371/149 January 23, 1899. Also see *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961*, selected and edited by Ade L. Bush, vol. I, Internal Affairs (London: British Library, 1989), pp.116-17.

<sup>57</sup> FO/785173, August 20, 1901: a letter from the British ambassador in Constantinople Sir O 'Conner to the British prime minister lord Lansdowne regarding the Ottoman opposition to this agreement.

<sup>58</sup> FO78/5174, September 9, 1901: a letter from the British Foreign Office to N. O'Connor the British ambassador in Constantinople. The Foreign Office minister explains his approval of the Ottoman point of view which states that the Ottoman government would respect the situation of Kuwait provided that Britain would not send military forces there.



The Ottoman reply to Sheikh Mubarak after his agreement with Britain came in 1902. They reduced the borders of his sheikhdom by placing military checkpoints in the islands of Bubian, Um Qasr and Safwan, considering these points outside the district of Kuwait. These sites remained under the Ottoman control until 1914 when the First World War erupted and Mubarak exploited the opportunity, restoring them to Kuwait. They also supported his traditional enemies, Al Rashid. Ottoman support to Al Rashid was so decisive that it helped them defeat Mubarak in the famous battle of Sarif in 1901.<sup>59</sup>

Despite his protection treaty with the British, his relations with the Ottomans did not reach to the stage of enmity, but altered according to two variables. The first one was who governed Basra and the second variable was the changing nature of the political circumstances that impacted on the course of these relations. However, with the eruption of the First World War and the British occupation of Basra on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1914, all relations between Kuwait and the Ottoman State were cut off and therefore Kuwait entered in a new era in its foreign policy relations.

### **3.6 Kuwaiti-British Relations**

Studying the political relations between Kuwait and Britain entails highlighting Kuwait's relations with other European states that attempted to interfere in the Gulf, and whose attempts had an impact on the signing of the 1899 treaty. It is also necessary to give a brief review of the relations between the two countries before the agreement.

The Kuwaiti-British relations go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the headquarters of the British commercial agency transferred in Kuwait after the Persian conquest of Basra (1775-1779). Despite relations between Britain and Kuwait since that date, Kuwait remained relatively distant for the direct British influence until the 1890s due to its close geographical location to Basra—the Ottoman centre in the Gulf—and its nominal allegiance to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, despite the political influence of the

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<sup>59</sup> FO/ 371/559, September 10, 1908: a correspondence from the Government of India to India Office in London.

British government and its control of the Gulf, it did not deny the Ottoman sovereignty over some areas in the Gulf including Kuwait.<sup>60</sup>

The British government observed the situation closely in Kuwait although it had no political relations with its previous sheikhs despite its attempt to offer them a protection proposal in 1856, which was refused.<sup>61</sup> However, with the assumption of power by Sheikh Mubarak in 1896, the political environment changed and the British interest in Kuwait increased.

As mentioned earlier, the way Sheikh Mubarak took over in Kuwait led to the emergence of a political opposition led by Yousif Al Ibrahim and the sons of the two killed Sheikhs. They had made a series of contacts with other political forces, including the British government via its political resident in Basra, in order to help them restore the throne of Kuwait from Sheikh Mubarak. Coupled with this development, Mubarak's fear that the Ottomans might invade Kuwait, forced him to contact the British in 1879 asking for protection. Although his demand was not agreed at the time, Kuwait became under direct British interest. This is substantiated by the reports of the British politicians in the Gulf, which emphasized the importance of Kuwait for British interests in the region.

In one of his reports, Colonel M. J. Meade, the British political Resident in the Gulf, described Kuwait as an excellent port. If it becomes under the British protection, there is no doubt that it will be one of the most important centres in the Arabian Gulf. He added that the British protection of Kuwait means a concentration of British political interests in the Gulf and its coasts.<sup>62</sup> Other politicians also pointed out this importance, such as Colonel Loch the British consul in Baghdad.<sup>63</sup> Despite this, all the British did was to strengthen their relations with the Kuwait sheikhs and simultaneously maintain the status quo, lest this would put them in a clash with the Ottomans. They sought to prevent the Ottomans' interventions in Kuwait so that their interest would not be affected. However, when the Ottomans opened the door for negotiating a tender for a

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<sup>60</sup> Laurence Lockhart, "Outline of the History of Kuwait", *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 1947, (34), p.264.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'al, op. cit., vol.3, pp.119-20.

<sup>62</sup> R/15/1/471, FF.108-9, September 10, 1897: a correspondence from Colonel M. J. Meade, the British Political Resident in the Gulf to the Government of India.

<sup>63</sup> Al 'Abid, op. cit., vol.2, p.167. Also Briton Cooper Busch, "Britain and the Status of Kuwait 1896-1899", *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 21, p.190.

railway that extend from the Mediterranean to the Gulf in 1898, the British changed their conservative policy based on the status quo and entered a direct relations with Kuwait.<sup>64</sup>

In the Russian's constant attempt to obtain a footstep in the regions to compete with Britain, one of the Russian noblemen, Count Vladimir Kapnist, applied to receive the concession for the railway.<sup>65</sup> Russia had taken many steps in this regard; such as the attempt of the Russian Ministry of Finance to establish a branch of bank in Iran; the contact with the Sultan of Muscat to sign an agreement with Russia that would be more suitable than the one he concluded with Britain; and in 1900 it signed an agreement with Iran to regularize the customs matters in which Russia sought to modify the tariffs of some imported commodities from Iran in order to destroy British trade. Russian also appointed a political representative in Bushire in order to compete with Britain and attempted to sign an agreement with those who had not yet signed with Britain. Therefore, had the attempt of Count Kapnist succeeded, this would have created a concession for the Russians in Kuwait and the Gulf in general.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, the changing political conditions played a role in making Britain think seriously about changing its policy towards Kuwait. For example, the rapprochement between France and Russia in the late nineteenth century led Britain to lose some of its control over the Mediterranean. Furthermore, a rapprochement between Germany and the Ottoman State occurred in the wake of the visit of the German Caesar to Constantinople in 1889. This visit resulted in the agreement over the Baghdad-Berlin railway project. Britain saw in this project a real threat to its interests and its presence in the Gulf and the region as a whole.<sup>67</sup>

It was clear that if the British wished to maintain their control over the Gulf, they should close these ports in the face of the fleets of these countries. This would only be brought

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<sup>64</sup> Hafiz Wahba, *Jazirat Al-Arab fi Al-Qarn Al-Ishreen [The Arabian Peninsula in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]* (Cairo: Lajnat Al-Talif wa Al-Tarjma wa Al-Nasher, 1935), p.98.

<sup>65</sup> Salwa Al-Ghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak Al-Sabah: Sheikh of Kuwait 1896-1915* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p.63.

<sup>66</sup> Abu Hakimah, *op. cit.*, p.323.

<sup>67</sup> The Ottoman-German rapprochement resulted from British occupation of Egypt in 1882, which was a challenge to the Ottoman government and considered as an occupation of part of its properties. The Ottoman government sought to enable Germany of competing with Britain. Al 'Abid, *op. cit.*, vol.2, p.189.

about by concluding agreements with the Arab rulers; among them was the sheikh of Kuwait whose country was the weakest link that Britain feared due to the lack of agreement with its ruler. Therefore, the contacts between the British government and India's British government were restored to reconsider the proposal of Sheikh Mubarak of 1897 regarding the request for British protection. These contacts were crowned with the agreement of the British government announcing its protection of Kuwait. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, sent a letter to the British political resident in the Gulf, Colonel M. Meade, instructing him to contact Sheikh Mubarak and write the terms of a secret agreement with him.

On 23 January 1899 Colonel Meade and Sheikh Mubarak signed the protection agreement,<sup>68</sup> which came as an undertaking on the part of Mubarak to Britain with the following terms:

A- On behalf of himself and on his heirs, the Sheikh of Kuwait undertakes not to receive any agent or representative of any country in Kuwait or in any other part within Kuwait without an advanced permission from the British government.

B- The Sheikh of Kuwait commit himself and those who would come after him that Kuwait would not concede, sell, or lease, or give any part of the his property to any government or subjects of other governments without the British government approval. This also applies on the property of the Sheikh that might be in the ownership of citizens of other countries.

In order to ensure that the terms of the Kuwaiti-British treaty were properly observed, the appointment of political agents began early in 1904 in Kuwait. There were 20 British political agents from 1904 until 1961.

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<sup>68</sup> FO/371/149, January 23, 1899. Also *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961*, pp.116-17.

**Table 3.3**  
**British Political Agents in Kuwait, 1904-1961<sup>69</sup>**

| Date       | Political Agent   |
|------------|---|
| 1904-9     | Col. S. G. Knox   |
| 1909-15    | Capt. W. H. Shakespear  |
| 1915-16    | Lt. Col. W. G. Gray   |
| 1916-18    | Lt. Col. R. E. Hamilton   |
| 1918-      | Capt. P. G. Lock  |
| 1919-20    | Capt. D. V. McCollum  |
| 1920-9     | Maj. J. C. More   |
| 1929-36    | Lt. Col. H. R. Dickson  |
| 1936-9     | Capt. G. de Gaury   |
| 1939-41    | Maj. A. C. Galloway   |
| 1941(part) | Lt. Col. H. R. Dickson  |
| 1941-3     | Maj. T. Hickinbotham  |
| 1944-5     | Mr. C. J. Jackson   |
| 1945-8     | Mr. M. P. O' C Tandy  |
| 1948-1     | Mr. H. G. Jakins  |
| 1951-5     | Mr. C. J. Pelly   |
| 1955-7     | Mr. G. W. Bell  |
| 1957-9     | Mr. A. S. Halford   |
| 1959-61    | Mr. J. C. Richmond ( became the first British Ambassador to Kuwait) |

By analyzing the terms of the 1899 agreement, it is obvious that it was a series of undertakings and commitments on the part of the sheikh of Kuwait regarding matters and interest that were relevant to Britain without similar British commitments towards Kuwait. However, it is implied that the respect of the Kuwaiti rulers of this agreement would be exchanged for a British protection against any external intervention. Britain would also preserve the internal independence of Kuwait and maintain the regime and offer some financial concessions. This was substantiated by the course of events that

<sup>69</sup> Zahra Dickson Freeth and H. V. F Winstone. *Kuwait: Prospect and Reality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p.78.

followed. In fact, financial aid started in the wake of the conclusion of this agreement in which Britain paid Sheikh of Kuwait 15 000 rupees.<sup>70</sup>

After the ratification of this agreement by India's British government and the British government in London,<sup>71</sup> both sides tried to keep it secret as Sheikh Mubarak was not interested in sabotaging his relations with the Ottoman government due to his fears of retaliation on his properties in Basra. His ships continued to hoist the Ottoman flags. The British government also had no interest in deteriorating the relations with the Ottoman State or begin an era of dispute with other European powers in the Arabian Gulf.

However, and given the new political developments in the region, it was no longer possible to keep the agreement secret. The British ambassador to Constantinople, Sir Nicholas O'Connor, told the Ottoman authorities in 1900 about the agreement whereby the sheikh of Kuwait had no right to concede any part of his land to any other country without the permission of Britain. The Ottoman government promptly protested this agreement on the ground that this agreement was a challenge to its sovereignty. The German government announced that it acknowledged only the Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait and regarded this agreement as a violation of the Berlin agreement of 1878 that included the safeguarding of the all parts of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>72</sup> The British response was that it did not intend to change the status quo in Kuwait and it only meant to protect the sheikh of Kuwait from any troops that might be sent by the Ottomans to fight him.<sup>73</sup>

Hence, Kuwait practically entered under the British protection and all attempts by Russia and Germany to find a footstep in the ports of the Arabian Gulf and compete the British interest were thwarted and pre-empted. The Ottoman state was forced to accept this reality and it did not seek to change the status quo in Kuwait in exchange for a

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<sup>70</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit., vol.2, p.126.

<sup>71</sup> FO78/5113, February 12, 1899: a correspondence from Viceroy of India to India Office explaining what had been accomplished regarding the protection agreement with Kuwait and asking their opinion regarding this agreement.

<sup>72</sup> FO/78/6114, September 14, 1899: a correspondence from the British ambassador to Constantinople, O'Connor, to the British Minister of foreign Office, Salisbury, in which he explain the Ottoman Sultan's point of view regarding Kuwait.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit., vol.2, pp.129-30.

British undertaking no military action to occupy Kuwait.<sup>74</sup> Both countries arrived at an agreement in 1913 regarding Kuwait, this agreement, however, was never ratified due to the eruption of the First World War.<sup>75</sup>

On the eve of the First World War, Britain renewed its agreements with the sheikhs of the Gulf, including sheikh Kuwait who was told by Sir Percy Cox, the British Political Resident in the Gulf, that “the British government intends to grant him, and other sheikhs in the Gulf as well, new advantages, and intends to renew its agreement with them, because their help and support were indispensable during these circumstances”.<sup>76</sup>

In August 1914, the British government informed Sheikh Mubarak that Britain had entered the war against Germany and the Ottoman State, and Mubarak answered that he and all Kuwaiti tribes were with Britain.<sup>77</sup> Britain occupied Basra on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1914; therefore Kuwait was connected directly with Britain and at the same time disconnected all of its ties with the Ottoman State. Kuwait’s political affairs during the British occupation of Basra were at the disposal of the British political governors in Basra. When Baghdad was occupied by the British, Kuwait became connected with the British High Commissioner in Baghdad who ran Kuwait through instructions to the British Agent in Kuwait. When the local rule was established in Iraq, the British government decided to put Kuwait’s political affairs under its Political Resident in the Gulf.<sup>78</sup>

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Kuwaiti-British relations were based on the associations that linked the sheikhs of Kuwait to Britain. However, during the war, their relations were linked to the economic problems that resulting from the war, which became the focal interest of Britain in its relations with Kuwait especially after the death of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah in 1915. Britain waged a campaign of starvation by using the economic siege as a means to put pressures on the Ottoman State. Britain told its

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<sup>74</sup> FO78/5174, September 9, 1901: a correspondence from the British Foreign Office to N. O’Connor, the British ambassador in Constantinople.

<sup>75</sup> Al ‘Abid, op. cit., vol.2, pp.258-59.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz’aal , op. cit., vol.2, p.148.

<sup>77</sup> F0371/1322 November 2, 1914: a correspondence from Sir Cox, the British political resident in the Arabian Gulf, to Sheikh Mubarak in which he informed him about the outbreak of the war and demanded him to attack and occupy Um Qasr, Safwan and Bubian.

<sup>78</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz’aal , op. cit., vol.5, p.271.

Arab allies including Kuwait to cooperate in the attempt to tighten the siege. Kuwait was very important in this connection due to its location and its inhabitants' trade activities. Tribes in the southern Iraq used to go to Kuwait to obtain goods and supplies coming from India but the British authorities instructed Kuwait not to sell these supplies to the tribes without permits.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, permits were only given to tribes that cooperated with the British occupation of southern Iraq. This led to increases in the prices of commodities to the extent that tempted the Kuwait merchants to smuggle to Iraqi tribes and other subjects of Al- Rashid, the allies of the Ottomans. Britain officially protested this to Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah (1915-17), who expressed his readiness to put British observers on the borders to prevent smuggling.<sup>80</sup>

Sheikh Jaber died in 1917 and was succeeded by Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah (1917-21). The latter was known for his sympathy to the Ottomans despite the fact that the course of the war clearly showed that it was going against the Ottomans. As a result, during his reign, the volume of smuggling increased. Salem was probably motivated by his desire to take the interests of the merchants into account who were hurt by the siege. These merchants were an important class that had a significant role in the Kuwait internal affairs, who made the Islamic sympathy to the Ottomans the justification for their smuggling.<sup>81</sup>

As a consequence, Britain sent Sheikh Salem an envoy asking for a British control over the borders by placing British observers. Sheikh Salem hesitated to accept this and when he consulted the merchants' class they urged him to reject the British demand. However, Britain warned him that there was a necessity of putting Kuwait under the control of British inspectors to prevent smuggling to areas belonging to the Ottoman State. Kuwait, as a result of this policy, was subjugated to the British occupation forces in 1918 for the first time.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Salah Al-'Aqqad, *Al-Tayarat Al-Siaysiah fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The Political Currents in the Arabian Gulf]* (Cairo: Matba'at Al-Anglo-Al-Misria, 1974), pp.106-09.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit., vol.4, p.107.

<sup>81</sup> This was what forced the British government to express its resentment of Sheikh Salem and its desire to grant Sheikh Khaz'aal Al Marado, the governor of Arabistan at that time, or one of his sons the rule in Kuwait instead of him. Al Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit, vol.4, p.294.

<sup>82</sup> Al-'Aqqad, op. cit., pp.226-27.



Britain begun to think about the future of Kuwait after the end of the First World War, and the demise of the Ottoman and German danger on Britain's interest in the Gulf. This was coupled with Britain's resentment of the stance of Sheikh Salem regarding the economic siege that aimed at preventing the arrival of supplies across the borders of Kuwait to the enemy forces. As a result, it seriously thought of changing the status quo in Kuwait or even annexing it to the property of Ibn Saud in Najd. This was evident from the British stance regarding the border settlement in the conference of Uqair in 1922 which cost the ruler of Kuwait around two-third of his sheikhdom which was annexed to Ibn Saud.<sup>83</sup> However, the British feared of the expansion of the territory of Ibn Saud and the implication of this on their interests in the Gulf. This was coupled with the early discovery of oil in the region and the subsequent American competition with Britain prevented the implementation of this British design regarding the future of Kuwait.

### **3.7 Kuwait Society and Population**

It might be useful to mention here that demographic fluctuations in Kuwait and in Arabian Peninsula as a whole during the period under investigation were based on economic and political conditions. Migrations, which were determined by the annual amount of rainfall, the availability of pasture, the military strength of different tribes, and the balance of political power in the area as a whole, were the main characteristics of the society of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

It is also worth pointing out that, since the life of the desert demands that the Bedouin always move in search of water and pasture, and because Bedouins were at liberty to cross the frontiers between different countries of Arabia, it was impossible to give an accurate definition for their subordination to which country and in recognizing their census. Thus, with the absence of any formal records in Kuwait until 1957, this led to the scarcity of the statistics on size and distribution of population in Kuwait before 1957. Whatever statistics are available, they are approximate and mainly derived from

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<sup>83</sup> See the Arabic text of this conference in: Mohammed Habib, *Al-'Alim Al-Arabi min Al-Muhit ila Al-Khalij [The Arab World from the Ocean to the Gulf]* (Cairo: Matba'at Al-Anglo-Al-Misria, 1971), p.10.

personal estimates of European travellers and/or the British political agency in Kuwait.<sup>84</sup>

The earliest information about the Kuwait population was given by the Danish traveller Carsten Niebuhr, who visited Kuwait in 1765 and estimated its population at 10 000. He indicated that this number decreases in the summer to about 3000 because most of Kuwait's inhabitants go pearling or move inland to avoid the high temperature on the coast. The population increased rapidly, mainly by virtue of the influx of immigrants from neighbouring country of Iraq. These were composed chiefly of rich Iraqi merchant families who migrated to Kuwait after the East India Company had moved its office from Basra to Kuwait as a result of the Persian occupation of Basra (1775-79).<sup>85</sup>

Surprisingly, J. H. Stocqueler, who visited Kuwait in 1831, estimated its population to be 4000 inhabitants.<sup>86</sup> This figure is difficult to accept and the only way it maybe explained is that he might have visited Kuwait during the summer where most of its population were out pearling or had moved inland as mentioned by Neighbour or as a result of the plague throughout Kuwait and Eastern Arabia in 1783.<sup>87</sup> However, according to Colonel Lewis Pelly, Kuwait had about 20 000 inhabitants in the 1860s and, despite continual feuds and warfare, the population increased to about 35 000 by 1908 according to Lorimer's estimations,<sup>88</sup> and then multiplied to be 60 000 inhabitants by 1930.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the population of Kuwait was estimated to be 80 000, then it rose to 218 493 according to the first official census in 1957; of this figure 83 584 were non-Kuwaitis.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mohammed Mahjob, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah [Kuwait and Migration]* (Al-Iskandaria: Al-Haiiah Al-Misria Lil Kitab, 1977), p. 88-90.

<sup>85</sup> Niebuhr, op. cit., p.127.

<sup>86</sup> Y. S. Al-Sabah, *The Oil Economy of Kuwait* (London: Kegan Paul, 1980), p.24.

<sup>87</sup> Ahmed Al-Ibrahim has mentioned in his book *Madinat Al-Kuwait [Kuwait city]* that Kuwait was lost more than three-fourth of its population in 1783 by the plague. Ahmed Hassan. Al-Ibrahim, *Madinat Al-Kuwait [Kuwait City]* (Kuwait: Publications of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies' Centre, 1982), p. 27-28.

<sup>88</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.1088.

<sup>89</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1951), p.67.

It should be borne in mind that these statistics generally are confined to Kuwait city and the neighbouring villages, and might include the number of Bedouin who had settled around water wells nearby Kuwait city in the summer. Nomadic tribes, as mentioned earlier were not included in all the previous estimations. The only estimation given to them was by Khaz'aal, who indicated that the grand total of the Kuwaiti tribes' members was estimated to be 15 000 people in 1921.<sup>90</sup>

Having outlined the demographical development of Kuwaiti society up to the 1950s, it might be useful to mention at this point that all the population of Kuwait (sedentary and nomadic), except the non-Arabs, belong to one of the Kuwaiti tribes which are: 'Anzah, Mutair, 'Ajman, Shmmar, Utaibah, Bani Khalid, Bani Hajer, Sbai'a, 'Awazim, Rashaidah, Harib, Sahul, Dhafir, in addition to the Baharnah and Hasawiaha (people from Bahrain and Al-Hasa) who settled in Kuwait in the late 1700s and early 1800s and specialized in ship-building industry.<sup>91</sup>

The human response to the environmental constraints in Kuwait saw the development of two types of community. Firstly: the people of *Hadhar*, or settled communities in the city. Secondly: the people of *Badiya* pastoral nomads, herding camels, sheep or goats, who claim membership in a specific tribal group and not a specific settlement. Although these two parts were economically different in their modes of production, socially they were not separated from each other. Integration of the two parts in Kuwait continues by the social and tribal overlap between them. Most of the resident population in the city descend from nomadic tribes and the root of each city dweller goes to a particular tribe. All city dwellers, except for the non-Arabs, were of tribal backgrounds and although great economic changes had occurred in their lives, tribal and clan relationships continue to prevail.

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<sup>90</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, op. cit., vol.1, p.34.

<sup>91</sup> Dickson, op. cit., pp.82-110. Also *Gazetteer of Arabia: A Geographical and Tribal History of Arabian Peninsula*, edited by Sheila A. Scoville, (Austria: Akademische Druck-u Verlagsanstalt, 1979) different pages.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

To sum up, it is possible to argue that during Sheikh Mubarak's assumption of power in 1896 until Kuwait's independence in 1961 there were two main characteristics that had characterized the Kuwaiti society:

A) Generally there were no radical changes in the policies of Kuwait. While the sheikhs of Kuwait had enjoyed an internal independence in conducting the internal affairs of Kuwait, the British became responsible for conducting the external affairs of Kuwait and its foreign relations. Yet the First World War and Berlin-Baghdad Railway project at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were major factors in giving Anglo-Kuwaiti relations the intimacy which continued until the days of independence in 1961. The Second World War had, of course, an effect on Kuwait's internal and external political developments.

B) Internally, Sheikh Mubarak's seizure of power in 1896 marked the transformation of political power within Kuwait, the transformation of the basis of Al-Sabah authority from a tribally mediated form of community consensus to an externally mediated basis of power. It might be worth while to note that the political regime in Kuwait was based on a sort of consultation between the ruler from Al-Sabah family and the notables (the merchants) in the Kuwait city.<sup>92</sup> The relationship between the Al-Sabah family and the mercantile community, in particular before the epoch of Sheikh Mubarak was mostly close. While the merchants, who were wealthy and powerful, benefited from their close relation with the ruling family, the latter was economically dependent upon them. By the time Sheikh Mubarak assumed power the situation had changed and the relations took another shape.

Backed by the British and depending on their financial aid, Sheikh Mubarak and his successors transformed themselves from community leaders into autocratic rulers, making the Al-Sabah family a centralized power structure in the society. An example of this power was the ability of the sheikh to arbitrarily levy taxes. Prior to Mubarak, customs duties imposed on certain goods were voluntary contributions of the merchants. When Mubarak ruled Kuwait, he established a regular customs office in 1899 and

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<sup>92</sup> Al-Rashid, *op. cit.*, p.90. See also Al-Rihani, p.656.

imposed a five percent tax on all goods coming to Kuwait by land or sea. This increased gradually until it reached ten percent on some goods. He also imposed a real state tax which required the payment of one-third the total value of a house sold in Kuwait.<sup>93</sup>

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the epoch of Sheikh Mubarak can be considered the starting point of the Kuwaiti modern history and has special significance because: A) externally it facilitated the integration of Kuwait into the international system after the signing of the treaty of 1899 which, in turn, affected the Kuwaiti society's economic and social structures, and B) internally this affected the social structure and disturbed the balance of power within the Kuwaiti society by changing or re-shaping the interdependent economic and political relationships between the ruling family and the merchants, which, in turn led the merchant class to lead the political opposition against the ruling family along the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The final point which needs to be stressed here is that Kuwaiti society was not in isolation from the peripheral circumstances that surrounded it. The political circumstances that Kuwait and the region witnessed had an impact on the Kuwaiti society and its relations with other societies and on its ways of living. The ups and downs in Kuwaiti relations with the Ottoman Empire, European powers and neighbouring Arab principalities, and the political reality that the family of Al-Sabah lived was not isolated from the social and economic life of the inhabitants. It also had its impact on its productive forces and economic relations as will be seen in the following chapters.

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<sup>93</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal , op. cit., vol.2, pp.296-97.

**Section II**  
**Maritime Economic Activities**  
**Semi- Capitalist Mode of Production**

The geography of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in general —the bare of the land, the hot weather and the scarcity of rainfall— means that its people traditionally had a hard struggle against nature. Due to these ecological conditions, agriculture could not become the main economic activity in the region. Kuwaiti people —since the establishment of Kuwait in the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the discovery and export of oil in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century—had to make their living from other resources. The primary resource their economies came to concentrate upon was the sea, which supported pearl-diving, shipbuilding and trading activities. On a very limited basis, agriculture was carried out in the oases such as Al-Jahrah, Fantas, and Failakah Island, with nomadic production predominating in the inland areas.

From the beginning, the transition from nomadic to sedentary life in Kuwait was based on the industries of pearling, shipbuilding and trade and commercial sea transportation, which constituted the mainstay of the pre-oil Kuwaiti economy and major generator of surplus capital in Kuwait's community. Therefore, to trace the social formation of Kuwaiti sedentary society in the pre-oil era and to understand its social dynamics and political developments, the focus will be upon the role of the economic factor in shaping and affecting the social structure of Kuwaiti settled society and the historical process of the evolution of class structure within the context of the maritime semi-capitalist mode of production. Generally, this mode of production influenced the social formation of Kuwaiti settled community and the pattern of relations of production within these industries was crucial in setting the framework of social relations generally. Yet, as this section will demonstrate, it is through the maritime semi-capitalist mode and relations of production, appropriation and distribution of surplus which typify it, the social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary community can be most clearly understood.

The elements of the semi-capitalist mode of production upon which this section (chapters four, five and six) will concentrate are: Pearling, shipbuilding industry and commercial sea transportation and long distance trade as they constituted the main bases of the Kuwaiti pre-oil economy. For better understanding of the characters of this mode

of production, an account is given to the specific combination of the forces and relations of production which it involves.

## **4.1 Introduction**

Pearl diving, exercised by the population of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in general, was regarded as one of the most significant economic activities and an important source of economic life in that area. It was one of the main bases of the Kuwaiti economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and most of the commercial interactions were connected to it. According to historical references, pearling was the major economic activity which employed most of the Kuwaiti labour force and, accordingly, it played a decisive role in shaping the general developments of the Kuwaiti economic and social structures. The pattern of relations of production and the form of ownership within this occupation had considerably contributed in affecting and re-shaping the general framework of social relations of the Kuwaiti sedentary society.

This chapter, therefore, examines the nature of the pearling occupation, its division of labour and relations of production and their impact on the general social structure of Kuwait. In order to do this, pearling will be analysed as an element of the semi-capitalist mode of production (a systemic combination of relations and forces of production that entails a determinate form of appropriation of the product or surplus product produced in this mode) and the four elements entailed in Laclau's definition of a mode of production will be tested: type of ownership of the means of production; form of appropriation of the economic surplus; degree of development of the division of labour; and level of development of the productive forces. But before these matters are discussed, a general description of this occupation, its methods, and the ways of its funding is needed. Such a description is essential to an understanding of the impact of pearling on the economic and social life of the Kuwaiti people and will help in giving a clear picture about the nature of the forces of production and the form of the relations of production that involved in this industry.

## **4.2 The Diving Occupation**

Although historical sources do not define the starting date of discovering pearling or diving to extract pearls, it is possible to argue that pearling was known in this area for



hundreds of years. A description of the methods of pearl diving and the pearl fisheries were evident in the poetry of pre-Islam poets. Poets were always using known objects from reality as part of figurative language in order to make description, similes, and comparison.

Some historical Islamic sources mentioned pearl diving in the Arabian Gulf. For example, the historian Abu Al-Hassan Al-Mas'audi<sup>1</sup> and the great Arab traveller Ibn Battutah<sup>2</sup> pointed out to pearling in their writings where they talked about diving ways, places and timing of diving.

According to these sources, one could argue that the occupation of pearling is an ancient one, despite the fact that no detailed information is available for the early and middle ages. The picture is clearer in the modern ages where the western coast of the Gulf — which extends for approximately 330 miles from Dubai in the south to the inlet of Kuwait— was famous as the best place where pearls could be found. In addition, the most beautiful and valuable pearls were in fact extracted from the Arabian Gulf.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the historical nature of pearling in the Arabian Gulf means that large numbers of the population in this area have exercised this occupation. Anyone could practice this occupation at any point of the Gulf provided that the tools were available.<sup>4</sup> This was the case because peeling was not subject to geographical or political borders. From this, one could say that Al-Utub tribe, who established their principality in Kuwait in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, must have known about pearling before their moving to Kuwait. This is evident from the prosperity that Kuwait enjoyed after they settled in it.

Pearl diving was deemed one of the most difficult occupations because it entails patience, suffering, strength, stamina, and adventure. It was also considered one of the social occupations simply because people cannot do it individually. Therefore, it had an

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Al-Hassan bin Al-Hassan bin Ali Al-Mas'audi, *Muruj Al-Dhahab wa Ma'aadin Al-Jawhar [The Meadows of Gold]* Part 1, 4<sup>th</sup>ed (Beirut: Dar Al-Andalus lil Tiba'aa Wanashir, 1981), pp.168-69.

<sup>2</sup> Abu Abdullah Mohammed Ibn Battutah, *Rihlat Ibn Battoteh (Travels in Asia and Africa)* (Beirut: Dar Sadir-Dar Beirut lil Tiba'aa Wanashir, 1964), p.279.

<sup>3</sup> Badder Al-Deen Abbas Al-Khususi, *Dirasat fi Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Iqtisadi wa Al-Ijtima'ai [Studies in Economic and Social History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1983), p.125.

<sup>4</sup> John Murry, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Arabia* (London: John Murry, 1984), p.184, and Isa Al-Qatami, *Dalil Al-Muhtar fi 'Alim Al-Bihar [The Guidebook of Seas Science]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1964), p.205.

aspect of collective work. The process of learning this occupation was through the participation of individuals in this collective work and through gradual practice. Besides, some of the activities associated with this occupation do not require so much particular skills but physical effort. This made it possible for anyone to take part in this activity as long as they had the necessary physical strength. Indeed, this is what made many Kuwaiti Bedouins—who had no knowledge of the sea, swimming, or diving—participate in this occupation.<sup>5</sup>

Environmental and climate circumstances in fact forced the inhabitants of Kuwait to exercise this occupation in order to secure their daily living and to make some profits. It seems that the inhabitants of Kuwait —*Al-Utub* and those who moved with them—during the 18<sup>th</sup> century had some knowledge of pearling and other relevant maritime activities before coming to Kuwait. The Danish traveller, Carsten Niebuhr, who visited Kuwait in 1765, remarked, “The inhabitants of Kuwait were 10 000, who owned 800 boats and live by the fishery of pearls and of fishes”.<sup>6</sup> Given their short history in Kuwait, around 50 years, this number of boats is evidence of the development of their maritime activities. The English traveller, William Palgrave, who visited Arabian Peninsula between (1862-1865), said:

Among all the seamen who ply the Persian Gulf, the mariners of Koweyt hold the first rank in daring, in skill, and in soiled trustworthiness of character. Fifty years since their harbour with its little town ...was a mere nothing; now it is the most active and the most important port of the northerly Gulf.<sup>7</sup>

The fast pace of economic prosperity that Kuwait had achieved since the arriving of *Al-Utub* confirmed that they had a previous experience in different sea activities. It would not be surprising if *Al-Utub* had known this.

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<sup>5</sup> Saif Al-Shamlan mentions that many of the Kuwait Bedouins and other Bedouins in the Arabian Peninsula were working in pearling. Majority of 90 percent of them were divers. Many of them were to become famous such as Hintteel Al-Mutteiri and Hizam Al-Mutteri. He ascribes this to the fact that Bedouins are brave people and they exerted big efforts to become divers. But in reality the social rank of divers was better than that of the sailors, and the divers' income is much higher. Saif Marzuq Al-Shamlan, *Tariekh Al-Ghaws ala Al-Lulu fi Al-Kuwait wa Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The History of Pearling in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1986), pp.379-81.

<sup>6</sup> Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries*, vol.2 (Edinburgh: Morison and Son, 1792), p.127.

<sup>7</sup> William Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia, 1862-1865* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p.187.

Although there are a few details and statistics about pearling in Kuwait for example, the number of pearling boats, and labour force in pearling, according to historical references, pearling seemed to be the predominant economic sector which employed most of the Kuwait labour force. These pearling employees were totally dependent for their income on the revenue from the pearling season. Regarding this, Sir Percy KNOX, the British political Agent in Kuwait 1904-09, stated: "Almost half of the population of Kuwait went to the (pearl) fisheries."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it would appear that the surplus derived from pearling provided capital for trade and other economic activities. According to Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, the pearling industry greatly influenced the economic and social life of the people of Kuwait. Al-Rashid stresses that when there was a bad pearling season, all Kuwaitis greatly suffered, even to the degree that the poor faced hunger, as they did not have money to buy food<sup>9</sup>. A clear expression of this view can also be seen in the description given by Sir Charles Belgrave who worked in Bahrain as British political agent. He said:

It is difficult to describe the intense interest taken by everyone in the pearling catch. Not only the divers, but almost everybody else was affected, including the merchants, the shopkeepers, the boat-builders, the men who grew the dates which were taken out to diving boats, and also the government —because if it was a good season imports were larger and the government collected more revenue from customs duties. Most of the (Gulf) States in those days existed on income from the customs<sup>10</sup>.

### **4.3 Workers in the Diving Occupation.**

The widespread availability of the relative profitable pearl diving occupation among communities in the Arabian Gulf before the discovery of oil, coupled with the scarcity of other economic activities, led many people to work in pearling. As mentioned earlier, this type of activity entails a sort of collective financial and physical participation of many people. As a consequence, there was a necessity to have certain traditions, norms, and rules that governed and regulated the conduct of this occupation

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<sup>8</sup> The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947, *Administration Report of Kuwait for the Years 1905-1906* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1986), p.87.

<sup>9</sup> Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat, 1978), p.72

<sup>10</sup> Charles Belgrave, "Persian Gulf –Past and Present", *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 1968, p.29.

and those traditions were passed to next generations. Because the working people in this occupation formed a social group—with its special division—these norms and traditions defined the rights and duties for each one in this group. These norms and traditions became the basis of the law of divers which was issued in 1940 to regulate this occupation.<sup>11</sup> However, this law was biased towards those who controlled or owned the means of production.

As a result of the development of this occupation, its tools, the increase of the number of people working, and the complexity of its financial operation, the rules and traditions had developed, albeit at a small scale. The development was confined to the financial operations and the ways of controlling transactions. It is worth mentioning that the mechanical apparatus of any kind in pearling was forbidden, and its tools, except for the boats and the methods of diving, had not changed since they were described by 14<sup>th</sup> century travellers. The Australian traveller, Alan Villiers, who visited Kuwait in the period between 1938 and 1939, confirmed that there was a violent opposition for the introduction of new diving techniques lest this would have led to exhaustion of pearl fisheries and the big financial costs that would be demanded.<sup>12</sup> Another reason was that the British encouragement to keep the pearling industry along traditional lines and their objection of any foreign interference in the Arab monopoly of pearling. They believed that the intrusion of foreigners supplied with dredgers and diving equipment would drive thousands of Arabs to gun-running, slavery and piracy for living.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the Kuwaiti divers maintained their old techniques of pearling until the end of the industry in the 1950s. This was also confirmed by the fact that the establishment of a law for controlling and regulating this occupation was delayed until 1940, favoured the class that possessed the means of production (this will be discussed later).

The people working in pearling in Kuwait were divided into two main groups.<sup>14</sup> The first group is the men who extract pearls from the Gulf, the workers who have only their labour power to sell. They were generally known as divers. The second group is the financiers of pearl voyages and the buyers of pearl harvest at the end of the season — this included those who buy pearl from the divers to sell it to the pearl merchants and

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<sup>11</sup> The first written law that governed the pearl diving occupation was first published in Kuwait in 1940. see appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1940), p.374.

<sup>13</sup> M. Morsy Abdullah, "Changes in the Economy and Political Attitudes, and the Development of Culture on the Coast of Oman Between 1900-1940", *Arabian Studies*, vol. 2, pp.167-68.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.202-14, and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.202.

the traders who sell it in universal markets and who were known as *tawawish*. They were mainly the owners of all the means of production and capital and the purchasers of the labour power.

#### 4.3.1 Divers (*Ghwawis*)

The nature of this occupation, as mentioned above, necessitated the existence of certain traditions and rules that were hereditary. According to these traditions, each one in the diving boat was responsible for a certain task and this is connected to the financial gain that he expected to receive at the end of the diving season. The people working as divers were divided into the following:

- A. *Nukhuda*.<sup>15</sup> This word taken from the Persian language, means the captain of the ship. The captain was in some cases the owner of the ship or in some cases he leased it from another owner. The captain was the only decision-maker and all those on board the ship were under his control. His main task was to direct the ship properly to avoid all risks. The captain should be one of those experienced sailors who have knowledge of the different lanes, the wind direction and the season of rainfall. He was also experienced in the depth of seas and the places of shells and pearls. He was the ultimate person responsible for directing his men towards survival.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that although *nukhudas* mostly were mentioned among the divers as they participate directly in the pearling process, they were —economically and socially— positioned in a higher rank than other divers.
- B. *Al-Ja'adi*. He was the second in command and the deputy of the captain who takes over if necessary. *AL-Ja'adi* was usually present in only big ships.<sup>17</sup> He should be very wise and experienced to the extent that he could assume the leadership when necessary.
- C. *Al-Muqaddami*. He was the sailors' chief and responsible for the work on board as well as the helmsman. His task was supervising the other sailors. *Al-Muqaddami* was available in all big ships.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Arab Navigation", *Islamic Culture*, vol.5 (4), October 1941, p.436.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.202-3. Among those who were known as *nukhudas* in Kuwait during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were Abdulrahman Al-Yaqout (1963), Mohammad Hmoud Al-Barjas (1936), Mubarak bin Nassir Al-Badr (1963), Tahous bin Shadid Al-'Atibi (1963), and Abdu Aziz bin Jasim Al-Sa'adoun (1955). See Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, pp.18-23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.271.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.271. Among the most known *muqaddamis* in Kuwait were Yossif bin Ali Al-loughani (1976), Abdulhadi bin Mohammad bin Abdulhadi (1976), Ibid., vol.2, pp.124-203.

- D. *Ghwas* (diver). This referred to those who actually dove in the deep waters to collect the pearl. They were the backbone of the pearling occupation and they bore the biggest burden of the whole process.<sup>19</sup> In order to carry out their tasks, they relied on their physical strength, skills, and their ability to stay for a long time under water. Divers were relatively regarded as skilled workers.
- E. *Siyb* (Hauler or puller). The person who pulled the divers from the sea in response to a tug on the guard-rope, which indicated that the diver had to run out for air. This job did not entail the same risks as that of the divers. Their mission did not need special skills apart from focusing on the movement of the divers. Unlike the work of divers, anyone could have done this job. As a consequence they were socially below the divers. They also did some other jobs on the board such as serving the divers, and helping them in opening oysters. Their income was less than that of divers.<sup>20</sup>
- F. *Radhif* (The hauler's assistant): a young boy of around 14 years old who helped the puller in big ships only. Their income was less and they also work as trainees.<sup>21</sup>
- G. *Tabab*. This referred to children from seven to ten years old. Their number on board the ship did not exceed four. Their task was to offer services such as water, food and tea. The purpose of having them on board was to train them and get them accustomed to the risks in their future work. They did not have a definite payment and their income was mainly from what they could find such as neglected oysters or shells left by sailors.<sup>22</sup>
- H. *Nahham* (The singer). This man was of crucial importance for morale and efficiency. He sang for the sailors in order to entertain them and set the rhythm for the tasks, which required teamwork. *Nahhams* were found in most of diving ships as well as commercial transport ships. Captains compete to get the best

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<sup>19</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.203. In his book, *Safahat min Tariekh Al-Kuwait*, the historian, Yossif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai mentions the most famous Kuwaiti divers such as Beit Al-Romi, Beit Ali bin Saif, Beit Abu Qamaz, Abu-Rusli, Al-Dabous, Saud Al-Mutairi, Ibn Mudhf, and Al-Mina'ai. Al-Gina'ai refers to the families that worked in pearl diving. I do not assume that he means those who do diving only as he pointed out that they suffered losses in the 1930s of the 20th century as a result of the drop in pearl's prices which means that he is talking about all those who involved in pearling as industry not only the divers. Yossif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, *Safahat min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [Pages from the History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968), p.66, whereas Saif Al-Shamlan mentions the most famous divers such as Ibrahim Al-Adan, Mohammad Al-'Ameri, Said Mohammad Al-Zawi, Abdulrahman Al-Balol, Sultan Al-Mani'a and Rashid Al-Hurshani. Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.376.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.272, and Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.203.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, pp251-72.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.204 and Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.74.

singers and they allocate them a certain income on par with the rest of the crew.<sup>23</sup>

- I. *Al-‘Azaal* (in big ships only). This refers to a person who dives on his own and who gets his own puller. He was called *‘Azaal* because he isolated himself from the ship. However, fifth of his income would go to the ship in addition to his food expenses.<sup>24</sup>

### **4.3.2 Pearl Merchants (*Tawawish*)**

They were of two types: The first type were pearl traders who go to the place of diving (where the diving ships anchor) in order to examine and buy pearls from captains. They used special ships known as *tiwashah* ships. They sail almost a month after the diving ships started its mission in order to give them sufficient time to collect pearls. They usually knew the prices and they move from one diving ship to another with the purpose of buying from the captains.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, they fill their ships with food to sell to the diving ships at higher prices than those in the market.<sup>26</sup> These were the small *tawawish*, who resell what they collected from the diving ships to other wealthier merchants.<sup>27</sup>

The second type is the wholesale merchants in whose hands was ultimately the process of selling. These merchants fulfilled two key functions: they buy the pearls from the *tawawish* and then resell them in international markets in Bahrain, Bombay, and sometimes in Paris. They also provided the financial credit which most of the ship captains needed in order to fit their boats out for the pearling season. These dealers were known as the big *tawawish*. They used their own ships to pearl diving fisheries in Kuwait, Bahrain, Al-Hasa, Qatar, and even Oman in order to meet their trade-partners to get the latest information about the pearl markets in Bahrain, India, and Europe. According to their assessment they sell pearls.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that at the top of this class were about ten very rich merchants, called *tujjar*, who buy on a very large scale from the ship captains and had their own direct commercial dealings with

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<sup>23</sup> Among the most famous *nahhams* in Kuwait were Farhan Abu-Heileh, Suleiman Al-Gariz, Salih Kahil Rashid Al-Jeimar and others. Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, pp251-72.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.272.

<sup>25</sup> Villiers, op. cit., pp. 379-81.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.251, and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, pp.284-85.

<sup>27</sup> H. R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949), p.488. Among the best known of them in Kuwait during the first half of the 20th century were: Ali Al-Farhan, Said Mohammad Al-Rifa'ai, Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Radhwan, Ibrahim Al-San'a and others. Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, pp.282-83.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp.281-82.

correspondents in Bombay and even in Europe.<sup>29</sup> The most well known among them were Hilal Al-Mutteiri whose wealth was expected to be more than 6 000000 Rupees.<sup>30</sup> Bashir Abdulrahaman Al-Mudhif, Salim Abu Qamaz, Zeid Al-Khalid Al-Khdeir, and others.

#### **4.4 Funding the Diving Voyages**

As mentioned above, the diving occupation needs a collective effort. Some equipment also is indispensable for the mission. It also requires a lot of money to cover the expenses of the diving trips and to supply the divers' families with whatever they need during the divers' absence.

As it was very difficult to meet all of these demands and as the captains, in many cases, could not finance their trips, the pearling production activity was based on a debt system. Two systems, for regulating the process of funding the diving ships, emerged in the Arabian Gulf. These will now be examined.

##### **4.4.1 Fifths (*Khamamis*)**

This system prevailed in Qatar and the Trucial coast of Oman. It requires that all the crew including divers and haulers join the captain (who finances the expenses of the diving trip) on the basis of pre-fixed shares: after the pearl were sold, the ship-owner — whether the captain, pearl-trader, or financier— deducts a proportion of the profits to cover the cost of water, food, and other general overheads. One-fifth of the remaining money —or 20 per cent of net income— goes to the ship owner. The rest would be divided up into shares. Each diver receives three shares, as does the ships' captain. Each hauler would receive two shares, while the hauler assistant, if there was one on board, receives one share, allocating part (diver's share) to the diving tax instituted by ruler of Kuwait sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf: Oman and Central Arabia*, Historical, vol.1 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p.2236.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Gina'ai, op. cit., pp.60-61, and Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.214.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammed Ghanim Al-Rumeihi, *Al-Pitrol wa Tagheir Al-Ijtima'ai fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [Oil and Social Change in the Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Moassassat Al-Wahdah lil Nasher wa Al-Twazi'a, 1974), p.33.



Though in theory this distribution of gains seemed fair because sailors provided the physical effort whereas the ship owners or *nukhudas* provided the capital. However, in reality, it was often very different. If the gains were not as good as the ship owner hoped for, he resorted to tricks in order to get the whole gains, leaving meagre gains for those working for him which, in fact, did not reflect the efforts exerted during the diving trip.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Advances or Credit (*Salafiyya*)

This system was the dominant one in Kuwait and Bahrain.<sup>33</sup> The financier gives a cash payment to the sailors at the outset of the trip, provided that they repay it by the end of the diving trip. According to this debt system, *nukhudas* were divided into three types:

- The owners of the diving ships who relied on their own financial sources. Funding of this category includes *tisqam*<sup>34</sup> and the advances that offered to sailors. In this case, the *nukhudas* would be free to sell their pearls to whom they want. Sailors favoured to work for such an owner because they could control the price of the pearl.<sup>35</sup>
- Ship owners who were financed by other traders known as *tawawish*. In exchange, the ship owners would be obliged to sell the pearls they collected to the same *tawawish* that lent them the money.<sup>36</sup>
- Those who hire ships from others. In this case, the ship owners received a fourth of the gains, half goes to the ship, and the rest is distributed among those who worked for the ship.<sup>37</sup>

As well established practice, each *nukhuda* gives some money to his sailors (as an advanced payment) at the end of the pearling season with the sailors committed themselves, in writing, to work to this particular *nukhuda* in the next season.<sup>38</sup> This was known as *tisqam* and given as a deposit against their work for the next diving season. Furthermore, *nukhuda* would give some money (as a loan) to his sailors just before the

<sup>32</sup> Charles Belgrave, "Pearl Diving in Bahrain", *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol.21, 1934, pp.450-52. Also Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.34. This practice was due to the fact that communities in both Kuwait and Bahrain were settled.

<sup>34</sup> *Tisqam* is a pocket money given to sailors, in anticipation of their diving for the same captain the following year.

<sup>35</sup> *Nukhudas* were named as market sellers. See Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.284.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina'ai and Baddr Al-Deen Al-Khususi, *Tariekh Sina'at Al-Sufin fi Al-Kuwait wa Anshiiatatha Al-Mukhtalifa [Ship-building Industry in Kuwait and its Different Activities]* ((Kuwait: Moasasat Al-Taquadum Al-'Almi, 1982), p.151.

<sup>38</sup> Dickson, op. cit., p.485.

onset of the pearling season so that the latter would be able to provide their families with food and clothes during their pearling work. The *nukhuda* keeps a record of all of these amounts of money because sailors on the whole were illiterate; consequently, the record depends on the trustworthiness of the captain.<sup>39</sup>

It is worth noting that sailors were not paid equally. The divers and the haulers were paid differently and even the divers were paid according to their efficiency and skills. During the pearling trip the *nukhuda* also pays his sailors an amount of money known as *kharajiya* when the ship arrives at one of the ports for rest.<sup>40</sup> All the money advances, in fact, were considered as liabilities against each of the crew members and their families.

The value of these credits and *tisqam* were not fixed but determined by the economic conditions of the season. It was defined for the first time by the Kuwaiti court in 1934 which, since then, issued an annual instruction, at the beginning and the end of each pearling season, defining the amount of the advance for the divers and the haulers. The following table illustrates the amount of the credits, in rupee,<sup>41</sup> for the period from 1934 to 1946.

**Table 4.1**  
**Amounts of Divers' and Haulers' Advances during 1934-1946**<sup>42</sup>

| Year    | A Diver's Advance | A Hauler's Advance |
|---------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1934    | 37                | 32                 |
| 1939    | 40                | 35                 |
| 1940    | 40                | 35                 |
| 1941    | 50                | 45                 |
| 1942    | 60                | 55                 |
| 1943    | 120               | 110                |
| 1944/45 | 100               | 90                 |
| 1946    | 100               | 90                 |

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.486 and Richard Bowen, "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf" *The Middle East Journal*, vol.5 (2), 1951, p.178.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khussusi, op. cit., p.151.

<sup>41</sup> The main currency in all the Gulf sheikhdoms and Al-Hasa coast of the mainland during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Indian Rupee –replaced in the Gulf States after Indian independence by the Gulf Rupee, which was at par with the Indian currency. Kuwait changed to its own currency at the 1960s after its independence. Between the two World Wars the rate of the rupee was: 15 rupees for £1 sterling or \$4 (15Rs =£1 or 4\$). A lakh or 100 000 rupees, was worth nearly £8 000 or \$31 000. The Persian Gulf trade Reports 1905-1940, *Reports on the Trade of Kuwait 1905-1940* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1987), different pages.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, pp.122-33.

The reason behind the rise in the amount of advances after 1938 was due to the prosperity in trade and commercial transportation in Kuwait by sailing ships which, in turn, was the result of the outbreak of the Second World War when European steamers were not able to reach the region. This in fact led to an increase in the income of traders, which in turn reflected on *nukhudas' tisqam* and credits.

The sailors were asked to repay their debts after the end of the pearling trip. Their ability to repay was governed by the gains they could make. If the gains were good, they could repay, otherwise the debts would be accumulated to a degree that they would not be able to repay.<sup>43</sup> This also applied to the *nukhudas* who relied on others to fund their trips or who hired others ships. The latter can only sell their pearls to the one who financed their trip (*musaqqam*) at a price agreed upon before the onset of the trip.<sup>44</sup> But if the gains were not enough to repay the debts, they should work with their creditor for the next season.<sup>45</sup> When the debts accumulated year after year, the diver found himself a captive for the *nukhuda*, and the *nukhuda* to the ship owner or the creditor. There were some conditions that governed the process of lending such as the *nukhuda* giving up his ship in case of inability to repay. Or, in some cases, the *nukhuda* would give up his house,<sup>46</sup> or land if stipulated in the contract. In many cases, *nukhudas* faced a difficult financial problem and lost their ships and they themselves became divers.<sup>47</sup> This debt system, however, was a mean of surplus appropriation from the real producers (labourers) by non-producers (*tawawish*) and a way of control which the appropriators have over the productive activity of the producers and even on the conditions under which these labourers can produce.

As a result of this economic phenomenon, the most affected were the divers whom the whole structure of pearling rested upon their shoulders and who might end up as slaves. They would be obliged to work for the same *nukhuda* and could not move to another

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<sup>43</sup> Bowen, op. cit., p.178.

<sup>44</sup> The only case where *nukhuda* could sell to other dealers other than the one who financed the trip were when the pearl prices enable him to repay the financier and when the latter was unwilling to pay the same price. However if *nukhuda* sells his harvest without referring to financier, the purchaser would be obliged to repay the *nukhuda* debts to the financier even if they were less than the prices of pearls. See Lorimer, op. cit., p.2233.

<sup>45</sup> Alan Villiers mentioned that the economic conditions in Kuwait were much better by 1938. This means that, unlike the past, the government controlled the amount of advances and the ways of repayment. Villiers, op. cit., pp.178-79.

<sup>46</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., pp.2233-34.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.34.

one unless the new *nukhuda* committed himself to pay off all their debts.<sup>48</sup> It is, however, clear that by the debt system, divers did not own their labour power, the fruit of their labour was appropriated by others and were extremely under a very harsh exploitation. Even death was not an exit for divers from their debts as their debts were then inherited by their sons. In some cases, the *nukhuda* would ask a diver's widow to marry him as a condition for clearing up her dead husband's debts. Otherwise, she might become a servant and her sons would become divers to the creditor to repay their father's debts.<sup>49</sup>

This practice—which prevailed because it served the interests of those who possessed the fund and the means of production—lasted until 1940 when a law of divers was issued.<sup>50</sup> The pearling business was not subjected to any governmental rule simply because there were no governmental institutions until 1930 when the municipality of Kuwait was established. The new diving law came as a result of the political development in Kuwait in the 1930s. The divers were not able to change this rule because the merchants—the owners of the means of production and the capital—put it forward and because the government was receiving tax (the allowance of one diver from each ship) from this class.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the government had a vested interest in the continuity of this occupation as one of its constant revenue sources. The monopoly of the capital and means of production held by a particular group of men (*tawawish*) enabled them to bind their will on others and to force them to perform tasks alien to their own needs

#### **4.5 Diving Tools and Equipment (Means of Production)**

In order to carry out this occupation, certain tools had to be available. This equipment was as follows:

1- Ships: there were different types of fishing boats such as *Batil*, *Biqarah*, *Sambuk*, *Shu'ai*, *Jalibut*, *Boom* and others.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Bowen, op. cit., p.178. Also Paul Harrison, *The Arab at Home* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1924), p.80.

<sup>49</sup> Bowen, op. cit., p.178. Also Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.35.

<sup>50</sup> This new law actually served the *tawawish* and *nukhudas* because they were the group who drafted it. The law came in a period of recession and this group were concerned that the divers would not be able to repay their debts and so they pushed for this rule in order to safeguard their interests and rights.

<sup>51</sup> It is estimated that the sheikh of Kuwait was receiving around \$20 000 to \$60 000 annually. See Lorimer, op. cit., p.2289.

<sup>52</sup> Dickson, op. cit., pp. 473-83.

2- *Al-Fitam*: a clip made of tortoise bones. Its length is about one finger and it comes with an opening that the diver fixed it into his nose in order to prevent the leakage of air or the entrance of water during diving.<sup>53</sup>

3- *Al-Khabat*: a piece of cow hide that the diver places around his fingers so as to avoid injuries caused by some oysters.<sup>54</sup>

4-*Al-Diyeen*: a small series made of threads placed around the neck of the diver in which he collects oysters.<sup>55</sup>

5- *Al-Hajar*: a small piece of heavy lead. The divers place it around their legs with a knot of ropes in order to help them dive deeper. There was another type called *hajar lasif* for shallow water.<sup>56</sup>

6- *Al-Shamshul*: a short that the diver wears during diving. The hauler wears *azar* —a piece of cloth that could be wrapped around the bottom half of the body.<sup>57</sup>

7- *Al-Idah*: a long rope used by the hauler to pull the diver. The length of the rope is usually 72 to 81 metres.<sup>58</sup>

8- *Al-Zaibal*: a rope used by the hauler in order to pull the *hajar* after the arrival of the divers to the basin.<sup>59</sup>

9- *Al-Tartor*: a cap to be placed around the head of the diver.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from the diving ships, these tools were very primitive. The people working in this occupation refused the introduction of more advanced equipment lest the fisheries would drain away. Another reason for this rejection, it was believed, the workers would not be able to cope with more expensive tools which would be more advanced.<sup>61</sup>

These tools, however, were the actual means of production (the elements which are combined in the actual process of production to produce use values) in pearling. Their ownership was only confined to those who were financially capable to own them (merchants and *nukhudas*). While the ships as the essential means of production for pearling were owned by captains and financiers, other tools were provided by the captains as a part of preparing their ships for the pearling voyages.

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<sup>53</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.204, and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.363.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Qatami op. cit., p.206.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.363.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.363 and Al-Qatami op. cit., pp.204-05.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp.205-6 and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, pp.363-65.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.364.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Villiers, op. cit., p.374.

It must be remembered that the term ownership of means of production entails two interrelated concepts: 1) a relation of property and 2) a relation of economic possession. The property relation specifies what is commonly called the juridical or legal ownership. In pearling, invariably the legal ownership resides not in the hands of the direct producer but in the hands of the non-labourer.

Economic possession refers to the control of the means of production as they are combined in the labour process. The labour process involves the combination of three elements: labour activity (work), the object of labour, e.g. raw material and the means by which labour acts on the objects of labour, e.g. tools and equipment.<sup>62</sup>

By breaking down the labour process in pearling into its constituent elements and analysing them in terms of economic possession it is very clear that, firstly, the labour activity (work) was entirely under the control of the *nukhuda* or his *muqaddami* who exercise a real authority over the labourers. Secondly, although the objects of labour that is, pearls, were not under the direct control of both labourer and non-labourer as pearl beds were open for all and were not owned privately, the extraction of pearls was subject to the non-labourers control. This was due mainly to their control over the means by which labourers work and even over the conditions under which labourers work to extract them. Thirdly, the means by which the labourers act on the objects of labour were entirely owned by the non-labourers (*tawawish* and *nukhudas*) and, although labourers had some control over the utilization of these means, this was under the supervision of the owners and conditions put forward by them.

In sum, it is possible to say that the real producers in pearling (divers, haulers, etc.) had no legal or juridical control over the means of production which were privately owned by the non-producers. They had also –by the unavoidable debt system- lost their control over their labour power which was sold according to the non-producers' will and prices put forward by them. On the other hand, although the real producers had some economic control over the utilization of the means of production, they had no economic control over the ownership of these means of production or over the labour activity and its object.

It can therefore, be said that all means of production in pearling were owned by a small number of merchants (*tawawish*) and (*nukhudas*). Meanwhile, the real productive forces

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<sup>62</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, "On social Classes", *New Left Review*, 1975, pp.28-30.

(divers, haulers, sailors, etc.) were kept away from owning these means. Lacking access to these means of production, labourers had only to sell their labour power to survive. The price of labour power within the pearling occupation had no determinate level. It was based on the shares system which was usually negative because labourers' shares, at the end of pearling season, were relatively small and they often had to repay larger loans which they had received before the pearling season.

#### 4.6 Diving Process

In the Arabian Gulf in general and in Kuwait in particular, there was a certain season for pearl diving, which was known for all people working in this occupation. The timing for the start and the end of this season was fixed and only modified if it came during *Ramadan*, the month when Muslims fast. They usually did not dive during this month.<sup>63</sup>

People working in pearling divided the season in periods where the length of which depends on their desires and the fluctuation of weather. However, in most cases the weather would be suitable because the diving seasons were in summer where the sea would be quiet, the water warm, and visibility good. On the whole, the periods of diving were as follows:<sup>64</sup>

*Al-Khanchiyahh*: This is the beginning of the diving season starting in April. A few of diving boats set out to shallow waters and fisheries near the coast.

*Al-Ghaws Al-Kabir*: This is the main pearling period<sup>65</sup> which lasts from June to September. In this season, big pearling boats go to deep water fisheries which were far from the coast and known as *al-hirat*,<sup>66</sup> whereas small pearling boats do so but to fisheries close to the coast.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.3204.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, pp.273-74, Viliiers, op. cit., pp.374-75, and Hessa Al-Rifi, "Sea Chanties of Kuwait", *Arabian Studies*, vol.2, 1985, p.89.

<sup>65</sup> The beginning of this season was a day called *yaum Al-Rakbah*, and ends in a day called *Al-Quffal* (which was defined when the day and night are equal, which happens on 23 September. However, in most cases, the captain defined it and later it was defined by the Kuwaiti court. The Kuwaiti court would announce the beginning and end of the season in posters fixed on buildings. See Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.207-08 and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, pp.126-27.

<sup>66</sup> *Hirat* were the fisheries places. The word *hir*, as Saif Al-Shamlan points out is a Persian, which means the place of pearls and gold mining. *Hirat* of Arabian Gulf extends from Kuwait to Hormez straits. It was divided, according the divers' customs, into five divisions (Kuwaiti *hirat*, Qatif *hirat*, Qatar *hirat*, Bahrain *hirat*, and Oman *hirat*). Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.209-10, and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.447.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.207-08.

*Raddah*: This starts in October after returning from *Al-Ghaws Al-Kabir*. It lasts from ten to forty days with the purpose of finding some extra oysters.<sup>68</sup>

*Rudaydah*: It begins immediately after the end of *raddah* in November but only for a few days in fisheries near the coast.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to the start of the diving trip, the *nukhuda* prepared everything that the trip needed including dates, food, tea, sugar, oil, wood and ropes. Then he asked those sailors who committed themselves to work for him —by *tisqam*— to prepare the diving ship. They all go to the shore in order to pull the ship into the water. This was usually done with the help of people and friends. The haulers would start moving all the equipment and the tools and they would load big wooden water containers. Then they were allowed to have a last visit to their families before the trip started.<sup>70</sup> After that, they all set out on their trip towards the pearling fisheries with many children and women seeing them off and singing.

On arrival at the fisheries, the captain would order the sailors to drop the anchor and then the diving process would start. The work usually started at dawn with every sailor start doing his task. The diver would fix the *fitam* around his nose, the *diyeen* around his neck, and the *zaibal* around his legs. Then he would hold the *idah*, which is used by the hauler, and would jump into the water. When the diver reached the bed the hauler would pull the *zaibal*. Then the diver would start collecting as many oysters as he can, staying under water for two minutes or, in rare cases, three minutes. When he was finished, he would shake the rope for the hauler to pull him over to the surface. He would give the hauler the *diyeen* to empty it, and the diver would take a short break before doing the same again. Every dive was called *tabbah* and every ten *tabbahs* were called *iqjimmah*.<sup>71</sup> In each time the diver would collect from three to twenty oysters. In Kuwait, each diver would dive ten consecutive *tabbah* and around fifty times a day. However, in bad and cold weather the number of *tabbahs* is around ten to twenty a day.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Bowen, "Marine Industries of Eastern Arabia", *Geographical Review*, vol.41, 1951, pp. 395-96. Also Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.274.

<sup>70</sup> Dickson, op. cit., pp.485-86.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, pp.369-70, and Bowen, "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf", pp.171-72.

<sup>72</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.2229. The captain is constrained to choose the depth of fisheries according to the ability of his divers. The deeper the place, the more difficult it would be for the divers to stay for longer time under water.



The diving would continue during the day although the divers would have short breaks in order to eat their meals, which were usually some dates. After taking their dinner, the divers would go to bed in order to wake up early to open the oysters, which were piled in sacks on the deck, so that no one knows exactly who caught the one which may contain the great pearl. Keeping the oysters over the surface of the ship the whole night helps make opening them easier.<sup>73</sup> They used a metal tool called *miflaq* to open the oysters. The percentage of finding pearls in shells is less than one-third.<sup>74</sup> The whole process is executed with strict supervision of the captain and after the extraction of pearls, the captain wraps them in a specific cloth and puts them in his own safe or box.<sup>75</sup> The captains usually keep a record of the weight of pearls, their description, and keeps the best quality of oysters (around 3 to 4 percent), throwing the rest in the sea.<sup>76</sup>

As far as life on the ship is concerned, it is no less hard than the divers' lives. Sailors spend the whole time working very hard. They eat their meals beside the oysters, which smell very bad.<sup>77</sup> Needless to say, the divers must contend with risks associated with diving including attack from whales, sharks or health problems. Many of the divers suffer from diseases. Sometimes the diver loses his breath and when pulled to the surface he might die.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, many diving boats had some preventative medicines, including thyme and saffron, in order to cure those affected. They also used fire and superstitious proverbs for treatment.<sup>79</sup>

The hard work continued until the end of the diving season, which is determined by a signal sent by the prince of diving—known for the divers as *sirdal*. The *sirdal* is usually appointed from among those with long experience in the occupation, with a good knowledge of rains, winds, and the depth of seas, and the pearl fisheries. The sheikh of Kuwait appointed him and his mission was to direct the ships to the fisheries and to determine the dates of the start and the end of the season.<sup>80</sup> The pearling-ships used to keep close to the ship of the *sirdal* in order to note the returning signal, which was an artillery shell, and hoisting the flag on the ship of the *sirdal*. Upon hearing this

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp.2229-30, and Bowen, "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf", p.175.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.175.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.212.

<sup>76</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.2230.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.210.

<sup>78</sup> Villiers, op. cit., pp.389-390 and Al-Shamlan, op. cit, vol.1, p.370.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.210-13.

<sup>80</sup> No diving ship can return to the coast before the others because the *sirdal* would not allow this and the captains feared the reaction of the sheikh of Kuwait. On one occasion in 1905 a ship returned before the other and the Sheikh ordered the captain to go back. See Lorimer, op. cit., p.2230.

signal, the trip for returning to the shore starts and their families wait them with drums, singing, and folk dancing<sup>81</sup>. The day of the return of the divers, known as *quffal*, was considered a great day in Kuwait.<sup>82</sup>

#### **4.7 Pearl Selling and the Distribution of the Gains (Form of Appropriation of the Economic Surplus)**

Pearls are usually sold to small merchants (*tawawish*) who follow the pearling ships a month after the beginning of the diving trips. They wander from one ship to another in order to examine and purchase the pearls. The *tawawish* might sell them to other bigger dealers who usually resell them to yet wealthier traders. At the end, they sell them to the international markets.<sup>83</sup> The most well known markets of pearls were Baghdad, Basra, Aleppo and Istanbul from which pearls go to Europe. Bahrain, Linjah and Dubai were regarded as big trade centres in the Gulf, and Bombay and Karachi were considered the most important pearl trading centres universally. Through Bombay, pearls were moved to be sold in the international markets in Paris, London, and Europe.<sup>84</sup>

It is worth noting that *nukhudas* who borrow money from other traders in the beginning of the pearling season were obliged to sell their pearls to them with an agreed upon prices which was usually 15% to 20% less than the market. It was not possible for *nukhuda* to sell to any one other than the one who financed his trip. The only case was if his gains from selling to other were enough to repay his debts. However, if a *nukhuda* sold to another dealer, the latter would be responsible for the first *nukhuda's* debts, even if the debts valued more than pearls.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Dickson, op. cit., p.488.

<sup>82</sup> It was a happy day because during the pearling trip Kuwait was empty of men except the sheikh, his men, traders, and the elderly. In addition, the market prospers again because the sailors received their income and their families need a lot of expenses. See Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.207-08, and Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, p.300.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.284 and Dickson, op. cit., pp.489-90.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol. 2, p.258, see also Nourah Al-Qasimi, "Al-Wojoud Al-Hindi fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi" [The Indian Presence in the Arabian Gulf], Unpublished MA Thesis (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University 1984), p.103 and Omar Zarawi, "Al-Jaliat Al-Arabia fi Bombay" [The Arab Communities in Bombay], *Al-Bi'thah Magazine*, October, 1950, p.18.

<sup>85</sup> The difference in price, which was agreed upon between the captain and the financier was an interest on the loan. But because interest was prohibited by Islam, the agreement on a less price was meant as an interest. Some historian such as Isa Al-Qatami argues that the interest was defined by 10 per cent and Lorimer define it between 10 to 25%. Lorimer, op. cit., p.2232, and Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.214.

In order to maximise the profits by financing pearling trips, there were certain practices, which were agreed upon by the merchants. One of these rules was that any merchant would not deal with the clients of another merchant and he would not lend them or purchase their harvest.<sup>86</sup> However, a few ship owners resorted to borrowing money from the market and merchants without interest. In this case, they have the freedom to sell their harvest. This was risky because the harvest of the trip might not be enough to repay and the lender would not wait for another season. Therefore, the ship owners might be forced to sell their properties or their ships to repay their debts. But debts due to pearl dealers can be delayed to another season.

After selling the pearls to *tawawish*, the *nukhuda* distribute the profits to those working for him according to the following common practice:<sup>87</sup>

- Fifth of the revenue goes to the owner of the ship.
- The cost of the food and provisions are deducted from the revenue.
- What is left is distributed among the workers according to the diving' custom and as follows:<sup>88</sup> three shares to *nukhuda*, three shares to the diver, two to hauler, one for each of *radhif*, *nahham*, and the cook. Furthermore, a diving tax to be paid to the sheikh of Kuwait which is equal to a diver's portion (three shares).<sup>89</sup> In his book, *Dalil Al-Muhtar fi 'Alim Al-Bihar [The Guidebook of Seas Science]*, the historian Isa al-Qatami, presents a clear example of the process of profit distribution.<sup>90</sup> A pearling ship has 25 divers, 29 haulers, and two *radhifs*. The total revenue of the ship was 85 000 rupees. The cost of food and other provisions was 9 062 rupees. The profit was divided as the following: fifth of the revenue (17 000 for the ship owner), the cost of food 9062 rupees is deducted; the profit left is 58 938 rupees.  $25 \times 3 = 75$  shares for the divers,  $29 \times 2 = 58$  shares for the haulers. In addition, three shares go for the *nukhuda*, three for the government, and two shares for the two *radhifs* (a total of eight shares).

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. Also see The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940, *Report on the Trade of Kuwait for the Year 1937-38* (Trowbridge: Redwood Burn, 1987), p.5.

<sup>87</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.213-14.

<sup>88</sup> Paul. E. Case, "Boom Time in Kuwait", *National Geographic Magazine*, vol.11, December 1952, p.788.

<sup>89</sup> Between \$20 000 to \$60 000 annually go to the sheikh of Kuwait who in turn lends some money to some merchants and *nukhudas* for personal benefit. The Sheikh of Kuwait was making a massive amount of money especially during the prosperity period during the rule of Sheikh Mubarak and the beginning of the rein of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber. This tax continued until 1938 when the legislative council abolished it, only to be enacted again in 1940 by the Consultative Council, who reduced it to two shares. This tax continued until the demise of the process of pearling in Kuwait. See Lorimer, op. cit., p2289, and Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.213.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp.213-14.

If we calculate the shares they would be:  $75+58+8=141$  shares and the value of each share would be 418 rupees. Therefore, *nukhuda* and each diver receive  $3 \times 418 = 1254$  rupees, the hauler gets  $2 \times 418 = 836$  rupees, and each *radhif* receives  $1 \times 418 = 418$  rupees.

However, only the *nukhuda* was involved in the process of selling the pearls and so his men were kept in the dark about the process. As a consequence, it all depends on the honesty of the *nukhuda*, though there was no reason for this practice. As a consequence, the law of divers, which was issued in 1940, obliged each *nukhuda* to inform his sailors about the prices.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, one could argue that the portion of each sailor depends solely on the honesty of the *nukhuda*.

The pearling process clearly shows the specific way in which human labour is subjected to control, and in which surplus value is expropriated from the producers. The form of appropriation of the economic surplus is normally the most variable aspect of class relations in modes of production. The manner in which the economic surplus is appropriated from the direct producer by the non-labourer is the precise criterion for outlining the specific class natures of different modes of production. As mentioned earlier, modes of production are differentiated by their differential modes of exploitation. What is specific about the form of exploitation internal to social relations of production in pearling is that the distribution of the gains was calculated on the basis of long-established practise. This practise, in fact, gave the main part of the gains to the merchants who financed the pearling trips and the owners of the ships. Although the divers, haulers and other crew members performed very difficult work and constituted the fundamental element in the productive process which was actually producing wealth, their share in the product was minimal.

#### **4.8 The Economic Reward for Kuwait from Pearling**

The pearling occupation was important as a source of work for the large part of labour forces in Kuwait and was significant as a major economic source of revenues for the sheikh of Kuwait who used to receive a tax that equals the share of a diver for each ship.<sup>92</sup> However, it is difficult to give an accurate statistics on the annual quantities of

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<sup>91</sup> Clause 39 of law of divers, see appendix 1.

<sup>92</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.2289, and Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.213.

pearls in Kuwaiti fisheries or its economic rewards or even the tax paid. This difficulty stems from the following considerations:

- Large quantities of pearls (half or two-third) were used to be sold in Bahrain market before the return of the Kuwaiti fleet.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, these sold quantities and its economic rewards are not included in the available statistics.
- Until the 1930s, the absence of governmental institutions or departments that could supervise the occupation of making a record of accurate statistics. As a consequence, the available statistics are only estimates and are taken from foreign sources rather than local.
- The price of pearls, as mentioned earlier, varied according to the place and time of selling. For example, selling in the fisheries was different from that of selling in the market in Kuwait, which in turn was different from the price in the markets of Bahrain and India. Hence, the available prices do not actually represent a reference.

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<sup>93</sup> The Persian Gulf Trade Reports, *Report on the Trade of Kuwait for the Year 1911-1912* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1987), pp.2-3.

**Table 4.2**

**Numbers of Pearling Labourers, Ships and the Value of the Pearl Harvest during 1906-1939<sup>94</sup>**

| Year      | Number of Labourers | Number of Ships | The Value of the Pearl Harvest     |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1906/1907 | ----                | ----            | Rs284 000                          |
| 1907/1908 | ----                | ----            | Rs170 000                          |
| 1908/1909 | ----                | ----            | Rs357 500                          |
| 1909/1910 | ----                | ----            | Rs246 000                          |
| 1910/1911 | ----                | ----            | Rs293 500                          |
| 1911/1912 | 20 000              | 800             | Rs571 000                          |
| 1912/1913 | 30 000              | 812             | Rs915 000                          |
| 1913/1914 | ----                | ----            | £40 367= (Rs605 505) <sup>95</sup> |
| 1914/1915 | ----                | ----            | £3 311= (Rs49 665)                 |
| 1915/1916 | ----                | ----            | £26 063= (Rs390 945)               |
| 1916/1917 | ----                | ----            | £40 133= (Rs601 995)               |
| 1917/1918 | -----               | ----            | £18 067=Rs271 005)                 |
| 1918/1919 | ----                | 1200            | ----                               |
| 1919/1920 | ----                | 900             | £3 200= (Rs48 000)                 |
| 1920/1921 | ----                | 320             | £11 333= (Rs169 995)               |
| 1921/1922 | 1000                | 320             | £11 956= (Rs179 340)               |
| 1922/1923 | ----                | ----            | £105 066= (Rs1 575 990)            |
| 1923/1924 | ----                | ----            | £6 667= (Rs100 005)                |
| 1924/1925 | ----                | ----            | £188 666= (Rs2 829 990)            |
| 1925/1926 | ----                | ----            | £11 333= (Rs69 995)                |
| 1926/1927 | ----                | ----            | ----                               |
| 1927/1928 | ----                | ----            | £44 133= (Rs661 995)               |
| 1928/1929 | ----                | ----            | £80 000= (Rs1 200 000)             |
| 1929/1930 | ----                | 400             | £30 000= (Rs450 000)               |
| 1930/1931 | ----                | 350             | £47 917= (Rs718 755)               |
| 1931/1932 | ----                | 350             | Rs3 62 000                         |
| 1932/1933 | ----                | 350             | Rs450 000                          |
| 1933/1934 | ----                | 277             | Rs515 500                          |
| 1934/1935 | 6000-7000           | 250             | Rs364 000                          |
| 1935/1936 | 6000-7000           | 300             | Rs235 200                          |
| 1936/1937 | 6000-7000           | 300             | Rs110 000                          |
| 1937/1938 | 6000-70000          | 200-300         | Rs258 000                          |
| 1938/1939 | ----                | 150             | Rs200 000                          |

It is possible to argue that the figures given in the above table can help give a picture on the financial revenue of this occupation. However, we cannot totally depend on for the following reasons:

<sup>94</sup> The Persian Gulf trade Reports 1905-1940, *Reports on the Trade of Kuwait 1905-1940* different pages. And The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947 *Administration Report of Kuwait for the Years 1934,35,36 and 37*(Trowbridge: Redwood .1986), p.49, p.48, p.34, and p.36.

<sup>95</sup> The value pearls during the period from 1913-1931 was mentioned in Sterling Pound. The value of Sterling Pound during this period was 15 Indian rupees. In the table above, statistics were mentioned in both Sterling and its equivalent of Indian rupees.

A- These statistics—which were taken from reports of the British political agents on Kuwaiti trade—do not indicate the methodology or mechanism which was used to obtain these figures. Furthermore, they do not mention the sources of this information.

B- These figures clearly contradict what is mentioned in the other historical sources whether Arabic or foreign. For example all historical sources agree that 1913 was the peak year (the highest pearl production in Kuwait) but these reports offer another version. They point out that the best production levels ever achieved in Kuwait were in the years 1922/23, 1924/25, and 1928/29. These estimates mentioned in these reports are not reliable since all other historical sources unanimously agree that these years indeed represent the deterioration in the pearling occupation and the decrease in its economic reward due to the emergence of the Japanese cultured pearls and the beginning of the world economic crisis known as Great Depression of 1929.

The numbers of ships and men employed in pearling were also subject to historical controversy. For example, the historian Yousif Al-Gina'ai mentions that the number of pearling ships during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah was 812 ships.<sup>96</sup> Many historians cite this figure. However, the historian Isa Al-Qatami estimated this number at 1200 ship for the year 1338 hijri (1918-19 AD).<sup>97</sup> Here it is possible to argue that Isa Al-Qatami might have suggested the total number of the ships in the port of Kuwait though his suggestion can be understood as the pearling ship only. Dickson mentions that the number of the pearling ships in Kuwait was 700 ships,<sup>98</sup> whereas Villiers estimates the number to be 600 ships.<sup>99</sup> Richard Bowen has a different point of view. He argues that:

Estimating the number of ships and men employed in the Persian Gulf pearling fisheries is similar to estimating the population of the Arabian Peninsula. The published figures are largely based on Arab guesswork; most of them are probably much too high.<sup>100</sup>

From the above discussion, it is clear that one cannot be sure about the exact number of the pearling ships or the people working in this occupation in Kuwait from 1896 to 1946

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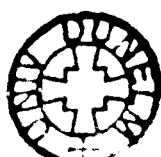
<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.196.

<sup>98</sup> Harlod Dickson was the British High Commissioner in Kuwait during 1929-1936. He published two books; *The Arab of the Desert* (1951) and *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (1956).

<sup>99</sup> Villiers, op. cit., p.371.

<sup>100</sup> Bowen, "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf", p.167.



because of the absence of accurate statistics. However, it is possible to rely on the estimates given by people who lived in that period such as Al-Gina'ai Al-Qatami, Dickson, Villiers and others. In short, the pearling occupation was one of the main pillars for the traditional Kuwaiti economy since its inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century through to the 1930s. It attracted large numbers of Kuwaitis who found in it the best way to escape the poverty of the desert.

The heyday of this occupation was during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (1896-1915) as a result of the abundance in productivity of the pearl fisheries and the high demand on pearl. 1913 was called the year of abundance as a result of the increase in the productivity to an unprecedented level where it reached around six million rupees. However, the occupation suffered from a decline in 1930s and indeed it ceased in 1958.<sup>101</sup> The deterioration and extinction of the pearl occupation in Kuwait can be ascribed by the following reasons:

- The great depression of 1929 with its implication of the Indian rich and other dealers who used to buy big quantity of the Arabian Gulf pearls.<sup>102</sup>
- The emergence of the cultured pearl in Japan, which was of equal quality and less price.<sup>103</sup> The cultured pearl was not different in shape or weight or colour from the natural one.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, it was difficult to distinguish between the natural pearls and the false one. Villiers says, "The better-cultured pearls defy detection even by the Arab expert, and there was not one merchant in Kuwait who, in spite of a lifetime in the business, could distinguish a cultured pearl from a real pearl without the most exhaustive examination, and often destructive tests".<sup>105</sup> The price of the cultured pearl was initially a third of the natural one, but later as a result of the abundance in productivity it became around 1/13 of the price of the natural one.<sup>106</sup>
- With the development of the social, cultural, and economic life, the taste and demand of consumers change. Many of them started to prefer modern goods

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<sup>101</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1951), p.248.

<sup>102</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.215.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Also Bowen, "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf", p.164.

<sup>104</sup> See the undated hand written document by Sheikh Yousif Al-Gina'ai about Japanese cultured pearls and comparing it to the natural one. The archive of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait.

<sup>105</sup> Villiers, op. cit., p.372.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Also Bowen, "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf", p.164.



such as furniture, dresses, and cars and the replacement of expensive jewellery with cheaper ones such as cultured pearls.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, the discovery of oil in the Arabian Gulf led to a decrease in the numbers of those working in pearling. Many of them turned to oil production and the reliance on pearling was confined to sailors in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Oman.<sup>108</sup> It ceased to exist in Kuwait in 1958.

#### **4.9 The Division of Labour and Relations of Production in Pearling**

The pearling production activity, as has been pointed out, was based upon the debt system. In this system when the revenue was distributed, the result was usually negative for divers and other workers. The divers' shares were usually negative because their shares were relatively small and they often had to repay larger loans (principal and interest) which they had received before the pearling season. If they did not settle their debts after the distribution of the revenue, these debts accumulated year after year, and might be inherited by their sons and brothers.

The debt system created a kind of dependency relationship between the crew members of pearling boats and *nukhudas* on one hand and between *nukhudas* and merchants (*tawawish*) on the other.

On the whole, it can be argued that the system of diving was a harsh one and was based on a custom that all people agreed with it out of necessity. The diving process reflected a social hierarchical phenomenon where, at the top, were merchants (*tawawish*)—the owners of the means of production—who impose a rate of interest on their capital at the beginning of the season and also hold a monopoly on the scale of produce at the end. The divers—who were the backbone of the pearling process—were at the bottom of this pyramid and were forced to accept the rules and norms put forward by merchants and captains. This clearly demonstrated the connection between the ownership of the means of production and the production relations and the role of these two variables in defining the form of the social structure of Kuwaiti sedentary community. It should be remembered that people's relationship to the means of production determines their position and place in the production and the mode of distribution of the products. Where

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<sup>107</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.215, also Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook*, p.247.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, p.131.

one group of people makes its living by appropriating the labour of the other, then society is divided into the exploiter and exploited.

The productive process of pearling, in fact, rested upon a harsh exploitation of divers and other labour forces, as a mechanism for capital accumulation. Merchants (*tawawish*) benefited most from pearling and there were some merchants who were extremely rich. For a better understanding of the degree to which merchants benefited from pearling industry, one might consider a merchant's income: A) as the merchant was the financier of the pearling voyage he obtained 20% discount when he bought the pearling harvest; B) if he was the owner of the pearling ship, he received the fifth of the whole revenue of the pearling voyage; and C) if he sold pearls at the international markets (Bahrain, Bombay, etc.,) he received a much higher price for pearls than the original price.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, merchants (*tawawish*) accumulated more capital by, firstly, acquiring many houses from *nukhudas* who were unable to repay their debts. Secondly, they reinvested their capital by buying more ships and employing many divers and other crew members at a subsistence level. Thirdly, they reinvested another part of their capital in the trade sector.

Pearling as an economic activity was entirely based on exploitation. The owners of capital and means of production (*tawawish* and to some degree *nukhudas*) were extremely exploitative of the workers (divers and other crew members). It was a mode of production which characterized by unequal economic relations between the owners of the means of production and the producers. A mode which was specified by a particular form of ownership that determined the manner—in which appropriation of the economic surplus occurs—and the degree of control—which the appropriator has over the productive activity of the producers. The ownership of the means of production in pearling was, in fact, a monopoly of the merchants and financiers meanwhile the divers and haulers lived in a state of permanent indebtedness. The form of the ownership and the nature of the relations of production led to unequal distribution of power and wealth within the Kuwaiti sedentary community and this, in turn, played a decisive role in determining the general social relations of this society.

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<sup>109</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.2232, Villiers, op. cit., p.376.

It can be said that while the Kuwaiti society did not experience capitalism in the European sense, the relationship between the divers and the merchants and ship-owners was akin to capitalist relationships. Divers and other crew members were trapped within a system of clearly defined duties and marginal rights, giving them little opportunity of improving their positions, and which effectively transferred the economic surplus to the hands of their masters. While the *tawawish* and *nukhudas* (the owners of the means of production) constituted a social class which was limited in number and represented the dominant class in the society, the workers (those who involved directly in the pearl diving: divers, pullers, etc.) were the most exploited people who deprived from the ownership of means of production and only forced to sell their labour power in the market to survive. The status of debt serfdom effectively tied them to the owners of the means of production and maintained them as a dependent class. Even when a law for organising this occupation was first codified in 1940<sup>110</sup> it was evidently intended to reinforce the position of the merchants. The courts established to enforce this law were known as *al-salifa* and the judges in these courts were themselves prominent *nukhudas*. The pearling law, indeed, was enacted at a time when the merchants have achieved their social status in the Kuwaiti society as a dominant class. They formed the majority of the Consultative Council, which indeed issued the law. The law, in fact, came to emphasise the control of the merchants (*tawawish*) on the *nukhudas* and the latter on the sailors. In other words, the issuance of the law came to reinforce the dominance of a certain class in the society.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

To conclude it is clear that the form of the ownership and the pattern of relations of production, within the pearling industry, played a crucial role in determining the social structure of the sedentary community in Kuwait. While the tribal character still prevailed, the social structure of the settled community was determined further by the economic factor. As a result of the historical development of pearling as an economic activity, its division of labour and relations of production, the social differentiations and social strata were shaped further by economic factors.

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<sup>110</sup> This was because of the delay in the emergence of the governmental institutions until the 1930s when the municipality of Kuwait was founded and when the Legislative Council was established in 1938/39, which was succeeded by the Consultative Council of 1940.

The process of intensification and transformation of the forces and relations of production in the Kuwaiti sedentary community led to the emergence of early class society which manifested a semi-capitalist mode of production. This mode of production, however, produced a social formation of a class society in which the upper class had reinforced its ultimate economic, social and political hegemony. This ultimately created a more clearly hierarchical social structure along socio-economic lines.

The process of class formation profoundly altered the content of the social relations of the Kuwaiti sedentary society. The settled community, according to the nature of the ownership of means of production and the pattern of relations of production, was divided into two classes: *tawawish* and to some extent *nukhudas* as owners (the exploiting class) and divers, pullers, etc., as workers (the exploited class). It should be noted here that within such exploitation, in Marx's most theoretically central sense, it was not merely the case that a relatively small number of people appropriated a part of the surplus product which others produce, but, in addition, the exploiting class controlled even the conditions under which another class can produce.

In other words, as a consequence of the evolution of the relations of production within this industry (the dominance of the merchants upon the means of production and bringing down divers and other pearling labour force to poverty), the social structure developed to a rigid hierarchical class structure. The class structure was articulated mainly upon the economic base (that is the ownership of the means of production and the position within the division of labour).

The relations of production, as has been shown, involved the principal means of production being owned by a restricted group of merchants, with whom the majority of other social groups maintained as a semi-capitalist type of relationship. This means that the chief consequences of pearling and other maritime economic activities, as it will be shown in the following chapters, were the emergence of a class system. The social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary community crystallised into class formation proper, and upper and lower classes were the main components of class structure within this mode of production. While the dominant class, which was constituted from the merchant, owned and controlled most of the means of production, the lower class,

which included divers, haulers, etc., did not own the means of production and was extremely exploited by the dominant class. Yet, the lower class was the main producers and the main force that generated the surplus capital in pearling which appropriated by the dominant class.

It can, therefore, be said that the Kuwaiti sedentary community had moved out of the stage of kinship-based or tribal communal exploitation and begun to develop a class structure founded upon the differential relationships of various social economic groups to the means of production and distribution. But, in spite of this transformation from a tribal to a class society, the tribal framework of organization was maintained. Although the social structure was crystallised along class lines, tribal, ethnic and sectarian cleavages preserved their roots within the society. This means that while classes emerged, tribal, ethnic and sectarian identities and differentiations retained their salience in social interaction (e.g. in marriages or/and through the role of the tribe as a social unit). The tribe within the new semi-capitalist mode of production was transformed into a unit of occupational stratification and a mode of reproduction of different kinds of labour. A situation where the means of production were severely limited meant that those who owned this means had a powerful base within their own extended families.

## Chapter Five Shipbuilding Industry

### 5.1 Introduction

Boatbuilding or the shipbuilding industry as it is known in the Arabian Gulf was the vital means for pearling and seafaring activities on which the pre-oil Kuwaiti economy depended. As both pearling and sea commerce depended entirely upon ships and boats as the main means of production, Kuwait developed its own shipbuilding industry and, moreover, it became the shipbuilding centre for the whole Arabian Gulf. Although there are no statistics available, it is reported that shipbuilding industry was regarded one of the maritime activities in which the Kuwaitis had considerable experience. It was developed to such a level that Kuwaitis could built a more sophisticated and complex vessels able to carry larger crews longer distances. They introduced new efficient techniques into this industry that enhanced the capability of ships to cross the oceans and the seas.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence, and despite the unavailability of detailed information about the size of the labour force employed in shipbuilding, it can be said that a considerable number of the inhabitants of Kuwait relied on shipbuilding as a source of living in the pre-oil era. It was true that the industry did not seem to employ a substantial portion of the labour force as in pearling and seafaring because firstly: it required highly skilled workers which did not seem to be available all time and, secondly: the demand for boats from either the Kuwait market or the whole Gulf market was probably limited (not every diver or sailor would have one boat). Nevertheless, shipbuilding as economic activity had played a crucial role in the economic life of Kuwait as it was the key source for providing other maritime industries by means of production. Furthermore, many people indirectly had engaged in this industry and their lives were entirely dependant on it, such as merchants, raw material sellers, sail makers, blacksmiths, nail makers, etc.. Shipbuilding, therefore, was a fundamental element of the maritime economic activities that constituted the semi-capitalist mode of production.

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<sup>1</sup> Amin Al-Rihani, *Muluk Al-Arab: Rihlah fi Al-Bilad Al-Arabia [Arab Kings: Trip in Arab Land]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, undated), pp.666-67.

This chapter, therefore, elucidates the shipbuilding industry as an element of the semi-capitalist mode of production and its specific combination of forces and relations of production which typify it. Although the investigation concentrates on the nature of this industry, its workers, and ways of financing it, special attention is given to the pattern of relations of production and the form of ownership within this occupation and its impact on the social structure of Kuwait.

## **5.2 Historical Background**

Although it is difficult to know exactly when this industry started in Kuwait, the knowledge of the Kuwaitis in shipbuilding had almost certainly passed to them from Oman. This was for the following reasons:

A. Oman was known for its long-standing experience in maritime activities. This experience might go back to thousands of years BC. The Omani sailors had been among the pioneers in maritime activities and they were the masters of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf.<sup>2</sup> They also interacted with different people from various places and therefore they learnt and benefited from this.

B. Al-Utub, and those who accompanied them to Kuwait, came from the Arabian Peninsula, and were connected to Oman; indeed they share the same origin. These ties were social, economic, and political which had a role in transferring the ideas, literature, arts, and customs among the inhabitants of the region. Another point is that the geopolitical borders of Oman were not demarcated accurately and, as a consequence, Oman expanded during certain periods to include parts of the Arabian Gulf. The Omani culture reached these areas accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

C-During 1896 - 1946, the techniques of shipbuilding, its names, and other relevant matters in Kuwait were, on the whole, similar to and compatible with those in Oman. This argument is substantiated by Kuwaitis' advanced maritime activities during the first years of Kuwait's establishment. This experience might have been acquired, as mentioned earlier, before coming to Kuwait. This was also evident by the economic development that Kuwait had witnessed during the first decades after its establishment.

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Information and Culture in Oman, *Oman wa Tariekhuha Al-Bahri [Oman and its Maritime History]* (Oman: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1959), p.9 and George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval times* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), pp.6-11.

<sup>3</sup> Abdulrahman Al-Ma'ani, *Dawr Al-Omanyen fi Al-Milaha wa Al-Tijarh Al-Islamiah hata Al-Qarn Al-Rab'ai Al-Hijri [The Omani People's Role in the Islamic Navigation and Trade until the Fourth Century Hijri]*, (Oman: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1986), p.4.

The point here is that the Kuwaitis were skilled in this industry to the extent that European travellers who visited the area praised the skills of the inhabitants of Kuwait in this regard. The Danish traveller Carsten Niebuhr, who visited Kuwait in 1765, says, “The inhabitants [of Kuwait] are said to employ...in the naval industry more than eight hundred boats.”<sup>4</sup> A hundred years later, an English traveller, William Palgrave, praised the Kuwaitis’ maritime experience and he emphasised that the Kuwaiti port was among “the most active and the most important port of the northerly Gulf”. He also praised the skills and courage of the Kuwaiti sailors that made them prominent.<sup>5</sup> The same observation could have been made by the British political agent in Kuwait during the 1930s Harold Dickson, who emphasized that Kuwait, was known for its boat building and he added that the best boats were built in Kuwait as a result of dry weather, which in turn helped to get better wood for shipbuilding.<sup>6</sup> Zahra Dickson also confirmed that the biggest ships were built in Kuwait.<sup>7</sup> However, the most graphic descriptions were those given by the Commander A. Rowand and by Australian traveller Alan Villiers. Rowand mentioned that, “Kuwait appears to be the principal place where native craft are built, and Bums [Booms] seem to be the type most frequently built there; but nearly all types of vessels are constructed”.<sup>8</sup> In Villiers words: “[Kuwait] has one of the most interesting waterfronts in the world. The place —which extends two miles— is one great shipyard of Arab Dhows”.<sup>9</sup>

From what these travellers say, one could argue that shipbuilding remained a major economic activity in Kuwait. In spite of the increasing competition of steam and motor ships and launches since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, sailing crafts or Arab dhows remained the backbone of all the maritime activities and the only source of means of production for people who engaged in these activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries*, Part 2 (Edinburgh: Morison and Son, 1792), p.127.

<sup>5</sup> William Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia, 1862-1865* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p.187.

<sup>6</sup> H. R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: a Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 473.

<sup>7</sup> Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.105.

<sup>8</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf: Oman and Central Arabia*, Historical, vol.1 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p.2321.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1940), p.352.



The shipbuilding industry was known in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in general as *Al-Qalafah*<sup>10</sup> and the boat-builder was known as *Qallaf*. The latter means the one who processes wood, which was a physically demanding job.<sup>11</sup> As with all other maritime activities, the shipbuilding industry relied on collective work, a group of people under the supervision of the builders' master (*Raees Al-Qalalif*). This was known as *Ustadh* or master-shipwright who, drawing on his long experience, actually directed all workers. He, as architect, put forward the designs and the broad guideline for the work.<sup>12</sup> This occupation was learnt through practice. Thus, the shipwrights' sons came with their fathers to the shipyards to learn the basis and principles of this occupation. Therefore, the fame of those master-shipwrights came as a result of their practice and experience. This occupation was inherited and then passed to the next generations.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.3 Workers in Shipbuilding Industry

Like all other maritime activities, the shipbuilding industry needs collective effort. Therefore it attracted a group of people. Each is assigned a specific task as follows:<sup>14</sup>

- *Al-Ustadh* (master-shipwrights). He is the one who designs and supervises the building of the ship. He directs all the other workers in this occupation. Furthermore, he is responsible for fixing the ship in case of any problems and so he accompanies the ship on long voyages in order to help in case of any defect. As a consequence, the captains (*nukhudas*) of the pearling and trade ships were

<sup>10</sup> Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, *Bina Al-Sufin Al-Khashabia fi Dawlat Al-Bahrain [Wooden shipbuilding in Bahrain]* (Bahrain: Bahrain Centre for Research, 1990), p.27.

<sup>11</sup> Najat Al-Gina'ai and Baddr Al-Deen Al-Khususi, *Tariekh Sina'at Al-Sufin fi Al-Kuwait wa Anshittatha Al-Mukhtalifa [Ship-building Industry in Kuwait and its Different Activities]* ((Kuwait: Moasasat Al-Taquadum Al-'Almi, 1982), p.42, and Saif Marzuq Al-Shamlan, *Tariekh Al-Ghaws ala Al-Lulu fi Al-Kuwait wa Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The History of Pearling in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1986), p.465.

<sup>12</sup> Among those who were best known, as master-shipwrights in Kuwait during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were Hajj Salman and his son Ahmed bin Salaman. H. Dickson and his daughter Zahra mentioned that the families of the above two were the most famous Kuwaiti families who presented ship designs. Other people were famous in this occupation such as Hajj Saleh bin Rashid and his brothers (Jasim and Abdullah), Hajj Hamoud bin Baddr, Abdullah bin Jum'ah, Hussein Al-Mansour, Hajj Hamoud Al-'Aumeiri, Hajj Mohammad Marzouq and others. Interview with Hajj Musa Sabti Sulieman one of the Kuwaiti shipwrights, the interview was done by Saif Al-Shamlan and broadcasted in documentary television programme on May 24, 1967 The Archive of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait. See also Freeth, op. cit., pp.105-06, and also H. R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours*, (London: George Allen & Uwin, 1956), pp.37-38.

<sup>13</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.140.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.44, and Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, op. cit., p.28.

competing for recruiting the best master-shipwrights who was paid certain allowance from the revenue of the trip.<sup>15</sup>

- *Al-Muqddami*. He is the assistant of the master-shipwrights and he replaces him and runs the business in his absence.
- *Al-Qalalif*. They are the carpenters who make the wood of the ship. They do their work under the supervision of the master-shipwrights or his assistance.<sup>16</sup>
- *Al-Darraboun or Al-Darareeb*. These workers fasten the iron nails into the wood of the ship once the carpenters finished their work.<sup>17</sup>
- *Al-Mazouris* (coolies). Those who carry wood and move it from one place to another.
- *Al-Waleeds* (apprentices). Those are the boys who help the *qalalif*. Those boys are working in order to learn this occupation so they help them by offering them tools and collecting the scattered, small pieces of wood.

Despite this hierarchy in work, this occupation is different from pearling in two respects: firstly, most of the labour forces employed in shipbuilding industry were skilled labourers and, secondly, there was a chance for everyone working in this industry to promote gradually until he reaches the highest position.

What is interesting in the shipbuilding industry is that it contained unusual members who were mostly from the same origin and belonged to the same tribal background. The ship-builders in Kuwait have had their own community, known as *Baharna* (people who belonged to the Shi'aa sect of Islam and originally from Bahrain).<sup>18</sup> They were the only specialists who had a long tradition in this industry. The shipbuilding industry and some other crafts tended to be controlled by families or communities who guarded access to their crafts, usually keeping out non-kinsmen to protect their livelihood. As it was a highly skilled craft and of a great importance to Kuwaiti society and indeed to the whole of the Gulf societies, shipbuilding was particularly difficult to enter without the

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<sup>15</sup> Ahmed Abdulaziz Al-Marini, *Al-Kuwait wa Tareikhuha Al-Bahri aw Rihlat Al-Shira'a [Kuwait and its Maritime History]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, undated), p.35.

<sup>16</sup> Among those who were famous as carpenters in Kuwait in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Jassim bin Abdulrasul, Mohammed bin Hussein, Abdullah Al-baddr, Isa bin Abdul Aziz, Ayoub bin Baddr and others. Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.44.

<sup>17</sup> An example of those who were famous as *darrabeen* in Kuwait during the same period were Abbas bin Hussein Mohammad Al-Abbas, Salim bin Mohammed, Hamid Abdullah Mahmoud, Umran Khalaf, Mohammed bin Rabi' and others. Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Laurence Lockhart, "Outline of the History of Kuwait", *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol.34, 1947, p.264.

necessary family or tribal ties to the important craftsmen.<sup>19</sup> This, however, indicates the crystallization of the sect-tribal factors with the economic one in determining the general social structure of Kuwaiti sedentary society. It shows that these factors (as Althusser pointed out) were not separate from the economic but also important and constituted an essential part of the social relations of production, at the same level, as the economic.

The monopolisation of this industry by the *Baharna* community can be justified by, firstly: the tribal origin being the main criterion in determining the type of occupation and, because the labour of production was mostly differentiated along tribal lines, shipbuilding was considered as a subordinate industry which practised by groups of *non-sharif* origins. Secondly: the desire of the *Baharna* community to protect their livelihood by shutting out non-kinsmen. That is why they tended to take their sons with them to the shipyards to teach them the principles of this occupation.<sup>20</sup>

Although shipbuilding industry was restricted to a tribal or a kinship-based group as direct labourers, there were many others who participated in this industry in indirect way such as moneylenders, raw materials' sellers, sail and iron makers, etc. Thus, by virtue of their indirect role, those people played a significant part in this industry and contributed effectively in determining its general principles. Accordingly, these people will be considered among the labour forces of shipbuilding industry.

#### **5.4 Instruments of Labour and Raw Materials (Means of Production)**

The shipbuilding industry defers from pearling and other economic activities that, in addition to the necessary capital and instruments of labour, it requires raw materials. Many of these raw materials were not available in Kuwait and so had to be brought from India and East Africa<sup>21</sup> where there were many specialised merchants. Those merchants had stores known as '*Amayer*' where they sold wood and all the necessary

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<sup>19</sup> Nels Johnson, "Ahmed: A Kuwaiti Pearl Diver", in: *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Edmund Burke, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993), p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.106.

<sup>21</sup> Villiers, op. cit., pp.352-353.

raw materials for shipbuilding such as ropes, nails, equipment for carpenters, and the special oil for this industry.<sup>22</sup>

#### **5.4.1 Raw Materials**

The most important materials for shipbuilding were:

A- Wood. It is the most important material for shipbuilding and it was imported from India and sometimes from East Africa.<sup>23</sup> The wood comes in different types such as *Al-Sajj*, *Al-Qans*, *Al-Jnkari* and *Sbeitt*<sup>24</sup>.

B- Ropes. These were usually made of the fibres of coconut and palm trees. They were imported from India in big or small packs, and come in different types according to their length, thickness, and uses.<sup>25</sup>

C- Nails. These were iron nails imported from India, Iran, and Bahrain. They come in different shapes and length according to the place where it should be fixed. Some of these nails were made by Kuwaiti blacksmiths.<sup>26</sup>

D- *Fatayil*. Cotton threads used to fill spaces between the wood boards of the ship. They were put first in fish oil (*sil*) in order to stick them between the woods to prevent leakage of the water inside the ship. They were imported from Dubai and India.<sup>27</sup>

E- *Sil* and *shonah*. The *sil* was a material made from the oil of fish imported from Eden, Hadramout, and India. It was used to paint the ship after the finishing of manufacturing.<sup>28</sup> The tallow (*shonah*) or (*al-wadk*) was a blend of oil and limestone used to make a material that can resist the sea salt. It was used to paint the lower half of the ship. The lower half was sometimes covered by copper to prevent the erosion of the wood.<sup>29</sup>

F- The sail fabric. It comes in 40 to 50 metres pieces and the tailors cut and re-shape it in rectangular pieces according to its type and size. It was usually imported from India,

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<sup>22</sup> Among the most famous merchants who use to dail with such things were Hamad Al-Saqer, Abdulaziz Al-Othman, Ahmed and Falah Al-Kharafi, Abdulwahab bin Abdulaziz Al-Qatami, Shaheen Al-Ghanim and others. Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.48 See also Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, op.cit., p.43

<sup>23</sup> James Hornell, "Tentative Classification of Arab Sea-Craft", *The Mariner's Mirror: The Journal for Nautical Research*, vol.28 (1), 1942, p.13. Villiers, op. cit., pp. 352-53 .

<sup>24</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit.,p.48. See also Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, op. cit., p.46 and Al-Marini, op. cit., p.36.

<sup>25</sup> Saif Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, p.458.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op.cit., p.48. Also An interview with Hajj Musa Sabti Suleiman on May 24, 1967.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Gina'ai, and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.56.

<sup>28</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.2319, Al- Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.56.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.217.

Karachi, and Bahrain.<sup>30</sup> As a result of the fluctuation of demand from one year to another, the estimation of the quantity, price, and the cost of transporting of these materials into Kuwait in turn varied. The following table, which depended on the Kuwait trade reports by the British political agents, shows the materials of shipbuilding industry imported by Kuwaiti sailing ships and their values during 1904-1944.

**Table 5.1**  
**Materials of the Shipbuilding Industry Imported to Kuwait, 1904-1944**<sup>31</sup>

| Year    | Articles                                       | Value                 |
|---------|--|-----------------------|
| 1904/05 | Timber   | RS100 000             |
| 1905/06 | Timber   | Rs30 000              |
| 1906/07 | Timber   | Rs38 000              |
| 1907/08 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | Rs79 626              |
| 1908/09 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | Rs191 509             |
| 1909/10 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | Rs340 330             |
| 1910/11 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | Rs238 792             |
| 1911/12 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£9 591)=Rs143 865    |
| 1912/13 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£18 315)=Rs274 725   |
| 1913/14 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£14 825)=Rs222 375   |
| 1914/15 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£4 571)=Rs68 565     |
| 1915/16 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£6 821)=Rs102 315    |
| 1916/17 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£17 886)=Rs268 290   |
| 1917/18 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£13 993)=Rs209 895   |
| 1918/19 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£58 360)=Rs875 400   |
| 1919/20 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£96 541)=Rs1 448 115 |
| 1920/21 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£11 898)=Rs178 470   |
| 1921/22 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£8 038)=Rs120 570    |
| 1922/23 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£2 527)=Rs37 905     |
| 1923/24 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | (£6 511)=Rs97 665     |
| 1924/25 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£7 792)=Rs116 880    |
| 1925/26 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£11 363)=Rs170 445   |
| 1926/27 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£2 524)=Rs38 696     |
| 1927/28 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£5 325)=Rs81 038     |
| 1928/29 | Timber, fish oil, nails, sail cloth and tallow | (£4 205)=Rs63 730     |
| 1929/30 | Timber, fish oil and tallow                    | (£2 495)=Rs37 425     |
| 1930/31 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | (£6 507)=Rs97 605     |
| 1931/32 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs51 354              |
| 1932/33 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs81 286              |
| 1933/34 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs98 316              |
| 1934/35 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs91 650              |
| 1935/36 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs149 274             |
| 1936/37 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs110 339             |
| 1937/38 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs116 105             |
| 1938/39 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs451 252             |
| 1939/40 | Timber, fish oil, sail cloth and tallow        | Rs207 621             |
| 1943/44 | Timber and fish oil                            | Rs130 950             |

<sup>30</sup> An interview with Hajj Musa Sabti Suleiman, on May 24, 1967. See also Al-Rihani, op. cit., p. 666.

<sup>31</sup> The Persian Gulf Trade Reports, *Reports on the Trade of Kuwait for the Years 1904-1944* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1987), different pages.

From the annual value of the materials of shipbuilding industry imported to Kuwait, it is very clear that these materials constituted a considerable part of the Kuwait imports during the mentioned period. This, consequently, indicates the significance of this industry to the Kuwaiti economy as it was the backbone of pearling and seafaring and the only source for major and most important means of production of these activities. On the other hand, it illustrates the amount of population involved directly (as merchants, *nukhudas* masters, shipwrights and carpenters) or indirectly (as traders, sailors and materials makers etc) in this industry. As mentioned earlier, shipbuilding industry did not seem to employ a large part of labour force in Kuwait as direct workers. Nevertheless, it is obvious from the above table that a substantial part of the Kuwaiti population relied on it as a source of living.

It should be noted that the materials and tools needed for shipbuilding continued to be used until the cessation of this occupation in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Zahra Dickson Freeth in her book, *Kuwait was my Home* (1946) states that shipbuilders in Kuwait were still using those primitive implements.<sup>32</sup>

#### **5.4.2 Means of Production**

The essential means of production in the shipbuilding industry were the shipyards, the places where ships were built. These shipyards were known in Kuwait as *Al-Nuqa'*. This word means the basin where ships anchor to get both protection against waves and maintenance. This was like a curve fence against the sea with a height of a few metres in order to protect shipyard from strong waves. There was an opening in the side of shipyard. Immediately after the building of a ship, it was pushed into water after removing one side of the shipyard which was rebuilt once the ship was put to water.<sup>33</sup>

The importance of these shipyards lay not only in shipbuilding but in their use for other purposes such as receiving ships and unloading them. They provided protection for ships during their stay in these places. This was probably one of the main reasons why the owners of these shipyards maintained them and why the ships-owners used to contribute to maintenance of these shipyards.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.140.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.97.

The other essential, but less important means used in shipbuilding industry, were the carpenters' equipment such as: Indian drill, adze, saw, knife, hammer, bow, rough plane and others. Each one has a specific function and normally the name is taken from the function.<sup>35</sup>

## **5.5 Shipbuilding Funding System, Workers' Wages and the Cost of Building**

### **5.5.1 Funding System and the Wages of Workers**

The shipbuilding industry during the period from 1896 to 1946 was funded in two ways. First: according to a daily basis. According to this method, the merchant or *nukhudha*—or whoever want to get a ship— would provide wood and other relevant materials (usually from India due to the low cost), then would hire master-shipwrights to supervise the process of building according the instructions (the type and size of the ship) that the owner wanted. The master-shipwrights would be asked to bring with him his assistant (*al-maqddami*), carpenters (*al-qalalif*), and (*al-darrabeen*). Wages of the workers were defined on a daily basis and so were the hours of work. If they agreed on all of these details, a written contract would be made.<sup>36</sup>

The wages of the workers, according to this system, varied according to the size of the ship and the time needed for its building. The wages also vary from one worker to another. For example, the daily wages of the master-shipwrights were the highest, followed by carpenters, then *al-darrabeen* and so on. The only principle for these variations was that workers should have expended an equal amount of effort in obtaining them and then their wages should have varied accordingly. It was not possible to have a defined wage for each due to changes in the economic life and the decrease in the income. As a consequence, the wages which mentioned by some —the daily wages for the master was four rupees, the carpenter two rupees and the beater one and a half

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<sup>35</sup> Villiers, op. cit., p.35. Also Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, op. cit., pp.36-40.

<sup>36</sup> Villiers, op. cit., p.420, and Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, op. cit., p.28.

rupee<sup>37</sup> — cannot be relied on as a reference measure, but refer to a certain period of time during the 1930s.

Second: The system which was known in Kuwait as *qintarah*. According to this system, an agreement between the master-shipwrights and the one who wants the ship states the latter to pay a certain amount of money to the master-shipwrights in order to build the ship. The amount of money was paid in stages. The owner of the ship would pay a third in advance, the second third during the process of manufacturing, and the last third on the finishing of the process. The master-shipwrights, according to this system, would provide everything such as the materials and the wages of the workers, in addition to their food during the process of the shipbuilding.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth pointing out that according to both these systems, shipwrights, carpenters and workers were only responsible for the building the ship. Other tasks such as sewing the sails, rigging the ship, painting its lower part and floating it away from the shipyard were tasks of the sailors who will join the new ship. These sailors were not paid for this work as this counted as part of the necessary fitting out of the ship and the labour going into the general effort necessary in the earning of their shares.<sup>39</sup>

It is apparent that shipbuilding was different from other maritime industries in the way of payment. While in all maritime affairs, there were no wages or set of payments as almost every thing was profit sharing, shipbuilding was completely different and depended entirely on the wage workers. The sharing of profits, taking into account capital and labour, and often also expertise and responsibility, had always been the method of paying for work in all other maritime industries, though wages were only common to shipbuilding. The only reason for the prevalence of profit sharing, not only in Kuwait but throughout all the sheikhdoms of the Gulf, may lie in the extreme variability of the profits themselves in relation to an equal amount of effort expended in obtaining them.

The broad feature of shipbuilding industry as a fundamental component of the semi-capitalist mode of production is that whether ships were built according to the daily or

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<sup>37</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.114. Villiers reports that the wages of the carpenter was two and half rupees for a work that extend from sunrise to sunset. The other workers would receive no more than one rupee a day. However, the excellent carpenter might receive three rupees a day. Probably he means the prices during his visit to Kuwait in 1938/9. See Villiers, op. cit., p.420.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.114, and Villiers, op. cit., pp.420-21.

<sup>39</sup> Villiers, op. cit., p. 420.



*qintarah* systems, labour forces (in spite of their high skills) were only wage workers who have to sell their labour power in the market to the owners of capital and means of production. As a consequence of the unequal distribution of powers, rights of the ownership, and use of means of production between the owners and the workers, the results of their use were unequally distributed, and this in turn led to unequal relationship between both of them. As merchants and *nukhudas* were the only people who can provide capital and raw materials for shipbuilding and the only ones who had been investing their money in maritime activities which require ships in the first place, workers in shipbuilding industry had only to sell their labour power to them and accept all unavoidable harsh conditions put forward by them. By comparing the amount of money needed for building a ship (which varied from £000 to £4 500<sup>40</sup>) and the workers wages (which varied 1.5 to 4 rupees a day<sup>41</sup>) it seems apparent that the capital owners were in an advantageous position over other workers by which they were able to increase their capital, build more ships and, accordingly, employ more workers. Accordingly, wages were not defined by the workers or according to their will. They were mostly biased in the merchants and *nukhudas*' favour who can hire the cheapest shipwrights whether in Kuwait or in other shipyards of the Arabian Gulf or India. As a result, these workers remained as wage workers and were unable to improve their position even to the extent that they could build ships for themselves and use them as their own means of production.

### **5.5.2 The Cost of Shipbuilding**

The cost of shipbuilding, according to the above mentioned systems, varies according to the prices of timber and the relevant materials, in addition to the cost of shipping it. It also varies according to the size and capacity of the ship. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to define the cost of the ship. With regard to this, Villiers states that since the capacities and the tonnage of the ships were reckoned always in terms of stowage, the cost of making a boat in Kuwait was estimated to equal its capacity of dates. For example, the building of a ship with 1000 packages of date's<sup>42</sup> capacity would cost 6000 rupees. The price of each package of dates during the years 1938/39 was between six to seven rupees.<sup>43</sup> Though this was a rough estimate, Allan Villiers cites a real example

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.232.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.114, also Villiers, op. cit., p.420.

<sup>42</sup> Each package in the Gulf equals around 180lb, see Villiers, op. cit., p.419.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

for the cost of building a ship when he referred to the ship (known as Triumph of Righteousness), built by shipwright Abdullah bin Rashid for the trader Hamad Abdullah Al-Saqer with a 2300 packages date's capacity was between 12 000 to 13000 rupees. The following table gives a detailed account about the cost of building this ship in 1914:

**Table 5.2**  
**The Cost of Building a Ship in Kuwait in 1914 <sup>44</sup>**

| Item  | Cost     |
|---|----------|
| Cost of the timber (Carpenter's contract price for labour)  | Rs6 000  |
| Sails   | Rs2 800  |
| Masts   | Rs2 000  |
| Longboat  | Rs1 000  |
| Gear, including capstan, compass, binnacle, water tanks, firebox, four anchors and necessary roping stuffs and blocks | Rs200    |
| Caulking and paying stuffs, including fish oil for outside and inside coats   | Rs340    |
| Gig   | Rs100    |
| Total   | Rs60     |
|   | Rs12 500 |

It is worth mentioning that this cost cannot be an ideal scale for the cost of shipbuilding due to the differences in the prices of the materials needed for the industry. These prices vary from one year to another. For example, a ship known as *Baghalah* cost around £1000 at the beginning of the 20th century. However, this price went up to £4 500 in time with the increase in the prices of the materials.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly (with the absence of any Kuwaiti records) any figures given to the value of ships built in Kuwait during the period under investigation can only be considered as estimations and not as accurate figures. The following table, which depended on the reports of British political agents in Kuwait, illustrates the number of ships and its estimated aggregate value during the period 1909-1944.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.421.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.232.

**Table 5.3**  
**The Number of Ships and Their Aggregate Value, 1909-1944<sup>46</sup>**

| Year      | Number of ships | Aggregate value   |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1909/1910 | 6-10            | ----              |
| 1910/1911 | ----            | ----              |
| 1911/1912 | 65-70           | £15 000=Rs150 000 |
| 1912/1913 | 120             | £26 700=Rs347 100 |
| 1913/1914 | 42              | £10 000=Rs130 000 |
| 1914/1915 | ----            | ----              |
| 1915/1916 | 9               | £6 600=Rs85 800   |
| 1916/1917 | 33              | £16 500=Rs214 500 |
| 1917/1918 | 5               | £7 933=Rs103 129  |
| 1918/1919 | 7               | £14 000=Rs182 000 |
| 1919/1920 | 26              | £15 500=Rs201 500 |
| 1920/1921 | 12              | £12 867=Rs167 271 |
| 1921/1922 | 36              | £6 420=Rs83 460   |
| 1922/1923 | 14              | £2 540=Rs31 850   |
| 1923/1924 | 23              | £8 000=Rs104 000  |
| 1924/1925 | 24              | £7 750=Rs100 750  |
| 1925/1926 | 46              | £16 533=Rs214 929 |
| 1926/1927 | 33              | £1 380=Rs17 940   |
| 1927/1928 | 40              | £4 467=Rs58 071   |
| 1928/1929 | 58              | £8 947=Rs116 311  |
| 1929/1930 | 21              | £2 627=Rs34 151   |
| 1930/1931 | 15              | Rs38 080          |
| 1931/1932 | 27              | Rs40 500          |
| 1932/1933 | 4               | Rs35, 000         |
| 1933/1934 | ----            | ----              |
| 1934/1935 | 12              | Rs80 700          |
| 1935/1936 | 40              | Rs1, 00 900       |
| 1936/1937 | 23              | Rs77 250          |
| 1937/1938 | 49              | Rs70 100          |
| 1938/1939 | 11              | Rs30 000          |
| 1939/1940 | 19              | Rs10 000-Rs13 000 |
| 1943/1944 | 7               | ----              |

<sup>46</sup> The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940, *Reports on the Trade of Kuwait 1905-1940*, various pages.

It is apparent from the above table that, in the course of 50 years with which the research is concerned, Kuwait appears to be a key resource of ships not only for itself but for the Arabian Gulf region as whole. Shipbuilding continued to be a backbone of other maritime activities and a very important source of living for a considerable part of the Kuwaiti inhabitants.

The point to be made here is that although the British political agents' reports have mentioned the number of ships and its aggregate value as accurate figures, these figures can not be taken as reliable resources. The likely truth is that, while the number of ships seems to be reasonable as ships can be accounted and/or their numbers might be taken from the direct producers, the aggregate value of these ships can not be accepted as an accurate one. As the costs of ships varied according to the type of the ship and depended entirely on the prices of the raw materials and the cost of building. It was very difficult to know the actual cost of any ship without having detailed records about the cost of its raw materials, wages of its builders and prices of its sails, etc. Accordingly, the above mentioned figures of the aggregate value of the Kuwaiti ships can only be accepted as estimated figures.

As the British reports did not mention the type of ships built every year, it is also very difficult to justify the variation in their numbers from one year to another. The reason is that ships were built for different purposes and varied according to their use. While big ships were used for long distance trade and pearling there were other medium and small ships used for other purposes such as commercial transportation between the ports of the Gulf or fishing and carrying water from Shatt Al-Arab to Kuwait city. Consequently, the increase or decrease in the number of ships can only be ascribed to the prosperity or the decline of these economic activities and the economic fluctuations in the area as a whole. It should also be taken into account that in spite of the competition of European steamers and motor ships, it seems apparent that sailing craft remained the key resource of the Arab navigation. This is because, firstly, European steamers were unable to approach most of the many small ports in the Gulf due to their shallow waters and the lack of the navigation charts at that time.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, the two World Wars had played a crucial role in the resumption of the shipbuilding industry in

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<sup>47</sup> Louise E. Sweet, "Pirates or Politics? Arab Societies of the Persian or Arabian Gulf, 18<sup>th</sup> Century". *Ethnohistory*, vol.2 (3), 1964, p. 265.

Kuwait as the British navy stopped the arrival of the European commercial steamers into the Gulf which increased the demand for the sailing ships.<sup>48</sup>

One further financial matter needs to be discussed here: the question of debt. The sailing-ships of Kuwait were rarely built without the owner (*nukhuda* or trader) going in debt to one of the merchants, a debt which is seldom paid off.<sup>49</sup> Debts in the shipbuilding industry were not a regular part of the transaction and had less chance of arising than in other maritime activities. It is true, that debts existed in shipbuilding industry as part of a business relationship between people but when they exist they bind a particular person (*nukhuda* or trader) to another particular merchant and have to be paid off according to the agreed way of payment between them as a personal relationship. People with money did not find it profitable to invest their money by lending it to others to build ships; on the contrary, they found it more profitable to build ships by themselves for their own purposes, or hire them to others in both pearling and seafaring. In this way ships as the principle means of production in all maritime activities, were mostly monopolized by a small group of merchants. These merchants were able to control most of the maritime activities as they were the owners of the means of production and the providers of capital needed for these industries. The exclusive possession of capital and means of production, of course, put them in an advantageous position over other workers and enabled them to increase their capital, build more ships and, accordingly, employ more workers.

## **5.6 Organization of the Work and Types of Ships**

### **5.6.1 Organization of the Work and the Building Process**

Although the main aim of this chapter is not only to give a detailed description about the shipbuilding industry as this has already been done by others, it should be taken into account: a brief description of the organisation and the process of shipbuilding is extremely useful to shed some light on the early historical developments of this industry.

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<sup>48</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.216. Ghanim Sultan, *Al-Milaha Al-Arabia wa Ahmiatuha Qadiman wa Haditan [Arab Navigation and its Ancient and Modern Importance]* (Kuwait: Moasasat Al-‘Aqadum Al-‘Almi, 1988), p.83.

<sup>49</sup> Richard H. Sanger, *The Arabian Peninsula* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), p.154.

This will also help in giving a clear picture about the division of labour and the organization of the labour forces in this industry.

Before the introduction of iron nails into shipbuilding in the Arabian Gulf, since the inception of this industry until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, ships were assembled with ropes made of coconut peel. This is what drew the attention of the Italian traveller Marco Polo in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when he said:

Their [inhabitants of the Gulf] ships are very bad, and many of them are wrecked, because they are not put together with iron nails, but sewn with twine made from the husk of Indian nuts. They steep the husk in water until it becomes like the hairs of horse's mane; then they make twine of it, with which they stitch their ships... They possess no iron to make nails, and so have recourse to wooden treenails, and to stitching with twine. It is hence a matter of no little peril to sail in those ships. I assure that many are lost, for violent storms are frequently in the sea of India.<sup>50</sup>

The process of fixing the board of wood was difficult. The shipwrights worked in pairs, one inside the ship and the other one outside the ship. Each of them inserted the rope through a hole and passed it to his mate and the other did the same until this rope revolved around the major rope. In this process, the shipwrights used both hands and feet to accomplish such a difficult job. They pulled the rope strongly in order to wedge the rope between the wood pieces and after that they closed the holes by using small wooden stakes.<sup>51</sup>

The use of ropes and the extension of the sail across the ship were characteristic of the shipbuilding industry in the Gulf and this persisted until the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Marco Polo (1254-1324) is the Italian traveller who travelled to the East until he arrived to China in 1275. He stayed in China until 1291 leaving by sea to Persia and then to his country. His opinion is probably exaggerated because these ships served for a long time but probably its oldness or lack of maintenance led to what he said. See Denison Ross and Eileen Power, *The Travels of Marco polo*, trans. Aldo Ricci (London: George Routledge, 1931), p.45. See also W. H. Moreland, "The Ships of the Arabian Sea about A. D. 1500", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, April 1939, pp. 182-190.

<sup>51</sup> Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shamlan, op. cit., p.31.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Marini, op. cit., p.36.

However, at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and with the advent of the Portuguese into this area, the iron nails were introduced into shipbuilding industry. Nails replaced ropes and were used to fix the body of the ship and to connect its wooden components. Manufacturing by using ropes disappeared accordingly. The arrival of the Portuguese into the region was a watershed in the history of shipbuilding industry. The interaction with the European ships added a new dimension to the marine life in the region. Among the most technical impacts of this interaction were the introduction of iron nails in this industry and the designing of the stern of the ship to be wider, exactly like the European ships.<sup>53</sup> As a result, the history of some boats—the one used by the Omani people and the Arabian Gulf in general, which was known by the name *Sambuq*—goes back to the Portuguese era. The continuous interaction with the Europeans led to the introduction of different designs of boats' stern. Some of them were square, which was known as *Baghala*. Some of the old designs from the Portuguese era survived, such as *Bedeni*, *Baqarah*, *Batil* and other similar ships.<sup>54</sup>

The process of producing ships was undertaken by the shipwrights who prepared all parts and put them in the proper place according to instructions given by the master-shipwrights. The master would define exactly the position of each part according to the measures in his design. After placing all parts in the proper positions, he would order the shipwrights to fix them together by using iron nails. They would make the background of the ship first, then the sides and so on until they finish the whole ship.<sup>55</sup> The sails were not made by the shipbuilders, but bought ready made from India and Bahrain. They were made by the sailors who would join the new ship under the supervision of the most experienced. They were made in rectangular forms according to the size of the sail, which was defined according to the size of the ship.<sup>56</sup>

Once the ship was made and the sails were fastened, the sailors knocked down the side of the shipyard in order to lower the ship into the sea. This is done amid a grand celebration attended by families who came to celebrate, but who also helped to move

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<sup>53</sup> T. M. Johnstone and J. Muir, "Portuguese Influence on Shipbuilding in the Persian Gulf", *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol.48 (1), 1962, pp. 58-62.

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Information and Culture in Oman, *Oman wa Tariekhuha Al-Bahri [Oman and its Maritime History]* p.62. Hornell, op. cit., pp.36-40

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Hajj Musa Sabti Suleiman on May 24, 1967, see also Sanger, op. cit., p.8

<sup>56</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.666. Also Alan Moore, "Notes on Dhow", *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol.48 (4), 1962, pp.208.

the ship into the water. This was part of the collective work that characterised all marine activities.<sup>57</sup>

It is very clear that in shipbuilding the building process was organized according to the workers' skills and, consequently, the division of labour and the workers' wages were determined according to this criterion. While the master-shipwrights and their assistants were the designers and supervisors of the building process who received the highest wages, carpenters, apprentices and other workers were the real producers who fulfilled most of the work but received lower payments. As master-shipwrights, their skill status was emphasized, but—in the eyes of others—they were, with other workers equally specialists in the productive sense in this industry. But, even with their high skills, their social status was also linked to this industry which was considered as a local craft, confined to the non-original social group of people.

The time needed to finish building a ship was not defined and depended on the type and size of the ship, and also the number of the workers—around 15 to 16 workers in most cases.<sup>58</sup> It is worth mentioning that some of the Kuwaiti ships were made in India under the supervision of Kuwaiti masters<sup>59</sup> due to the availability of the materials necessary for ship production. Then the ships sailed back to Kuwait. However, the number of these ships remained small because the majority of the Kuwaiti master-shipwrights preferred to work in Kuwait close to their families. Moreover, most of the ship owners preferred their ship to be produced in Kuwait under their supervision.

### **5.6.2 Types of Ships**

Different types of ships were built in Kuwait. They differed according to their use and the area of work allocated to each. For example, there were ships for pearling, which were designed and prepared to withstand long and difficult trips that last for around five months. Other types of ships were used for commercial transport, and the transport of people and cargo among the ports of the Arabian Gulf, India, and East Africa. Others

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<sup>57</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.141. Badder Al-Deen Al-Khususi, *Dirasat fi Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Iqtisadi wa Al-Ijtima'ai [Studies in Economic and Social History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1983), p.231

<sup>58</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.114.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.114.



were only specialised to work in the Arabian Gulf for trade, fishing and transport among near ports. In addition, there were ships used for pearling and trade at the same time. Some ships could sail to deep water and others only in shallow and near water.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that all of these ships were produced and owned privately without the help or interference of the government. Therefore, the merchants and *nukhudas* who financed the production of these ships produced and operated them to get private profits. As a consequence, the ownership of these ships was private and the government had nothing to do with it except to extract tax, which was an important source of revenue for the government.<sup>61</sup>

However, ships according to their use were divided as follows:<sup>62</sup>

A- Ships for commercial transport over long distances, such as India and the eastern coast of Africa. The capacities of these ships were defined in accordance to the volume and size of the cargo to be shipped.

B- Ships for pearling. These were smaller in size and the number of sailors determines their capacity. In many cases, the transport ships were used in pearl diving.

C- Ships for commercial transport among the ports of the Arabian Gulf, which were medium size. They were used in shipping cargo and passengers, and their capacities were around seventy tones.

D- Ships for fishing in the Arabian Gulf. They came in small and medium sizes and they work in shallow water and places near the coast.

E- Small ships used for transporting water,<sup>63</sup> rocks, and services among big ships, which might anchor in deep water in pearl fisheries. They differ in size and type according to the task that should be carried out.

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<sup>60</sup> Louise E. Sweet, "The Arabian Peninsula and Annotated Bibliography", In: *The Central Middle East: a Handbook of Anthropology*, edited by Louise E. Sweet, vol.2 (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1968), pp.321-22.

<sup>61</sup> Saif Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.1, p.237, Lorimer, op. cit., pp. 2319-27.

<sup>62</sup> Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, pp.473-83, Hamad Mahmoud El-S'aidan, *Al-Mausu'aa Al-Kuwaitia Al-Mukhtasarah [The Shorter Kuwait Encyclopaedia]*, vol.1 (Kuwait: Press Agency, 1970), p.209. Faisal Al-'Adhmah, *Fi Bilad Al-Lulu [In the Country of Pearl]* (Damascus: The Publication of the Committee of Culture in the Arab Youth Association, 1945), p.77.

<sup>63</sup> Fresh water was not available in Kuwait so it was brought from Shatt Al-Arab. Ships were provided with barrels to transport water and empty them in special pool in Kuwait. The boys transferred the water in bottles made of leather or iron to be sold to Kuwaiti families. See Eleanor Calverley, *My Arabian Days and Nights: A Medical missionary in old Kuwait* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1958), p.18.

In sum, the following are the most important types of ships built in Kuwait and used for various purposes: Jalibut, Batil, Sambuq, Shu'ai, Baqhala, Baqarah, Boom, Mashuwah, Keet, Huri, Kutiah, Balam, Flukah, Kinr, Huwairjiyh, Ghinjah, Tchalah.<sup>64</sup>

Based on the discussion above, one could argue that the shipbuilding industry in Kuwait during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of the most important maritime activities because all other relevant activities depend on it. Ships produced in Kuwait were considered to be of the highest quality, probably due to, as Dickson pointed out, the dry weather in Kuwait. This left an impact on the way wood and indeed boats were dried as a result of temperature and dryness, which prevailed in Kuwait. This made Kuwait the best place for this industry in the Gulf.<sup>65</sup>

It is difficult to have an accurate estimation of the size of the Kuwaiti fleet for the period of this research, 1896-1946, because of the overlap of the purposes used by different ships. Even the statistics that existed for the numbers of the pearling ships and the transport vessels are not an accurate indicator because of the overlap of their uses. However, due to the inter-linkage between the shipbuilding industry on one hand and other maritime industries (pearling and seafaring) on the other, it appears that the shipbuilding industry developed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps this industry witnessed a decline as a result of the great depression of 1929 and the recession of pearling industry since the early 1930s. But it partially recovered during the Second World War, since all British steamers were used in military operations. Reporting this change in the shipbuilding industry, Major Galloway, the British Political Agent in Kuwait, wrote that "The famous boat-building industry continues to flourish".<sup>66</sup>

However, the outbreak of the First World War 1914-1918 and then the Second World War 1939-45 contributed to a large extent in creating a massive maritime activity in the region to the extent that it doubled the productivity of this industry in Kuwait in particular and the Gulf in general. This was due to the inability of commercial European

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed description of these ships and their use, see Hornell, op. cit., pp.15-30. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, pp.473-83. Lorimer, op. cit., pp. 2319-27.

<sup>65</sup> Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, p.473.

<sup>66</sup> The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947 *Administration Report of Kuwait for the Year 1939* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1986), p.26.

steamers to reach the region because the British navy took over these ships.<sup>67</sup> The result was that there was a great demand on sailing ships for the movement of goods between the Gulf and India, the Red Sea, and the eastern coast of Africa and, consequently, their rent rose.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the number of the produced ships in Kuwait was around 20-25 ships annually, with 300 people engaged in this industry.<sup>69</sup> During the Second World War Kuwaiti production was expected to be 30- 50 sail ships, *Boom*, annually.<sup>70</sup> However, with the end of the Second World War and the discovery of the oil in the region, this industry suffered and indeed ceased to exist by the end of the 1950s, not least because the manpower turned to the oil companies and governmental jobs.

## **5.7 The Division of labour and Relations of Production in Shipbuilding**

### **Industry**

The shipbuilding industry, as pointed out earlier, involved both direct and indirect workers. It would be inappropriate to confine it as an economic activity to those who only were involved directly in this business as shipwrights or carpenters, etc. There were many other people who took an indirect part in this industry such as merchants (moneylenders), sellers of raw materials and carpenters' equipments, sail makers, blacksmiths or nail makers, etc, and these should be included within the labour force involved in this industry.

The broad characteristic of shipbuilding industry, as one of the key elements of the maritime semi-capitalist mode of production, is that this occupation was formed by the unity of small groups. These were the owners of capital, a considerable number of hired skilled workers and others who worked on self-employed basis, e.g. traders and blacksmiths in addition to casual workers who were employed on the daily wage basis to carry woods in the shipyards or help in cutting and sewing the sails. Accordingly, a complex division of labour existed within the shipbuilding industry. The major noticeable divisions included the owners of capital (merchants and *nukhudas*), raw

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<sup>67</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.216, Sultan, op. cit., pp.123-24.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.216.

<sup>69</sup> Dirweesh Al-Miqdadi, "Al-Kuwait Tas'aa li Isti'aadat Majdaha Al-Bahri Al-Qadeem" [Kuwait Endeavours to Recover its Ancient Maritime History], *Al-Arabi Magazine*, (6), May 1959, p.113.

<sup>70</sup> Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Al-Tuhfa Al-Nabhania fi Tariekh Al-Jazera Al-Arabia [The History of Arabian Peninsula]* vol.8 (Cairo: Al-Matba'aah Al-Mohamadia Al-Tijaria, 1949), p.184.

material and equipment sellers, master-shipwrights and carpenters. Within each of the main classifications there were further specializations.

It is noticeable that most occupations related to this industry, were inherited but occupational change did occur and sometimes individuals held more than one occupation at the same time. For example, merchants who invest their money in this industry were the same investors in pearling and long distance trade; *nukhudas* or captains who provide the capital for building new ships were at the same time the captains of pearling and sea trade ships; master-shipwrights were also the masters of commercial sea transportation and long distance trade ships. With the exception of the work of the real producers of ships ( master-shipwrights, carpenters, etc), which was confined to the Baharna community, other work related to this industry were open to, and in practise held by, all men without regard to their descent status.

As ownership is the key aspect in defining the mode of production since it determines the manner in which appropriation of the economic surplus occurs and the degree of control which the appropriator has over the productive activity of the producers. It is obvious that the essential questions which should be answered here are: what kind of ownership prevailed in shipbuilding industry as an element of the semi-capitalist mode of production? How was surplus labour appropriated under this mode? And what is the principal relation of production under this mode?

In the shipbuilding industry, ownership contains three elements: ownership of raw materials, ownership of means of production, and ownership of labour power. It was very clear from the system of funding of shipbuilding that raw materials in both ways of funding were not owned by the workers in this industry. According to the first one (the daily basis system of funding), raw materials were provided by the people who wanted to build a ship and, according to the second one (the *qintarah* system), the prices of raw materials were included with the whole price of the shipbuilding process and in this case provided by the master-shipwrights.

Accordingly, it is obvious that the raw materials for shipbuilding were not owned by the workers. Conversely, they were owned or provided by those who possessed the capital needed for the building process itself. While this is apparent, the form of ownership of the means of production, particularly shipyards, was not clear and seemed to be a

contested one. Although historical sources have indicated some names of shipyard-owners, these sources did not clearly mention whether those people were shipwrights or not and, if they were not, these sources did not provide any information about the ways of using them by the non-owners. For instance, Saif Al-Shamlan, Najat Al-Gina'ai and Baddr Al-Deen Al-Khususi all emphasized that among the famous shipyards in Kuwait were those which belong to: Ahmed Abdulmuhsin Al-Khrafi, Abdulattif Suleiman Al-Othman, Al Abdualil, Hamad Abdullah Al-Saqer, Nasser Al- Badder, Falah Al-Khrafi, and Said Yassin Al-Rifa'ai,<sup>71</sup> but they did not mention clearly whether those people were shipwrights or not.

However, by looking at the names of these shipyard owners, it seems apparent that these owners were not shipwrights. As most historical sources emphasized that shipbuilders and their workers were mostly from the Baharna group who were originally from Bahrain and belonged to the shi'aa sect of Islam, some of these names undoubtedly were not shi'aa. They belonged to well known families such as Al-Khrafi, Al-Saqer, Al- Badder, etc, who were Sunni and descendants of an original or *asil* Kuwaiti tribes.

From this point of view, and in spite of the scarcity of information about the system of ownership of shipyards, it can be said that shipyards, as the principal means of production in shipbuilding industry, were not owned by the shipwrights or other workers in this industry. They were possessed by the same class who owned the means of production in pearling and seafaring (*tawawish* and *nukhudas*), who made them as places for building new ships, maintaining, receiving and unloading their old ones.

Regarding the ownership of labour power, it is worth mentioning that workers in shipbuilding industry were different from those of pearling and seafaring in two respects: firstly, they were mostly skilled workers who inherited the knowledge of this occupation from their families. Therefore, their chance for getting a job depended entirely on their knowledge and experience in this industry. Secondly, shipbuilding as an occupation was not a permanent one or a work which needs to be done during a specific season or a certain period of time. It depended entirely on the demand of

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<sup>71</sup> Saif Al-Shamlan, op. cit., vol.2, pp.231-35; and Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.97.

pearling and seafaring activities as ships were the essential means of production in both industries.

It must be remembered that all pearling and seafaring ships were owned by a certain class (*tawawish* and *nukhudas*) who were financially able to monopolize their ownership. Accordingly, and because workers in the shipbuilding industry were financially unable to provide the capital and raw materials needed for building ships, they could not be independent workers who can build ships for themselves and sell them in the market. Consequently, the only available way for them to work and then to survive was to sell their labour power in the market.

Therefore, they transferred to be wage workers who had only to sell their labour power in the market. The lack of capital and raw materials —as essential fundamentals of shipbuilding—forced all the labourers in shipbuilding to become wage workers who had only to wait until the capital owners provide them with these essentials to work. It was true that part of those workers' labour was rewarded in the form of wages to be used in their own maintenance but most of their labour was obtained by the owners of capital and means of production. Subsequently, these workers had only to use their knowledge, experience and physical effort to perform the desired work for the owners in return for an agreed wage mostly priced according to those owners' will and heavily biased in their favour. They were like the house builders who have only their knowledge in construction and wait until others provide them with raw materials to perform the work according to an agreed way of payment.

It is possible to argue that the shipbuilding industry —as was the case for pearling and seafaring— was based on exploitation<sup>72</sup>: where a small class of non-labourers exploited the majority of the workers. The only variation is that the form of labour utilized in shipbuilding industry differed sharply from that employed in other maritime industries and the relationship between the workers and the owners of capital and means of production in shipbuilding was akin to capitalist wage relations. Shipbuilding was a

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<sup>72</sup> In order therefore for exploitation, in Marx's most theoretically central sense, to occur, it must not merely be the case that a relatively small number of people appropriate a part of the surplus product which others produce, but in addition the exploiting class must control the conditions under which another class can produce. Erik Olin Wright, "The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis-comments", *Theory and Society*, vol.25, (October, 1996), pp.696-97.

mode in which ownership of the means of production was severed from ownership of labour power: it was that which permits the transformation of labour power into a commodity sold in the market, and utilized and priced mostly in accordance with the will and need of the owners of the means of production. It was based on unequal relations of production, unequal social relation between the owners and workers in respect to the ownership and use of means of production and the appropriation of the fruits of using them. It is clear that by virtue of the relations of production which people entered as a result of their rights and effective control they have over the means of production, owners were in a position to control the workers, price their labour power and appropriate the surplus value of their work.

The basis of variation between shipbuilding and other maritime industries is of central importance. Labourers in shipbuilding industry were not only exploited workers who were forced to sell their labour power in the market under exploitative conditions; they constituted a means of accumulation not only through the product of their labour in shipbuilding industry but also through their work on long distance trade ships as shipwrights whose task was to fix the ships in case of defect. The product of the workers labour was not consumed or distributed to them. On the contrary, it was the way by which the owners of the means of production could accumulate and appropriate more and more economic surplus. Those workers were, thus, dependant on the owners not only for access to a means of production but even for the use of the product of their labour. On the other hand, the owners of capital and means of production exploited their positions to increase their wealth and to expand their economic and consequently their political power. They were apparently able to impose their will on individuals reluctant to appropriate most of their labour value and to keep them as wage workers.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Shipbuilding, as mentioned earlier, relied upon a form of exploitation of wage labour as the mechanism for accumulation. As a result, and in spite of the kinship or the tribal framework of organization, the nature of the relations of production and the form of the ownership in shipbuilding industry led to unequal distribution of wealth and power

between the people involved in this industry. This, in return contributed decisively in determining the general social relations of the Kuwaiti sedentary society.

It seems apparent that the pattern of relations of production within the shipbuilding industry, as in pearling, played a major role in determining the social structure of the Kuwaiti society. While it was true that the access to this industry was confined to a kinship-based social group (Baharna community), the relations of production based on individual ownership of the means of production (raw materials and instruments of work) gave rise to corresponding social relations. With the maintenance of tribal, ethnic and sectarian differentiations the society was obviously divided into two different classes: the owners of the means of production who constituted a dominant class and enforced their ultimate economic, social and political hegemony and the workers —the working class who owned nothing but to sell their labour power in the market to survive.

To sum up, it is possible to argue that in spite of the preservation of the tribal, ethnic and sectarian identities and differentiations, the dominant relations of production within the maritime semi-capitalist mode of production (in which the shipbuilding industry is a part) led to the transformation of the Kuwaiti sedentary community into a class society. The class structure was based mainly on the economic base where the owners formed the dominant class which enjoyed the full ownership of the production means and the power to acquire the final surplus product, and the workers constituted the dominated class which separated from the means of production and transformed to wage labourers, possessors only for their labour power. Therefore, the social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary community was crystallized and merged into the dominant relations of production which was shaped further by the economic factor. This eventually created a more noticeably hierarchical social structure along socio-economic lines.



## Chapter Six

### Commercial Sea Transportation and Long Distance Trade

#### 6.1 Introduction

Commercial sea transportation and long distance trade, which was known in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in general by the name of *Al-Sifr*, was the third important economic activity that the inhabitants of Kuwait had experienced and mastered. This economic activity was practised over a long time because the inhabitants of the region in general owned ships and, more importantly, they had a very good knowledge of the seas.<sup>1</sup> Archaeological studies, carried out by a Danish mission during 1958-1959, confirm the existence of marine commercial links between Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in general and Persia, India, and East Africa since the second and third millenniums BC.<sup>2</sup>

The key elements in the role of Kuwait in trading and commercial sea transportation were its geographical location on the end of many caravan routes from the hinterland of Arabia Alpo and southern Iraq to the Gulf, the relative stability of the town and the port, and its general policy of charging lower tariffs than other trading centres in the Gulf. Moreover, because the relatively short distance between Kuwait and other destinations, Kuwait was the favourite market for the Bedouins from south Iraq, Najd, and the middle of the Arabian Peninsula<sup>3</sup>.

The strategic location of the Arabian Gulf also played a significant role in the prosperity of this activity in Kuwait. There were commercial ties between the Arabian Gulf with ports on the Red Sea, the south of the Arabian Peninsula, the eastern coast of Africa, and India. Therefore, the Kuwaiti commercial ships arrived at Calcutta, Malabar, Karachi, Ceylon, and Bombay in the Indian continent and Berbera, Mogadishu, and

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<sup>1</sup> Knowledge of shipbuilding in the Arabian Gulf region goes as far back as 2800-1800 BC. It was mostly confined to the Omani people who used to produce ships and use them for several purposes, the most important of which was sea trade. It should be taken into account that the name of Oman did not mean just the current Oman but also consisted of some other parts of the Gulf. Ministry of Information and Culture in Oman, *Oman wa Tariekhuhu Al-Bahri [Oman and its Maritime History]* (Oman: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1959), p.19.

<sup>2</sup> "A Brief Report on the Works of the Danish Archaeological Mission in Failaka Island in the Years 1958/9", *Al-Kuwait Al-Yaom Magazine*, (218), March 29, 1959, pp.17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Abdul Aziz Hamad Al-Saqer, *Al-Kuwait Qabl Al-Zait [Kuwait before the Oil]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1984), p.67, also Amin Al-Rihani, *Muluk Al-Arab: Rihlah fi Al-Bilad Al-Arabia [Arab Kings: Trip in Arab Land]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, undated), p.668.

Zanzibar on the eastern coast of Africa.<sup>4</sup> Over this extensive area of the Gulf and Indian Ocean Kuwaiti ships carried local products and other cargo which they picked up on the way. As a consequence, Kuwaitis were compelled to rely on their commercial and navigational skills as main resources of living. Therefore, a substantial part of the Kuwaiti labour force took employment in the maritime trade and commercial sea transportation.

The principal argument of this chapter, therefore, is that prior to the discovery and exportation of oil, the sea commercial transportation and long distance trade was a very significant economic activity in Kuwait and played a crucial role in its economic, social and political life. It was a key element of the maritime semi-capitalist mode of production, which was characterized by its specific combination of relations and forces of production. Although the analysis is based on investigations conducted by the historical method, concentrating on the nature of this economic activity, its workers, and ways of finance and distribution of revenues, more attention is paid to the pattern of relations of production and the form of ownership within this occupation and its impact on the social structure of the Kuwaiti society. On this basis this chapter asks to what extent forces and relations of production affected the social and tribal distinctions that differentiated classes of producers and owners of means of production within this occupation? And consequently what was the general social structure of the Kuwaiti society in the pre-oil era?

## **6.2 Reasons of the Expansion and Prosperity of the Commercial Transportation and Sea Trade**

The Kuwaiti sea trade was dynamically interlinked the pearling industry. Both industries were the major economic activities which employed most of the Kuwaiti labour force. Pearls were the main exportable commodity that was produced in Kuwait. Due to the lack of locally available resources —as a result of the environment— pearls were exported to provide capital to finance initially basic, and subsequently varied, imports. Thus, the surplus capital derived from pearling strongly stimulated the

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<sup>4</sup> Lusher, *Kuwait in 1868* trans. by Abdulah Al-Sani'a (Kuwait: Dar Al-Talaba, 1958), p.28, and Isa Al-Qatami, *Dalil Al-Muhtar fi 'Alim Al-Bihar [The Guidebook of Seas Science]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1964), p.216.

expansion of trade. The development and prosperity of this commercial activity in Kuwait was due to a set of factors that can be summarised as follows:

1. The lack of local other natural resources and goods. This is due to the natural environment and climate in Kuwait to the extent that it was not possible to meet the basic needs. Therefore, the inhabitants' desire to secure these requirements from abroad.
2. Kuwait's geographical location. Kuwait is located at the north-eastern shore of the Arabian Gulf, near the sea road that goes from areas that produce seasonal commodities (in India and South East Asia) to its markets in Europe and through the Mediterranean. Kuwait was also the natural port for Najd and the starting point for sea trade routes—especially during the decline of commercial status of Basra—and because it is the meeting point for commercial ships from the West and the East. Many of these ships stopped in the port of Kuwait in order to be re-supplied. In addition, Kuwait was used as a port for loading and unloading goods.<sup>5</sup>
3. Utilising winds. Winds in the Arabian Gulf had an impact on the link of the Kuwaiti ships with the rest of the Arabian Gulf, the Indian continent, and the eastern coast of Africa, because winds were the source of power for the Kuwaiti sailing ships until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Two types of wind blew in the Arabian Gulf. The first one is the north wind (known as north-western wind), which was dry and cold during winter but refreshing during summer. It reached its greatest strength at the beginning of summer. The second type was the south wind. It was southeastern and known as *Al-Kous*. This type of wind in the Arabian Gulf coincides with the summer monsoon winds and the winter monsoon wind in the Indian Ocean.<sup>7</sup> The monsoon wind pushes ships out of the Gulf, thus commercial trips would begin with the blowing of the north western monsoon wind with the associated sea current in the Arab Sea in the Gulf of Oman until the African coasts. That means travel to the eastern coast of Africa

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakima, *History of Kuwait*, vol.1, Part.1 (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1967), p.49, and Al-Saqer, op. cit., p.67, see also Ghanim Sultan, *Al-Milaha Al-Arabia wa Ahmiatuhā Qadiman wa Haditan [Arab Navigation and its Ancient and Modern Importance]* (Kuwait: Moasasat Al-Taquadum Al-'Almi, 1988), pp.95-96.

<sup>6</sup> Kuwaiti ships kept working by using sails and depending on wind until 1945 when Kuwaitis began to introduce diesel engines, see Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.216.

<sup>7</sup> Mohammed Mutwali, in his book *Hawdh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi, [The Arabian Gulf Basin]*, explains the link between the Arabian Gulf wind and the Indian Ocean by saying "the reason for the blow of this wind is the location of the Gulf between the depression focused on Asia on the one hand, and on the other hand the European high pressure focused on the north Atlantic." See Mohammed Mutwali, *Hawdh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The Arabian Gulf Basin] Part I* (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Anglo-Al-Misria, 1978), p.118.

usually started at the end of autumn and during winter in order to make use of the prevailing force of wind and the current westwards. In the opposite direction, the return trip from Africa starts with the end of spring and the beginning of summer so as to benefit from reverses in current circles and wind which blow to the northeast pushing winds to the south Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf. These trips to India are the opposite of the ones to Africa.<sup>8</sup>

4. The interest of the Kuwaiti rulers, since the inception of Kuwait, in trade. They encouraged this activity through securing and protecting trade routes and charging very low import and export tariffs, which in turn helped attract merchants and led to the prosperity of trade to and from Kuwait. Kuwait, accordingly, witnessed a trade boom that drew the attention of foreign travellers who visited the country.<sup>9</sup> The interest of the Kuwaiti rulers in trade was due to the scarcity of other resources, their experience in trade and their knowledge of its financial rewards. Another reason for their interest was the customs that they extracted, which formed an important source of revenue for the sheikdom especially during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah 1896-1915.<sup>10</sup>

This is coupled with the progress in shipbuilding industry in Kuwait, which enabled them to reach many ports and cities where there were different goods and commodities in demand. In addition, the proximity of Kuwait to the important production centres in the Gulf, such as those for the Iraqi dates and some of the Bedouin production in the Arabian Peninsula, played a considerable role.<sup>11</sup>

The above factors led to increasing prosperity from trade in Kuwait. This led to establishing trade ties with different ports on the Arabian Gulf, the south Arabian Peninsula, and also ports in Indian and eastern coast of Africa. According to Abu Hakima in the Arabian Gulf the Kuwaiti mercantile fleet was the second largest fleet

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<sup>8</sup> Sultan, op. cit., p.100, Mohammd Riyad Rashid, "Al-Khalij wa Al-Khalijiun Qabl 'Aam 1939" [The Gulf and its Inhabitants before 1939], *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, (36), October 1983, p.269.

<sup>9</sup> An example of those who visited Kuwait was Carsten Niebuhr who visited it in 1765. He praised its inhabitants' fame in trade, Pelly who visited it in 1863 who described the market in Kuwait, which was, according to him, crowded by Arabs and non-Arabs. He ascribed that to the rulers' justice and the movement of trade. Another one was Palgrave who visited Kuwait in 1868 and praised its trade fame. See Abu Hakima, op.cit., vol.2, Part.1, pp.168-74.

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat, 1978), pp. 61-66.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1940), p. 423. Also Paul. E. Case, "Boom Time in Kuwait", *National Geographic Magazine*, vol.11, December 1952, p.792.

after the fleet of Masqat in carrying commerce and goods.<sup>12</sup> Kuwait also became a transit point where large quantities of imported items were re-exported from Kuwait to other ports on the Gulf, inside the Arabian Peninsula and to the Bedouins of Syria.<sup>13</sup> It is worth mentioning here that Kuwaiti trade experienced a period of rapid growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But it also passed through several periods of decline and recession during the First World War and the late 1930s. These periods of decline and recession were caused by the British blockade against the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Ibn Saud's blockade against Kuwait between 1922 and 1938 and by the world wide great depression in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of that, it is possible to argue that a considerable number of the inhabitants of Kuwait had been engaged in this occupation and a substantial portion of the labour forces in Kuwait had relied on it as a source of living. This occupation, therefore, had its own traditions that defined the characteristics of all those engaged in it and, consequently, its impact on their social relations and the social structure of the Kuwaiti society as whole as it will be seen in the following sections.

### **6.3 Workers in the Commercial Ships**

In addition to the crew, the number of sailors working for each ship seems to have varied between forty and fifty men<sup>15</sup> but in actual fact this number is bound by the capacity of the ship which was usually measured by how many packages of dates it could carry. One hundred packages of dates entail one sailor.<sup>16</sup> The crew in all commercial ships were constituted from a group of people, each of whom was assigned a specific task as follows:

1- *Nukhuda* (captain). In many cases he was the owner of the ship or one of the merchants. He was in charge of the ship and was assumed to have mastered a good knowledge and techniques of the sea. His task was to define the routes of navigation in

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakima, *The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965* (London: Luzac & Company, 1983), p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.61, and Sultan, op. cit., pp.103-4.

<sup>14</sup> Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina'ai, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait Bain Al-Harbain 1919-1939" [The Economic and Political Development of Kuwait in the Inter War Period, 1919-1939], Unpublished MA Thesis, (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University, 1972), p.84. Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.67-68.

<sup>15</sup> Sultan, op. cit., p.128.

<sup>16</sup> Dates were the only way of measuring the capacity of a ship. Each twenty packages of dates equal one tone. Alan Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", *The Middle East Journal*, vol.2 (4), October 1948, p.401, and Richard H. Sanger, *The Arabian Peninsula* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), p.155.

order to avoid rocks. He was supposed to be familiar with trade because the destination of the voyage was determined by the fluctuation in price and subject to the rule of supply and demand.<sup>17</sup> This position was hereditary. A *nukhuda* should be from a family which works in this occupation and who was sent to school to be literate enough to carry out this occupation. *nukhudas* did not mix with other sailors in the ship lest this degraded them socially.<sup>18</sup>

2- *Al-Muqaddami* (foreman or quartermaster). He was the chief of sailors and in charge of the internal management of the ship and everything that was relevant to the sailors. Another junior *muqaddami* who conveyed instructions from the *nukhuda* to sailors sometimes aided him.<sup>19</sup>

3- *Sukkani* (helmsman). His job was very important because he was the one who steered the ship according to the *nukhuda's* instructions. He had to be healthy, with good sight, and of course, had to remain watchful during the trip to avoid catastrophe. There were often three or four helmsmen to take turns to steer the ship.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, there was what was called *nukhuda Al-Bar* who bought the requirements for the voyage once the ship arrived at a port and supervised the process of loading goods.<sup>21</sup> Other crew members were *al-naham* (the singer), cook, drummer, and lute player. Also the ship had a shipwright whose task was to fix the ship in case of any defect.<sup>22</sup>

Sailors, whose number varied according to the capacity of the ship, were from a lower social level than *nukhudas*. Many of them were Negroes, the descendants of slaves, or Persians. Their task was loading and unloading when the ship was anchored in port. But, once the ship was sailing, their task was confined to fixing sails, fastening masts and controlling the process of sailing. The possibility of getting promotion was very slim. All what they could hope for after gaining a good experience was promotion to become a captain of small, second hand boats. However, the ambition of the majority of them was simply to get a financial reward from this occupation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sultan, op. cit., pp.128-29.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", p.406. Sanger, op. cit., p.153.

<sup>19</sup> Sultan, op. cit., p.129, Najat Al-Gina'ai and Badder Al-Deen Al-Khususi, *Tariekh Sina'at Al-Sufin fi Al-Kuwait wa Anshittatha Al-Mukhtalifa [Ship-building Industry in Kuwait and its Different Activities]* ((Kuwait: Moasasat Al-Taquadum Al-'Almi, 1988), p.193.

<sup>20</sup> Sanger, op. cit., p.153. Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi., op. cit., p.193.

<sup>21</sup> Sanger, op. cit., p.153.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Also Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.225.

<sup>23</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, pp.39-40, also Badder Al-Deen Al-Khususi, *Dirasat fi Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Iqtisadi wa Al-Ijtima'ai [Studies in Economic and Social History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1983), p.236.

The *muqaddami* would distribute tasks among sailors after receiving the instructions from the *nukhuda* through the junior *muqaddami*. They, in turn would work in teams and in shifts so that each would get enough time of rest and sleep. As far as guarding the ship once in port is concerned, the junior and the senior *muqaddamis* would do this job alternatively and in some cases, if the port was risky, the *nukhuda* himself would remain onboard the ship.<sup>24</sup>

Although there are no statistics available about the people involved in this occupation, because of the lack of any governmental records, there is sufficient evidence to indicate the growth of the Kuwaiti commercial fleet and its increasing capacity, which illustrates, in turn, the size of population engaged in seafaring during the period under investigation. Lorimer stated that in 1905 the mercantile fleet of Kuwait included 36 sea-going cargo vessels, 50 coastal cargo vessels and 50 *Ballams* engaged chiefly in trade from the Shatt Al-Arab.<sup>25</sup> In 1920 the number of large sailing ships in Kuwait was estimated to be 150 with a capacity of 40 000 tones. The capacity of the largest was 575 tones and the smallest 100 tones. In 1939, Kuwait had a registered fleet of 106 ocean-going dhows and from 50 to 60 smaller dhows engaged in inner-gulf trade.<sup>26</sup> During the Second World War, the number of the Kuwait fleet was around 200 ships with a total capacity of 30 000 tones. The capacity of each ship was between 90 and 500 tones.<sup>27</sup> From the number of the Kuwaiti commercial ships and their capacities—which according to Villiers' criterion delineate the number of sailors<sup>28</sup>—one could argue that seafaring as a significant economic activity had a substantially large labour force. It should be taken into account that there was a great deal of overlap between the commercial and pearling fleets. Many of the ships that engaged in pearling in the summer months shifted their operations to commercial transportation and trade in the winter time. Therefore, these figures can not be regarded as an accurate statistics of the Kuwaiti commercial fleet.

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.193.

<sup>25</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), pp.1053-54

<sup>26</sup> Jacqueline Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p.65.

<sup>27</sup> Sultan, op. cit., pp.123-24

<sup>28</sup> Each one hundred packages of dates entail one sailor, Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", p.401.

## 6.4 Financing the Commercial and Transporting Ships

Like other maritime activities seafaring entails the collective financial and physical participation of many people. As a result, there was a need to have certain traditions, norms, and rules that governed and regulated the conduct of this occupation. It should be taken into account that customs were stricter and they were more strictly enforced by those in authority, since uniformity was a matter of public importance. Accordingly, these norms and traditions were predominantly introduced by those who owned the capital and means of production and biased mostly towards their interests. With the passage of time these norms and traditions became the regulations of this occupation and eventually they became the basis of the *Al-Sifr* law which was issued in 1940 to regulate the seafaring occupation.

This occupation, as the case in pearling, relied on the uniform and unchanging credit system in which the merchants, backed by the sheikh or the ruling family and the *nuakhudas* were tied to the merchants by a structure of debt. Also the sailors were tied to the *nukhudas* in the same way.<sup>29</sup>

In general, this occupation was financed by capital accumulated in the hands of merchants and ship-owners. The *nuakhuda* whether he was the ship-owner or hiring it from a merchant, not only had to provide the ship and supply it with provisions. He also had to provide the sailors with loans to support their families whilst they were on their lengthy voyages. Sailors, as in the case of divers in pearling, had to repay their debts after coming back from the trading voyages. While, theoretically the financial terms under which the sailors and other crew members of the sailing ships worked seemed quite fair, but in reality these workers seemed almost slaves. They were unlikely to be free of debt. More often than not, their shares were insufficient to cover their advances. The sailor who could not repay his debts was bound to work for the same ship in the next season.<sup>30</sup>

Exchange of money and labour between a *nukhuda* and his sailors were long-term transactions. Trading voyages themselves lasted for many months, but in addition the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp.406-07.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.193.



system of loans in many cases readily developed into situations of long-term indebtedness.

It is very clear that by the debt system, until they repay their debts, workers were tied to the general market prices which was put forward by the financiers and could not take advantage of special offers. In case a sailor wanted to move to another ship, he should, as the case in pearling, get what was known as *al-brwah* (permit) from the *nukhuda*. The other *nukhuda*, who wanted to recruit the sailor, was bound to repay all the sailor's debts to the first *nukhuda*.<sup>31</sup> If the *nukhuda* wished, he could transfer sailor in debt to another *nukhuda* without the sailor's consent, or hand him over to a shopkeeper to work off his debt onshore. The pertinent point here is that the seafarers not only made up the crew of the voyage but also were responsible for making the ship's sails, rigging the ship, painting its lower half and floating it away from the shipyard. All this represented essentially unpaid labour.<sup>32</sup>

Another point which is needed to be stressed here is that if the *nukhuda* hired a ship from the merchant and if the ship was lost, it was the *nukhuda's* loss, and not the merchant's. The *nukhuda* must pay back not only the value of the ship, but the advance given to him to finance his voyage. The merchants carried out this form of arrangements to insure their money since Islam forbids all forms of insurance.<sup>33</sup>

It is convenient to mention here that the utilization of the debt system, whether in seafaring or any other maritime activities, was regarded as a kind of guarantee for both sides (creditors and debtors). The creditors (merchants), for their part, would ensure that by providing a loan to the *nukhudas* he would continue working for them until the loan is repaid and, accordingly, they were guaranteed the continuation of their business and their investments in this occupation. Similarly, by lending money to their crew and sailors, the *nukhudas* would ensure that these workers would stay with them for the next season and there would be no need for other workers. On the sailors and other workers' side, the debt system was the only available means by which they could ensure their work in the next season. Consequently, the bond between the creditors and the workers

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<sup>31</sup> The *Brwah* is a written consent given by the *nukhuda* whereby he allows his sailor to move to work for another *nukhuda* who in turn undertake to repay the sailor's debts. Saif Marzuq Al-Shamlan, *Tariekh Al-Ghaws ala Al-Lulu fi Al-Kuwait wa Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The History of Pearling in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1986), pp.94-97.

<sup>32</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, p.420.

<sup>33</sup> Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", p.401.

was often lifelong, and even more lifelong, for it continued among the families on both sides.

As far as ownership is concerned, in seafaring as in pearling, it was consistently that legal ownership resides in the hands of the non-labourers (merchants and *nukhudas*) and not in the hands of the direct producers. Ships, as they were the central means of production in the sea commercial transportation occupation, were often owned by merchants and sometimes the *nukhudas* hired them for a fixed share of the owners, which was half of the ship revenue.<sup>34</sup> Other labourers never had any kind of legal ownership of these means of production.

In terms of economic possession or real economic control which refers to the control of the means of production. As they were combined in the labour process including the labour activity (work), the object of labour (commodities and capital in seafaring), and the means by which labourers act on the objects of labour (ships). It is very clear that these three elements were all under the control of the non-labourers and labourers never had any control over them. The labour activity (work) was entirely under the control of the *nukhuda* or his foreman who exercised a real authority over the labourers on the ship voyage. The objects of labour (commodities and capital) in seafaring were subject to the non-labourers control. The means by which the labourers act on the objects of labour (ships) were entirely owned by the non-labourers (merchant and *nukhudas*) and though sailors had some control over the utilization of these means, this was under the stringent supervision of the owners or their representatives and according to their instructions.

It is, therefore, possible to conclude that, as in pearling, the real producers in seafaring (sailors) never had any legal or juridical control over the means of production which were privately owned by the non-producers (merchants and *nukhudas*). Due to the inescapable debt system sailors had also lost their control over their labour power which was priced and sold according to the desires of non-producers. On the other hand, though sailors had some economic control over the use of the means of production, they had no economic control over the ownership of these means of production or over the labour activity and its object.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp.424-25 and Lorimer, op. cit., vol.1, p.2327.

## 6.5 Voyages and Routes of the Kuwaiti Ships

August of each year was the beginning of the season for Kuwaiti voyages, which coincided, with the date's season in Basra.<sup>35</sup> The trips were divided into three voyages:

A- The first trip was called *heirfi*, and usually started on 20 August. It occurred yearly when ships would go to Basra to collect unripe dates.<sup>36</sup> The shipping and loading of the dates had to be done according to an agreement between traders and *nukhudas*.<sup>37</sup>

B- The second trip was called *zheiri* and usually started on 20 September where the Kuwaiti ships would sail to Basra to collect dates.<sup>38</sup>

C-The third trip usually started on the 20 October when the ships went to Basra for the same purpose. The ships were loaded with other goods such as vegetable and wheat. Dates were shipped for the Kuwaiti merchants in order to be exported to other ports.<sup>39</sup>

After loading the ships with dates from Basra, the ships were divided into groups according to their next destinations such as India and East Africa. The following table shows the routes and destinations of the Kuwaiti commercial ships, the ports and the time needed for these voyages.

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<sup>35</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.224.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Also Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1951), p.252.

<sup>37</sup> The shipping prices were between 15-20 rupees. However these prices cannot be considered fix due to fluctuation of the price as a result of the rule of demand and supply. See, Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., 187. Also Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.224.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Gina'ai, and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.187.

<sup>39</sup> Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", p. 403.

**Table 6.1**  
**Routes of the Kuwait Navigation<sup>40</sup>**

| The Route  | Distance or Time Needed for Voyages   | Ports  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>1-Sea routes to the Arabian Gulf ports</b><br>A-Kuwait-Basra sea route <sup>41</sup><br><br>B- Sea routes between Kuwait and Iran <sup>42</sup><br><br>C- Kuwait-Al-Hasa route<br>D- Kuwait-Bahrain<br>E- Kuwait-Oman <sup>43</sup> | Kuwait to Basra 142 miles<br>Kuwait to Al-Fao 86 miles<br>Kuwait to Shatt Al-Arab 63 miles<br><br>Kuwait to Muhmarra 124 miles<br>Kuwait to AbAden 112 miles<br>Kuwait to Lingeh 411 miles<br>-----<br>Kuwait to Bahrain 276 miles<br>Kuwait to Dubai around 459 miles<br>Dubai to Muscat 306 miles | Al-Fao<br>Shatt Al-Arab<br><br>Muhmarra (Khurrmshhar),<br>AbAden<br>Lingeh and Qais<br><br>-----<br>Bahrain.<br>Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi,<br>Ra's Mas'oud, Kiblah, Diba,<br>Khor Fakkan, Muscat, and<br>Ra's Al-Had. |
| <b>2- Sea routes to the ports of Arabian Peninsula and East Africa</b><br>A-Kuwait-Aden<br><br>B- Kuwait to East Africa  | Ships needed between 12-15 days to finish a trip <sup>44</sup><br>The time needed for the completion of the trip is about nine or ten months. <sup>45</sup>   | Sahar, Sihout, Shihr, Mukkala and Aden.<br>Berebra, Djibouti, Mogadishu, Mombassa, Dar Elsa am, and Zanzibar.  |
| <b>3-The sea rout to Indian ports<sup>46</sup></b>   | Kuwait to Jwader 859 miles,<br>Kuwait to Karachi 1111 miles<br>Kuwait and Dawarkah around 1241 miles<br>Kuwait and Bombay 1527miles   | Jwader, Karachi, Dawarkah, Bombay, and Jwa and then to Calcutta port and from there to Ceylon  |

<sup>40</sup> Sultan, op. cit., p.109. Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.80. Adel Mohammed Abdulmugani, *Al-Iqtisad Al-Kuwaiti Al-Qadim [The Ancient Economy of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, Undated), p.114. Also Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, op. cit., p.252.

<sup>41</sup> Sultan, op. cit., p.109.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.80.

<sup>43</sup> Ships needed 7-20 days to finish a trip and sometimes it needed one month, depending on the wind and the sea currents Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, op. cit., p.252.

<sup>44</sup> Abdulmugani, op. cit., p114. Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, op. cit., p.252.

<sup>45</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, pp.425-26. Sanger, op. cit., p.159. Some of the Kuwaiti ships might sail directly from India to Africa through Bombay and Karachi then to Africa westwards through the island of Suqatra without passing through Eden. The period needed for this trip in normal circumstances was one month. Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.162, Abdulmughni, op. cit., p.152.

<sup>46</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, op. cit., p.252, Abdulmughni, op. cit., p.172

In each port, merchants would sell part of the shipped dates.<sup>47</sup> They also would transport other goods at these ports. Before arriving to Mukkala, for example, *nukhudas* would make sure of what the inhabitants need and subsequently they would bring it from Aden. In Mukkala they used to exchange goods and commodities where the small ships such as *Huri* and *Mashuwah* accompanying large the ships made the exchange. These small vessels used to carry goods from big ships to the port and vice versa. The Kuwaiti ships often stayed for some time in Aden and Hadramout to sell part of its load before setting out to East Africa and Ceylon.<sup>48</sup> Goods and passengers to Zanzibar, Mombassa and Dar Al-Salaam loaded ships that arrived in Aden. Upon arrival at each harbour, the process of unloading and loading was done. It is worth noting that some Kuwaiti ships used to carry out two trips a year from Kuwait to India and Aden.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, the principal goods coming to or being exported from Kuwait were not only the Kuwaiti products or goods for local consumption. They also included the primary consumption products produced in different places and re-exported to another places via Kuwait. Although statistics about the volume of the Kuwaiti external trade are still wanting, the following table shows ample evidence of the importance of the Kuwaiti external trade and its imports and exports with different ports whether in the Arabian Gulf or Indian Ocean.

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<sup>47</sup> Case, *op. cit.*, p.792.

<sup>48</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, pp.423-24. Sanger, *op. cit.*, pp.159-61, and Al-Qatami *op. cit.*, p.224.

<sup>49</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *op. cit.*, p.252. Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, pp. 423-24.

**Table 6.2**  
**Kuwait Imports and Exports during 1896-1946**

| Country                                       | Imports   | Exports   |
|---|---|---|
| Iraq  | Dates, rice, vegetables, fruits, wheat, barley, tobacco, coffee, and water in addition to the products of the Bedouins of the southern Iraq which include sheep, skins, wool and ghee, etc <sup>50</sup> .    | Horses, weapons, clothes in addition to other consumptive commodities, and materials that the Iraqi Bedouins tribes were in need. <sup>51</sup> |
| Iran  | rugs  | Coffee Black pepper, cotton cloths, tobacco, painting materials and nuts. <sup>52</sup>   |
| Ports of the Gulf and south Arabian Peninsula | Pomegranate, lemon, Bahraini almonds from Bahrain<br>Cloth, pickles, coffee, sugar, spices, iron, lead from Qatar.<br>Yoghurt, fish oil for ship painting from Hadramout and Aden. <sup>53</sup>              | Pearls to the market of Bahrain, Iraqi dates, and timber brought from India and East Africa and other Indian spices.                            |
| India   | Timber, cloths, spices, sugar, coffee, weapons and munitions, nails, sesame, cardamom, sandalwood, ambergris, ginger, and fruits such as banana, dried lemon, Indian dates, mango, and coconut. <sup>54</sup> | Pearls and Iraqi dates.   |
| Ports of East Africa                          | Dates, salt, rice, sugar, dried milk, Indian corn, honey, ghee <sup>55</sup>  | Timber, Somali coal, palm oil, coconut, Arabic glue, carnation, and bottles of lemon juice. <sup>56</sup>                                       |

Since Kuwait served as a transit port town for the hinterland of Arabia and southern of Iraq, a substantial part of the Kuwait imports were consumed by the nomads of those areas. On the other hand, their products constituted a considerable part of the Kuwaiti exports. Most of the imported products seem to have originated in the international

<sup>50</sup> Eleanor Calverley, *My Arabian Days and Nights: A Medical Missionary in Old Kuwait* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1958), p.18. Mostafa Al-Najar et al, *Tariakh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi Al-Mo'asir [The Contemporary History of the Arabian Gulf]* (Basra: Basra University Press, 1984), pp.134-40

<sup>51</sup> Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), pp.185-92. and Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina'ai, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait", p.149.

<sup>52</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., pp.297-98

<sup>53</sup> Al-Saqer, op. cit., p.63, Sultan, op. cit., p.119, Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.187.

<sup>54</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., pp.1313-15, Abdulmughni, op. cit., p.149, Siltan, op. cit., p.121, Al-Saqer, op. cit., p.63.

<sup>55</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, p.613.

<sup>56</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., pp.1313-15, Sultan, op. cit., p.120, Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.187, Rashid, op. cit., p.271.

markets such as Europe, India and East Africa. In the other direction and besides the pearls and Iraqi dates, Kuwait, on a smaller scale, exported the Bedouin products to the markets of India such as horses, wool, hides, and clarified butter (ghee) which were produced by the Bedouin tribes as a supplement to their subsistence economy.<sup>57</sup>

It is therefore possible to argue that the continuous demand of different commodities, especially foodstuffs and daily consumed products in the Arabian Gulf region in general, played a decisive role in the prosperity of the Kuwaiti seaborne trade and the increase of number of ships and people involved in this business. Moreover, many regions around the Indian Ocean specialized in the production of commodities for which there was a steady demand such as pearls in the Arabian Gulf, timber cloths and foodstuffs in India and East Africa. The Kuwaiti fleet, therefore, served as a commercial sea transporting fleet between various ports of the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean more than a fleet for the Kuwaiti port itself. And, as a result, Kuwaiti merchants traded not only in the needed goods in the Kuwaiti market but also in the demands of other markets around the region. Accordingly, most of the Kuwaiti merchants had their trading offices in different ports —from the coast of the Arabian Gulf, to Bombay— in order to supervise their work, know the products and demands of the market, and to directly contact their clients. The sons of those merchants or their relatives were the ones who run these offices. However, the headquarters for these branches were in Kuwait and Basra.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the sheikh of Kuwait himself, Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah (1896-1915), paid a special attention to this business as it was one of the key elements of the Kuwaiti economy. He set up a special agency in India to take care of the Kuwaiti trade and to help the merchants.<sup>59</sup>

As far as the speed of the ship and the time it took them to reach ports, it was conditioned by the type of the ship, the velocity of wind and the current. It is possible to say that the average speed in general was between six to eight miles per an hour. However, the speed could sometimes reach 14 miles per an hour once the wind was

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<sup>57</sup> Mohammed Al-Farhan, *Al-Kuwait Bain Al-Ams wa Al-Yaom [Kuwait between Yesterday and Today]* (Damascus: Dar Samir Amis, 1959), p.111, also Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina'ai, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait", p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with the three Kuwaiti merchants, Mash'an Al-Khadir, Abdulrhman Al-Baher and Khalid Abdulatif who had taken part in the Kuwaiti sea trade before 1950s, the interview was done by Saif Al-Shamlan and broadcasted in a documentary television programme in 1965. The Archive of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait.

<sup>59</sup> Nourah, Al-Qasimi "Al-Wojoud Al-Hindi fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi" [The Indian Presence in the Arabian Gulf], Unpublished MA Thesis (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University, 1984), p.18.

strong and blowing in the same direction the ship takes. Below is the assessment of the average period that a big ship, especially *Boom*,<sup>60</sup> needed in normal conditions.

**Table 6.3**  
**Time Needed for Commercial Ships between Different Ports<sup>61</sup>**

| Departure to Destination   | The Time of the Trip |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Basra to Karachi           | 15-20 days           |
| Basra to Aden              | 25 days to a month   |
| Kuwait to Muscat           | One week to a month  |
| Muscat to Zanzibar         | Around one month     |
| Muscat to Aden             | 12-15 days           |
| Bombay to Mogadishu        | Around 20 days       |
| Bombay to Aden             | 18-20 days           |
| Bombay to Colombo (Ceylon) | 7-10 days            |
| Bombay to Muscat           | Around 10 days       |
| Karachi to Bombay          | Around one week      |
| Zanzibar to Muscat         | 20-25 days           |
| Karachi to Aden            | 18-20 days           |

Based on the above discussion, one could say that the occupation of seafaring which was practised by the inhabitants of Kuwait relied, in the first place, on the sailing ships especially the *Boom*, and *Baghlah*. The Kuwaitis who mastered the process of manufacturing these vessels kept using them until 1945 when they were developed by being equipped with diesel engines.<sup>62</sup> There was much reliance on this type of ships simply because the European ships did not reach Kuwait until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The European ships, which came with goods for Kuwait, used to stop in the harbour of Muhmarra in Arabsitan and from there sailing ships shipped goods to Kuwait.<sup>63</sup> By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sheikh Mubarak asked the European steam ships to come

<sup>60</sup> The *Boom* ship was regarded one of the most significant ship used in Kuwait during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the low cost of its production when compared to *Baghlah* and also due to its big size and capacity. See Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp. 214-16. See also H. R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951), pp.474-75.

<sup>61</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, op. cit.,p.252, and Abdulmaghni, op. cit., pp.172-75.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., p216.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.64.



to Kuwaiti ports directly.<sup>64</sup> This indeed narrowed the options of the sailing ships. At least 50 British ships arrived in Kuwait in the period 1900-1906 with a capacity of 51 893 tones.<sup>65</sup> However, this came to an end after a protest by the Ottoman authorities in Iraq as this development impacted negatively on the trade with Basra. Events such as the outbreak of the two World Wars and the great depression of 1929 were reasons for the resumption of active work for the sailing ships. Indeed, an increase of reliance on this type of ships was noted, because the British authorities took over the European ships, which arrived into the Arabian Gulf region.<sup>66</sup> In 1941 Major Hickinbotham the British Political Agent in Kuwait (1941-43), wrote "the war has brought prosperity to the Kuwait merchants and they have become more and more concerned with their own [trade] affairs".<sup>67</sup>

In sum, the outbreak of the two World Wars and the inability of the European ships to come to this region during this period contributed to the persistence and prosperity of shipbuilding industry and related economic activities during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The relevant point which is needed to be stressed here is that in seafaring as in pearling, the ship represented the unit of production, independently owned or hired but controlled by the *nukhuda*. But the distribution between capital and labour was not organized on the basis of production per se. It was organized on the basis of transformation through commerce of surplus product produced in the international markets (India, East Africa, etc.) into commodities for exchange in local and regional markets (Kuwait, Basra, Arabian Gulf ports, etc.) and vice versa. Because surplus extraction via other grounds was relatively weak in the Kuwaiti sedentary society, the main character of its social formation was determined further by the extraction of a surplus from other societies through long distance trade.

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<sup>64</sup> Sheikh Mubarak made a contract with one of the British companies that said their ships would directly come to Kuwait. Mubarak was motivated by the desire to extract extra fees and by increasing the volume of trade. In fact, an average of two ships started to arrive weekly to Kuwait. However, this measure enraged the Ottoman authorities in Iraq because this impacted the trade in Basra. Consequently, they stop coming to Kuwait. Hussein Khalaf Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Siyasi [The Political History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hilal, 1962), pp. 113-14.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Qatami, op. cit., pp.216-17. Sultan, op. cit., pp.123-24.

<sup>67</sup> The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947 *Administration Report of Kuwait for the Year 1939* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1986), p.2.

## 6.6 Distribution of Revenues (Form of Appropriation of the Economic Surplus)

Due to the variation of the ships' voyages and because the revenues were different from one ship to another according to the types of goods and its prices in different ports, it is very difficult to give an accurate estimate to revenue of each ship and the gains of its sailors. Therefore, it will be appropriate to rely on the detailed description given by the Australian traveller, Alan Villiers about his participation in one of the commercial voyages from Kuwait to East Africa. In his description Villiers gave a clear picture about the financial revenues of these trips and the ways of commercial interaction in the ports of which the Kuwaiti ships arrive. During his visit to the region and particularly during his participation in commercial trip in 1938/39 to the ports of Aden, the Arabian Peninsula, the eastern coast of Africa and the returning trip, Villiers shed light on the commercial interactions and transactions, the types of goods exchanged at the different ports, and the revenue of the trip and how it was distributed among the workers.<sup>68</sup>

Villiers mentions that the ship that he was on board carried dates from Shatt Al-Arab to Berbera on the eastern coast of Africa. It returned to Aden without empty and so its owner gained nothing. In Aden, he used the money made by the trip to buy salt, rice, sugar, canned milk, Indian corn, and other things in order to carry them to the ports of the Italian Somaliland, Kenya, and Zanzibar in east Africa. From the ports of Mukalla and shihr in the Hadramaut, the ship also carried tobacco, honey, ghee and Arab cooking stones. In addition, the ship carried 130 passengers —each male passenger was charged eight rupees and each female paid twelve rupees to Africa. In the port of Haifun on the eastern coast of Africa, the *nukhuda* found it impossible to do business because of the restriction on currency imposed by the Italians. Therefore, he had to exchange some of the rice and sugar with local dried fish, and he sold an old boat for one hundred rupees. A few passengers were picked up at Mogadishu and some ghee, cooking stones and other materials were sold. Other passengers from Lamu joined the trip for Mombassa and Zanzibar. At Mombassa, some rice and ghee were sold and more passengers joined for Zanzibar. In the latter place, he sold of the rest of the consignment and all the passengers. Then, the trip continued to Rufiji Delta. There, the money obtained during the trip was used to buy a quantity of mangrove poles, some of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp.423-27.

which was sold in Zanzibar in the way back. Other goods were added such as cloves, vermicelli, coconuts, and soap in order to resell them in Muscat and the ports of the Arabian Gulf. The gross total of the trip is illustrated in the following table.

**Table 6.4**

**The Gross Total of the Gains of Kuwaiti Commercial Ship Voyage to East Africa <sup>69</sup>**

| Item  | Amount in Rupees |
|---|------------------|
| The fare of shipping 2300 packages of dates from Basra to Berbera of (one and half rupees a package).   | Rs3 450          |
| The cost of buying salt, rice, sugar, canned milk, etc., from Aden  | Rs3 000          |
| Left  | Rs450            |
| The fare of carrying 103 men and 15 women from Mukalla and Shihr. The fare was 8 rupees for a man and 12 rupees for a woman                     | Rs1 000          |
| The price of the boat in Haifun   | Rs100            |
| The exchange of rice and other commodities for dried fish and salt. The profit from this transaction after selling the fish in Zanzibar latter. | Rs500            |
| In Mogadishu, the fares of various passengers for Lamu, in addition to selling cooking stones and other commodities.                            | Rs250            |
| In Lamu, the fare for carrying some passengers to Mombassa and Zanzibar   | Rs100            |
| In Mombassa, the fare for carrying some passengers to Zanzibar  | Rs100            |
| In Zanzibar, the profit from selling the load (the amount of exchange that was done in Haifun is not included)                                  | Rs800            |
| The total cost of mangrove cargo including unofficial fees in Rufiji Delta  | Rs1 700          |
| The price of selling this consignment in Bahrain upon returning   | Rs6 000          |
| Profits from selling mangrove poles   | Rs4 300          |
| Profits from soaps, cloves vermicelli coconut, etc, (Approx).   | Rs1 000          |
| Other revenue from unknown sources but crew entitled to share. (Approx)   | Rs1 000          |
| <b>Total Gross earnings</b>   | <b>Rs9 600</b>   |

Therefore, the net profit of this trip was 9 600 rupees. 1500 rupees deduced from these profits for the provision food during the trip. The rest of the money, 8 100 rupees, was divided into two. 4 050 rupees went to the ship, and 4 050 rupees were divided among the sailors according to the above-mentioned system. The allowance for each sailor was

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.424.

135 rupees.<sup>70</sup> The American traveller, Richard Sanger, who wrote about the trips of the Kuwait ships and its commercial transactions at the beginning of the 1950s, also confirmed this. He added:

The gross profit from a typical ten months voyage is around 10 000 rupees. Once direct costs have been subtracted, about 4 000 rupees are left for the owners of the ship, and 4 000 rupees for division between the *nukhuda* and his crew. The average Kuwaiti sailor feels that Allah has been good to him if he gets 150 rupees (50 dollars) for his nine months of tugging at ropes in the scorching sun and sleeping, drenched with dew, curled up on a coil of rope.<sup>71</sup>

It is notable from the distribution of the net profits of commercial voyages that owners of the means of production and workers were placed in unequal economic positions. By the debt and shares systems, sailors did not own their labour power and the fruit of their labour was appropriated by those who owned the trading ships. Debit and sharing systems clearly illustrate the specific way in which human labour was subjected to control, and in which surplus value was expropriated from the real producers. What is specific about the form of exploitation internal to social relations of production in seafaring is that the distribution of the gains was calculated on the basis of long-established practise. This practise, in fact, gave the main part of the gains to the ship owners and the financiers of the trading ships. Although the sailors and other crew members performed very difficult work and constituted the primary element in the productive process which was actually producing wealth, their shares in the product were minimal.

The relevant point which needs to be stressed here is that as a result of the debit system, the scarcity or absence of any other alternatives to the labour force and the insufficiency of the economic surplus in all the maritime activities, the workers were obliged to continue working in the same sectors and with the same financiers and creditors. The status of debt serfdom effectively tied them to the owners of the means of production and maintained them as a dependent class. Even death was not an exit for workers from their debts as their debts were then inherited by their sons.

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<sup>70</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, pp. 424-25.

<sup>71</sup> Sanger, *op. cit.*, p.163.

This description offered by Villiers and confirmed by Sanger gives a clear picture on how the commercial transactions were carried out among the ports that the Kuwaiti ships reached. Having outlined the basic features of the commercial transactions of a Kuwait ship's voyage, it could be argued that the economic law of demand and supply in the ports governed, to a great extent, these transactions. This in turn dictates the direction of the trip and also the commodities to be shipped. This also governs the financial rewards of each trip. However, it is difficult to give an accurate estimate to the annual financial income of the Kuwait fleet because the revenue was different from one ship to another and was conditioned by the types of goods and the demand.

Profits were distributed among the workers according to the shares system. The sharing of profits, taking into account capital and labour, and often also expertise and responsibility, had always been the method of paying for work in the sea trade. The value of the share was determined by the voyage's revenue. It should be remembered that the proportions in which profits were shared were customary once, not subject to general alteration; but special individual services were rewarded by extra payments made mostly by prior agreement. The distribution of the revenue was done after deducing food expenses, ports' fees, the additional wages of the *nukhuda*,<sup>72</sup> the rewards of excellent sailors, and the ship's allowances, which is half of the income.<sup>73</sup> The distribution of the gains is illustrated in the following table:

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<sup>72</sup> This additional reward is granted to excellent *nukhuda* who knows some astrology because this would help defining directions and distances. This in turn makes the trip easier. See Al-Qatami, op. cit., p.225.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., and Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, pp.425-26.

**Table 6.5**  
**The Distribution of the Revenue of Commercial Ships <sup>74</sup>**

| The Worker                       | His Share  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Nukhuda                          | 4 shares. In addition to 400 rupees if he knows astrology.         |
| Senior muqaddami (Quartermaster) | 2 shares   |
| Junior muqaddami (Quartermaster) | One and half share   |
| Mu'allim(Shipwright)             | 1.1/5 share. Sometimes 2 shares if he is well known for his skills |
| Sukkanis (Helmsmen)              | 1.1/5 share each   |
| Cook                             | 1.1/4 share  |
| Naham (The singer)               | 1.1/4 share  |
| Drum man and lute player         | 1.1/4 share each   |
| The accompanied boat             | 1 share  |
| The rest of sailors              | 1 share each   |

It should be taken into account that the additional rewards that was given to the knowledgeable *nukhuda* or the one which was given the astrology man in case the *nukhuda* was inexperienced, and the rewards that were given to excellent sailors or to the singer (*naham*) were taken out from the half allocated to the ship and not from the half allocated to the sailors.<sup>75</sup>

It is very obvious that as a result of the debt system (of finance) and the unequal sharing system (of gains distribution), when the revenue of the trade voyages was distributed, the end result was mostly unfair for sailors and other workers. After deducing the half of the ship owner and the cost of the provision of the voyage, the remainder—which would be divided according to the established sharing practice— did not seem to provide a good payment for everyday difficult work over a duration of about nine months. The sailor would be very fortunate if his share was good enough to keep him at subsistence level. All what the sailor could gain throughout this long period of time, if he was lucky, would not be more than 150 rupees (50 dollars).<sup>76</sup> The sailors' shares were generally negative because, as in pearling, their shares were comparatively small and they had to repay their larger debts which they had been advanced before the start of the

<sup>74</sup> Al-Qatami, op .cit., p.225.

<sup>75</sup> Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad*, p.426.

<sup>76</sup> Sanger, op. cit., p.163.

trade voyage. If they did not pay off their debts after the distribution of the revenue, these debts accumulated and they were bound to work for the same ship in the next season.<sup>77</sup>

## **6.7 Division of Labour and Relations of Production**

The division of labour and relations of production in commercial sea transportation and long distance trade were similar to that of pearling. As indicated before, Kuwait served as a port in the Arabian Gulf for trade from and to Basra and the hinterland of Arabia as well as to and from India and East Africa. Kuwait's dhows usually made trading voyages carrying pearls and Iraqi dates. On their return, they carried cloth, timber, mangrove, poles, sugar, etc.<sup>78</sup>

As pointed out earlier when discussing trade sailing ships, sailors were the main labour force during a trading voyage. They were led by a *nukhuda* who was usually the nominal owner of the ship's load. The *nukhuda* was assisted by three or four helmsmen and one or two assistant foremen. Finally, the merchant was the owner of the ship and the financier of the voyage.

Seafaring or sea commercial trade was based on a debt system which was one of the most important factors in maintaining the strict division of labour and functions between the various groups involved in seafaring and which underpinned all aspects of this occupation. As in pearling, by the debt system the *nukhuda* was tied to the merchant by a debt and the sailor was tied to the *nukhuda* in the same way. The typical structure of the debt system in seafaring was that the merchant, whose goods were loaded by a sailing ship, paid in advance to a *nukhuda*, so that the *nukhuda* could provide provisions for trade voyage and paid advances to his crew by which they could provide their families with food and other needs during their absence.

The distribution of the gross profit of seafaring voyage was based on a merchant's profit whose share was one half of the whole gross profit since he was the ship owner. After

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<sup>77</sup> Al-Gina'ai and Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.193.

<sup>78</sup> Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", pp.407 -11

deducing the provision of the voyage and the custom duty<sup>79</sup> from the other half the remainder was distributed according to the above mentioned share system. Regardless of the fact that sailors worked under strenuous circumstances, their shares from a seafaring voyage were roughly enough to keep them at a subsistence level, after they paid back the money they had been advanced. However, the merchants' income from the seafaring voyages was substantial. Their income was a consequence of the appropriation of the surplus of the sailors' productivity. Furthermore, merchants would, in order to accumulate more capital, reinvest their wealth in constructing new ships and employing other sailors at subsistence level. As a consequence, through this recycling, merchants maintained their effective control over seafaring activities.

Due to the form of the ownership and the appropriation of the surplus profit, the development of the division of labour and the relations of production in seafaring brought into existence more exploitive relations of production. As a result of the nature of the debt system and the unequal sharing system the merchants, as they were the only owners of means of production (ships), continued to accumulate more and more capital, whereas most of their labour force (sailors) underwent a harsh economic exploitation and suffered poverty.

It seems apparent that the lack of the means of production and the nature of the funding debt system contributed effectively in maintaining the real producers (sailors), as in other maritime industries, under strenuous circumstances. They greatly suffered, even to the degree that the poor faced starvation and remained as clients of the merchants ships' owners with whom relations through debt eventually brought them into a serf-like position. In this regard, Alan Villiers stated:

The sailors go to sea because they know no other life, and they make wretched living by incredibly difficult methods. They have no possessions other than the cloths they stand in and ...a few sarongs... they know no shelter and rarely have a bed... at sea they stretch out on the deck beneath the stars ... as accommodation for the seamen or any one else in most dhows.... What keeps the seaman a disciplined and more or less contented worker is his hop of

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<sup>79</sup> The sheikhs of Kuwait first levied a 1% custom duty which was gradually increased to 4% of the goods size. This rate was increased to 5% and later to 10% on some items during the reign of Sheik Mubarak. Hassan Mahmoud Suleiman, *Al-Kuwait Madhiha wa Hadhiruha [Kuwait: Its Past and Present]* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba Al-Ahlia, 1986), p.49 and Khalid Al-Sa'adoun, *Al-'Alaqat Bain Nijd wa Al-Kuwait (Relations between Najd and Kuwait)* (Riyadh: Matbo'aat Darat King Abdul Aziz, 1983), p.190.



reward.... and his ambition to get hold of a tiny shop in the *Suq* of his home town. This is an ambition he rarely achieves. His more usual fate is to die young, especially if he be also a pearl diver.<sup>80</sup>

It can be readily seen from Villiers' description that the form of ownership and the pattern of relations of production was the key element in determining the social structure of the people involved in this occupation. While the merchants and, to some extent, *nukhudas* owned and controlled most of the capital and means of production in seafaring (ships) and accordingly the accumulated more capital and enjoyed more domination, the sailors (the real producers) lacked the basic essentials for living. Consequently, they were not only forced to sell their labour power in the market according to the prices and conditions of the owners but were also, under the debt obligation, coerced to perform essential tasks as unpaid labour.

In order, therefore, for exploitation, in the Marxist most theoretically central sense, to take place, it was not merely the case that a minority of people appropriate a part of the surplus product which others produce, but in addition the exploiters had a hold over the circumstances under which the exploited can produce. Thus, one can argue that the system of finance itself, which concentrates most of the earnings of this occupation in the hands of the creditors and progressively reduced the returns of the workers, was the effective means by which the creditors gained effective control over this economic activity and determined its norms and traditions. The debt system which was introduced by the creditors and owners of the means of production and unpleasantly accepted by the workers created a kind of dependency relationship between the workers and the owners. By the status of this system, as in pearling, the real producers (sailors and other crew members) were effectively tied to the owners of the capital and means of production and maintained as dependents to them. Thereby, the debt system was the mechanism by which the labourers were subjected to the financiers and owners of means of production control, and forced to accept all their harsh exploitative conditions as they had been lacking any other alternative sources of living.

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<sup>80</sup> Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade", p.407

## **6.8 Conclusion**

It is evident from the study of seafaring that as a result of the predomination of the unequal ownership of capital and means of production and its resultant relations of production, the tribal social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary society was affected further by the economic factors and transformed to become akin to a class society. The class structure was articulated chiefly upon the economic base (the ownership of the means of production and the position within the division of labour).

The financiers and merchants, as the owners of capital and means of production enjoyed a massive extent of hegemony in the Kuwaiti settled society and constituted a dominant class at the top of the nascent hierarchical structure. The labourers, who were the real producers who performed most of the hard work but were often rewarded nothing except a lifelong indebtedness, composed another inferior class at the lower level of the hierarchical social structure of the society. Apparently, these classes were the outcome of the predominant forms of ownership of means of production and the prevalent unequal and exploitative relationships between them in which the dominant class took unfair advantage of the subordinate class. This evidently illustrates the association between the ownership of the means of production and relations of production and the role of these two variables in determining the social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary society.

Yet, in spite of the emergence of classes —as a response to the evolution of relations of production— the tribal framework of organization was remained. The productive forces maintained their tribal character of the desert, providing tribal pattern to the organization of labour and society. While there had been an extreme inequality between the owners of capital and means of production and the workers, the relationship between them was not seen by the local community as a relation between capital and labour in the economic sense. Workers, in the local sense of the word, were not regarded as the employees of the financier or the ship-owner: they were considered as his followers. There was a great deal of continuity of tribal norms and patterns within the settled community. Accordingly, and in spite of the transformation of the sedentary society into a class society, traces of the old social dominance remain, and some of the former socio-economic practises continue to exist.

Although merchants and ship owners constituted the dominant class in the society their control was not only over money but also over men. They were the leaders of society and, in a more particular and immediate way, the leaders of the men with whom they had economic ties. As in the nomadic society, where the position of the sheikh was confined to a certain families according to economic and social principles, the economic base of the sedentary society led to the emergence of what can be called the central families. With the passage of time, the economic organization of the maritime industries in general extended gradually into social order and the owners of capital and means of production families transferred to be the leading or central families in the sedentary society.

Due to their economic resources many other families were tied to the merchants' families by the debt system as labourers. The accumulation of debts year after year gave these moneylenders the right to re-employ the same labourers in the next seasons until they pay their debts off. The continuation of indebtedness and re-employment created a kind of social dependency relationship between the creditors and debtors. While it was very common to find many members of one family and their relatives working together with the same financier or ship-owner to whom, in many cases, they were tied by a tribal or familial relationship, the relation between the two sides was an economic one in the first place. But the long-term, reciprocal reliance between the two sides created a kind of social responsibility for both. For example, in addition to the prestige, the absence of any governmental system of security made the mercantile families rely on the loyalty of those who gathered around them to secure themselves and their properties. They also relied on their collective and forcible support to deal influentially with other influential or powerful families. Furthermore, there was a great deal of trust between the merchants or ship-owners and their workers in running their business during their absence. Indeed, the lack of any other sources of living made the labourers completely rely on the continual credits of the capital owners.

The reciprocal reliance between the mercantile families and their followers was a matter of some significance in relation to the old customary traditions applied in Kuwait and throughout the Arabian Gulf region in general. The more followers the mercantile family could gather round, the more prestigious it could become gaining collective and forcible support in addition to larger and more producible labour force. Therefore, the central or leading family around which the other families were gathered, in seafaring

and other maritime industries, was of some importance to the sedentary society, partly because of its financial resources and also because of the number of its followers. The pre-eminence of certain families was, thus, a result of respect based on history of long-term leadership, wealth and patronage rather than on a pure physical coercion or threat.

Another pertinent point which needs to be highlighted here is that the inheritance of debts by the debtor's sons or relatives, whether in seafaring or other maritime industries, was not only considered as an economic relationship between the creditor and the heirs or relatives of deceased debtor. It was not only an economic obligation for the indebted family. Rather, as in the tribal society, it was a social and moral obligation, a question of honour. After the death of the debtor, his debts automatically would be transferred to the oldest son or nearest male relative of the deceased man. It was put to him as a family matter which should be respected, otherwise if he dodged these demands his and his family's honour would be in doubt.<sup>81</sup>

To conclude then, it is possible to argue that situations arising from the economics of maritime organization affected the social formation of the sedentary community in Kuwait. But, although this social formation was of a different kind from the social structure of the nomadic society, the tribal character still remained. On other words, it can be said that the sedentary society—in the Kuwait city— though originally formed on a core of tribal unity, by historical stages it came to organize itself into a polity where the tribal socio-economic practises coexisted with the nascent class system<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> Nels Johnson, "Ahmed: A Kuwaiti Pearl Diver", in: *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Edmund Burke (London: I. B. Tauris & Co, 1993), p. 95.

<sup>82</sup> As mentioned by Altusser the kinship rules and tribal practices became part of what constitute this mode of production. This does not mean that the ideological or the political levels or practices were separate from the economic but also important. They constituted an essential part of the social relations of production, with the economic being dominant in the last instance.

**Section III**  
**Nomadic Economic Activities**  
**Traditional Mode of Production**

The desert represents the largest part of Kuwait, and Bedouins, whose number was estimated, prior to 1921, to be about 15,000, formed a large portion of the Kuwaiti Population.<sup>1</sup> Throughout their long history, the desert Bedouins were dependent for survival on their herds, supplying the surplus meat and dairy products to the settled population. They also controlled the desert trade routes, escorted caravans, and provided them with guides and drivers. Except for the summer when large numbers of Bedouins settled down in places close to water, the majority were nomads who constantly used to move from one place to another and cross the boundaries between Kuwait, Najd and Iraq according to the available rainfall and pasture.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, it was impossible to distinguish between the Bedouins of Kuwait, Najd or Iraq, or to get an accurate estimation of their number in each country. Therefore, all figures given were only speculations. Although Kuwait suffered from the lack of fresh water, there were some wells in hinterland of Kuwait.<sup>3</sup> The settlement of the Bedouins around these wells led to the creation of agricultural villages adjacent to the south coast of Kuwait, and particularly, *Jahrah* village, which was located twenty miles west of Kuwait city.<sup>4</sup>

Agriculture, on a very limited basis in the oases of *Al-Jahrah*, *Fantas*, *Failakah* Island, pastoralism and caravan trade were the three major sources of living for a considerable part of the Kuwaiti population (the Bedouins) and one of the key pillars of the Kuwaiti economy before the oil. The most obvious features of these three activities appear first in quantitative terms, in reference either to the percentage of the population engaged in each of these productive domains or to the percentage of the

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1 Hafiz Wahba, *Jazirat Al-Arab fi Al-Qarn Al-Ishreen [The Arabian Peninsula in the 20th Century]* (Cairo: Lajnat Al-Talif wa Al-Tarjma wa Al-Nasher, 1935), p.77, and also Mahmoud Bahjat Sinan, *Al-Kuwait Zahrat Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [Kuwait the Flour of the Arabian Gulf]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hilal, 1962), p.119.

2 Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.94.

3 J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p.898.

4 Ibid., p.899, and Freeth, op. cit., p.85.

total value produced by the various sectors of production. Consequently, to pinpoint the social formation of the Kuwaiti nomadic society in the pre-oil era and to realize its social dynamics, a special attention should be paid to the role of the economic factor in shaping and affecting the social structure of the Kuwaiti nomads. Also, attention will be paid to the historical process of the development of the Bedouin social structure within the context of the traditional mode of production which was characterized by its specific forms of ownership, utilization of means of production and its strict relations of production.

This section, therefore, will examine the nature of the traditional mode of production and its impact on the social formation of the Kuwaiti nomadic society in the period 1896-1946. An analysis of the various forms of the ownership of means of production and patterns of relations of production affecting the social structure of the Kuwaiti nomadic society will be an important concern of this section. The components of the traditional mode of production upon which this section (chapters seven and eight) will concentrate are: Agriculture, pastoralism and the caravan trade as they constituted the main bases of the Kuwaiti nomadic economy in the pre-oil era.

## Chapter Seven Agriculture and Pastoralism

### 7.1 Agriculture

On the whole, Kuwait is a barren desert. Its soil consists of weak sand with little ability to preserve water. Thus, water can accumulate only in some valleys that have a muddy crest formed by the flow of water. In addition to the scarcity of rain and underground water,<sup>1</sup> Kuwait is also situated in desert regions with a climate that is very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. The average temperature is between 38-44 degrees centigrade in the summer and 8-18 in the winter.<sup>2</sup> It is also subject to strong winds with negative impacts on agriculture. These winds are sometimes associated with sand storm with a speed of 75 miles per an hour<sup>3</sup>. Humidity is also another feature that reaches around 70 per cent during the winter and 95 per cent in the summer.

With no surface water, almost no rainfall, and extreme climate conditions, Kuwait's physical environment was scarcely amenable to agriculture except for areas where some wells exist. However, the agricultural production in these areas was hardly enough for the local population and definitely not for export. Even so, the subsistence agriculture had for many decades formed an additional resource of living for a small part of the Kuwaiti population. Agriculture was only meant to realise some sort of self-sufficiency or, in rare cases, to gain some profits by selling the surplus in the market of Kuwait city but was not intended for export.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the availability of some underground water, the fact remained however that this source dried up quickly and get salted. This led to increase of demand on water and that is why Kuwaitis relied on water imported from Shatt Al-Arab. See Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat 1978), pp.59-60.

<sup>2</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1951), p.306

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.307-08

### **7.1.1 Agricultural Areas and Water Sources in Kuwait**

Due to the ecological conditions and the concentration of water in certain places, agriculture was only confined to these places and had never been considered as a major economic activity. It was practised as a self-sufficient secondary occupation or for making some additional gains by selling the surplus in the market. Consequently, the number of people involved in this occupation was limited and the agricultural products were hardly sufficient for local consumption. In spite of this, and because of the arid circumstances and the scarcity of fresh water, these dusty agricultural areas gained a great local reputation in the pre-oil era and a considerable proportion of the Kuwaiti people inhabited them and engaged in agriculture on their own account. These areas were also the residency of the Bedouin tribes in the summer time and the key resource of the agricultural needs of the Kuwait City market.

It is to be noted, however, that despite the centrality of the agriculture in specific areas, people working in farming were neither autonomous nor isolated. On the one hand, because agricultural products were acquired by both sedentary people in the city and pastoralists in the nearby desert, agricultural villages became the connecting point between these two parts of the Kuwaiti society. On the other, individual farmers could and often did occupy more than one productive location simultaneously. It was possible for a farmer to be engaged in farming and/or pearling or farming and /or sheep-herding at the same time. More importantly, individual peasant families were invariably enmeshed in a whole series of social and economic relationships with other units of production whether in nomadic or sedentary community. However, the most important agricultural areas in Kuwait were:

#### **Failakah Island**

*Failakah* is an island that located northwest of Kuwait. It is 15 miles away from Kuwait with a length of 8 miles and a width of 3 miles.<sup>4</sup> The western coast of the island is inhabited due to the availability of the underground water—six feet depth—and

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<sup>4</sup> Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Al-Tuhfa Al-Nabhania fi Tariekh Al-Jazera Al-Arabia [The History of Arabian Peninsula]* vol.8 (Cairo: Al-Matba'aah Al-Mohamadia Al-Tijaria, 1949), p. 120, and Hafiz Wahba, *Jazirat Al-Arab fi Al-Qarn Al-Ishreen [The Arabian Peninsula in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]* (Cairo: Lajnat Al-Talif wa Al-Tarjma wa Al-Nasher, 1935), p.80.



consequently the prospects for agriculture.<sup>5</sup> Wheat and barley were cultivated in this island. The annual production of wheat was estimated to be around 6 000lbs whereas the total production of grain was expected to be 30 tones annually.<sup>6</sup> In addition, some vegetables were cultivated such as onions, carrots, radishes, cucumbers, and watermelons.<sup>7</sup> Other plants were cultivated such as clover and palm trees; it was estimated these were around 90 palm trees at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

### **Al-Jahrah**

This is a big village situated 19 miles to the west of Kuwait City. This village was suitable for cultivation due to the existence of water wells, estimated to be around 120 wells. These wells were divided into water drinking wells and wells for agriculture and animals because of its gradual transformation to salt.<sup>9</sup>

The most important agricultural products in this area were wheat, barley, and clover. In good seasons, the production of wheat was 120 *mann*<sup>10</sup> and the production of barley was double. Other products such as watermelons, melons, beans, pumpkins, okra, onions, radishes, tomatoes and aubergines were produced in limited quantities that might be exported to the markets of Kuwait City. There were around 2000 palm trees that owned by the relatives of the ruler of Basra.<sup>11</sup>

### **Fantas**

This village was situated 16 miles to the south of Kuwait. Its land was suitable for agriculture. Water was available and the depth of water wells was about twenty feet. These wells were supposed to be around thirty but some were very salty.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> S.J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p. 513. Abdul Aziz, Al-Rashid mentioned that the depth of some wells did not exceed one yard, Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.48.

<sup>6</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p. 513.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Al-Nabhani, op. cit., p.120.

<sup>8</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.513.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Nabhani, op. cit., p.72, and Wahba, op. cit., pp.81-82.

<sup>10</sup> *Mann* as a unit of weight had been used in Kuwait. The *Mann*, used for weighting cereals and dates equals (138 lbs. 13oz. 1ldr. English) Lorimer, op. cit., p.1055.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.898. H. R. P Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.63.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Nabhani, op. cit., p.83. Also Lorimer, op. cit., p.535.

Its land was used for the cultivation of barley, clover, onions, radishes, watermelons, beans, tomatoes, and cucumbers. The number of palm trees was expected to be around 300.<sup>13</sup>

However, because of the concentration of water in certain places, the agricultural activity was confined to these places, which in turn made this activity unavailable to the whole population. On the other hand, this activity required the availability of money for buying seeds, animals, and equipment. However, the money was not available. The problem was also that this sort of cultivation depended on the rainfall which was not guaranteed in all seasons. These factors entailed caution in efforts and fund. In addition, this led to a limited numbers of people working in cultivation. The result was that this activity became secondary and was not one of the major economic occupations.

Regarding water sources, the rains were deemed the best natural source of water for irrigation. However, the problem remained that rain was rare and there was no good distribution. As a consequence, rain did not meet the demands of this occupation<sup>14</sup> and so were not a reliable source. The unreliability of rainfall pushed the farmers to depend totally on the water in the wells, which was known in Kuwait as *Al-Jilban* and were excavated at various depths, around 10-20 metres.<sup>15</sup> The problem with these wells was that they had little water and became salty very quickly. As a result, they would dry very quickly and farmers had to dig other wells.<sup>16</sup> Digging these wells was done in a co-operative and collective manner and during spare time, using primitive tools. However, digging wells was risky because the land was fragile and this might lead to the collapse of the well causing damage or death to the people working.<sup>17</sup> During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, water, in Kuwait, was extracted for agriculture in one of the following ways:

***Al-Girb***- a wooden instrument revolving around rollers and using ropes that were fixed into canteens made of skin. Other ropes were tied to them, which were pulled by camels or

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Al-Nabhani, op. cit., p .83.

<sup>14</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook*, p.306

<sup>15</sup> Faisal, Al-'Adhamah, *Fi Bilad Al-Lulu [In the Country of Pearl]* (Damascus: Committee of Culture in the Arab Youth Association, 1945), p.75.

<sup>16</sup> In his book *In the Country of Pearl*, Faisal, Al-'Adhamah, mentioned that he had seen in *Al-Shamiah* area in Kuwait a small farm with 10 metres length and 8 metres width. This farm was irrigated by eight wells. He added that wells often crumbled because the fragile nature of the land and because of rain and wind. As a result, Kuwaitis used cement to build the mouth of the well. Ibid., p.75.

<sup>17</sup> Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.95.

donkeys up and down hills that were ten metres in length. Once the camel or the donkey arrived at the end of the distance, the canteens full of water would be raised. The water would be then poured in a small pool. From this pool, water was distributed to small farms. This way was used in the Fantas and was passed to the Kuwaitis by Najd. It was used in deep wells with plenty of water.<sup>18</sup>

*Al-Shadouf*- a man held a jerry-can which was released down the well. After a while, it raised at the other end of the rope which was fixed into a stone. This was common in the Island of Failakah and used for wells with shallow water.<sup>19</sup>

*Al-Frashiah*- a rope with an umbrella shaped piece of skin fastened to its end. These together were dropped into the water where they spread and filled with water. This way was used on small farms that had plenty of wells.<sup>20</sup>

However, the scarcity of water, smallness of agricultural areas and the absence of any modern agro-technical methods of production were the most significant factors in bringing about the low productivity in agriculture in Kuwait.

### **7.1.2 Ownership of Means of Production in Agriculture**

Generally speaking, ownership of land in pre-oil Kuwait was based on a feudal-like system, when land titles were no longer controlled by the ruler and his officials but came into the hands of large category of relatively independent land owners who did not cultivate the land themselves. But the critical question is that: was the pattern of ownership the sign of the appearance of feudal relations of production? And did it really represent a feudal mode of surplus appropriation? The answer to these questions requires an understanding of how the farming systems work in practice.

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<sup>18</sup> Al-'Adhamah, op. cit., pp.75-6, Lorimer, op. cit., p.898.

<sup>19</sup> Al-'Adhamah, op. cit., p.76, Badder Al-Deen Abbas, Al-Khususi, *Dirasat fi Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Iqtisadi wa Al-Ijtima'ai [Studies in Economic and Social History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1983), p.249.

<sup>20</sup> Al-'Adhamah, op. cit., p.76.

Land in Kuwait was generally owned by sheikhs who had full property rights over it. Its ownership was based on tribal feudalism by which the land belonged to the sheik of the tribe. The farmer would only have the use of it in accordance with an agreed set of rules and principles. However, a sort of private ownership emerged for the merchants and the wealthy people<sup>21</sup> who received it from the sheikhs as a gift. Another way of getting ownership of land was paying money to the sheikh who, in turn, conceded some lands. Sometimes, the sheikhs of Kuwait were in need for cash to cover their expenses and so they sold land to the moneylenders. Farmers, on the other hand, did not own the land they farmed, at least in the technical economic sense of the word. They simply had the right to cultivate and use the land but no right to ownership<sup>22</sup>. A farmer was able to use the land so long as he could secure the seeds and water and accept to pay part of the harvest to the sheikh or the land owner. In other cases, the sheikh or land owner would provide seeds, land, and animals to the farmers in exchange for certain rewards.<sup>23</sup>

The ownership of water wells, on the other hand, was automatically connected with the ownership of land and accordingly it would go back to the land owner whether he was the sheikh or the farmer. In the meantime other tools used in extracting water were totally owned by the farmers.<sup>24</sup>

Before the advent of the oil era, agriculture in Kuwait relied primarily on animals for ploughing and for extracting water from wells. These animals were either owned by farmers or hired by them.<sup>25</sup> The manure of these animals was used as fertilisers. This was placed in bags and then put in the canals where a farmer tread on them so as to dilute them and water would keep running with some fertilisers.<sup>26</sup>

There were some other primitive means that were used in cultivation and continued to be used until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. One was the primitive plough, which was called *ifdan*.

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<sup>21</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.514.

<sup>22</sup> Mohammad Abduh Mahjoub, *Al-Hijrah wa Al-Taghiuer Al-Ijtima'ai fi Buniat Al- Mujtama'a Al-Kuwaiti [Migration and Changes in Social Structure in Kuwaiti Society]* (Kuwait: D.T. Publications Agency, undated), p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> Mohammad Abduh Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah [Kuwait and Migration]* (Al-Iskandaria: Al-Haiah Al-Misria Lil Kitab, 1977), pp. 124-25.

<sup>24</sup> Al-'Adhamah, op. cit., p.77. Dickson, p. 64-65.

<sup>25</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p. 899.

<sup>26</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce. *Kuwait Guidebook*, p.309.

Another one is an iron pickaxe, which was used to make, to fix, to open, and to block canals. It was called *fakhin*. The axe was another tool, which was used to level land and was known by the name of *masah*.<sup>27</sup> These implements were usually a farmer's personal possessions, acquired through inheritance or exchanged or bought from the local blacksmiths in Kuwait City market.

In sum, it is possible to argue that ownership in agriculture in Kuwait was shared, while land as the principal means of production was mostly owned by sheikhs and merchants, ownership of the means of production other than land was open to a wide degree of variation, from the land owner providing all inputs except labour, to the labour providing all the means of production except land.

### **7.1.3 Division of Labour and Relations of Production in Agriculture**

In spite of the limitation of the agricultural areas and its marginal rewards in comparison with other economic activities, the agricultural production led to a sort of relative commercial exchange between the agricultural areas (Failakah Island, Jahrah, and Fantas) and the market of Kuwait City. These areas maintained the supply of the Kuwaiti market with products for some financial rewards. On the other hand, this activity was a source of revenue for the government for paying alms and for paying to the sheikh of Kuwait the rent of the land.<sup>28</sup>

However, agriculture in Kuwait in the pre-oil era was associated with primary native social control that, for want of a better term, may be described as semi-feudal. It was based on a semi-feudalist system in which sheikhs and capital owners (merchants) owned the land and the farmers, the real producers, were completely deprived from owning it. Land (as a principal means of production in agriculture) was given to peasant families who acted as tenants and did the actual farming in return for a commitment to pay a portion of the yield, in money or in kind. Since farmers owned no land at all and could not work in farming unless land owners allowed them access to their land, taking into account the scarcity or

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., pp.898-99.

unavailability of any other sources of living, they were forced to work under the control of the land owners and accept all their conditions.

By owning the means of production—in this case primarily land—landowners had the ultimate power not only to determine the amount of the farmer's production to be appropriated but even the conditions under which the farmers can produce and the level of their subsistence. The landowner's economic power in fact derived from their ownership of the means of production (land) and from the fact that therefore the farmers had no way of withdrawing from their control, as they can not subsist from land unless the landowners allow them to do so. Therefore, it is possible to argue that agriculture was an economic activity which was characterised by its own production factors and its own relations of production. It was based on a semi-feudal system by which the land owners enjoyed complete rights and powers over the land and the results of its use while the farmers' rights were only limited to the use of land under conditions determined by the landowners. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that agriculture-generated surplus was not large enough to form a strong basis for the emergence of an agriculture bourgeoisie class for its self. On the contrary, the landowners' class was, in fact, the already established class of sheikhs and merchants who owned the capital and wanted to invest part of it in agriculture.

Consequently, the pattern of ownership—the owners' rights and powers—over the land evidently defines their social relationship to the farmers with respect to the use of land and the appropriation of the fruits of using the land productively. This, according to the Marxist perspective, denote a class relations—when some people have greater powers/ rights with respect to specific kinds of productive resources than do others—these relations can be described as class relation.<sup>29</sup> The emergence of a class of landowners was the necessary concomitant of the emergence of a class of farmers who were the direct producers of agricultural production. What this terminological shift reflects is the differentiation between the two classes (the owners of capital and means of production and workers). This process of class formation, whether in agriculture or any other economic activities, so profoundly altered the content of the social relations of Kuwaiti society as a whole. It led the entire

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<sup>29</sup> Erik Olin Wright, "Foundation of Class Analysis: A Marxist Perspective" at: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Foundations.pdf> (14.8.2001).

social formation of Kuwaiti society to be developed gradually from a simple social stratification to a hierarchical semi-class society along socio-economic lines.

The second aspect of the agriculture as an economic activity was that the landowners who benefited mostly from what can be termed (the sharecropping system) did not directly appropriate the land or the means of production, which was left in the farmers' hands, but it appropriated a considerable portion of the harvest - the output of the peasant's surplus labour - in one way or another. The sharecropping system, in fact, was the means of surplus appropriation from agriculture producers by a class of non-producers.

It is also worthwhile to note that farming, as an economic activity, was considered a subordinated occupation practised by the tribes of unknown origin such as Al-'Awazim, and Al-Rashaida, and semi-resident tribes from Najd which in dry seasons concentrate around the Kuwaiti water sources. These inferior or non-*sharif* tribes were not regarded of pure descent and placed in a stage lower in the tribal hierarchy. They usually considered by the pure nomads as a soft sort of semi-townsmen and they were less mobile in the desert as they relied primarily on sheep and goats<sup>30</sup>. Regardless of that, these inferior tribes served as an economic link between the nomadic noble tribes in the desert and the mercantile community in the Kuwait city. They were the suppliers of the townspeople with agriculture products, and they also worked as shepherds for noble tribes and as pearl divers for the merchants.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, and in spite of the continuation the tribal framework of organization in the sedentary community, it is becoming increasingly clear that the chief consequences of the agricultural economic activity (as in the maritime semi-capitalist mode of production) were the emergence of a class system. With the appearance of the two classes (the owners of capital and means of production and workers) there came new rules for social life and a more settled form of social stratification which was shaped further by the economic factors.

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<sup>30</sup> H.R.P Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: Allen & Uwin, 1951), pp.108-11, Freeth, op. cit., p.68- 69.

<sup>31</sup> Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait* (Oxford: West-view, 1997), p.24.

The relevant point which needs to be highlighted here is that since the sea activities attracted majority of men, the agriculture season, which just coincide with the beginning of pearling and other marine activities had to rely on women especially in Failakah Island. It was the perception of many Kuwaiti farmers that their farming products were inadequate to provide subsistence for the people dependent on them, which induced many more men to seek employment in the maritime activities. As a consequence, women were the backbone of this activity except for such jobs that entailed extreme physical efforts such as digging wells which were carried out by men in their break time from sea works.<sup>32</sup> Much of labour, therefore, was performed by women who represented a very high percentage of what can be called the unpaid labour.

It is worth mentioning that the agricultural activity was connected to a large extent with another social system, rural system. This system was very simple because it entails a sort of connection between a person and land and settling in a particular place. This also needs a sort of raising the living standards and therefore it could lead to development. This system was a new phenomenon for the Kuwait society as it was a society of nomads in the desert and subject to the tribal customs. Many of them moved to the city and the rest maintained in the desert. As a result, a village became a connecting point where large number of Bedouins settled near it to make use of water and it supplies the city dwellers of the agricultural needs.<sup>33</sup>

## **7.2 Pastoralism**

Pastoralism or animal husbandry which characterised the life of the Bedouins for ages was a livelihood form based upon herds as the major subsistence source. It entailed the Bedouins to move from one place to another seeking water and grass for their animals. There were good spaces for grazing in Kuwait. This made it a suitable environment for this occupation for several Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti tribes. Spring was considered a good season for an improved livelihood especially if it was preceded by winter with a lot of rainfall.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah*, p.111.

<sup>33</sup> Freeth, *op. cit.*, p.94.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.124-25.



The social structure of the pastoral societies is almost invariably based upon a tribal system which was dictated by the natural circumstances of the desert that made staying in one place without the existence of certain conditions not possible. Hence, all Bedouins, whether from Kuwait, southern Iraq or the hinterland of Arabia (who graze within the Kuwait territory), were organised according to a tribal basis. The largest tribal confederations, such as those of 'Anzah and Mutair, were headed by a paramount leader or *sheikh mashaykh* (sheikh of sheikhs). Individual tribes within a confederation were headed by a sheikh, generally composed of several clans, which were also headed by other small sheikhs. The tribe was a social institution where the loyalty was to the head of the tribe who was chosen according to the tribal consensus.<sup>35</sup> The tribe was a framework for a common identity that requires certain rights and commitments from its members such as the right for benefiting from the natural resources such as land and water. In addition, it entails the right of protection in exchange for defending the common interests of the tribe and fighting for it if necessary.<sup>36</sup> The tribe was also an economic, social and political unit in terms of its self-sufficiency and, through its sheikh, certain alliances were established, relationships with other tribes and with the political authority in Kuwait were organised.<sup>37</sup>

### **7.2.1 Means of Production and its Ownership in Pastoralism**

All aspects of pastoral social and economic life were ordered in relation to livestock and the environment in which they live. In pastoral societies, animals hold central value within the society and were the basis of association in a complex of social and political institutions. The livelihood was practised predominantly in semi-arid and arid areas where pastoralists were able to exploit land and conditions that normally cannot support other economic activities. The system depended largely on the availability of water and the distribution and quality of, and access to, pasture. Consequently, pasture and water were the most important resources for pastoralism and changes in their availability greatly influence pastoralists' livelihood security. On the other hand, livestock was the most important asset for the

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<sup>35</sup> Abdul Aziz Hussein, *Muhadharat 'Ain Al-Mujtama'a Al-Arabi fi Al-Kuwait (Lectures about the Arab Society of Kuwait)* (Cairo: Arabic Studies Institution Press, 1960), p.57, Abdul Malik Khalaf Al-Tamimi, *Al-Khalij Al-Arabi wa Al-Maghrib Al-Arabi [The Arab Gulf and the Arab Maghrib]* 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (Cyprus: Dar Al-Shabab lil Nashir, 1986), p.20.

<sup>36</sup> Soraya Al-Torki and Donald Cole, "Mujtama'a Maqbl Al-Naft fi Al-Jazera Al-Arabia: Mujtama'a Morakab am Faudhah Qabalia" [The Arabian Peninsula's Society before the Oil: Tribal Anarchy or Compounded Community], *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi Magazine*, (141), November 1991, p.43.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Tamimi, op. cit., p.20.

pastoralists and livestock productivity was directly dependent on access to pastures and water.

According to the nomadic system each tribe has its own *dirah* (tribal territory) which was considered a decisive element in measuring tribal strength. The size of the *dirah*, which contains the tribal wells, depends on the tribe's size and power. The *dirah* was associated with a tribe and refers to a particular area used by the same tribe for summer watering and grazing, including a number of wells of traditional tribal ownership. It was the tribe homeland and no other tribesmen were allowed to graze, live or even to cross with their herds, without the permission of the sheikh of the tribe. It should be noted that there was a big variation between the *dirah* as a particular area for the tribe and other wider range areas (pastures) which were open to all tribes and their use was based on the who comes first principle.<sup>38</sup>

However, there were many famous pastures in Kuwait such as Al-Zour, Al-Mifrad, Al-Rawdatein, Al-Leyah, Al-Doughah, Al-Shtif, Al-Na'ayem, Al-Hmatiyat, Al-Sheihat, Al-Qerneh, Al-Haqiqah, Al-Seir, Al-'Amarah, Qalimat Shayih, and Qalamt Sabah. All of these pastures were inside the Kuwaiti lands. There were other areas where Kuwaiti Bedouins go during the spring such as Al-Sh'eib, Jabal Sanam on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti borders, and Al-Dabdabah and Al-Wafrah on the borders of Kuwait and Najd.<sup>39</sup>

All of these areas were not subject to the sovereignty of any tribe but open for all. Many Bedouins came from Iraq, Syria or Najd and grazed in the desert of Kuwait. On many occasions, the Kuwaiti Bedouins moved and grazed in Iraqi and Saudi pastures. This practice persisted until the demarcation of the political borders between Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Zahra Dickson Freeth pointed out:

Since the life of the desert demands that the Bedouin shall move always in search of pasture, many of the Saudi tribes from Najd and Hasa will move into Kuwaiti territory in years when grazing is better there than in their own lands. Every year too, the Muntaiq shepherd tribes of Iraq migrate southward to feed their flocks in

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<sup>38</sup> Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, pp.46-48.

<sup>39</sup> Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah*, p.112.

Kuwait, and to sell their lambs and clarified butter in the Kuwait markets. By an age old unwritten understanding between Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bedouin are at liberty to cross the frontiers between these countries when they please, and without formality.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, the problem to whom these tribes belonged remained unresolved until 1942 when Kuwait and Saudi Arabia eventually came to an agreement.<sup>41</sup>

The right to graze these pastures was not exclusive on certain types but subject to one principle: who came first. In many cases it was enough to find a stick in one of these areas to know that this area was booked and used.<sup>42</sup> With the passage of time, this principle created special areas for grazing for certain tribes. Moreover, the tribal customs created certain regulations to organise the border of the used areas to prevent aggression from other tribes. This issue was organised by traditions that stated each tribe kept a distance from areas used by others. Besides, the Kuwaiti Bedouin community never knew a system for selling or hiring pastures.<sup>43</sup> The only exception was for selling grass, which was used by some Bedouins for fires and heating.<sup>44</sup>

Within the *dirah* there was no private ownership of land as each tribe held its pastures and water sources communally. Wells used for animals were also communal for all members of the tribe. However, due to scarcity of water, and the settlement of some clans beside some wells, these wells became as a private property of these clans and they carried their names, for example, the 'Adeilah well carried this name after the settlement of 'Adeilat clan beside it and the 'Aradih well after the settlement of 'Awarid clan. Tribes, accordingly, protected these wells and prevented others from using them.<sup>45</sup>

Animals in the nomadic society were private property for individuals with families; thus they represent corporate units of ownership. Each family owned its own herds and held

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<sup>40</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.69.

<sup>41</sup> Donald Powell Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads* (Chicago: Aldine, 1975), p. 33. Also Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.124.

<sup>42</sup> Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah*, p.126.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>44</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.68, the price in this case is for the effort exerted in collecting grass and not for the grass itself.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Rashid, op. cit., pp.59-60, and, Freeth, op. cit., p.128.

them communally as a group. Most of these animals were inherited from the paternal grandfather of the group, although some come as part of the dowry or inheritance of women who had married into the household.<sup>46</sup> The tribal units made certain marks (*al-wasm*)<sup>47</sup> to distinguish their animals from that of other tribes. However, this did not mean a collective ownership of the animals, but meant that there was a collective responsibility among the members of the tribe to protect their properties collectively. In addition to the big brand that distinguished the tribe, smaller brands determined which section, clan or family within the tribe the animal belonged to.<sup>48</sup>

To conclude then, it is possible to argue that while the livestock was the individual property, grazing land and watering wells, within the tribal territory, were the collective property of the pastoralists in the sense that they were left undivided and available to all who own stock. In other words, the nomadic society typically combined individual ownership of livestock, with collective appropriation of land and watering wells. Animals belonged to families, while their pastures and water wells were open to the all members of the tribe. The collective utilization of land and water and the collective tending and protection of animals did not mean the collective ownership of animals (the final product of pastoralism). It meant the collective responsibility of all the members of the tribe towards the tribe as a whole and its properties. It was the only means of survival and the only possible way of life in the desert inhospitable environment.

### **7.2.2 Pastoralism and its Economic Rewards**

For the Bedouin community the year is considered to be the framework of the economic life circle. It starts with the hot summer, which last for forty days and was known to Bedouins as *Al-Kinah*.<sup>49</sup> During this season, Bedouins assemble with their herds around wells due to the dry up of the pastures. Lorimer mentions that 700 families often went to

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<sup>46</sup> The family which formed the basic productive unite in the tribal society was composed of an old man and old woman, their sons and their son's wives, and their children. Cole, op. cit., p.24 and 69.

<sup>47</sup> This sign is known in Kuwait as Al-Wasm or Al-Thagh. This sign is drawn on animals especially camels by branding in certain places such as the head, the right cheek, or the legs. See Henry Field, *Camel Brands and Graffiti from Iraq, Syria Jordan, Iran and Arabia* (Maryland: American Oriental Society, 1952), pp. 26-41, and Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, pp.419-28.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., and Freeth, op. cit., p.130.

<sup>49</sup> Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah*, p.112.

Jahrah village where a number of water wells were available. These people belonged to Muteir tribe who lived in their tents near the village.<sup>50</sup> Many Bedouins, during this season, would join the pearling season. The end of the summer was known for the Bedouins when a star known as *suheil* appears in the sky. The appearance of this star was a signal for moving back to the pastures.<sup>51</sup> They set out to pastures near water sources known as *al-minda* until winter started. Then they would move deep into the desert and would not return until the beginning of following summer then the cycle is repeated.<sup>52</sup>

In a pastoral society, environment, climate conditions and the nature of animals were the major variables in determining the type of animals to be herded. Furthermore, animals were not only the basic source of subsistence but also the measure of personal and social status. Accordingly, the type of animals represented not only the economic position of the owners but was also the major basis of social differentiation between different nomadic tribes in Kuwait and Arabian Peninsula in general. As a consequence, and because camels can endure much longer periods without water, and camel herders were thereby able to range much more widely than other pastoralists, camel-herding tribes were usually the most powerful militarily who achieved hegemony in the desert and had a higher status than other herders. The camel enabled the Bedouin to move far away from water sources (camels were not watered at all in the winter and can stay from two to seven days without water in the summer). Bedouins could survive for months on its milk and, if necessary, slaughter it for meat. It also provided hair for tent cloth and clothes, fuel (dung), and transportation.<sup>53</sup>

Sheep and goats, on the other hand, were more demanding in their need for water and thus more limited in their migrations. Their herders, therefore, migrated shorter distances and stayed mostly on the periphery of the desert or close to the permanent water wells in the nearby villages.<sup>54</sup> Sheep and goats provided milk, wool and meat for the Bedouins' own consumption and cash from supplying them to villages and town markets.

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<sup>50</sup>Lorimer, op. cit., p.897.

<sup>51</sup>Freeth, op. cit., p.93.

<sup>52</sup>Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah*, p.113.

<sup>53</sup>'The Bedouin of Arabia' at: <http://www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/mgcbedu.html>(8.11.2002). Also Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, p.413.

<sup>54</sup>Jacqueline Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 18 and also Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of the Middle East 1800-1914* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), p. 344-45.

The Arabian horse was famous for its beauty and endurance; therefore, raising horses was a profitable business in Kuwait in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were some people who specialised in horses by knowing their ancestors, ways of raising them, preparing them for races, or for war. Although raising horses formed an important source of income during the 19<sup>th</sup> century where horses were a main item of Kuwaiti exports especially to India, this business became unfeasible with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to low demand.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, horses in the period under investigation were used only for riding purposes and were considered a symbol of inconsiderable wealth of their owners.<sup>56</sup>

Having delineated the most known types of animals used by Bedouins, however, it is difficult to give an estimation of the number of these animals and the quantity of wool, meat, skins and other items during the period under study. These animals were goods which were subject to selling in the market and exchange for whatever Bedouins needed from commodities. It is possible to say that pastoralism was an important economic activity for a considerable number of the Kuwaiti Bedouins whose numbers were expected to reach 15 000 during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> This occupation was also important for many tribes from Najd and Iraq who frequently went to the Kuwaiti desert in order to exchange their products in the Kuwaiti markets. The Kuwaiti society also relied on them for the supply of meat, skins, wool, and also for exporting skins abroad.

Although it is not possible to define the number of these animals or the quantity of their production during the period under study, it is possible to note the importance of pastoralism in the Kuwaiti economy by reading the description given by Zahra Dickson Freeth for the camels and the herds in the desert:

In a wide desert valley sixty miles west of Kuwait town... we had found the countryside covered with camels as far as the eye could see... there were camels everywhere; I had never before seen so many gathered together in one place. On

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<sup>55</sup> Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, *Safahat min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [Pages from the History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968), p.62.

<sup>56</sup> Issawi, op. cit., p.345.

<sup>57</sup> Wahba, op. cit, p.77. Mahmoud Bahjat Sinan, *Al-Kuwait Zahrat Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [Kuwait the Flour of the Arabian Gulf]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hilal, 1962), p.119.

every side they roamed the desert in there hundreds, and the far horizon was notched with their tall silhouettes.<sup>58</sup>

The above description gives a clear picture of the volume of this economic activity and indeed makes up for the lack of accurate figures of these animals. This is the case especially when she talks only about one place and does not talk about all pastures in Kuwait.

As far as the prices of these animals were concerned, they varied from one animal to another. Price fluctuated in line with the rise and decline of the economic life in general from one year to another. However, Lorimer, while talking about the tribe of Muteir, mentions that the price of the best riding camel (*dalul*) was not more than \$100, and the female camel (*dalul*) was £6 for a female and £10 for a male, while the best male baggage camels (*Ba'aier*) can obtained for £6 and the best females for £5 each. The prices of goats and sheep were between \$4 and \$6 per head, but as the price of the female was always higher than that of the male,<sup>59</sup> these prices cannot be taken as a benchmark since the prices given are just for the years from 1905/06.

It is worth noting that Bedouins were used to shear their herds according to the price of the wool in the markets of Kuwait, Najd, and Iraq. Iraqi Bedouins, for example, would compare the prices of wool in the markets of Kuwait and Iraq. If prices were better in Kuwait they would shear their sheep and would sell the wool in Kuwait otherwise they would delay the process of shearing until they got back to Iraq, and so on.<sup>60</sup>

Because it is difficult to know the number of animals or the quantity of their annual production, it is hard to define the annual economic rewards for this occupation for the period under study. However, it is possible to argue that pastoralism was a source of income for those working in it and of course for Kuwait generally. This importance lies in the following:

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<sup>58</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.130.

<sup>59</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.2334 and 2344.

<sup>60</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.137.

A- Large percentage of people work in this occupation. Their numbers were estimated to be 15 000 in addition to others coming from the Bedouins of Iraq and Najd.

B- An important income for the Kuwaiti ruler. Bedouin paid alms and tax once they sold their animals in the market of the city. The amount of money that the Kuwaiti Bedouins paid annually for the sheep they sold in the market was estimated to be around \$2 000 annually. The tax paid for the camels was about \$1500. The alms (*zakat*) on the Bedouins' animals were estimated around \$25000 annually.<sup>61</sup>

### **7.2.3 Social Structure of the Pastoral Nomadic Society**

The social structure of the nomadic societies was almost consistently based upon a kinship system. In order to enjoy access to the use of pasture and water, the principal means of production in the desert, the Bedouins found it essential to belong to a certain tribe. The organizing principle of the tribe was kinship, which defined and regularized relations among the different tribal units. Through it, the individual tribesmen were ultimately related to all other members of their tribe. Within the tribe's domain (*dirah*) the main body of the tribe was subdivided into various genealogical subgroups (clans). Those clans were in turn subdivided again into smaller genealogical units (*fukhds* —group of families—).<sup>62</sup> While each family formed a basic productive unit that had its own herd within the tribe, these households collectively lived, worked and migrated together. To get a clear picture for the organisation of tribes, an example of *Al-Mutair* tribe is presented:

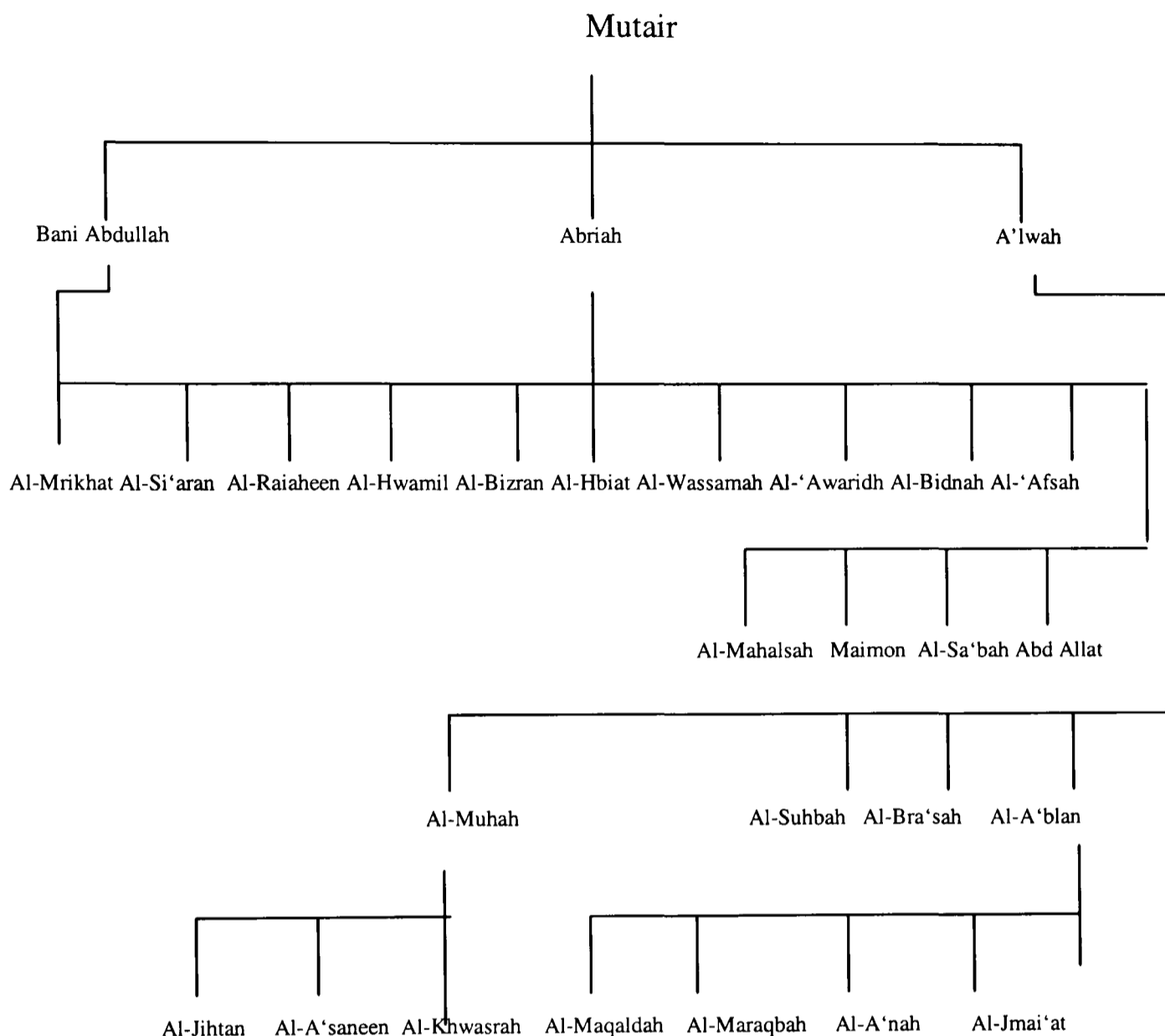
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<sup>61</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.1344. Despite the definition given by Lorimer for the amount of alms as (\$1 per 100 head of sheep and \$1 per 5 camels), this definition is certainly incorrect because alms of animals were taken in kind by the Islamic Shari'aa law.

<sup>62</sup> Jibrail S. Jabbur, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 286-7. Also *The Bedu or Bedouin of the Middle East* at: <http://www.globalconnections.co.uk/pdfs/BEDUMideast.pdf> (13.9. 2003).



**Table 7.1 Al-Mutair Tribe<sup>63</sup>**



Nomads, during the peace times would live, work and migrate in mini-groups (clans or *fakhds*) within the Bedouin tribal territory (*dirah*). *Dirah* was considered a decisive element in measuring tribal strength. The size of *dirah*, which contained the tribal wells, depended on the tribe,s size and power. Each tribe in Arabia used to have its *dirah* through which it would roam with its camels in the autumn, winter and spring. Within the *dirah* the grazing areas were systematically exploited, herds were managed, and camels or other wealth were distributed within structures which encompassed a number of minimal lineages. These were the tribal sections (clans and *fukhds*) whose their functions were economic as well as political. However, during the summer time members of divisions (clans) would assemble around their own specified water wells or close to urban settlements or villages. It should

<sup>63</sup> Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah*, p.144.

be noted that a tribe did not always remain in its own *dirah*. If the rains were good and grazing was plentiful, the tribes naturally would stay at home. If the rains failed, tribes would migrate to places where grazing would exist, and so would overflow into the territories of its neighbours.<sup>64</sup> The tribal *dirah* was always smaller than the range area, which usually overlapped with other tribal groups' *dirahs*.

As the size of the tribes were mostly large, the gathering of the members of the whole tribe during the peace times had been always rare. The larger the tribe, the more it was likely to be subdivided into almost independent clans, or even new tribes, and the harder it was to live and herd together and coherently. Accordingly, each section of a Bedouin tribe moved in systematic relation to analogous sections through the annual regime of nomadic movement. A serial order of migration was followed, each section separated from the others and, in orderly fashion, they occupied the pasture areas. The migration proceeded rather slowly, especially in years of abundant pasture and the distances between sections seemed to allow enough time for the growth of annual plants in the pasture areas, in the course of a few rains, to recover.

During turbulence, insecurity and wars a clan, clans and sometime tribe came together in one block.<sup>65</sup> The tribe into which a man was born compelled his loyalty and duty, and that of his sons and all his descendants in the male line, theoretically for as long as the line continued to exist. Bedouin society was characterized by a fierce loyalty to family, clan and tribe which triggered blood feuds and demanded revenge killings. They had a rigid code of honour in which the chastity of their women was very important and which included hospitality and generosity. The loyalty of tribesmen towards each other and towards the tribe as a whole was a moral and obligatory condition. With the whole tribe, all sections and sub-sections of the tribe would act as a united body in relation to other tribes but within the tribe itself the members of a section (clan) would unite when necessary in opposition to another section of their own tribe by virtue of their greater closeness of common descent. Similarly, the members of a sub-section (*fakhd*) would unite in opposition to another *fakhd* within their own clan of the tribe. Thus, the idea of tribal loyalty involves some kind of

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<sup>64</sup> Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, p. 47.

<sup>65</sup> Fuad Hamzah, *Qalb Jazerat Al-Arab [The Heart of Arabia]* (Cairo: Al-Matba'ah Al-Salafiyah, 1933), pp.131-39.

tribal unity, not merely in opposition to others but also in the internal relations of the tribe. The kin group was responsible for all its individual members in matters of morals and honour, including blood vengeance.<sup>66</sup>

However, these kinship relations were not without purpose. Most or all of the social relations in the pastoral Bedouin society were a result of the hardship of life in the desert. The pastoral society was uncommitted to any scale of corporate organization or structure other than the tribe, accords well with the mobility required under desert conditions. Such kin groups, however, were vulnerable to predation or competition for pasturage from analogous units which were larger. This implies competition within the tribal structure and territory which did not seem to accord with other facts. In the physical hardship of Bedouin life, the high value set on collective work and mutual help was a condition of survival.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that these kinship relations were ultimately related to the dominant relations of production by which the latter modified and renewed the former constantly. In his analysis of the lineage-based and segmentary societies of the Guro socio-economic formation Claude Meillassoux argues that the:

Economic imperatives, among others, contribute to the creation of new units whose members are tied by relations of production and consumption. The biological family can not stay within its narrow genealogical framework and is replaced by functional families whose members are associated by economic obligation rather than by relationships of consanguinity. Under such a dynamic the bonds of kinship have to be sufficiently elastic to adapt such modification.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Meillassoux states that the cycle of birth and death ceaselessly destroys and rebuilds the natural families, but these families are constantly reorganized and manipulated into effective production units.<sup>68</sup> Kinship relations, therefore, have a genealogical base, but this base is first modified to meet the requirements of production so that relations of production can be realized within it.

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<sup>66</sup> *The Bedouin of Arabia at:* <http://www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/mgcbedu.html>

<sup>67</sup> Claude Meillassoux, quoted in Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and Primitive "Societies"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 141-42.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.141.

Economics, in the nomadic society, was functionally related to social and political arrangements. Non-economic factors of kinship and politics were the very organization of economic processes. They were the economically essential elements of an economic calculus. In the nomadic society, an individual's work was produced in his capacity as a social person, as father and a husband, brother and lineage mate or a member of the clan or the tribe. In other words, labour was organized by a non-economic relationship as an expression of pre-existing kin and community relations. Production, to a large degree, was organized on the basis of households. Most of the nomadic households owned their herds and the household provided the required labour force. Production was very much a domestic function of which the extended family was the central institution. The family was directly engaged in the economic processes of production, consumption and exchange. The type of goods the family produced and the allocation of labour were essentially a domestic matter. All decisions were made in response to domestic needs. Nevertheless, the family production, in the nomadic society, was not only a production for use, it was also a production for exchange and a family was not necessarily a self-contained work group, rather its members usually cooperated with individuals from other households of the same ancestry and many tasks may be undertaken collectively.<sup>69</sup>

It is worthy of note that, although the system of kinship or lineage provided a structure that linked each individual independent family to ever larger clan, it was, in its turn, linked to other larger structures until the whole members of the tribe were incorporated. And, in spite of the collective ownership and utilization of the means of production (land and water) in the tribal society, this does not mean that tribal societies were not ranked or all their members were placed in an equal economic and social position. On the contrary, tribal societies were made up of people of unequal status whose social standing varied widely. This variance was calculated in terms of ownership of animals; those advantaged might or might not have a better lifestyle than those who were poor, but they always had much more prestige, power and security and they disdained those who were beneath them. In a pastoral society, a successful career was built upon the possession of animals which were to serve as the basic source of subsistence, as a measure of personal status, as the medium in which social ties were expressed, as the basis upon which influence and power in the community

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<sup>69</sup> Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), p.75.

was established. As a consequence, all the potential satisfactions of social life hinge upon the acquisition of a good quality and an adequate supply of animals.

As noted above, environment, climate conditions and the nature of animals played the major role in determining the type of animals to be herded in the Arabian Desert. As a result, camels, sheep and goats were the major assets of the Kuwaiti Bedouins. The camel was the largest of domesticated animals of Kuwait and Arabian Peninsula in general. Its range and scale of uses, its specific adaptations to desert conditions and its limitations were the foundations of Bedouin culture. As a source of food it provided both meat and milk, but for the Bedouin the camel was more significant as a milk producer. For the Bedouin, the camel was a multipurpose resource for food and other materials, a valuable commodity for exchange, a means of heavy transport, and a fast-moving durable mount for defensive and offensive movement.<sup>70</sup>

The capacity of camels to tolerate extremes of heat and lack of water, to thrive on desert plants beyond the capacity of other domestic animals, and to cover great distances in the course of nomadic grazing supported Bedouin life in the outer ranges of the ecological niche of desert pastoralism. But the climate and rainfall regime of the Arabian Peninsula and the geographical distribution of permanent watering wells enforced an annual migration pattern which, after winter in the interior desert, converged upon summer camping places in vicinity of settled areas. The range of a pastoral society in the Arabian Peninsula included winter pastures, permanent watering wells for summer, and access to an urban market.

Sheep and goats, on the other hand, can not stay away from water for long periods. They need better and softer pasture. As a result, shepherds were more limited in their migrations, and stayed mostly on the periphery of the desert or close to the permanent water wells in the nearby villages. In combination, the features of the camel were superior to those of any other animal in the region and render the camel-breeding Bedouins superior to shepherds and non-Bedouin communities. The Bedouin camel-herding tribes had maintained a

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<sup>70</sup> Louise E. Sweet, "Camel Pastoralism in North Arabia and the Minimal Camping Unit", in: *Man, Culture and Animals: The Role of Animal in Human Ecological Adjustment*, edited by Anthony Leeds and Andrew P. Vayda, (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1965), p.132.

distinctive pattern and a dominant position over other shepherds tribes and settlements by virtue of their ability to exploit the grazing ranges into other economies can not spread, and by virtue of their fighting strength, mobility and control of communication routes. By their mobility camel herds achieved hegemony in the desert and assumed aristocratic origins as a legitimation (known as *sharif* or noble tribes).<sup>71</sup>

The camel breeders were regarded as the noblest tribes. They occupy huge territories, travel great distances, and were organized in large tribes and tribal confederations in Arabian Desert. Lower in rank were the sheep and goat breeders who stayed mainly in the periphery of the desert or near the cultivated regions. Shepherds, whether they were the owners of their flocks and organized as independent tribes or who organized along client tribal lines in a serf-like position herding the flocks owned by the noble tribes or the wealthy town dwellers, were generally allied to one of the powerful camel breeding Bedouin tribes and pay them a tax for protection.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, camel herding tribes often claimed regular tribute from the sedentary peasants. This tribute was presumably for the use of land belonging to them but which they had allowed the settled people to use. It should be remembered that some of the agricultural oases were located within some of the powerful tribes' *dirahs* (for example the *dirah* of Al-Murrah tribe covered approximately 250 000 miles and contained many oases of Al-Hasa).<sup>73</sup> In such a case agriculture land would belong to the tribe, but mostly was owned by the sheikh of the tribe or one of its divisions or sub-divisions' sheikhs, and farmers (their tenants and sometimes their slaves) would pay them an annually tribute. Powerful tribes also took a kind of insurance tribute (*al-khawah*) given to them from inferior ones and from caravans. Those who paid *al-khawah* tribute were granted full protection against raiding or harassment of any kind while they were trading throughout the *dirah* of the powerful tribe.<sup>74</sup> The paying of *al-khawah* was, in the desert law, degrading for it was a sign of weakness which was equalled to inferiority.

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<sup>71</sup> Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, p. 109. Elizabeth E. Bacon, "Types of Pastoral Nomadism in Central and Southwest Asia", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol.10, 1954, p.44 -45.

<sup>72</sup> Ismael, op. cit., p.18, also Sweet, op. cit., p.148.

<sup>73</sup> Cole, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> *Bedouin Economy in Tradition and Change* at: <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/24.htm>, (18. 11. 2003). Also George F. Sadlier, *Dairy of a Journey across Arabia 1819* (Cambridge: falcon & Oleander Press, 1977), p. 85.

Conversely, those who extracted this tribute were considered noble and intermarriage between the two castes was very rare.<sup>75</sup>

It can be concluded that all other nomadic and semi-nomadic groups were organized along tribal lines and lived in a subordinate symbiosis with the noble tribes. Urban centres built up alliance with them to establish and protect trade routes and even governments cajoled and co-opted their leaders into the aristocracy of the cities.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the economic position which was based on the type and quantity of animals owned in the tribal society led to the creation of a highly stratified social system in which the camel herders held hegemony and superiority over both the shepherd nomads and the sedentary people in the agricultural and urban places. Nevertheless, the noble Bedouin tribes were not, however, an aristocratic class supported primarily by the productive labour of subordinate classes, in the sense of stratified agrarian or capitalist societies. They remained independent camel breeding societies and their status, power and prestige depended on their great camel herds and means of maintaining them at full strength.

#### **7.2.4 Relations of Production and Division of Labour in Pastoralism**

Within the tribal society, it is extremely difficult to talk about the emergence of classes—in the economic sense of the word—and the exploitation of the labour of others on a mass scale. This does not mean that all members of the tribe or its sub-sections' members were placed in an equal social position. In contrast, members of the nomadic society were ranked unequally and stratified primarily according to an economic criterion. They varied greatly in wealth and in standing within the tribal structure. The major prominent division included the sheikhs and wealthy nomads in the top of the social hierarchy followed by the followers (tribesmen) and then the servants and former slaves in the lowest place. All Bedouin tribes, sections and sub-sections (clans and *fakhds*) were led by families of sheikhs who occupied the higher social position in the nomadic society. Sheikhs were independent, ranked above and had superior power over the others. There was a great deal of differentiation between the lifestyles of the sheikhs and the common tribesmen. In both tribe and its primary

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75 Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928), pp.44-45.

76 Ismael, op. cit., p.20.

sections the position of sheikh was hereditary to one particular family. The hereditary tradition persists not only within the tribe but with the sheikhs of the various sections and sub-sections of the tribe. The hereditary sheikhs of one of the primary sections of the tribe were also hereditary sheikhs of the whole tribe which means not only hereditary leadership but a hierarchy hereditary leadership. These sheikhs, though they were the leaders of the various sections and sub-sections of the tribe, they occupy on a hereditary basis the position of being the sheikhs of the whole tribe.<sup>77</sup>

Although it was true that the position of sheikhs depended essentially upon the tribal consensus, this did not mean that they had the consensus of all the members of the tribe. It meant the consensus of the other potential successors, other sheikhs and nobles (*majlis*) council of the tribe who were in the same position of sheikhs and who assumed this position by their wealth and tribal origin. Wisdom, bravery, wealth and a display of hospitality and generosity were the essentials of assuming the sheikh position and were the qualities which make a sheikh respected by his followers and gained him respect among the other lineages, clans and tribes. More importantly, sheikhs not only had authority over the internal and external affairs of their people, but they also owned most of what the tribe, clan or *fakhd* had. In a way, all property that had a public aspect was theirs, though such possession was in name only, and they practised their power by regulating the utility of the property. In addition, all tributes paid by the inferior tribes, villagers and caravans were collected and redistributed by the sheikhs.<sup>78</sup> They were also the collectors of tax and alms for the central governments (the Al-Sabah of Kuwait, Al-Saud of Najd and the Ottoman government representatives in Iraq and Syria). This was a substantial means by which the Bedouin sheikhs increased their own wealth as these governments allowed them to retain part of this tax for themselves as a reward for the collection.<sup>79</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the range of variation in social organization among nomads was based on the type and number of herds. With the superiority of the camel herders over all the members of the Bedouin society, the number of herds owned was the major variable in determining the social status of the family and its head whether within the tribe as a whole

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<sup>77</sup> Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, pp.52-53.

<sup>78</sup> Sweet, op. cit., p.140, also Peter Lienhardt, "The Authority of Sheikhs in the Gulf: An Essay in the Nineteenth Century History", *Arabian Studies*, vol.2, 1975, p.63-69.

<sup>79</sup> Musil, op. cit., p58-59.



or within its divisions and sub-divisions. It should be remembered that individual ownership of herds was vested within the family, and the head of extended family was considered the real owner of all herds. As a consequence, the number of camels a Bedouin family owned expressed its socio-economic status, the more the family owned, the more its social status among other units of the tribe improved and the more its head was known as a distinguished figure in the community. Increase of herds would mean an increase in the wealth of the breeding units of the tribe, and this in its turn would mean gaining highly respected position within the tribe. As a consequence, considerable variations in wealth existed within the nomadic society, sheikhs were predominantly the richest owning between 300-400 camels, wealthy nomads around 60, well-to-do people 30-40 and the poorest own only 10 camels.<sup>80</sup> This statement, however, can not be considered as accurate and applicable for all the Bedouin tribes. Stratification of property among Bedouins varied greatly from one tribe to another.

In terms of the exploitation of the labour of others, the pastoralists mostly utilized the labour of semi-dependent kinsmen (particularly family members, such work —of course— was unpaid) and an occasional itinerant or otherwise destitute herdsman. The central feature of the nomadic society lies in the overlapping of the economic and social relations as the principal means of survival in that society. Accordingly, labour did not exist as a differentiated activity independent of the worker's other social capacities. Labour was organized by a non-economic relationship as an expression of pre-existing kin and community relations. In contrast, hiring wage labourers was not a widespread practise in nomadic life where working for others took the form of mutual cooperation.<sup>81</sup> However, there are some references to the hiring of herdsmen by some wealthy Bedouins. For example Louise Sweet, although she did not give a detailed account of the methods of payment, confirmed that much of the husbandry of animals was performed by a group of herdsmen who were distinct from the guards (tribesmen) and were not combatants during the war time. She writes:

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<sup>80</sup> Issawi, *op. cit.*, p.344.

<sup>81</sup> Donald Cole states that within the Al-Murrah tribe if a sheep and goat households own some camels they entrust them to the care of a related household that specializes in herding camels, Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

These may be the younger brothers in the family unit, poor men of the clan or some other clan of the chiefdom, refugees or poor men from other chiefdoms, or men of the [serf] of subordinate tribes.<sup>82</sup>

In much more detailed description, Alois Musil mentioned that:

Each herd has its own herdsmen (*r'ai al-bel*), who is hired for ten months and, according to the size of herd is paid either two *majidiyyat* [Ottoman currency], a suit of clothing, and shoes, or merely six *majidiyyat*, besides receiving one young male camel.<sup>83</sup>

Musil's account evidently indicates that utilising the labour of others in the form of wage labour existed in the Bedouin society. Moreover, historical evidence clearly shows that a considerable number of shepherds worked for others, primarily as herders, wherein they herd the sheep and goats of townspeople or the camels of wealthy Bedouins who, during their summer stayed in the town, sent out their herds with hired herdsmen.<sup>84</sup> These herdsmen were usually from non-noble or subordinate tribes.<sup>85</sup>

The clearest form of exploitation can apparently be seen in relations between tribesmen and the small groups of servants and metal workers. Most, if not all, noble tribes had with them groups of people who were known as *salubba*. *Salubba*, as mentioned earlier, were ranked on the lowest level of the Bedouin social scale amongst the Arabs. They mostly worked as tinkers, tattooists, pot menders, saddle makers, guides, entertainers and servants to the tribe they lived with or whose territory they were in.<sup>86</sup> In addition, most of the nomadic camps contained a group of slaves and servants who performed a substantial and more difficult part of work in the Bedouin society. In spite of the end of the slave trade, the descendants

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<sup>82</sup> Louise E. Sweet, "Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouin: A Mechanism of Ecological Adaptation", *American Anthropologist*, vol.67, 1965, p.1136.

<sup>83</sup> Musil, op. cit., p. 336. It should be noted that Musil spent many years with the *Rwala* Bedouins who belong to 'Anaiza' tribe. The homeland of these Bedouin was North Arabia, Southern Iraq and Syrian Desert where the Ottoman currency was used more than Indian Rupees which were used in Kuwait and other Arabian Gulf countries.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 45. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, p. 109-10, also George August Wallin, *Travels in Arabia* (Naples: Falcon Press, 1969), p. 149.

<sup>85</sup> Sweet, "Camel Pastoralism in North Arabia", p. 145.

<sup>86</sup> Bacon, op. cit., p.45-6. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, p.515-419. Also Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, vol. 1 (London: Jonathan Cape & the Medici Society, 1926), p.281.

of former slaves continued working as serfs to their original masters. As they had left no relations or traces behind them in their original homeland (Africa), and had long ago lost any connection with their real families, they became part of the families they worked with and serfdom became their only niche in the community they lived in. Otherwise, they would have been homeless and jobless. As a result, they underwent a transformation from slavery to function as serfs and personal servants to the upper elite, owed various dues and services to clan or tribe chiefs and notables. Moreover, and in addition to the watering of animals which was their chief work, work such as loading, unloading, transporting, pitching the tent and tending the herds of their masters during hot summer time, were their other duties.<sup>87</sup>

All these servants, in fact, were subservient to the noble Bedouin tribes. They were ranked in the lowest level of the social hierarchy of the Bedouin society. Noble or *sharif* Bedouins never intermarried with them as such intermarriage —from the Bedouin viewpoint— would have disgraced the honour and blood of the tribe. Economically, these vassal groups were the poorest in the Bedouin society as they represented the unpaid labour class. They provided all these services for only their security and protection by the tribe they worked with.<sup>88</sup>

From what has been said it can be concluded that social status in the nomadic society was related to the division of labour, giving the system of stratification the appearance of caste. The form of ownership and the pattern of relations of production in the nomadic traditional mode of production gave certain tribes and certain families within the tribe effective control over the forces of production as well as over the surplus and necessary product. Camel herders, by their wealth (camels) and thus their ability to control most of the grazing areas and watering wells, occupied the higher position in the nomadic social hierarchy. In the second position were the shepherds who were less wealthy and poorer in strength. Therefore, they were subservient to the camel herders and worked as a wage herders or paid tributes to them in exchange of their protection and security. At the very bottom and lowest rank were the tinkers, servants and blacksmiths, etc. who represented the unpaid and most exploited labour class. As a consequence, it can be said that, in spite of the overlapping

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p.502-4. Musil, op. cit., p.276-8.

<sup>88</sup> Sweet, "Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouin", p. 1134.

between the social and economic factors in determining the social structure of the nomadic society, social differentiations and social strata were shaped further by economic factors, and the significant social divisions were based on the economic criteria rather than kinship and descent status. However, as workers tended to be part of the owner's households such exploitation of the labour of others did not establish a social class system in the technical sense of the term. Class appears to play a rather different role within the nomadic groups. Social stratification in the nomadic society appears to correspond more appropriately with the Weberian status groups than social classes in the Marxist perspective. It represents a number of individuals who shared the same status situation which was determined by the distribution of social honour (prestige).<sup>89</sup> Although high status groups did not necessarily signify property owners, members of different groups in the nomadic society often had a certain lifestyle and could wield social power. The criteria for their entry into a status group were always the sharing of kinship in addition to the economic elements.

The difference between the *sharif* (noble) or *qabili* status—which was a status category refers to a descent from *asil* Arab origin— and the *beisri* or *khadiri* status—which denotes to a status category of free people who can not claim recognized Arab pure descent<sup>90</sup>— and those of slave and servant status, was, in the first place, an economic and occupational distinction rather than a social one. It is apparent that the occupational diversity existed within this system. While the position of sheikh as a higher and respected occupation was limited to special wealthy families of noble status, other lower occupations, e.g. shepherding and blacksmithing, etc., were forbidden to them but open to other lower status such as *beisri* and servant status who were less wealthy and thus were unable to improve their social position.

### **7.3. Conclusion**

It is possible to argue that the most noticeable features of agriculture and pastoralism —the first two elements of the traditional nomadic mode of production— were their forms of ownership and utilization of means of production and their strict relations of production.

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<sup>89</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp.166-67.

<sup>90</sup> Al-Torki and Cole op. cit., p.44

The specific nature of ownership and patterns of relations of production of these activities effectively contributed in determining the general structure of social relations in the Kuwaiti society.

The ownership and utilisation of land and water sources (the chief means of production) in agriculture and its resultant relations of production led to the transformation of society into a semi-feudalist class society. The land owners (sheikhs and merchants) assumed the dominant position and the farmers (the real producers) composed the subordinate and most exploited class. Conversely, in pastoralism, grazing land and watering wells were owned collectively by the members of the tribe. The collective ownership of the means of production allowed all the tribe members equal, or almost equal, access to them. Therefore, there were limited chances within the tribe to accumulate private properties (pastures or water wells). On the other hand, tribal sheikhs did not extract surplus from other members; that is, there was no internal mechanism of surplus extraction within the tribal units. In other words, it can be said that in the nomadic structure there were two unstable strata: a dominant but not exploiting ruling stratum and a mostly self-sufficient stratum comprising the rank and file of the tribe.

The distinction in pastoralism was based more clearly on the possession of herds which considered the final product of pastoralism. The type, and of course, the number of herds played a crucial role in determining the ability of the owners to control and utilize the basic means of production in pastoralism and the social status of the owners within their own tribal unit or within the nomadic society as a whole. As a result, and because the labour was organized more precisely by non-economic relationships (kinship), the utilization of labour did not establish a social class system in pastoralism. It created a status group, in the Weberian sense of the term, in which people from different economic classes (owners and workers, sheikhs and followers) became (by kinship criteria) members of the same status group as they shared the same specific style of life.

While it is true that the significant social divisions in both agriculture and pastoralism were based on the economic criteria, the most fundamental division appears to be between the true nomadic (camel herders) and semi-nomads shepherds and villagers. The ownership of camels, as a fast-moving durable mount defensive and offensive movement, enabled the

camel breeding tribes to occupy and exploit the largest grazing areas and watering wells in the desert and to control trading routes crossing their *dirahs*. As a result, they achieved hegemony and superiority not only within the nomadic society but also over other semi-nomadic and settled communities and assumed aristocratic origins as a legitimation. They became the nobles of the region while the semi-nomadic and villagers and even the city dwellers were ranked in a subordinate position to them.

Nonetheless, and in spite of the great variation in their economic life, nomadic semi-nomadic and sedentary people of the Kuwaiti society had never been antagonistic or hostile. Alternatively, the economic interdependence between the nomadic and settled populations of Kuwait had been an important characteristic of the Kuwaiti society for several centuries.

## Chapter Eight The Caravan Trade

### 8.1 Introduction

Although pastoralism was the common occupation of all nomads, this does not mean that raising animals was their only economic activity. During the modern history of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Bedouin tribes had also intermittently engaged in considerable trade (mainly the caravan trade) with urban markets. The flexibility so characteristic of pastoral nomadism and the ability to transport goods and people have meant that pastoralism has long been associated with the caravan trade as one of the major livelihood strategies. Prior to the evolution of modern transport, animals were the only method of moving large quantities of goods across land. Consequently, pastoralists often became heavily involved in trade caravans, guiding, managing and supplying the appropriate livestock. In Arabia, this evolved into a quite sophisticated form of blackmail, whereby the nomads both guided the caravans and required payments to protect them.<sup>1</sup>

However, commercial caravans had effectively contributed to the activation of Kuwait's external trade and were one of the primary pillars for the growth and development of the Kuwaiti economy. Long-distance trade caravans played a major role in the economic exchanges and commercial relations that took place between Kuwait and the major centres of Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. They were the main links for Kuwait with distant cities in Syria, southern Iraq, eastern and central Arabia. These economic ties had an enormous impact on Kuwait's internal development and its external political relations. Another reason for the active caravan trade were the needs of the consumer Kuwaiti society and the needs of the neighbouring societies, which relied on the Kuwaiti market to supply the material and necessary commodities.

Accordingly, caravan trade, as an economic activity, attracted a considerable part of the Kuwaiti population who participated in it whether directly as merchants, money lenders

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<sup>1</sup>Louise E. Sweet, "Camel Pastoralism in North Arabia and the Minimal Camping Unit" in: *Man, Culture and Animal: The Role of Animal in Human Ecological Adjustment*, Edited by Anthony Leeds and Andrew Vayda (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1965), p.137.

and cameleers, or indirectly as guards and guides, .etc. Most importantly, the caravan trade was the most important economic activity jointly practiced by both the nomadic and the settled people of Kuwait. There was a complex system of interaction between the nomadic tribes and the settled population in which goods and services were exchanged between the two sides. Throughout their long history, nomadic tribes had lived on their herds, supplying the surplus Bedouin products to the sedentary communities in return for manufactured and agricultural goods that they were unable to produce. They also controlled the desert trade routes, escorted caravans, and provided them with drivers and guides. This economic interdependence between the nomadic and settled populations of Kuwait had been an important characteristic of society for several centuries.

This chapter, therefore, presents a complete historical analysis of Kuwait's caravan trade and the economic interactions between the settled and nomadic communities of Kuwaiti society. The object of this chapter is to ask how far the caravan trade contributed in the prosperity of the Kuwaiti economy in the pre-oil era? And to what extent did the caravan trade —as a critical element of the traditional nomadic mode of production with its specific patterns of ownership and relations of production— contributed in determining and affecting the social structure of Kuwaiti society? This will be attempted through a study of patterns of ownership of capital and animals (means of transportation), ways of finance and economic and social relations between the participants in this economic activity. This chapter will also investigate the size of caravans, destinations and types of commodities, with special attention being paid to the market of Kuwait and the Bedouin participation in its prosperity. It is hoped that this will help to elucidate the significance of this economic activity and thus its impact on the political and social structure of the Kuwaiti society. It is of utmost importance to mention at this point that the information regarding the caravan trade, its organization and the participation of Bedouin tribes is not exclusive to Kuwait only. It can be applied to all northern and central Arabia, southern Iraq and Syria as this area was the homeland of the 'Anzah, Mutair, 'Ajman, Shmmar, Utaibah, Bani Khakid, Bani Hajer, Sbai'a, 'Awazim, Rashaidah, Harib, Sahul and Dhafir tribes to which the Bedouins of Kuwait belonged.



## **8.2 Factors Contributing to the Prosperity and Decline of the Caravan Trade**

Since its inception, Kuwait has played an important role in the transit trade into the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Syria. Goods and commodities were imported from India, Iran, and east Africa to the Kuwait port, and then re-exported to the Arabian Peninsula, southern Iraq, and Syria by using commercial caravans. And conversely, products of these areas were brought by caravans to the Kuwait City and re-exported to the international markets. What helped Kuwait play such a role was the period of instability that Basra had experienced due to the spread of plague in 1773 which led to immigration of large numbers of its inhabitants, including merchants, to Kuwait and so they practised their trade activities in Kuwait.<sup>2</sup> Another reason for the decline of the commercial status of Basra was the siege imposed by the Persians and the subsequent occupation of it by the Persians from 1775-1779. The result was the decline of trade in Basra and the transfer of its Indian trade with Baghdad, Aleppo, Constantinople and the hinterland of Arabia into Kuwait. This was also added to the transfer of the British East India Company's factory from Basra to Kuwait in 1775. Since then, Kuwait turned into a very important port and accordingly became a significant station for commercial caravans from Kuwait to southern Iraq, Syria, and eastern and central Arabia.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the factors mentioned in the commercial sea transportation, Kuwait was also helped by its geographical proximity to these regions.

The caravan trade enjoyed the attention and the protection of the rulers of Kuwait, especially during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, 1896-1915. Because of its economic significance, Sheikh Mubarak paid a special attention to this trade, and encouraged those who were involved in it. He made constant efforts to secure the caravan trade routes and guarantee the safety and protection of caravaneers and their goods by punishing those who attacked them.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that, in spite of its critical importance during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the caravan trade declined and suffered during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The caravan trade was often influenced

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakimah, *The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965* (London: Luzac & Company, 1983), p.110. Faiq Tahboub, *Tariekh Al-Bahrain Al-Siaysi [The Political History of Bahrain]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salsil, undated), p.45.

<sup>3</sup> Abu Hakimah, op. cit., pp.23-27, Mohammed Hassan Al-'Adarous, *Tariekh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi Al-Hadit [The Modern History of the Arabian Gulf]* (Cairo: Dar 'Ain Lil Dirasat wa Al-Bohouth, 1996), p.62.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Aziz, Al-Rashid, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat, 1978), p. 64. H. R. P Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: Allen & Uwin, 1951), p.443.

by the current political circumstances and sometimes ceased completely due to the political disputes between Al Sabah and Al Rashid, and between the latter and Al Saud in the hinterland of the Arabian Peninsula. This situation might have been aggravated by the political disputes between the Ottoman State and the influential European states such as Britain. However, reasons for the decline of the caravan trade can be summarized as follows:

- The siege imposed by the British forces during the First World War in order to prevent the supply of food and goods from Kuwait to Britain's adversaries such as the Ottomans, the Germans in Syria and Lebanon, and Ibn Rashid, the ally of the Ottomans, in Arabia.<sup>5</sup>
- The commercial disputes between Kuwait and Najd (one of the most important destination for this trade). This problem occurred because Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, the governor of Najd at that time, prevented his subjects from trading with Kuwait as a result of his inability to reach an agreement with the ruler of Kuwait regarding the customs tax between the two countries.
- The dispute with Iraq over the lack of a definite custom tax between the two states. These two problems led to an increase of smuggling between these areas and the ceasing of the caravan trade.
- The economic great depression of 1930s and its negative implications for the economic life in general and trade in particular. However, shortly after that, trade started to prosper again during the years of the Second World War. This was because of the resumption of work for the Kuwaiti sailing ships and the stopping of the European steamers to come to the region. This enabled the Kuwaiti merchants to work as commercial mediators in the region and supplying food to the armies of the alliance working in Iran and Iraq during the war.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Hussein Khalaf Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal *Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Siaysi [The Political History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hilal, 1962), p.129. Al-Rashid, op. cit., pp.238-40.

<sup>6</sup>Isa, Al-Qatami, *Dalil Al-Muhtar fi 'Alim Al-Bihar [The Guidebook of Seas Science]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1964), pp.216-7. Badder Al-Deen Abbas, Al-Khususi, *Dirasat fi Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Iqtisadi wa Al-Ijtima'ai [Studies in Economic and Social History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1983), p.264.

### 8.3 Routes of Commercial Caravans, their Sizes and the Time Needed for their Trips

The most important routes of the commercial caravans from Kuwait to Basra, southern Iraq, central and eastern Arabia and Syria<sup>7</sup> were as follows:

A- The route from Kuwait to Basra passes by Qasr Al-Sheikh, Umm Qasr, and Saffwan. It continues to Zubier or Basra. The length of this route from Kuwait to Saffwan is 111.5 miles, and from Saffwan to Zubier is 17 miles.<sup>8</sup>

B- The route from Kuwait to Basra through Jahrah and then to Saffwan directly. This route goes in a straight line for around 56 miles north to Saffwan. The total distance of this route is around 76 miles.<sup>9</sup>

C- The way from Kuwait to Al-Qasim towards Najd passes through Jahrah, Umm Al-'Amarah, Wadi Al-Shiq then to Al-Qasim. The length of this route is between 25 to 30 miles.<sup>10</sup>

D- The way to Hafar towards Najd passes through Jahrah, Umm Al-'Amarah, Wadi Al-Shiq, Al-Qasim, Riq'ai, Qasr Ballal in Wadi Al-Batin, to Hafar. The distance from Kuwait to Hafar is 180 miles.<sup>11</sup>

E- The route from Kuwait to Hafar directly through Warah 'Adan, Dibdibah plain until Hafar. It is around 180 miles.<sup>12</sup>

F- The route from Kuwait to Zilfi in Najd.<sup>13</sup>

G- The route from Kuwait to Najd through Wabrah. The distance is around 140 miles.<sup>14</sup>

H- The route from Subihah in Kuwait to Al-Hasa.<sup>15</sup>

J- The route from Kuwait to Aleppo in Syria. This route was very important during the 18<sup>th</sup> century but lost this status in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the prevailing political conditions and particularly with the eruption of the First World War.

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<sup>7</sup> The Kuwaiti Ministry of Guidance and News, *The Annual Book* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1972), p.11.

<sup>8</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol.1, Historical (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), pp.1067-70.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.1070-71.

<sup>10</sup> Amin Al-Rihani, *Muluk Al-Arab: Rihlah fi Al-Bilad Al-Arabia [Arab Kings: Trip in Arab Land]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, Undated), p.671.

<sup>11</sup> Lorimer, op.cit., pp. 1070-72.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 1072-73.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.1073.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.671.

The size of caravans varies according to the volume of the goods shipped and the commercial conditions in the destinations. Therefore, there was no fixed system for the size of caravans. Furthermore, the numbers of animals and camels were difficult to count due to the fact that, in some cases, these animals were bought from Bedouins on the way to destination and so did not count among the animals of caravans.

Despite the lack of detailed information on the size of the commercial caravans during the period under investigation, it is possible to make use of the information given by the European travellers, who accompanied such caravans in earlier times. This is because caravans, during the period under investigation, maintained the same routes in the desert and continued using the same means of transportation used by those travellers. If there were a difference, it was only in the types of goods and prices.

The traveller Bartholomew Plaisted mentions that the caravan that he accompanied from Basra to Aleppo in 1763 was composed of around 2 000 camels at the beginning. Some camels were not loaded but were only intended to be sold in Aleppo. In the middle of the route another caravan joined with 3 000 camels. Therefore, the subtotal was 5 000 camel and around 1 000 men<sup>16</sup>. The caravan that Edward Ives intended to travel with from Kuwait to Aleppo in 1758 was composed of 5 000 camel guarded by 1 000 men.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact that this information refers to an earlier period, it is possible to say that the size of caravans was not defined. The increase or decrease in the size of caravans was due to several factors such as the volume of the goods to be transported, the commercial conditions in the intended markets, the probability of other caravans joining in the route, and buying animals during the trip in order to sell them in the intended markets.

The duration of trips through the desert varied according to differences in the size of the caravans, and the differences in the distances between different markets. Big caravans used to travel at a slower speed than small caravans. Furthermore, the nature of the landscape played a role in limiting the speed of the caravans. This is confirmed by the

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<sup>16</sup> Bartholomew Plaisted, A Journey from Busserah to Aleppo, in: *The Desert Route to India*, edited by Douglas Carruthers (Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), p.80.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakimah, *History of Kuwait*, vol.1, Part 1 (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1967), p.277.

traveller G. Forster Sadleir who said about his trip across the Arabian Peninsula in 1819 that he calculated the average speed according to the number of hours as follows:

When the trip is no more than eight hours, there would be a decrease in the calculated distance to two miles and a half-mile to two miles and three quarters of a mile. The reduction in speed was due to the mountain and rocky nature of the land.<sup>18</sup>

In the light of what Forster Sadleir mentioned, it is difficult to calculate the time needed for a trip from Kuwait for example to Najd or Basra and vice versa. This is because it is not possible to define the speed of the caravans, the period of recess to get water, and the time needed to negotiate with tribes about the tribute of passing, and so on.

## **8.4 Economic Rewards of the Caravan Trade**

To realise the size of the financial revenues of the Kuwaiti caravan trade for the period of this study, it would be helpful to shed some light on the organization of the Kuwaiti markets, transactions, currency and commercial dealings between nomads and merchants in these markets. Furthermore, an analysis of the caravan trade, as one of the critical pillars of the Kuwaiti economy, inevitably entails a close examination of the Kuwait customs as the place concerned for obtaining the most important revenue for the government treasury and because the caravan trade and the selling of Bedouins was part of it.

### **8.4.1 Kuwaiti Markets**

Kuwaiti markets were the starting point and the returning point of the caravans to the neighbouring areas with economic and commercial links. These markets were the centres of trade activity and so it warrants giving some details about them.

The city of Kuwait, during the period under investigation, was composed of a number of neighbourhoods that were separated by a main road that connects the important markets with the beach.<sup>19</sup> One of the most distinctive features of these neighbourhoods

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<sup>18</sup> G. Forster Sadlier, *Dairy of a Journey across Arabia 1819* (Cambridge: Falcon & Oleander Press, 1977), p.27.

<sup>19</sup> Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Al-Tuhfa Al-Nabhania fi Tariekh Al-Jazera Al-Arabia [The History of Arabian Peninsula]* vol.8 (Cairo: Al-Matba'aah Al-Mohamadia Al-Tijaria, 1949), p.144. Also Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.38.

was the existence of the markets where people assembled to sell and buy. The yard of Al-Safah was regarded as the main market in Kuwait. In this market, caravaneers used to do all their commercial transactions. This was also the main market for Bedouins who used to come to exchange their products such as ghee, sheep, and wool and for what was available such as clothes and food.<sup>20</sup>

Besides this central market, there were other markets that had special features such as the meat and fish markets, the blacksmith market, the vegetables market, and so on.<sup>21</sup> There were also many shops for different trade activities.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, it is possible to argue that Kuwait, as well being a commercial centre for importing and exporting goods to the international markets (Iran, southern coast of Arabia, India and East Africa) was also a commercial link between these markets and the hinterland of Arabia, southern Iraq and Syria. This clearly illustrates that the economy of Kuwait City was not a subsistence-oriented economy but one in which trade was a key element. It should also be noted that Kuwait market served as a social and cultural centre in which distinctive systems and different cultures had evolved. The following table gives a clear picture for the commercial transactions and the number of people who specialized in them as merchants and craftsmen in the Kuwait for the year 1904.

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<sup>20</sup> Faisal Al-'Adhamah *Fi Bilad Al-Lulu [In the Country of Pearl]* (Damascus: Committee of Culture in the Arab Youth Association, 1945), p.126.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>22</sup> Rasim Rushdi, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Kuwaitiein [Kuwait and Kuwaitis]* (Beirut: Al-Matba'ah Al-Rahbania Al-Libnania, 1959), p.34.

**Table 8.1**

**The Number of Merchants and Craftsmen in Kuwait Market for the Year 1904<sup>23</sup>**

| Number | Type of Trade or Vocational Activity   | Number | Type of Trade or Vocational Activity   |
|--------|--|--------|--|
| 36     | Piece goods dealers  | 32     | Dates merchants  |
| 21     | Goldsmiths   | 16     | Druggists  |
| 11     | Blacksmiths  | 28     | Fruiterers   |
| 12     | Tinsmiths  | 24     | Rice merchants   |
| 7      | Gunsmiths  | 15     | Wheat dealers  |
| 11     | Lamp makers  | 13     | Leather workers  |
| 132    | Dealers in Bedouin requests (such as<br>carpets, cheap cloaks, nails,<br>horseshoes, lead and shot). | 3      | Professional cooks   |
|        |  | 2      | Oil pressers   |
| 13     | Leather workers  | 147    | Grocers and druggists  |
| 17     | Quilt makers   | 9      | Ghee sellers   |
| 23     | Haberdashers   | 9      | Grass sellers  |
| 21     | Tailors  | 35     | Brokers of private goods on<br>commission who had fixed<br>places of business. |
| 37     | Cloak embroiderers   |        |  |
| 7      | Gold and silk braid workers  | 12     | Tea shops  |
| 12     | Arab head fillets makers   | 7      | Cafés  |
| 13     | Barbers  | 250    | Warehouses for the storage<br>of grain.  |
| 11     | Confectioners  |        |  |
| 8      | Bakers   | 70     | Business offices   |
| 11     | Fishmongers  | 6      | Stores for the material used<br>in pressing oil.                               |
| 36     | Butchers   |        |  |
| 14     | Tobacconists   |        |  |

The logical conclusion to be drawn from the above table is that Kuwait City was very important commercial centre for both the nomadic and the sedentary population. Within this commercial centre a complex division of labour existed. The major discernible divisions included the dealers in Bedouin requests and the craft workers whose products and work were marketed beyond the bounds of the city to the Bedouins.

<sup>23</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.1054.

More importantly, Kuwait market provided the framework that linked the sedentary community in the city with other communities in the region and the region as a whole to a wider world outside the Arabian Gulf. Of special significance in the regional economy were the Bedouins. Bedouins had completely relied on the Kuwait market for obtaining food, cloths, weapons and all of the manufactured goods and equipment required for herding activities. They also relied on the market of Kuwait in marketing their products which were sold to the Kuwaiti merchants who then either marketed them locally or sent them abroad as exports.

It can, however, be said that Kuwait City was the commercial centre not only for the city dwellers but also for the Bedouins and urban centres in different parts of central Arabia, Syria and southern Iraq who made good profits from trading in Kuwaiti markets. Among the most important commodities that were carried by caravans from Kuwait to the hinterland of Arabia were rice, wheat, barley, coffee, sugar, tea, cloths, weapons, and other materials which came to the Kuwaiti port from Iran, India, Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa and re-exported to the markets of Najd, Al-Qasim, 'Aneizah, Buridah, Al-Hasa, Jubayl, and others.<sup>24</sup>

Kuwaiti imports from these places were Bedouins products such as sheep, camels, skins, and wool.<sup>25</sup> In addition, they come back with the products of the markets that the caravans reached in order to sell them in Kuwait or re-export them.<sup>26</sup> Kuwait also played an important role in exporting horses from Najd which were gathered in the Jahrah village in Kuwait to be re-exported to India. This trade was practised by a number of Kuwaiti traders and it prospered during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Lewis Pelly mentions in his reports on Kuwaiti trade between 1863-65 that Kuwait was exporting 800 horses annually, the average prices of each horse was 300 rupees, and it exported wool with annual income of 40 000 rupees. The value of the Kuwaiti trade from horses at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was expected to have reached 90 0000 rupees annually.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Al-'Adhamah, op. cit., p.71, Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Saqer, *Al-Kuwait Qabl Al-Zait [Kuwait before the Oil]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1984), p.17.

<sup>25</sup> Al-'Adhamah, op. cit., p.71, Ghanim Sultan, *Al-Milaha Al-Arabia wa Ahmiatuha Qadiman wa Haditan [Arab Navigation and its Ancient and Modern Importance]* (Kuwait: Moasasat Al-Taquadum Al-'Almi, 1988), p.119.

<sup>26</sup> "Markets in Kuwait: Old and Modern", *Al-Arabi Magazine*, (66), May 1964, pp. 129-30.

<sup>27</sup> Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, *Safahat min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [Pages from the History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968), pp.61-62.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis Pelly, quoted in Abu Hakimah, *History of Kuwait*, p.232.



Although these figures go back to earlier times, they show clearly that Bedouin products were of greatest importance to the Kuwaiti external trade. These products kept flooding Kuwaiti markets during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, except for horses, which suffered a decline in demand in the Indian markets. The volume of trade between Kuwait and Najd was estimated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be around 500 000- 600 000 rupees annually, however it decreased to 300 000 rupees yearly with the outbreak of the First World War and the eruption of disputes in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula between Al-Saud and Al-Rashid.<sup>29</sup>

Another relevant point which needed to be highlighted here is the Kuwaiti currency. Kuwaitis in their commercial dealings used to employ different types of currency. For example, the gold Ottoman lira, the British sterling, the Maria Teresa dollar or riyal, which was known as the French riyal, the Indian rupee, and the Iranian *gawareen* were all used in Kuwait. In addition, other currency existed made of bad silver metal such as the Basri riyals, and the copper riyals.<sup>30</sup>

This situation was imposed on Kuwait because it was a desert state with an economy that relied on pearls and trade with neighbouring and distance countries. The sheikhs of Kuwait tried to issue their own currency in 1886 from copper but the use of this currency was short-lived.<sup>31</sup>

Although it is difficult to define the periods of dealing with the currencies mentioned, it is possible to have an idea about the exchange rate by comparing the percentage of these currencies with each other. The Maria Teresa dollar during the period 1905-30 averaged between 133-165 Indian rupees,<sup>32</sup> it also equalled five Iranian *gawareen*. The Indian rupee was equal to 2.5 grain or 0.186621 grams of pure gold.<sup>33</sup> It was also equal to 1.5 British shilling or 33 American cents.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.668.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.319.

<sup>31</sup> Majidah Faiq Jundi, *Al-Siayah Al-Naqdhiah fi Al-Kuwait 1970-79 [The Monetary Policy in Kuwait 1970-79]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, undated), p.17.

<sup>32</sup> The Persian Gulf trade Reports 1905-1940, *Reports on the Trade of Kuwait 1905-1940* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1987), different pages.

<sup>33</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1951), p.319. See also Abdullmuna'aim Al-Sayid Ali, *Al-Tatwar Al-Tariekhi lil Al-Andhima Al-Naqdhiah fi Al-Aqtar Al-Arabia [The Historical Development of the Monetary Systems in the Arab Countries]* (Beirut: Centre of the Arab Unity Studies, 1983), p.135.

<sup>34</sup> Sayid Nofil, *Al-Khalij Al-Arabi aw Al-Hodod Al-Sharqiah Lil Al-Watan Al-Arabi [The Arabian Gulf or the Eastern Borders of the Arab World]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Talabah, 1969), p.196.

The merchants agreed among themselves on the exchange rate of these currencies, and therefore they had no preferences of a specific currency. This situation was changed with the outbreak of the First World War and the decline of the Ottoman influence, especially in Kuwait. This pushed merchants to deal basically in Indian rupees because of the close trade connection between India and Kuwait.<sup>35</sup> This was the currency that Kuwait and all other Arabian Gulf sheikdoms were unofficially tied to since 1835<sup>36</sup> and continued until 1959 when the Indian government issued special rupees for the Arabian Gulf region. These rupees continued in Kuwait until the issuance of the first Kuwaiti currency, the Kuwaiti Dinar, in 1961.<sup>37</sup>

### **8.4.2 Kuwait Customs**

The customs tax from the caravan's trade, which was given to the sheikh of Kuwait before the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, was calculated according to the kind of goods. A merchant paid a certain amount of money for each camel.<sup>38</sup> Some revenues were occasionally in kind such as fish and some of the Bedouin products.<sup>39</sup> The tax was three percent of the goods and this tax was voluntary self-imposed by the merchants due to the absence of any customs departments in Kuwait at that time.<sup>40</sup>

The first customs department was established in Kuwait during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak. It was a small and simple administrative unit. The sheikh instructs one of his guards (*fidawi*) to supervise all the revenues of land and sea.<sup>41</sup> The customs fees were fixed at the beginning, when the department was set up, by 4% of the goods size. This rate was increased to 5% and later to 10% on some items. In addition, Sheikh Mubarak imposed tax on houses that were sold. The amount of this tax was a third of the price of the property.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook*, p.320.

<sup>36</sup> Nourah Al-Qasimi, "Al-Wojoud Al-Hindi fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi" [The Indian Presence in the Arabian Gulf], Unpublished MA Thesis (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University, 1984), p.107.

<sup>37</sup> The Kuwaiti Dinar equals 2 48828 gram of pure gold. It is divided into 1000 pennies (fills). The Indian rupee equals 75 Kuwaiti pennies which mean that the Kuwaiti Dinar is 13 30 Indian rupees. Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook*, p.320.

<sup>38</sup> Khalid Al-Sa'adoun, *Al-'Alaqat Bain Nijd wa Al-Kuwait (Relations between Najd and Kuwait)* (Riyadh: Matbo'aat Darat King Abdul Aziz, 1983), p.140.

<sup>39</sup> Hassan Mahmoud Suleiman, *Al-Kuwait Madhiha wa Hadhiruha [Kuwait: Its Past and Present]* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba Al-Ahlia, 1986), p.49.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.96.

<sup>41</sup> Musa Hanoun Ghaban, "Tatwer Nidham Al-Hukum wa Al-Idarah fi Al-Kuwait" [The Development of the System of Governing and Administration in Kuwait], Unpublished MA Thesis (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University, 1988), p.58.

<sup>42</sup> Suleiman, op. cit., p.49. Al-Sa'adoun, op. cit., p.190.

In 1908, Sheikh Mubarak summoned all merchants and asked them to define a fixed percentage on all imported goods in order to cover the government's expenses. The merchants decided to pay a percentage of 4%. This percentage remained unchanged until Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (1921-50) raised it to 6%.<sup>43</sup> The revenue of this tax was divided among the government department of the state, which started to emerge in the early 1930s. It was decided that 1% would go to health services, 1% to education, 0.5% to municipality, and the rest to other government expenditures.<sup>44</sup>

On the whole, these taxes represented an important income for the sheikh of Kuwait. It was regarded the largest source of revenue for the government for that time. The customs tax on importation was estimated to be \$20 000 annually, the sea customs were \$150 000 annually<sup>45</sup> whereas the sheikh of Kuwait received \$28 500 annually from the Bedouins as shown in the following table:

**Table 8.2**  
**The Annual Proceeds of the Sheikh of Kuwait from the Bedouins<sup>46</sup>**

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| \$25 000 | Alms on Bedouins' flocks                |
| \$2 000  | Tax on sheep sold in the Kuwait market  |
| \$1 500  | Tax on camels sold in the Kuwait market |

The number of annual trade caravans between Kuwait and the neighbouring counties was estimated to be around twenty caravans from south of Najd and two caravans from Jabal Shammer in central Arabia.<sup>47</sup> This was the case until the eruption of disputes between Al-Saud and Al-Rashid. There is no accurate information about the number of caravans between Kuwait and southern Iraq or between Kuwait and Syria.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that making an accurate account of the volume of the financial rewards coming from the trade exchange between Kuwait and the adjacent

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>44</sup> Ibrahim Abduh, *Dawlat Al-Kuwait Al-Hadithah [The Modern State of Kuwait]* (Cairo: Dar Al-'Aroubah, 1962), p.135.

<sup>45</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., p.1076.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.1316, and also Adel Mohammed Abdulmugani, *Al-Iqtisad Al-Kuwaiti Al-Qadim [The Ancient Economy of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, Undated), p.138.

countries is difficult. This is due to the lack of accurate statistics that could define the volume of these annual dealings. Furthermore, the prevailing political conditions which governed the increase and decrease in the level of interactions made the above-mentioned statistics not one hundred percent accurate. However, it is possible to measure the volume of this interaction and its importance for Kuwait by noticing the impact of the trade problem between Kuwait and Najd and between Kuwait and Iraq and by noticing the impact of the British siege during the First World War on the economic life in Kuwait.

The problem between Kuwait and Najd goes back to 1913 when Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, the governor of Najd, dominated Al-Hasa and controlled important naval outlets at *Al-Uqair*, *Al-Qattif*, and *Jubayl*. Ibn Saud sought to make these ports a substantial source of income for his country and benefit from their financial rewards. Another reason for this problem was the inability of Ibn Saud to impose customs fees on goods coming to his country through caravan routes. It is well known that a large number of his subjects, the inhabitants of Najd and central Arabia (merchants or Bedouins) favoured dealing with the Kuwaiti markets through desert routes.<sup>48</sup> As a consequence, he made many efforts to solve this problem with the sheikhs of Kuwait by giving some suggestions such as setting up a customs firm for him in Kuwait to collect the tax on these goods before they reach his country or appointing a Kuwait officer to collect this tax and send it to him. All these suggestions were rejected by the Kuwaiti sheikhs. Constantly, Ibn Saud ordered his subjects (merchants and Bedouins) to stop trading with Kuwait and to turn to his ports instead. This caused a very big crisis between the two countries which remained having a negative impact upon trade and the economic situation, until 1942 when the two sides signed a general agreement regarding trade, borders and travelling issues.<sup>49</sup>

This impasse was a commercial disaster for Kuwait whose markets experienced serious losses. Kuwaiti income of customs declined from 100 000 rupees in 1922 to 60 000 rupees in 1932.<sup>50</sup> With regard to this, the historian Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid writes:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., *Najat Al-Gina'ai "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait Bain Al-Harbain 1919-1939"* [The Economic and Political Development of Kuwait in the Inter War Period, 1919-1939], Unpublished MA Thesis, (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University 1972), p.84.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp.108-9, also Dickson, op. cit., p.49.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.668.

This crisis—between Kuwait and Najd—led Kuwait to the verge of bankruptcy...after you were seeing the markets and shops full, and after you were seeing caravans coming and going one after another, after all of this, the situation became desperate to the extent that if the ruling sheikh felt it, he would know that the country was going to ruins...the reason for all of this was the problem between Najd and Kuwait.<sup>51</sup>

This clearly shows the importance of trade exchange through the desert and the economic role it could play in raising the living standards and the development of the economic life in the city. It also shows the implication of the economic recession that was inflicted on Kuwait.

The importance of this trade interaction is also shown through the rejection of the Kuwaiti sheikhs to offer any solution to the smuggling problem with Iraq. This problem emerged due to the differences in the customs systems in both countries. In Iraq, the system was designed to increase the revenue of the state. As a consequence, the Iraqi government was increasing the tax to more than 100%. On the contrary, in Kuwait, the system was based on decreasing the customs fees in order to attract merchants to its ports and markets and this would ultimately lead to the increase in the volume of external trade exchange.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the customs fees did not exceed 6%.<sup>53</sup> The difference in the two customs system led to the spread of the process of smuggling from Kuwait to Iraq due to the gap in prices between the two countries and the huge profit smugglers could make. This problem persisted until the discovery of oil when trade and fees were no longer the primary source of income for both countries.

The importance of this trade can also be seen through the response of the sheikh of Kuwait, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah (1917-21), to the British request to stop exporting foodstuffs to their enemies during the First World War. The sheikh of Kuwait was completely unwilling to implement the siege imposed by Britain on the export of the food from Kuwait during the war. Therefore, the British were forced to place some of their officers to control and supervise the implementation of the siege on the borders of

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<sup>51</sup> Al-Rashid, *op. cit.*, pp.65-56.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Gina'ai *op. cit.*, p.148.

<sup>53</sup> Abduh, *op. cit.*, p.135.

Kuwait.<sup>54</sup> This was because the Kuwaiti commitment would only mean depriving itself of an economic reward that comes from its borders through trade.

All these three problems indicate clearly that the caravan trade was a very important economic activity not only for Kuwait but for the region as a whole. It was an essential economic activity for a substantial part of the population and any decline or prosperity this occupation witnessed reflected directly on all other aspects of life.

The prosperity of caravan trade and the increase of the volume of trade between Kuwait and the neighbouring countries were due to the lack of restrictions on trade in Kuwait, low customs fees, simplification of procedures, and the Kuwaitis' good manners and treatment. These factors, in addition to the strategic location and the big trade fleet, had an impact on the development and prosperity of this important economic activity.<sup>55</sup>

## **8.5 Organization of Work and Economic Relations Involved in the Caravan Trade**

The trade caravans were often comprised of a number of camels, and sometimes donkeys and mules owned or hired by professional persons called *Jammaleen* (cameleers). Each cameleer mostly owned a fleet of between 40 and 140 camels and used them as means of transportation between different cities throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The task of those cameleers was not only to rent their camels but also to accompany the caravans from the start until the destination and to provide guards and apprentices who were responsible for loading and unloading camels. All these tasks were done for an amount of money paid by the merchants to whom these caravans were transporting goods. This amount also included tributes to be paid to tribes in the routes of caravans.<sup>56</sup>

It might be useful to realise at this point that there is a mix-up between the terms *Jammaleen* and *'aqilat*: many resources have used the two terms to refer to the same category of people. It should be pointed out that there was not a great deal of variation

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, , op. cit., vol.4 , p.106.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Saqer, op. cit., p.67. Also Al-Khususi, op. cit., p.265.

<sup>56</sup> Soraya Al-Torki and Donald Cole, "Mujtama'a Maqbl Al-Naft fi Al-Jazera Al-Arabia: Mujtama'a Morakab am Faudhah Qabalia" [The Arabian Peninsula's Society before the Oil: Tribal Anarchy or Compounded Community], *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi Magazine*, (141), November 1991, p.50. Also Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, vol. 1 (London: Jonathan & The Medici Society, 1926), p. 11.

between the two categories and many *jammaleen* worked as *'aqilat* and vice versa. The *jammaleen* can be best described as the organizers of the trade caravans between different cities of Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Arabian Gulf. The *'aqilat*, on the other hand, is a term used to refer to a group of people who were primarily engaged in buying animals (camels, horses and in a lesser degree sheep) from Bedouin tribes in Arabia to re-sell them in the markets of Syria, Iraq and Egypt. They were town dwellers but specialized in buying animals from the Bedouins and selling them in the markets of the cities. Although some resources have mentioned that the *'aqilat* was a particular pure Arab race or even tribe,<sup>57</sup> this interpretation is completely wrong: the *'aqilat* was not a tribe, it was an occupational category or identity referring to a group of people who were of various tribal origins and had formed a network that specialized in buying and selling animals. They operated on a wide scale throughout Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Some of the *'aqilat*, especially those who traveled frequently between the Bedouin camps in Arabia and urban markets in different cities, might have originally come from the same ancestry but this can not be applied to other *'aqilat* who were settled in communities in Baghdad, Kuwait, Al-Qasim and Buridah in Arabia, Syria and Egypt.<sup>58</sup> The only distinction, therefore, between the cameleers and *'aqilat* was that while the cameleers were traders for themselves who buy goods from one place and re-sell them in another one or transporters of goods for a merchant in one place and his agent in another one. The *'aqilat* were an animal's wholesale traders who work for themselves by buying animals from the Bedouins and re-selling them in higher prices in the urban markets.<sup>59</sup> It was also possible for the *Jammaleen* and *'aqilat* to be engaged with these two occupations at once, for example the *'aqialy* can buy animals from the Bedouin camps on his way to the city and sells them in the city market, then returns with a load of goods to a particular merchant in his own city.

Although there is no detailed information about the occupation of cameleers and *'aqilat*—how they acquired it or if it was heredity—it is possible to argue that their tasks were based on their relationship with the tribes on the ways of the caravans. They might have belonged to one of these tribes or there might have been a sort of agreement between

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<sup>57</sup> Dickson, op. cit., p.112. Doughty, op. cit., p. 11. Lady Anne Blunt, *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 142.

<sup>58</sup> Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928), pp.278-79.

<sup>59</sup> Louise E. Sweet, "The Arabian Peninsula and Annotated Bibliography", in: *The Central Middle East: a Handbook of Anthropology*, edited by Louise E. Sweet, vol.2 (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1968), p.329.

them and the tribes that the tribes would guarantee the security of the caravans for certain amount of money to be paid.

In most cases, the cameleer would deal with a particular merchant who had trade relations with an agent in the market of the destination. The merchant would give the cameleer a list of the goods he wanted to purchase in order to give it to the agent who in his turn would prepare the demands and would give them back to the cameleer to be given to the merchant. For example, a merchant from Najd would agree with a cameleer to bring his demands from an agent in the Kuwait market or vice versa. In other cases, if there was a relationship of trust, the merchant would give the money to the cameleer and ask him to make the purchases on his behalf. This way of obtaining goods was more advantageous to the merchant, because the agent charged a commission while the cameleer would charge only for the service. The merchant, in all cases, would pay the cameleer a certain amount of money for the service. This amount of money, however, was not defined. It varied according to the size of the caravans, the distance of the route from the departing point to the arrival point, and the volume of the goods carried by each camel.<sup>60</sup> In most cases, payments were paid per load and according to the types of goods. The camel roughly carried about 200 kg of sugar or rice. Some of this money had to go to the camels' owners if the cameleer was not the owner.<sup>61</sup>

Although wages and fees had always been the method of paying for work in caravan trade, the sharing of profits, taking into account capital and labour, and often also responsibility, was also common. Sometimes the merchant and the *jammal* would work together on a shared basis in which the merchant would provide money and the cameleer would provide work. In such a case the net profit would be divided between the cameleer and the merchant in a way that the latter would get two-thirds or half of it. If the agreement was that the merchant was to get two-thirds, he must stand the entire loss that might result from the transaction. In the other case the loss was shared equally.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the cameleers, in addition to their work as transporters, worked as merchants for themselves: they used to export goods from one city and re-sold them at a higher price in another one. They also used to buy camels, horses, sheep and other

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<sup>60</sup> Abu Hakimah, *History of Kuwait*, pp.276-77.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Torki and Donald, *op. cit.*, p.50.

<sup>62</sup> Musil, *op. cit.*, p.279.



Bedouin products and re-sold them at higher prices in the markets of their destinations. They also supplied the Bedouins with arms, cloths, coffee and many other manufactured goods.<sup>63</sup>

It is possible to obtain a clear picture on how the caravan trips through the desert were organised from Ahmed Abu Hakimah's, book, *History of Kuwait*, in which he cites Captain Matthew Jenour. Jenour travelled the desert route from Aleppo to Iraq in 1785 and offered the following description:

Preparations hinged on the way the person want to travel, does he want a quick trip or slow or does he want to reduce expenses? If he wants a quick trip, he should agree with 4-6 Arabs, to take the minimum possible of stuff, and in this case he leaves everything to his guards to secure him because they know better what should be done and the best routes to be taken. If he wants a slow trip, he should buy in this case tents, mules, donkeys, camels, and food and this required larger number of the guards. The third way, which is the cheapest and most common, was caravan, this comprises of a number of traders, travellers some of them ride horses and majority ride camels. They move regardless of their numbers under strong security. All of them move with instruction of sheikh. The shortcoming of this way that it takes a longer period.<sup>64</sup>

Although Jenour was talking about the trade between Iraq and Syria in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the third way he mentioned —caravans— was the one which continued until the mid of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the region of the Arabian Gulf in general. The sheikh of the caravan that Jenour mentioned was the cameleer (the *Jammal*), under whose control and leadership the caravan was. In most cases, the cameleer owned a private herd of camels and animals. He may have obtained them through inheritance, but the major way of obtaining them was through a process known as *buda'aah*. This process was a way of joint investment between a merchant and a cameleer. The merchant would buy camels and entrust them to a cameleer who made journeys with them until the money obtained from the transports of goods by them covered their cost. At this point, the merchant and the cameleer became owners of the camels on a fifty-fifty basis. If one of them no longer wished to continue the relationship, the camel was sold and the money obtained

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Al-Torki and Cole, op. cit., p.50.

<sup>64</sup> Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakimah, *History of Kuwait*, p.277.

from the sale was split in half and shared. If, on the other hand, both wanted to continue the relationship, the merchant would pay the cameleer half the market value of the camel. Then the process would begin over again as though the camel had been newly purchased.<sup>65</sup>

Each cameleer would have a number of apprentices (*subiyan*) working for him and accompanying the caravan. The number of these apprentices depended mostly on the number of camels in the caravan. They were either the cameleer's own sons, relatives or hired by him. The main task of these youths was loading and unloading the camels. These youths were divided into groups within the caravan. Each group was responsible for loading and unloading a certain number of camels in the caravan. In addition, there was a herdsman, usually a Bedouin, who accompanied the caravans with the task of supervising and grazing the camels and the animals along the way. All these apprentices and herdsmen were waged workers who were paid according to an agreed upon method of payment before the start of the caravan journey.<sup>66</sup>

## **8.6 The Bedouins' Contribution to the Caravan Trade**

The caravan trade was not only confined to merchants and caravans, it was also a very important source of income for the noble Bedouin tribes. The Bedouins were an influential part of it. It should be remembered that the noble tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula remained as independent camel breeding societies whose social status, power and prestige depended on their great camel herds and means of maintaining them at full strength. Accordingly, these tribes were essentially autonomous and wielded a great deal of military strength by which they occupied huge territories in the desert and controlled all caravan trade routes throughout Arabia. The control of caravan routes had long been one of the sources of tribal income and power. However, the relationships between these tribes and other societies were managed in terms of mechanisms of inter-chiefdom, not mechanisms of state apparatus. And their control over caravans' routes and imposing tributes for the right of passage should be seen not only as a tribal custom but as a mechanism which provided protection and safe passage in the absence of state control.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Al-Torki and Cole, op. cit., p.50.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p.49.

<sup>67</sup> Louise E. Sweet, "Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouin: A Mechanism of Ecological Adaptation", *American Anthropologist*, vol. 67, 1965, p.1134.

There are, however, two important points to be emphasised when considering the Bedouin participation in the caravan trade. On one hand, Bedouin tribes were the only producers of camels (the principal means of transportation in the caravan trade). The camel, by its capacity to tolerate heat and lack of water and moist forage and to bear heavy loads, was the most favourite and suitable means of transportation for caravaneers throughout Arabia. More importantly, Bedouins were the key source of many principal goods traded by caravans to be consumed by the cities' dwellers or re-exported to the international markets (such as animals, meat, wool, skins, ghee, dried cheese, etc).

Accordingly, during the summer, where the weather was very hot and the temperature was extremely high, cameleers and *'aqilat* did not make commercial trips. Instead, they used to go out to the Bedouin camps based around wells to buy camels and other Bedouin products to re-sell them in urban markets. In such a case, the cameleer or *'aqialy* would travel to the Bedouin camp —whether as a trader for himself or as an agent for a city dweller merchant— and after permission from the sheikh of the tribe or the clan he would put up his white tents in the same camp. The Bedouins then would bring their camels and other products to be sold to him for cash. Sometimes, if the cameleer brought arms, ammunition or other manufactured goods from the city, the Bedouins might exchange their animals for these articles.<sup>68</sup> It worth pointing out that the sheikh of the tribe or clan —in which the cameleer had put up his tents to buy the Bedouin products— used to take a commission from the cameleer on the sale of every camel. The amount of this commission was estimated by Alois Musil during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be one-half or one *majidi* (Ottoman currency) (\$0.45). In return, the cameleer was regarded as the host of the sheikh and enjoyed his protection along his stay within the *dirah* of this sheikh.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, when cameleers or *'aqialt* bought animals from the Bedouins, these animals were branded by the marks of the tribe and left to graze within its territory until they took them to the market. Cameleers mostly had their own herdsmen who would accompany their herds along the way to the urban market but they also used to hire

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<sup>68</sup> Musil, op. cit., pp.279-80.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

herders from the tribe from where they were buying at the time. These herdsmen were usually from sheep and goat herding tribes.<sup>70</sup>

Camels and other Bedouin products were also brought by the Bedouins themselves to the town market during the summer to be exchanged for foods and manufactured goods. It is worthy of note, however, that each tribe throughout Arabia had its special or favourite towns which they used to go up to for their necessities. For instance, from time immemorial, Kuwait was the supply town and favourite market for the Mutair, Harb, Shummar, 'Awazim and Northern 'Ajman tribes.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, many merchants worked in connection with Bedouin caravans which came to the *Safat* market where they unloaded their commodities. Other merchants in the town managed to specialise in supplying the Bedouins' needs. Most of them were from Bedouin origins, and there were some 132 merchants specialising in selling to suit the Bedouin needs.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, and in spite of their adaptability as producers and consumers, the Bedouins never took part in commerce (as merchants) on a large scale and never became merchants on their own account. Historically, Bedouins regarded themselves as free camel herders and raiders —these were the only manly jobs. They scorned other labour in agriculture, trade and crafts which were performed by slaves or by the settled population. More importantly, production, in the nomadic perspective, was evaluated not by its exchange value, but rather by its use value. Describing a camel merchant's trip to a Bedouin camp in Northern Arabia Doughty noticed that:

They purchase only of the best beast: although they bid high prices the Arab [Bedouins] are never very willing to sell them. They camel they think is a profitable possession, a camel will bring forth a camel, but money is a barren good that passes quite away in the using. Commonly, they will sell of their beats only when they have some present need of riyals, and then sooner of the males; but they are the better of carriage.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Also Sweet, "Camel Pastoralism in North Arabia", p. 145.

<sup>71</sup> Dickson, op. cit., p.49.

<sup>72</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., vol. 2, p.1054.

<sup>73</sup> Doughty, op. cit., p.233.

Furthermore, Donald Cole stated that: “the Al-Murrah keep camels for subsistence and only rarely exchange them for cash or barter in any markets”.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, money as a medium of exchange was not a new thing in the desert.

The other point which needs to be mentioned here is that, as Bedouins used to move freely across the borders of Kuwait, Najd, and Iraq, they became one of the reasons for the economic problems between Kuwait and other adjacent countries over smuggling. By no coincidence at all, pastoralism had been associated with smuggling. The consolidation of national borders and the evolution of contradictory tariffs in neighbouring countries made nomads the ideal group to smuggle contraband between these countries. This was particularly highly developed between Kuwait, Najd and Iraq where extremely different economies border one another and long featureless frontiers were almost impossible to control<sup>75</sup>.

On the other hand, the second and most important part the Bedouins took in the caravan trade was their control of the caravan routes and imposing of tributes on their passage. With the relative absence of any other means of extracting surplus tribal chiefs depended, to some degree, on the extraction of surplus from other societies through tributes and fees. It can be said that the history of the caravan trade in Arabia was intimately connected with the history of the Bedouin tribes and completely subjected to their tribal organization. Movements of caravans across tribal territories, however, were controlled by the tribesmen through a general custom in all tribal territories of Arabia.

All caravans had to pay tributes (*Al-Khawah*) to the superior and powerful tribes while they were passing or trading throughout their *dirahs*. These tributes were paid for the safety and rights of crossing the territory of the tribe. In return, tribes who extract tributes had to grant full protection to the caravans while they were crossing their territories. It should be noted that the grantee of protection and free passage was only exclusive to tribes or clans who were paid. Accordingly, caravaneers used to deal and pay each tribe and, sometime each clan, separately.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Donald Powell Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads* (Chicago: Aldine, 1975), p.102.

<sup>75</sup> Mohammed Al-Farhan, *Al-Kuwait Bain Al-Ams wa Al-Yaom* [Kuwait between Yesterday and Today] (Damascus: Dar Samir Amis, 1959), p.111, Al-Gina'ai op. cit., p.149.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Torki and Cole, op. cit., p.50.

The amount paid to the tribes was subject to bargaining. They either would pay the highest percentage or the tribe would not take responsibility of securing the caravans, which practically meant that the caravans would be subject to raid and loot.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, trading through lands belonging to Bedouin tribes known for their militancy was very expensive. So there were certain procedures to guarantee the immunity of caravaners and their goods. These procedures included what was known as *al-wajeh* (literally face; honour) or the sending of *al-rafiq* (companion) to personally guarantee free passage. *Al-Wajeh* was a sign mostly on a stick or cane with a special notch, the same as the tribal *wasim* (brand) given to caravaner meaning that he is under the protection of this tribe. *Al-Rafiq*, on the other hand, was a man whose duty was to accompany the caravan along the tribe territory and personally guarantee its safe passage.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, tribes who gave *al-wajeh* or sent *al-rafiq* with the caravans became partners in the trade activity in the desert.

It is worth pointing out that tributes were not only paid by caravaners or cameleers. Travellers and *'aqialt* were also subject to the Bedouin raids and, accordingly, they used to pay tributes to the Bedouin tribes. Furthermore, the *'aqialt* used to have in every large tribe or clan what was called *akh* (brother) to whom they pay an annual amount of money in addition to one good riding camel and some gifts. The main task of this *akh* was to restore to them every camel stolen by a member of his clan.<sup>79</sup>

Although there is an ample indication in the literature that tributes were transmitted to the sheikh of the tribe or the clan who would redistribute them among the kin groups of his tribe or clan,<sup>80</sup> a great deal of confusion still remains on the questions of how these tributes were distributed and on what basis? And did the distribution include all the tribe members (sheikhs, tribesmen, servants and slaves) or was it only limited to the sheikhs and tribesmen? And were these tributes distributed equally or not?

However, there is no clear evidence that there was a specific principle of distributing tributes between sheikhs and their followers or whether these tributes were distributed equally or not. It is most likely that the distribution of tributes was based on the same

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<sup>77</sup> Sadlier, op. cit., p. 85. Dickson, op. cit., pp.442-43.

<sup>78</sup> Doughty, op. cit., p. 235. Dickson, op. cit., pp.125-26. See also Christina Phelps Grant, *The Syrian Desert* (London: A. & C. Black, 1937), p.172.

<sup>79</sup> Alois Musil mentioned that the *akh* receives from the *'aqialt* 4 to 5 Turkish pounds (\$18-22.50), one good riding camel and two or three good cloaks annually for this task. Musil, op. cit., p.280.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Torki and Cole, op. cit., p.50. Sweet, "Camel Pastoralism in North Arabia", p.140.

principles of distributing the booty of raids. According to Musil —who spent many years with the *Rwala* Bedouins of North Arabia— the booty of raids was distributed unequally between the participants. By custom, the leaders of expeditions, who were mostly aspiring young men of the chief lineage, received more of the booty than the rank and file of raiders<sup>81</sup> and other clients and servants were regarded as non-combatants and received nothing.<sup>82</sup> On this basis, the chief lineage members of the tribes and clans were entitled to receive more of the tributes than their tribesmen. While other subordinate groups (herdsmen, servants and slaves) were definitely out of the distribution process at all.

The chief lineage members of the tribe were, by custom, entitled to enjoy many rights than others. They restricted the shiekhship as a legitimation for themselves. They maintained their exclusiveness through rules of martial exchange with their close relatives (first cousin marriage system) or with the chief lineage members of other tribes. They were also the collectors of tax and alms from their followers and tributes from other subordinate tribes, villagers and caravans. One result of this is that all these rights enforced the sheikhs' position both within the social structure of the nomadic society and with the central government they belonged to.

It is important here to mention that central governments in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula as whole were so dependant on the Bedouin tribes who provided a crucial source of income and a significant and indispensable military force for their protection. Accordingly, most of these governments paid special attention to the sheikhs of Bedouin tribes to obtain their loyalties and to achieve strong backing from their tribes.<sup>83</sup> As a consequence, it is possible to argue that with the absence of state control in the desert, Bedouin sheikhs had enjoyed an ultimate authority and high position among their people. The superiority they achieved was derived mainly from the power they wielded in society through the economic resources they owned. Furthermore, this situation was consolidated by the encouragement of central governments which used the Bedouin sheikhs as representatives of the central authority in the desert. Besides their essential task as the leaders of the tribes, Bedouin sheikhs became the representatives of central governments in the desert. They used to collect tax and alms and keep peace

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<sup>81</sup> Musil, *op. cit.*, pp.441-61.

<sup>82</sup> Sweet, "Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouin", pp.1136 -46.

<sup>83</sup> Jacqueline Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p.27.

among the Bedouin tribes on the behalf of the government during peacetime and lead tribesmen as military forces during war. In return, central authorities reinforced their positions among their tribesmen by supporting them and giving them part of the tax they collected.

## **8.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is evident that the caravan trade was a key element of the Kuwaiti economy in general and the traditional mode of production in particular. Besides being a key pillar of the Kuwaiti economy in the pre-oil era, this economic activity was a very important link between the Kuwaiti market and the regional economy (Bedouins) and between the region and other different economies outside Arabia.

More importantly, this economic activity, as an essential element of the traditional mode of production, was characterized by its particular mechanism and its specific relations between those who were involved in it. The caravan trade or camel transportation was organized as a profit-making enterprise which entailed the participation of many members from both nomadic and settled communities. These participants, however, were from different economic and social standings and, accordingly, their relationship was established on an unequal basis and unsurprisingly led to an unequal result.

It is important to note that, whether or not the relationship between those participants was exploitive and led to an equal distribution of the final product. These factors were of intrinsic interest, but they should not obscure the fundamental point that the monopoly of capital and means of production (camels) was the key element of determining the nature of this relationship.

In order to obtain a clearer idea of how relations of production were organized and how surplus was extracted in the caravan trade, the participants in this occupation should be divided into two categories:

1-City dwellers: merchants (the capital owners), cameleers and *'aqilat* (the organizers and leaders of caravans) and loaders (the apprentices or *subiyan*) who do most of loading and unloading work.



2-Nomads: Bedouin sheikhs (the tributes and commission takers) guards and *rafiqs* (guides and protection providers) and herdsmen who were hired by caravaneers to graze their animals along the caravan way.

As this economic activity entailed the availability of money to buy goods and animals (the principal means of production) and to hire labourers and pay tributes and fees along the caravan route, the caravan trade depended almost entirely on the merchants (the capital owners). The ownership of capital was the major and indispensable element in this economic activity. As a consequence, the class of merchants, whether in Kuwait or in other urban centres throughout Arabia, Southern Iraq and Syria, was the backbone of the caravan trade and all other participants from both the settled and nomadic categories were connected to them.

Within the city dwellers category, merchants occupied the key position in this economic activity. All other participants (cameleers and '*aqilat* and their apprentices), because of their capital shortage, were completely dependant on them as this occupation was their key source of living. Within the nomadic category, all partakers (sheikhs, guides, *rafiqs* and herdsmen) were also connected to the merchants through the tributes and fees they received for their participation.

The distinction between the relations of these two categories with the merchants was based on the nature of the relations of production involved in this economic activity and the method of surplus extraction. Taking into account the unequal amount of effort expended in obtaining profits and ways of distributing them in the caravan trade, it seems apparent that relations between the merchants and other city dwellers participants took an unequal form: the merchants were the most advantaged group in this activity followed by the cameleers and then latter the loaders. It is evident that the ownership of capital and means of production (camels) was severed from ownership of labour power. In addition, the relationship between the owners and non-owners permitted the transformation of labour power into a commodity (wage-relations). Through their exclusive control of capital and then the means of production, capital owners were able to control both the conditions under which others can work and the ways of distributing the final product.

On the other hand, relations between merchants and nomadic participants took another form. Nomadic participants (sheikhs, guides and *rafiqs*) had never taken direct part in trade or had become merchants on their own account. Consequently, they had never become under the control of the merchants or were in desperate need to work with them. On the contrary, Bedouins, by virtue of their camel pastoralism which provided the basis of a viable economy and by virtue of their ability to move and dominate huge territories and control communication routes, maintained a distinctive pattern and a dominant position over other societies and settlements in their territories.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, they were in a superior position over the merchants who were in a constant need for: Firstly, Bedouin products which constituted a substantial part of the merchants' transactions and, secondly, the Bedouin sheikhs' consent and protection to use communication routes within their territories. As a result, the caravan trade played an essential part in the nature of relationships between the merchants and Bedouin chiefs because it made possible the transfer of part of the surplus from the former to the latter.

To some extent, it is also possible to talk about exploitation and unequal distribution of gains within the Bedouin category participating in the caravan trade. Taking into account the amount of effort expended by each of these partakers (sheikhs, guides, guards and *rafiqs*) in obtaining profits from caravans and comparing that with the distribution of these profits between them, it is very clear that there was a great deal of variation. Bedouin sheikhs, the aristocrats of the Bedouin society, who had never taken a direct part in this commercial process, were the most benefited group while others (guides, *rafiqs*, guards, etc.), who were involved directly in this business, gained less portion from the returns. Most importantly, it should not be forgotten that although tribal territories were owned communally by all members of the tribe, Bedouin sheikhs had the final word in using them and giving permission to other tribes and caravans to use or cross them. No Bedouin would think of disobeying the mandates of his sheikh. Accordingly, giving permission to caravans to pass and taking part in them was based on the consent and decisions taken by the Bedouin sheikhs and no Bedouin can do so without his sheikh's permission.<sup>85</sup> As a result, it is possible to say that the role of the Bedouin sheikhs in the caravan trade was not less important than that of the merchants.

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<sup>84</sup> Sweet, "Camel Pastoralism in North Arabia", p.130.

<sup>85</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, p.172.

Both played a distinctive role as a dominant group within their categories and as an essential part in this occupation in general.

In the light of these considerations, one can argue that merchants (in the city) and Bedouin sheikhs (in the desert) were the two major effective participants in the caravan trade. Both were in a superior position that enabled them to control this economic activity. Because of their high positions, which were derived primarily from the power each group exercised in society through the economic resources they controlled, these two groups were able to set up an established mechanism by which they benefited more and made others completely dependant on them to take part in this economic activity.

Moreover, one may conclude that, in spite of their spatial and cultural differences and political rivalries, these two groups were economically interdependent. And despite what can be described as their inconsistent or quasi-antagonistic relationship, the dominant nomadic strata and merchant exploiting class were able to attain alliances or cooperative relationships that seemed to be aimed at maintaining and consolidating their economic gains in special circumstances.

**Section IV**  
**The Impact of Economic Activities on the Social and Political Structures of Kuwait, 1896-1946**

Geographical and environmental factors, as has been shown in the previous chapters, involved two modes of production (semi-capitalist and traditional modes) which prevailed in Kuwait during 1896-1946. Naturally, the predominance of these two modes of production and their articulation in the Kuwaiti social formation left their mark on the course of the history of Kuwait.

The task of this section, however, is to examine the effects of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production on the social and political structures of the Kuwaiti society (chapters nine and ten). The main aim is to trace to what extent the patterns of ownership of the means of production and the nature of relations of production within the above mentioned modes of production contributed to determining the social and political structures of Kuwait. To what extent did they provide the basis for social mobility and political participation in Kuwait during the period under investigation?

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| <p><b><u>Chapter Nine</u></b><br/><b><u>The Impact of Economic Activities on the Social life in Kuwait, 1896-1946</u></b></p> |
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## **9.1 Introduction**

As has been discussed in previous chapters, the geographical location of Kuwait on the upper part of the Arabian Gulf played a crucial role in forming the nature of life of the inhabitants of Kuwait. This location was of great significance for the establishment and development of Kuwait. The geography and natural environment of Kuwait delineates broadly the interaction of social forces that shaped Kuwaiti society. The combination of arid desert and sea coast outlines two different lifestyles: nomadic and maritime; therefore, the desert and the sea come together to provide the general framework of Kuwaiti society. The combined effect of the desert and the sea reflected on the different social groupings within Kuwaiti society and, of course, on social relations, traditions, customs, and norms.

This chapter, therefore, will examine the effects of the maritime semi-capitalist and traditional modes of productions on the social structure of Kuwait during the period under investigation. The main objectives here are to trace to what extent the predominant social relations, traditions, customs and norms in Kuwaiti society were affected by the pattern of ownership of the means of production and the nature of the production relations. The analysis will focus on questions of whether or not Kuwait, in the period 1896-1946, was a tribal society, or a class-structured society based upon unequal relations of production. And, if so, what was the dynamics of class relations in the Kuwaiti society? This chapter will also investigate the impacts of these two modes of production on the family, the status of women and the cultural production in Kuwaiti society.

## **9.2 The Social Structure of Kuwait during 1896-1946**

The components of the maritime economy and Bedouin economy represented essentially two modes of production embedded in one social formation. The social

formation of Kuwaiti society in general was structured by the combination of the semi-capitalist and the traditional modes of production in which the former was dominant in the sedentary community and the latter was prevailing in the desert. It was natural that the dominance of the semi-capitalist mode of production in the sedentary community led to an extensive variation in the patterns of ownership and relation of production from that of the traditional mode in the desert. The articulation of these two modes of production within the social formation of Kuwait society as a whole (taking into account the tribal, social and religious considerations) helped to a large extent in uniting the society and concealing any sort of antagonism or hostility between these two different but not separated groups of people.

The historical development of the maritime economic activities and the evolution of the forces and relations of production in the Kuwaiti sedentary community led to the emergence of a class society which manifested a semi-capitalist mode of production. The settled community, according to the nature of the ownership of means of production and the pattern of relations of production, had developed into class society as follows:

1- The ruling family and the merchants who constituted a dominant class—in the settled community— which owned most, if not all, the available capital and thus controlled all the economic activities and their means of production. Historically, the ruling family (the Al-Sabah) and the merchants were the first to settle in the small town of Kuwait, transforming it into a thriving commercial port<sup>1</sup>. While the Al-Sabah ruled, the merchants and their crews sailed and traded along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. The merchant class goes back to the Utub tribes—from which the Al-Sabah family is decedent—which moved from the middle of the Arabian Peninsula and settled in Kuwait and a large number of them worked in pearling and trade.<sup>2</sup> Another part of this class was the merchants who came from Basra and settled in Kuwait during the Persian occupation and the spread of plague in Basra

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<sup>1</sup> Since the establishment of Kuwait until 1896 the Al-Sabah family and the merchant class constituted almost one class which jointly dominated the society socially, politically and economically. Since the reign of Sheikh Mubarak, 1896-1915, the merchant class lost much of its political influence on the ruling family. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakima, *The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965* (London: Luzac & Company, 1983), p.23.

during 1775-79. In addition, many also came from neighbouring countries and Iran.<sup>3</sup>

On this basis, the members of the merchant class can be divided into two categories:

A-The merchant group which was composed of the sons and grandsons of original Sunni Kuwaiti families that go back to the tribes of Utub, Bani Khalid and others. This particular group was characterised by the social status, familial affiliation, and high financial status and had the influence and power on both the ruler and other social groups in Kuwait.<sup>4</sup>

B- The group that consisted of those who later came to Kuwait. This group were in the second rank, not only in terms of the class order of wealth but also in terms of the social status and the social and political influence. This was the case because of they possessed less wealth and their families background<sup>5</sup> which prevented them from playing as an effective social role as the first group.

The relationship between the rulers and the merchants, though it had its ups and downs, was mostly close. The merchants, who were wealthy and powerful, were the aristocrats of Kuwait and benefited from their close relation with the ruling family and the latter was economically dependent upon them. In general, the merchant class, though it had lost a substantial part of its political influence on the ruling family since the reign of Sheikh Mubarak (1896-1915), it remained economically and socially as a dominant class over other social classes in the Kuwaiti sedentary community. Furthermore, it took upon itself the task of achieving balance between the ruling family and other social classes, which was entailed by the nature of its economic power and due to its entire monopoly of the capital and means of production needed by both sides. In other words, it can be said that merchants formed a controlling but not a clearly ruling class in the pre-oil Kuwaiti society.

2- The labour class: this includes all the workers in maritime activities (pearling seafaring, shipbuilding, and craftsmen). Added to them the Bedouins who worked as part time labourers in the maritime activities during the summer or as *fidaweyiah* (special guards) for the ruling family sheiks. This class had little power, wealth and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.73-80, J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 Geographical and Statistical (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p.1312.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Hewins, *A Golden Dream: The Miracle of Kuwait* (London: W.H. Allen, 1963), p.179.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed Abdullah Baz, *Political Elite and Political Development in Kuwait*, PhD Thesis (George Washington University, 1981), pp.110-11.

political influence and, despite their long-run oppression, it was unable to develop itself or form a political group united by a common interests. This had come about as a result of the small size of the society, the scarcity of any other alternative economic resources and the absence of any sort of education or institutionalized means by which this class could develop itself and express its opinion.

Consequently, it is possible to argue that as a result of the development of the relations of production within the maritime economic activities (the dominance of one class upon the capital and means of production and the deprivation of the labour forces and bringing them down into poverty), the social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary community developed to a firm hierarchical class structure within the tribal framework of organization. The nascent class structure was based mainly upon the economic criterion (the ownership of the means of production and the position within the division of labour). Nevertheless, this did not conceal the tribal, ethnic and sectarian cleavages which retained its impact on the social interaction. The semi-capitalist mode of production, however, produced a social formation in which these cleavages crystallised along socio-economic lines into a class structure.

On the other hand, the social structure of the Bedouin society was somewhat different. Although, the term nomads or Bedouins includes all those who, lived in the desert and whose labour was organized by a non-economic relationships, it is possible to argue that social stratification between Bedouin tribes in the desert and within each Bedouin tribe was also articulated on an economic base. As a result of the predominant patterns of ownership and relations of production of the traditional mode of production the Bedouin tribes were stratified as follows:<sup>6</sup>

1- Superior or *sharif (asil)* tribes. For centuries these have been the most powerful and most honoured. They considered themselves as pure-bred Bedouin of noble stock. Their superiority was entirely based on their exclusive ownership of camels. In the desert, camels were a source of wealth and power, allowing nomads to cover and control the large grazing areas and watering wells in the desert and to control trading routes crossing their tribal territories.

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<sup>6</sup> H. R. P Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951), pp.108-11, Zahra Dickson Freeth, *Kuwait was my Home* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.68-69.



2- Inferior or non-*sharif* tribes (shepherds) who were less mobile in the desert as they relied primarily on sheep and goats. Therefore, they were less wealthy, weaker and less mobile to control large areas like the *sharifs*. As a consequence, they were considered of not pure descent and were placed a stage lower in the tribal hierarchy. They remained subordinate to the noble tribes working as waged herders or paying tributes to them in exchange of their protection and security.

Nevertheless, although social stratification in the nomadic society appears to represent a status groups in which a number of individuals —who share the same status situation and determined by the distribution of social honour (prestige) — often had a certain lifestyle and can wield social power. However, in spite of the fact that the sharing of kinship and economic elements were only their criteria for entering into a status group, the Bedouin structure itself, had witnessed another social stratification between the members of the tribes based also on economic criterion and was articulated further along socio-economic lines. This stratification was between:

- A- The sheikhs and wealthy Bedouins who occupied the higher position in the top of the social hierarchy of the Bedouin society. Occupying this position entails both noble descent and wealth.
- B- The tribal desert shepherd whose job in life was to care for the sheep of the town dwellers or of the tribal sheikhs. These shepherd tribes were known under the general term of *shawawi* and placed in a rank lower in the social hierarchy.
- C- Finally, at the very bottom were the tinkers, servants and blacksmiths, etc. who represented the unpaid and most exploited labour class in the nomadic society.

Although these divisions had socio-cultural and sectarian roots they developed gradually to a socio-economic divisions shaped by economic factors and acquired economic bases. The right to utilize the means of production and the ability to appropriate the substantial part of the final product and thus accumulate more wealth provided the basis for the permanent superiority of the first group and made the subordinate groups almost entirely dependant on them.

However, despite this rough general division of the Kuwaiti society into two different parts (Bedouins and the city dwellers) and in spite of the great variation in their economic life, these two parts did not remain hostile and distant. On the contrary, they had always been interrelated and constantly interacted. In addition to the Bedouin part time involvement in the maritime economic activities both parts engaged in a reasonably symbiotic relationship in which the exchange of Bedouin products for foods and manufactured goods played a prime role. Within the framework of this symbiotic relationship between nomadic and sedentary people, trade was the major medium of exchange. Commercial exchange generally took two forms: the first involved trading in the local market in Kuwait City which was close to the nomads' migration routes; the second relied on long-distance caravan trading activities which mostly crossed the nomadic tribes' territories and relied on their protection.

More important was the social and tribal overlapping between them as most of the villagers and city dwellers descended from nomadic tribes. As a consequence, all city dwellers, except for the non-Arabs, were of tribal backgrounds and affected in one way or another by the tribal culture. It is worth noting that despite the fact that city dwellers were settled, they were still influenced by Bedouin and tribal principles and many of tribal norms and patterns remained in the settled community. Therefore, the tribe —as an organising framework— continued to exist whether in the form of nomads, or settled city dwellers. The tribe was the basis of the social, economic and political life in Kuwait and in the Arabian Gulf in general.

In the Bedouin society the tribe was a social system based on affiliation to one ancestry. Its relations with other tribes were organised by unwritten traditions and norms. However, other factors such as wealth, power and strength impact on its relations with other tribes. Therefore, a tribe was an economic, political, and social unit in terms of its self-sufficiency and its relations with other tribes. It was headed by a sheikh who held the political and legal power. The tribal council, which consist of heads of clans and families, aided the sheikh. Alliances with other tribes were also made through the sheikh.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Bates and Amel Rassam, *People and Cultures of the Middle East*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1983), pp.110-11 also Halim Barakat, *Al-Mujtama'a Al-Arabi Al-Mo'aasir [The Contemporary Arab Society]* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1986), p.72.

In the settled community and within the semi-capitalist mode of production the tribe was transformed into a unit of occupational stratification and a mode of reproduction of different kinds of labour. The economic organization of the maritime activities extended gradually into social order in which the owners of capital and means of production families transferred to be the leading or central families in the sedentary society. And in spite of the fact that the relationship between the dominant and dominated classes was an economic one in the first place, it was very common to find many members of one family and their relatives working together with the same merchant, financier or ship-owner to whom, in many cases, they were tied by a tribal or familial relationship.

This clearly illustrates that, family, tribal and sectarian groups (as stated by Bill) were embedded within a structure of interrelated classes. The cross-cutting of the vertical and horizontal stratification in the layer of the Kuwaiti society below the ruling family meant that the nascent –economically determined class stratification- was cut across and diluted in its effect, making for permeable class boundaries. Class distinctions were somewhat softened by common (ethnic, tribal, sectarian, etc.) group affiliation<sup>8</sup>. At the same time group relations and formations were moulded and shaped to a considerable degree by class influence<sup>9</sup>.

As a consequence, it is possible to argue that despite the great variation between the dynamics of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production, these two modes of production provided a general framework for Kuwaiti society in which the tribal socio-economic practises coexisted with the nascent class system. In other words, it may be fairly said that the social formation of Kuwait in the period under investigation was structured by the coexistence of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production.

The most fundamental characteristic of the combination of these two modes of production was the appearance of the merchants and the Bedouin sheikhs as the dominant class in Kuwaiti society. While the merchants, depending on their economic power, constituted a dominant class and exercised an absolute sovereignty over other classes in the sedentary community, the Bedouin sheikhs and their assistants (tribe

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that group –according to Bill- is defined as an aggregate of individuals other than class who interact in varying degrees in pursuance of a common interest. James A Bill, "Class analysis and the dialectics of modernization in the Middle East", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.3 (October 1972), p.427.

<sup>9</sup> James A Bill and Carl Leiden, *The Middle East: Politics and Power* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), p.89.

council members), depending on their wealth and tribal superiority, composed a superior status group and enjoyed an ultimate supremacy in the desert. It is true that there was a great deal of distinction in the nature of the relationship between the merchants and their workers in the sedentary community and between the sheikhs and their tribesmen and followers in the desert. But both merchants and Bedouin sheikhs constituted the most influential class in the Kuwaiti society that monopolized the economic power of society. Their political influence (on the ruling family and on other inferior classes) was mainly derived from the weight each group gained in society through the economic resources they controlled and, then, by the social and political dominance they achieved.

Moreover, the impact of the merchants and tribal sheikhs on the history of Kuwait was much more powerful than any other class. While merchants were the strongest economic class in the town which provided money and offered funds for running the country and purchasing arms for defence purposes, tribal sheikhs collected tributes from their tribesmen in the peacetime —acknowledging the authority of the sheikh of Kuwait— and supplied men in war times. As Kuwait was so dependent on the protection of nomadic tribes which had frequently been tapped as a source of armed retainers and whose tribesmen represented the majority of the Kuwait army in the pre-oil era, tribal sheikhs played a substantial role in the social and political structure of the Kuwaiti society.

### **9.3 The Impact of the Economic Activities on the Family in Kuwait**

It is useful to mention here that the basic characteristics of the family and family life in the sedentary community remained stable and did not vary much from that of the nomadic society. In the nomadic community, production was organized on the basis of households. Most of the nomadic families owned their herds and provided the required labour force collectively. Nevertheless, the family production was not only a production for use, it was also a production for exchange and a family was not necessarily a self-sufficient work group; rather, its members usually cooperated with individuals from other households of the same descent and many tasks were undertaken collectively.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), p.75.

In the sedentary community, kinship and tribal relationships were transformed into extended familial relations. In order to achieve a better economic status a family would enter one of the occupations collectively. The head of the family owned a ship or a number of ships for pearling or trade his brothers, uncles and cousins would work collectively onboard the ships. They might be helped by some relatives or some other workers outside the family, or some of the slaves that belonged to the family. Thus, the extended family became a unit of socio-economic production which played a central role in social regulation in the Kuwaiti sedentary community.<sup>11</sup>

This system in fact strengthened the familial connections because the members of the family relied on each other economically. On the other hand, it supported the absolute authority of the head of the family to whom most of the financial rewards went. Relations of production within this system involved the principal means of production being owned and then the final product being appropriated by the heads of these families and their sons. Therefore, this system had the potential to maintain the workers in their economic status, which in turn forced them to continue doing the same tasks under their family head's dominance.

Moreover, Kuwaitis practised polygamy and sometimes they had several wives in one house. Undoubtedly, although polygamy was legal and socially acceptable, another reason for its increase was the desire for large families. As the family was the basic economic unit, an advantage was seen in increasing its size. More importantly, the predominant relations of production in the semi-capitalist mode of production increasingly led to the emergence of leading or central families in the sedentary community. Due to long-term reciprocal reliance between the creditors and their debtors, resulting from the debt system practiced in the maritime activities, mercantile families gained not only an economic advantages but also prestige, collective and forcible support from those families who gathered around them by the debt system. As in the nomadic society, the more followers the mercantile family could gather around it the more it could get prestige and effective support and the more it could deal influentially with other powerful families.

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<sup>11</sup> Mohammed Ghanim *Al-Pitrol wa Tagheir Al-Ijtima' ai fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [Oil and Social Change in the Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Moassassat Al-Wahdah lil Nasher wa Al-Twazi'a, 1974), p.35.

However, in order to preserve the same economic situation, and to secure the non-transfer of the ownership of the capital and means of production outside the family, prosperous families used the cross-cousin marriage system<sup>12</sup> or confined marriage to certain families. Prior the discovery of oil, marriage in Kuwait was based on one rule: equal marriage in terms of the social status and the familial affiliation. In addition, marriage between cousins was a tradition followed in the city and the desert. It was not possible for a girl to marry other than her cousin without her cousin's permission. It should be taken into consideration that marriage could only take place within the same lineage or between families with a similar social position with regard to prestige, power and privilege. The daughters of wealthy merchant families or noble powerful tribes were not allowed to marry men outside their class boundaries.<sup>13</sup> One prominent exception to this was the practice of political marriages between the leading families of noble Bedouin tribes for alliance purposes in the nomadic society, or between them and the ruling family. This was also true with regard to the marital exchange between the ruling family and some mercantile families in the sedentary community.

The family was the economic unit in the social organisation. Its social relations and traditions were derived from its tribal links that it came from and its link to a certain occupational activity such as pearling, trade, camel or sheep herding, etc. The head of the family, whether it was nomadic or sedentary, had the final say in family matters. He was also regarded, like the head of the tribe, as the ultimate authority in familial issues was in his hands. His authority sometimes exceeded his family to others who were connected to his family by marriage.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there was a special place, for each Kuwaiti family, where senior members of the family meet to discuss their affairs and to celebrate different occasions. This place was known as *diwaniyeh* or *majlis* and usually took the name of the head of the family. It was not only referred to as a meeting place but also as a social system which referred to the status of the family.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the patriarchal authority did not change after marriage and the husband continued to be under the authority of his father and the wife under the

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<sup>12</sup> Marrying cousins was common in Kuwait to the extent that a girl cannot marry other than her cousin without his permission even if she does not like marrying him. See Freeth, op. cit., pp.89-90.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See also Donald Powell Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 70-76.

<sup>14</sup> Abdul Aziz Hussein, *Muhadharat 'Ain Al-Mujtama'a Al-Arabi fi Al-Kuwait [Lectures about the Arab Society of Kuwait]* (Cairo: Arabic Studies Institution Press, 1960), p.57.

<sup>15</sup> Hamd Muhammed El-S'aidan, *Al-Mausu'aa Al-Kuwaitia Al-Mukhtasarah [The Shorter Kuwait Encyclopaedia]* (Kuwait: Press Agency, 1970), p.27.

authority of her father. This meant that the future of the marital life was linked to the two fathers, which might lead to the end of marriage.<sup>16</sup> A husband's acquiescence to his father indeed resulted from the continuation of the father's authority, which was determined by the relations of production that make the son linked to his father—the owner of capital and means of production. He could not achieve independent status from his father because of the latter's ownership of the means of production and the continuation of the son to work with his father.

Acquiescence to the opinion of the two fathers was linked to the continuation of the economic interests between the two fathers. These interests sometimes would dictate that they would separate or that they would continue even if they did not want to.

Socio-economic power was thus concentrated in the head of the household, and the traditional marriage system was strictly endogamous; control of the capital and means of production would thus be retained. However, one should take into account other factors such as illiteracy, ignorance, and backwardness in Kuwaiti society, which contributed to the continuation of this social phenomenon.

Hence, one could argue that the system of marriage and the associated phenomena within Kuwait during the period 1896-1946 were connected to the prevailing economic reality and determined further by the predominant relations of production. The desire of families to maintain a particular economic situation and the desire to retain the capital and means of production meant that this marriage system suited the social and familial affiliation of the husband. This in fact led to the emergence of the phenomenon of original (*asil*) and non-original (*al-beiseri*) families, which encompassed both social and economic connotations and also carried both social and economic distinctions.

On this basis, families in Kuwaiti society and in the Arabian Gulf region in general, were classified as follows:

- D- Original or *asil* families with known ancestry that belong to one of the known tribes.

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<sup>16</sup> Badder Al-Deen Abbas Al-Khususi, *Dirasat fi Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Iqtisadi wa Al-Ijtima' ai [Studies in Economic and Social History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1983), p.188.

- E- Non-original families with lower social status (known as *al-beiseeryah*, or *al-khuderiyeh* or *bani khadir*).<sup>17</sup> Those families had no known ancestry and practiced certain low vocational or economic activities such as sheep herding, blacksmith, butchery, etc.
- F- Families associated with services (known as *Sulaib* or *Sulubba*). In addition, there were servants —former slaves— whose roots went back to Africa and were brought to the Gulf during the heyday of the slave trade.

Although the ethnical and tribal affiliation seems to be the basis for this social order, original and non-original (*beisri*) in fact were economic distinctions rather than social ones. In this regard, Mohammad Al-Rumeihi in his book *Oil and Social Change in the Arabian Gulf* confirmed that there were some families who were considered *asil* in their original society but when they moved to another society they became *beisri* because they lost their wealth and lost their status accordingly. On the other hand, some families who were deemed *beisri* in their former society were transformed into *asil* ones when they became wealthy in their new society.<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of the accuracy of Rumeihi's conclusion, the fact remains that the matter of keeping the capital and means of production —in both sedentary and nomadic communities— played a crucial role in preventing social mobility between social classes. Therefore, in order to maintain their economic and social privileges, *asil* families did not marry their daughters with *beiseri* who did not belong to one of the known families. This, as mentioned, was meant to prevent the transfer of capital and means of production to the non-owners. This fact can also be realised from the widespread deprivation of women from their rights of inheritance.<sup>19</sup> To prevent the transfer of capital and means of production outside the family, and despite the Islamic law which entitled a woman to a share of an inheritance half that of a man's, women were almost entirely deprived from their rights of inheritance in Kuwait. As a result, the most fundamental outcome of this system was the emergence of many well-known

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Torki, Soraya and Donald Cole, "Mujtama'a Maqbl Al-Naft fi Al-Jazera Al-Arabia: Mujtama'a Morakab am Faudhah Qabalia" [The Arabian Peninsula's Society before the Oil: Tribal Anarchy or Compounded Community], *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi Magazine*, (141), November, 1991, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.36.

<sup>19</sup> Yousif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, *Safahat min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [Pages from the History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968), p.78.



families such as Al-Rumi, Al-Mudhif, Al-Shamlan, Al-Gina'ai and others. These were of commercial families who had a key role in the economic life in Kuwait.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, it can be argued that the most important direct consequence of the predomination of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production and their resultant relations of production was their impact on the social mobility within Kuwaiti society. The desire of what can be termed as the upper class in both the nomadic or settled communities to continue its control over the capital and means of production and thus to maintain its social superiority led to widespread cross-cousin, same lineage and same social status systems of marriage. Their exclusiveness through rules of martial exchange that precluded intermarriage with other lower and less wealthy classes was clearly a way of maintaining the capital and means of production in their hands and preventing others from obtaining them. This contributed considerably in maintaining the social order of the Kuwaiti society and prevented, to a large degree, the social mobility between social classes.

On the other hand, despite the visibility of the tribal and ethnical factor in determining the type of the economic activities to be practised within the Kuwaiti society—which was clear through the association of some of the tribal units with special occupations such as (the Baharna community who worked as shipbuilders) or (*Sulubba* group who worked as blacksmiths), or the specialization of some nomadic tribes in camel breeding and others in sheep-herding—social stratification in Kuwaiti society was determined further by economic factors whereby the owners formed the dominants that enjoyed the full ownership of capital and means of production and the power to acquire the final surplus product. Therefore, they were not only able to dominate other lower-ranking classes—who were connected to them through economic relations within tribal framework—but also to control the conditions under which the latter could produce and thus improve their economic and social status.

As a consequence, the difference according to the vocation was the most salient outcome of the maritime economic activities in the settled community and was the basis of ordering these social groupings where the merchants and *nukhudas* were at a higher social level than the divers and sailors. The merchants and *nukhudas* and their sons—

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<sup>20</sup> Saif Marzuq Al-Shamlan, *Tariekh Al-Ghaws ala Al-Lulu fi Al-Kuwait wa Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The History of Pearlning in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1986), pp.217, 228, 275 and 311.

onboard ships—did not mix with other sailors lest this would socially degrade them according the prevailing norms. Moreover, each social class (merchants and sailors) had its own special forum (*diwaniyah*) in which they discuss their problems and other relevant issues. The *diwanyah* was confined to male heads of families and other men from a similar social background, forming a society, which operated for its own collective benefit. It functioned as a male institution in which their decisions were made.<sup>21</sup>

#### **9.4 The Impact of the Economic Activities on Women in Kuwait**

During the period of this study, as elsewhere in the Arab world, women—who were mostly illiterate—suffered from constraints of backwardness imposed on them by the conservative nature of the Kuwaitis in line with inherited traditions and customs. In the Kuwaiti sedentary society, women were not allowed to work or interact with men. In their houses, men allocated a special space for women to be away from visiting men. Furthermore, their houses were built without windows so that women would not be seen by passers-by. They also made a special section of the house, which was designed for women in a way that passers-by could not see who was inside the house.<sup>22</sup>

Many Kuwaitis took the extreme step in isolating women from men in order not to interact with them at all. Some men, out of extremism, refused to mention the name of their wives, daughters, and sisters.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a habit was formed in some families that did not allow girls to go out once they reached adulthood, when the girl would be ready for marriage. However, if they went out, they could only do so while wearing a black gown from the top of the head to the tip of the feet.<sup>24</sup>

However, it is possible to say that women, in the eyes of Kuwaitis, represented an important pillar of the Kuwaiti society and the process of isolation of women was done

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<sup>21</sup> Mohammad Abduh Mahjoub, *Al-Kuwait wa Al-Hijrah [Kuwait and Migration]* (Al-Iskandaria: Al-Haiyah Al-Misria Lil Kitab, 1977), p.289.

<sup>22</sup> Freeth, op. cit., p.107.

<sup>23</sup> Those who carried out the public census in Kuwait in 1938 faced a problem as many Kuwaitis refused to mention the name of their wives. This led to the occurrence of a catastrophe that impacted upon the legislative council in 1938 when some merchants refused to deal with the council during the process of conducting the census. One merchant refused to give details about the number of his family. The officials apprehended him and a confrontation followed which indeed was used to ask for the downfall of the council. See Ahmed Al-Baghdadi, "Tatawer Nidham Al-Hukum fi Dawlat Al-Kuwait" [The Development of the Governing System in Kuwait], *Al-Bahith Magazine*, (31), April, 1984, p.12.

<sup>24</sup> Eleanor Calverley, *My Arabian Days and Nights: A Medical missionary in old Kuwait* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1958), p.123.

in line with the inherited traditions and customs that nobody could violate. Dealing with women in this way was meant to maintain her honour, which was also regarded as the honour of her family and even her lineage and tribe. Depriving women from inheritance was justified on the grounds that women would marry capable husbands who would secure their future and, more importantly, in order to maintain the family property that might go to another family.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the strict conservative social system, women were not isolated from the rest of the productive forces or precluded from participating in the development of Kuwaiti society. The veil and isolation did not prevent women from taking part in work and sharing with men the hardship of their lives in order to secure their living. They contributed positively, according to their social position, in different productive activities.

It is worth mentioning that the predominant economic activities and their resultant relations of production affected not only the lives of men but also had its effects on women's lives. Access to privileges and resources, determined by relations of production within the tribal and kinship framework, divided women and ranked them according to their family's social standing. As a consequence, there was a great deal of variation between lives of the merchants, tribal sheikhs and wealthy Bedouins' women and the lives of women from other social classes. By virtue of their class membership, upper class women had a much wider opportunities to have a better life than others. While the women of the upper class, whether in settled or nomadic communities, had a comfortable life as their husbands provided them with a number of servants and slaves who do all the house and domestic work, women from lower-ranking classes, in addition to their housework, were directly involved in the mass production of goods and thus were naturally affected by its consequent relations.

They worked on different things that might bring them some profits such as midwives, marriage brokers (*khatabas*) and dressmakers. Some were involved in petty trading as peddlers or market traders in *suq al-harim* (the women's market), where female traders gathered to sell fish or many other goods brought by their husbands from their trading voyages. Others worked as mediators or a link between the dressmakers and the female traders in the market for a commission from the total price of the product. Moreover,

many poor women depended almost entirely on the upper class to earn a living by working as servants and labourers in the merchant houses or tribal sheikhs and wealthy Bedouins' tents.<sup>25</sup> It is worth mentioning at this point that women in the Kuwait City worked not only as part of household production activities but also as hired workers and, in the case of trade and some other services, on a self-employed basis.

In the nomadic society, although there was a clear sexual division of labour by which women were associated with the housework and raising children and men performed most of the outside work, e.g. herding, milking and watering animals, Bedouin women performed some of the men's tasks under certain circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, women in some agricultural regions such as *Al-Jahrah* and *Failakah*—where their husbands work at sea—carried out all the processes of agricultural production except for well digging (which was done by men in their free time).

Consequently, it is possible to argue that Kuwaiti women, especially from the lower-ranking classes, were not segregated from the economic reality. And the dominant economic activities in Kuwait and their resultant relations of production impacted on their position during the period under investigation. It reflected on them and so they had to bear a lot from its negativity. They were subject to lose their relatives working onboard the pearling or trading ships if the ship sank. They were liable to be expelled from their houses with their children, once their husbands fell into debt and decided to use the house to settle debts. Kuwaiti woman also suffered if her son was deposited with the sponsor until he repaid the debts of his dead father. The matter might become worse if she became a servant or a wife for one of the merchants or *nukhudas* to whom her dead husband was indebted.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, and despite of all positive contributions of the woman, she suffered from ignorance, social backwardness, and the intellectual decadence that characterised Kuwait during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although social obligations and norms that regulated women's lives did not necessarily mean that all women had a similar experience, women in general, whether from rich or poor, higher or lower ranking

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<sup>25</sup> Mohammed Hassan Al-'Adarous, *Tariekh Al-Khalij Al-Arabi Al-Hadit [The Modern History of the Arabian Gulf]* (Cairo: Dar 'Ain Lil Dirasat wa Al-Bohouth, 1996), p.373, also Haya Al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), pp.41-46.

<sup>26</sup> Abdul Mailk Khalaf Al-Tamimi, *Al-Khalij Al-Arabi wa Al-Maghrib Al-Arabi [The Arab Gulf and the Arab Maghrib]* 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (Cyprus: Dar Al-Shabab lil Nashir, 1986), p.25.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., pp.35-37.

classes, were of a lower social status in the eyes of men during this period. They were seen as something without any value. Their opinions were not sought even in matters relevant to them. The historian, Yousif Al-Gina'ai, who witnessed that period, mentioned that:

Women were considered valueless by all men except the most forward-looking. Men view them as useless chattels. If a woman was mentioned in conversation it is customary for the other person to say, may God honour you for mentioning her. A girl was compelled to marry a man, especially if he was her cousin. It does not matter if he was ugly or immoral. A man who was 80 had the right to marry a 20 year old girl.<sup>28</sup>

This clearly illustrates that women had little if any power at that time and were generally excluded from the men's world. With the absence of education and any institutionalized means, women were unable to express their opinions or to claim their rights. However, taking into account other factors such as widespread illiteracy, ignorance and backwardness in Kuwaiti society during that period, which contributed to the continuation of many social phenomena, dealing with women in this way was, to a large extent, a result of the predominant economic activities and its consequent relations of production. The deprivation of woman from inheritance, forcing her to marry within her lineage or within the same social status class and using her as means of political and tribal alliances, clearly indicates the desire of the dominant class to maintain its economic recourses and continue its supreme political and social supremacy.

## **9.5 The Impact of the Economic Activities on the Cultural Heritage in Kuwait**

Having dealt with the effects of the economic activities on the social structure, family and women in Kuwait it remains necessary to outline the impacts of these activities on the cultural production of Kuwaiti people during the period of study. Undoubtedly, cultural heritage is one of the most important outcomes of the social interaction between different social classes and groupings within the society and between the society as a whole and the wider world.

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<sup>28</sup> Isa Al-Gina'ai, op. cit., p.78.

The Arabian Gulf, which Kuwait is a part, was described as a cultural meeting point. Its people who are part of the Arab and Islamic world belong to a deeply rooted Arab-Islamic culture. But the region borders on both Islamic and non-Arab, and non-Islamic, cultures, and its people were influenced to varying degrees by different cultures such as the Iranian, Indian and African cultures.

The people of the Arabian Gulf in general and Kuwait in particular, lived on the meagre economic surpluses produced from pearling, trade, animal grazing, and limited agriculture. These economic activities indeed played a principal role in giving the Kuwaiti society a particular literary and art culture which derived its principles from the heritage of the Islamic and Arabic culture and whatever the Kuwaiti took from other cultures such as the Persian, the Indian, and the African. The reason for this impact was the interaction with the mentioned cultures and civilisations. This had come about as a result of the trade exchange of people who belonged to these different cultures. It was notable in Kuwait that the artefacts of everyday life such as beds, wardrobes, cooking utensils and cloths were a blend of the local materials and imported ideas for manufacturing and designing.<sup>29</sup>

As all other Gulf societies, the Kuwait cultural production, prior to the discovery of oil, was linked to the economic reality and the economic activities practised by the inhabitants. There were songs and lyrics about diving, voyages in the sea, songs for military parades in the desert, and songs for work in agriculture in the village. These were part of the martial production in which the *naham*, who sings onboard the ship to urge divers and sailors to work, was one of the workers and the participants in the productive process itself. In addition, there were tribal bands, which carried out military dances known as 'Ardah or Al-'Aialah.<sup>30</sup> This was not an independent work in the tribe but one that could be carried out by those who were capable as part of their public work.

It is worth mentioning that the traditional culture in Kuwait was largely linked to the material production. It was based on a general heritage that included religious

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<sup>29</sup> Mohammed Ghanim Al-Rumeihi "Waqi'a Al-Thaqafa wa Mustaqbalaha fi Aqtar Al-Khalij Al-Arabi" [The Culture Reality and its Future in the Arabian Gulf Countries], *Al-Mustqbal Al-Arabi Magazine*, (49), March 1983, p.4.

<sup>30</sup> It was a popular dance carried out by a group of men on happy occasions and it was done before going to fight during the wartime in order to make the fighters more enthusiastic and to raise their morale. See Freeth, op. cit., pp.152-155.

instruction and the production of poetry in both classical and vernacular Arabic. The cultural production in Kuwait, as in any other society, was derived from the reality of life in all of its shapes. It was also directly connected with the concerns of daily life that was affected by the economic conditions. The economic factor was firmly connected to the different aspects of the social and cultural life in Kuwait during the period of study. It was the major factor in the development of all stages that the Kuwaiti society had been through. It had a decisive role in drawing the features of the Kuwaiti society and in defining its identity and its social and cultural structures.

Kuwait's vernacular literature, known as the *nabati*<sup>31</sup> poetry, was a true expression of people's life with all of its human and social incidents. It was also a direct photographing of daily life problems and the cruelty of nature. This popular literature derived its themes from realities of daily life.

To conclude, one could argue that the sea and desert environments had left a direct impact on different branches of culture. All cultural and literature production of the Kuwaiti people, such as singing, poetry, prose, proverbs, and public tales, were mainly derived from the domestic environment in Kuwait which was formed by the interaction of the economic and social realities. The formation of these two realities, the social and the economic were also influenced by the interaction of the Kuwaitis with other cultures, namely, the Indian, Persian, and African. The input of these cultures was evident in different aspects of the Kuwaiti cultural life.

## **9.6 Conclusion**

The most direct consequence of the predominance of the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production in Kuwait in the pre-oil era was its contribution in providing the basis for a social structure characterized mainly by social stratification on economic basis.

The semi-capitalist mode of production possessed a specific characteristic in that its relations of production were founded upon the private ownership of the means of production. Within these relations of production (protected by a system of social norms

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<sup>31</sup> This is a sort of literature and poetry that was presented in the vernacular language and called *Nabati* due to the mix of people who were called in Kuwait *Nabt*. See *Al-Kuwait Magazine*, (56), February 1965, p.28.

and traditions) entrenched some principles of a definitive form of domination by particular social class over the disposition of the means of production, the appropriation and the distribution of the final products and even the inheritance of the rights attached to them.

The traditional mode of production, on the other hand, though it was characterized (particularly pastoralism) by its almost equal access to the means of production, the superior position of some tribes, and some social groups within the tribe (derived basically from their economic power and protected also by a system of social norms and traditions) established also a form of an ultimate domination. This, enabled these superior tribes, and then superior groups within these tribes, to control the utilization of the means of production and appropriate a substantial part of the final product and also monopoly the inheritance of these rights for themselves than others. In other words, it can be said that traditional mode of production formed a structure, in which two unstable strata existed: a dominant but not exploiting leading stratum and another mostly self-contained stratum comprising the mass of the nomads. It was true that the dominant stratum in the Bedouin society was not detached from the bulk of the society and its actions must not violate tribal customs, but these customs themselves were based mainly upon an economic criterion which allots certain group of people more power than others.

Depending on their economic power, the dominant class in the town and superior stratum in the desert were able to achieve and maintain an ultimate social hegemony over other social classes. They were also —as it will be discussed in the next chapter— capable to exercise a political influence upon both other lower-ranking classes and the ruling family. In other words, it is possible to say that these two categories constituted the dominant but not ruling class in the Kuwaiti society in general in the period under investigation.

The crucial point to be emphasised, regarding the impact of the economic activities on the social structure of the Kuwaiti society as a whole, is the absence or more accurately the non-effectiveness of the middle class in the social mobility. However, although it would be difficult to talk about middle class —in the Western sense of the term— in Kuwaiti society during the considered period, it is possible to say that according to the principles of division of labour, wealth and power, some social groups within the



Kuwaiti society can be stratified in the middle class position. For example, petty merchants who were less in financial status, social and political influence, master-shipwrights in shipbuilding industry and *nukhudas* in pearling and seafaring were stratified in a position in which they were less wealth, social status and political power from the upper class (ruling family, merchants and tribal sheikhs) but were in better economic and social positions than the labouring class (sailors, ship-carpenters, sheep herders, etc.). However, whether these groups were totally considered middle class or not, their position was clearly determined by economic factors and acquired economic basis. But, more importantly, they played no independent role in social and political life.

The second but no less important consequence of the predominance of these modes of production was its contribution in forming the basis for a complex division of labour along socio-sectarian lines. The major visible divisions were between the powerful Sunni merchant class and the Shi'aa shipbuilders and handcraft groups, between the noble (*asil*) camel breeding tribes and the non-noble sheep herding tribes, and also between *nukhudas* from a noble or *sharif* tribal ancestries and divers and sailors from non-*sharif* descents<sup>32</sup>. This clearly indicates that although the development of the relations of production —since the 19<sup>th</sup> century— had created a new type of class basis, tribal, ethnic and sectarian cleavages maintained their roots within Kuwaiti society. The continuation of the tribal, ethnic and sectarian framework of organization can be justified that this framework, whether in nomadic or sedentary society, was the only way for monopolizing economic, social and political privileges.

This framework, in fact, provided a social system by which each tribal, ethnic and sectarian group was able to guard access to their economic activities and preclude others from entering them. Moreover, this system provided the basis for a long-term of reciprocal reliance between the owners and non-owners of capital and means of production between these various groups and between the members of each group separately. Accordingly, the owners ensured a long-term of support from their followers in terms of protection and social prestige while the latter gained a continuous source of living.

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<sup>32</sup> The majority of nomads who participated increasingly in the maritime activities were from Mutair, 'Ajman, Bani Hajer, 'Awazim and Rashidah tribes. Usually those from Mutair, 'Ajman and Bani Hajer worked as *nukhudas* while those from 'Awazim and Rashidah were mainly divers. See El-Sa'aidan, op. cit., p 1446.

Therefore, the desire for monopolizing economic power and thus maintaining social and political privileges contributed effectively in maintaining tribal, ethnic and sectarian cleavages within the new society. More importantly, the economic, social and political monopolization was also the direct reason for the predominance of cross-cousin and equal marriage systems. To maintain their economic and thus their social and political privileges and to prevent others from sharing these benefits, ethnic, sectarian and tribal units followed the cross-cousin and equal marriage systems which preclude intermarriage with other social groups who were less in terms of economic and social status.

This clearly indicates the cross-cutting vertical with horizontal stratification (as presented by Bill) by which family, tribal and sectarian units tend to reflect a single class membership structure and class divisions, serves to retard individual and group mobility. Moreover, this illustrates the articulation of other ideological and political levels, with the economic being determinant in the Kuwaiti social formation, as presented by Altusser. This does not mean that other levels or practices were separate from the economic, but they were also important and constitute an essential part of the social relations of production, at the same level, as the economic.

As a consequence, it was natural that these social systems would reflect negatively on the status of women who were stratified in a lower social status and put under the complete control of men. In order to achieve and maintain all the above mentioned privileges, women were not only deprived from her rights in inheritance and economic benefits but were also bound to accept all social regulations and norms which were entirely enacted and ratified by men. By these regulations, women were used to serve men's desires in maintaining social and economic interests and making political and tribal alliances through predetermined marriage systems.

Taking into account the small size of the society, widespread illiteracy and the absence of any educational and institutionalized means, people found nothing but their cultural means to convey their opinions and express their feelings about the harshness of life and its unchanging conditions. As a consequence, their cultural production was a direct photographing of their daily life, which maintained its traditional features and contained new elements. Cultural production was a clear picture about their every day life which

became a mixture of urban features, derived primarily from their developed culture and their interplay with the wider world, and a sense of belonging to the desert, with all its nomadic customs and traditions.

## Chapter Ten

### The Impact of Economic Activities on the Political Life in Kuwait, 1896-1946

#### 10.1 Introduction

The history of Kuwait is linked with the family of Al-Sabah who has ruled Kuwait since its inception in 1756. Although Kuwait came under the Ottoman sovereignty in some stages of its history, and its sheikhs accepted to hold the Ottoman title *Qaimmaqam* (District-Governor) which nominally referred to Kuwait as a part of Basra district, the Ottoman influence was only nominal and Ottomans never exercised real power over Kuwait. Kuwait accordingly enjoyed a sort of autonomy under Al-Sabah family regime from its establishment until 1899 when it came under the British protection by the treaty of 1899 between Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah and the British. According to this agreement, all Kuwait foreign issues and international relations became under the direct control of the British whereas internal matters of the country remained in the hands of Al-Sabah family.

The political and administrative system in Kuwait and in all Arabian Gulf sheikhdoms in the pre-oil era was in compliance with the prevailing tribal norms not governed by a definite system or a written constitution. It was based on tribal traditions in which the position of sheikh was restricted to one particular family on a hierarchy hereditary leadership basis. On this basis, Al-Sabah family assumed the position of sheikh within Al-Utub confederation before their arrival to Kuwait in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Because the society was small and not extremely affected by foreign political attitudes the concept of authority in the Kuwaiti society and in fact in all societies of the Arabian Gulf remained almost entirely on a tribal basis. And consequently the form of government was connected with institutions of Bedouin tribes and the style of government had been highly personal and simple. This had been the case since the establishment of Kuwait in 1756 and Al-Sabah's assumption of power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Othman Abdulmalik Al-Salih, *Al-Nidham Al-Dustory wa Al-Muasasat Al-Siaysia fi Al-Kuwait [The Constitutional System and the Political Institutions in Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Musasat Al-Taquadum Al-'Almi, undated), p.37. J.G.Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol.2, Geographical and Statistical (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), p.1316.

This chapter, therefore, examines the developments of the political system in Kuwait in the period 1896-1946. The main concern of this chapter is to address the dynamics of the Kuwaiti political system and the impact of economic factors on the decision-making process. This concern is pursued from historical and contextual perspectives, focusing on two major components: firstly, the historical developments of the Kuwaiti political system, and secondly, the economic factor's role in determining and affecting the political structure of the Kuwaiti society during that period. The aim of this chapter is to ask how far the most crucial aspects of the political structure of the Kuwaiti society were determined by the predominant modes and relations of production?

The political system in Kuwait went through three different historical phases, each of which characterized by its distinctive features and particular characteristics. As a consequence, and to better understand the political process in Kuwait and the role of economic factors in its evolution, these three stages will be analyzed separately.

## **10.2 The Political and Administrative System in Kuwait, 1756-1896**

As mentioned earlier, Al-Sabah family has ruled Kuwait since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their assumption of power over Al-Utub confederation, who established Kuwait at that time, was based on a tribal tradition. Al-Sabah family was the leading family of Al-Utub confederation before their departure from central Arabia and along their way to Kuwait. As a consequence, they were recognized by all their followers as the family or lineage to whom the leadership was restricted.

During that period of time and even later, and in spite of the transformation of Al-Utub from the nomadic to the settled life, the sheikh who assumed power from Al-Sabah family used to rule as a tribal sheikh more than a sedentary ruler or governor. He had his *majlis*, a public session whereby any individual member of the community was granted personal access to the ruler to ask for redressing his grievance or restoring his rights. He was also surrounded by his council members (the community and other noble lineages notables) with whom the *Shura* (consultation process) was practiced and by whom the sheikh was advised on important matters of the community.

It might be useful to mention at this point that Kuwaiti society was small and, with the exception of the wider culture of Arabian Peninsula and of Islam, this society has

borrowed relatively little from the outside until very recent years. Foreign models and foreign ideologies have played no part in forming its dominant institutions. As a result, the political system remained on its old tribal basis —highly centralized: indeed all important decisions were personally made by the sheikh. It was based on the personality of the ruler who was chosen on a tribal hierarchy hereditary basis to wield the executive authority. The sheikh, as in the tribal traditions, derived his legislative power from the Islamic institutions and the predominant traditions. According to this system the sheikh governed and managed all the economic, political, and judicial matters as he saw them according to the then prevailing tribal traditions and norms.

The process of selecting a ruler was not a random one. It was not hereditary in the sense that it passed from father to son, but the nomination was done within Al-Sabah family and after that the notables would endorse it.<sup>2</sup> The candidate from Al-Sabah family, as in the tribal traditions should have the principal essentials of assuming the sheikh position (wisdom, bravery, wealth and a display of hospitality and generosity) regardless of his relations with the previous ruler.<sup>3</sup> The practice was that after the death of the ruler, the ruling family would meet to nominate one of them to succeed.<sup>4</sup> After this process of selection the notables and sheikhs (the elite) of the community came to endorse his legitimacy to govern provided that he would commit himself to fair governance and consult them in matters of national interest, according to the prevailing traditions.<sup>5</sup>

It worth mentioning that despite the transformation of the community from nomadic to sedentary life, it is important to emphasize that tribal organization, tribal values and norms and political weight of tribes within the context of the nascent society remained intact in the new order. The inheritance of power that differentiated the noble Bedouin tribes from non-noble Bedouins and the sheikhs and notables from other tribesmen in the desert became the basis of stratification in the new sedentary settlement. As a consequence, a number of families or lineages who share with Al-Sabah common ancestral heritage as descendants from 'Anezah tribe or from other noble tribes assumed

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Al-Baghdadi, "Tatawer Nidham Al-Hukum fi Dawlat Al-Kuwait" [The Development of the Governing System in Kuwait], *Al-Bahith Magazine*, ( 31), April 1984, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> It is noted that since the assumption of Sabah lof power in 1756 until 1892, power used to pass from father to son.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hayat, 1978), p.90, and Al-Salih, op. cit., pp.40-41.

a higher position within the new sedentary society. They became the aristocrats of the new community and were considered almost as equals to Al-Sabah family members. The status of these families was primarily based on their tribal background they shared with Al-Sabah family. Then this position was reinforced more by their wealth which they accumulated in the early days of the rise of Kuwait and thereafter. It is well known that while Al-Sabah family became the ruling family, these families controlled most of the economic and commercial affairs in Kuwait. With the passage of time this group of families transferred into a social class, in the economic sense of the word, which dominated most, if not all, the available capital and means of production within the nascent society.

The merchant class became the spine of the Kuwaiti new economy and represented the economic power within the new society through their enterprises and ownership of product aspects, such as capital, ships of trade and pearling. Therefore, the leaders of these families who carried both tribal background and wealth became the notables of the society by whom the homage to the new selected ruler from Al-Sabah would be paid. The superiority that this group enjoyed was derived primarily from the power they wielded in society through the economic resources they controlled. It should be noted that the chief members of these families had a close social and inter-marital relationship with Al-Sabah family and were treated almost as equals by the senior members of Al-Sabah. It had also become a custom that they were expected to be consulted by the sheikh of Kuwait on important matters before making his final decision.<sup>6</sup>

Although the ruler cannot carry out his responsibility before he was paid homage from the elite (the leading merchant families), this was not important, from a practical point of view, because the elite of Kuwait never refused to pay homage to any one chosen by the ruling family. However, the desire to obtain a pledge of allegiance was sought because the elite were merchants with economic importance. They were the controllers of all economic sources of Kuwait (trade, pearling, shipbuilding, caravan and commercial sea transportation, etc.). In other words, they were the key financial source Al-Sabah family relied on to run the country. However, the condition for paying homage was that the ruler would govern fairly. There was no framework that governed

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<sup>6</sup> John Murry, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Arabia* (London: John Murry, 1984), p.194. Also Ahmed Abdullah Baz, *Political Elite and Political Development in Kuwait*, PhD Thesis (George Washington University, 1981), p.5.

this demand except for a pledge from the ruler to govern in accordance to the Islamic law and according to the prevailing traditions and norms.

Because of the simplicity of the social life, the small size of the society, the limitation of external relations, and the insistence of rulers to secure the allegiance of the elite and notables of the society, the regime in Kuwait was based on a sort of consultation between the ruler from Al-Sabah family and the notables from the merchant class.<sup>7</sup>

In order to secure the allegiance of the merchant class and to obtain its financial support, the principle of *shura* (consultation) between Al-Sabah family and the merchant class, which was based on the tribal traditions, remained the principle of governing in Kuwait until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> In this connection, the Kuwaiti historian Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid confirms that the political system in Kuwait —since Sheikh Sabah I until the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah in 1896—was based on consultation. He states that:

The ruler consulted the elite and notables whenever needed in order to protect the country against emergencies and against the attacks of enemies. He had no right to reject or choose after they agreed on an issue. He only adds his name to their decision.<sup>9</sup>

It can be argued that during this period of time, Al-Sabah family was not a ruling family in the strict sense of the term: it was almost an administrative group who ran the affairs of the community with the participation of other leading families in the Kuwait town who carried other responsibilities. The authority of Al-Sabah family was derived from their long history as a leading family of Al-Utub confederation and based on the homage paid by the notables of other leading families. As a consequence, the sheikh from Al-Sabah family was almost the community leader who wielded the executive

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.90, and Amin Al-Rihani, *Muluk Al-Arab: Rihlah fi Al-Bilad Al-Arabia [Arab Kings: Trip in Arab Land]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, undated), p.656.

<sup>8</sup> Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina'ai, *Sheikh Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai wa Daoruhoo fi Al-Hayat Al-Ijtima'aia wa Al-Siaysiah fi Al-Kuwait [Sheikh Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai and his Role in the Social and Political Life in Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, undated), p.52, and Abdul Aziz Hussein, *Muhadharat 'Ain Al-Mujtama'a Al-Arabi fi Al-Kuwait [Lectures about the Arab Society of Kuwait]* (Cairo: Arabic Studies Institution Press, 1960), pp.91-92.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Rashid, op. cit., p.90.



authority which based on the legislation derived from the Islamic *shari'aa* law and the prevailing traditions and norms.

The *shari'aa* law was the main source of guidance for personal affairs such as heritage, marriage, divorce and so on, whereas traditions and customs deal with daily life issues. In this regard, the historian Yousif Ibn Isa Al-Gina'ai mentions that "there was no legal constitution in Kuwaiti or law to depend on in carrying out verdicts".<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the Islamic law and customs remained the basic framework that the ruler relied on in carrying out verdicts. The importance of these customs laws lies in the difficulty in bypassing them because people get used to them, and in this case the custom laws had the support of the society.<sup>11</sup> The ruler, in theory, was responsible under both the rules of the Islamic law, which cannot be violated and which was interpreted by the *'aulama* (religious scholars) and implemented by the *qadhi* (judge), and the customs rules, which were binding on all. However, the matter of respecting these rules or violating them was a matter that had to do with the personality of the ruler. In this connection Al-Gina'ai confirms that "if the ruler was fair and the judge was just, the verdicts were fair, however if the country were inflicted by an oppressive ruler and a corrupt judge, justice disappears."<sup>12</sup>

Based on what was discussed above, one could say that the political system in Kuwait for the period from 1756 to 1896 was one that based on legislative authority (derived from the Islamic law and the prevailing customs) and an executive authority represented in the personality of the ruler who was obliged to carry out the rule without giving him the authority to legislate.

The pertinent point needed to be underlined here is that, although Kuwaiti nascent society retained a number of features which may have been fairly specific, one can claim that the Kuwaiti social system had rapidly evolved from a position in the 17<sup>th</sup> century where nomadism had been common to a new situation where a new mode and relations of production became predominant. On their way to Kuwait Al-Utub confederation was almost certainly accompanied by segments of other nomadic and

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<sup>10</sup> Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, *Safahat min Tariikh Al-Kuwait [Pages from the History of Kuwait]* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1968), p.30.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Baghdadi, op. cit., p.34.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Gina'i, op. cit., p.31.

non-nomadic groups, attached in a client-tribal relationship. By their accompanying with those different economic groups and throughout the period of time they had spent along the eastern coast of Arabia, Al-Utub moved considerably from nomadism (traditional mode of production) to a maritime semi-capitalist mode of production.

The most fundamental characteristic of the new development was the transformation of the society into a class society in which Al-Sabah family and the merchant class became the dominant class. It seems apparent that Al-Sabah family and the merchant class during this phase constituted almost one class which jointly dominated the society socially, politically and economically. Socially, these two groups were ranked as the upper class of the society which assumed superiority as a legitimation and maintained it by their exclusiveness through rules of marital exchange that precluded intermarriage with other lower classes. Politically, Al-Sabah family ruled with the participation of the merchant class who was able to have their say in the important matters before the final decision took place. And economically, the merchant class was dominant with the participation of the Al-Sabah family, some, if not all, of whose members took a direct part in economic activities and who benefited indirectly from the revenues of these activities.

It is also noteworthy that tribal traditions were not only the basis of the internal political system of Kuwait: they also became the principles of the external relations between Kuwait and other tribal and political powers in the region. Political borders between Kuwait and other political entities in the region were not demarcated during this stage. And Kuwait was not regarded by the adjacent tribal and political powers in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula as a political entity in the rigorous sense of the term. It was recognized as tribal territory of Al-Utub tribal confederation, which contains a substantial commercial centre for both nomadic and settled communities. Therefore, the authority of Al-Sabah at that time was not recognized as a central government by other Bedouin tribes in the interior land. On the contrary, they considered Al-Sabah as the leading family of Al-Utub tribal confederation and their relation with them was entirely based on the tribal traditions which regulated relations between different tribes. As a result, it is possible to argue that Bedouin tribes were autonomous entities out of the Al-Sabah control and played no part in the development of the Kuwaiti political system before reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah.

### **10.3 The Political and Administrative System in Kuwait, 1896-1921**

The phase 1896-1921 is regarded a turning point in the modern history of Kuwait. The reason for this was that from 1896 onwards Kuwaiti society witnessed a dramatic transformation in most of its political, economic and social structures. During this period of time Kuwait transformed into a political entity in the technical sense of the term, and assumed a special consideration from the international powers in the region. The transformation in the external political status of Kuwait, in fact, led to a considerable change in the economic and social structures of the Kuwaiti society and affected significantly most of its aspects. In 1896 Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, the seventh ruler of Kuwait—who is widely regarded the founder of the modern Kuwait—assumed power in Kuwait by force after killing his two half brothers Mohammed and Jarah Al-Sabah.

As mentioned in chapter three, the way Sheikh Mubarak assumed power through led to an internal political opposition to his regime from the Al-Sabah family (headed by the sons of the two killed brothers and their advisor Yousif Al-Ibrahim). This led to the intervention the foreign powers (the Ottoman government, Britain and then Germany and Russia) which eventually led to the signing of 1899 treaty by which Kuwait became under the British protection. By this agreement, Sheikh Mubarak, in return to a series of obligations and commitments regarding matters and interest that were relevant to Britain, was granted the exclusiveness of the authority in his lineage only from Al-Sabah family. He and his successors were also granted a British protection against any external intervention in addition to an annual financial aid.<sup>13</sup>

The way Sheikh Mubarak assumed power and its consequent outcomes led to substantial changes in the political structure of the Kuwaiti society in general and the nature of relationship between different classes within that society. These changes can be outlined as follows:

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<sup>13</sup> Hussein Khalaf Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, *Tariekh Al-Kuwait Al-Siaysi [The Political History of Kuwait]* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Hilal, 1962), vol.2, p.126.

- A- The way of assuming power within Al-Sabah family. This was based on the consensus of Al-Sabah family members and the endorsement of the merchant class changed into an exclusive right to Sheikh Mubarak and his lineage only.
- B- A considerable part of Al-Sabah family, according to the 1899 agreement, was deprived from assuming power which led them to lead the opposition against the ruling part.
- C- The financial support Sheikh Mubarak and his successors were granted to receive, according to the 1899 agreement, provided them with a very important alternative source of income and made them, to some degree, independent from the merchant class. This was a decisive turning point in the relationship between the two groups who constituted jointly the dominant class in the Kuwaiti society since the inception of Kuwait.
- D- The appearance of the Bedouins as an effective power in the Kuwaiti political life. This was the most fundamental outcome of this political evolution. The relationship between the Bedouin tribes and Al-Sabah family during this stage became a relation between Bedouin tribes and central authority. The authority of Al-Sabah during this phase was recognized by the adjacent Bedouin tribes as the central government to which they had to pay taxes and alms during peacetime and provide men and arms in wartime.

All these changes brought about a comprehensive transformation in the political structure of Kuwaiti society and reinforced the position of Al-Sabah<sup>14</sup> family externally and internally. Externally, Al-Sabah family —by the protection and political support of the British— was able to assume a political position and play its role beside other political entities in the region. Internally, the financial and military support of both the British and Bedouin tribes reinforced the position of Al-Sabah family within the Kuwaiti society and transformed it into a ruling family, in the strict sense of the term, and weakened the position of the merchant class who became politically subordinate to Al-Sabah family. As a result, the merchant class had lost a considerable part of their influence on the decision-making process. Moreover, the system of *shura* (consultation) disappeared completely during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak who followed a strict

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the term Al-Sabah from now on refers only to the Sheikh Mubarak lineage to which the leadership was restricted according to the 1899 agreement.

approach in governing. He became authoritative and independent in his opinion to the extent that many historians described his rule as a dictatorship.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth mentioning that as a result of their long history of governing in Kuwait, Al-Sabah family had learnt to secure their sources of income by which they maintained their position as leading family. They also engaged indirectly in most of the economic activities as investors by which they were able to secure an independent stable source of income. However, the following table illustrates clearly the annual income of Sheik Mubarak and its resources.

**Table 10.1**  
**Annual Income of Sheikh Mubarak<sup>16</sup>**

|                                       |                  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Date gardens at Fao (Iraq)            | \$108,000        |
| Rent of shops in Kuwait bazaar        | \$9,000          |
| <i>Zakat</i> (alms) on Bedouin flocks | \$25,000         |
| Tax in sheep brought into the town    | \$2,000          |
| Tax payable by butchers               | \$2,500          |
| Tax on sale of camels                 | \$1,500          |
| Sea custom                            | \$150,000        |
| Duties on exports to interior s       | \$20,000         |
| Tax on pearl divers                   | \$60,000         |
| Fines                                 | \$6,000          |
| Share of fish caught in Kuwait coast  | \$7,000          |
| Interest on money lent to merchants   | \$8,000          |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>\$399,000</b> |

It is apparent from the above table that although investments of Al-Sabah family (in date gardens and lending money) and Bedouin alms and taxes constituted a substantial part of Al-Sabah family sources of income, other earnings from commercial activities that were under the merchant class hands were also important and indispensable. Therefore, and in spite of the extraordinary change in the relation between Al-Sabah family and the merchant class during this stage, this change did not lead to a complete splitting up in their relation. For example, although Sheikh Mubarak's assumption of power was not on the basis of Al-Sabah selection —which was the principle used

<sup>15</sup> Al-Rihani, op. cit., p.657, Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, op. cit, p.128, and Hussein, op. cit., p.92.

<sup>16</sup> Lorimer, op. cit., vol.1, p.1076.

before— he sought to obtain the homage and allegiance of this class, who had no choice but to pledge allegiance to him.<sup>17</sup> This illustrates clearly that homage did not mean acceptance or rejection of rulers but was meant for the ruler to secure the loyalty of this class and the continuation of his relations with them.

Accordingly, it can be said that as a consequence of the British protection and Bedouin financial and military support, the merchant class had politically lost its position as an effective class in the Kuwaiti society and transformed into a subordinate class to Al-Sabah family. Economically, the merchant class maintained its position and remained as dominant class in the Kuwaiti society by its dominance of most of the economic activities and means of production. In other words, it can be argued that, while the merchant class had lost a substantial part of its influence on the ruling family, it remained as a dominant class over all other classes by its monopoly of capital and means of production.

Transformation in the political status of the merchant class naturally led to a dramatic change in the nature of their relationship with Al-Sabah family. From the reign of Sheikh Mubarak on, the merchant class transformed from the position as allies and partners of Al-Sabah in the governing process of Kuwait into the position as opposition leaders. They became the opponents of Al-Sabah family who continued to claim their right to political participation. Throughout their opposition to Al-Sabah family, the merchant class depended almost entirely on their economic power to claim their rights to political participation. The first political step the merchant class had taken against Al-Sabah family was during Sheikh Mubarak reign. In 1910, a dispute took place between Sheikh Mubarak and senior merchants of Kuwait because of the desire of the sheikh to double the costs incurred in warning with Sa'doun Basha Al-Sa'adoun, the sheikh of Muntafiq tribe in south of Iraq<sup>18</sup> after the latter's victory in the Hadiyeh battle of 1910. Another reason for this dispute was Mubarak's desire to prevent the inhabitants from

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Rashid, *op. cit.*, p.148.

<sup>18</sup> Sa'adoun Basha was the head of the Mintafiq tribe in south of Iraq, which belonged to Basra province. The enmity between them was because some of his followers looted the property of Kuwaiti merchants who belonged to the Al-Muteir tribe. His rejection to return the lost properties led Mubarak to send a campaign under the leadership of his son Jabir in order to restore the property. However, Sa'doun Basha won over the campaign and inflicted big losses on Mubarak. Mubarak sought to take revenge by initiating another war only to be opposed by the merchants. This disputed was solved when Jalal Bek the Ottoman governor of Basra intervened. *Ibid.*, pp.185-89.

pearling, which represented a fundamental source of wealth for merchants, because he needed men for war in that particular year.

The continuation of the war with Sa'adoun Basha and the prevention of the inhabitants of Kuwait from going pearling cost the merchants big losses. Their failure to convince him to end the war pushed the merchants, who were headed by three senior merchant (Hilal bin Fajhan Al-Mutairi, Shamlan bin Ali Al-Saif, and Ibrahim Al-Medhif), to emigrate from Kuwait. Some of them settled in Al-Hasa and the others moved into Bahrain.<sup>19</sup>

As a consequence of the merchants' emigration, Sheikh Mubarak lost a huge portion of his funds. Moreover, he sensed the seriousness of the matter and feared that the rest of the merchants might follow suit. Therefore, he sent a delegation to appease the merchants and convince them to return to Kuwait but this delegation failed in his mission. After sending his son, Sheikh Salem, and the failure of that mission also, Sheikh Mubarak had no choice but to go himself to the merchants. He succeeded to appease them and bring them back to Kuwait in 1911.<sup>20</sup>

The emigration of this class and the diligent attempts by Sheikh Mubarak to bring them back demonstrates clearly the significance of this class, its economic weight, the political role they played, and the social status they had enjoyed. This class was the most important pillar of the political system and thus a significant factor in its stability. This emigration clearly illustrated the impact of the merchants' class on the regime in Kuwait—regardless of the power of the ruler—and its influence in the local scene. This was done through its supply of funds to the government through taxes and financial support.

The merchant class also headed the public rejection to Sheikh Mubarak's signing of the 1899 agreement with Britain. This was resented by the public due to their perception of the Ottoman State as a religious authority that should not be replaced by the non-

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<sup>19</sup> Saif Marzuq Al-Shamlan, *Min Tariekh Al-Kuwait [From the History of Kuwait]* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1986), pp.152-55, Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, op. cit., vol.2, pp.280-82.

<sup>20</sup> See the letter of Sheikh Mubarak to those merchants on 24 Sha'aban, 1328 Hijri (1910), and also the letter of Hilal Al-Muteiri to Shamlan bin Ali Al-Seif and Ibrahim Al-Mudhif (the leaders of this emigration) on 23 Sha 'aban 1328 Hijri (1910). The Archive of the Centre of Manuscripts, Folklore, and Documents in Kuwait.

Muslim British authority. They also lead the public rejection to Sheikh Mubarak's request to offer help to Sheikh Khaz'al Al-Marado, the ruler of Arabistan, who faced a popular revolution because of his support to the British in occupying Basra.<sup>21</sup>

All these events apparently show that the decision-making process was only in the hands of the ruler and the *shura* (consultation) between him and the notables of the society (merchant class) had completely disappeared. They also illustrate the rejection of the merchant class to the 1899 agreement with Britain by which they lost their influence on the governing process of Kuwait. More importantly, all these events clearly indicate that merchant class headed the opposition only to maintain their economic interests<sup>22</sup> and to restore their political influence in decision-making process. In spite of their constant opposition to Al-Sabah family during this phase and later on, the merchant class never claimed overthrowing Al-Sabah family from power or replacing them.

After the death of Sheikh Mubarak, his son Jaber governed until 1917, who was then succeeded by his brother Salem Al-Sabah who ruled until 1921. Both of them followed their father's way of governing. This means that during this period there was no development in the political and administrative system in Kuwait. The reign of Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, 1917-21, coincided with political disputes such as his problems of Al-Saud and Al-Rashid, the siege imposed by Britain during the First World War.<sup>23</sup> This siege harmed the interests of the merchants. The merchants played a role in not violating the siege and they pressed Sheikh Salem not to implement it. This led the British government to be firm with Sheikh Salem and accordingly appointed some observers to enforce the siege. Merchants were the big losers of implementing the siege. Therefore, the political opposition grew and tried to express itself more clearly during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber in which the opponents asked for political participation and reforms in administration and governing system.

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Rashid, op. cit., pp.203-07.

<sup>22</sup> Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid mentions that Sheikh Mubarak was fond of money to the extent that he invented new types of tax. He shared others in their properties and his share was better than that of the partners in which he receive a third of whatever the partner sell or rent, Ibid., p.220.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, op. cit., vol. 4, pp.114-76.



## **10.4 The Development of the Political and Administrative System in Kuwait, 1921-50.**

Before dealing directly with the developments of the administrative and political systems in Kuwait during this stage it is worth noting that political development was naturally linked to the social and educational developments. During this period of time and as a response to the increased demand for some basic knowledge of reading and writing in the commercial and business transactions, the educational system had witnessed some development. In addition to the continuation of the *Katateeb* (religious circles) and simple Quranic studies in mosques, some private schools begun to appear as a reflection of the requirement of the economic life and coping with the development of the society. These schools such as Al-Mubarakiyah school, Al-Ahmadiyah school and other social and educational institutions played a significant role in enriching the educational movement in Kuwait and its reflection on the social and political life.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most fundamental outcomes of the developments of the educational system was the exclusiveness of education to the sedentary rich people who owned both the time and money needed for education such as merchants and *nukhudas*. Moreover, the nature of the economic activities itself would not allow pupils, from other classes, to dedicate their time for study because of the necessity of their existence, whether on board ships and boats, in an attempt to learn these occupations or in the desert to shepherd their flocks. Furthermore, the nature of different economic activities did not entail knowledge of reading and writing as much as the occupations of merchants and *nukhudas*. As a result, this group of people were more able and interested in sending their sons to schools. The result of the dependency relationship between education and the economic situation and the self-reliance for funding made education confined to a certain social class. The outcome was that not only rich people (merchant class) were able to get some education but also those educated would later have an impact on the political and social life in Kuwait.

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<sup>24</sup> All the educational and social institutions before the establishment of the education department in 1936 were financed privately by the merchant class. See Yosif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, op. cit., pp.37-40, Al-Rashid op. cit., pp. 367-69. Al-Shamlan, op. cit., p.201.

Therefore, the influential class —the merchants who were able to get education— was the first who realise the importance of development of administrative and governing system, and the necessity of the political participation of other classes with Al-Sabah family in running the state. Accordingly, after the death of Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah in 1921 and before the selection of his successor, the seniors of the merchant class assembled with the family of Al-Sabah and expressed specific demands for reform in matters of administration and governing in the country.<sup>25</sup> They presented the following document:

In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful

We—the below mentioned names—had united and agreed to carry out the following measures:

A- The house of Sabah (the ruling family) should be persuaded to simplify the process of appointing a new ruler.

B-Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber, Sheikh Hamed Al-Mubarak and Sheikh Abdulla Al-Salem are the proposed candidates for the post of ruler.

C-If the house of Sabah has decided upon a candidate, this decision should be submitted to the British government for approval.

D-A consultative council must be elected to administer the affairs of the country on the bases of justice and equity. This council may comprise both the house of Sabah and representatives of the people of Kuwait.

E-The appointed ruler should become the head of the council.<sup>26</sup>

This document was signed by Mohammed bin Shamlan, Mubarak Mohammad Boursley, Jasim bin Mohammed bin Ahmed, Salem bin Ali Boqmaz, and Nassir Ibrahim. These names were among the senior merchants in Kuwait.<sup>27</sup>

By scrutinising this document, it is evident that the merchant class—relatively educated because of its financial capabilities—had achieved a considerable degree of political

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<sup>25</sup> H. R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours* (London: George Allen & Uwin , 1956), pp. 257-58.

<sup>26</sup> Yousif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, op. cit., p.197, Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, op. cit., vol.4, pp.317-18.

<sup>27</sup> Khalifa Al-Waqyan, *Al-Qadhia Al-Arabia fi Al-She'ar Al-Kuwaiti*, [*The Arab Issue in the Kuwait Poetry*] (Kuwait: Modern Press, 1977), p.41.

awareness. It announced its rejection of the rule without restrictions and according to the personal opinion of the ruler. It showed that the time had come for this class to restore its political influence in the decision-making process and have its opinion in administering the country and choosing its ruler. More importantly, this document indicates the development of the political system and its mechanisms from a tribal form into a more advanced structure. It plainly illustrates the transformation of the merchants from a group of high-ranking figures who used to participate in administering the country on a tribal basis into an influential class which claimed a direct participation in the governing process on more progressive form through a consultative council.

It is worth mentioning that at the time the document was being drawn up, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber, whom the Sabah family agreed as a successor, was on a visit to King of Najd, Abdul Aziz Al-Saud in an attempt to improve the Kuwaiti-Saudi relations, which was suffering from tension.<sup>28</sup> Upon his return to Kuwait, he agreed and did not oppose the document.

#### **10.4.1 The Formation of Consultative Council**

With the approval of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber, the first consultative council in the history of Kuwait was established in 1921. This council was composed of twelve members appointed from well-known wealthy families. The members were: Hamad Abdullah Al-Saqir who was appointed as a president, Sheikh Yousif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, Mr. Abdulrahman Khalaf Al-Naqeeb, Hilal bin Fahjan Al-Muteiri, Shamlan bin Ali Al-Saif, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, Khalifa bin Rashid Al-Ghanim, Ahmed Fahad Al-Khalid, Mish'aan Al-Khudheir Al-Khalid, Ahmed Salih Al-Humeidhi, Marzouq Al-Douad Al-Badr, and Ibrahim Al-Mudhif.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber was in Najd in order to sign a peace agreement with Abdul Aziz Al-Saud after the battles of Humd and Al-Jahrah in 1920. When the Kuwaiti delegation was preparing to go back to Kuwait, the news of the death of Sheikh Salem arrived. Therefore, Ibn Saud tore up the peace document, announcing to Sheikh Jaber that there would be no need for conditions or reservations as he would be the next ruler. See Al-Rashid, *op. cit.*, pp.274-75.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Sheikh Khaz'aal, *op. cit.*, vol.5, p.14. It might be useful to note that most, if not all, these figures were mentioned in chapters 4, 5 and 6 as owners of capital and means of production. All of them were also the chief participants in establishing Al-Mubarakiyah and Al-Ahmadiyah schools and financing other social and educational institutions such as the national library and the literary club.

A quick look at the names of the members of the first consultative council shows that all of them were merchants including the three merchants who had opposed Sheikh Mubarak and emigrated from Kuwait in 1910. They were Hilal bin Fahjan Al-Muteiri, Shamlan bin Ali Al-Saif, and Ibrahim Al-Mudhif. It is possible to argue that the establishment of the council marked a new era in the modern history of Kuwait as it represented an attempt by the merchant class to impose itself on the ruling family and its insistence to take part in governing the country. It is apparent that the merchant class, depending on its economic power, was able to improve its educational and cultural abilities and thus was able to enhance its political awareness and cope with the political developments than other classes. As a consequence, it was able to exploit these advantages and reshape its relationship with the ruling family in a new approach. It is evident that the merchant class was trying to restore its political influence in a new framework by which it could maintain its relationship with the ruling family and retain its power as an effective class in the society. This new approach of relationships between the merchant class and ruling family became the framework in which the Kuwaiti political system had developed at this stage.

However, the council started its session by endorsing the appointment of the Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber unanimously. The new ruler was sworn in to work with dedication and he signed the following charter that presented by the members of the new council and included the following articles.<sup>30</sup>

- Islamic law to be the basis of all regulations and the judicial system.
- If the convicted claim that the verdict is against the Islamic law, the case of the convicted and the verdict of the judge would be written and referred to experts on the Islam affairs and whatever they agree on would be the correct verdict.
- If the two opponents agreed on someone to arbitrate between them, peace and reconciliation are achievable.
- The participation [of the notables] in the external and internal matters which are relevant to the country in a way to benefit the country and defend it.
- Anyone has an opinion would be able to present it to the ruler and if good would be taken into account and implemented.

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<sup>30</sup> Al-Waqyan, op. cit., p.44, Mohammed Abdulqadir Al-Jasim, *Al-Kuwait Mutalith Al-Democratia [Kuwait: A Triangle of Democracy]* (Cairo: Matba'at Al-Shoroq, 1992), p.25.

It is obvious from the document presented by the notables and the charter signed by the sheikh, that the political and administrative system in Kuwait had entered a new era entirely different from the previous one. It is also clear from the text of the charter that the members of the council sought to reform the judicial system—which was not based on fixed laws and verdicts but were referred to rulers and judges regardless of their qualification.<sup>31</sup> The members of the council forced the sheikh to delegate and authorise his judicial power to one of the fair and just judges instead of the previous judge whose tenure was characterised by procrastination, and contradictions in verdicts.<sup>32</sup>

The council continued its sessions. However, only after a short period of time, a dispute erupted between the council members in matters that were regarded by Al-Sabah as family issues. This led to a dispute between the members of the council and members of the ruling family. This resulted in differences among the members, especially when some of them sought to achieve personal aims.<sup>33</sup> These differences led to the boycott of some members of the sessions, and that many differences among the members led to a lack of trust of the public in the council. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber took advantage of this situation and boycotted the sessions. This led to a gradual dissolution of the council after two months of its establishment.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the first attempt of the merchant class to take part in power came to an end without achieving its objectives and so the country went back to the old system and was ruled in much the same way as previously. The reasons behind the failure of this attempt were the following:

- This experience was not based on sustainable principles and regulations. The membership of the council was not linked to efficiency and capability, but on the basis of social status and wealth and through appointment. This indicates that the existence of this council came as a result of the desire of the merchant class to take part in the decision-making process.
- The experience was not derived from the need to consult and legislate, but was motivated by achieving personal objectives and interests of those who pushed for this idea. The differences in perspectives and opinions of members of the council and the subsequent inability of arriving at unifying outcomes led to the end of council.

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<sup>31</sup> Yousif bin Isa Al-Gina'i, *op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Baghdadi, *op. cit.*, p.39.

<sup>33</sup> Because all the members were merchants, they tried to serve their own economic interests and all legislation would be serving their objectives, see Hussein, *op. cit.*, p.107.

<sup>34</sup> Dickson, *op. cit.*, pp.257-58.

- The negative stand of the sheikh of Kuwait and the Al-Sabah family and the lack of desire on their part of others participating in government and administration.

Despite the failure of this attempt, it is possible to indicate that this experience was evidence of the development of the political, economic, intellectual, and social life in Kuwait. It was also evidence of the increase of the size and complexity of the society to the extent that a need emerged to enacting laws to regulate the conduct of the society and, of course, led to a sort of political awareness among the inhabitants—particularly those who were able to get some kind of education: the sons of the wealthy families. This led this class to declare its desire to end the authoritarian approach and the need to have political participation in governing taking into account the regional and international conditions surrounded Kuwait.

Kuwait, after the failure of the mentioned attempt, went back to the same methods of governing before the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah—which was based on a sort of consultation between the ruler and the notables on some issues but with no restriction or laws to define this consultation or to divide work between the ruler and the inhabitants but rather based on the prevailing norms and traditions. This type of governance continued until 1930 when a need arose to regulate the country in line with new methods. The reason behind this necessity was the development of the social and economic life resulting from the increasing size of the population and the development of the economic activity, which in turn led to the complexity of daily life to the degree that entailed setting up some departments to supervise and manage the daily life.

#### **10.4.2 The Establishment of the Municipality of Kuwait**

The municipality of Kuwait was established in 1930 in order to offer services to the population and to supervise the daily life in the city. This municipality was composed of 12 elected members and a mayor.<sup>35</sup> Its budget was covered by a special 2.1% tax.<sup>36</sup> It practised its daily work until 1932 when a special law issued organising the work of the

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<sup>35</sup> Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina'ai, *Baladiat Al-Kuwait fi Khamssin 'Aman [The Municipality of Kuwait in 50 years]* (Kuwait: Matba'at Al-Anba, 1980), p.31.

<sup>36</sup> Abduh, Ibrahim, *Dawlat Al-Kuwait Al-Hadithah [The Modern State of Kuwait]* (Cairo: Dar Al-'Aroubah, 1962), p.135, Hassan Mahmoud Suleiman, *Al-Kuwait Madhiha wa Hadhiruha [Kuwait: Its Past and Present]* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba Al-Ahliya, 1986), p.50.

municipality, and defining its scope and duties. Before the issuance of this law, the municipality used to supervise the work of all departments such education, health, and controlling pricing and measurements due to the lack of other institutions.<sup>37</sup>

The municipality carried out its tasks as outlined in the law of 1932. These tasks included organising dealings in the market such as prices and weights, defining the extent of lands, the measurements of streets and lightening, appointing guards for the public services, deporting the suspicious and criminals, defining the boundaries of houses, defining the type of trade activity, controlling and issuing regulations for selling and buying, supervising health and the press, placing fees on commodities and stores and collecting these fees to the government treasury and re-spending them on services, and organising the process of elections of the municipality. It also set the date for elections and defining the validity of the candidate or not.<sup>38</sup>

The establishment of the municipality and the issuance of law to regulate its functions explicitly illustrate to what extent the Kuwaiti sedentary society had developed and its complete transformation from a simple nomadic society into a more developed sedentary society. It is worth noting that with the establishment of the municipality of Kuwait in 1930, the Kuwaitis, for the first time, practised the first election process in order to elect members to the council. The historian Abdul Aziz Hussein mentions that the process of electing the members to the council was done through “inviting the elite of the country for a meeting in order to choose secretly members without nomination.”<sup>39</sup> The first mayor elected for the Kuwait municipality was Suleiman Al-‘Adasani who was succeeded by Yousif Al-Nisf. Their tenure was about ten years.<sup>40</sup>

It is clear that despite the fact that members were elected, notability and wealth remained the principles of assuming position in the municipality council. This

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<sup>37</sup> Musa Hanoun Ghaban, “Tatwer Nidham Al-Hukum wa Al-Idarah fi Al-Kuwait” [The Development of the System of Governing and Administration in Kuwait], Unpublished MA Thesis (Cairo: ‘Ain Shams University, 1988), pp.37-38. Upon the establishment of the municipality, its functions were to clean the city, supervise bakeries, burying dead people, guarding the city, and supervising the lightening of the city. See Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1951), p.135.

<sup>38</sup> *Minutes of the Kuwait Municipality Sessions*, vol.1 session no. 23, 1936. The Archive of the Centre of Manuscript, Folklore and Documents in Kuwait.

<sup>39</sup> Hussein, op. cit., p.94.

<sup>40</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook*, p.135, Najat Abdulqadir Al-Gina‘ai, *Baladiat Al-Kuwait fi Khamssin ‘Aman*, p.31.

highlights the continuous attempts of the merchant class to take part in administrating the country and the development of its approach to assume power. This was accompanied by an increase in the political awareness that was associating the movement of development in the Kuwaiti society.

The elected council assumed the responsibility of carrying out the internal public policy of the country, enacting special laws. This indicates clearly the scope of the social, economic and political development that Kuwait witnessed in that period and its gradual transformation to take means of modern administration. The municipality continued to do its work until the emergence of a special council for running the services in the country. These councils developed and became departments with special tasks such as education, police, customs, health, and so on.<sup>41</sup>

In 1936, a council for education was elected on the same basis that the municipality was established.<sup>42</sup> The councils of education and municipality represented a new trend towards participation in power as members of both of them were elected.<sup>43</sup> They also focused on internal matters, which became the focus of attention for the inhabitants—especially those who had some education—and saw in them the best means for developing the government system. However, the experience of the two elected councils—as other previous experiences—did not last for a long time due to the continuous disagreements between their members and the ruling family. As a result, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber dissolved the education council and established another one whose members were appointed. This led to a public resentment and pushed the members of both councils to resign in protest<sup>44</sup> against what they saw as an absolute rule. Since then, the relation between the two sides (the merchant class and the ruling family) entered a new stage in which both used their available means and power to defend their interests. The most fundamental feature of this stage appears to be that of direct conflict between the merchant class and the ruling family and interference of other internal and external powers in this conflict.

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<sup>41</sup> *Minutes of the Kuwait Municipality Sessions*, vol.3 session no. 43. The Archives of the Centre for Manuscript, Folklore, and Documents in Kuwait.

<sup>42</sup> Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, *Kuwait Guidebook*, pp.11-12.

<sup>43</sup> Ghadban, op. cit., p.45.

<sup>44</sup> Khalid Al-'Adasani, *Nisf 'Amm min Al-Hukm Al-Niabi fi Al-Kuwait [Half a Year for Parliamentary rule in Kuwait]* (Cairo: Maktabat Dar Al-'Aroubah, 1947), p.5.



### **10.4.3 The Kuwaiti National Movement**

There was a set of factors behind the emergence of what might be termed the Kuwaiti national movement, which called for administrative and political reform. These factors were the growth of the merchant class, the development of the educational and cultural life and interaction with the outside world, especially Iraq. The Iraqi regime was in favour of changes in the traditional political direction and in the revival of the ideals of Arab unity, which was promoted in some Arab countries, Kuwait in particular.<sup>45</sup> Other reasons, such as the negativity of the Kuwait regime, represented in the continuation of the absolute rule and the backwardness of the authority, and the lack of regulation on taxes imposed by the government on houses and trade shops in order to cover its expenses played a major role.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, the government's direct intervention in dissolving the education council and in preventing some prominent figures—who called for change and development in the administration in Kuwait—from being elected to the council of municipality and education was a reason for the emergence of this movement.<sup>47</sup> It started as an underground association with twelve members of the sons of the merchant class and called itself the reform bloc.<sup>48</sup> It started working secretly by circulating leaflets calling for reforms, writing on walls, and using the Iraqi press which sympathised with the demands of the movement and which found in it a good forum to preach its ideas.<sup>49</sup>

It is worth noting that the national movement was influenced by the prevailing political trends in Iraq—which was leaning to a pan-Arabism direction during the reign of King

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<sup>45</sup> Salah Al-'Aqqad, *Al-Tayarat Al-Siaysiah fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi [The Political Currents in the Arabian Gulf]* (Cairo: Matba'at Al-Anglo-Al-Misria, 1974), pp.231-32.

<sup>46</sup> As mentioned elsewhere, some of these taxes were more than the rent of shops, see Mohammed Ghanim Al-Rumeihi, "Harakat 1938 Al-Islahiya fi Al-Kuwait wa Al-Bahrain wa Dubai" [The 1938 Reform Movement in Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai], *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, (4), October 1978, p.33.

<sup>47</sup> Al-'Adasani, op. cit., p.5.

<sup>48</sup> The names of the members were not mentioned in all historical sources that talk about the association. However, it is certain that these members were among the sons of the merchants who received a reasonable education, see Al-'Adasani, op. cit., pp.5-6, and Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., pp.33-34.

<sup>49</sup> For example, Iraqi newspapers: Al-Zaman, and Al-Istiqlal. See the demands of this movement in *Al-Zaman Newspaper* on 11 April 1938.

Ghazi.<sup>50</sup> This was the case because of the easiness of communication between Iraq and Kuwait and the impact of the Iraqi media such as magazines and newspapers. In addition to that, the radio station of Al-Zuhoor palace which preached pan-Arabism and was encouraged by King Ghazi personally to broadcast especially in Kuwait.<sup>51</sup> Many Kuwaiti students were sent to Iraq to continue their education and therefore they came under the influence of Iraqi ideas. The first Kuwaiti student delegation was sent to Iraq in 1925. Among the most prominent of its members was Khalid Suleiman Al-'Adasani who, in 1938, became the secretary of the consultative council.<sup>52</sup>

The demands of the national movement focused on the principle of *shura* (consultation) and to implement the following requests:

- Establishing a legislative council to rule the country in a transparent way that the nation would be aware of the following situation.
- The necessity of the elite to take part in ruling the country along with the ruling family.
- Organising the economic situation in the country.
- Establishing a department for security and police emulating the one in Iraq.
- The ruler should be in touch with ordinary people and listen to their complains.
- Closing Kuwait in the face of foreigners whose majority were Iranians.
- Allowing Arabs to visit Kuwait without denying anyone.
- Setting up a special department for passports, travel and residency and linking it to the department of security.
- Separating the issue of visa on passports from the British consulate in Basra.
- Opening schools on larger scale and allocating a budget for sending students to study abroad.

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<sup>50</sup> Khaldoun Hassan Al-Naqeeb, *Al-Mujtama'a wa Al-Daolah fi Al-Khalij wa Al-Jazeera Al-Arabia (Society and State in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula)* 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (Beirut: Centre of Arab Unity Studies Press, 1989), p.116.

<sup>51</sup> See documents: FO371/23180-48, FO371/23180-54 FO371/23180-58, and FO371/23180-62. These were messages between the British Ambassador to Baghdad, M. Peterson and the British Foreign Office regarding the broadcast of Qasr Al-Zuhoor broadcasting station to Kuwait.

<sup>52</sup> Khalid Al-'Adasani, is the son of the merchant Suleiman Al-'Adasani who was elected as the first mayor for the Kuwait municipality in 1930. Al-'Adasani, op. cit., p.6, Al-Waqyan, op. cit., p.45.

- Signing defence/offence pacts with the neighbouring Arab governments to prevent any ambition for foreign countries in Kuwait.
- Emulating the Iraqi systems regarding education, finance and catching up with Arab renaissance.
- Developing the civilian and judicial administration by establishing two courts: one religious court and another for appeal.
- Organising the administration of customs and placing it under a special department and appointing a general director to run it.<sup>53</sup>

Examining these demands shows clearly the scope of the development in awareness of the Kuwaiti society in general and the national movement in particular. This was reflected in demand to participate in decision-making process, organising the state's institutions, setting up new institutions to catch up with the development of the society. It is also obvious that these demands were aimed at developing the education, judiciary system, and asking the help of more developed Arab countries, Iraq in particular and, probably most importantly, these demands included signals of the demand for political independence from Britain. This was crystallised in the demand for a separation of the authority of the passport visa from the British consul in Basra. It is explicit that the merchant class who headed this movement aimed to get the sympathy and the assistance of other lower-ranking classes by concentrating on developing the country and calling for independence and pan-Arabism. However, these demands were confined to improving the system in Kuwait and never called for the change of the regime. These qualified this movement to be a reformist opposition movement, which aimed only for a political participation, the introduction of parliamentary life into Kuwait, and developing the institution of the state.

There were several means of expressing these demands such as secret leaflets, writing on walls, and using the Iraqi press, which increased the enthusiasm of those calling for reform.<sup>54</sup> The movement created a positive atmosphere which the sheikh of Kuwait could not ignore. It enjoyed the sympathy of the public who was ready to accept its

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<sup>53</sup> See *Al-Zaman Newspaper*, 11 April 1938, and also Al-'Adarous, op. cit., p.245.

<sup>54</sup> Al-'Adasani, op. cit., p.6, Yousif Ibrahim Abdullah, "Tareikh Al-Ta'alim fi Al-Khalij Al-Arabi" [The History of Education in the Arabian Gulf], Unpublished PhD Thesis (Cairo: University of 'Ain Shams, 1992), p.407.

ideas, demands, and objectives. Therefore, the movement revealed itself and called itself the national bloc. It presented the Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber with a petition through senior merchants such as Abdullah Al-Hamad Al-Saqer, Mohammed Al-Thnyan Al-Ghanim, and Khalid Abdulateef Al-Bader.<sup>55</sup> The following is an excerpt from the petition:

...The basis that the nation endorsed your succession, on the first day of your assumption of power, that you govern on the basis of *shura* (consultation). This is the principle that was imposed by Islam and followed by the wise caliphs in their golden ages. However, tolerance that occurred between you and the nation led to forgetting this rule. In addition, the development of the situation, the change of time, and the critical condition that your subjects have been through, pushed the faithful of your subjects to advice you in order to come to an understanding with you, to sort out matters, to pre-empt the fluctuation of time, to safeguard our country, and to maintain its independence. We sought nothing but removing the reasons for the complaint through the faithful of your subjects. We hereby present our demand to form a legislative council composed of the loyal subjects to supervise running the country. We authorised our messengers to negotiate with you on this basis and we pray to God to guide all of us to the interest of the country, 30 *Rabi'a Al-Thani* 1357 Hijri.<sup>56</sup>

It is obvious that the main demands of the national movement were to set up a consultative council and to participate in the power in order to develop the governing and administrative system in Kuwait.

#### **10.4.4 The Establishment of the Kuwaiti Legislative Council in 1938**

Those who presented the petition were from the notables of Kuwait—who had connection with the ruling family, especially the strongest figure at the time, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who showed some interest in the movement and

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<sup>55</sup> Al-'Adasani, op. cit., p.6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp.5-6, Abdul Fattah Hassan, *Mabadi Al-Nidham Al-Dustory fi Al-Kuwait [The Principles of the Constitutional System in Kuwait]* (Beirut: Matba'at Dar Al-Nahdhah Al-'Asria, 1986), p.107.

encouraged it.<sup>57</sup> Following the impact of the advice offered by the British political agent in Kuwait, Captain. G. De Gaury (1936-39), who advised the sheikh of Kuwait not to oppose the introduction of some reforms,<sup>58</sup> Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber agreed on establishing a legislative council. This was the second attempt—to take part in power—by the merchant class represented in the notables of Kuwait.

The movement started immediately to set up a committee to select the voters who would have the right to vote. This committee confined the right to vote to only 150 Kuwaiti families.<sup>59</sup> Despite the justification for this selection presented by Khalid Al'Adasant (who became the secretary of the council) that, because the absence of registration department and the presence of many Iranians, this was the best way to know Kuwaitis from non-Kuwaitis,<sup>60</sup> the nobility and wealth factors played the major role in deciding who would have the right to vote. It is clear that the nature of the economic life, the semi-capitalist mode of production produced a social formation of a class society in which the upper class (the merchants) had reinforced its ultimate economic, social and political hegemony and did not allow other lower classes to compete them. This is obvious by looking at the names of those who were elected. They were: Abdullah Alhamad Al-Saqir, Yousif bin Isa Al-Gina'ai, Mohammed Al-Thnyan Al-Ghanim, Al-Sayd Ali Al-Sayd Suleiman, Yousif Marzouq Al-Marzouq, Salih Al-Ottoman Al-Rashid, Msha'aan Al-Khdeir Al-Khalid, Abdulateef Mohammed Al-Thnyan, Khalid Suleiman Al-'Adsani, Yousif Salih Al-Hmeidhi, Mohammed Al-Daouad Al-Marzouq, Sultan Ibrahim Al-Kuleib, Meshari Hassan Al-Bader, and Khalid Abdalateef Al-Bader.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Mohammed Al-Rumeihi argued that the reason for Sheikh Abdullah's encouragement of this movement was his desire to assume power in Kuwait. Sheikh Abdullah missed the chance to be the ruler upon the death of his father due to his small age. See Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.36. Khalid Al-'Adasani confirmed that Sheikh Abdullah met the British political agent in Kuwait and presented the approval of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber to the demand of the movement. This indicates that Sheikh Abdullah was not only supporting it but also took part in the activity of the movement, Al-'Adasani, op. cit., pp.6-7.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.37.

<sup>59</sup> Al-'Adasani, op. cit., p.11, Najat Al-Gina'ai, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait Bain Al-Harbain 1919-1939" [The Economic and Political Development of Kuwait in the Inter War Period, 1919-1939], Unpublished MA Thesis, (Cairo: 'Ain Shams University, 1972), p.225.

<sup>60</sup> *Jasim Al-Saqer*, "Al-Tajrubah Al-Democratia fi Al-Kuwait" [The Democratic Experience in Kuwait], *Al-Qabis Newspaper*,(3501), February 9, 1982.

<sup>61</sup> Faisal Ahmed Othman Al-Haider, *Wathaiq Al-Haraka Al-Demoqratia Al-Saiysia fi Al-Kuwait 1921-1992 [Documents of the Democratic Political Movement in Kuwait 1921-1992]* (Kuwait: Dar Dat Al-Salasil, 1995). p.14-15.

The names listed above came from the same families that composed the first council in 1921. Furthermore, many of them were the same members in both councils and some of them were the sons of former members. All of the members were from the well-known merchant families in Kuwait. This clearly shows that this movement was not only a political reformist movement claiming political reforms and developing the country. Rather, it was a new approach for the merchant class to restore its political power and reinforce its economic and social position. It indicates clearly the continuous efforts of the merchant class and the different ways it took to achieve this goal.

As a result, and to maintain their relation with the ruling family, after the election of the new council members, the council members chose Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, the then regent, to be the president of the council. The first thing the council did was to enact a basic law to regulate and organise the country in all fields: judicial, legislative, and executive. The law, which consisted of an introduction and five articles,<sup>62</sup> aimed to organise all institutions of the country. It also sought to bring the whole country under the authority of the council where no decision could be taken without its approval including the matters of accords, concessions, and international agreements. This practically meant stripping the sheikh of Kuwait from all of his authorities from taking any decision without referring to the council. More importantly, the law stated explicitly that the speaker of the council would represent the executive authority in Kuwait and, at the same time, it is the council who would represent the legislative authority. This means that the sheikh of Kuwait would have no control over the two legislative and executive authorities.

This law was endorsed by the council and then presented to Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber to ratify it. He did not oppose it in principle,<sup>63</sup> however, he hesitated to accept it on the ground that it should be applied gradually. It was conspicuous that Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber realised how this law would encroach on his authorities and would interfere in all domestic politics and did not want to ratify it but, at the same time, he sought to choose a way that would not arouse the anger of the council. However, the council realised his ulterior objective and so sent him a firm letter asking him to ratify the law. Their letter

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<sup>62</sup> Al-'Adsani, op. cit., pp.10-11, Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., pp.36-37, Najat Al-Gina'i, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait", pp.205-06.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed Al-Baghdadi, "Al-Tajrubah Al-Democratia fi Al-Mujtama'a Al- Kuwaiti" [The Democratic Experience in the Kuwaiti Society], *Al-Bahith Magazine*, (38), April-June, 1985, p.12.

had the implicit threat that the council had made up his mind and therefore the sheikh of Kuwait had little choice but to ratify it. This letter indicates the scope of the development of the national movement and its power to the extent that it threatened to use its power in order to realise the demanded reforms. The letter is dated on 12 *Jumadi Al-Awal* 1357 *Hijri*:

Your Highness, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah,

The legislative council has presented to you a law that enjoyed a unanimous approval of the members of the council clarifying the basic authorities of the council. We were told by his highness, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem what happened between you and him during his attempt to get your signature. Frankly, we feel that your answer was not convincing...in response to the statement of your highness, we would like to inform you that the council is not comfort and not convinced in these verbal statements. In the conditions that you assume power, you committed yourself that *Shura* (consultation) would be the principle of ruling, and as days went by, the nation has not seen your pledge in practice. Your highness, the deputies of the nation who are determined to serve the people and the country were serious and not hesitant. They have sworn that there would be no obstacle between them and serving the people. This moment is probably a watershed in the history of the country. It either takes us to what is good under your leadership or to the opposite. We are ready as one group to all expected options. In this moment we present our letter and waiting your decisive written answer to agree, and we pray to God to guide all of us to the good of the nation.<sup>64</sup>

It is obvious from the letter that the merchant class was strong enough to declare decisively that there would be no return to the individual absolute ruling in decision making. They were sufficiently strong to consider that the word should be for the legislative council in all matters, domestic or external, relevant to Kuwait and even the matters of the ruling family itself. This feeling of strength led the council to use the language of open and clear threat to the ruler in case he refused to approve this law. The source of this perceived strength could be ascribed to its economic power (its

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<sup>64</sup> Al-Jasim, op. cit., pp.29-30.

control of all aspect of economic activities) and its economic and social influence on other social classes. Therefore, it used its ability to influence the regime, which was in need to its financial support. On the other hand, it was able to use its dominance over other social classes, which was derived from its control over the means and relations of production, to obtain its alliance and use it as a public pressure on the ruling family to reach its objectives.

The hesitation of the sheikh of Kuwait to endorse the law stemmed not only from what the law represented (the encroaching of his authorities), but also from the implication of this on his relations with Britain, on which the sheikh had no say unless he refer to the British agent in Kuwait. The latter had a major role in the disputes which erupted later between the council and the government because of the council's threat to British interest in Kuwait. Despite the complex situation, the sheikh of Kuwait ratified the law on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1938. This was the first written legal document in the modern history of Kuwait.<sup>65</sup>

Following the ratification of the law, the council started working by taking some important measures. In addition to some general reforms which aimed at organizing the society, such as sacking the corrupt employees and judges, establishing civil courts, opening a new school and sending some students to study in Baghdad and Cairo, the council had taken some significant actions which were evidently aimed at serving the interest of the merchant class. The council abolished some taxes and reduced others such as the tax imposed on exports, on food, and the tax on pearling. It also cancelled some of the monopolies such as the monopoly of water, building stores and shops in the city. In addition, it regulated the customs and financial matters in a way that the value of customs tax on the imports of the country was defined, and the way it should be used on the institutions of the state. More importantly, the council started founding a regular police force and cancelled the Bedouin guards of the sheikh (*fidaweyiah*), and limited Iranians emigration into Kuwait.<sup>66</sup>

It is obvious that most of these regulations were in the favour of the merchant class and were imposed to serve their interests and reinforce their economic and political

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<sup>65</sup> Al-Rumeihi, op. cit., p.37, Al-'Adarous, op. cit., p.246.

<sup>66</sup> *Al-Siaysah Newspaper* (1236), March 27, 1972. Also Al-Waqyan, op. cit., p.50.



dominance. More importantly, by these regulations, the merchant class was clearly aimed at weakening the power of the Bedouins which became a key player in the balance of power in Kuwait during this phase. Bedouins, because of their financial and military strength provided the ruling family with a suitable alternative power to maintain its supremacy and relatively replaced the merchant class. It might be useful to mention at this point that Bedouins constituted a considerable part of the sedentary community in Kuwait as both part time labourers in the maritime activities and as *fidaweyiah* (bodyguards) and representatives of the ruling family sheikhs.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the *fidaweyiah* and the Bedouin tribesmen—in the desert— represented the army of Kuwait in the pre-oil era by which the sheikhs of Kuwait maintained not only their internal stability but even their external relationships with the neighbouring political entities. By these regulations, the merchant class, whose members carry both social and economic connotations—wealth plus an original (*asil*) lineage and Sunni sect of Islam— were also intended for preventing the growth of non-original and Shi‘aa groups by limiting the Iranian emigration to Kuwait.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the crucial decisions that the council took at the beginning and the reforms that enacted, it was clear that this council would not last for a long time due to the sensitivity of matters that the council sought to bring under its control, especially those that pertained to the authorities of the ruler and foreign policy that directly touched the British existence in Kuwait. These matters enraged the British political agent in Kuwait. He sent a letter to the British political resident in the Gulf, clarifying that the law of the council is similar to what was included in the statements of the French council in 1791. He warned him that the council, though currently loyal to the British, had the potential to rapidly transform to a national council which might embarrass Britain, not only in Kuwait but also in the rest of the Arabian Gulf Sheikhdoms because of the potential of other similar movements that would emerge.<sup>68</sup>

This correspondence gives a clear picture of the British stance towards the council and the implication of the existence of such a council not only in Kuwait but also in all the

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<sup>67</sup> For example Sheikh Mubarak appointed one of his *fidaweyiah* as customs collector to supervise all the revenues of land and sea. Ghadban, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> FO371/23180-27, September 8, 1938: a letter from the British Political Agent in Kuwait Captain G. De Gaury to the British Political Resident in the Gulf regarding the consultative council of 1938 in Kuwait.

Arabian Gulf sheikhdoms. Therefore, Britain sought to encourage the sheikh of Kuwait to end this council due to its potential threat on its interests in the region.

The identification of the British stance with that of the sheikh and some social groups (Bedouins and Shi'aa groups which were considered Iranians) that did not have the representation right in the council led to the formation of an opposite bloc calling for the necessity of dissolving the legislative council and threatened to use violence if its demands were not met.<sup>69</sup> One cannot rule out that this new bloc was encouraged by the British political agent in Kuwait in order to increase the opposition trend and create a chance for Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber to get rid of the council. The Sheikh asked the members of the council to meet him. However, they refused and insisted that if he intended to dissolve the council, they would use force if necessary to face the situation. Some of them resorted to the weapons stores and therefore an armed confrontation became the only way to decide the matter.<sup>70</sup>

However, the sheikh was in an advantageous position especially when he secured the support of the British government, which was keener to dissolve the council, on his side. The Bedouin tribes, who were not represented in the council and whose tribesmen were working for the sheikh as *fidawayeh* (which was abolished by the council) stood by him as well. Equally important was the stand of the ruler of Najd, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud—who feared the arrival of the ideas of this movement into his country and because of the existence of loyal members to the Hashemite Iraq in the council—expressed his readiness to interfere militarily in favour of sheikh of Kuwait.<sup>71</sup> In addition, Iranians residing in Kuwait (the council took a negative approach towards them in depriving them from the rights of nomination and elections in the council) stood by the sheikh of Kuwait.<sup>72</sup>

All of these factors in fact enabled the sheikh of Kuwait to decide the matter in his favour and won the first direct conflict with the merchant class. The members of the legislative council had no choice but to negotiate after a number of people were killed

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<sup>69</sup> Al\_Baghdadi, op. cit., p.12, Abdul Fattah, op. cit., p.110.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Baghdadi, op. cit., p.13.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.13.

and the imprisonment of others as a result of the armed confrontation between the two sides.<sup>73</sup> As a consequence, the sheikh of Kuwait dissolved the council on 18 December 1938 after an experience that lasted only six months. He announced the formation of another one by appointing fourteen members; four of them from the ruling family and the rest were notables from those who stood by him against the former council. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah was appointed speaker of the council. The council, however, had no authority apart from presenting advice to the sheikh. With the eruption of the Second World War the regime went back to the previous way of governing which continued until the death of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber in 1950.<sup>74</sup>

Based on what was discussed above, it is possible to say that the political opposition which later became known as the national movement was composed of notables and merchants whose class interests were coalesced with the public interests dictated by the nature of the development of the society. The reasons behind the demands of the merchant class of reforms, political participation, and indeed the formation of the national movement, especially during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber, were that the sons of this class received a better education inside and outside Kuwait; the acquisition of this class of culture and political awareness through their trade relations with other areas, especially Iraq; and the surrounding political conditions which helped develop and crystallised a sort of political awareness among the educated. Examples of these external developments that impacted upon the political awareness of this trade were the impact of the First World War on the region; the 1919 revolution in Egypt; the 1925 revolution in Syria; the Jewish emigrations into Palestine and the Palestinian revolution in 1936; and the political and social implications of the Great Depression.<sup>75</sup>

To sum up, it is possible to argue that all these political events represent the starting point of the state formation, in the strict sense of the word, in Kuwait. It is true that other factors (e.g. the appearance of the Bedouins as a military and economic power and the British military and financial support to the ruling family after the 1899 agreement) played a crucial role but the economic factor was the major one in this historical process

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<sup>73</sup> Rashid Abdullah Al-Farahan, *Mukhtasar Tariekh Al-Kuwait [The Shorter History of Kuwait]* (Cairo: Dar Al-'Aroubah, 1960), p.197, Najat Al-Gina'ai, "Al-Tatwer Al-Siaysi wa Al-Iqtisadi lil Kuwait", pp.249-51.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Jasim, *op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>75</sup> Salah Al-'Aqad, "Al-Istiqrar wa Al-'Awamel Al-Mudhadah fi Al-Kuwait" [Stability and Counter-factors in Kuwait], *Al-Siyasah Al-Dawliyah Magazine*, (43), 1976, p.149.

of the Kuwaiti society. Firstly; because Bedouins and the British, in addition to their military protection, they provided the ruling family with a very significant source of income by which it was able to be independent from the merchant class. And secondly and more importantly was the emergence of class society based upon the nature of division of labour and the ownership of means of production. The importance of class in the process of state formation stems from the role of the dominant class in the political and administrative institutionalisation of state apparatus to diffuse its domination over the society and ensure its economic and social hegemony.

It is clear that all these political and administrative institutionalisations (the establishment of the consultative, municipal, educational and legislative councils) were all efforts made by the merchant class to share power with the ruling family and diffuse its hegemony over the society.

Because the majority of the members of the Kuwaiti national movement belonged to the merchant class, it was natural that this fact reflected on its method and approach towards the ruling family. The activities of this movement were within the framework of reforms and political participation. It sought to the introduction of economic, social and political reforms. It did not ask for the change in the regime as it had an interest in maintaining its economic and social status and it was aware of the implication of its potential failure to bring about such a change, especially in the light of the existence of other social groups with political influences such as the Bedouins who were faithful to the ruling family.

## **10.5 Conclusion**

To sum up, it is possible to argue that the tribal framework of organization maintained as a system of governing before the reign of Sheikh Mubarak, in which a sort of consultation between the ruler and the notables existed. However, this system changed completely during the period 1896-1946 into an increasingly dictatorial direction. This extraordinary transformation was due to many remarkable developments in the political and economic aspects of Kuwaiti society. It seems evident that the economic factor played a fundamental role in this vital change and in determining the political structure

of the Kuwaiti society as a whole. The British interference (as a military and financial support) and the alliance of the Bedouin tribes (as a source of income and a military force) with the sheikh of Kuwait involved effective power being concentrated more and more in his hands. The sheikh's ability to ensure alternative sources of income and secure military forces for protection enabled him to get rid of the influence of the notables (the influential merchant class).

This dramatic transformation in the relationship between the ruling family and the merchant class led the latter to become politically subordinate to the ruling family after being its faithful ally since the establishment of Kuwait. As a result, and in order to restore its political influence, the merchant class transformed into a political oppositional class against the ruling family. Depending on its economic power, though it lost some of its political influence, the merchant class was able to control most of the economic and social institutions in Kuwait. Thus, it was able to maintain its indirect influence on the ruling family and reshape its relationship with it in a new approach.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the substantial transformation in its relationship with the ruling family, the merchant class remained dominant over other social classes which were economically dependant on it. As has been shown elsewhere, the relations of production, in the maritime semi-capitalist mode of production involved the basic means of production being owned by a particular class (merchants) to whom the majority of the sedentary community and a considerable part of the Bedouins were linked in a semi-capitalist type of relationship. However, class struggle or class conflict—in the Marxist sense of the term— between the owners of means of production and the labourers was not an observable fact in Kuwait. That is to say, the existence of economic classes which bear differential relationships to the means of production and which were, therefore, antagonistic did not express their antagonism in political action. The major reasons for that were:

- The existence of a wide variety of important intra-class groups renders class units relatively diffuse<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> James. A Bill and Carl Leiden, *The Middle East: Politics and Power* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), p.89

- The small size of the society and the continuation of the tribal consciousness, which made the individual relationship a condition of survival, somewhat concealed the realities of economic and social inequality.
- Group fissures within classes were numerous and deep enough to weaken cohesion and to retard class consciousness<sup>77</sup>.
- Loyalty to primordial groups such as the family takes precedence over loyalty to class<sup>78</sup>.
- The scarcity or absence of any other alternatives to the labour force and the insufficiency of the economic surplus made the working class unable to develop itself or form a political group united by a common interests.
- The complete lack of modern education within the labouring class and the widespread belief in superstitions between its members made them believe that existing circumstances were determined by fate and were hence unalterable. This led to the absence of class-consciousness, and awareness on the individual's part of the interests of his class.

As a consequence, it can be said that the working class was not an effective participant in the political conflict in pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Nevertheless, the absence of the class conflict does not detract from the reality of the mode of production determining social structure.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Eleven Conclusion

### 11.1 Introduction

The conclusion is comprised of three sections. The first concludes the study by relating its findings to the propositions outlined in the introduction chapter. The second reviews the importance of the mode of production approach and its implication in a non-Western society. Finally, the last section recommends relevant areas for further research.

### 11.2 Summary and Findings

In this study, efforts were made to trace the role of the economic factor in determining social and political structures of Kuwait society from 1896 to 1946. More precisely, it was an attempt to apply the theory of modes of production for a non-Western society where, in most cases, feudal relations did not exist, or at least made little quantitative and qualitative difference.

As a result of the harsh geographical and environmental conditions and the scarcity of water for agriculture, the inhabitants of Kuwait and Arabian Gulf in general during the period under examination, and even long before, depended almost entirely on two different sources of living: maritime economic activities (pearling, shipbuilding, and commercial sea transportation) and traditional economic activities (pastoralism, caravan trade and agriculture on a very limited basis, in some oases). On the basis of what has been seen through the historical study of these economic activities, it can safely be submitted that these two economic activities presented two distinct modes of production each of which had its specific production forces (tools, methods, aspects of nature to be appropriated by human production) and its particular patterns of ownership of means of production and relations of production.

For the purpose of this study these two modes were termed semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production. Because the former was similar to the capitalist mode of production in the exploitation process and varied only from it in the way of

appropriating the surplus value, it was called a “semi-capitalist mode of production”. This mode of production dominated in the Kuwaiti sedentary society. Meanwhile, as the labour and mechanism of surplus extraction were determined by non-economic relationships and organized more precisely on traditional forms of organizations, the latter was termed “traditional mode of production”. This mode prevailed in the adjacent and interior desert of Kuwait.

It was evident from the study that as a result of the historical development of maritime economic activities (semi-capitalist mode of production), their division of labour and relations of production, the social structure of the Kuwaiti sedentary society was shaped further by economic factors. The semi-capitalist mode of production, however, produced a social formation of a class society in which the owners of capital and means of production constituted a dominant but not ruling class whereas the workers composed the non-owners and most exploited class.

The essence of class formation was the historical development in which the new semi-capitalist mode of production presented itself and linked with the pre-existing one (the traditional mode). Although the new class structure was articulated mainly upon economic basis in which the pattern of ownership of means of production and the nature of its resultant relations of production played the major role, the predominance of the semi-capitalist mode of production did not dissolve the tribal, ethnical and sectarian framework of organization practiced in the traditional mode. That is to say, the reproduction (the continued existence of the traditional mode of production in the nomadic community) and the transformation (the replacement of the traditional mode by the semi-capitalist mode) was the result of specific changes in social relations.

The transformation of the Kuwaiti sedentary community into a new mode of production was not sudden or arbitrary. It was a result of the long period of time Al-Utub had spent along the eastern coast of Arabian Peninsula in their way to Kuwait. During this period of time, Al-Utub had learned most of the maritime economic activities and moved from nomadism (traditional mode of production) to a maritime semi-capitalist mode of production.

The new semi-capitalist mode of production, however, provided the basis in which the tribal, ethnical and sectarian socio-economic practices crystallized and coexisted with



the nascent class system. In other words, it can be said that while the social formation of the Kuwaiti sedentary society constituted by a single mode of production (the semi-capitalist), it did not rule out other elements belonging to the pre-existing traditional mode. The presence of these elements, belonging to the traditional mode of production, in the sedentary community social formation were not ruled out as long as their presence did not threaten or contradict the conditions of existence of the dominant relations of production of the dominant semi-capitalist mode. That is to say that other political, ideological and theoretical levels or instance which composed the semi-capitalist mode of production were articulated with the economic being determinant in the last instance.

At the same time, the traditional mode of production which was replaced by the semi-capitalist mode in the settled society remained prevalent in the adjacent and interior desert. The broad trait of this mode of production, (with special exception to agriculture which was practiced on a very limited basis and based on a semi-feudalist system), was the organization of labour and production on non-economic basis. As a way of survival—in the nomadic society—labour and production were organized around family, clan and tribal basis in which means of production were owned collectively. In other words, economic relationship in the nomadic society was always expressed through structures (sets of practices) which bear other functions too. That is to say that, the demand to meet human individual and social needs in the traditional mode of production shaped the organization of production, determined the utilization of the means of production, and thereby influenced social relations.

Nevertheless, collective ownership and utilization of the means of production never meant that nomadic society's members were not ranked or all were placed in an equal economic and social position. In contrast, collective work and mutual help was only a condition of survival and participants in the production process were from different economic and social standings. Economic and social statuses in the nomadic society were mostly calculated in terms of ownership of the final product (animals and tributes). Therefore, regardless of their lifestyle, those who advantaged (certain tribes and certain social groupings within the tribe) always had a much better chance to accumulate more wealth and then had much more prestige, power and security than others.

By virtue of these advantages, those tribes and those groupings within them were able to obtain more power to control the utilization of the means of production and thus accumulate more and more wealth again. In other words, the individual actors that participated in production in the nomadic society had different kinds of rights and powers over the use of the means of production and thus over the result of their use. The sum total of these rights and powers, in fact, determined the social relations of production between the participants.

As a consequence, the economic position, which was based on the ability to get more wealth and hence prestige and power to control the means of production, led to the creation of a highly stratified social system in the nomadic society. This system involved an economically advantaged minority of individuals who benefited more from the utilization of the means of production and an economically disadvantaged majority of individuals who did not. It was apparent that the relationship between these two categories, whether within the nomadic society as whole between tribes or within each tribe between its members, was established on an unequal basis and naturally would lead to exploitation and unequal distribution of gains. Therefore, it can be said that in spite of the overlapping between social and economic factors in determining the social structure of the nomadic society, social differentiations and social strata were shaped further by economic factors, and articulated along socio-economic lines.

On the basis of these general considerations, it can be argued that the components of the maritime and Bedouin economies represented essentially two modes of production embedded in one social formation. The fundamental characteristic of the combination of these two modes of production was the coexistence of the tribal socio-economic practises with the nascent class system. More importantly, the combination of these two modes of production contributed effectively in forming a vastly stratified social structure based largely on economic basis.

This study has also demonstrated that although a large part of the Kuwaiti population was transformed into a class-structured community on an economic basis, this did not dissolve the tribal, ethnical and sectarian framework of organization. In contrast, the new system provided the basis for crystallising and reshaping all these frameworks in a new order along economic basis.

In order to achieve a better economic status, and to monopolize their economic activities and preclude others from entering them, families, tribal and ethnical groups specialized in one economic activity by which they were transformed into socio-economic production units. With the passage of time, the economic organization of the maritime industries in general extended gradually into social order in which the owners of capital and means of production families transferred to be the leading or central families in the sedentary society. In the meantime, most, if not all, of their workers were tied to them through familial, tribal or ethnical relations. As a result, it was very common to find some activities confined to certain tribal, ethnical or sectarian groups (e.g. trade to the Sunni *sharif* group, shipbuilding and handcrafts to the Baharna Shi'aa group and blacksmith to the Sulubba group, etc.). In other words, it can be said that the dynamics of the Kuwaiti social structure during 1896-1946 (as stated by Bill) developed out of an integrated system of both (ethnic, tribal and sectarian) vertical groups and (economically determined classes) horizontal stratification. Both group and class structures relate to one another reciprocally, and it is this reciprocity that builds coherence into the socio-political system.

This fact in turn led to the continuation or even to the reinforcement of the cross-cousin and equal marriage systems. As in the nomadic society, the cross-cousin and equal marriage systems became the basis for monopolizing economic resources and maintaining social and political superiority over other social groups. Moreover, these systems became also the basis for making tribal and political alliances. As a result, it was natural that these systems would have a negative effect on the status of women who were put under the complete control of men and stratified in a lower social status in spite of their positive contribution —according to their social position— in different productive activities.

This study evidently showed that, as a result of the patterns of ownership of means of production, division of labour and the resultant relations of production within these two (semi-capitalist and traditional) modes of production, merchants and Bedouin notables constituted a dominant class in the Kuwaiti society. The merchants, by virtue of their economic power, constituted a dominant class which achieved an ultimate dominance over other classes in the sedentary community. The Bedouin notables (sheikhs and wealthy Bedouins), depending on their wealth and tribal superiority, composed a superior status group and enjoyed a supreme dominance in the desert. Depending on

their economic power, merchants and Bedouin notables were able to achieve and maintain an ultimate social hegemony over other social classes and constituted the most influential class in Kuwaiti society.

On the other hand, the lack of capital and means of production and the rights and powers to use them, made the majority of individuals in both sedentary and nomadic societies such as sailors, divers, pullers, ship-carpenters, herders, guards and *rafiqs*, etc. compose the labouring and less advantaged class which was almost entirely dependant on the former in its source of living. Obviously, the relationship between these two classes was both unequal and exploitative in that the dominant class took unfair advantage of the subordinate one. That is to say, the pattern of ownership of capital and means of production and the rights and powers to use them in Kuwaiti society, to a large extent, shaped the nature of the social stratification and the nascent system of social classes in that society.

However, in spite of the great deal of distinction between their specific forms of ownership and patterns of relations of production, these two modes of production provided the basis in which the expropriation of surplus value always takes place between more than two classes or social groups. For example, in pearling and seafaring it was not only *nukhudas* whose surplus was extracted by merchants but also *nukhudas* themselves extracted surplus from sailors. This was also the case in shipbuilding industry between merchants and master-shipwrights and then between the latter and shipbuilders and carpenters. On the other hand, in the traditional mode of production, although production —to a large degree especially in pastoralism— was organized on the basis of households, there was a surplus extraction between nomads and semi-nomads and between the tribal notables, tribesmen, former slaves and servants. In other words, it can be said that in spite of the possibility of the existence of some social groups within the Kuwaiti social formation, which can be stratified in the middle class position according to the principles of division of labour, wealth and power (e.g. petty merchants, *nukhudas* and master-shipwrights, etc.), the two (dominant and dominated) classes were the two fundamental and characteristic classes of the Kuwaiti social formation.

From what has been seen throughout this study, it is evident that the dominant class (merchants and Bedouin notables) never achieved a political dominance, in the strict

sense of the word, in Kuwaiti society. Although it was able to attain a political influence upon both other lower-ranking classes and the ruling family, it never became a ruling class. However, the political influence this class achieved was mainly derived from the power its members gained in society through the economic resources they controlled and, then, by the social and political dominance they achieved. All other lower-ranking classes and social groupings in the Kuwaiti sedentary and nomadic society were linked to this class through economic links within social, tribal or familial frameworks. On the other hand, this class provided the economic and military power upon which the ruling family relied throughout its long history of governing in Kuwait.

Apparently, though the merchants and Bedouin notables constituted the influential class in Kuwaiti society in the considered period, there was a great deal of variation between the effects of each of them in the Kuwaiti governing process. The difference appears to be in the role each group played in the Kuwaiti political life in general and in the time of playing this role. The merchants, since the establishment of Kuwait in the 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1896, were able to participate directly in the governing process and to have their say in important matters before the final decision took place. This role was mainly derived from their economic power (as they were the only source of income for the ruling family). Thereafter, from 1896 to 1950 and as a result of the subsequent political and economic changes that had taken place in Kuwait, the merchants lost a substantial part of their political influence and became subordinate to the ruling family.

Bedouin notables, on the other hand, never practiced a political influence on the Al-Sabah family or on the Kuwaiti sedentary community before 1896. Kuwait, during this period of time, was considered as a tribal territory of Al-Utub tribal confederation which was led by Al-Sabah. Therefore, the relationship between the Bedouin tribes and Al-Sabah family during this stage was based on the tribal traditions which regulated relationships between different tribes in the nomadic society. Since 1896, and as a result of the dramatic transformation in the external political status of Kuwait by which Kuwait transformed into a political entity, the authority of Al-Sabah was transformed into a central government for the adjacent Bedouin tribes. And the relationship between the Bedouin tribes and Al-Sabah family became a relation between Bedouin tribes and central authority to which they had to pay taxes and alms during peacetime and provide men and arms during the war.

It should be realised that while the influence of the merchants on the ruling family was entirely derived from their economic power, Bedouin notables played a rather different role. It is true that Bedouin taxes and alms constituted a substantial source of income for Al-Sabah family but, more importantly, Bedouin notables were the leaders of a huge numbers of tribesmen by which they dominated large territories in the desert and claimed regular tributes from caravan traders and sedentary peasants. As a result, the influence of the Bedouin notables was not only derived from their economic importance to the ruling family but also from their military power which made all urban centres compete in building up political alliances with them.

The appearance of the Bedouins as a military and economic power and the interference of the British after the 1899 agreement in the internal affairs of Kuwait led to a thorough change in the balance of power in Kuwait. The financial and military support of both the British and Bedouin tribes provided the basis for transforming Al-Sabah family into a ruling family, in the strict sense of the term, after being a leading family since the inception of Kuwait in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The British protection and Bedouin financial and military support reinforced the position of Al-Sabah family and provided them with a significant alternative source of income which made them, to some degree, independent of the merchant class. As a consequence, the merchants had lost much of their influence on the decision-making process and became politically subordinate to Al-Sabah family.

In order to restore their political influence the merchants transformed into a political oppositional class against the ruling family. Their economic power remained the only effective means by which they reshaped their relationship with the ruling family and maintained their indirect influence on it. In other words, despite the big loss of the merchant class and the extraordinary change in their relation with Al-Sabah family, they remained a dominant class over all other classes by their monopoly of capital and mean of production. By their economic power they were also able to get a better chance in education than others. Education, which had witnessed some developments during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was almost entirely confined to the sedentary rich people who owned both the time and money needed for education such as merchants and *nukhudas*. As a result, the merchant class —depending on its economic power and by virtue of its educational achievements— was able to lead the political opposition against the ruling family and call for reforms and political participation.

Accordingly, it can safely be argued that—in addition to the other factors (the appearance of the Bedouins as a military and economic power and the British military and financial support to the ruling family)—the emergence of a class society based upon the nature of division of labour and the ownership of means of production in Kuwait represented the starting point of the state formation, in the strict sense of the word, in Kuwait. The emergence of a class society marked the emergence of state. The importance of class in the process of state formation stems from the role of the dominant class in the political and administrative institutionalisation of state apparatus to diffuse its domination over the society and ensure its economic and social hegemony.

It was evident that the dominant class in the sedentary society (the merchants) made many efforts to set up administrative and political institutions to diffuse and articulate their hegemony over the entire society. During the period 1896 and 1946, Kuwait witnessed the initial stage of the state formation in which the dominant class in the sedentary society (the merchants) played the major role. All political and administrative institutionalisations (e.g. the establishment of the consultative, municipal, educational and legislative councils and the issuance of the *diving* and *Al-Sifr* laws) which affected the formative process of the state were made by the merchant class. All these efforts were made by the merchant class to share power with the ruling family and diffuse its hegemony over the society. More importantly, this, indeed, influenced the gradual development of the proto-state structure which would be the basis of the state apparatus in the post oil period. In other words, it can be said that in the period under consideration Kuwait proceeded through the first stage of state formation. In this stage Kuwait witnessed a major transformation from nomadism (traditional mode of production to semi-capitalist mode of production) on its way to an oil-rentier economy.

It was apparent that the economic factor played the key role in determining the nature of relationship between the merchants and the ruling family. Throughout its long history in opposing the ruling family (from 1896 to 1938), the merchant class depended only on its economic power and aimed only at participating in the governing process. It was clear that the principal object of the merchant class was only to have its say in the decision-making process to protect its economic interests and establish administrative institutions by which it could reinforce its domination. Therefore, the merchant class never claimed to overthrow Al-Sabah family or to replace them.

On the other hand, the Bedouin notables never interfered directly in the governing process in Kuwait or claimed direct political participation. Their relationship with the ruling family was mostly through tribal and political alliances which define clearly the duties and rights of each part. As a consequence, they were usually closer and their relation more favourable to the ruling family than the merchants. Furthermore, members of the ruling family usually intermarried with them in order to strengthen their position by obtaining the loyalty of their wives' tribes.

With regard to the relationship between merchants and Bedouin notables, it can be said that in spite of their spatial and cultural differences and political rivalries, these two groups were not isolated or separated. On the contrary, they were socially interrelated and economically interdependent. It is true that their relationship underwent many ups and downs as a result of their political rivalries and because of the Bedouins' control of the caravan trade routes and claiming tributes from the merchants. Nevertheless, the dominant nomadic strata and merchant class, depending on their social and tribal relationships, were able to set up alliances and cooperative relationship by which they maintained and consolidated their economic interests. Here again the cross-cutting vertical and horizontal stratification system played a major role in maintaining the relationship between the merchants and Bedouin notables.

It was remarkable that in spite of the emergence of a social stratified system on economic basis and the transformation of a considerable part of the Kuwaiti society into class society, class struggle or class conflict—in the Marxist sense of the term—between the owners of means of production and the labourers was not an discernible fact in Kuwait. In other words, the emergence of economic classes which bear differential relationships to the means of production and which were, therefore, antagonistic did not express their antagonism in political action.

As mentioned elsewhere Kuwait, at that time, was in the initial stage of a state formation. In spite of the continuous efforts of the merchant class to set up administrative and political institutionalisations which indicate the extent of the development of its political consciousness, the dominated working class was unable to develop itself or form a political class united by a common interests. This was a result of the existence of a wide variety of important intra-class groups which rendered class



units relatively diffuse, the loyalty to primordial groups (e.g. family, clan, tribe) took precedence over the loyalty to class, and group fissures within classes were numerous and deep enough to weaken class cohesion and to retard class consciousness. In addition, the small size of the society and the continuation of the tribal consciousness, where the personal relationship became a condition of survival, made the realities of economic and social inequality, to some degree, indiscernible. Moreover, the complete lack of modern education within the labouring class and the widespread belief in superstitions between its members made them believe that existing circumstances were determined by fate and were hence unchangeable. This led to the absence of the class-consciousness, and awareness on the individual's part of the interests of his class.

As a result, it can safely be said that the working class had taken no part in the political process and did not contribute effectively in the political development of the pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Nevertheless, the absence of the class conflict does not detract from the reality of the mode of production determining social structure.

To sum up, it is possible to argue that the developments of social and political structures of the Kuwaiti society during the period 1896-1946 were, to a large degree, affected by shifts in modes of production and its consequent relations of production. It is evident that the pattern of relations of production within the semi-capitalist and traditional modes of production in the pre-oil Kuwait played the major role in setting up the general framework of the Kuwaiti social formation and its subsequent political and cultural developments.

### **11.3 Theoretical Considerations**

The application of the theory of modes of production and the utilization of the concepts of mode of production, social formation, and articulation of modes of production in this study were very useful. The mode of production theory in its less determinate form was useful in shedding light on understanding social transformation in Kuwaiti society by showing how traditional mode of production (with its economic, political and ideological levels) articulated with the semi-capitalist one. It provided a historical analysis of the transformation of the Kuwaiti society from one stage to another and the

coexistence of the former traditions and norms with the new nascent practices and settings.

The mode of production model raised fruitful questions about the combination and consequence of different patterns of economic organizations in Kuwait. It provided the basis for realising how economy conditioned social and political developments. Moreover, this model offered a framework for comparing the evolution of sedentary and nomadic parts of the Kuwaiti society. In other words, the mode of production approach illuminated clearly the coexistence of more than one mode of production (and among (non-corresponding) 'instances') within single social formation and how they related to each other (that is articulated).

On the other hand, while the social formation concept referred to the multitude of social relations of production within the society the term articulation emphasized their contact and interaction (it emphasized change). The concept of articulation focused attention on the interaction of the varied way in which different patterns of production and their reinforcing political institutions and ideologies combined in real settings.

By using the mode of production theory, Marxist and Weberian concepts of class and status group and non-Marxist models such as Ayubi's and Bill's, it was possible to come to the conclusion that the economic factor was the major and effective pivot in the historical movement of the Kuwaiti society, and played a crucial role in shaping its social and political structures.

#### **11.4 Further research**

This study clearly shows that there is a considerable need for a further research concerned with three relevant areas.

First: agriculture which was practiced as a source of living in the pre-oil era in Kuwait, western part of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the Trucial Coast of Oman (the present UAE). Agriculture, considered a subordinated occupation practised by the tribes of unknown origins, was based on a semi-feudalist system by which the land owners (sheikhs and capital owners) enjoyed not only complete rights and powers over it and the results of its use but even on the conditions under which peasants used it. This

system of production, the ways of owning the land, the inheritance and distribution of the land and the distribution of the product between the owners and producers and then the distribution of the portion of the owners between them if the land, for example belongs to a tribe or a clan all need further investigation. This, will surely lead to better understanding of the economic organisation of this activity and its impact on the social and political structure of the society.

Second: although this study has highlighted the impact of the economic activities on the cultural production of the Kuwaiti people, it is possible to say that there is a considerable need for further research on this topic. Cultural production of the Arabian Gulf people in general in the pre-oil era provides a very useful material for understanding the social, economic and political realities of that society.

Third: the role of women in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf region in general in the pre-oil era, needs further investigation. Women were an important part of the society and had a substantial contribution in its development but historical studies have never given them the attention they deserve.

Finally, the last point of importance which is worth mentioning here is that it is hoped that the framework applied to this study can form the basis for a comprehensive study of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula as a whole and a comparative study between this area and North Africa. People of the Arabian Gulf countries and North Africa, especially, Libya, and considerable parts of Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco in the pre-oil era had relatively lived in similar geographical, environmental and economic situations where nomadism, caravan trade and some other handicrafts were practiced and had their effect on the structure of these societies. This similarity can certainly be a base for a further comparative study from a different perspective which depends on the importance of the economic factor as a determinant factor in the historical movement of societies.

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## Appendix 1 The Law of Divers<sup>1</sup>

In the name of God, the merciful  
The Law of divers in Kuwait  
Issued in the Year 1359h-1940A.D

We the ruler of Kuwait: Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, in accordance the suggestion of the chairman of the consultative committee, and because of our wish to reform the country and our subjects, we order the following:

**Article One:** This is called the Law of Divers and is composed of 51 articles.

**Article 1:** It is obligatory for every sea diver to appear before his captain at least half a month prior to the official diving trip to service the ship. This order is effective inside and outside the country except in cases of a legitimate excuse [for absence]. If the diver appears without an excuse, he shall be punished.

**Article 2:** The seamen are obliged to obey the orders of the captain during the season of diving whether they are on sea or on land. They have no right to disobey or object to his orders whatever they may be. However, if anything occurs which may disturb the system of diving, the captain then should have the crew or others witness it and take the issue to the ruler.

**Article 3:** when a seaman receives *salaf* [an advance] from his captain and is absent without a legitimate excuse then he is obliged to return the advance. In addition, he will have to pay the penalty decided upon by the Government at the end of the diving season.

**Article 4:** A seaman signs with a captain for diving and receives the advance. If the ship stops in one of the ports and the seaman stays behind, then his case will be taken to the ruler.

**Article 5:** When a seaman is a month or later in appearing for the official trip of the diving season without a legitimate excuse, then the captain has the choice of either

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the consultative council's meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Jamadi Al-Alawal*, 1359 *hijri*. Translation is derived from Jacqueline Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), pp.161-71.

levying the official fine [*fasal*] or reducing the advance by half and allowing the seaman to join the ship. This is only if half of the season has not passed. But if more than half of the season has passed, then the seaman has to pay the approved penalty.

Article 6: If the season is over and the seaman did not appear and did not have a legitimate excuse for his absence, then he has to pay the penalty levied.

Article 7: If a seaman escapes from diving two times or more and is apprehended, he will not be released without the bond of a guarantor.

Article 8: For any seaman who does not fulfil the service expected from him on the land or the sea the captain has a choice of either paying him only half of the advance or taking from him half of the advance and releasing him, or accepting from him a note promising one-third of his share.

Article 9: If a seaman gets sick, it is the duty of the captain to take care of him as well as circumstances allow. If the seaman could not stay on the ship due to illness, it is the captain's duty to send him home. When the seaman reaches home, he is expected to see a doctor. If God grants him recovery, then he must return to his captain.

Article 10: If a seaman claims to be sick and is sent home by his captain for treatment and the doctor discovers he is not sick, then he will be punished and must return immediately to his captain.

Article 11: The penalty [levied on the seaman] for diving captain is the same amount decided by the government, for the advance.

Article 12: If a captain signs a seaman to duty and the seaman has a penalty levied against him [by a former captain] in an explanatory note and was not able to pay the penalty... the former captain can write a note for the penalty and the latter captain has no right to the levied penalty.

Article 13: If a captain was unable to dive [because of being] late and could not pay the penalty [to the crew], then he must write a note [guaranteeing to the crew] one-third of the share for one full year and the captain [who the crew sings on with] does not get part of it.

Article 14: If a seaman diver borrowed money [from the captain] after the return, then he is required to take the advance and travel with [the captain] for the dive [the following season] and he has no right to ask his captain for a note that year.

Article 15: All seamen who are diving together: the living pay the debts of the dead, the present of the absent, on the condition that those who participate have reached the age of maturity. The agreement should be written in the presence of all those who are

participating and witnesses. No participants should break up until all debts on all of them are paid.

Article 16: The captain has no right to pay money to any of the participants except in the presence of all [members of the crew] or a legal authorization from those absent. If the captain paid one of them and the rest did not approve it, then it becomes a special [arrangement] with the receiver.

Article 17: If one of those participating in the dive dies and leaves any thing besides his house, his [belongings] will be distributed among his debtors in accordance with the amount of debt. As for the house, it will be under the jurisdiction of articles 18 and 19.

Article 18: If a seaman dies and leaves a house and has no inheritors, this house if it came from the money of the diving captain, and he can prove it, is for the captain. But if it was owned as a result of inheritance or purchased from money not derived from diving, then it will go to all the debtors, each in accordance with his debt.

Article 19: If the seaman dies and has no property except his house and has young children, and it is proven that the house came from the money of diving, the captain has to wait until the children reach the age of maturity. Then he will give them the choice between paying the debt to the captain, or diving [to satisfy] the debt of their father, or selling the house and paying its value to the diving captain. If it is proven that the house came from [money] other than diving money, the descendants will be giving the choice at the age of the maturity between selling the house and paying its value to all the debtors, or keeping the house and guaranteeing payment of the father's debt.

Article 20: It is not allowed for the diving captain to pay seamen joining him on the [system] of one-third share more than the specified government increase. He has no right to delay [payment] of the third. It should be paid at the end of the diving season

Article 21: If a captain gave a seaman a new note [promising] one-third of the share and another captain joined him, the first [captain] has no right to regain the seaman until the money of the new captain is depleted, unless the first captain has a good excuse to regain [the seaman]



Article 22: If a captain was unable [to go] diving after the seaman joined him on the [system] of one-third share, the captain has the right to send the seaman diving with whomever he chooses, or give a note [promising] one-third of the share. The captain that is unable to go diving has no rights [on the seaman] until the money of the seaman's new captain is depleted. The new captain has to pay the unable captain one-third of the seaman ['s share]

Article 23: The seaman who joins [a crew] on the [system] of one-third and a leftover occurred from his earnings, and after paying one-third to the first captain, he has to pay one-fourth of the leftover to the unable captain. But if he [the seaman] was paid five rupees of the advance, all the leftovers are for the seaman

Article 24: The [financially] weak captain who enlists seamen on the [system] of one-third and pays then [in advance] from 10 to 15 rupees and if he does not get his money by the end of the earning season, the seamen have no right to ask in coming year for the advance according to the government regulation. They have to be satisfied with last year's advance or repay the advance they have.

Article 25: If a seaman was not able to dive with the big ships and was able to ride with the small ones or with the Khamamis on the system of one-third, then one-third goes to his captain if there was one or captains if they were more.

Article 26: If a seaman accepted a note on one-third [system] and does not go diving without legitimate reason, then he has to pay the penalty suitable to his circumstances. In the case of disagreement, the ruler will be the final judge.

Article 27: If a diver takes to the sea alone [*azzal*] and had taken an advance, no matter how little it may be, he has no right to the fifth except with the agreement and consent of a captain. If he has not taken an advance, he has the right to half of the fifth. And if the loaner is indebted to another captain, the loaner will have ten percent of the leftover and the rest will go to satisfy the loan.

Article 28: If a captain rented a ship on the [system] of half of the fifth and took on an *azzal* [loaner] with him, he has one-fourth of the fifth, except if he has a condition [stating] one-half of the fifth; then he has that.

Article 29: If a *tabab* dives *rawasi* [dives without assistance] and God was generous, his captain will have one-half of the fifth and the share of the coast of food [for the *tabab*]. If the *tabab* dives with a rock, *hajar* [with assistance], his captain will get one-half of the fifth and one share of *radhif* and the coast of food [for the *tabab*], and if the *tabab* dives *aydah* [with assistance], then he will pay the share of the *siyb* in addition to half of the fifth and the coast of his food.

Article 30: If a captain took a ship and spent on it what is essential [to its maintenance] and this expenditure was more than the ship's earnings, the addition will stay as a debt on the owner of the ship in the coming season to be paid to the captain. But if the owner sold the ship, then he has to pay the debt from the [sale] price. If the ship sinks, the captain will have nothing. But if it broke and can be repaired, the debt stays as it is.

Article 31: If a captain rents a ship for a fixed [amount] of money, then everything spent on the ship will be counted toward the rental, and the captain has to itemize the expenses in a detailed bill.

Article 32: Every seaman who is employed in government [service] or the oil company is obliged to pay to the chief of divers [*maamour al-ghawasin*] fifteen percent of his monthly salary.

Article 33: For every seaman who is employed by other than government or the oil companies, the captain then has the choice between compensation [*facil*] or the seaman.

Article 34: [In the case of] every merchant who advances a loan to a diving captain [in anticipation of the] diving harvest and the captain was not able to gain enough to make payment., the merchant has no right to demand payment from property. But he takes all the seamen and the ships. And if this does not satisfy all the loan, he then can take property, with the exception of the captain's private dwelling.

Article 35: If a diving captain borrowed from somebody and uses his property or his house as security in a legal contract and the captain is unable to pay, then the debtor can sell whatever property was put up as security, and the captain has no right to direct the debtor to the seaman or the ships.

Article 36: Everyone who gives to [lends] the diving captain is obligated to provide all the money [to outfit the ship] and provide food on the sea and land [for the crew] and to pay the captain what he owes on the seamen's account. [The lender is also obliged to pay] the thirds to the crew on [the system of] one-third without interest. The captain is obligated to surrender to the lender all that is purchased and will not hide from him anything. If he hides anything, then he has no right for the remainder of the account and the thirds and a punishment will be inflicted on him.

Article 37: Anybody who wants to demand payment of a debt from a captain should do it immediately after *quffal* [close of the season]. If a month elapses since *quffal* before the debtor requests payment, then he forfeits his right for this year. The debtor has the right to make his demand next year in accordance with this article.

Article 38:

It is forbidden for the diving captain to make a condition with a *tawash* [pearl merchant] when selling [in which] some money [is gained] for the captain himself or any of his relatives. [if it] becomes evident that he has taken some [money] this will be taken from him and will be added to the total [income]. It is not allowed for the captain to make an income from pearling [additional] to his share.

Article 39: The diving captain is obligated to inform the seamen of the value upon the completion of sale.

Article 40: Every captain who lends [advances] money to the seaman on *Al-khanchiyahh* or *raddah* after the issuing of this law, all that is left by the end of the two seasons will be considered as cancelled.

Article 41: If a seaman owed a captain a remainder of *khanchiyahh* or *raddah* before the issuing of this law, its settlement is with the ruler. And if a seaman rides with a captain whom he owed previously and a leftover occurs [after taking the shares] then the captain receives payment of his old debt [from the leftover].

Article 42: If a seaman has in his hand a note on the [system] of one-third and a *tawash* or *qatta* [merchant] or others took the seaman [in his service] during the diving season, then the one who included the seaman [in his crew] has to pay the levied penalty. And if he included the seaman without a paper, then the blame is on him and he will pay the levied penalty.

Article 43: If a merchant captain took a seaman on a journey going to Zanzibar or Malabar and fifteen days passed from the diving [season] and his seaman does not arrive, then the merchant captain has to pay the levied penalty to the diving captain. The diving captain has the choice between receiving the levied penalty or taking the seaman. If the seaman is late [the same period] for the second trip, the judgment will be the same.

Article 44: It is obligatory for the captain of a merchant ship on his second trip to ask the diving seaman to have in writing permission from his diving captain to join [the merchant crew]. If the merchant captain signs the seaman without the written [permission] and the season of diving begins and the seaman does not arrive, and the [pearling] ship departs, then the merchant captain has to pay to the diving captain one and half times the amount of compensation decided by the government. The merchant captain will be reprimanded by the ruler. But if the [diving] captain did not go diving, the merchant captain in this case is obligated to pay the penalty which is paid by the other seamen [of the diving crew] who do not go diving.

Article 45: If a seaman arrives in the season of diving and his merchant captain wants to send him to Basra for unloading of cargo, he has the right to do so.

Article 46: If the seaman was delayed fifteen days because of travelling [with a merchant vessel] and his captain did not go diving, then the captain has a choice of either taking the seaman or taking half of the advance paid by the merchant captain

Article 47: It is not allowed for the lender to complain about a seaman who has taken the advance from his captain, but he is obligated to take the complaint earlier to the ruler.

Article 48: If a seaman stayed behind fifteen days and was of the diving seamen who are supposed to join [the crew] after the first [group] his captain has the choice between taking him or taking the compensation on an average basis. This is paid by the merchant captain.

Article 49: If a seaman signed a note on the one-third [system] and then took a ship [as a captain], one-third of the harvest of *qalatiyah* [sheikh's share] and the fifty of its half, whether the seaman was a seaman or captain, will be taken from him.

Article 50: It is forbidden for any captain to sign up a seaman [who belongs] to other captains unless the seaman has in his hands a book from the accountant of diving in

which what he owes and what is owed to him is recorded. Both the captain and the seaman have to appear before the accountant to change the registration.

Article 51: The Consultative Council executes this order: issued on 22 *Rabia Al-Thani*: the year 1359 *hijri*, occurring 29 May 1940.

Signed:

The ruler of Kuwait

Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Chairman of the consultative council

Abdullh AL- Salem Al-Sabah

It was also decided to add to the law of diving two new articles.

Article 1: If a seaman dies after he leaves to go diving, even if it was a short period, a complete share will be allocated as if he were alive to the end of the season.

Article 2: If a captain was delayed from going to diving and his seaman want to go with the first [group], he either gives them an advance and they will be delayed with him or he gives them an advance and sends them with the advance [group]. If the captain is unable to do so, he will give the seaman a note on the one-third [system].

**Appendix 2**  
**The Law of Long Distance Trade( *Al-Sifr*)<sup>1</sup>**

We the ruler of Kuwait: Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, in accordance to what the chairman of the consultative council advised us, and our will to reform the country and the people, we order the following:

**Article One:** This law is called the law of travelling and is composed of 61 Articles.

Article 1: The ship has to be in an immaculate status and fully equipped for sailing.

Article 2: The captain has to be in a perfect state of mind, fully experienced with the sea roots, and of good behaviour.

Article 3: The ship owner must assign an experienced man to assist the captain, and to fill in during emergencies, and he –the owner- is not to be acquitted unless no one experienced enough can be employed.

Article 4: If something happened to the vessel or it was damaged, and it was of great risk to the vessel and the sailors, the captain must do his best to save the vessel, as the sailors are to do their duties and obey the captain's orders, to save their own ship or any other ship, and who disobeys this will be punished by the government.

Article 5: Neither the sailors nor their leader [foreman] has the right to object if the merchant and the captain agreed on any destination to sail to.

Article 6: The sailor's chief (*muqaddami*) must not leave the vessel on any time, unless he obtains permission from the captain, if the captain was available. But if he was not available and the sailor's chief did get off the vessel, without authorisation, he will be considered as an offender. If these offences are repeated, the captain has the right to step him down from his roll to become a common sailor and not to have a raise.

Article 7: If one of the sailors offended his leader, or failed to do his share of the duties, then the captain has the right to cut down his share in accordance to his offence, and add it to the shares of the rest of the sailors. In contrast, if the captain sees a very devoted sailor,

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the consultative council's meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Jamadi Al-Alawal*, 1359 *hijri*

working more than the rest, then the captain can reward him for that, and this reward comes out of the total profit of the voyage.

Article 8: The *Sukkani* [helmsman; a person who is in charge of steering the vessel] must have very sharp sight, a large background in the sea and the country borders. able to steer the vessel and determined the directions of the wind, which is if the vessel is sailing. But if the vessel is anchored, he must fulfil his duties when the time comes. If some one else took charge of the steering, then he must help his colleagues, and if he fails to do so, he will be considered as a failure and will be punished according to Article 6.

Article 9: After calculating what the vessel gained from the trip, the monies for food, shelter, and the expenses of repairing the vessel are deducted from the total, and the rest is divided into two sums: one sum goes towards the vessel, and the other goes to the sailors. The rewards given to the sailors come out of the sailors share or the vessels share. Detailing that is first; increasing the shares of two helmsmen, the increase of the captain's share, the *muqaddami's* share, the *Mu'allim* (shipwright's) share, and the (junior *muqaddami*) the captain's assistant's share, all that comes out of the vessel's share of the profit, Second; the shares for the accompanied boat, the *naham* (singer) and the cook, all come out of the sailors' share.

Article 10: If the vessel left to Basra, and some sailors were left behind, or did not arrive in time to help loading, or they arrived close in time to sailing, the sailors who arrived early and did most of the work have the right to receive more bonuses, valuing this goes to the captain's conscious.

Article 11: If the vessel departed the Kuwaiti port heading towards Basra, and a sailor was ill, the captain should seek the closest medical help; start the treatment as soon as possible. But if the treatment takes longer time, the captain must return the sailor to main land Kuwait, and calculate his wages according to his efforts and the period he spent on board.

Article 12: If one of the sailors had a broken ligament caused by the work carried out on the vessel, then he gets a full share in any where that this happens, and the captain must take full care of him, and drop him to a town that is easy to access by vessels, and take him to hospital for treatment. If the treatment takes a long time, the captain must provide the sailor with enough pocket money and money to go home via a vessel, in addition to the treatment's expenses and the living costs if it was less than 200 rupees. If the total amount exceeds the 200 rupees, then the sailor has to pay the difference.

The sailor , after he gets well, must get back to his vessel by any other Kuwaiti vessel, if that was not possible, and he finds a vessel that is going to Kuwait. he must be on board that vessel, if not, then he must use any vessels including steam ships.

Article 13: If the vessel was is the Basra port, and one of the sailors asked permission to go to Basra city for a private business, then the captain must inform him of the time he must return at. If the sailor was late, without a legitimate excuse, and the ship had to depart the port, then the sailor has no right to ask for his wages, but he must pay for his food and other expenses during the trip. If the sailor was sent by the captain, and the ship had to leave for some reason, then the sailor must do his best to catch up with the vessel before the time runs out, or be of quick thinking and use another vessel to catch up with his. If does that then his right is preserved, but if he didn't, and the vessel leaves, then he has only his wages that the captain values to ask for.

Article 14: If a sailor dies in Basra's port, then he gets only the departure from Kuwait share, but if he dies on the way back to Kuwait, then he gets a full share.

Article 15: If one of the sailors intentionally stayed back in one of the ports of India, Yemen, or Zanzibar, then he has no right to ask for his share, but he must pay the advance he already taken for that trip. But if he intentionally did that during the return journey from Masqat to one of the gulf's ports, then he is entitled only to a fraction of his share of the profit, and then he will be paid on the day wage basis as a new labourer from the port he was late from, until the vessel reaches the Kuwaiti port. The wages of a labourer will be a day's wages for every day the sailor not on board the vessel, and if the captain needs a labourer to replace the absent sailor, then he will pay this labourer from the sailor's wages, which will be punished by the government. This is during the trip, but in the main land Kuwait, the labourer will be paid as any labourer from this vessel or any other.

Article 16: If the ship stopped in any port temporarily, and the period was not known, then the sailors must wait and be ready for the captain when he comes back, if he leaves the vessel. But if one or some of the sailors were late, and the captain had to depart, the captain has the right to leave them behind, and he will not be responsible of what might happen to them physically or financially, such as the return expenses to their vessel. Who ever is left behind and fails to come back to the vessel, will be considered as a fugitive and will have no share, but must pay his dues and will be punished by the government.

Article 17: If the vessel departs the destination port and some fault to the vessel happens, and the captain had to lose some of the carriage to prevent the vessel from sinking, then he



has the right to do so without getting permission from the owners of the carriage, yet the captain must inform them as soon as possible with the details of the incident through their agents or via mail or telegraph. If the captain could not inform the owners, then he has the right to act in accordance with the benefit of the owners, and all the losses will be compensated from the vessel's and the carriage's profit.

Article 18: The captain must carry on repairing the vessel as quickly as possible after unloading the carriage. If 20 days pass before the repairs take place, then the owner of the carriage has the right to leave this vessel and hire another one, yet he has to pay the ship owner in accordance with Article 17 the value of the ship's hire in that port they stayed in. If the carriage owner accepted to wait for the vessel, then the vessel's owner must accept this, and reload the carriage back to the vessel after the repairs are done, and the fees will be full. The carriage being damaged by water must be paid for, if the damage was severe, if not then they all must reach an agreement, and there must be some monies for the timber and the leaves, and if any of those is missing, then its value will be taken from the captain's share.

Article 19: If a contract is signed by the merchant and the vessel's owner to ship dates or another carriage from the port of Basra, then the trader must ship the carriage before the end of the 30 days period, which starts from the completion of the paper work of the vessel from the Fao centre, or after finishing unloading the old carriage and the start of loading the new carriage. If this period expires, and the carriage was not loading on the vessel, then the trader must pay the sailors 4 Annas each daily as expenses until the day the carriage is fully loaded on board the vessel.

Article 20: If a contract is signed by the merchant and the vessel's owner in Kuwait or any other port to take the vessel to any where, and the trader does not fulfil his part of the contract, after the vessel is made ready for the trip, then the trader cannot withdraw from the contract unless he pays the vessel owner half the agreed amount of money. But if the trader did start to load the vessel with the carriage and failed to finish, and the period stated in Article 19 expires, then the trader is required to pay the full amount of the vessel's rent mentioned in the contract. If the vessel's owner did not comply with the contract's rules, then he must pay the trader half the agreed rent of the vessel.

Article 21: The vessel's owner has no right to add another carriage to the trader's, unless approved by the trader himself.

Article 22: If the trader hired a vessel from any other country, and agreed to load the carriage from another country, and after arriving there, the period in Article 19 expires without loading the carriage, and then the trader must pay half the rent to the vessel's owner, where the owner will be free from the contract to do anything.

Article 23: If a trader hires a vessel from any port such as the Basra port to go to Eden, and when arriving to Masqat, the trader demands to go to India, then the trader must pay the full rent going to Eden, unless otherwise stated in the vessel's logbook that the trader has the choice to change destinations, then he only pays for the trip to India. If the vessel arrives to India, and the trader wanted to take the shipment back to Eden, then he is obliged to pay the difference for the distance between India and Eden, and the choice is the captain's.

Article 24: If a trader hires a vessel to the ports of India, and there were no conditions between the trader and the captain, then they follow the leads of the rest of the traders. If the cities of Dohticage and Bawanger are not mentioned, then the captain should get 12.5% more than what was stated in the contract.

Article 25: If the captain had to lose some of the carriage because of a sudden danger, to save lives or the vessel, then he must do that, and what is left of the carriage will be divided among the traders, and the carriage lost because of the danger will not be compensated. The sailors and the vessel's shares of the profit must not be affected by that incident. If there was any carriage belonging to a foreign trader, it will be treated as Kuwaiti carriage.

Article 26: If some sailors escaped from their vessel or died, and the captain had to replace them with other sailors from another vessel, then these new sailors get their full share from the vessel they left and a quarter of the profit of the new vessel they got in, and the remaining three quarters goes to the vessel they came from, and the captain of that vessel determines their share of that according to the distance they travelled.

Article 27: The sailors have no right to claim their shares unless the vessel arrives to Kuwait, and then they will collect their shares. Any one leaves the vessel without the captain's permission will be considered as absent according to Article 6. If the sailor wanted to pay off his dues, to get off at one of the ports, then by this Article prevents him from doing so, until the vessel arrives to Kuwait, and the sailor's profit will be calculated as usual.

Article 28: If the captain hires a foreign sailor without *brwah* (a written consent), taking his word of mouth that he has no debts, and take him on his vessel, and after arriving to any port a captain appears and claims that this sailor is in debt, in that case the sailor stays in the

ship, and must be protected from this person, Unless he agrees to pay what this sailor's debt to this vessel. And if a foreign sailor boards a vessel, and his period expires, and some one claims that he owes him money, then his claim is not valid, and that goes on the Kuwaiti sailors on foreign vessels as well.

Article 29: If a sailor boards a vessel and took money from the captain, and some one claims that he owes him money, then the claimer has no right to delay the sailor from sailing with the vessel.

Article 30: If a sailor agreed to work on a vessel, and took money from its captain and did the same with a different vessel, then he will be subject to punishment, and only the first agreement is valid...

Article 31: If a sailor travels with a vessel to India and comes back to Kuwait, and after finishing unloading wants to leave and asks for his wages, he must be paid after deducting the cost of his travelling and food. If that was less than his wages, then he either pays the deference or goes onboard the vessel again to pay his dues.

Article 32: If a vessel arrives to Kuwait on its way to Basra, and some sailors wish to stay in Kuwait, then they are not allowed to do so, and they must continue their trip to Basra, finish unloading the carriage, and then they will be allowed to stay in Basra if the vessel had to sail again, or go back to Kuwait on the same vessel if it's destination is Kuwait.

Article 33: The captain must not hire a sailor without *brwah*, and if he hired a sailor with *brwah* and this sailor was indebted to another captain then the new captain is obliged to pay the money. If the sailor has a *brwah* confirming that he is not indebted and then some one appears claiming that the sailor owes him money –claim is invalid after the announcement of this law.

Article 34: Any sailor is asked to travel to the *heirfi* (the first trip to Basra) and was not asked to go for diving but he went for pearling and delayed to join the trip, whoever got him onboard for pearling is responsible for paying compensation.

Article 35: If a sailing captain freed a diving sailor by paying his debts according to his *brwah*, and the sailor wanted to dive, then he must gain the approval of the sailing captain. If the diving captain intentionally hires this sailor without permission, then it is his responsibility to pay what the sailor owes to the sailing captain.

Article 36: The captain after arriving to Kuwait, and finishing the work on board the vessel, must pay the sailors after deducing the advances and expenses of the trip.

Article 37: If a sailor leaves his captain, and keep a *brwah* shows that his indebted, and boards another vessel and travels with a new captain, and afterwards he becomes indebt to the new one, he must pay his new captain his dues before leaving the vessel. If the sailor goes back to his first captain, then this captain must pay the sailor's debts to the later captain.

Article 38: If one of the sailors has more than one debt to different captains, and asks one of them to give him *brwah*, and this captain does without informing the other captains, then this captain is responsible for all the sailor's debts.

Article 39: If one of the sailors has some left over debts from previous trips, and gets hired by a diving captain in the *raddah*, then this captain is responsible for the sailor's debts.

Article 40: If a vessel collides in the sea or on the shore, and the sailors manage to get to the port, then all the Kuwaiti vessels must contribute to take some sailors onboard, and must help them to go back to main land Kuwait.

Article 41: If a vessel was lucky enough to find some floating treasures like ambergris in the middle of the sea, then fifth of its value goes towards the vessel's share and the rest is distributed among the crew, everyone according to his share, including the captain and the life boat.

Article 42: If the vessel comes across other floating materials such as timber, then the value of these materials is to be added to the whole profit of the trip. If the captain finds the owner of these findings afterwards, then, he must give the owner half of the value of the findings, and that's for the long distance findings, but within the borders of Kuwait, the findings must be divided among the whole crew according to their share.

Article 43: If one of the sailors committed an assault against other sailors or even the captain, then all sailors must help the captain to restrain this sailor and hold him back. If there were any concerns about this sailor, then the captain has the right to get him off the vessel at any port, and if there was a Kuwaiti vessel available in that port, the captain must hand him to that other vessel and pay this sailor his wages based on the period he spent on board the vessel with them.

Article 44: If a sailor takes some pocket money (*kharajiya*) from the captain and did not work regularly to pay it off, then the captain has the right to release him from his duties, and collect what he took. If that sailor was already in debt, then he has to pay that as well.

Article 45: If a sailor disappears from the vessel outside Kuwait, and is in debt to a diving captain, then the vessel owner is not responsible for him because he abandoned all of his

employees. And if some one claimed that this sailor owed money to him or he is an owned slave, the captain must defend him as strong as he can. There will be no responsibility towards the captain if he could not protect this sailor.

Article 46: If a sailor escapes or commits a criminal offence that it's punishment is beating up or imprisonment, whether that was on board the vessel or at any other country, and was sentenced by that country's government to pay a fine, then he must pay. If he was sentenced to prison, then the captain must pay him his wages up to the last day he worked.

Article 47: If a sailor was sentenced to prison or fined and the reason was defending the well being of the vessel, then that fine and all other expenses must be added to the expenses of the food, and if he was late because of that, then all his wages will be reserved for him.

Article 48: If the captain needed another man to be in charge of the steering of the vessel, then his wages will be added to the food supply expenses, unless other wise agreed with the trader.

Article 49: If some damage accrued to the vessel in the middle of the sea, then the captain has the authority to do what ever necessary to repair the damage.

Article 50: If a sailor was intentionally stayed behind, and wanted to cross back to his country, he has no right to claim his wages, unless the captain wanted to grant him something.

Article 51: if the vessel's body or machinery was damaged and needed to be towed from the middle of the sea using another vessel or a steam boat, then the cost of that is deducted from the overall profit of the trip.

Article 52: If the vessel arrives to the port of Basra carrying carriage of traders, and they wanted to unload it quickly before the vessel anchors, and they sent a towing boat to pull the vessel through to Basra, without the permission of the captain or the vessel's owner, then the fees must be paid by the trader, unless the captain or the owner has hired that towing boat, then the fees will be added to the food supplies expenses.

Article 53: If after owner has paid the sailors their wages and collected his dues, and gave them their *brwahs*, if after all that, the total sum was wrong, therefore they all are responsible for it, even after one year.

Article 54: If the captain has contracted a trader to ship his carriage, and he received this carriage and then there was something missing in the carriage, the captain is responsible for this shortage. If the captain deliberately shipped the carriage without checking it and on

arrival discovered that it was short of some materials, then the captain is responsible for that.

Article 55: If a father travelled with his son or two brothers travelled together or cousins, and were partners, and had some debts, then they must share the payment for these debts, and if one of them could not pay, then they must share his payment, and if they were in dispute, then the captain will calculate their shares individually, all with accordance to his job, providing they accept the captain's judgment.

Article 56: All sailors must not abandon their vessel on any port, but they must have shifts to guard it, at least half of them stay in, and no one is allowed to stay over night in the ports they stay in.

Article 57: The deputy of the captain must obey the captain's orders, providing that these orders do not break this law, and no harm will be caused to the sailors because of these orders. The captain has no right to spend the money, other than the essentials, like the expenses of the vessel and so on, and the extra money must be paid to the owner or his agent.

Article 58: The captain must declare clearly in the vessel's log book that every one is governed by the law of Kuwait.

Article 59: If there was a fire accident onboard the vessel, then the incident is governed by the same law of throwing the carriage in the sea, according to Article 25.

Article 60: If the vessel was sold for the purpose of gaining profit by the owner, then the sailors must have a share of a normal trading voyage, and the owner must return the sailors to their countries, even if he had to hire a steam boat.

Article 61: If the vessel was sold because of its old age, or for a reason beyond the owner's will, then the owner must only return the sailors to their country. If the sale happened after the annual trip, then the captain must pay them their shares minus the cost of their trip back home.

**Article 2:** This must be carried out by the chairman of the consultative council.

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Ruler of Kuwait  
Ahmed Al Jabber Al Sabah

chairman of the consultative council  
Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah

