

# Christians

## In Kuwait



مشورات  
وزارة الشؤون  
الدينية  
الكويت

Hamza Olayan

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In Kuwait



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## **Dedication**

To all people seeking truth as it is with neither implication  
nor exaggeration



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# Introduction

One year ago when I first started gathering material for this book and establish an action plan after reading the history of Christians and churches in Kuwait, I came across a great deal of misconception and contradictions and had to follow two methods:

The first was to directly meet the church leaders and officials and talk to them, which eventually lasted for months and revealed the truth and helped me document the information from its original sources.

The aim was to show those revelations in an objective, calm and well composed style. I continued my mission with a comprehensive survey of Christian cemeteries – their locations, divisions, where they were and how they came to be.

When I tried to uncover some of them, I faced a problem, especially when I came to what was known as the Jewish Cemetery. It was in fact a cemetery for the Christians located in Sharq, just behind the Al-Khalijeeya Complex.

I have deliberately inserted pictures to reflect the reality in the chapters which talk about the churches and cemeteries.

The second method I followed was an unbiased historic scheme that tells the contradictory stories and events in the footnotes, to highlight what they actually lacked.

I collected about 29 relative books in both English and Arabic which forms the basis for substantial research in addition to the studies and university publications, and local Arab newspapers publications.

Other helpful sources are the official trustworthy websites which are indispensable in the publication of this book. It gave me insight into every publication, political or religious, and I could take the route of methodical research, which in turn resulted in pure objectivity and commitment as much as I could digest.

Many questions popped up during this project such as how to portray the history and the role of Christians in Kuwait without falling into the perspective of being a religious missionary, which is too difficult for many to accept?

Is it possible then not to project this perspective onto the historic stages that followed the Arab-American Mission? Who are the Kuwaiti Christians? How many are they? What do they form? Where did they come from? Do we have to succumb to the campaigns which every now and then incite people? How should we treat them? What are the recognized churches? When were they founded? And to what denomination do they belong?

Taking all that into consideration, all Christian groups, Arabs or foreigners, according to history have travelled through Kuwait, thanks to its location.

Before and after independence, the Christian presence in public life ran deep into the society, the state and private institutions. This presence was highly appreciated and trusted due to its peculiarity.

Several churches were built in some governorates and they never complained of any harassment. Instead, they became intertwined in the society, taken care of by rulers, the Amirs and statesmen, who assisted them when needed to perform their rituals. Even in employment, projects and everyday life, the relationship was and still is, better.

There is a de facto recognition that Kuwait has provided all kinds of services to Christian clergy who in turn have praised Kuwait and its leadership during national and religious occasions.

They considered these services a form of tolerance that distinguishes this society from its Gulf counterparts. However, finding land to build new churches remains a tough nut to crack.

Kuwait has found for itself a bright spot on the world map for embracing the Christian denominations and its commitment to freedom of belief and religion in accordance with its Constitution which has been in force since the 1960s.

Hence the book reviews the historical aspects that discuss the history of Christianity and Christians in Kuwait and the Arabian Peninsula before and after the American Mission, uncovering the most important periods through to the fifties and sixties and the subsequent decades.

This book reveals the history of the eight recognized churches and the developments and events they have gone through. There is a separate chapter for the cemeteries for non-Muslims, a label launched by the Kuwait Municipality on the graves of the Christians.

This book, 'Christians in Kuwait', may not be new in terms of its content. It is preceded by many writings and theses, some of which were brief and incomplete, and some have been used for biased purposes.

Some books have been translated into Arabic and written by people who had many experiences coming from abroad. Thus, their testimonies are of historical value and stature. However, this book remains the first comprehensive reference that tests the limits of accuracy.

'Christians' is a very broad headline but it is important and vital for a fundamental reason. Christians belong to the Arab land in terms of the culture, the language, the history and co-existence.

They are an integral part of the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant and the Holy Land in Palestine, where Jesus Christ was born. Kuwait, for sure, is one of the havens that has formed this extended environment.

What gives this book an added value is the fact that it is issued in Kuwait, the Gulf country known for its peaceful relationship with the Christian groups.

It is being issued in the midst of conflicts and Arab revolutions where Christians have in some instances been displaced and deported and their churches destroyed, eventually forcing them to migrate.

This situation has given rise to serious questions about the fate of Arab Christians and the future awaiting them, especially that they are among those who built this land and have been efficient participants in its cultural prosperity.

It goes without saying that the minorities have paid a heavy price during the conflicts in the region. The growing numbers of extremists, who target the Christians in the region, have shattered the hopes for co-existence and tolerance.

We open this file from Kuwait in a much wider circle to include the Levant Christians in terms of their existence within regional and international conflicts which have the ability to empty the Arab world of its strength and pluralism, which has long been a distinguishing mark, in case it finds a willing entity to undertake such a hideous and painful task.

There is a fear that the Levant may be emptied of its Christian citizenry. Should it happen, it will be a big catastrophe for this land where ancient civilizations comprised all religions.

This is the purpose of this book. It is about the relationship between Kuwait and Christians and their role in the sequence of events that this country has witnessed since its birth and until now. It is an example of its civilization that brightens its history.

**Hamza Olayan**

Kuwait

Arabic Edition 2014

**Chapter One:**  
**Failaka – The First Foothold**



## Failaka The First Foothold

Over the ages, the Failaka Island has been a religious center for the Gulf region. The Greek historian Arrian stated in 170 BC that the Failaka Island was named Ikaros after the Greek island in the Aegean Sea.

Another Greek historian Aristoteles, who accompanied Alexander the Great during his campaign in the East, said Alexander named the island after the Greek island in the Aegean Sea.

Regarding the discovery of the island by the Greeks, there are two different versions. The first depends on the description given by Aristoteles while the other derives it from the account written by Admiral Androstenes who was sent by Alexander the Great with the fleet commander Nearchus to explore the coast of the Arabian Gulf down the Euphrates where he saw the island.

These historic events highlight the role played by the Failaka Island and the many cultures it embraced. By the time the Danish Archaeological Investigations began to explore important archeological sites in Bahrain, the Kuwaiti government decided to summon the mission to look for similar discoveries.

The mission paid great attention to Failaka in the belief the island was an extension of the civilization already discovered in Bahrain and was historically connected with it.

The mission discovered traces back to the Bronze Age in Bahrain which they called the Dilmun Civilization. The discoveries included the graves of merchants and their families.

They were mentioned in the Ur tablets by the name 'Dilmun King'. Also discovered were residential areas and temples dated back to the Third Millennium BC.

The first mission began excavations on February 11, 1958. More missions followed in different historic stages such as the French Mission in 1983 which continued until 1988, followed by other missions the American, Italian, Jordanian, Egyptian and the British.

The first excavation on the island was a rock on which carved Greek writing read: *(Sotelse citizen of Athens and the soldiers (dedicated this) to Zeus Soter (the Savior) to Poseidon and Artemis Soteira the Savior).*

These discoveries indicate the presence of hills dated back to the early Bronze Age. The excavation areas included several hills, most important of which were the Sa'd and Saeed hills.

In the area between the two sites, the Guesthouse, or the Khan, was discovered. It was a house of 12 rooms. This discovery helped confirm the existence of Greek monuments on the island that could have belonged to the soldiers of Alexander the Great.

More discoveries followed and monuments of Greek or local deities from the era of Alexander were found on Saeed hills. From this point, the findings provided crucial evidence that the Failaka Island witnessed the Christian civilization, albeit unclear for how long.

In 1960, the excavators made a very significant discovery. They came upon a temple with Greek writings which could have been the cultural center dated back to the Hellenistic Period in the late 4th century (before the death of Alexander), nearly in 325 BC till the first half of the of the 2nd century, circa 150 BC.

The following year, the excavators found a Greek castle which was dated back to the Third Century BC and some copper coins some of which were minted by Seleucus I Nicator in the name of Alexander the Great (around 310-300 BC).

The excavations were made and published by the Danish Archaeological Investigations in five volumes. The third volume which contains the findings between 1958 and 1963 is published under the title (The Sacred Enclosure in the Early Hellenistic Period<sup>(1)</sup>).

It focuses on the enclosure site which was sealed by a defense wall. Behind the wall there were two temples, altars and ditches (were immolations were performed) and some adjoining constructions.

The building in general was a mixture of religious and mundane form without any specific date for these constituents although it approximately dates back to the Third Century BC in light of the potteries found there.

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(1) The Sacred Enclosure in the Early Hellenistic Period is the 3rd of 5 volumes published by the Danish Archaeological Investigations between 1958 and 1963. It is authored by Kristian Jeppesen, translated by Dr. Ghada Al-Hejjawy Al-Qaddoumy and published by the National Council for Culture, Arts & Letters, 2011

What strengthens the belief that this place belonged to that period is the discovery of monetary treasures from the Greek Period (200-210 BC), in addition to the carvings on the Ikaros Stone found at the entrance of one of the temples.

### **Palaces and Churches**

Those discoveries showed that the island witnessed many demographic civilizations starting from 2000 BC until 1200 BC, an evidence of its cultural diversity.

The island consisted of six inhabited villages: Saeeda, Al-Disht, Al-Qurainiyya, Al-Subahiyya, Al-Qusor and Al-Zor. The excavation works carried out specifically in the middle of the island in Al-Qusor, has many archaeological sites.

Since this village depicted a pure Christian character, it was called the Christian Village. It stretched over an area of 3 km x 3 km, embodying the Christian settlement site in the Gulf.

The excavation works led to the discovery of a monument, a replica of a church very similar to Eastern churches, stretching over an area of 30 meters x 30 meters.

It dated back to the Fifth and Sixth centuries AD. It had three large prayer halls accessible from three side entrances. There was also a hall at a higher level accessible from three thresholds.

All the flooring works and walls were made of gypsum from the inside. A grave of a monk with a cross over it was also found in the church. It has been rumored it stood there until the Abbasid era and formed the center of the village, surrounded by around 144 housing units.

One of those units, which were close to the church, consisted of a wall surrounding a yard with three residential rooms in the centre of it. The Kuwaiti-French Mission reported that the grave might have been of one of the monks since the mission also discovered many crosses that belonged to the Nestorian doctrine.

These findings reinforced the belief that Christian communities existed in the Gulf area including Kuwait from the Fourth till the Seventh Century AD, when the Christian existence began to shrink into monasteries in conjunction with the spread of Islam<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) The Christian Existence in Kuwait, Shehab Al-Shehab, Al-Watan Kuwaiti Newspaper, 16/7/2012

In later stages, another church was discovered on the Akaz Island<sup>(1)</sup> which consisted of one small 17.50 x 6.5m hall. It also had a choir and a patio accessible through a stair of five thresholds.

These findings confirm that the inhabitants living along the coasts of Kuwait were Eastern Christian fishermen who followed the Nestorian doctrine which prevailed from the eastern Arabian Peninsula in Oman up to Mesopotamia, probably between the Sixth century and the 19th Century.

However, those fishermen preferred to move after the spread of Islam to islands near Kuwait such as Failaka. Many houses and warehouses were discovered in the vicinity of those churches and that is the evidence of the existence of these inhabitants at that time and their involvement in agricultural activities.

In spite of this long history, it is certain that the excavation work remains incomplete. Once completed, it will lead to more findings. The Failaka, on the other hand, continued to be inhabited in the modern era. No area was designated to be a cemetery according to Mr. Muhammad Hadi Abdul-Rahim<sup>(2)</sup> who lived on the island for many years since 1961 and married there.

### **The Nestorian Doctrine<sup>(3)</sup> in history**

Since different studies state the Christian existence in the region was Nestorian, especially during the Abbasid Era, it is worth mentioning that this doctrine was named after Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople.

His teachings were condemned by the Ephesus Council in 431 AD due to his theological interpretation of the entity of Jesus Christ.

The followers of this doctrine, the east Syrian Christians, differed from the Byzantine Church and the Patriarchate of West Syria in Antioch on the basis of the conflict between the Roman and Persian Empires.

In 410 AD, the council in Al-Mada'in organized the East Syrian Church and put six provinces under the control of the Patriarch of the Armenian Church who resided in the capital of the Sasanian Empire.

These provinces were: Babylon, Susiana (Gundeshapur), North Euphrates, Maishan (Basra), Adiabene (Erbil) and Garmaï (Kirkuk).

(1) Andrew Thompson P.P 33 - The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, 1993

(2) Interview conducted by the author in May 2014 with Muhammad Hadi Abdul-Rahim

(3) A doctrine named after Nestorius who called for the Virgin Mary not to be considered as mother of God since she was a human.

Later, the provinces of Persis and Merv were added in the 15th and 16th centuries respectively. The missionaries made the Merv province a path to Central Asia and China.

The Nestorian merchants and missionaries settled along the trade routes in India while their Arab counterparts settled in the Gulf and south of the Arabian Peninsula. It is exactly there that the Christian existence was affected by the Byzantine missionary activity and the Nestorian doctrine.

The Persian conquest in 597 gave a new and important boost to the Nestorian doctrine since the Arab inhabitants in the north of the Arabian Peninsula were followers of the Nestorian Church. In fact, their last monarch Al-Nu'man III (580-602) was baptized in this church.

Despite the Sassanid emperor's tolerance towards them, the Nestorians were brutally persecuted throughout history. As a result, the position of the Patriarch of the Armenian Church fell vacant during the era of Khusraw II (591-628).

Consequently, the Nestorians welcomed the Arab conquerors who helped free them from the Sassanid and found some tolerance in the new religion of Islam towards all Christians who are the People of the Book.

Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him, signed a treaty with the monarch of Najran and Abi Al-Hareth, the Nestorian Bishop of Najran, whereby Muslims protected the Christians in return for a tribute according to which only priests and monks would be forgiven.

This treaty was one in a series that was intended to organize the relationship between Christian and Muslim rulers, the most prominent of which was the one signed by Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab.

The attitude of Prophet Muhammad towards the Nestorians was positive when he met them in Yemen on the trade route between Yemen and Iraq. Among the Nestorians then was Qiss Bin Saeda from Najran who the Prophet is said to have listened to one of his preachers in Okaz.

This cordial relationship, however, was not enough to allay fears of the two sides which led to some Nestorians converting to Islam. This conversion was worrisome for Ishoyahb III, the Patriarch of the Armenian Church.

After the Christians went through many upheavals the Umayyads treated them well and appointed them in official positions. Following the turmoil in Mesopotamia, the church began to weaken and there were divisions among the patriarchs.

This weakness allowed Al-Hajjaj Bin Yusuf in Iraq (694-714 AD) to intervene in the church. While dissent continued within the church during the Abbasid Era, some periods in this Caliphate saw the Caliph and the Patriarch coming closer and that made it possible for the Patriarch to move his headquarters from Al-Mada'in to Baghdad in the late 18th century.

The Nestorian Patriarch became the official representative of Christians inside the Abbasid Caliphate. During the next two centuries, the Nestorian employees played a vital role in the administration where monasteries were an essential supplier of qualified personnel, some of whom were of very high stature.

As a result, more Nestorians converted to Islam like Ali Bin Issa (859-946 AD) from the family of Bani Al-Jarrah who started his life in Qunna, one of the most famous monasteries in Iraq.

The prominent Nestorian philosopher Abu Bishr Matta bin Yunus was also a teacher in the monastery. The contribution of the Nestorians spread in the fields of science, medicine and philosophy and they translated many works of medicine and philosophy of Aristotle, Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen into Syriac.

The actual rulers in the Abbasid Caliphate between 945-1055 AD were the Buyid Shia and the more tolerant with Christians.

Upon the conquest of the Sunni Seljukes, many Nestorian churches and monasteries were destroyed but after the Seljukes strengthened their rule in Syria and Palestine, the Nestorians led a better life and their church flourished in the east and the west.

During the Era of Mongols, the Nestorians first found some tolerance and they took part in the famous conquest of Baghdad in 1258 but situations changed completely after the Mongols converted to the Sunni sect.

More Nestorians converted to Islam but this doctrine took a huge blow at the hands of Tamerlane between 1360 and 1405. The survivors fled to many areas

like the Hakkari Mountains where they later became known as the Assyrians because they adhered to the independence of their church. Others however, made contacts with the Romans for the sake of protection.



*A tour for the accredited diplomats in Kuwait on Failaka Island*



*Some of the monuments on the island*



*Visitors in front of Al-Khadher Tomb on Failaka Island*

**Chapter Two:**  
**The Arabian Mission – Historic Stages and  
Work Development**



# The Arabian Mission<sup>(1)</sup> – Historic Stages and Work Development

The Arabian Mission in Kuwait played a big role for the Christian existence and the arrival of many Christians into the country, especially the first group who obtained the Kuwaiti nationality.

At this stage, they shaped an introduction to the real Christian existence in Kuwait. The historical and documentary impact drawn from the tasks it was entitled to is reflected in the events and developments happening within the mission and the local community reaction towards it.

This is in addition to the folkloric narratives that made the mission very sociable. The mission even enjoyed a very close relationship with the political leadership in Kuwait and with all the Amirs who showed great respect for the mission's efforts specifically in the field of health.

Hence, it was not strange for any study about Christians in Kuwait to delve deep in its everyday details since it formed an important period in the history of Kuwait and helped shape it as well.

The Arabian Mission<sup>(2)</sup> reflected the tendency of the Protestant denominations to exist and spread outside the United States of America and attracted people to it.

The Mission was in fact the arm of the Dutch Reformed Church. It was established in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1889 as an independent institution.

However, in 1894, it became a member of the Reformed Church which is the Protestant Church, keeping the independence of its work. It was founded by four famous Christian personalities: Dr. Lansing and three of his assistants: James Cantine, Philip Phelps and Samuel Zwemer.

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(1) Dr. Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Subai'y mentions that the original name of the mission was The Wheel but was changed in 1899 upon an official request presented to the Foreign Missionaries' Commission in the Dutch Reformed Church in America to begin with evangelism in the Arabic-speaking countries. See: *Doctors for the Kingdom: The Work of the American Mission Hospitals in the Kingdom*, Dr. Paul L. Armerding, trans. by Dr. Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Subai'y, 6th Book, published by Darat Al-Malik Abdul-Aziz, Publications, 1425 H, Introduction.

(2) There are various names for the mission in different sources and references. It was called the Arab Mission of the Reformed Church in America, Dutch-American Reformed Mission, American Protestant Mission and American Mission in Arabia, which was used by Dr. Mustafa Abu Hakma. The reason behind all those different names is that the Arab Mission began as an independent movement aiming at promoting Christianity in Arabia before being subordinate to the American Church which followed the Protestant reformation rising in Holland. Due to that conflict, it was not surprising for it to be called all those names. The Arab Mission, however, remains the most accurate.

They were ready to begin their task. Back in 1784<sup>(1)</sup>, a pre-emptive step was taken in the form of the foundation of the Theological Institution where Dr. Lansing was teaching Arabic. The purpose of founding the institution was to train the evangelists of the Reformed Church.

The early founders were looking forward to cooperate with Keith Falconer's mission in Aden but they changed their mind after visiting the city in 1891 due to political and military restrictions imposed at that time.

They decided to look for another location and Cantine became the first member<sup>(2)</sup> of the mission to sail from America to the Arabian Peninsula in 1889 before Zwemer joined him.

Zwemer played a big role through his explorations from the south coast of Muscat and heading north along the eastern coast of the Gulf where the explorers made short trips to the internal areas.

Since the Ottoman Sultanate did not allow the employees of the mission to venture outside their coastal stations in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, they chose to settle in remote areas which were not under the direct control of the Sultanate.

### **Basra – The First Station**

The members of the mission began established their first center in Basra in 1891. Later in 1892 Zwemer moved to Bahrain and remained there until 1896.

In 1902 Zwemer founded the Mason Memorial Hospital in Bahrain -- the first hospital in the Arabian Gulf. Later in 1926, under his direct supervision he built another hospital.

During his stay in Bahrain, Zwemer tried hard to lure doctors to the Arabian Mission and he even visited the Gulf area several times.

In 1908, the Peter Zwemer School was built in Muscat, and a part of the building was dedicated to serve as a hospital.

In later stages in 1947, the mission began work in its own hospital in Qatar but it was short lived. It actually stopped working in 1952.

In the Arab region the Mission began its activities in Basra, Iraq then Bahrain and Oman and back to Iraq in Amara before reaching Kuwait.

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(1) The headquarters of this institute remained in New Brunswick before it was affiliated with Rutgers University.

(2) Dr. Stanley Mylrea, Kuwait before the Oil, translated by Dr. Muhammad Ghanim Al-Rumaihy, Dar Madarek, 3rd Edition, P26

The basic objective for which those branches were founded was to preach in the Arabian Peninsula including Kuwait. This objective is crystal clear in the historical documents related to the mission's activity in Kuwait during that period.

The evidence is found in what Zwemer wrote during one of his trips to Kuwait. He bluntly stated that the reason behind the visit was to 'measure the possibility of the Mission's work and encourage colporteurs to work even more'.

In later stages, this goal was even more apparent. In the 3rd paragraph of letter C-72, dated Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, 1910, which could be considered an independent source, Captain W.H. Shakespeare, the Political Agent in Kuwait, told Bushehr, the Resident Agent in the 'Persian Gulf', that the Mission uses medical services only as a means to achieve its true aim which is religious orientation.

### **Existence in Kuwait**

After the Mission guaranteed its existence in Basra then in Bahrain in 1891 and 1892<sup>(1)</sup> respectively, it made Kuwait its next step when Rev. Samuel Zwemer visited it in 1896<sup>(2)</sup>.

Doctor Stanley Mylrea<sup>(3)</sup> said Zwemer probably arrived in Kuwait on May 17<sup>th</sup>, the day Sheikh Mubarak the Great assumed power<sup>(4)</sup> and became the Amir.

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(1) Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait before the Oil, Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, Pp 3-4

(2) Samuel Zwemer in a Short Visit in 1903: Great Changes in Kuwait, Khalid Muhammad Al-Bassam, Al-Qabas, 17/1/2002, P10

(3) Sources differ in determining the actual date of the launching of the mission in Basra and Bahrain. Some say it was in 1892 for both stations, like Dr. Ahmed Abu Hakma P337. Others say that Basra station started in 1891, like Dr. Abdul-Malik Al-Tamimy P33. Some say Bahrain station began in 1893, like Dr. Paul Armerding in his book Doctors for the Kingdom: The Work of the American Mission Hospitals in the Kingdom, translated by Dr. Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Subai'y P188. Al-Tamimy, however, says it was launched in 1892.

(4) There is a contradiction in Samuel Zwemer's visit date between 1895 and 1896, the latter being likelier according to Dr. Stanley Mylrea. He mentioned this in his article Those Kuwaiti Nights, which was originally a speech he delivered in Kuwait on 29/10/1949 in the annual meeting of the mission and was published in Neglected Arabia Journal, Ver. 220 in 1950 and translated by writer and researcher Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani then published in her book Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait before Oil, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, PP11-22. However, in his book The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son, P177, Lewis R. Scudder believes it was in 1896 rather than 1895, especially that the contradiction in dates occurred only in Scudder's book, as well as in the date of Zwemer's visit in 1903 which he said happened in 1904 as will be elaborated later. This contradiction was noticed by many writers and researchers like Dr. Muhammad Al-Rumaihy. In his translation to Dr. Mylrea's memoirs "Kuwait before Oil", he said in the introduction of the 2nd edition, re-published in the 3rd edition P15: "This book or memoir was written by an academic who sets historical events as per the modern scientific approach.. It is rather just a memoir jotted down by the writer.. in a way that lacks accuracy discipline and exactness. It is a big mistake to take everything the writer says as a postulate and even a bigger mistake to throw it all away as if it was fiction." He concluded that this book was not really a book and should not be considered as one and that it was rather one of several narratives. If they were matching, then they would be documented and considered history even if they were odd and isolated from other narratives. This worthy note can be applied to memoirs and other writings of the rest of the pillars of the mission including those of Dr. Scudder.

En route from Bahrain to Basra, Zwemer described Kuwait City as 'the cleanest Arab town in the Gulf which has a fine harbor'. In May the same year, the evangelists Salome Antoon and Razouki Nu'man visited Kuwait for five days.

In his report on their trip, Zwemer claimed 'the door is now ajar. One more visit and that by our medical missionary will push it wide open, and perhaps bear it off its hinges'.

Nonetheless, he was wrong. Next year, his optimism proved to be wide of the mark. Another evangelist, Yusuf Mikha<sup>(1)</sup>, visited Kuwait and it was clear than ever before that Sheikh Mubarak the Great<sup>(2)</sup> was still closing the door firmly.

He did not allow the Mission's representatives to land on the beach and ordered those who had already landed<sup>(3)</sup> to go back on board their ships.

The mission's attempts continued with the arrival of Rev. Fred Barty and Dr. Wells Thomas<sup>(4)</sup> in 1905 to find other ways to attract the citizens by means of providing educational and medical services which were seriously lacking.

Another visit took place in 1903 and for the first time it was of a medical nature comprising Dr. Sharon Thoms and his colleague but the Amir gave them a cold shoulder and forced them back on a small boat to Faw and then to Bahrain. This angered the two men.

In early 20th century, the pioneer missionaries continued their visits. Rev. Samuel Zwemer visited again with Dr. Sharon Thoms and James E. Moerdyk in 1909<sup>(5)</sup> but the Sheikh did not permit them to stay for long and the third was even prevented from setting foot on the beach.

However, the hope of establishing an outstation in Kuwait did not fade. The missionaries continued their efforts before and after that visit with great zeal. In fact, they had anticipated the sturdy rejection and resistance due to the nature of the area and the strong bond to Islam.

This persistent pursuit to establish an outstation for the mission in Kuwait, as described in many different foreign sources, gained strategic dimension beyond

(1) لا تصلح للنقل إلى اللغة الإنجليزية لعدم أهميتها للقارئ بهذه اللغة وعدم اتصالها بثقافته.

(2) Same previous reference Min Nafithat Al-Amercany

(3) The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son, Lewis R. Scudder, P177

(4) Sheikh Mubarak bin Sabah Al-Sabah (1840-28/11/1915) is the 7th ruler of Kuwait and its true founder. He assumed power on 17/5/1896 and was called Mubarak the Great.

(5) Eleanor Calverley Kent, First Lady Doctor in Kuwait, trans. by Abdullah Hatem, 1st Edition, 1968, P26

the geographic borders of the country, taking into consideration its closeness to Najd and Ihsa' and other internal areas.

This is in addition to the fact that it was a commercial center for tribes from Persia, Iraq and other countries which would make the mission's task a lot easier.

In this context, Arnold Wilson wrote about the importance of evangelism<sup>(1)</sup> in Kuwait saying 'Kuwait's strategic location makes it of a special significance, particularly for the evangelists<sup>(2)</sup>.'

Dr. Eleanor Calverley, while sailing from Bahrain to Kuwait with her husband Rev. Edwin, expressed a similar idea when she saw the city for the first time.

She recalled what one person said about Kuwait in the Annual Meeting for the Working Missions in Arab Countries. He said Kuwait was a strategic center for the mission work because of its vast trade with the Arabs of the desert and a hub for Bedouin caravans selling wool, animal skins and yoghurt.

Yet, Dr. Paul Harrison was even clearer when he talked about Bedouins coming from distant areas such as Mesopotamia, the Shammar Mountain, Land of the Two Holy Shrines and Hadhramaut.

In short, they were coming from remote areas where no white man had ever traded<sup>(3)</sup>.

The lack of enthusiasm on part of the Amir of Kuwait was interpreted by the mission as 'religious fanaticism'. In fact, the real reason behind his stubborn rejection was the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement signed on Jan, 23rd, 1899 whereby the Sheikh had committed to neither selling nor leasing any piece of land even from his own properties<sup>(4)</sup>.

The British strictness in this regard went on until 1951 when the United States opened its Consulate in Kuwait, much to the grumbling of the British.

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(1) Excerpts from article Those Kuwaiti Nights, which was originally a speech delivered by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait on 29/10/1949 in the annual meeting of the mission and was published in *Neglected Arabia Journal*, Ver. 220 in 1950 and translated by writer and researcher Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani then published in her book *Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait before the Oil*, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, PP11-22.

(2) Dr. Mylrea mentioned that this visit preceded his coming to Kuwait, which occurred in July 1911, a previous reference, P67

(3) *A Study of the History of the Christian Minority in Kuwait*, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Al-Hajery, Professor of Kuwait History, Faculty of Arts, P7

(4) Article "Bedouins and Medicine in Kuwait", written by Dr. Paul Harrison and published in *Neglected Arabia Journal*, Ver. 107 in 1915 and translated by writer and researcher Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani then published in her book *Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait before Oil*, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, PP 109-110

This incident was confirmed by Sheikh Mubarak himself when he supervised the process of measuring the land the mission had bought in 1913.

He then said<sup>(1)</sup>: “You all know that I signed a treaty with Her Majesty’s government whereby I am committed to neither sell nor lease any piece of land for foreigners. You will know I kept my word. All of you remember the German Committee which was sent here to buy vast territories of my country to build railways. What did they get? Not a single inch, and the same case was with the rest.”

### **The Bible Shop**

During its annual meeting in the winter of 1903, the mission agreed that Kuwait would be the headquarters for a branch subordinate to Bahrain. At that time, it was surprising that, between July and August, the relationship between the ruler and the mission took a positive turn when they were allowed to open their Bible Shop in August<sup>(2)</sup> 1903.

It was the main pillar of evangelism within the mission in the Arabian Peninsula and it was deliberately located near the markets since they believed its role would go beyond selling books for the people or just meeting with them.

It was the same scenario in Kuwait when it was opened in the inner market stretching north to the Merchants Market and ending south in the Tellers Square near the Al-Mubarakiya School.

The Iraqi Christian Salome Antoon was appointed supervisor of the Bible Shop and that is why he came back to Kuwait with his family after James Moerdyk signed a long-term lease contract for the building<sup>(3)</sup>.

The Bible Shop played a major role in the mission’s activities and a letter from Zwemer about his voyage to Kuwait in February 1903<sup>(4)</sup> revealed a lot of facts concerning it.

In that letter, Zwemer said Kuwait was the main station during his tour of the Arabian Peninsula but the most important thing, he said about the Bible Shop is

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(1) Dr. Ahmed Abu Hakma says that the mission officials thought the Sheikh’s stubborn refusal was due to his extremism and pointed that they had forgotten that it was due to the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement signed between him and the British which forbade him from selling or leasing any piece of land even from his own properties to any foreigner without prior consent from the British. Source: Kuwait’s Modern History 1163-1385 H 1750-1965 AD, That Al-Salasil Publications, 1st Edition, 1984, P336

(2) From the article Those Kuwaiti Nights by Dr. Stanley Mylrea’s on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P22

(3) Arab Charitable Society and the Early Indications of Modern Renaissance in Kuwait (1321 H – 1913 AD), Bader Nasser Al-Mutairy, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1998, P25

(4) Excerpt from Those Kuwaiti Nights by Dr. Stanley Mylrea’s on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P11

that it was opened with the consent of the Sheikh who also agreed that Antoon hire a house for his family to stay with him<sup>(1)</sup>. Zwemer also said in his letter<sup>(2)</sup>: "I left Bahrain today by ship to make a short visit to Kuwait to measure the possibility of the Mission's work there and encourage colporteurs to work even more.

"I was very pleased when I arrived at Kuwait port where colporteur Salome Antoon welcomed me on board the ship. Instead of hoping to find a house to rent, I went with Antoon to the Missionary house in Kuwait for which we were granted a year-long contract lease by the Ruler.

"On Feb 20th, Zwemer left Kuwait on a small ship carrying cattle and goods and he arrived in Manama in Bahrain on the 9th day after leaving Kuwait.

He went on to say: "Colporteur Antoon is a Christian from Mosul in Iraq and was trained in the Mission in Baghdad and has 10 years experience in selling Christian books in addition to his previous work in English and foreign societies.

"His five children and their mother made me feel at home although it was a three-room house."

This confirms the Mission's first activity was well arranged and peaceful. He also stated that he carried books with him "because I knew Christian books in the Bible Shop were running out of stock... And we had to develop it very rapidly."

He said, he noticed the big demand for educational books and stationery. He added, he noticed "the Holy Bible was selling very well and our sellers made a great work in this regard without any opposition."

During his visit, Zwemer met the Ruler of Kuwait twice and confirmed he had heard him speak very highly of Antoon after six months of his stay in Kuwait.

This makes it likelier that Antoon was the first Christian family to live and settle in Kuwait. Salome and Bible seller Antoon could have been the two Christians referred to in Father Anastas the Carmelite's<sup>(3)</sup> essay on Kuwait in 1904 in which

(1) Some Arab sources say this visit was made in 1903 but Dr. Scudder in his book *The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, Lewis R. Scudder, P178 says it was made in 1904. What supports this belief is that the bookshop keeper, as British documents confirm, sent a letter to the Political Agent in August of the same year informing him that the Sheikh had decided to close the bookshop, as would later be revealed. This date was mentioned by Scudder only, as he also did with the date of Zwemer's visit which he said happened in 1895 instead of 1896. All this make it clear that what he mentioned was inaccurate.

(2) *The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, Lewis R. Scudder, P187. In a letter he sent to the author, Abdul-Wahhab Ali Naqi Al-Naqi said that house "was one of our grandfather's houses, the late Ali Naqi bin Muhammad Al-Naqi. He hosted Antoon in this house he arrived until a suitable house was arranged for him to move to. He came with a recommendation from Sheikh Khaz'al whose wife was our mother's aunt"

(3) Those details were mentioned by writer Khalid Al-Bassam in Al-Qabas on 17/1/2002, P10..

he said Kuwait had a population of 20,075, all of whom were Muslims except for 60 Jews and two Christians<sup>(1)</sup>.

After a short period of Zwemer's visit, Sheikh Mubarak's attitudes began to change. He renewed the ban on book sales and closed the Bible Shop after one year of its opening and asked Salome Antoon to leave Kuwait.

James Moerdyk visited the Sheikh later to try and understand the motives but to no avail. In the face of Sheikh Mubarak's refusal the mission found no way out but to send a letter to the British Agent in Kuwait in September 1904 through the custodian of the Bible Shop asking him to reach an understanding with the ruler.

The Bible Shop remained shut until 1910. When it resumed its activity a new supervisor was appointed named Hanna. The following year, and for the first time, a clergyman, Gerrit Pennings, was temporarily appointed and he immediately began visiting people to win their friendship and encourage them to visit him, according to one of Rev. Edwin Calverley's letters<sup>(2)</sup>.

Pennings tried to work from the dispensary but due to lack of interest in the first stage, he was obliged to act from outside it. This, in turn, forced Sheikh Mubarak to ask Pennings to limit his religious activity from inside the dispensary<sup>(3)</sup>.

Rev. Edwin Calverley succeeded him in 1912 as the first permanently appointed priest. Affirming their shared and unified goals, Dr. Paul Harrison<sup>(4)</sup> who supervised the Mission's dispensary at that time, and Edwin Calverley were keen to go to the Bible Shop in the afternoon to talk to the visitors who were mostly merchants.

Hence, the relationship between the two sides began to improve. At that period, a young man called Jerjis who came from Syria with his mother, nurse Rojina, and sister Amina, was responsible for the Bible Shop and selling copies of the Bible.

The Bible Shop was mentioned in the detailed narrative written by Danish explorer Barclay Raunkiær in 1912 rather sarcastically. He said that<sup>(5)</sup> "one walks in the main street past the coal market and on the right side he finds a Bible Shop affiliated to the American Evangelical Mission."

(1) He is Butrus Jibra'il Yusuf Awwad, known among scientists and literary figures as Anastase-Marie the Carmelite.

(2) Excerpted from Al-Sharq Magazine, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Al-Hajery, Study of the History of the Christian Minority in Kuwait, P7

(3) Christian Evangelist Activities in Kuwait, Edwin Calverley, Neglected Arabia, Ver. 92, Jan, Feb and March 1915, Arabian Mission, New York, PP8-10. Also The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son, Lewis R. Scudder, P178

(4) Dr. Abdul-Malik Khalaf Al-Tamimy, previous source, P89

(5) He was within the first medical staff to work in the mission's hospital after the era of Dr. Bennett. He later served with Dr. Mylrea before leaving Kuwait to Muscat in 1913.

Inside, on a table covered with Arabic copies of Christian books, sits a man with great patience, even more patient than any other human being.

All day long, life just goes on in front of him in the never-ending noise of trade, bargaining and muttering and he seldom comes outside the shop. And when that happens, he gets even more nervous as the discussion between an evangelist<sup>(1)</sup> and a Wahhabi enthusiast is too inept and never fruitful.”

He was born in 1846 in Baghdad in a family of Lebanese descent and studied in The School of the Carmelite Fathers then in The College of Jesuit Fathers in Beirut. He traveled to Belgium where he became celibate before moving to France to study theology and becoming a priest in 1893. His article was published in two parts in Al-Sharq Magazine, 10th edition of the 7th year on 15/5/1904.

The role of the Bible Shop became more obvious later in the correspondences between the Mission's prominent figures. In one of his letters about the reality of evangelism in Kuwait in 1916, Dr. Stanley Mylrea wrote<sup>(2)</sup>:

“Regarding our Bible Shop which sells Christian evangelical literature, Hanna the supervisor found that the attitudes of the Kuwaiti people towards us as a mission had lost a sense of a lot of extremism.

“The sales had boosted and while the Jews were the biggest buyers of the New Testament, the Arabs and Persians mostly bought the Bible and the Old Testament.

“The most important notice regarding the Bible Shop in Kuwait is that we gained total freedom of speech and discussion and our evangelists now say and discuss whatever they desire.

“There are three types of visitors who come to shop. The first merely comes for discussions and showing off knowledge. The second talk about anything except religious issues while the third discover our religion and understand Christianity.

“Most discussions that occur in our shop are friendly and with no disputes whatsoever. I can say there are always 10-15 visitors in the shop and many also come to read Arabic newspapers.”

Mylrea also noted the great demand for mundane books and that “Beirut remained a major supplier for these books but it became too difficult to get them after the war.”

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(1) Raunkiær, Through Wahhabiland on Camelback, P49

(2) Dr. Stanley Mylrea Describing Evangelism in Kuwait in 1916, Khalid Muhammad Al-Bassam, Al-Qabas, 26/7/2001, P8

Concerning the outdoor sales, colporteur Michael achieved a great success when he sold all the copies he had, especially the New Testament and the Bible for Persian merchants in the city market.

Colporteur Michael cordially befriended many Hasawi (from Ihsa') tailors whom Michael said were focused on salvation through Christianity.

Mylrea also mentioned the colporteurs' activities outside the Kuwait City, specifically among Bedouins. He said that "there were great numbers of Bedouins living in tents in the desert outside Kuwait City among whom Michael was practicing evangelism.

Last year, he managed to do it in only one tent whereas this year he was welcomed into every tent without any problem or objection or even hatred from anyone.

The Bible Shop resumed its activity until a few recent decades. In 1968, inspired by the Danish Mission Society in Aden, Harvey Staal opened a new branch for the bookshop on a piece of land carved out of the old Olcott Memorial Hospital for women which had been closed a year before and named it the Holy Family Bookshop.

Within the first month of operation, the new book shop sold more Bibles than the Bible Shop in the old market place had sold the whole previous year<sup>(1)</sup>.

In its seafront location, the shop soon ran into problems, however. Nine months after its encouraging beginning, the government informed the mission that the shop could not be operated from where it was.

The area was not zoned for commercial activity. In this context, Dr. Scudder mentions with the help of Mr. Muhammad Hussain Al-Khalifa<sup>(2)</sup>, a new location was found in a commercial area in Salmiya.

When Leif Munksgaard<sup>(3)</sup> of the Danish Archaeological Investigations came to manage it, the small Family Bookshop quickly overgrew, and another bigger shop had to be rented across the street in the same commercial district which has been the shop's location ever since.

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(1) The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son, Lewis R. Scudder, P216

(2) He was one of the first people to work in the mission's hospital.

(3) The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, P72

Since 1973, Noor Belmont was appointed supervisor for the bookshop who settled in Kuwait with his family. Until that time, the Bible Shop was supervised by Ya'qub Shammās assisted by Samir Hanna while D. J. Shing was appointed secretary, who was succeeded the following year by S. S. Thomas.

### **Mission's Hospital**

Kuwaiti ruler Sheikh Mubarak insisted on his refusal to grant the Arabian Mission any license to stay in Kuwait until the summer of 1909<sup>(1)</sup> when the first contact was made between the Kuwaiti ruler and the mission.

It happened after Sheikh Khaz'al, ruler of Muhammarah<sup>(2)</sup>, invited the American doctor Arthur Bennett, the mission's touring doctor in Basra, to treat his diabetes<sup>(3)</sup>. The doctor's presence coincided with Sheikh Mubarak's visit to his dear friend Sheikh Khaz'al.

Dr. Mylrea described the relationship of the two Sheikhs by saying "they were always together, if one of them bought a yacht, the other would do the same, and if one of them used lightning; the other would use the same thing."

The meeting between the Sheikh and the doctor took place in Al-Failiyya near Muhammarah in the presence of Sayyid Rajab Pasha, Naqib of Basra; another close friend of Sheikh Mubarak.

Sheikh Khaz'al and his guest talked very highly of the doctor's competence and in the words of Dr. Mylrea "Sheikh Khaz'al told<sup>(4)</sup> his friend Sheikh Mubarak that Bennett was the man they should be hosting in Kuwait because they were dying unnecessarily and that Bennett could perform an operation or prescribe a pill and everybody's health would improve<sup>(5)</sup>."

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(1) Sources and references differ when mentioning this year. Dr. Mylrea said this year did not witness any evangelical activity except for the short visit to Kuwait made by Rev. Zwemer and Moerdyk who were denied a long stay by Sheikh Mubarak while Sharon Thoms was not allowed to leave the boat. (See Kuwait before Oil, Dr. Stanley Mylrea's Memoirs, P40). Dr. Eleanor Calverley said that the Sheikh's meeting with Dr. Bennett occurred in the Summer of that year, which is likelier since the British documents confirm that the discussions with Sheikh to launch the mission coincided with Bennett's visit in January 1910, which makes it sensible to say they had first met before that.

(2) Muhammarah is a small independent state in Persia in the area adjacent to Shat Al-Arab and later became called Khorramshahr

(3) Arab Charitable Society and the Early Indications of Modern Renaissance in Kuwait (1321 H – 1913 AD), Bader Nasser Al-Mutairy, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1998, P25

(4) Excerpts from article Those Kuwaiti Nights, which was originally a speech delivered by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait on 29/10/1949, same previous source, P13

(5) Dr. Mylrea used to exaggerate when describing political events and developments especially those which provided an added value to the mission and its institutions and more specifically those events he helped shape thanks to his strong personality.

Upon this recommendation, Sheikh Mubarak asked the doctor to accompany him on board his yacht and check his daughter's eyes<sup>(1)</sup> who was suffering from cataracts, a very common disease in Kuwait that led to loss of eyesight<sup>(2)</sup>.

The doctor later performed the surgery on the Sheikh's daughter successfully which cemented a relationship of trust and friendship between the two men and that is when the Sheikh invited Dr. Bennett to visit Kuwait.

At that time, the Dar Al-I'timad British Dispensary was the only center for healthcare in Kuwait and was opened on Oct 30, 1904<sup>(3)</sup>, to treat<sup>(4)</sup> Kuwaitis and prescribe medicine for free.

It was supervised by a British doctor, the first ever to come to Kuwait, and a pharmaceutical nurse. The dispensary remained open until 1949 which means it was still working when the Arabian Missionary started providing healthcare<sup>(5)</sup>.

Bennett made haste to accept the invitation and he received another boost of trust from Sheikh Mubarak. A son of Sayyid Rajab Pasha<sup>(6)</sup>, the Sheikh's close friend, was suffering from tumor in the neck and had been to India where he was seen by a number of specialists, all of whom refused to operate.

Bennett was eventually asked to see him and advised a surgery in which he successfully removed the tumor and saved the boy's life<sup>(7)</sup>.

Dr. Bennett arrived in Kuwait in January 1910 and his competence made the Sheikh realize the high level of medical services the missionary can afford, which his country was in desperate need of.

(1) This piece of information was mentioned in Dr. Mylrea's *Kuwait Before Oil*, P68 and *Those Kuwaiti Nights* by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P13. It was also mentioned in Dr. Lewis Scudder's book *The Arabian Mission's Story 1998*, P178. However, they contradicted in the details. Dr. Mylrea said the patient was the Sheikh's daughter while Dr. Scudder said it was his sister; which Eleanor Calverley confirmed.

(2) All sources agreed that Dr. Bennett came to Kuwait for the first time to perform a surgery for the Amir's daughter's eye but Dr. Scudder, who managed the hospital between (1939-1975) said that he came to treat a horse owned by the Sheikh and that Dr. Bennett did operate on the horse and removed a tumor or a dimple. It seems though that this incident is correct but its timing is not. Many sources agree that it took place after the launching of the dispensary to prove the Dr. Bennett's efficiency when people refused to come to the dispensary. See *The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, P177, Lewis R. Scudder, PP178-179.

(3) *History of Health Services in Kuwait*, Al-Jarallah, Khalid Fahad, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 1996, P57

(4) In her memoirs, Violet Dickson (Um Saud) mentioned that the dispensary was opened in 1905.

(5) *Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969*, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P9

(6) *The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, Lewis R. Scudder, P178

(7) In her book, *Kuwait Was My Home*, Zahra Freeth said the Sheikh was motivated to summon the doctor after a prominent figure in Kuwait had taken his sick son to the mission in Basra for treatment where he recovered very quickly. Consequently, his father advised the Sheikh to bring the mission to Kuwait. See *Kuwait Was My Home*, translated by Futouh Abdul-Muhsin Al-Khatrash, 1st Edition, 1997, P130. It was not possible to determine whether it was Sayyid Rajab Pasha's son since the patient had been treated in Basra.

A discussion began about the possibility of establishing a hospital in Kuwait and the Sheikh invited the doctor to stay in Kuwait and practice medicine.

He seemed more open<sup>(1)</sup> to the idea this time but on certain conditions. This was confirmed by the British Agent in Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup> in excerpt 3 written on Jan 19, 1910 where he stated that 'Dr. Bennett and Rev. Gerrit Pennings, both from the American Mission, arrived on board the ship Al-Mushtari<sup>(3)</sup> and were hosted by Sheikh Jaber Bin Mubarak in a café in the evening waiting for Sheikh Mubarak to return from Failaka, hoping to get his approval to open a shop to sell Bibles.

'Rumor has it that Sheikh Mubarak had met Dr. Bennett in Basra a short time ago and had asked him to come to Kuwait and the doctor promised him to visit Kuwait following his visit to Bahrain'.

Another excerpt from the British Political Agent in Kuwait written on Jan 26, 1910 said that 'Bennett and Pennings left Kuwait for Basra on horses backs given to them by the Sheikh. It was said that Sheikh Mubarak asked Bennett to come back to Kuwait in one month to practice medicine'.

Dr. Bennett left behind him a Christian Iraqi assistant to supervise the construction of a dispensary that would offer simple medical services like first aid<sup>(4)</sup>.

A month later, after the annual meeting for the missionary, a committee was formed to go to Kuwait to negotiate with the Sheikh over obtaining a piece of land to build 270x300 f hospital.

The committee consisted of Dr. Bennett and John Van Ess. They were cordially received by the Sheikh, who, after having granted them two horses, gave the doctor a large house owned by his nephew.

This incident is proved in many later documents, one of which is the excerpt 12 from the diaries of the British Political Agent dated March 23, 1910 which reads 'the Sheikh gave Dr. Bennett a large house that belonged to one of his cousins, just near his palace.

'Dr. Bennett held small religious meetings with a number of Baghdadi Christians on Sunday March 13 in Paul Gray Agency building. Some thought the Sheikh chose

(1) The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son, Lewis R. Scudder, P180

(2) Muhammad Al-Asa'd, Al-Zaman Magazine, 25/9/1999, P64

(3) Dr. Bennett's visit to Kuwait was made on the back of a camel or a donkey, excerpted from Those Kuwaiti Nights, by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait and published in Neglected Arabia Journal on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P13

(4) Kuwait Before Oil, Dr. Stanley Mylrea's Memoirs, P68

this specific palace because he wanted to keep a close eye on<sup>(1)</sup> the evangelists while others believed it was because he wanted them to be very near in case he needed their assistance for himself or his family’.

The Boodai Diwaniya, located in Al-Rashdan market near Mubarakiya, was rented as headquarters for the dispensary<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Getting the land**

The developments began to take new dimensions. The efforts and pressure were mounting to get a piece of land on which to build the hospital. The available letters and documents show that this was never easy, taking into consideration the British political and security worries.

The first step the mission took was to sign a treaty with the British, the most powerful entity in Kuwait, as per the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement signed in 1899. The British were so keen not to allow any communication between the mission and the Turks.

With this treaty signed in Bahrain, the mission had removed the technical obstacles. Nonetheless, Sheikh Mubarak had stipulated from the very beginning that the land would be used only to build the American Mission Hospital and that the mission would quickly appoint a doctor to assure him that the treaty remains of a pure medical nature with no evangelical activities whatsoever.

However, there was more to it than meeting the eye. One British secret document showed vigorous attempts to drop the word ‘medical’ from the description of the mission’s activities when the tender process began.

All these steps paved the way for the official signing of the agreement to open a missionary in Kuwait. It was signed by William Shakespeare, the British Political Agent, on behalf of Sheikh Mubarak, and by both James Moerdyk and Dirk Dykstra on behalf of the mission.

On Nov 29, 1910, the British Political Agency issued a secret correspondence, no. C-72, from Captain W. Shakespeare, the Political Agent, to Bushehr, the Political Resident Agent in the ‘Persian Gulf’, stating obtaining the land had become a

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(1) Evangelism in the Gulf Area, Dr. Abdul-Malik Khalaf Al-Tamimy, P23

(2) The British document referred to here stated the dispensary was in the house granted by the Sheikh while Abdulla Hatem confirmed it was in Boodai diwaniya. Also, Dr. Scudder, in an interview, confirmed renting a house from a Kuwaiti citizen. See Pages from the Memory, Books for All Series 52, Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Part 1, P38, Dr. Lewis Scudder

reality containing the specifications of the land and a request from the ruler of Kuwait to obtain an Arabic version of the tender. That correspondence consisted of seven points.

### **Medical services for women**

The mission was keen to deliver its services to all people and move on as planned, so they rented two houses. Dr. Mylrea rented the first house when he first came in 1911 on a 30-year contract, a clear sign that the mission was a long term project.

That house was known as the Beit Al-Rubban and was used by the shop supervisor, Jerjis, his mother and his sister, in addition to Gilany, the Afghan convert pharmacist.

Dr. Mylrea also lived in that house for a short time when he came back to Kuwait with his wife. The house in general witnessed many important stages of the mission's journey.

The second house was a quarter mile away from the dispensary and was dedicated to Rev. Edwin Calverley and his wife Eleanor who arrived in Kuwait during the last weeks of 1911 on board the Indian ship Baroda, coming from Bahrain where she had spent two years.

She also took intensive courses in Arabic in Amara<sup>(1)</sup>, Iraq and passed a special test, another strong indicator to the mission's great interest in every minute detail of this integrated project. Dr. Paul Harrison was present to continue supervising the men's hospital.

Only a few weeks after becoming the first ever lady doctor in Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>, she was ready to carry out her duties. Once she set foot in the house, she chose the location for her clinic in the special Diwaniya because it was the part that best considered the nature of the society.

This incident coincided with the New Year, to be exact on Jan 1, 1912. Eleanor, who became widely known as Khatun Halima", sat at her desk with her medical instruments neatly arranged around her. In a special record for the female patients' names, she wrote 'Jan 1, 1912' on the first line, and on the second, she wrote 'the First Case'.

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(1) Dr. Mary in Arabia: Memoirs, Mary Bruins Allison, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2009, P103

(2) Arab Charitable Society and the Early Indications of Modern Renaissance in Kuwait (1321 H – 1913 AD), Bader Nasser Al-Mutairy, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1998, P28

It was hectic for the enthused doctor who could not sleep the previous night, as she waited for the first case to knock on the clinic door. She waited with Rojina and Amina who worked under Dr. Bennett in the mission's station in Bahrain.

Hours passed and no one knocked on the wooden door and the doctor's anxiety began to mount even more. Finally, the women's clinic in the Mission's Hospital registered the first case when a fatherless Sudanese girl entered with a deep wound in her foot.

### **A piece for the Dutch<sup>(1)</sup>**

The mission was late in fulfilling its pledge to the Sheikh to commence the construction of the hospital very quickly, and that was stirring the Sheikh's anger.

Dr. Mylrea continuously visited the site to set an initial perception of the building which would reflect the Arabian-American mission's existence in Kuwait. But he left to Bahrain en route to America on his first vacation after coming to Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>.

It is worth mentioning here that one engineer, who visited the site for inspection before Mylrea's departure, told the doctor that there were signs of the existence of oil there<sup>(3)</sup>.

Rev. Edwin Calverley supervised the construction of the hospital during Mylrea's annual vacation which ended in the fall of 1913. Two young men from the University of Michigan came to Basra to weigh the potential chances of teaching in the city, offering to finance the school and afford the personnel.

After their efforts went in vain, they tried to work for the Turkish government who refused to pay them and they offered the mission to perform the design and construction of the hospital<sup>(4)</sup>.

Soon after the two young men embarked on their task, things took an unexpected turn. The land was supposed to be rectangular, measuring 200 cubits east and west and 170 cubits north and south but it turned out to be consisting of seven

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(1) Muhammad Al-Asa'd, Al-Zaman Magazine, Ver. 52, 2/10/1999, P58

(2) Mylrea says in the 3rd edition of his book that he had left to Bahrain and America in the spring of 1912 and that time the Calverley's arrived while many sources said they had arrived at the end of December 1911.

(3) The doctor never mentioned the basis on which the engineer thought there was oil and he did not determine whether he meant that exact spot or Kuwait in general. Excerpted from Those Kuwaiti Nights, by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait and published in Neglected Arabia Journal on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P16

(4) Excerpted from Those Kuwaiti Nights, by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait and published in Neglected Arabia Journal on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P16

or eight angles. Calverley was continuously keeping Mylrea informed of all developments.

After the differentiation in measurements, it seemed the Reverend deliberately and single-handedly re-took the measurements<sup>(1)</sup> according to the contract and he planted cement pillars at all different angles which were considered the cornerstone for the hospital.

The border issue remained unresolved until Mylrea came back in the fall of 1913 and the quick-tempered doctor headed immediately to the Sheikh's palace on the sea shore.

The Sheikh was sitting in the bill hall surrounded by statesmen with the guards standing on the other side. The first words uttered by Mylrea were: "when you sold us the land, were you not willing to give us the whole hill?"

"What do you mean", the Sheikh asked. Mylrea then told him the story of the engineers and the borders after which the Sheikh asked him: "Have you moved my borders?"

"The borders were not correct", came Mylrea's replied. The Sheikh exploded in anger, saying<sup>(2)</sup>: "Listen, doctor. My patience has run out. I sold your mission the land three years ago because you had promised to build the hospital, which you never did and only God knows when that is going to happen. Every one of you comes and then goes. And I do not know for how long you will stay here. I seriously thought of calling off all my agreements with you and getting you all out of here."

Dr. Mylrea said after this outburst, the Sheikh ended the meeting hinting that he was feeling very bad and gave his guards the signal<sup>(3)</sup>.

That incident put on hold the entire and the winter of 1913 ended with no progress. Dr. Mylrea kept visiting the palace once or twice a week but the Sheikh never brought up the issue of building the hospital and things remained this way for a long time.

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(1) In all references Dr. Mylrea had not mentioned that Rev. Calverley made this move. He sarcastically blamed the Sheikh's men who put piles of stones to border the land. What made this incident more probable was the Sheikh's tantrum when he later knew about what had happened.

(2) Dr. Stanley Mylrea, *Kuwait Before Oil*, translated by Dr. Muhammad Ghanim Al-Rumaihy, Dar Madarek, 3rd Edition, P76

(3) Excerpted from *Those Kuwaiti Nights*, by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait and published in *Neglected Arabia Journal* on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P18

Eventually, Dr. Mylrea decided to talk to the Sheikh again and he suggested the Sheikh visit the site to take the measurements himself. Mylrea said the Sheikh told him three times he would come but did not. Then he decided to come the fourth time.

On Feb 9, 1914, the rainy weather did not prevent Sheikh Mubarak from appearing at the site in a convoy of three wagons. He was in the first one while Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak was in the second and Lieutenant-Colonel William Grey<sup>(1)</sup>, the Political Agent, was in the third with his escort.

The measuring process took merely 15 minutes after which Sheikh Mubarak spoke to the audience and said, despite the German ambitions to get the land for themselves, he had no right to either cede or sell any piece of land because of the agreement he has signed with the British.

He then turned to the mission and its aims, saying: "I ask myself: who are these people to whom I sold this very piece of land on which we are standing now?"

"Are they politicians? No. Are they a commercial institution? No. Why did they come here? They came here to teach us, and God knows we need to be taught. They came here to build a hospital and look after our patients. And now the doctor wants me to give him something. I do not know what he wants but I will give it to him whatever it is." After he asked Dr. Mylrea what he wanted, the doctor replied: "Your Highness, I want you to give us the entire hill..."

Under the title 'A Piece for the Dutch', this incident was quoted in the British historical documents including the whole scenario with which this land was obtained, as well as the vital role Sheikh Mubarak played in granting an additional piece of land for the mission of the Dutch Protestant Church, which allowed the mission to gain more area:

According to Mylrea, measuring the land was done using the official measuring tool. He said he had heard that the measuring result was 199 cubits east and west and 179 cubits north and south. When the doctor tried to talk about it, the Sheikh did not give him a chance.

As mentioned in this telegram, he immediately went to deliver a speech in which he reminded everybody of his agreement with the British.

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(1) The doctor said he was the one who suggested that the British Political Agent be present when measuring the land so that the mission could preserve the measurements in the archive of the Political Agency for ever. Those Kuwaiti Nights, by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait, published in Neglected Arabia Journal on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, P20

According to Mylrea, the Sheikh said<sup>(1)</sup>: “Men of Kuwait, I asked you to come here for a special reason. You all know that I have signed a treaty with Her Majesty’s government whereby I am committed to neither selling nor leasing any piece of land for foreigners.

“You will know I kept my word. All of you remember the German Committee which was sent here to buy vast territories of my country to build railways. What did they get? Not a single inch and the same goes for the rest.

“But who are these men? Are they diplomats? Are they politicians? Are they traders? These men came here to teach us. They are going to build a hospital and look for our patients. The doctor wants something that I do not know but I am telling you all overtly that whatever it is that he wants, I will give it to him.” Having finished his speech, he turned to the doctor and asked him what he wanted.

Dr. Mylrea replied that he wanted the Sheikh to give him the entire hill<sup>(2)</sup>. The Sheikh replied that the following day he would send his men so that the doctor would tell them where exactly he wanted the border line to be provided that he would not move or change them this time.

Hence, the construction of the new men’s hospital accelerated. It was located on the west side at the sea shore. Constructions also included a house that was later dedicated to Dr. Mylrea’s family and was supervised by Mr. Shaw<sup>(3)</sup> from the Shaw and Haines Company, who was then succeeded by Mr. Haines<sup>(4)</sup>.

Mylrea and Edwin Calverley later decided to seek help from a young Arab Christian man to supervise the work which caused some tension between the parties after the workers started calling him “the foreigner.”

It was the first building in Kuwait and the Gulf at that time to be built of cast iron and cement which were imported from outside. Consequently, and with the WWI

(1) Those Kuwaiti Nights, by Dr. Stanley Mylrea in Kuwait, published in *Neglected Arabia Journal* on 29/10/1949, same previous reference, PP21-22

(2) That hill was very much talked about in the memoirs and writing of the pillars of the mission even an emotional way. Dr. Mylrea’s wife called it “the hill of happiness.” See *Desert Outings in Kuwait*, Bessie Mylrea, published in *Neglected Arabia Journal*, Ver. 99, 1916, translated by writer and researcher Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani then published in her book *Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait Before Oil*, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P94

(3) Although Mylrea reiterated in his memoirs, P81, that it was those two young men from Michigan who had built the hospital, which was also stated by Dr. Abdul-Malik Al-Tamimy in his book P47, scrutinizing that story leads us to believe that the two young men left their residence in Basra before the British had occupied it in WWI, making the fact that it was Shaw who built the hospital more accurate, as stated here.

(4) *Arab Charitable Society and the Early Indications of Modern Renaissance in Kuwait (1321 H – 1913 AD)*, Bader Nasser Al-Mutairy, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1998, P40

battles intensifying, the construction of the building came to a halt due to shortage in funding and materials.

Dr. Eleanor Calverley had left Kuwait on Aug 7, 1914 followed by her husband in November and they remained outside Kuwait for two years for security reasons.

When the war ended and the construction completed, the mission hospital was ready in 1914 with a total cost of \$6,000 donated by Frank Chambers from New York, in addition to the apparatus, medicines, instruments and furniture.

The Kuwaitis called the hospital The House of Glass because of the great amount of glass used in doors and windows. The wood imported from India was also used in the finishing.

The mission officials took practical steps to start working in the hospital. En route to Kuwait after her first vacation, Dr. Eleanor Calverley contracted a new nurse from Bombay called Elaine Fieldhouse.

Mrs. Bessie, Dr. Mylrea's wife, also joined the medical staff where she gradually gained experience. Women refused to be examined by her husband, so she undertook the responsibility of listening to them and report their cases back to Dr. Mylrea who would then give the medication.

However, she did not last long since she was there just because of the shortage in the medical staff and returned to her hobby, sewing, and Nurse Mary Van Pelt later became in charge of the nursing staff.

Before the hospital started work officially, Dr. Bennett then Harrison and Mylrea all worked in a house owned by a Kuwaiti<sup>(1)</sup>.

During its first years, the hospital saw a big turnout<sup>(2)</sup> since it was the first in the history of Kuwait and the first surgery to be performed at this hospital was appendectomy<sup>(3)</sup> on Ahmed Al-Marzouq. The number of patients began to grow gradually. In the first year, it was 2,387<sup>(4)</sup> and reached 4,521 in 1914 before the figure reached to 6,166 patients in 1915 and 1916.

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(1) Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait Before Oil, Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P4

(2) Interview conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery with Kuwaiti long-lived Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa, published in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 11075, on 17/1/1997, PP6-7

(3) Interview with Dr. Lewis Scudder, writer Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Pages from the Memory, Books for All Series 52, Part 1, P38

(4) Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait Before Oil, Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P5

## **A new women's hospital**

Dr. Eleanor worked with her colleague Dr. Mylrea in the same hospital until 1919 when a new women's hospital was built the following year. It was similar to the men's hospital, consisting of one floor and two wards.

The interior was more developed since the walls were porcelain-covered and provided with chrome-plated sinks. The residential quarters, for the nurses was annexed to the building and Nurse Refmony was the first to live in it.

Later, the hospital witnessed significant stages when Mary Van Pelt was appointed head nurse in the late 1920s, becoming the first qualified American nurse to work in Kuwait.

Dr. Eleanor described her saying<sup>(1)</sup> "the sight of her in her white starched uniform and hat moving in the wards, was a new experience for the patients." The hospital had dedicated a Ford T vehicle to be used for outdoor cases, especially in emergencies.

## **Battle of Jahra and the expansion**

In 1920, Kuwait fought off many attempts for occupation by the forces of Faisal Bin Al-Duwish and the conflict reached its height in May and then in the fall of the same year when Al-Ikhwan invaded Kuwait which culminated in the famous Battle of Jahra.

This battle led to the building of Kuwait walls. Upon these occurrences, the British Warship High Flyer arrived to protect Kuwait and help its local forces.

The Battle of Jahra was a major phase in Kuwait's modern history and it also formed the most important turning point in the Mission Hospital's journey, thanks to the massive amount of medical services it offered to the citizens wounded on the battlefield.

The Kuwaitis were so impressed that they began to donate for the hospital to show their appreciation for the services rendered. On Oct 10 of that same year, the gunfire intensified all through Kuwait, including the periphery of the hospital, coming from the battlefield in Jahra between the Kuwaitis and forces of Faisal Bin Al-Duwish.

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(1) Eleanor Calverley, *My Arabian Days and Nights*, 1958, chapter 13

At two o'clock, the hospital began receiving the wounded soldiers and about 120 of them were hospitalized, a majority of them the following day.

Those who were seriously wounded were taken via the sea on Oct 12 and 63 Kuwaitis became martyrs in that battle, thanks to the hospital's medical efficiency, only 4 of the 120 wounded died.

On the other hand, Faisal Bin Al-Duwish suffered huge losses. He lost 800 of the 3,000 fighters. Some of the injuries were fatal since they did not find medical assistance.

The mission was included in the British government plans in security emergencies. The machineguns were mounted on the hospital's roof and British soldiers were deployed on the roofs of the homes of Dr. Mylrea's and Rev. Calverley's.

On Oct 23, Dr. Mylrea was summoned for a security meeting on board a warship in the presence of Arnold Wilson, the British Civil Commissioner in Iraq.

Mylrea was consulted about the possibility of transferring American and British citizens on board the ship in case the attacks resumed. But later, there was no sign of Al-Duwish and Mylrea dropped a letter from a plane over the area where Al-Duwish was believed to be. There was no trace of him afterwards.

Despite the medical staff's great efforts in treating the wounded, the Kuwaitis at first remained unmoved and cautious towards the mission hospital.

As a result, while sitting in a crowded coffee shop Dr. Mylrea made his bitterness clear and showed his anger to the reaction of the Kuwaitis who had left him and his staff to work alone in difficult conditions with no sign of appreciation.

Rumor has it that a member of the ruling family saw the doctor throwing his tantrums and left. He seemed to have informed the palace of what had happened and how the folks in the coffee shop had reacted.

In the evening, two of the men who were in the coffee shop, knocked on Dr. Mylrea's door and handed him a list of donors who had collected 1,000 rupees and they offered more help in money and supplies.

The Kuwaitis continued to visit the doctor with their donations and on Oct 16, the total money donated was 6,100 rupees in addition to supplies like foodstuff, coal and blankets.

In 1920, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah offered the mission another piece of land as mentioned in one British document.

Among the donors was Abdul-Latif Issa, a prominent figure in Kuwait at the time, who donated a new piece of land. The two pieces were attached together to build a hospital for women and a residence for the medical staff.

Long-lived Muhammad Al-Khalifa was reported to have said that the mission's officials bought a house that belonged to the family of Al-Abd Al-Jalil and attached it to the hospital and they also bought a house and Diwaniya that belonged to Jassem Al-Ya'qub<sup>(1)</sup> and that Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber granted them the street which they attached to the hospital<sup>(2)</sup>.

The improvement on the medical level did not end with the men's hospital. In 1937, construction work was about to begin for the second women's hospital, later known as the Olcott Memorial Hospital.

In her letters, nurse May Van Pelt gave an accurate realistic vision of that period. She wrote<sup>(3)</sup>: "We are having a new women's hospital, the construction materials are ready, and agreements have been reached with the builders.

Finally, the idea of commemorating Mrs. Van Santvoord Olcott, Secretary for the Arabian Peninsula Affairs in the mission's board of directors, had become determined."

Two years later, in 1939, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber officially opened the hospital when Dr. Mary Bruins Allison was the gynecology supervisor in the mission.

This paved the way to a new era in the mission's work in gynecology and pediatrics. The construction works was handled by Hajj Ahmed Al-Banna' and the Kuwait Oil Company was committed to paying all the expenses after a cordial agreement with the mission<sup>(4)</sup>.

With the opening of this building, the hospital's capacity grew up to 5,000 cases a year and that included 100 surgeries.

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(1) Pages from the Memory, Books for All Series 52, Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Part 1, P38, Dr. Lewis Scudder

(2) Interview conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery with Kuwaiti long-lived Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa, published in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 11075, on 17/1/1997, PP6-7

(3) Mary Van Pelt's 9th letter, dated 30/11/1937, from Mary Van Pelt Letters (Khatun Maryam), Dr. Khalid Fahad Al-Jarallah, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2011, P83

(4) Evangelism in the Gulf Area, Dr. Abdul-Malik Khalaf Al-Tamimy, P50

With the growing turnout for medical services, the second development phase began in November 1954 with the construction of a new hospital called Dr. Mylrea Memorial Hospital.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Dr. Lewis Scudder, chairman of the mission's hospitals, placed the corner stone for the new hospital.

In his speech, the Sheikh expressed his pleasure with the mission's continuous role which started with Dr. Mylrea in his grandfather Sheikh Mubarak's era<sup>(1)</sup>.

Mylrea was truly one of the most important figures of the Arabian Mission in Kuwait and the region. Besides his fame at medical level, his role went well beyond that as he was present in the main stages of the mission in Kuwait whether in supervising the hospital in general or in his contribution to religious and spiritual readings. His role also went beyond the mission itself.

It was rumored that when he heard that the hands of a thief were to be amputated, he convinced the ruler not to carry out the punishment and the man was pardoned and the punishment was never carried out again in Kuwait.

Another incident proves that the example was no fluke. He mediated once again to save a young girl who was accused of immorality and had been sentenced to solitary confinement in a mud house until death. Although the ruler did not respond to the doctor's mediation promptly, he later came around to.

Judging from the beginning of his career, it could easily be realized that the mission did not choose Dr. Mylrea to undertake this task by chance, taking into consideration the large number of Bedouins in Kuwait and their strong adherence to their traditions and social norms.

He was a brave man who travelled to Turkey in 1897 to help the victims of the Armenian massacres which made him study medicine in order to help those in need.

Despite being born and raised in England, he travelled to Philadelphia to fulfill his career ambitions. While studying there, Samuel Zwemer invited him to join the Arabian Mission and his journey with the missionary started from Bahrain in 1907.

On the career level, his fame exceeded the borders of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia. One Sunday, in May 1914, while he was supposed to be enjoying his holiday or

(1) Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freeth, translated by Dr. Futouh Abdul-Muhsin Al-Khatrash, 1st Edition, 1997, P134

praying at the Beit Al-Rubban, he was preparing to travel to Najd after receiving an invitation from Prince Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, who had accepted Sheikh Mubarak's request to host the doctor.

Since the Sheikh's car had a mechanical problem, a wagon arrived to take the doctor on a 33-km trip outside Kuwait City. Dr. Mylrea described the journey in detail, specifically the camp of Bin Saud which consisted of a main street with white European tents on both sides.

His special tent was at the end of the street, and at entrance stood Bin Saud to greet him. This greeting was a sign of appreciation for the doctor who was going to treat the Najdi Prince's men from fever.

Mylrea's description of his host reflected his great ability to delve deep in the characters of the persons he happened to meet. He said of the Prince: "I was hugely impressed with all his details and countenance. His face and looks tell of an acute smartness, energy, determination and power.

It is a good face that testifies for his reputation as a man with strong belief and purity; not the face of a spoilt nouveau riche. It is the face of a man who was capable of restraining himself and knew what it meant to fast and pray..." This was evidence that the mission knew well how to choose its men.

Mylrea was held in high esteem by his colleagues in the mission and the region in general. Although the annual report of 1929 described Dr. Louis Paul Dame as the "most prominent master" in Bahrain, Dame himself informed his colleague in Kuwait in detail about the surgery he performed on the Crown Prince, Saud, the King's first son.

In spite of being a minor surgery, Dame sent a letter to Mylrea on Nov. 2, describing the fracture in the Prince's left arm after falling off his horse during a festival celebrating one of the King's son's completion of reading the Holy Qur'an.

Mylrea wrote about his visit to Saudi Arabia in 'Neglected Arabia: (January – March 1915)', and pointed out that Prince Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz firmly told him: "We will welcome you on one condition. Leave my people alone when it comes to religion." He then talked about Islam in Najd, saying affirmatively that Islam was the true religion.

The doctor was respected and appreciated by the ruling families and political references in and outside Kuwait. In 1916, Prince Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and Sheikh Khaz'al, who were visiting Kuwait, accompanied Sheikh Mubarak to visit Dr. Mylrea in his house.

Even though this visit was for medical purposes, it reflected the high esteem and respect the doctor enjoyed. The Sheikh could have summoned him to his palace after all.

Mylrea spent 28 years in Kuwait. He retired and accompanied his wife, Bessie, to India who died of cancer. Then he came back to Kuwait where, on Jan 3, 1952, he died in the house in which he lived for a long time.

He was buried in the small Christian cemetery behind Al-Ghanim Company and wordings carved on his grave read: "O Man, I came here not to take care of you, but to take care of others<sup>(1)</sup>." At his funeral, a member of the ruling family delivered a speech, expressing his gratitude to the man who devoted his life for the Kuwaiti people. He finished his speech saying that Mylrea was the father of modern Kuwait.

### **Names of prominent doctors of the mission and their careers**

Sharon Thoms who was appointed in 1898 studied Arabic in Basra between 1898 and 1900. He served in Bahrain from 1900 until 1909. During that time, he tried several times to enter Kuwait. He died in a crash in Oman in 1913. He supervised the construction of the Mason Memorial Hospital in Bahrain.

Paul Harrison was appointed in 1909 and arrived in Basra the following year. After completing his study in Arabic, he moved to Kuwait in 1911. Two years later, he went back to Bahrain and stayed there until 1922 then came back to Kuwait in 1924 for no more than a year before heading back to Bahrain.

He worked in Oman between 1928 and 1938 then returned to Bahrain between 1941 and 1948 and retired the following year. He came out of from retirement between 1952 and 1954 and led the mission's initial medical tours in Saudi Arabia in the Eastern Province then in Riyadh.

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(1) Dr. Mary in Arabia: Memoirs, Mary Bruins Allison, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2009, P112. However, in Dr. Futouh Abdul-Muhsin Al-Khatrash's translation for Kuwait Was My Home, that sentence read: "Oh, Son of Man came not to help others, but to be helped." See Kuwait Was My Home, Zahra Freeth, translated by Dr. Futouh Abdul-Muhsin Al-Khatrash, 1st Edition, 1997, P130

In 1938, Dr. Wells Thoms was appointed in Kuwait. He was the son of Sharon and Marion. Wells Thoms who worked in the Mason Memorial Hospital in Bahrain. He was appointed in the mission in 1933 and arrived in Bahrain the same year.

Gerald Nykerk was appointed in Kuwait in 1963 and died of a heart attack a year later.

Doctors heading to Kuwait used to study Arabic in Bahrain before their arrival but this changed in some cases. Kuwait became a center for teaching Arabic after it hosted many doctors and workers of the mission.

Among those who learnt Arabic in Kuwait were Harold Storm between 1927 and 1929 and Bernard Voss in 1952 before he headed to Bahrain the following year.

As far as the female medical staff was concerned, Eleanor Calverley was the first lady doctor to enter and work in Kuwait in January 1912 and she was known as 'Khatun Halima'<sup>(1)</sup>.

Then, there was an important nursing role for Bessie, Dr. Mylrea's wife, who was known as 'Khatun Sai'da' because of her always smiling face. She helped her husband in many tasks before leaving upon the arrival of Nurse Mary Van Pelt in Kuwait towards the end of 1920.

Van Pelt remained in Kuwait until 1939 and in 1929 she was assigned to temporarily supervise both men's and women's hospitals. At that time, Eleanor Calverley and her husband were still on vacation and the substitute nurse Esther Barny Ames<sup>(2)</sup> had not yet finished her Arabic studies.

After that, Dr. Mary Bruins Allison arrived in Kuwait in October<sup>(3)</sup> 1934 and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber called her 'Wasmiyya' because her arrival coincided with the period known locally as 'Wasm', which means plenty of rain. Later, Dr. Ruth Crouse arrived.

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(1) Kuwaitis used to call lady workers in the mission hospital Arabic names and it is said that Eleanor Calverley took her alias (Khatun Halima) with her to Bahrain. All the names were given in Kuwait on the basis of the looks of the person or his characteristics. Other names were given names relating to condition of the weather like Dr. Mary, who was called (Wasmiyya). The word Khatun is derived from Farsi, meaning "lady."

(2) She might well be the only Arab-born lady doctor to work in the mission's hospital. She was born in Basra in 1902 for Evangelists Fred and Margaret Barny and was appointed in 1927. She went to Baghdad to study Arabic and moved between Kuwait, Bahrain and KSA. She married John Ames, employee at Standard Oil Company and bore his name.

(3) From many sources, we can exactly tell the month Mary Bruins Allison arrived in. In her 5th letter, Nurse Mary Van Pelt said: "Finally, I am not alone. A young lady doctor arrived last week." Mary Van Pelt Letters (Khatun Maryam), Dr. Khalid Fahad Al-Jarallah, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2011, P55

Among the many Arab Christians who worked in this hospital were Sulaiman Sama'n, Benjamin and Ya'qub Abu Habib, known as Ya'qub Al-Nasrani, and Nurse Jamila Elias, the first Arab nurse.

Elias was a young Iraqi Christian lady following the Roman Catholic Church in Basra. She was trained in the British Hospital in Basra and came to Kuwait in 1933.

She stayed with her husband and child in the rooms behind the hospital before joining the Ministry of Health which gave her a house in Kaifan.

During her work at the mission, she was assisted by two Iranian aides in prescribing medicine and treatment. Later came the Egyptian nurse Labiba who worked at the KOC hospital in Maqwa' and was then moved to the Ahmadi Hospital<sup>(1)</sup>.

Dr. Scudder mentioned some other workers like the first pharmacist Shah Ridha, Sulaiman, Abdul-Karim, Hajji Abbas, Awadh, and Qambar, the first dresser.

The hospital also attracted some Kuwaitis, including Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa<sup>(2)</sup> who was the first to work in Radiology in 1943 before going to Bahrain in 1949 to study this specialization and then to India in 1951. He later earned a diploma in radiography.

The mission hospital left a significant impact in the hearts of many, and saved the lives of dozens of critically ill and the incurable diseases from 1930 to 1932.

It also cured traditional diseases such as boils, sore eyes caused by flies, retinal detachment, trachoma<sup>(3)</sup>, which leads to blindness, liver diseases, infections of the skin, itching resulting from smallpox and cases of blindness.

The hospital also conducted surgeries Kuwait never knew before in that era, including a case of hydrocephalus for a young child. Dr. Harrison was trying to treat the child and when his father refused to give a piece of artery from his own hand to use as a drain in the child's neck to relieve blood pressure on the brain, the doctor truncated the artery of his hand by himself.

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(1) Interview conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery with Kuwaiti long-lived Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa, published in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 11075, on 17/1/1997, PP6-7

(2) Dr. Scudder mentioned that name was Haidar Muhammad Al-Khalifa, Pages from the Memory, Books for All Series 52, Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Part 1, P38, Dr. Lewis Scudder, P41

(3) It was a common disease in Kuwait at that time and caused contraction of the eyelid, bending of the eye lashes

This scene stunned the owner of the Diwaniya where the incident happened and said to the doctor: "I swear to God if you filled this room with silver and gave to me, I would not have let you do this to me for whoever it was."

Medical services of the hospital were not exclusive to the people of Kuwait, but included several nationalities such as the Danish explorer Raunkiær who arrived in Kuwait from Basra on Jan 22, 1912 and was treated by Doctor Harrison, who did not know he was suffering from tuberculosis, which later caused his death<sup>(1)</sup>.

Doctor Stanley Mylrea treated Sheikh Hafez Wahba<sup>(2)</sup>, one of the early Egyptian pioneers to visit the Gulf and who worked in Kuwait before working with King Abdul Aziz bin Saud, and later becoming the Saudi ambassador to Britain.

Starting from 1916, the missionary found more acceptances and in that year organized a meeting in Kuwait for all its representatives in the Gulf. The missionary officials enjoyed their holiday and practiced their rituals freely on Thanksgiving Day, St. Valentine's Day, New Year's Eve and Easter.

Such events, especially Thanksgiving, were marked by eating turkey which they imported from India whenever possible. They celebrated and decorated the tamarisk tree on Christmas and celebrated Easter with recitation playing the organ.

Those social relations reached their zenith during the reign of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who was keen to share with the Christian community its festivals and regularly visited the family of Dr. Calverley.

He once joined the family at Christmas party in 1921 and the children began reciting hymns. He showed his appreciation to the family when he said: "I hate to see you going. I have always thought of you as brother and sister and I always trusted you. Believe me when I say that I love you from the bottom of my heart."

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber's appreciation for the medical work continued. He once summoned Nurse Mary Van Pelt then Dr. Allison to address his wife and he sent a car to bring them from the hospital.

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(1) William Facey and Gillian Grant, *Kuwait by the First Photographers*, London Centre of Arab Studies, 1998, P51

(2) Dr. Stanley Mylrea, *Kuwait Before Oil*, translated by Dr. Muhammad Ghanim Al-Rumaihy, Dar Madarek, 3rd Edition, P95

In case it was not treated, it would have led to total loss of sight. The treatment took place at the women's dorm into Dasman Palace and the wife of the Sheikh rewarded them with two pearl rings.

The foreign communities in Kuwait and the pillars of the missionary, as well as the British Political Agency, were keen on respecting the Sheikh's beliefs about food that were contrary to Islamic law.

Colonel Dickson made sure the Sheikh was never offended by crossing this line whenever foreign delegations were invited to feasts. The Sheikh was once invited for lunch on board French ship Bougainville which arrived in Kuwait in the early 1930s, and the Colonel pledged to take care of the food.

However, the chef served a dish of cold pork despite the Colonel's warning to the crew. The Colonel then whispered in the Sheikh's ear: "You should not eat this, Your Highness<sup>(1)</sup>", in a clear sign for the respect paid to the religious beliefs and traditions in Kuwait.

Colonel Dickson's family used to throw English-style parties for Christmas at their house with fireworks. The mission once invited a group of English speakers to chorus singing in the Church and the next day a celebration was held in the hospital for the staff and Arab Christians.

In another evidence of the mission's pillars keenness on reinforcing their relationships with the community, they always visited them in Diwanias to congratulate them at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Women also visited many houses to offer congratulations and the first visit was always for the first lady, wife of the Ruler, and they were in return, invited to spend a whole day out in the desert.

On April 1, the medical role of the mission in Kuwait came to an end after the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health entirely took charge of the men's hospital, renting it for an annual sum of KD 14,000 and transforming it into a hospital for Dermatology.

Thus, it was the official termination of the Arabian Mission in Kuwait and Dr. Mary Bruins Allison was eloquent enough when she said: "The hospital was my son who died in front of my eyes. It was my church who killed him."

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(1) Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P164

## Short term educational services

The mission was able to provide high standard health services that were superior to the criteria known to the local community at the time and to the services provided by the dispensary.

To the contrary, the teaching reality was not the same. At that time, Kuwait had known Qur'anic schools but there activities were limited to teaching the Qur'an traditionally by the Mullah.

The call to establish Al-Mubarakiya School soon followed in conjunction with the anniversary of Prophet Mohammed's birth on 12 Rabia' Al-Awwal<sup>(1)</sup>, 1329 H, which coincided with April 12, 1911. The school was then opened in conjunction with the memory of the migration<sup>(2)</sup> of the Prophet Muhammad on 1st Muharram, 1330, which coincided with Dec 22<sup>(3)</sup>.

This reality did not prevent the mission from intensifying its efforts to establish its own educational system, and in 1912, Mr. Shaw, in charge of craftsmanship and educational work, arrived in Kuwait to achieve the mission's most important aim. Rev. Pennings, due to his temporary appointment, had already started an inconsistent educational activity, teaching English for some pupils<sup>(4)</sup>.

Since 1913 the mission began its educational activity and Rev. Edwin Calverley started work to open a school in the American Hospital<sup>(5)</sup>. He later changed his mind and decided to use the house owned by Beit Al-Rubban which Dr. Mylrea left in October 1914, moving to his new home near the hospital that was newly built that year.

Beit Al-Rubban<sup>(6)</sup> was big enough to accommodate more than one family at a time in addition to teaching in it concurrently. The third yard of the house was dedicated for this purpose<sup>(7)</sup>, making it the first school of its kind to afford studying material other than Qur'anic studies.

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(1) This date was not clearly mentioned in the book Pages from the History of Kuwait, Yusuf bin Issa Al-Qana'y, P45

(2) Abdullah Al-Nouri, Education in Kuwait in Half a Century, P39

(3) Arab Charitable Society and the Early Indications of Modern Renaissance in Kuwait (1321 H – 1913 AD), Bader Nasser Al-Mutairy, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1998, P28

(4) Christian Evangelist Activities in Kuwait, Edwin Calverley, Neglected Arabia, Ver. 92, Jan, Feb and March 1915, Arabian Mission, New York, PP8-10

(5) Fawziyya Al-Sabah, Al-Rai A-Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 14355, 9/10/2006, P33

(6) Mansour Al-Hajery, History of Churches in Kuwait, Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, 18/4/1998, P11

(7) Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, 18/4/1998, P11

The school started by teaching English and printing, for which Calverley authored a book called (Arabian Primers). Calverley brought an Assyrian Iraqi assistant from Mosul called Jerjis Issa, who became the first English language teacher in Kuwait and he was followed by Ismail Kiddo<sup>(1)</sup> in 1925.

Calverley introduced many other subjects such as geography but it seemed that English, Sciences were lined with Christianity<sup>(2)</sup>. Regarding the school's importance, Calverley said: "Considering it is our only way in Kuwait to continuously affect the youth, we have been able to trust this small number of pupils and the future of this activity. Had we been able to convince more of them, we would have joined greater numbers of them in our school."

However, three months later, the school was facing strong opposition from the community because Calverley was used to taking the pupils with him to the Church every Sunday to pray.

He also used to teach them Christianity, giving them Arabic versions of the Bible so that their parents would read it at home. The opposition was so strong that many people stopped asking the English language teachers' help and preferred to pay 4 anas, around 20 fils, to get their letters written or translated for them.

Because of the great need for the English language especially in commercial transactions, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qana'y tried unsuccessfully to enter foreign syllabi into the school.

This opposition was not strong enough to force it to close its doors, so Rev. Calverley and his assistant Jerjis Issa started touring the Diwanias to urge people to make use of this opportunity<sup>(3)</sup>. The following people were among the students who joined the school:

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- (1) It is rumored that his original name was Israel which he changed to Ismael before opening the first school to teach English for his own account. See Bassem Al-Loghany, A Photograph of History, Jerjis Celio, the First English Language Teacher and Ismael Kiddo, Owner of the First English School, History of Education in the State of Kuwait, "Documentary Study", 1st Vol., Education in Kuwait from Its Birth until 1355 H (1936 AD), First Beginnings, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2002, P133
  - (2) History of Christianity in Kuwait, Fawziyya Salem Al-Sabah, Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 14355, 9/10/2006, P33
  - (3) History of Education in the State of Kuwait, "Documentary Study", 1st Vol., Education in Kuwait from Its Birth Until 1355 H (1936 AD), First Beginnings, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2002, P129

- Sayyid Abdul-Razzaq Al-Ruzouqy
- Abdul-Latif Al-Mahmeed
- Sayyid Abdul-Samad Al- Sayyid Ahmed Zadah
- Sayyid Abdul-Qader Al- Sayyid Muhammad Al-Rifa'ey
- Majid Bin Saleh Al-Shaheen
- Sulaiman Al-Musallam

In a photograph taken later, the number of students did not exceed 22, among whom were:

- Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser
- Issa Bin Abdul-Jader
- Abdul-Aziz Al-Humaidhy
- Khalid Sulaiman Al-Adsany
- Hamad Saleh Al-Humaidhy
- Sayyid Abdul-Qader Muhammad Al-Rifa'ey
- Sayyid Rajab Abdullah Al-Rifa'ey and his brother Abdul-Aziz
- Sulaiman Al-Adsany
- Khalid Sulaiman Al-Adsany
- Abdullah Bin Sadhan
- Majid Bin Saleh Al-Shaheen

In addition to these names, the school attracted some Jews and a Muslim Afghan<sup>(1)</sup>.

It seems the mission's officials had seen this coming. In 1916, Stanley Mylrea<sup>(2)</sup> talked about the good turnout on educational services at a time when the opposition that faced the mission's teaching was the driving force behind establishing Al-Mubarakiya School in 1912.

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(1) When Mullahs Are Doctors, Edwin Calverley, published in *Neglected Arabia Journal*, Ver. 107 in 1918 and translated by writer and researcher Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani then published in her book *Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait before the Oil*, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, PP100-103

(2) Writer Khalid Muhammad Al-Bassam, previous reference, *Al-Qabas*, 26/7/2001, P8

In this context, Mylrea said: "Despite the fact we did not consider it as important as other missionary means, it was still of great value to our work in Kuwait."

He also noted the gradual rise in the number of pupils. "The number of pupils this year in Kuwait School was 39 including 6 Jews and Christians, which meant there were 30 Muslim pupils. The school did not receive any fees from the pupils and their average age was 12. There were no religious periods or duties for the pupils to perform but they listened to a religious sermon every morning."

He also drew a comparison between the Christian school and Al-Mubarakiya School. "As opposed to our Christian school, the large Muslim school in Kuwait was no longer popular with parents after the expulsion of an Egyptian headmaster because of his advanced ideas in geography and science, which resulted in many students dropping out of the school permanently."

Many parents told us they would send their children to us after they had learnt the Qur'an. I believed in a great future for schools in Kuwait, especially if we got a new building, modern equipment and qualified teachers."

The turnout was weak at the start and only 12 students were enrolled<sup>(1)</sup>, but some said that the school had equipped Kuwait with graduates who subsequently became the first heads of departments in the Sheikhdome<sup>(2)</sup> and worked in public works, health and customs<sup>(3)</sup>.

The teaching activities for the ARC's Arabian Mission continued until 1932 where 421 male students were attending the mission's school both in part and monthly studies.

Among those students was Abdullah, son of Mullah Saleh, headmaster of one of the popular schools, whose house was near the Sheikh's palace on the Eastern side of Kuwait<sup>(4)</sup>. However, the number of female students was 41 in the girls' school.

Despite this turnout and the financial deficit, the boys school officials, Reverends Calverley, Barny and Young, found that the project was not feasible. In three years,

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(1) Abdul-Malik Al-Tamimy, same previous reference

(2) The word "Sheikhdome" was used by writer Miriam Joyce in her book to refer to Kuwait

(3) Kuwait (1945-1996): An Anglo-American Perspective, Miriam Joyce, translated by Mufid Abdouni, Dar Amwaj for Publication and Distribution, 2001, P21

(4) Dr. Mary in Arabia: Memoirs, Mary Bruins Allison, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2009, P96

the formal official educational system began in Kuwait, sending the mission's school into oblivion.

This was a confirmation that the mission's school task was never successful and could neither affect the youth nor their parents as had been intended.

The decision to shut down the school did meet Mylrea's acceptance who believed the mission had made a fatal mistake in Kuwait and Bahrain.

He strongly thought that Christian teaching was the best and that there was no bigger catastrophe than transforming their schools in America and England into secular schools, as he put it<sup>(1)</sup>.



*The American Mission Hospital in Kuwait opened in 1915.  
This photo is believed to have been taken during inauguration*

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(1) Stanley Mylrea, previous reference, PP178-179



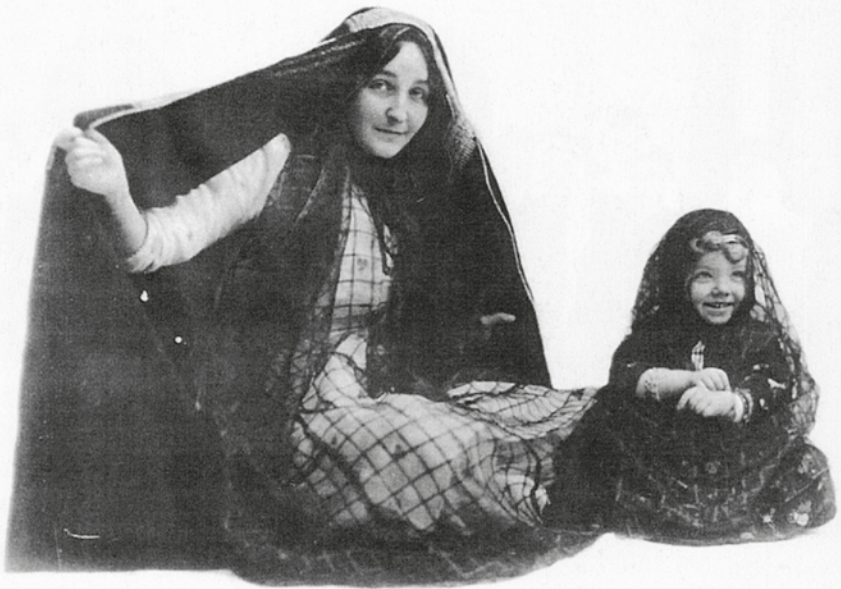
*Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah the Amir of Kuwait and Abdullah Al-Mullah Secretary of the Government of Kuwait during the inauguration of the American Mission Hospital in 1954*



*Edwin Calverley flanked by a number of his students in the palace of Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah when he visited Kuwait in 1955*



*The building of the American Hospital*



*Eleanor Calverley (Khatun Halima), the first lady doctor in Kuwait*



*Dr. Harrison and his wife*



*Dr. Mary Allison (Khatun Wasmiyya) whom Mary Van Pelt mentioned in her letter and worked with her in the 1930s*



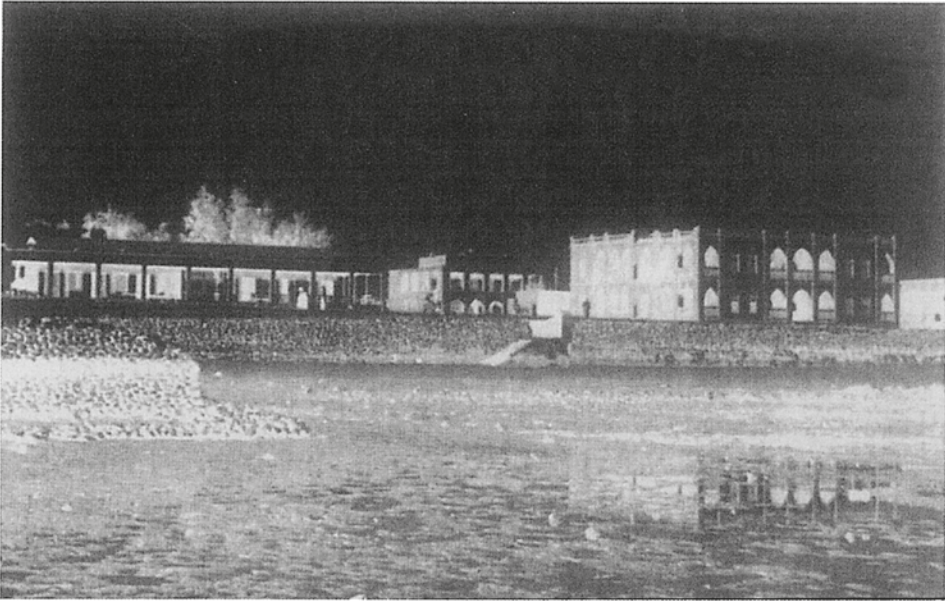
*Dr. Paul Harrison*



*Dr. Paul Harrison with a number of patients in the pharmacy in 1913. Harrison later wrote many books about Arabia, one of which was *The Arab at Home**



*Samuel Zwemer*



*The American Hospital. Also known as the Women's Hospital built in 1939*



*Eleanor (Halima) with her husband Edwin and daughters (from left to right) Grace (Nai'ma), Eleanor (Nora) and Elizabeth (Qamasha) in 1923*



*Dr. Myrea standing with some patients outside the residence of the British Mission*



*Dr. Lewis Scudder examining a patient in his clinic*



*Rev. Gerrit de Jong and his wife*



**Chapter Three:**  
**Western European Existence in Kuwait**



## Western European Existence in Kuwait

The Western European presence in Kuwait was an important chapter of the Christians who had settled here and formed a prelude to it but the nature of this presence changed according to the political and geopolitical circumstances in the region and the world.

The religious features were also present through the Carmelite Fathers which makes it possible to say that the Western existence was an indispensable part of the Christian existence in general.

So, how did this existence develop? What was its main feature? And what factors affected it and helped it spread?

From the very beginning the European presence in Kuwait was sporadic and non-continuous and in many cases it was no more than just a passage for foreigners, limited to political presence, while some areas were dedicated to the Christian presence in particular.

In 1623 the Carmelite Fathers led by Father Yasili Di Santo<sup>(1)</sup> founded their own monastery while the French presence was so powerful in the region, alongside the British who later in the 18th century became very influential in the Gulf. The Dutch presence too was strong until Britain pushed them out of the political and geographical circle.

There are many narratives regarding the presence of those three the then superpowers. In March 1758, a ship coming from India, carrying Dr. Yves and a group of his companions, anchored on the shore of an island to the northwest of the Gulf, which was considered a center for the Dutch Commercial Agency's activity led by Baron T.F. van Knipphausen.

The doctor and his companions were en route to Aleppo and the Baron suggested taking a short cut towards their final destination. He said they could take a small boat to Kuwait and travel from there with the tribes to Aleppo, a journey that could well take 25-30 days.

He was ready by March 31 but the journey never took off due to the failure of negotiations between the Baron and the then ruler of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah.

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(1) Kuwaiti-French Relations since 1778, Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, Dar Al-Qabas Press Printing, Publishing and Distribution, P7

Prior to that, particularly in the first half of the 18th century, the Netherlands and England had the biggest influence in the Gulf region. The Netherlands began to consolidate its position when it established the East India Company in 1602 while England had two main companies vying for India's trade before they were merged in 1708 to form the United Company of the Merchants of England.

Later, England gained many commercial agencies in several cities around Kuwait, Persia and Iraq, most significant of which was the strategically important Basra agency, but all agencies were affected by the tense relationships between the Persians and the Ottomans.

Hence, it can be said that those commercial activities paved the way for the European presence in Kuwait. The first European explorer to mention the name of Kuwait was Christian German explorer Carsten Niebuhr of the Scientific Mission of the Danish Kingdom.

Niebuhr took his information about Kuwait from the Dutch team whose members had worked in 'Kharj'<sup>(1)</sup> Island. A book on that voyage was published in 1772 containing a map referring to Kuwait as 'Koueit Gran'.

### **Carmelite Fathers**

Due to the ongoing turmoil between the British and the Ottomans, Kuwait emerged as a safe haven for the British mail coming from the Gulf to Aleppo after the Persian attack and siege of Basra so the mail was sent from Kuwait instead of Zubair beginning from mid-1775<sup>(2)</sup> when the British navy became a frequent visitor of the region.

The British ships carried visitors, including clergymen<sup>(3)</sup>, to the region and that made it possible to reinforce the European existence in Kuwait although it remained neutral until it took a temporary style.

The mail services continued in Kuwait during the four-month siege followed by another development in 1793 when the British Commercial Agency moved to Kuwait from Basra for two years and four months.

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(1) It is an Iranian island to the northeast of the Arabian Gulf, belonging to the Bushehr city. The Dutch rented the island from the ruler of Bandar Rig and established both a trading post and a fort on the island. They remained there until they were expelled by the ruler when disputes erupted between the two sides.

(2) Loorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, I, I, P.1002

(3) *The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf*, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, P7

Kuwait also hosted the Agency personnel from Basra after they faced difficulties with the Ottomans. They remained in Kuwait until Aug 27, 1795. The Agency was led by Samuel Manesty who was assisted by Harvard Jones and John Lewis Raynaud.

The most important event that year, however, was the first visit of a Carmelite Father. A priest called Abraham from the Armenian Catholic Church who was sent to Qurain in June by Father Blaise, the Viceroy of Basra, to baptize the British Agent Mcenty's daughter, Lucy.

The priest was awarded 10 piasters for his travel, and that incident was documented by the Basra Governor<sup>(1)</sup>. The Carmelites continued their visits to Kuwait by sea or land but their visits remained sporadic due to small number of Christians, which means they were visiting Kuwait as individuals rather than organized groups, which in turn means their existence was not continuous.

It could be said that the Portuguese sailors, who built a small fortress on the Qurain Island, were the first Christians to set foot on the Kuwaiti land when they visited it in 1795 after they had settled in Basra.

It is worth mentioning that moving the Agency from Basra for the first time was preceded a decade before a visit from German explorer Carsten Niebuhr<sup>(2)</sup> to the region in 1765.

He then pointed out that the population of Kuwait was about 10,000 who owned 800 boats and lived on fishing and diving. He provided no more details regarding their nature or loyalty.

### **French Captain Bourge De Borge**

In the midst of those events, the incident involving French officer Captain Bourge de Borge came to confirm the French existence in the region and in Kuwait.

On Aug 3, 1778, and upon the request of Antoine de Sartine, the Secretary of State of the Navy, the Captain was sent from the Port of Marseille carrying a letter to the French authorities in Podicherry, the capital of French India.

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(1) The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, PP44-45

(2) Carsten Niebuhr is a German explorer and cartographer who worked with the Danish government. He gained his information from an Indian employee in Kharj Island. A book of his was published in 1772

His first station was Lattakia Port from which he moved to Aleppo, crossing the desert road between Aleppo and Basra in a convoy of 25 people on Oct 19 of the same year.

When the convoy was 15 days away from Basra, it was attacked and the French Captain was hit in the head and taken prisoner. However, he managed to convince his captives to take him to Kuwait and promised to pay them a ransom of 100 Venetian Shakin, the currency of the then Republic of Venice, equivalent of 100 Sterling Pounds.

Once he arrived in Kuwait, he asked Sheikh Sabah the First for protection and the Sheikh agreed and took the ransom amount from an Armenian merchant.

In return, he gave the Captain a letter in which he asked Jean Baptiste Rousseau, the French Consul in Basra, to repay the amount. That incident reassured the nature of the foreign and Christian existence in Kuwait through the Captain who was the first Frenchman to set foot on the Kuwaiti soil, and also through the presence of the Armenian merchant<sup>(1)</sup>.

The capture of the French officer gave a clear indication of the depth of the relations between Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah and the representatives of the East India Company at that time despite the tension that encompassed the relations in light of that incident.

The repercussions of the deteriorating financial status of the Consul of Basra<sup>(2)</sup> and his declaration that he was not able to repay the ransom amount, in addition to the letter by means of which he was supposed to pay, all this led to the British ship Eagle heading towards Qurain with a senior official, Abraham, on board.

The goal was simple: to arrest the French Captain. This caused tensions between the British and the Sheikh who refused to deliver the Captain because he became his protégé.

In addition to that, and on the back of those developments, the French Consul in Basra, Rousseau himself, and his wife headed to Kuwait on Sept 30, 1778. From Kuwait, he sent a letter to the State Secretary of the Navy on Jan 9, 1779, informing him of his whereabouts<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) Kuwait's Modern History 1163-1385 H 1750-1965 AD, Dr. Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakma, P86

(2) Kuwaiti-French Relations since 1778, Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, P10

(3) Kuwaiti-French Relations since 1778, Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, P10

Despite those events, the British-Kuwaiti relationships remained solid and never faded in the era of Sheikh Jaber Abdullah Al-Sabah (1815-1859). Even if these relations lost some of their commercial shine due to the agency returning back to Iraq and the incident between Sheikh Jaber and Lieutenant Edmonds<sup>(1)</sup>, it was nothing more than a cloud upon a summer wind.

The relationship continued and the ruler of Kuwait continued to exchange precious gifts with the British officials. That commercial shine was restored when the commercial agency was brought back to Kuwait on Dec 15, 1821 before being withdrawn again on April 19, 1822.

The relationship between the two sides reached its peak with a proposal to establish a commercial center on the Failaka Island, according to the French Consul on June 7, 1839.

As for the French-Kuwaiti relationship, it later took a commercial dimension in accordance with the prosperous pearl trade. In 1853, the French officer Petenau visited Kuwait to buy horses from the merchant Yusuf Al-Bader.

Then there was another prominent merchant, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Bin Ali Al Ibrahim who frequently visited Baroda in India. On the French side, there was the famous merchant Victor Rosenthal who made multiple deals with Sheikh Jassem Al Ibrahim and Sheikh Abdul-Latif Abdul-Razaq.

All those relationships confirm beyond doubt the commercial prosperity between local Kuwaiti merchants and their British counterparts as well as the general development in the Western-Kuwaiti relationships.

### **Sheikh Mubarak and the exceptional stage**

When Sheikh Mubarak Bin Sabah assumed power (June 1896-1915) as seventh ruler from Al-Sabah family, later called Mubarak the Great, the British-Kuwaiti relationships and the European existence in Kuwait entered a more intimate stage.

This was based on the decades-long joint commercial history which was preceded by each side's attempts to maintain their own interests. The Sheikh was trying to protect his country from Hamdy Pasha's scheme of expansion while the Ottoman authorities were keen on building a railway to connect Tripoli on the Mediterranean with Kuwait via Hums and Baghdad for which it granted the Russian Count Vladimir Kapnist concession.

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(1) Kuwait's Modern History 1163-1385 H 1750-1965 AD, Dr. Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakma, PP231-232

This threatened the British commercial interests with India since Russia was looking forward to keeping its own commercial route to benefit from Kuwait's shipping advantages at a time when France had just contributed in the launching of the Suez Canal in 1896.

All those circumstances resulted in Sheikh Mubarak<sup>(1)</sup> signing an agreement with the British to protect him. The key condition in the agreement was that he had no right to neither cede nor sell any part of his properties to any foreign country without permission from Her Majesty the Queen's government.

That agreement<sup>(2)</sup>, known as the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement, was signed in 1899 and it paved the way for many more agreements between the two sides.

One of those agreements was signed on May 9, 1900 in which the Sheikh was committed to discontinue the arms deal with the Gulf. Those two agreements, despite the vast difference in goals and nature, formed a substantial foundation to attract more Christians to Kuwait.

The first agreement would put Kuwait on the European map and afford a source of security for foreigners and encourage more of them to visit. The second agreement, however, was a magnet for gun dealers because this trade formed in general an important source of income for Kuwait.

The European existence, and later the Christians, in Kuwait saw big discrepancies in the reports written by explorers during that period. Between 1815 and 1866, Kuwait was mentioned in reports of many British envoys, such as the Brucks Report of 1829, explorer Buckingham, Stocqueler who arrived in Kuwait on board a baghla, a kind of Kuwaiti ship, on April 4, 1831.

Captain Pelly, the British Resident in the Gulf who visited Kuwait in 1863 was warmly welcomed by Sheikh Sabah. They were all followed by Captain Hennell's report in April, 1841.

As for the details and feature of the Kuwait City at that time, Stocqueler mentioned that the population was about 4,000 and singled out their mode of dress and the inexistence of foreigners.

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(1) This article was attached to the original agreement through a letter sent from the British Resident in Bushehr, Colonel Meade.

(2) Mahmoud Mataqi explains that the negotiations between Sheikh Mubarak and the British regarding the agreement were conducted in the diwan of Haj Najaf bin Ghalib. This explanation was during an interview with him conducted by Jassem Abbas and published in Al-Qabas Newspaper Ver. 14679 on 12/4/2014, P14

This, however, is in stark contrast with historical data<sup>(1)</sup>, taking into consideration the ongoing commercial activity which was a natural prerequisite for continuous foreign existence.

Pelly in his reports pointed out the visit of Harvard Jones to Kuwait in 1790 and a popular market that attracted the locals and foreigners alike.

He said the population was around 20,000, according to him. In 1890, geographer Vital Cuinet provided an accurate description of Kuwait: "It was ruled by Sheikh Abdullah Bin Sabah and the population was around 20,000 Arab Muslims, including 50 Jews."

He did not mention the Christians<sup>(2)</sup>. The commercial nature of the Kuwaiti society at that time may have preferred to deal with Jews rather than Christians because of their cleverness in business while Christians sought refuge in Persia and Iraq to settle with their families<sup>(3)</sup>.

Although some references dropped the Christian existence from Kuwait in that era, this could never mean they were not there even temporarily for commercial, military or other reasons, and that continued until the beginning of the 20th century.

### **Arms deals**

It is not possible to discuss foreign existence in Kuwait without talking about arms deals which attracted many foreigners to Kuwait. It started in 1882 when the Persian merchants bought around 1,000 Martini-Henry rifles.

As a trade, it began to flourish in 1880 coinciding with the third Afghan war which raised the demand for weapons in the Gulf region which was in turn exporting weapons to India.

By 1881, Britain imposed a ban on import or re-export of weapons to Persia and the Gulf area without its approval. This trade was starting to annoy the British India government that was not able any more to use for its political interests.

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(1) Dr. Abu Hakma says: "We do not know to what extent was Stocqueler telling the truth when he said he was almost the only European people had seen for a long time. We know that English Agencies moved for the second time to Kuwait ten years prior to his arrival in it. It is hard for us to believe his claim seeing Kuwait has always been trading with foreigners throughout its history. See Kuwait's Modern History, Dr. Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakma, P202

(2) You can find the full script and source of the letter in Kuwaiti-French Relations since 1778, Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim

(3) A Study of the History of the Christian Minority in Kuwait, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Al-Hajery, Professor of Kuwait History, Faculty of Arts, P6

In spite of the British pressure on the whole region, the arms deals in Kuwait registered a noticeable growth when Sheikh Mubarak assumed power.

Britain tried to impose more restrictions and confiscated many unlicensed weapons shipments as happened in July 1898 when the British ship Sphinx seized a Kuwaiti boat carrying 56 Martini-Henry rifles and 5,569 cartridges.

Against the continuous British pressure, Sheikh Mubarak issued an order on March 24, 1900 banning the import and export of weapons into and from Kuwait, and this order was also broadcast<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Sheikh agreed that the British warships inspect the ships flying the Kuwaiti, British and Persian flags and confiscate any weapons and ammunition found on board.

At that time, Muscat, thanks to its geographical location and closeness to political and tribal turmoil spots, was the first market to export European weapons to the region.

Between 1902 and 1903, French and British arms exports<sup>(2)</sup>rocketed from \$433,990 to \$861,890 in 1903/1904 and kept on flourishing until 1906.

Considering the commercial role Kuwait played as a trade market towards Najd and Basra and the ports of South West Persia, it also witnessed some prosperity in arms deals, thanks to foreign ships, specifically the French which were used to carry water and fishing.

Sheikh Mubarak was providing weapons to his allies such as Bin Saud who was fighting Al-Rashid and came out victorious in January 1902. The import and export of arms deals via the port of Muscat from April 1, 1905 until Oct 30, 1906, which were re-exported to Kuwait on board foreign steam vessels, indicated there were 25 such operations.

Many merchants came to Kuwait regularly to get these weapons. Although Sheikh Mubarak signed an agreement with the British banning the export, import and smuggling of arms, he kept supporting it because it was a source of income to the Emirate.

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(1) In his book Kuwaiti-French Relations, Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim mentions that it happened in 1900 while Muhammad Al-Habib said there was an agreement signed with British in 1899 regarding banning trading and importing arms; Al-Qabas, 7/2/2012, P18

(2) Muhammad Al-Habib, Al-Qabas, 7/2/2012, P18

The arms and ammunition formed around 10 percent of imported goods to Kuwait in 1905/1906, and four fifths of those arms came from Britain. This brings to mind again the foreign role in this field and the existence it required in Kuwait.

Some historical documents dated after signing the agreement confirm that arms deals continued under the supervision of the British themselves. Among those documents was a letter sent from Sheikh Mubarak to Baliose, the British Consul in Muscat asking him to help Hajj Najaf Bin Ghalib pack 2,500 boxes of weapons and telling him that they should have known by now<sup>(1)</sup> about the license of another 3,500 boxes he took for his country.

### **Goguyer in the scene**

Later, Sheikh Mubarak followed many ways to deal with the British pressure on arms ban. He used to demand the weapons upon the approval of the British Resident in Bushehr.

His justification was the protection of tribes heading to Najd in addition to ships and local needs. Although the British Resident did not respond to the Sheikh's demands, arms dealers supplied him with different weapons such as the 'tufaq' rifle while the British merchants benefited from arms flowing from Muscat to Kuwait, which was why Britain took stricter procedures against mercenary.

At that time, the British surveillance was at its peak. In 1904, some British ships tried to seize a ship that belonged to Muhammad Sadiq Ma'rafy which was carrying a huge shipment of weaponry for three Kuwaiti dealers: Ali Taqi, Muhammad Baqer and Hajj Mushtaq.

Once the ship arrived in Kuwait and Sheikh Mubarak knew about the shipment, he ordered the ship to be brought to the shore and splashed it with oil to insinuate that it needed maintenance.

When the British arrived, the Sheikh denied the ship carried any arms, which he later bought. Those three dealers, in addition to Hajj Najaf Bin Ghalib and his elder brother Muhammad Taqi<sup>(2)</sup>, were some of the prominent figures who were involved in arms deals and they exchanged many letters with Sheikh Mubarak discussing the arms issues.

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(1) Those letters were revealed in an interview with Mahmoud Mataqi conducted by Jassem Abbas and published in Al-Qabas Newspaper Ver. 14679 on 12/4/2014, P14

(2) Pages from the Memory, an interview with Mahmoud Mataqi conducted by Jassem Abbas and published in Al-Qabas Newspaper Ver. 14679 on 12/4/2014, P14

Particularly during that period, the relationship between Sheikh Mubarak and arms dealer Antoine Goguyer rejuvenated after it had begun on May 11, 1897, making him one of the most active European figures on the scene.

He was a highly educated and a controversial personality and had a great effect in the history of the British and French existence in the region.

Goguyer started his career as a translator in French courts after he had mastered Arabic and wrote many essays in Arab newspapers published in France expressing his opposition to the French colonial policy.

He indulged in arms deals when he began supplying the citizens of Somalia and Ethiopia with weaponry. He then moved to Bahrain as an agent for a French jeweler to cover his work as an arms dealer. Muscat was his next stop where he developed strong relations with the Sultan and many French ministers.

These complicated connections enabled him to strike many undercover arms deals; he even smuggled weapons on board ships that flew the French flag, subsequently not being inspected by British warships.

Since February 1904, Sheikh Mubarak hosted Antoine Goguyer for three months after he entered Kuwait disguised as an Arab and called himself Abdullah Al-Maghriby<sup>(1)</sup>.

It seemed the arms dealer persuaded the Sheikh to import arms in his own French name so as not to cause the Sheikh any embarrassment with the British and facilitate the entry of arms on board ships that fly the French flag.

What reflected the solid relations between the two men was the suggestion made by Goguyer that Russia and France start mediating in goodwill between the Sheikh and the Topkapi Palace in Turkey after the Sheikh's relationship with the Ottomans deteriorated upon signing the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement.

To add more controversy to his name, it turned out that, after the French arms dealer's death in Muscat in 1909, it was discovered he was hiding about 100,000 pieces of weaponry and some money.

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(1) Kuwaiti-French Relations since 1778, Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, P26

## The Russians and the French

At the beginning of the 20th century, the pace of the Russians and the French towards Kuwait accelerated. In February 1900, the Russian ship Gilyak arrived in Kuwait when on a Gulf tour. And on Oct 14, 1900, the ship Drome arrived and its captain was welcomed on land by Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah.

On Dec 8 of the following year, a Russian cruiser Varyag, en route to China, made a stopover in Kuwait and Sheikh Jaber went on board to welcome the Russians.

Later, the officer-in-charge of Varyag accompanied Ovseyenko, the Russian Consul in Bushehr, to Jahra where Sheikh Mubarak was leading a defense force against a possible attack from Bin Al-Rashid.

In 1902, Sheikh Mubarak also received a Russian zoologist Bogoyavlensky and on Feb 9, the same year he welcomed the Russian Destroyer Askold, the biggest Russian ship to arrive in Kuwait.

Finally, on Feb 20 and 23, 1903, the Sheikh welcomed another cruiser, Buyarin, the last Russian ship to arrive in Kuwait. The meetings between the Sheikh and the Russian captains were conducted in French and the interpreter was an Armenian who worked as an agent for a cruise ship company and who used to live in the Sheikh's house.

This fact reinforces the belief that French language was widespread as a means of communication; an indication of the strong French existence in the area at that time<sup>(1)</sup>.

Foreign visits to Kuwait were not limited to the French and the Russians but included many other nationalities for even more purposes than just politics, especially because of the explorers' connections with countries of big influence in Kuwait.

In 1903, the German explorer Herman Burchardt visited Kuwait for 4 days during which he accurately documented Kuwait. He pointed out Kuwait was a big land with 30,000 inhabitants.

The city, as he said, was distinguished for its clean streets because they were cleaned with water every morning. He added, the Sheikh himself checked the

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(1) A view on the French Documents Regarding the History of Kuwait

(2) Eng. Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, published in Al-Qabas Ver. 12576, 3/6/2008, P46

city several times a day and that security was the top priority. He also mentioned that the main economic activities of the Kuwaitis were diving, pearling, sailing and shipbuilding.

### **From sporadic to continuous presence**

Britain sought to reinforce its relations with Kuwait. After signing the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement, too many other bilateral treaties and agreements were signed in different fields and services.

Thus, beginning from the early 20th century, the European existence in Kuwait was distinguished by continuity and culminated in the approval to establish a British Political Agency in Kuwait.

In February 1904, the Sheikh gave his approval to open a British post office in Kuwait and on June 24 of the same year, a very significant development occurred.

Sheikh Mubarak agreed that Britain appoint a political agent for it in his country and it was Major S.G. Knox who arrived in August. He stayed first at the Sheikh's palace until a residence was made ready for him, which proved the very special relationship between the Sheikh and the British.

Then the service agreements were signed. On Oct 15, 1907, an agreement was signed between the ruler of Kuwait and Major Knox, the British Political Agent, whereby the Bundar Shuwaikh land was leased to the British as an anchorage for the war fleet.

All those agreements were meant to prevent any foreign country obtaining any concessions in Kuwait and it also included telegraph, mail services and medical services through the Dar Al-'timad where a doctor was appointed as an assistant to the Political Agent shortly after the appointment of the first agent.

In 1911, it was agreed that the pearl and sponge concessions were not to be granted to whoever it was unless the Agent gave his approval.

Later, the telegraph station was founded before reaching an important agreement in 1913 whereby Kuwait was never to give any oil concessions without Britain's approval.

A few years later, the writings of foreign explorers started focusing on how Kuwaitis looked at the Westerners, which means there was a direct contact between the two parties, taking into consideration the existence of the members of the mission in the outstation of Kuwait.

One of the major Western visits of the time was that of the Danish explorer Barclay Raunkiær. He was sent by the Danish Royal Geographical Society to weigh the possibility of sending a scientific mission to explore the central south of the Arabian Peninsula.

Raunkiær provided his initial visions of the Eastern Coast of the Arabian Peninsula to choose a location where the base of the mission would be established.

After passing through Basra on Jan 22, 1912, he arrived in Kuwait with the convoys passing through Zubair which was described as 'a more Najdi than Iraqi city which lies nominally in the Turkish bailiwick but is really outside of it for practical reasons.'

After Zubair, he passed through Safwan then Jahra with its simple farms, before reaching the Kuwait City. Raunkiær stayed in Kuwait for more than three weeks and wrote down his impressions about his Gulf tours, that "severe extremism and xenophobia were widespread in the Arabian Peninsula<sup>(1)</sup>."

During WWI, Lord Hardinge was one of the few foreigners to give a clear idea about Kuwait after he arrived on Jan 31, 1915 on board the Northbrook and was received by the Sheikh's yacht.

Lord Hardinge was welcomed on an official visit from Sheikh Jaber and Lieutenant-Colonel Grey. The next day was the official ceremony when Sheikh Mubarak and Sheikh Abdullah ruler of Bahrain boarded the Northbrook to receive their honors from Hardinge, a token of appreciation from the King for their collaboration with Britain.

That afternoon, the Sheikh received Lord Hardinge at the palace, attended by a guard of honor of Royal Marines. Hardinge was then treated to a sight-seeing tour of the souq, returning by way of the Political Agency.

His visit ended the next morning with a drive along the bay to inspect the Sheikh's coaling station and the new American missionary hospital. Later, the famous Captain Shakespeare was appointed new Political Agent in Kuwait and played an indispensible role in reinforcing the British-Kuwaiti relations.

(1) William Facey and Gillian Grant, Kuwait by the First Photographers, London Centre of Arab Studies, 1998, PP50

He stayed there for 5 years until 1914. During his stay, and on April 16, 1912, Admiral Sir Alexander Bethell, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy in eastern waters arrived in Kuwait aboard Highflyer to bestow on Sheikh Mubarak the (KCIE) Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire.

Shakespeare had an essential role in exploring the areas surrounding Kuwait. In 1909, he explored 200 meters of land south of Kuwait Gulf while in the following year his explorations took him from North West to Hafr Al-Baten and beyond.

After his most famous journey in which he passed through Riyadh en route to the Suez in 1914, Shakespeare came back to the Arabian Peninsula the following year on a special task as a political officer, only to be killed in the battle of Jarrab in Najd.

The Kuwaiti-British relationships became even more solid with the appointment of Harold Dickson as a new Political Agent. He had been already known in the Kuwaiti community, having been present at Uqair Convention in 1922.

During his appointment, the Political Agent and his wife Violet were loved and appreciated as he indulged in Kuwait's political and social affairs.

Between 1929 and 1930, he led the negotiations with Faisal Bin Al-Duwish, the leader of Al-Ikhwan and the Prince of Mutair tribe which resulted in ending the Ikhwani invasion of Kuwait.

After his retirement in 1936, in a sign of his strong relationship with Kuwait and its rulers, Dickson was appointed by Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber as the local representative for the newly-founded Kuwait Oil Company.

He lived with his wife in the old Political Agent's house until his death on June 15, 1959. He was buried in the Al-Ahmadi cemetery after a funeral service in the nearby church<sup>(1)</sup>.

His wife Violet remained loyal to Kuwait and lived for 30 more years after her husband's death. She even witnessed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and later returned to Britain where she died in 1991.

In addition to the glorious memories, the Dicksons shared with the entire Kuwaiti community, the family left a historical and literary legacy manifested in the two

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(1) Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, P262

books the Colonel wrote 'The Arab of the Desert' and 'Kuwait and Her Neighbors' while his wife wrote a very valuable book 'Forty Years in Kuwait'.

Those books formed great references for many researchers and emphasize the role played by foreigners in Kuwait in addition to enriching its history.

From the 1930s onwards, the foreign existence in Kuwait has become much clearer, highlighted by the more advanced tools used by explorers to document their travels, especially cameras.

The third decade of the 20th century witnessed many ups and downs starting with the depression that hit the pearl trade before the economic status in Kuwait improved again towards the end of the decade thanks to the positive indications of the oil exploration processes.

This was obvious in many explorers' writings. Freya Stark<sup>(1)</sup> visited Kuwait three times between 1932 and 1937 followed by Alan Villiers in 1939.

On her first visit, Stark described Kuwait as a small desert town inhabited by 70,000 people who had not yet been introduced to the modern Western civilization.

That visit occurred on March 17, 1932 and lasted for two days. Stark was accompanied by Major Hubert Young, the British High Mission Chancellor in Iraq, his wife and Maria Huxley.

She wrote down her impressions about Kuwait, citing her admiration of "the Kuwaiti people's virtues and respect for their customs and traditions."

In a letter she sent to Flora Stark on March 20, she narrated her tours between the souq and the desert where Dickson's two sons were playing.

She clearly pointed out that there were no Europeans there except for the doctor and a few American missionaries who no one cared about. She also described the sea and the different kinds of ships at that time, which indicated some sort of commercial boost.

The hectic competition over oil between the British and Americans controlled the scene of events due to its global dimension but it also witnessed many funny stories.

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(1) Freya Stark in Kuwait, 1932 and 1937, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2010

With the discovery of oil in Bahrain in 1932, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) sent in June of the same year William Richard Williamson<sup>(1)</sup>, one of its representatives, to Kuwait.

His mission was to gain power within the inner circle of decision-makers to obtain oil concessions since indications were clear that there were huge commercial amounts of oil reservoir along the coast of the Arabian Gulf.

Williamson was chosen because he was fluent in both Arabic and Persian and his life was really exceptional. His parents migrated from Bristol when he was 13 and he gained favor among decision-makers in the Gulf region.

He was so affected with this environment that he converted to Islam but continued to wear the Western suit with the head scarf and band<sup>(2)</sup>. He even went on a pilgrimage to Makkah and changed his name to Hajj Abdullah Fadhl Al-Zubairi and lived with his wife in Kuwait in an area which the British called "the locals' neighborhood."

He was keen to raise his children according to the Arab traditions and one of them worked at a gas station.

All of this gave the implication that the Western Christian existence in Kuwait was rapid in contrast to what was being told in writings and anecdotes, including those of Freya Stark herself.

Dr. Mary Bruins Allison, for example, mentioned that she and her aunt were visiting John Scot who was newly appointed general manager in KOC in 1936.

In that year, the Bahra oil well was drilled on the Northern side of Kuwait Gulf, in the presence of a number of European employees who were supervising the drilling. However, the company at that time was barely known<sup>(3)</sup>.

Also at that time, Britain was reinforcing its own interests in the region and started discussing the establishment of the first bank in Kuwait; the British Bank of the Middle East.

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(1) Fuelling Kuwait's Development: The Story of the Kuwait Oil Company, Jonathan Fryer, trans. by Dr. Abdul-Malik Al-Tamimy, excerpts published in Al-Rai Newspaper, Ver. 11131, 22/12/2009, P34

(2) Kuwait (1945-1996): An Anglo-American Perspective, Miriam Joyce, trans. by Mufid Abdouni, Dar Amwaj for Publication and Distribution, 2001, P25

(3) Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P188

Historical documents show the first time this idea was suggested in a letter sent from the Political Agent in Kuwait Lieut Col H.R. Dickson on May 9, 1935<sup>(1)</sup> to the Resident Agent in Bushehr, saying “the only competitor to establish a branch for the British Bank of the Middle East in Kuwait is the Ottoman Bank but the Turks did not seem to be actually going forward with their plans to establish a bank of their own in Kuwait until now.”

Later, initial talks accelerated between the British officials and the then Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. A letter was sent from the British Political Agent in Kuwait to the Sheikh on Dec 1, 1936, asking his opinion regarding the British government’s desire to establish a branch of the bank in Kuwait.

It read: “Her Majesty’s government did not mind opening a branch of the bank in Kuwait and wanted to know the Sheikh’s terms and conditions as well as the nationalities of employees who would work in it.”

The continuous correspondences in this regard were concluded with the approval to establish a branch of the British Bank of the Middle East in Kuwait. The agreement consisted of 18 articles and was time lined for 25 years.

Towards the end of 1941, the bank became a reality and some shops were rented in Souq Al-Manakh<sup>(2)</sup> as its premises overlooking the old merchants market.

It was officially opened in February 1942 and Mr. Matheson was appointed manager since he contributed in its establishing and looking for a place close to commercial activity.

The bank’s interior furnishings were ready and the KOC<sup>(3)</sup> presented an iron safe for the money. The bank also sought the help of the senior clerk in its Basra branch and a commercial assistant for a month to help in the founding process.

The foreign existence continued to be more visible compared to the previous period. In 1937, the British diplomat George Rendel visited Kuwait and noted: “At the time of my visit, work had not yet started in the oil fields and Kuwait was still a traditional Arab city that had remained intact since the Middle Ages while pearling was being hardly blown by a great depression.”

(1) See: India Office Library and Record, R15 5 192, Political Agency, Kuwait, 9th May 1935

(2) The then Souq Al-Manakh was adjacent to the sea shore and known as the Old Souq Al-Manakh. It is different from the current location of Souq Al-Manakh.

(3) At that time, KOC had not yet been nationalized. It started as Kuwait Oil Company Limited in 1934 in collaboration with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, currently BP, and American Gulf Oil Company, currently Chevron.

The events were not short of funny stories, however. In the spring of 1940 after heavy rains, a pair of KOC employees, Masters Harvey, decided to go hunting.

While inside his car, Harvey saw a bustard and was about to shoot when all of a sudden another wild bird swooped on it. He thought they were of the same species and fired on the two birds.

Once the sound of the shots faded, he heard men shouting and saw vehicles coming from behind. It turned out that the other bird was a falcon 'Sardar' that belonged to Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber, so the employee faced a dangerous situation.

The next day, Harvey visited the house of the chief falconer, Saud Bin Namran, and presented him a gold-trimmed cloak as a gesture of peace.

It was said Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber promptly arrived at the scene and prevented the worst from happening since Bin Namran was about to shoot Harvey<sup>(1)</sup>.

Starting from Oct 20, 1940 the political events developed rapidly when the Italian fighters dropped bombs over Aramco company sites while flying over Kuwait.

The foreign oil companies evacuated their employees and their families and the KOC did just the same in April the following year but the plan was not executed until May 13 since the families of British and American employees were to be evacuated to Basra, only for the revolution of Rashid Al-Kailany to put them on hold.

When WWII erupted, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah allowed the British fighters on Kuwait's soil in order to face the turmoil in Iraq. In a sign of appreciation, the Sheikh was invested with the KCIE in 1944.

But this dispute led to the evacuation of the families of KOC employees while the Dicksons and the doctors of the American mission remained in Kuwait during the entire war.

Dickson and his wife were busy helping the Bedouins affected by the war and later Dickson was reassigned as a Political Agent for a few months in lieu of Major Galloway who had passed away.

In 1947, Kuwait entered a new phase of economic and urban development having reaped the benefits of oil revenues. The number of foreigners increased

(1) Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P203

significantly, particularly the British and the Americans who began to go beyond working for the KOC.

They became advisers to the government for economic and administrative affairs and some of them worked in health and industrial services.

The most notable project at that time was the sea water distillation which solved a huge problem and got rid of all traditional solutions.

The number of Europeans continued to grow and this was well expressed by Violet Dickson in 1949 when she said: "Europeans' circle began to widen to the point that we no longer know who the local residents were and who the British and Americans were<sup>(1)</sup>."

This demographic change was accompanied by drastic developments which were hard for everyone to cope with in terms of customs and traditions because these changes also affected the social aspect.

In January 1951, the Americans in large numbers entered Kuwait and this stage was culminated in the opening of the American Consulate in Kuwait and the appointment of Enoch Duncan as a consul. And in 1953, there were around 41,000 foreign workers in Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P250

(2) Kuwait (1945-1996): An Anglo-American Perspective, Miriam Joyce, trans. by Mufid Abdouni, Dar Amwaj for Publication and Distribution, 2001, PP35, 44, 47



*Headquarters of the British Bank of the Middle East in downtown Kuwait*



*William Shakespeare (British Political Agent)*



*Freya Stark*

## **Chapter Four: Kuwait and the Vatican – First Diplomatic Relationship**



# Kuwait and the Vatican : First Diplomatic Relationship

Diplomatic relations between Kuwait and The Vatican dates back to 1968 and it is the first relationship of its kind between a Gulf state and the headquarters of the Holy See but that distinctive relationship between the two countries was only a station within a long history.

This relationship began with a visit of Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah to the headquarters of the Supreme Pontiff and although it was a mere coincidence, it was the first meeting between a member of the ruling family of a Gulf State and the Pope.

The Pope's Awarding of the Amir, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah a special medal confirmed the depth of this relationship and the painful, exceptional circumstances experienced by Kuwait during the invasion renewed the strength and privacy of that relationship.

The Vatican showed solidarity and support to Kuwait's just issue and those unique bilateral relationships continued with the visit to The Vatican by the Crown Prince Sheikh Sa'ad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah in 1996 and then the visit by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in May of 2010, who was the highest ranking Kuwaiti official to visit the Pope.

The first step in these relations between the two countries was the visit of Health and Works Officer Sheikh Fahd Al-Salem Al-Sabah to The Vatican in 1950 when he met the Pope, albeit by pure chance without having any official status.

Kuwait was still under British protection and yet this visit gave an impression of the openness of Kuwait and its people. This was the first time that a member of a ruling family in the Gulf met the Pope and the British Political Agent in Kuwait Gerald de Gaury documented it, having already had a pivotal role in its completion.

He was a close friend of Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem and he expressed that friendship in his book "Traces of Travel<sup>(1)</sup>" where he described the meeting between the Sheikh and Pope Pius XII.

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(1) This script was translated, published and detailed by researcher Ya'qub Yusuf Al-Ibrahim in Al-Qabas Newspaper on 10/5/2010, P10, entitled Story of a Picture: a Memory that Drags Another. He provided a detailed explanation of the life of Captain Gerald de Gaury.

The Sheikh had asked the Captain to accompany him on a European tour en route to Cairo via Naples port in Italy where he would board a ship to sail to Alexandria.

Having arrived in Rome in the late hours of the night, the Sheikh called him the next morning and asked whether he had prepared a program for him to explore the city landmarks.

The Captain revealed in his book: "Instead of doing as the Romans do when in Rome, I suggested we do as the pilgrims to Makkah do; visit the holy places in the city."

During their visit to the St. Peter's Basilica and while they contemplated on one of the paintings, they were approached by a Bishop responsible for the visitors' entry.

He asked about the person in the Arab outfit and offered to take them to the closest point from where they can see the Pope from close range because in 40 minutes he would be going to the church. He indeed took them to the nearest point – a famous platform made by renowned sculptor Bernini – a place reserved for the VIPs. After a long wait, de Guerre began to describe the entry of the Pope.

"The Sheikh was surprised by the Pope's entry in his white cassock, carried on a portable stretcher. The hall reverberated with chants of 'Viva'.

The Pope then addressed the people in 5 languages before he met the guests individually. "I stood near the Sheikh to introduce him to the Pope. I introduced him by his name and country and told the Pope that Kuwait is an oil rich country, which made the conversation last longer.

"When the Sheikh arrived back in Egypt, his brother Sheikh Abdulla Al-Salem, the Amir of Kuwait, awarded him a medal the Pope had sent via the nearest diplomatic mission in Kuwait."

### **Abdullah Al-Salem and the Knighthood Medal**

Shortly after this visit, the Pontifical Apostle came in the same year from Aden on an official pastoral visit to Kuwait and met with Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and awarded him, in the name of Pope Pius XII, the Encyclical Graphic of the Knight Rank in recognition of his role in embracing Christians and providing them special environment in his own country<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) There is some contradiction regarding this incident since Andrew Thompson says that Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem received the Knight Rank on behalf of his brother the Amir. See: *The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious*

The Pope did not find enough appreciation for Kuwait so in 1953 he issued a decree to separate Kuwait from the territorial jurisdiction of the Bishop of Aden and turned it into an independent state under the direct supervision of Father Stella.

The document described Kuwait as 'the whole region that looks toward the rising sun, which is under the authority of the civil ruler of Kuwait, with no exception of the two plots of land which were called the Neutral Zone'. And in 1954, Kuwait was promoted to the rank of Apostolic Vicariate<sup>(1)</sup>.

Records show that Pope John XXIII sent the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, a letter in 1961 whereby he granted him Order of Knight of Pope St. Sylvester.

It was a tradition the Pope followed since the early Middle Ages to grant this award to princes and nobles and members of royal families, according to their office.

This clearly confirmed the policy of openness in Kuwait in dealing with Christians and the Pope expressed that in his letter to Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, where he said<sup>(2)</sup>:

"We learned from our brother, esteemed Bishop Ubaldo Teofano Stella, Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait, that you, in your capacity as the ruler of Kuwait, have shown generosity and hospitality towards the Catholic Church and religion.

"We consider it appropriate, in order to show our goodwill towards you, to grant you under this letter, Order of Knight of Pope St. Sylvester, bringing your Highness in the ranks of elite knights and grant you the honor of wearing the ribbon and the medal.

Awarded in Rome in St. Peter's Basilica on the 4th of March, 1961, in the 3rd year of our mandate

To His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

Signature Cardinal Dr. Tardini Vatican Foreign Minister

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Freedom in the Gulf, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, P48

(1) The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, P45

(2) This letter is mentioned in a historical document that belongs to writer Ahmed Shams Al-Din from Al-Qabas Newspaper. He called the Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait, Archbishop Giuseppe de Andrea, to authenticate the latter after translation. He published it in Al-Qabas Newspaper on 8/1/2005, P14 and it was republished in this book, P128 during the occupation of Kuwait in which he reminded him of the inevitability of Kuwait's independence and sovereignty, and telling him that he was praying for peace.

## **The invasion**

The relationship between the two countries maintained the same momentum during the next decades and it was built on mutual respect observing each other's community' privacy.

The Iraqi invasion to Kuwait in 1990 was a turning point in confirming this relation. Not only did The Vatican declare the Kuwait Liberation war as sacred but Pope John Paul II, Head of the Catholic Church at the time of the invasion, had also totally refused what was happening and he clearly expressed his stance in a letter to the then US President George Bush Sr.

The Christians in Kuwait were not far from sharing the suffering of its people in those exceptional circumstances. Father Bigol Anba Bishoy, Patron of the Copts, said that the Church had a role during the Iraqi invasion where they put themselves at the service of Kuwait and gathered and prayed for its people in the Church.

One of his most influential statements was when he said the following: 'At the dawn of the Liberation Day, at 5:45 am of the 26th of February, while the mosques' speakers were not broadcasting Athan Al-Fajr because of the blackout, the bells of the Catholic Church near Sheraton were ringing heavily to share in the joy of the people of Kuwait to declare the country's liberation.

## **PoWs and Missing people**

The diplomatic and moral efforts exerted by The Vatican were not limited to the issue of the invasion and did not stop with the liberation, but also included all the repercussions and tragedies resulting from this disaster.

The Vatican remained in permanent contact with the Kuwaiti officials and urged the concerned authorities in the United Nations to follow up on the proper application of international resolutions related to in this case, but the most important move by The Vatican was the follow-up the issue of POWs and missing persons.

In light of the solidarity and support shown by the Holy institutions, Kuwait was keen on keeping The Vatican in the midst of these efforts because of its religious and humanitarian weight and it kept The Vatican authorities informed of all developments related to this matter.

These efforts culminated in Pope John Paul II's reception of Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah<sup>(1)</sup>, Chairman of the National Committee for Missing People and Prisoners of War Affairs on Jan 20, 1994.

(1) Upon his arrival in the Italian capital, Rome, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah was informed of his mother's death. However, he did not cut visit short, giving priority to the national issues and the presentation of the POW's case to HH the Pope. See the comment of the National Committee for Missing Persons and Prisoners of War's Affairs on an article by Dr. Najy Saud Al-Zaid, published in Al-Qabas Newspaper on 9/9/1999, P36

Later, The Holy See followed this humanitarian issue attentively, and The Vatican Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Monsignor Jean Tauran, visited Kuwait in July 1996 and held talks with Kuwaiti officials before visiting again in November of the same year upon an official invitation and he met with the children and families of prisoners and missing people.

The committee remained in constant contact with the concerned authorities to take advantage of Pope John Paul II's visit to the city of Ur in 1999, where the committee hosted in July the World Christian Women's Union, which originates from democratic Christian parties in more than 120 countries.

When Kuwait's Ambassador to France Ahmed Abdul-Karim Al-Ibrahim presented his credentials as an Ambassador to the Vatican, Pope John Paul II expressed his hope again that humanitarian issues, chiefly the return of prisoners to their families, were quickly resolved since they were necessary for the reconciliation between the peoples of the region.

### **Pope John Paul II**

In light of the follow-up of the implementation of these files, the presence of Pope John Paul II at the head of the Catholic Church gave the relationship between The Vatican and Kuwait a special dimension.

In return, Kuwait was also loyal to the Holy See when the Pope died in 2005. His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a high ranking official delegation led by Senior Advisor in Al-Diwan Al-Amiri, Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah as an official envoy along with Ambassador Ahmed-Ibrahim to participate in the tribute to the Pope, which was attended by more than 200 world leaders.

Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad also sent a telegram to Cardinal Sodano, The Vatican Prime Minister, expressing on behalf of the people of Kuwait, his heartiest condolences for the loss of a great man who dedicated his life to love, peace and understanding among all peoples and religions of the world.

After the weekly Cabinet meeting chaired by His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the then Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for the Parliamentary Affairs, Muhammad Dhaifallah Sharar offered the condolences of the Council to the Christian brothers on the death of the Pope and said Kuwait's leadership and people share with them the feelings of

pain and sorrow for this great loss and pray to God to grant peace to the soul of Pope John Paul II.

He also said the Council had grieved the Pontiff's death and it had praised the remarkable achievements and attitudes of the Pope and his efforts in supporting world peace, tolerance, openness and dialogue between religions and that the Council had declared that humanity lost a religious symbol who dedicated his life to the service of human dignity and brotherhood among mankind.

The National Assembly paid tribute to the Pope in a speech delivered by Acting Chairman Mishari Al-Anjari<sup>(1)</sup>. He said<sup>(2)</sup> that mankind in general and Christians in particular had lost with the death of the Pope a great man who dedicated his life to serve the principles of Christianity, peace and security in the world.

He also praised the Pope's apology for the mistakes committed by Catholics in the Crusades. Al-Anjari pointed that it was during the reign of the Pope that the first historic agreement between Al-Azhar and The Vatican had been signed in 1998 to honor the interfaith human values and address violence, extremism and terrorism.

He also offered the Assembly's condolences to the Pope's lovers and the followers of the Catholic Church worldwide, expressing the Assembly members hope that the next Pope would continue John Paul II's approach in spreading peace and prosperity in the world.

In a gesture that embodied the spirit of openness and freedom of belief, the Catholic Church in Kuwait opened its doors to receive mourners in the presence of The Vatican Ambassador Giuseppe de Andrea, members of the diplomatic community and Christians of various denominations.

They recalled the Pope's attitudes and his calls for dialogue between religions and expressed pride in his personal qualities, recalling his forgiveness for the Turkish young man who tried to assassinate him, praising the fact that the Pope had visited him in jail and prayed by his side.

This reminds me of an article in the 'Allah Bilkhair' series by journalist Muhammad Musaed Al-Saleh on the Pope's death. He wrote that article under the title 'The quietness party'" referring to a letter he received from a reader saying that the

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(1) Al-Qabas newspaper, 5/4/2005, P8

(2) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 10, Session 1121, 4/4/2005, P14

Christians have expressed their sorrow for the death of the Pope by 'quietly' going to Church to pray for his soul and that some of them 'quietly' lit candles to express their grief and that the funeral and burial services were 'quietly' conducted.

The message then took another direction when it called for a 'quietness' policy in everyday life and the 'quiet' expression of joy and sorrow in a civilized manner.

### **Talks on establishing the Embassy**

Talking of bilateral relations between Kuwait and the Vatican, it was during a visit of Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Sa'ad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah to Pope John Paul II on Dec 13, 1996<sup>(1)</sup> that had the clear impact on strengthening cooperation and friendship between the two countries, which culminated in Kuwait's consent to open an embassy and appoint a resident ambassador to The Vatican in Kuwait.

Before that, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the Vatican, Monsignor Jean-Louis Tauran, visited Kuwait on Nov 21, 1996 carrying a message from the Pope to the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which was the starting point of the talks to open an embassy and appoint a resident nuncio in Kuwait<sup>(2)</sup>.

In January 2000, Kuwait was adopted as the headquarters of the Vatican's representative in the whole Arabian Peninsula before being moved later to Bahrain.

It was the first time the Nuncio was resident in Kuwait, and that time it was the Embassy's Charge D'affaires Giuseppe de Andrea, who made the Catholic Church his temporary headquarters until a location for the Nunciature was found.

On Oct 30, 2013, diplomatic relations between the two countries witnessed a significant development when The Vatican Embassy was opened in Yarmouk in the presence of the Minister of Interior of the Vatican, Archbishop Giovanni Angelo Pichu and Apostolic Nuncio to Kuwait, Yemen, Bahrain, Qatar and UAE, the Pontifical Envoy to the Arabian Peninsula, Ambassador of the Holy See, Bishop Petar Reich<sup>(3)</sup>, in conjunction with the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and the Vatican, which began on Oct 21, 1968.

Pichu's attendance carried a special dimension since he was the third man in The Vatican government. On the Kuwaiti side, Director of GCC Affairs Nasser Al-Muzayyen represented the Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah.

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(1) Al-Qabas Newspaper, 22/2/2012, P12

(2) Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 11922, on 11/2/2000, PP1 and 27

(3) Al-Nahar Newspaper, Ver. 1996, 1/11/2013, P5

Reich said that he had visited the Grand Mosque and the Church and expressed his happiness with the permanent dialogue between Muslims and Christians and assured the continuity of work to strengthen bilateral relations.

The Chargé D'affaires was sent from The Vatican to start the new diplomatic mission before becoming the first Papal Ambassador and the first resident Ambassador of the Holy See in the region.

The mission began its activity in an apartment in Bneid Al-Qar. Before that, and for three decades, the Papal Ambassadors in Iraq and in Lebanon took turns to do Holy representation in Kuwait and other Gulf states.

Administratively, the Embassy is a liaison office between the Supreme Pontiff and the local church and helps bishops, priests and nuns undertake their pastoral duties.

### **The highest ranking visit**

On the official visits level, the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, accompanied by his aide Izzat Jaafar, was the highest ranking Kuwaiti official to visit The Vatican.

The two sides continued to exchange visits between several high ranking delegates which later culminated in the visit His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah made to The Vatican in May 2010 when he met Pope Benedict XVI.

The two men stressed the importance of activating a dialogue between religions and civilizations and understanding among peoples. His Highness the Amir presented the Pope with a historically rare copy of the Holy Qur'an while the Pope received the Amir in a friendly atmosphere in his personal library for half an hour, which reflected the depth of the relationship between the two countries.

They focused on promoting peace in the Middle East and the dialogue between religions. His Highness the Amir then met with The Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Bertone, in the presence of Monsignor Dominique Mamberti, who praised the positive contribution of the Christian minority in Kuwait, where all denominations enjoy the freedom to practice their rituals.

The report of the US State Department in 2010<sup>(1)</sup> paid tribute to this visit which showed Kuwait's respect for all religions and confirmed that Kuwaitis show great tolerance to all religious groups.

A year before, His Highness the PM Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammad Al-Sabah had met Pope Benedict during an official visit to The Vatican in 2009. This visit was preceded by many others including one made by Deputy PM Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

### **With Pope Francis I**

When Pope Francis I took office in 2013, Kuwait was at the forefront of well-wishers, where His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to congratulate the Pope on the great confidence placed in him by the cardinals by electing him as successor to Pope Benedict XVI and expressed hope that His Holiness succeeds in spreading justice, co-existence and tolerance through respect of interfaith dialogue.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Switzerland and The Vatican Dr. Suhail Khalil Shuhaibar conveyed His Highness the Amir's congratulations to the Pope and participated in the first meeting between the new Pope and the ambassadors of all countries of the world.

The ambassador was reported to have said<sup>(2)</sup>: "I've touched since the beginning a special recognition from The Vatican to His Highness the Amir for his role in fostering cooperation and co-existence among peoples and in addressing the challenges and promoting progress in the developing countries.

"It was evident for me that The Vatican sees in Kuwait a model of religious tolerance which has its roots deep into the Islamic traditions."

The Papal Embassy in Kuwait was keen on participating with Christians in Kuwait in local events. The Nuncio in Kuwait, Monsignor de Andrea, presided a prayer of thanks at the return of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from medical treatment abroad in 2002.

Also participating in the prayer were Bishops of the Catholic Church and priests from various churches. Patron of the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait,

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(1) Excerpts from: journalist and researcher Hussein Abd Al-Hussein, Al-Rai Newspaper, 19/11/2010, P7 and journalist Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 20/11/2010, P2

(2) Coverage of the visit in Al-Qabas Newspaper, 23/3/2013, P3

Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, described this prayer as an expression of joy from all members of the Christian communities after the return of His Highness and said it also included prayers for the return of Kuwaiti prisoners.

In return, the embassy celebrated freely all its events, including the anniversary of the enthronement of the Pope and Kuwait's political leadership was keen to send congratulatory letters to the Pope.

With the appointment of Giuseppe de Andrea as The Vatican Ambassador to Kuwait in 2005, a reception was held at the Bayan Palace for the ambassador to mark the end of his functions where the then Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammad Al-Sabah emphasized the depth of the relations between Kuwait and The Vatican and the political leadership's keenness to uphold Islamic values that respect all religions where everyone in Kuwait lived safely away from intolerance and extremism.

He also asserted that members of various Christian communities enjoy their rights to practice their religious rituals freely. In turn, Ambassador D'Andrea praised the solid relationship between Kuwait and The Vatican and expressed his pride in the religious tolerance he experienced throughout his period in Kuwait.

The Vatican reciprocated with the same generosity. Upon ending the tenure of Ambassador Ahmed Al-Ibrahim in 2007, The Vatican gave him a three-day farewell ceremony and presented him with the Order of the Great Grand Cross of St. Gregor due to his reaching retirement.

The task was undertaken by Monsignor Dominique Mamberti at a formal ceremony in which he affirmed that the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI did not make this celebration only to honor Kuwait, but also to give a symbol of his personal appreciation for the Ambassador.

The Vatican permanently invited Kuwait and its institutions to attend its different events, so Kuwait was present in all the activities of the Vatican, including the Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in the Global Forum for Religious Freedoms in the world upon an invitation from The Vatican Council for Culture and TEDx Organization for Art and Innovation.

In addition, Kuwait participated with delegations representing private entities such as the Al-Waqf Al-Jaafari's delegation that represented Kuwait Awqaf Public

Foundation. At The Vatican they met Pope Benedict XVI upon a formal invitation in recognition of Kuwait's role in promoting religious tolerance.

Kuwait was keen to take into account the finest details of this relationship in reference to its importance, and so appointed an accredited journalist to the Holy See as a representative of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), and Yahya Matar became the first accredited journalist to The Vatican<sup>(1)</sup>.

HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah with Pope Benedict XVI

The Vatican Embassy in Kuwait

HH the then PM Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammad Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah with Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to The Vatican in 2009

The late Sheikh Sa'ad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah in The Vatican in 1996 with Pope John Paul VI

Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah, on behalf of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, receives a special medal from the Pope from the Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait.

A document that dates back to 1961 sent from the 23rd Pope to the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. It is written in Latin and was translated by the Papal Embassy in Kuwait. It reads: (See page 109)

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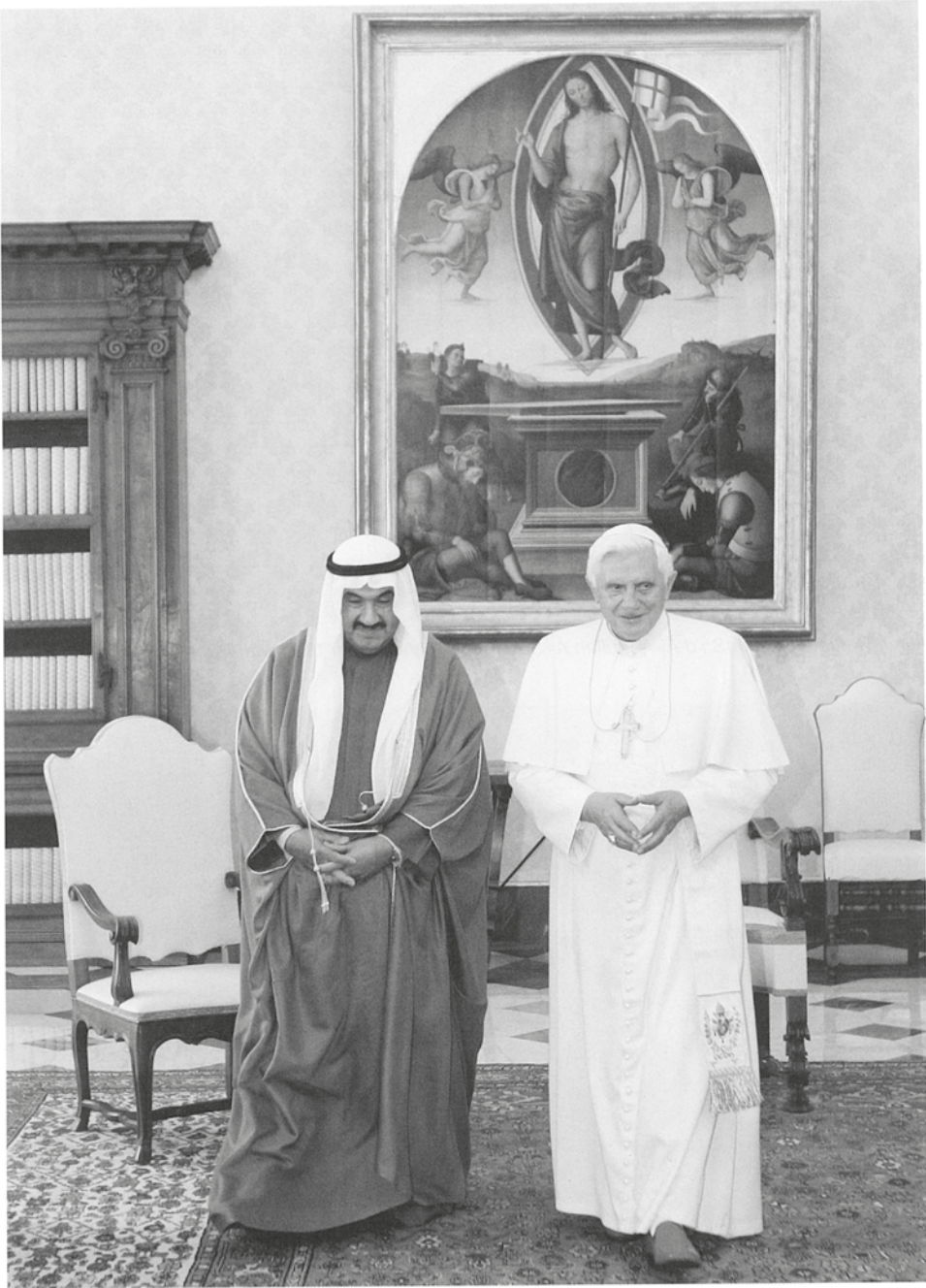
(1) Ahmed Shams Al-Din, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 20/1/2012, P48, This Day 18 Years Ago: Salem Al-Sabah with the Pope



*HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah with Pope Benedict XVI*



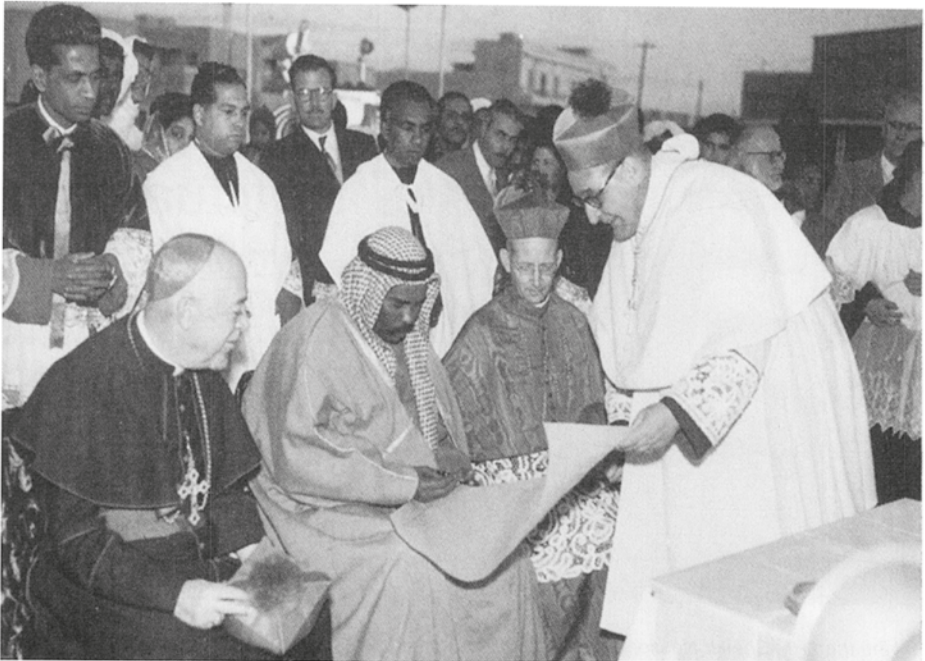
*The Vatican Embassy in Kuwait*



*HH the then PM Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah with Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the Vatican in 2009*



*The late Sheikh Sa'd Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah in the Vatican in 1996 with Pope John Paul VI*



*Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah, on behalf of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, receives a special medal from the Pope from the Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait.*

# JOANNES PP. XXIII

*Celsissime Vir,  
salutem ac prosperitatem*

*Ex amplissimo testimonio Venerabilis Fratris Ubaldi Theophani Stella, Episcopi titulo Antaeopolitani, Vicarii Apostolici Kuwaitensis, Nobis constat Te, ejusdem regionis, Kuwaiti, vulgo appellatae principem exercentem, erga Catholicam Religionem et Ecclesiam observantissimum, in illius Vicariatus sacros missivales beneficia conferre. Quapropter Te profecto dignum censemus, cui propensae in Te voluntatis Nostrae documentum exhibeamus. Hisce igitur Te Litteris*

*Equitem a Magna Cruce Ordinis Sancti Silvestri Papae*

*facimus, constituimus, renuntiamus atque in splendidissimum eorundem Equitum coetum ac numerum referimus. Tibi proinde concedimus, ut propriam Equitum a Magna Cruce hujus Ordinis vestem induere ac propria item insignia gestare queas, nempe maximi moduli nominis auream, sinistro innexum pectoris lateri, et similiter maximi moduli Crucem auream, octogonam, alba superficie, imaginem Sancti Silvestri Papae in medio referentem, quae fascia setica praelonga, rubro et nigro distincta coloribus, extremis oris rubris, a dextero humero ad extremum usque sinistrum latus transversa, sustineatur. Ne quid vero discriminis tam in veste quam in nominis et Cruce hujusmodi gestandis contingat, appositum schema Tibi tradi jubemus. Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo Piscatoris, die IV mensis Martii, anno MDCCCLXI, Pontificatus Nostrae tertio.*

*Celsissimo Viro  
Ubaldo Abdulla, S. Salim, S. Sabah.*



*D. Card. Tardini  
a publicis Celsae negotij*

## Wishing your Highness eternal prosperity...

'We learned from our brother, esteemed Bishop Ubaldo Teofano Stella, Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait, that you, in your capacity as the ruler of Kuwait, have shown generosity and hospitality towards the Catholic Church and religion.

'We consider it appropriate, in order to show our good will towards you, to grant you under this letter, Order of Knight of Pope St. Sylvester, bringing your Highness in the ranks of elite knights and grant you the honor of wearing the ribbon and the medal'.

Awarded in Rome in St. Peter's Basilica on the 4th of March, 1961, in the 3rd year of our mandate To His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

Signature  
Cardinal Dr. Tardini  
Vatican Foreign Minister



**Chapter Five:**  
**Kuwaiti, Arab and Eastern Christians**



## Kuwaiti, Arab and Eastern Christians

The Arabian Mission was an attractive force for Christians or at least a part of them but it was not the only driving force behind their accelerated arrival.

A few years after the mission existed specifically just before WWI, the Christian existence in Kuwait had entered a new stage with the arrival of the Arab Christians or Christians of the East in general, announcing the beginning of a new phase of that existence.

Furthermore, it paved the way to a drastic change on the community's social fiber when a large number of them obtained the Kuwaiti nationality in the 1950s.

Those changes only emphasized one fact that openness and acceptance of the other, were deep-rooted in the Kuwaiti community since it was ever there. This acceptance was not limited to Christians since Jews existed even before them in Kuwait.

Except for what Samuel Zwemer said about the existence of Salome Antoon, the young Iraqi Christian who was a colporteur at the mission's shop in 1903, no sources or information ever documented one case of an Arab Christian settling in Kuwait at that time.

To be more precise, no historical reference had ever given any indication of the existence of any Christian settling in Kuwait at that time except for those strongly connected with the mission because they worked in its institutions.

The Christian existence in general at that time was vague, taking into consideration the rapid political events and the mutual threats between fighting factions prior to WWI.

The countries of the region were not safe from these threats since they were under the rule of colonial powers with clashing interests. During WWI, some clergymen and employees of foreign governments were almost the only foreigners who stayed in Kuwait.

Some prominent figures of the mission such as Rev. Edwin Calverley's wife, Dr. Eleanor, went back to their countries at that time and stayed there for two years before returning to Kuwait.

## The palpable existence

The lack of accurate and consistent data regarding the Christian existence can be manifested in what Rev. Edwin Calverley wrote in 1918 in 'Neglected Arabia, the Arabian Mission' journal, under the title 'When Mullahs Are Doctors'<sup>(1)</sup>.

He discussed one habit that was common in the community and when he tried to ask about those habits, he said that some local Christian residents, who lived all their lives among Muslims, did not know anything about that habit.

Delving deep in what the Reverend said leads to the conclusion that he would not have returned and asked Christians about that habit had he not been so sure there had been a settling Christian existence in Kuwait at that time.

Having himself come to Kuwait in 1916, it is sensible to say that he came back to ask those who had come to Kuwait before him.

Father Noel visited Kuwait in 1949 at the invitation of the then retired General Dickson and said he had previously visited Kuwait in 1918, which gives more impression regarding the Christian existence at that time.

At that time, a foreigner or a European person was called Ya Sahb<sup>(2)</sup> during a conversation with members of the local community.

This vagueness began to totally unfold since the 1920s. There was a consensus on the fact that Ya'qub Shammās was the first missionary in Kuwait to be fluent in Arabic.

That was in 1916 when he came from Mardin in south Anatolia in the Asian part of Turkey. He was appointed aide to Rev. Calverley and worked in the mission hospital and became a "main pillar of the Arab Christian existence in Kuwait"<sup>(3)</sup>. He obtained the Kuwaiti nationality in 1949 and had five children<sup>(4)</sup>: Habib, Ayli, Saeed, Farida and Sami.

His two daughters worked in the hospital for a short time before they got married while Sami and Saeed joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Habib however, worked in the Ministry of Public Works and was later ordained Presbyter.

(1) When Mullahs Are Doctors, Edwin Calverley, published in Neglected Arabia Journal, Ver. 107 in 1918 and translated by writer and researcher Dr. Zubaidah Ali Ashkanani then published in her book Min Nafithat Al-Amercany: Reports of the Workers in the American Mission Hospital on Kuwait Before Oil, Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, PP100-103

(2) The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, P45

(3) When Mullahs Are Doctors, Edwin Calverley, published in Neglected Arabia Journal, Ver. 107, 1918 .

(4) The Arabian Mission's Story 1998, In Search of Abraham's Other Son, P177, Lewis R. Scudder, P240

After Shammas had moved to Kuwait, Arab Christians began to flood into Kuwait, chief among them were the families of Sama'n and Gharib.

The most prominent figure of the Gharib family was Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib, father of Rev. Emmanuel, who was born in Carboran<sup>(1)</sup> southeast Turkey.

He migrated to Kuwait in 1928 upon an invitation of his uncle Ya'qub Shammas<sup>(2)</sup> who he stayed with. Prior to that, his father was killed in WWI and then he moved to Lebanon where he joined the Red Cross and lived in refugee camps.

He later came to Kuwait before leaving for Bahrain where he stayed for 12 years with his two uncles; Sama'n, father of Sulaiman Shammas, and Hanna Shammas and worked with them in the mission hospital.

After that he left for Mosul and then came back again and exchanged letters with his uncles who had already moved to Kuwait. So he followed them<sup>(3)</sup> to Kuwait and worked in the mission's hospital until it was shut down on March 1, 1967. He moved to the Ministry of Health and obtained the Kuwaiti nationality in 1950.

The Shuhaibar family, on the other hand, came to Kuwait from Gaza, Palestine in 1948 in the aftermath of the Palestinian Exodus or Nakba. Other families included the Mansour family which came from Iraq and the Al-Mousa family.

In total, there were around five renowned families in addition to their branches<sup>(4)</sup>. Muhammad Al-Khalifa who lived for long mentioned that among the families that came from Iraq was the Abu-Habib family whose son Ya'qub was nicknamed Ya'qub Al-Nasrani<sup>(5)</sup>. The Nu'man family, Al-Khalifa added, also came from Iraq<sup>(6)</sup>.

Those families came to Kuwait for different reasons. Al-Mansour family, for example, were said to have been managing the properties and lands of the Al-Sabah family in Iraq and they fled after tension aroused with some factions who tried to put their hands on the lands.

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(1) Not all these names were mentioned in the reply of the Ministry of Interior to a parliamentary question on 9/11/1981 as will later be revealed in the following chapter. The reason for this might be that some names were changed at registration. For example, Ayli became Lina.

(2) Kamal Qubaisy, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Newspaper, Ver. 9113, Monday, 10/11/2003

(3) Interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery as part of Hadith Al-Thikrayat Series published in Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 4381/9935, 3/10/2003, PP12-13

(4) Interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib conducted by Sabah Al-Mousa published in Al-Nahar Newspaper, Ver. 1656, 14/09/2012, P12

(5) Mira't Al-Ommah Magazine, Ver. 1142, 7/11/1998, P12

(6) Interview conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery with Kuwaiti long-lived Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa, published in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 11075, on 17/1/1997, PP6-7

A member of the family, Subhi Ya'qub Mansour, a businessman, said: "I came with my family from Basra in Iraq where Al-Sabah, the ruling family, owned lands and were managing those properties until we came in the late 1940s"<sup>(1)</sup>.

These families lived in different areas and those who worked in Arabian mission dwelt in nearby neighborhoods such as Al-Hayy Al-Qibly, known as Al-Hamad houses (Barzan area) near the Church because it was about half a kilometer from the mission.

Among these was Rev. Emmanuel Gharib who said residents there were mostly Christians who worked in the hospital or in oil companies<sup>(2)</sup>. He later moved with his family to live in Dasma where the government had allocated a house for his father.

Some members of Shuhaibar family lived in the Dahla<sup>(3)</sup> neighborhood at the site of the Baladiya Garden on Jahra Street opposite the Jews houses<sup>(4)</sup>.

Family links played a role in attracting these Christians. Ya'qub Shammās was the uncle of Benjamin Ya'qub and Sulaiman Sama'n, who both worked in the hospital. After him came Dawood and Sulaiman Nu'man and worked in the Ministry of Health until 1950 with Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

As far as Nu'man family is concerned, Jamal Kamel Dawood Nu'man<sup>(5)</sup> narrated some of his family history in Kuwait. They were Assyrian Orthodox but when they obtained the Kuwaiti nationality, their names were officially registered as Nu'man.

He added, his family members are the descendants of the Lakhmids, the Qahtani Arabs, and so the family was known by this name only in nationality records while their members used between them the name Nu'man.

He said his family consisted of five uncles, all of them were dead by now: Salman, Sabri, Naeem, Henry and Sulaiman, in addition to an aunt called Nadira.

He could not remember anything about his grandfather but knows that his grandmother was buried in Kuwait although he has no idea where exactly she was buried.

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(1) History of Christianity in Kuwait, Fawziyya Salem Al-Sabah, Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 14355, 9/10/2006, P33

(2) See: interview with Subhi Mansour on Ishtar TV's website: <http://www.ishtartv.com/viewarticle.40621.html>

(3) Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 4381/9935, 3/10/2003, PP12-13

(4) The word "Dahla" means a swamp; a low land

(5) Interview with Ibrahim Jabra Shuhaibar conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery as part of Hadith Al-Thikrayat Series published in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 10683, on 20/9/1996, P4

She died when he was 8 or 9 years old; Jamal himself was born in 1958. His father Kamel Dawood Nu'man was born in 1921 and was buried in the Sulaibkhat cemetery. He had worked in the Ministry of Public Works. His other uncle, Naeem, was buried in Kuwait too.

Jamal Nu'man, Bu Issa, recalled the first days of his uncles in Kuwait. "Kuwait was the meeting point for my family. One of my uncles worked in Saudi Arabia, another in Bahrain, a third in Iran and a fourth in Lebanon.

They also travelled to Basra and spoke Farsi and Hindi fluently because they used to travel to those countries for business and come back to Kuwait, at a time where passports had not yet been used."

As for his parents, he said they got married when his mother was barely 14 years old and had just arrived from Baghdad. They lived in Qibla and led the normal life of that time, drinking water from the well and washing their clothes in the sea, according to his mother.

In the 1960s, they obtained the Kuwaiti nationality, like many other Christian families of that time. Jamal worked as a detective at the Farwaniya Police Station while some of his brothers worked in the oil companies and his cousin Henry was the Secretary of the Permanent Representative to the United Nations' Human Rights Council.

As for the church the family followed, Jamal said the Nu'man family were Assyrian Orthodox but since there was no special church for them, they turned to Catholic, Latin, Roman and Coptic Orthodox.

Nu'man and Celio families were relatives, the latter being known as the Salman family. Jerjis Celio was assistant to Rev Edwin Calverley who taught English language at the Arabian mission school in Kuwait.

Al-Adsani documents for 1925 refer to cases of documented ownership of houses that belonged to Christians in Kuwait. One of these documents read: 'Rashid Al-Nahedh sold to Maryam Bint Ali Al-Khamis the yard located in Mirqab, surrounded West by Beit Al-Mazar, North by the road, East by the house of Nasib Al-Fattash and South by William Al-Nasrani's yard, for 110 rupees on 20 Jumada Al-Thani 1344, (1920).'

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Another document read: 'Latifa Bint Fahad Al-Masha'ni sold to Abdullah Bin Mansour Bin Mnaia' the house located in Al-Rashayda Area, surrounded West by William Al-Nasrani's house, North by Abdullah Bin Hasan's house and East and South by the road, for 133 rupees. The sale and receipt of money were witnessed by Saud Bin Muhammad Bin Oun and Hamad Bin Nasser, on 29 Rabia' Al-Thany 1344.'

The reason these documents are important is that they prove Christians at that time did own properties which they had freely bought and sold, and that was the same thing the Jews did without any restrictions.

Colonel Harold Dickson's daughter, Zahra, reported her days in Kuwait when she arrived with her family in 1929 when she was just three years old.

She stayed for about 10 years and left and returned after the WWII ended. She said at that time, the existence of foreigners in Kuwait was so familiar because the mission had been in Kuwait long before that. And so, foreigners were always in the city<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Oil and its demographic impact**

All through the 1930s, the Christian existence in Kuwait, whether Arab or Western, had not witnessed any significant changes. Kuwait by that time had already become a magnet for explorers until the end of WWII when oil exploration began.

In order to broaden its activities in this new industry, the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) had to seek help from engineering experts as well experienced workforce.

Although the overwhelming majority of these experts were Western Christians since Kuwait was still under the British occupation, the economic development Kuwait witnessed enabled the Arab Christians to start flooding into Kuwait.

The Arab Christian existence became a reality when the construction of the churches began. In the early stages, these churches were frequented by non-Arab foreigners, specifically South Asian labor in addition to the Western workforce who were high ranking officers in the oil companies, service sectors and economic companies, and a small portion of the Christian community in the Levant and Egypt<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) Interview conducted by the author with Jamal Kamel Dawood Nu'man, 1/5/2014

(2) Interview with Zahra Dickson conducted by Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Habib, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 21/2/2012, P12

What makes it more certain that the Christian existence in that period began to widen after WWII is that Father Stray used to come from Basra to offer religious services to Christians until Father Teofano Stella arrived in Kuwait from Milano in 1948 becoming the first resident priest and lived in Ahmadi.

Two years later, he was joined by Rev. Augustine Klavita. In light of the construction boom that was taking place in Kuwait, an asylum for mental illnesses was being built beside the Christian cemetery, making any future expansion impossible<sup>(1)</sup>, despite the urgent need for that because of the rapid increase in the Christian population.

Since 1946, prayer services for a wide array of Christians were held in different places such as the American Mission church, and many prayer services were later held in some public places such as the mass was celebrated in the Officers' Restaurant in Ahmadi<sup>(2)</sup> in 1948.

At that time, the Kuwait Oil Company began building two churches in Ahmadi, the first one was called St. Paul's Church<sup>(3)</sup>, dedicated to its Christian employees, on a land given by the Kuwaiti government.

At that time, Ibrahim Jabra Shuhaibar was working for the KOC. With the rapid development in relations, Kuwait had an independent Papal Messenger for the first time in 1953, and in 1956, the Church of Our Lady of Arabia was inaugurated in Ahmadi at an official ceremony attended by Christian characters and Archbishops, including Bishop Latinos from Baghdad Stephen du Shayek and Chaldean Bishop in Basra Yusuf George.

On Jan 27, 1957 the cornerstone for the Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral was laid set to make it the headquarters for Catholics in Kuwait and went through several stages of procedures.

The Construction Council had agreed on May 30 of the same year to give free-of-charge land vide letter number S/221/508 dated 9 March, 1955, sent from the Kuwaiti Government's Secretary to the Head of Public Works, containing the consent of HH Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to grant a free land to build

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(1) Jamila Al-Awabdeh, Christians in the Gulf: Government Facilities and Legislation Fatwas, Al-Wasat Newspaper, Ver. 25, 5/6/2007, P17

(2) Kuwait (1945-1996): An Anglo-American Perspective, Miriam Joyce, trans. by Mufid Abdouni, Dar Amwaj for Publication and Distribution, 1st edition, 2001, P28

(3) Crusade Evangelical Danger in Kuwait, Ahmed bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Husain, 8th Edition, 1996, P70

a church for the Catholic community in Kuwait. The Church was granted official license on 24 March, 1962<sup>(1)</sup>.

In 1959, the Evangelical Church elected an Arab Council, affirming the growing number of Arab Christians, and the first Arab Pastor to be invited was Yusuf Abdul-Noor from the Church of the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt.

After joining the Evangelical Church, he contributed in writing to its Constitution<sup>(2)</sup>. Amid these developments, a comment in Al-Arabi Magazine, Vol. 44 in July, 1962 read: Kuwait goes by the generosity Islam has known since ancient times. Here is the Christian Church in the capital, for which the government has donated the land and provided a loan of half a million rupees with zero interest for 10 years.

In return, the Christians were kind enough not to put the Cross since that time. Kuwait has devoted openness that characterized its history in tolerance in the region and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem played a pivotal role in that, which was appreciated by all spiritual leaders of Christianity.

His words in response to the request of the Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria to obtain a land to build a church were an embodiment of that openness.

He said: "It is our great pleasure and total consent to see the followers of the Orthodox Church in Kuwait feel happy living among us and perform their rituals in a friendly atmosphere with the people of Kuwait.

We will assist to find them the suitable environment which makes them feel safe and secure. Your request is in our hands and we will look into it in the best circumstances and keep you informed, God willing."

That letter was followed by another from the then Housing Chief Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah on Oct 8, 1960, which stated the government's approval to host some prominent figures of the Orthodox Church at the government guesthouse until the completion of the building they had rented from Khalid Abdul-Latif Al-Hamad.

The Church was officially opened on April 2, 1961 before the Cabinet agreed on May 28, 1963 to give a piece of land to the Orthodox community to build their church<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 4381/9935, 3/10/2003, PP12-13

(2) Al-Qabas Newspaper, Ver. 4266, 20/3/1984, P3

(3) Interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib conducted by Sabah Al-Mousa published in Al-Nahar Newspaper, Ver.

With the rapid economic developments in Kuwait at the time, it began to attract Christians working in the basic services sectors such as schools, hospitals, insurance companies and hotels because of their great knowhow.

The 1960s witnessed the foundation of schools, mostly belonging to Christians, part of which continued and enjoyed a long history, such as Al-Jamil School, founded by Lebanese businessman Emile Bustani, especially for the children of employees at CAT Company.

It began work on Dec 20, 1960, directed by Khawla Rizq. In the following year, Najiba Yusuf Aqiqi<sup>(1)</sup> who was known as Mother Beatrine arrived in Kuwait and founded Fajer Al-Sabah School in 1963.

A year before that, there was Al-Salam School and in 1964, Al-Mansoura School, an affiliate of the Sisters of Iraqi Chaldean Catholics, was founded.

Besides the Christian Arab presence that had become part of the social fabric, Kuwait witnessed in the early 1950s the arrival of Christian Indians, specifically from Kerala, a large number of whom worked in the KOC in Ahmadi and practiced their rituals in their own language.

Eastern or the Arab Christian presence was not limited to a specific segment, as Kuwait's history is full of Armenian Christians memories. Malkoun was the first Armenian family to come from Basra, and its members were famous for their talent in car repairs and entrepreneurship.

Doctor Houphokemian was the first Armenian physician to work in Kuwait and was sent by the government to specialize in blood analysis.

He opened the first laboratory for this purpose in Kuwait before obtaining the Kuwaiti nationality. He died in Kuwait and was buried in the cemetery for the non-Muslims<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among those who entered Kuwait was Malik Malkian Sitian on Jan 24, 1961 who witnessed a significant incident upon his arrival. After stamping his passport, Officer Abdul-Latif Al-Thuwaini said to his colleagues: "He is an Armenian. He does not need a sponsor or insurance because Armenians have a very special status here."

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1656, 14/09/2012, P12

(1) Scents from the History of Kuwait, Ahmed Issa Bishara, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 19/6/2001, P15

(2) More details on her life are mentioned in Chapter Seven of this book

Also coming to Kuwait for the first time was Jack Hagop Bardakjian on Aug 16, 1955, saying his plane landed at the Al-Nuzha Airport which had a runway made of clay and a building made of iron sheets.

He also said he came with a friend who had earlier been to Kuwait, confirming that he had met some of his Christian acquaintances in Kuwait.

His work in a lathe shop affiliated to Muhammad Al-Omar Company, was the first of its kind, which enabled him to get to know Bu Ghuos, of the Armenian Garage and Marcel' Blacksmithing shop<sup>(1)</sup> which were Armenian institutions.

Among other Armenians who came to work in Kuwait was Mrs. Lucien Krabit Awadis Tatarian who, once out in the street, heard the words haram and nudity.

The Armenian women told her to go to the women's tailor, after which she never heard those words. She talked about how Kuwaiti women hosted her for the forenoon tea where they gathered to have friendly chats over tea, chick peas and beans.

In 1957, two years after its opening, Lucien worked in the Central Kitchen which supplied schools with meals for the students. That kitchen was founded during the presidency of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Ministry of Education. Lucien also worked in Al-Mansouriya School in Mirqab, half a kilometer away from the kitchen.

The Armenian existence was evident through many institutions such as the Armenian Scout which was founded 40 years ago from now, and the Women's Charity Society.

The Armenians used to freely celebrate their national occasions such as the commemoration the 1.5 million Armenian victims who lost their lives in the infamous massacre of 1915, in addition to their religious occasions such as the New Year's Eve on January 6 according to the Gregorian calendar.

On this occasion, each Armenian repents what they have done during the past year and shows pride in their good deeds. There is a difference between the celebration on December 25 and on January 6.

The latter was a celebration of all Christians as a symbol of the birth of Jesus Christ, his baptism and the coming of Kings from the Far East to bless his birth.

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(1) Personalities within Events Series, written by the author under the title Armenians in Kuwait under the Patronage of Shahe Panossian, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 9/6/2013, P22

December 25 was a symbol in the old Roman era of the gods' day, which the Roman used to celebrate in the 5th Century AD. So Christians decided on this day to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ while January 6 was the day of his baptism.

Kuwait also knew many prominent figures in medicine such as Dr. Sami Bishara who worked at the Al-Amiri Hospital and Jamila Fadhel Khoury who worked for a long time from 1959 till 1976 and provided a glimpse of how life was in the country at that time.

She also discussed the life and nature of the Christian community and how the authorities treated them in terms of their rituals and privacy. She said the government allowed some high ranking employees to obtain a license for wine<sup>(1)</sup> before withdrawing it and making it exclusive to members of the diplomatic community.

In this context, Jamila narrated<sup>(2)</sup> that that the Egyptian Consul had called her one night, sarcastically expressing his worry about her patients after she had lost the wine license.

After she assured him that she had not used the license since she had been appointed in the diplomatic community, he asked her if he could do anything for her.

She asked him for the following. "If you want to really do me a favor, I would tell you that the Orthodox Church needs a bottle of wine every day for the masses and I would be so grateful if you could afford it." The Consul gladly did her that favor.

In another incident, it was reported that a Lebanese assistant to Khoury, Fatima Al-Aris, while Khoury was in Chicago, submitted a proposal to the undersecretary of the ministry to amend one of the terms of the nurses housing law, which stated sending vehicles to transport Christian nurses from their housing to the Church on Sundays and Christian holidays because of the distance in order to protect them.

The amendment asked for the vehicles to be sent only once every two weeks and exclusively on holidays. Out of respect for her position, the undersecretary did not reply and waited for the return of Khoury to look at her request.

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(1) From Kuwait's Past Series, interview with Jack Bardakejian, conducted by Jassem Abbas in Pages from the Memory, published in Al-Qabas Newspaper, 6/4/2007, P22

(2) My Life's Journey between Science, Work and Love of Human Beings, Jamila Fadhel Khoury, Dar Al-Ma'aref for Publication, 1st edition, P109

After her return, Khoury met with her aide and confirmed the objection of her colleagues, even those who did not go to church, because the proposal would mean that the ministry persecuted Christian employees unjustifiably.

Then, the undersecretary tore the report<sup>(1)</sup>. Khoury had other relatives in Kuwait such as Yusuf Bolus Khoury and his wife Mariana Hannoush.

The Christians played an important role in urban development in Kuwait, where they devised some patterns that distinguished this urban development.

On top of the list is Saba George Shiber<sup>(2)</sup>, architect and planning and development expert, who worked at the Kuwait Municipality and was famous for his creativity.

He was able, with his sense of geometric delicacy, to convey to Kuwait the arched market style, known as 'Qaysariyya', which prevailed in Andalusia.

Shiber believed they would not have adopted it had it not been useful since the roof was curved and arched to protect shoppers from the sun and rain.

Shiber presented the proposal to the Municipality which approved it immediately, making him the first engineer to introduce the 'Qaysariyya' concept when planning the markets, especially in the ninth commercial area in Kuwait. Thus, it became one of the landmarks of urban Kuwait.

All those facts clearly indicate that that period was the golden stage of Christians in Kuwait.

Many of them worked in the government and private sectors which respected their religious commitment, such as celebrating New Year's Eve. This tendency remained applicable in Kuwait Petroleum Corporation which used to hold a special party for the occasion until 1981.

A resolution issued by the Civil Service Bureau, No. 20 A, for the year 1981, on 30 Safar 1402 AH, corresponding to Decr 26, 1981, states:

On the occasion of New Year's Day, and in consistency with the Cabinet decision No. 43 of 1379 regarding public holidays, and as the New Year's Day falls on Friday, Jan 1, 1982, the Civil Service Bureau is pleased to announce to all government entities to stop their work on Saturday, Jan 2, 1982.

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(1) More details on the life of Jamila Khoury will follow in Chapter Seven of this book

(2) My Life's Journey between Science, Work and Love of Human Beings, Jamila Fadhel Khoury, Dar Al-Ma'aref for Publication, 1st edition, P131

Best Wishes

Bureau President

Bureau Undersecretary Bader Yusuf Al-Nasrallah

Flexibility remained the main characteristic of different consecutive Kuwaiti governments and it marked its relationship with the Christians in their everyday life.

Christians in Kuwait lived in a very tolerant society that was used to accepting the other, which was manifested in all the narratives of the elderly people.

One of them was Anwar Hussain Al-Nassar who came to Kuwait from Al-Khubar in Saudi Arabia in 1960 and spent most of his childhood in different areas such as Khaitan, Faiha and Surra.

He spoke about his memories at school, especially at the primary school in Abraq Khaitan<sup>(1)</sup>. "Since my early years, I experienced religious tolerance when Christian students were allowed to stay in or leave in Islamic religion classes, which never spoilt our relationship with them."

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(1) Al-Shahed Weekly Newspaper, Ver. 502, Saturday, 4/6/2014



*First celebration of Al-Jamil School. In the picture are Sheikh Hany Alam Al-Din, father of Sheikh Faud Al-Khazen and son-in-law of Emil Al-Bustani, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Education, Faisal Al-Saleh and Principal Khawla Rizq, General Manager in the ministry*



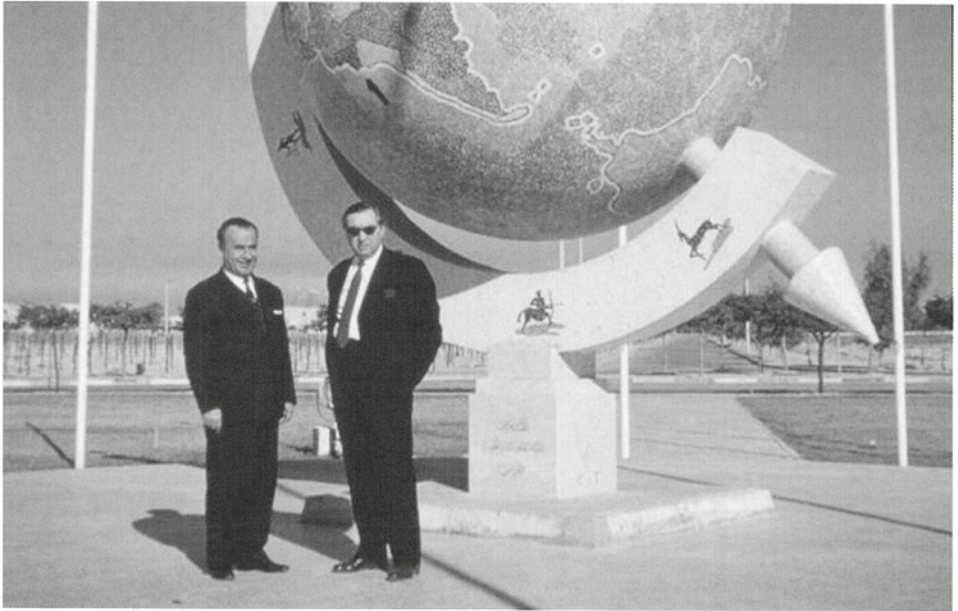
*Saba George Shiber*



*Ya'qub Shammās*



*Priest Yusuf Abdul-Noor*



*Emil Al-Bustani in front of a solid globe at the entrance of Shuwaikh Secondary School*

## **Chapter Six:**

- **Parliamentary Questions and Nationalization**
- **Under the Scrutiny of Legislation**



## Parliamentary Questions and Nationalization

Since the mid-seventies, the parliamentary questions regarding Christians became more urgent and the Abdullah Al-Salem Hall witnessed questions on various topics such as the presence of a missionary activity and questions about the current churches. Among the most significant questions were the following:

On January 26, 1970, MP Sulaiman Al-Thuwaikh<sup>(1)</sup> directed a parliamentary question through the Speaker of the Assembly to the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs regarding the church rituals and statues within its premises.

The question was as follows: "I came to know that the agreement between the government and representatives of churches at the time of its founding was on the basis that the ecclesiastical rituals and statues remain inside the church premises, not in its yards but recently some of them have been placed in the church compound, contrary to the agreement."

Later, during the session which was held on April 28, 1970, the MP who submitted the question said<sup>(2)</sup> that the response of the Minister and the Municipality Chairman was strange because they expressed their keenness on this matter while the Municipality confirmed that it would spare no efforts to protect the feelings of Muslims in this Muslim country.

Nevertheless, no attention was paid to the statues in the church compound which could be seen from hundreds of meters away. He wondered what keenness they spoke of and said: "If they were keen, why did they wait until they were questioned by the Parliament?"

He demanded the government to be more stringent toward religious practice and take into account the feelings of Muslims in this country.

On 3/2/1973, MP Falah Al-Hajraf through the Speaker of the Parliament directed a parliamentary query under No 6/3/3/130 to the Minister of Health. It read<sup>(3)</sup>: "I have come to know that some nurses working in the Ministry of Health are performing undercover missionary tasks. Was that true?"

The minister's response, under No 12 B-1-3499, refuted the MP Al-Hajraf's allegations. "We confirm that this claim is totally untrue. The ministry did not receive

(1) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 2, Session 0236, 10/3/1970, P66

(2) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 2, Session 0240, 28/4/1970, P2

(3) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 3, Session 0317, 17/11/1973, Annex 148, PP11-12

any complaints or information regarding the subject in question. We require the MP to provide us with documents or evidence, if any, in this regard, so we can start our investigations on it.”

The MP, however, was not convinced with the minister’s answer and demanded more investigation on this matter. He also necessitated that dressers and nurses should come from a Kuwaiti environment, assuring the minister that he had evidence that some nurses distribute the Bible to parents of the patients.

He went on to say a nurse visited a Kuwaiti family at their house and presented them a copy of the Bible which the family accepted and in turn presented the nurse with a copy of the Holy Qur’an, saying: “That is your present and that is mine. Let us see which is better.”

MP Al-Hajraf pointed that this incident was the basis for his parliamentary question to the minister, wondering that if we were Muslims and believe in our religion, God and Prophet, then how come all the nurses in Kuwait are non-Muslims?

He demanded that all qualified Kuwaiti nurses should be appointed after they were trained. He said, “Every head of department is Christian and every head nurse is Christian, so when is the ministry going to change this status”?

On March 21, 1973, MP Al-Hajraf directed another parliamentary query to the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs regarding churches in Kuwait.

The question was as follows<sup>(1)</sup>: “How many churches are there in Kuwait? Why are they so many? Why are they established in a country like Kuwait whose Constitution states that the country’s religion is Islam?”

The response of the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs said there are 8 churches in Kuwait; 5 in Qibla, 2 in Salmiya and one in Ahmadi. He added there are other churches where for some Christian denominations practice special rituals at the residences of clergymen.

As for the other part of the question, the minister referred to Article 35 of the Constitution of the State of Kuwait which reads: ‘Freedom of belief is absolute. The State protects the freedom of practicing religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals.’

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(1) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 3, Session 0321, 8/12/1973, PP9-10

MP Al-Hajraf was not impressed with the minister's answer. He said that despite Kuwait being a Muslim country, we only comply with the name since there is no one to defend Islam and its traditions and customs.

He demanded any religion that goes against Islam should be rejected, expressing his refusal to the minister's reply, asking him to apply the Islamic law because it is the religion of the country.

On March 1, 1976, MP Muhammad Ahmed Al-Rashid came up with a proposal and asked the National Assembly to endorse it and the government to apply it.

He said the current location of the church caused severe traffic jams especially on Sundays and during religious ceremonies due to the narrowness of Al-Hilali Road where the church is located.

Another reason, he added, was that the church was located in a crowded commercial area that contained ministries, banks, and vital public and private institutions.

Due to all of the aforementioned reasons, he suggested changing this location of the church to another place taking into account all the above mentioned criteria.

On May 31, 1980, MP Jassem Muhammad Al-Oun directed a parliamentary query to the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Abdul-Aziz Hussain, referring to the Municipality Council's approval on the structural plan for Qibla area, which included the removal of the church from that location. He finally asked the minister to define when exactly the removal was going to happen.

In his answer, the minister said that, in accordance with the Municipality Council's approval on the structural plan for Qibla area in his resolution No MB/73/9/80, dated 14/4/1980, the request had been forwarded to the Municipality's chief engineer to find an alternative location which had not yet been defined.

Al-Oun replied saying that the minister had taken six months to answer and highlighted two points. First, he said there were scenes of corruption on Sundays in the name of the Church, citing his previous experience as a criminal investigator for many years, and that was why he asked the government to quickly move the church to another location.

The other point was that the current location of the church caused a choking traffic jam. The minister affirmed that Al-Oun's remarks were the driving force

that pushed the officials of the regulatory affairs to decide to move the church to another location which he promised would happen soon.

On May 18, 1980, MP Jassem Al-Kharafi directed a question<sup>(1)</sup> to the then Minister of Interior, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah.

The question was generally about who were granted residence in Kuwait according to Article 23 bis of the Minister of Interior's resolution No 70 for the year 1976, including workers in the following churches:

- National Evangelical Church of Kuwait (NECK)
- The Catholic Church
- St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
- Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral
- Church of Our Lady of Arabia
- Evangelical Interior Church
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese
- Catholic Orthodox Archdiocese
- Assyrian Orthodox Church

The minister provided an account of the required names, according to the records of residency, in addition to those who obtained residence permits from the Ministry of Social Affairs in accordance with Article 18 of the Ministerial Decree No. 22 of the year 1975.

MP Al-Kharafi mentioned his question was based on previous queries about the existence of unlicensed non-Muslim houses of worship to illustrate the danger of giving it legitimacy.

He stressed the danger lies in the non-Muslim religious groups who were not even recognized in the West and their members roam around without license.

Al-Kharafi added those groups could be forming secret organizations that pose a threat to the society. He demanded that the government put an end to that and thanked the minister for his commitment to security and protecting the customs and traditions.

The minister replied that the ministry had shut down a number of unlicensed non-Muslim places of worship in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

(1) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 5, Session 0448, 7/12/1982, P62

On June 2, 1981 MP Jassem Al-Kharafi directed a parliamentary query<sup>(1)</sup> to the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs about the number of unlicensed non-Islamic houses of worship, their addresses, sources of funding and the number of followers of each religion.

He also requested a statement of the relative distribution of these numbers, the procedures followed for obtaining such a license and the laws regulating these procedures.

In addition, he asked whether there were any cases where such places were opened without a license and whether they were controlled by the state and what they were.

On 2/11/1981, the minister answered the first part of the question saying there were 3 licensed non-Muslim houses of worship: Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral; near the Sheraton Hotel, The Evangelical Interior Church; behind the General Department of Criminal Investigation and The Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi, and all 3 churches were funded by donations from their followers.

The minister added the ministry works in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior to keep an eye on unlicensed houses of worship.

Al-Kharafi commented that he presented to the Minister of Awqaf during the session a list of unlicensed churches and temples with the names their priests and post office addresses, demanding the ministries of Awqaf and Interior inform the Assembly of the procedures to be followed for shutting them down and the dates set for that purpose.

In 1983, MP Muhammad Ahmed Al-Rashid<sup>(2)</sup> asked the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs to provide him with a copy of the Municipality license to establish the church located near the Sheraton Hotel in Al-Watiya, as well as the date on which it was supposed to be moved.

The minister's reply came as follows: Based on the letter of the Secretary of the Government of the State of Kuwait No. 0/221/508 dated 9/3/1955, addressed to the Chairman of the General Works, containing the consent of HH the Amir to grant a free land on which to build a church for the Catholic community in Kuwait.

(1) Ministers Reply to MP's Questions, Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 2479, 12/9/1981, P3 - National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 5, Session 0423, 15/12/1981, P24, annex 39

(2) National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 5, Session 0475, 27/3/1984, PP36-37

It has been approved by the Construction Council in its session number 206, dated 30/5/1955, that a free land be allocated on which to build a church for the Catholic community in Kuwait.

The construction of the church was licensed under map No. 471 on 4/3/1962. The Church's land was leased upon a letter from the Cabinet Secretary to the Minister of Finance No. 312/451 dated 25/3/1967, stating the lease value was one dinar annually due to the inadmissibility of the land being registered in the name of the Church.

The Church is located within the Qibla Area Project which is currently under regulatory study and was decided to be moved to an alternative location under the Municipality Council's resolution No. M B 73/9/80, dated 14/4/1980.

Kuwait Municipality Licensing and Construction Control Section Construction Permit Request.

I, the undersigned, Bishop Stella, wish to be granted a license for the construction described below:

Owner's Name: Bishop Stella; Address of Owner: Catholic Church, near Jahra Gate; Use of the Construction Required: Religious Festivals Number of floors: 1; Region: Near Jahra Gate Date: 1962 Signature: Eng. Yusuf Al-Mallah; Reviews of the Head of Licensing and Construction Control Section Date: 4/3/1962

Head of Licensing and Construction Control Section  
Construction Licensing Committee Report  
License No. 471 was issued.  
From the General Manager of the Municipality  
Esteemed Minister of Finance  
Housing Department  
Greetings

Topic: the Land of the Catholic Church in Qibla

According to the Secretariat of the Cabinet, in its session No. 13-67 in March 12, 1967, the Cabinet had studied the Housing Management Memo No. 348, dated 9/1/1967 regarding the above subject, and decided to conclude a long term lease with the Catholic Church for the value of one KD annually due to the inadmissibility of registering this land in the name of the Church since it contradicts with the laws.

42/6220

9/6/55

Esteemed Mr. Abdulla Al-Mulla,  
Secretary of the Government of Kuwait  
Topic: Free allocation of a land for the  
Construction of the Catholic Church

The Construction Council, on its session dated 30.5.1955, and in in response to your letter No. S / 221 / 508, dated 03.09.1955, has decided to approve the allocation of a free land on which to build the Catholic Church.

Signature: Secretary of the Construction Council  
Tal'at Al-Ghussain

MP Al-Rashid commented on the details of all those correspondences, saying that in accordance with all of them, it had been decided in 14/4/1980 that the church be moved and that, at that time at the end of March 1984, the Municipality had not done that yet.

He added tens of mosques were removed from their locations on the sea shore after only days of the decision being made. He wondered if the mosque had less value and respect than the church. He pointed out that he had raised the issue of this church since the first Assembly meeting in 1963.

### **Nationality obtained**

Another evidence that the Christian existence at that time was under parliamentary scrutiny, is that MP Rashid Saif Al-Hujailan directed a question at the then Minister of Interior, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, demanding the names of all those who obtained the Kuwaiti nationality of all its categories since the enactment of the Nationalization Law until the date of the parliamentary question was raised on 09/11/1981.

The Minister of Interior informed the Assembly of his answer. He pointed out that the number of non-Muslims who obtained the Kuwaiti nationality until 22/11/1981 was 91 men, women and children.

Twenty-two of them were annexed to the files of their fathers or wives. He also said<sup>(1)</sup> that those 91 people obtained the nationality since the enactment of the

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(1) Parliamentary Affairs Editor, Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 2532, 20/2/1982, P5

Nationalization Law in 1959 and that 3 of them were dead by that time and one of them abdicated the Kuwaiti nationality after returning to his home country, India.

Another person and his wife converted to Islam after they had obtained the nationality. He changed his name from Edward to Anwar while his wife changed her name to Hidaya.

The following is the list of the names of 91 persons<sup>(1)</sup>.

No.	Name	Remarks
1.	Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar	
2.	Yusuf Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar	Annexed to his file is his son (Khalil, born 1970)
3.	Nabil Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar	Annexed to his file are his two children (Bassam, born 1976, Ghada, born 1978)
4.	Suhail Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar	
5.	Nuha Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar	
6.	Liza Habib Hakim	W/O Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar
7.	Jocelyn Rain Eskandar Shuwairy	W/O Yusuf Khalil Shuhaibar
8.	Amal Fuad Asfour	W/O Nabil Khalil Shuhaibar
1.	Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	
2.	Bassem Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	Annexed to his file are his children (Khalid, born 1963, Khalida, born 1974, Khuloud, born 1977)
3.	Hanna Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	Annexed to his file are his wife Suhaila Sami Bishara and his two daughters (Rana, born 1967, Rania, born 1977)
4.	Ibrahim Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	Annexed to his file is his son (Adib, born 1964)
5.	Hani Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	Annexed to his file is his son (Jabra, born 1973)
6.	Bolony Bassem Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	
7.	Imad Hanna Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	
8.	Najwa Jabra Issa Shuhaibar	
9.	Sawsana Ibrahim Jadoun	W/O Jabra Issa Shuhaibar
10.	Patricia Mafs Lloyd	W/O Bassem Jabra Issa Shuhaibar
11.	Silva Krykor Pedros	W/O Hani Jabra Issa Shuhaibar
1.	Sami Salim Yusuf Bishara <sup>(2)</sup>	Annexed to his file is his wife Melvina Nakhla Bishara
2.	Widad Sami Salim Yusuf Bishara	

(1) Reply came from HH Sheikh Nawwaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in his capacity as the Minister of Interior on 22/11/1981- National Assembly Minutes, Chapter 5, Session 0426, 13/2/1982, Annex 50, PP83-86

(2) A family of Palestinian origins

No.	Name	Remarks
1.	Yusuf Daniel Roa	Annexed to his file are his children (Jumana, born 1965, Lina, born 1967, Walid, born 1970)
2.	Kenneth Daniel Roa	Annexed to his file are his wife Fifi and daughter Rania
1.	Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib <sup>(1)</sup>	Deceased
2.	Nabila Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	
3.	Huda Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	
4.	Thurayya Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	
5.	Nael Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	Annexed to his file is his daughter (Nada, born 1980)
6.	Nihad Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	
7.	Emmanuel Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	Annexed to his file is his wife Lamy'a' Khalil Ibrahim and two daughters (Basma, born 1976, Hadeel, born 1980)
8.	Nabil Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib	
9.	Rifqa Ibrahim Alous	Widow of Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib
1.	Sulaiman Dawood Nu'man <sup>(2)</sup>	Annexed to his file is his wife Janette Tuma Bakas and son (A'la', born 1976)
2.	A'hed Sulaiman Dawood Nu'man	
3.	Alia Sulaiman Dawood Nu'man	
4.	Ayed Sulaiman Dawood Nu'man	
1.	Kamel Dawood Nu'man	Annexed to his file is his wife Janette Naeem Hanna
2.	Bader Kamel Dawood Nu'man	Annexed to his file is his wife Jinan Jboury Ya'qub and children (Wijdan, born 1976, Thamer, born 1980, Nader, born 1980)
3.	Ibtisam Kamel Dawood Nu'man	
4.	Sabah Kamel Dawood Nu'man	
5.	Bassam Kamel Dawood Nu'man	
6.	Jamal Kamel Dawood Nu'man	
7.	Fayeda Kamel Dawood Nu'man	

(1) He was born in Southeast Turkey and immigrated to Kuwait in 1928 upon an invitation from his uncle Ya'qub Shammās. After the death of his father in WWI, he moved to Lebanon where he joined the Red Cross and lived in refugee camps. He later came to Kuwait before leaving to Bahrain where he stayed for 12 years with his two uncles; Sama'n, father of Sulaiman Shammās, and Hanna Shammās who worked in the mission's hospital. When he came back to Kuwait, he worked in the mission's hospital until it was shut down on 01/03/1967. He then moved to the Ministry of Health and obtained the Kuwaiti nationality in 1950.

(2) An Arab family who came to Kuwait from Iraq

No.	Name	Remarks
1.	Kufakim George Hufakian	Registered with him is son (Hoby, born 1951 and has not yet obtained Kuwaiti nationality)
2.	George Kufakim George	
3.	Afifa Geryes Nassar	W/O Kufakim George Hufakian
1.	Ya'qub Shammas Ibrahim Shammas <sup>(1)</sup>	Annexed to his file is his wife Esther Mirza Mady Atrak
2.	Saeed Ya'qub Shammas	
3.	Wael Saeed Ya'qub Shammas	
4.	Lina Saeed Ya'qub Shammas	
5.	Basima Samuel Antar	W/O Saeed Ya'qub Shammas
1.	Sabry Sama'n Shammas <sup>(2)</sup>	Deceased
2.	Hanan Sabry Sama'n Shammas	
3.	Wijdan Sabry Sama'n Shammas	
4.	Samir Sabry Sama'n Shammas	
5.	Fahima Karabit Abdul-Ahad	W/O Sabry Sama'n Shammas
1.	Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim <sup>(3)</sup>	(Deceased)
2.	Nabil Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim	
3.	Amal Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim	
4.	Basima Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim	
5.	Fayza Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim	
6.	Bassem Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim	
7.	Lamia' Karabit Abdul-Ahad	Widow of Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim
1.	Mathews Shako Vadakan	Denounced Kuwaiti nationality after regaining his original Indian nationality
2.	Stephan Mathews Shako Vadakan	
3.	Ann Lucy Mathews Shako Vadakan	
1.	Malika Al-Khoury	
2.	Alice Ibrahim Tannous	
3.	Anisa Antoine Mansy	

(1) Ya'qub Shammas worked in the mission and the hospital and also supervised the Bible Shop.

(2) They were among the families that came from South Turkey. His father Sama'n Shammas had worked in the American Mission in Bahrain before he came to Kuwait.

(3) He worked as a pharmacist in the mission's hospital in Kuwait.

No.	Name	Remarks
1.	Kamil Shahin Al-Rayyes <sup>(1)</sup>	Annexed to his file is his wife Farida Anisa Jaber and children (Samera, born 1960, Zaher, born 1961, Badry, born 1962)
2.	Samer Kamil Shahin Al-Rayyes	
1.	Edward Ya'qub Thomas	Annexed to his file is his wife Odit Khasho Michael and children (Nahed, born 1965, Amany, born 1968, Ya'qub, born 1969) He converted to Islam on 10/6/1981 and presented a request to change his name in the Kuwaiti nationality to Anwar Ya'qub Thomas Bahnan Al-Khabbaz, and also to change his wife's name to Hidayah Ya'qub Abdullah after she had converted to Islam
1.	Henry Dawood Nu'man	Annexed to his file is his wife Elizabeth Ya'qub Shammas and son (Nawwaf , born 1961)
2.	Nadia Henry Dawood Nu'man	
3.	Nawal Henry Dawood Nu'man	
4.	Nael Henry Dawood Nu'man	
1.	Ghanim Georges Salman (Deceased)	Annexed to his file are his children (Sinan, born 1973, Dana, born 1967)
2.	Nawal Yusuf Fathallah	Widow of Ghanim Georges Salman
3.	Barakat Georges Salman	Annexed to his file is his wife Nadira Dawood Nu'man
4.	Nader Barakat Georges Salman	
5.	Salem Georges Salman	
6.	Kebro Lehdo Mousa	Annexed to his file is his wife Mary Sarkis
7.	Ismael Ibrahim Kadwa	
8.	Sabih Ya'qub Mansour <sup>(2)</sup>	Annexed to his file are his wife Nasy Abdul-Masih Gabriel and daughters (Nada, born 1963, Shatha, born 1967, Nuha, born 1972)
9.	Maha Sabih Ya'qub Mansour	
10.	Sahar Sabih Ya'qub Mansour	
11.	Sabih Dawood Al-Mousa	Annexed to his file are his wife Nazhat Wadia' Mousa and daughter (Lubna, born 1961)
12.	Khuloud Sabih Dawood Al-Mousa	
13.	Khaldoun Sabih Dawood Al-Mousa	
14.	Sabah Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas Ibrahim	
15.	Daniel Roa	
<b>91</b>	<b>TOTAL NUMBER</b>	

(1) Although his name was mentioned in the official record of the Ministry of Interior, it is well known that the family belongs to the Unitarian Druze, an Islamic sect, in Lebanon. His father was the private doctor for the late Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. His son, Samer, is a gynecologist.

(2) The family used to manage the properties and lands of Al-Sabah family in Iraq and they fled after tension aroused with some factions who tried to put their hands on the lands.

# Under the Scrutiny of Legislation

## Nationalization Law And The Changes

On April 4, 1981, MPs Ahmed Al-Sadoun, Muhammad Ahmed Al-Mershid and Muhammad Al-Rashid proposed a draft law amendment of the Nationalization Law.

In its session dated on Dec 22, 1981, the Kuwaiti National Assembly approved Legislative Decree No. 100 for the year 1980 after discussions were delayed five times due to lack of quorum.

The Assembly also approved the draft amendment to the decree presented by the 3 MPs which limited granting the Kuwaiti nationality to Muslims only, and thus closed the door on Christian citizenship.

The session witnessed an important debate about a segment of people who were classified under the category 'great services'. This amendment sparked another debate about the people who obtain citizenship by extension, such as wives and children, especially if the person converted from Islam.

It was His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed's decisive stand that made things clear when he was minister of Foreign Affairs. He confirmed that the government approved the amendment, but it will not apply to Christians who have already obtained citizenship. Here's a summary of what happened in that session:

At the beginning of the discussions, many MPs talked in support of the amendment and MP Muhammad Al-Mershid explained that the amendment was not aimed at the followers of a specific religion, but it just made Islam a prerequisite for obtaining the Kuwaiti nationality.

Despite confirming his absolute respect for Christians, he rejected granting them the nationality on the basis of 'great services'. He assured the condition of being Muslim was made due to the small number of the Kuwaiti population, citing that minorities did not pose any threat but could have future consequences.

He pointed out the amendment did not include those who obtained the nationality beforehand, and that some Nasara (Christians) did really provide great services to the country but could be compensated in other ways.

He reiterated what his colleague Jassem Al-Saqer mentioned about Dr. Stanley Mylrea on whom they had many reservations despite his great services because of his political missionary activities.

MP Mishary Al-Anjari supported the amendment and said it should be applied because nationalization is one of the most dangerous laws, calling for the authorities to be very strict.

However, he said they should not overlook the special cases where people had really performed great services, and said an ad hoc committee should be formed to clarify more the meaning of 'great services'.

MP Ahmed Al-Sadoun, one of the presenters of the amendment, said the proposition was made before parliamentary life was reignited, and that people were afraid it would open the door wide for those who seek the Kuwaiti nationality.

He added the last census showed that the population of Kuwait was 1.5 million, less than 50 percent of them were citizens. That was why, he clarified, they needed to alleviate their fears and set certain procedures for the law.

Al-Sadoun said the number of applicants asking to obtain citizenship was 65,000 which will rise to 260,000 when their relatives are counted, according to the 1980 census.

He added that there were many nationalities in Kuwait which include the pagans, Buddhists and Christians, so it was necessary to impose the condition of being Muslim.

According to him, that condition was never supposed to cause any embarrassment in light of the missionary activities of most religions. He wondered why they should be embarrassed when those who came to Kuwait to perform missionary tasks did not feel ashamed.

MP Jassem Al-Saqer said when he commented on that condition, it had not come to his mind that he might be adding intruding non-Muslim elements to the society.

He said: "When MP Al-Mershid quoted me saying that the nationalization law was applicable for Jews, it was not correct, because Jews prior to the Jewish State are different from those who came after it.

No Arab Muslim can even think of bringing a Jew into a Muslim society; otherwise we would be reinforcing other political movements in our Arab region.

There was, for example, the Maronite State, which was being discussed in Lebanon. This way, we would be condemning ourselves unconsciously.

In the international law, there are some rules that cause embarrassment for the Kuwaiti legislator, in addition to the fact that Islam allows us to marry women from the People of the Book. The international law states that a woman should obtain her husband's nationality. So, if a Kuwaiti man married a Christian woman, what should we do then?"

He then added: "Al-Mershid also quoted me talking of Dr. Mylrea's great services for our country, but that did not necessarily mean that I consider him a good example when it comes to values."

Al-Saqer concluded saying: "Constitutional jurisprudence did not commit MPs to the views of their voters but to their own beliefs and views. In response to what I felt from my voters, I would like to say that I do not hold to what I had said in a previous session on this subject."

Al-Saqer later said that had it been a secret session, he would have had elaborated more.

MP Muhammad Al-Rashid wondered how the government did not know about 32 unlicensed churches and that tens of mosques were removed from their locations from the seaside while the government did nothing to remove one church that existed in an unsuitable location.

He called on the government to shut down all unlicensed churches and deport those in charge of them, and confirmed his support for granting nationality only to Muslims.

The then Deputy PM, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Acting Minister of Information, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said: "To show our cooperation, I did not think the government opposed that. But I believed the law defining the number of persons to be granted the nationality should be issued by the government," assuring that the Christians who had already obtained the nationality would be excluded from the amendment.

## **The origion and the branch**

Some MPs discussed the legal status of those who obtained the nationality then abandoned Islam. On this matter, MP Jassem Al-Kharafi said that the branch followed the origin and that the nationality should be withdrawn from the branch so that the origin would think a thousand times before committing any wrongdoing.

MP Muhammad Al-Mershid said that this point could be a source of manipulation for those who converted to Islam in order to obtain the nationality and then abandon Islam afterwards.

On the other hand, MP Adnan Abdul-Samad argued that a Muslim wife should not be victimized if her husband abandoned Islam.

MP Faisal Sarkhoh said withdrawing the nationality is a punishment, and according to Article 33 of the Constitution of Kuwait which states that penalty is personal, they would be violating the Constitution had they withdrawn the nationality from wives or children of those who abandoned Islam.

But MP Al-Kharafi disagreed, saying that it was not a punishment but rather a restoration of a right given and not respected. He made it clear that whoever obtained the nationality should be fully aware of his commitments towards it.

Eventually, MP Al-Sadoun settled the matter when he said that Decree No 100 stated that withdrawal of the nationality from a person includes withdrawing it from his branches.

After voting on the decree, it was approved by a majority of 47 votes<sup>(1)</sup> and was published in the official gazette.

### **Decree No. 15 for the Year 1959**

Before that amendment, the Nationalization Law was governed by the Amiri Decree No. 15 for the year 1959 which defined Kuwaitis as “those who settled in Kuwait before 1920 and stayed in it in a regular manner.”

Those were considered the persons who established Kuwait, while the others obtained the nationality according to articles 2, 5 and 7 of the law. After that law was passed, some Christians applied for the nationality and later obtained, becoming the nuclei of Christians in Kuwait, whose names appeared in the report of the Ministry of Interior.

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(1) Refer to the National Assembly discussions regarding the amendment, Al-Qabas Newspaper, Ver. 3454, Wednesday, 23/12/1981, P4-5

## Split decision

The amendment caused a big dispute, reflecting the diversity in the Kuwaiti society as well as the split between advocates of secularism and those who were more extreme.

Among those who opposed the amendment was journalist Muhammad Musaed Al-Saleh who<sup>(1)</sup> approved the state's right to regulate its laws but thought the amendment was based on economic and demographic factors.

He believed the nationality should not be granted as MPs wish or according to their interests but rather upon detailed demographic analysis.

He said the amendment was based on fears of missionary and political activities resulting from a single incident, expressing his astonishment that the law was amended because someone had made a mistake.

Being an Islamic country, he argued, does not mean all citizens ought to be Muslims, and the same applies to many other Arab countries where the Constitution states the same and we find Christians and Jews.

He concluded that his opposition to the amendment stems from the contradiction with articles 21 & 35 of the Constitution.

Another opposing opinion came from the editor-in-chief of Al-Rai Al-A'am newspaper, Mr. Abdul-Aziz Al-Masaeed<sup>(2)</sup>. He defended the distinguished medical services of famous Dr. George Abouna<sup>(3)</sup> all over Kuwait, wondering how such a great man could not be granted the Kuwaiti nationality only because he was not Muslim.

He added that "despite our absolute pride in our religion, Islam, we think this exclusivity was wrong. There was a clear acceptance of the People of the Book in our religion and in the Holy Qur'an.

"There were many Christians who provided great services and obtained the nationality, so do we now have to come up with such legislation that neither serves our religion nor our country?"

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(1) The seminar was held in the Kuwaiti Graduates Society on 1/2/1982 where the main speakers were journalist Muhammad Musaed Al-Saleh and Dr. Othman Abdul-Malek. Some of its contents were published in Al-Seyassah newspaper, Ver. 4885, 2/2/1982, P4

(2) Abdul-Aziz Fahad Al-Masaeed wrote his opinion on the issue in his column Sabah Al-Khair in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 6512, 29/12/1981, P6

(3) For more details on Dr. George Abouna, See Chapter Seven of this book.

“Unless there was a breach to our religion, Kuwait ought to remain a safe haven for all those who deserve to be Kuwaiti regardless of their religions.

“Security does not come with introversion but rather by setting examples of good deeds. That amendment witnessed an unnecessary interjection of an unjustifiable matter which in no way serves our religion.”

Former minister and MP Ahmed Baqer<sup>(1)</sup> refuted the view that assigning the condition of being Muslim was baseless. “This condition does not contradict with Islam which frankly accepted the People of the Book.

“Although Islamic law made people equal in jurisdiction and prohibited injustice towards the unbelievers, it ordered us to distinguish Muslims from Christians and Jews for religious interests.

“God ordered us to take tribute from Christians and Jews and not from Muslims. This policy of distinguishing Muslims in their own homelands is an urgent need that carries great interests, and it does not mean any oppression of Christians and Jews who freely practice their religious rituals in Muslim countries.”

Baqer also believed this amendment did not contradict with the Constitution because people are equal before the law in terms of rights, duties and freedom of belief, which are the guaranteed rights of every resident in Kuwait whether Kuwaiti or not.”

Regarding the withdrawal of nationality in case of a non-Muslim practice, Baqer said that committing such a practice does not mean a person has abandoned Islam.

With regard to violating international law, Baqer argued that the law we were ordered to follow is God’s law and that if those who wanted to abide by the UN laws and dump the Sharia’ laws, then they had to accept the Jewish State which was acknowledged by international laws and the UN.

Other opinions adopted more detailed views in connection with the developments taking place in other countries, such as Lebanon where the civil war was tearing the country apart, and Egypt after signing Camp David accords.

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(1) The entire article entitled Discussions on the New Nationalization Law was published in Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 2254, 19/3/1982, P7

Writer Abdullah Ahmed Hussain<sup>(1)</sup> suggested granting the nationality only to Arabs, whether Muslims or Christians, and denying those Muslims who described Arab Nationalism as Zionism.

He also refused granting the nationality to any member of the Lebanese Phalangist Party and the National Liberal Party<sup>(2)</sup>. He believed that a certain group of Christians had done harm to Arabism but that only condemns the Christian parties and not the Arab Christian citizens.

### **Between efficiency and human reality**

Away from the driving force behind that amendment and the level of its political correctness, making this privilege exclusive to Muslims has had some negative effects, specifically on those highly qualified Christian personnel who served for long years and were very loyal to Kuwait and helped improve the country.

Every time one of those was pensioned off or had his term terminated, the issue would surface again and develop into a stormy discussion. This was the case with the prominent banker Ibrahim Dabdoub, whom the Al-Bayan newspaper in the UAE highlighted in an article titled Ibrahim Dabdoub, the Kuwaiti<sup>(3)</sup>.

“It is really amazing for a person to live in a country for more than fifty years, without having the right for nationality! And I wish the ban was optional or an act of sovereignty; that would have been much easier or excusable!

But for this ban to be forced by the law against a man who served Kuwait in the darkest periods of its history is a marvel. That is the case of the NBK Group CEO Ibrahim Dabdoub, who served the bank for 53 consecutive years.”

This reality is also bitterly expressed by some Christian Kuwaiti citizen. The Evangelical Church Pastor, Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, says that “when the law was first introduced by the Amiri Decree in 1959, it had not distinguished between the rights of the Muslims and Christians for citizenship but after the amendment, it neglected our rights as a minority.

“It prevented many highly qualified persons from being naturalized despite their huge contribution to the country. There is a human side to the story as well.

(1) Writer Abdullah Ahmed Hussain, Nationalization Law: Arabs Are the Material of Islam, Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 2532, 20/2/1982, P10

(2) Both are Lebanese political parties, the latter was founded by Kamil Shamo'un.

(3) Ibrahim Dabdoub, the Kuwaiti, Al-Bayan Amirati Newspaper, 26/12/2013

Kuwaiti Christian widows cannot have their children naturalized while Muslim Kuwaiti women, whether widowed or divorced, have that privilege according to Article 5 of the law.”

The argument regarding the nationality remains enclosed between two jurisprudential opinions that have long been a source of dispute inside and outside Kuwait.

The first opinion considers naturalization an acquired right for a person who has stayed in the country long enough and was known for his good conduct while the other considers naturalization an act of sovereignty which the government grants to whoever it thinks deserves it at its own discretion.

Law No. /53/2001

Talking of laws related to Christians or equality between citizens regardless of their affiliations, law No. 53/2001 was issued in 2001 consisting of 8 conditions for employment in the General Department of Investigation, one of which was being a Muslim.

Many thought the law was unconstitutional and lawyer Salah Al-Hashem filed a lawsuit, representing many citizens, against the National Assembly and the Cabinet, demanding the law be repealed because it violated the Constitution by discriminating between citizens on the basis of religion.

At that time, the Ministry of Interior published in local newspapers a vacancy for the post of a legal researcher, provided the applicant was a Muslim<sup>(1)</sup>.

In response, the Al-Qabas newspaper columnist Ahmed Al-Sarraf<sup>(2)</sup> said whoever wrote that notice did not know that the General Department of Investigation was founded by a Christian Kuwaiti, the late Khalil Shuhaibar<sup>(3)</sup>, who worked for years as a senior officer in the Ministry of Interior until he was appointed Assistant Undersecretary before he retired with hands clean.

### **Status of the non-Muslim woman**

The Personal Status Law prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men while it did not compel non-Muslim women to convert to Islam in order to marry Muslim men.

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(1) Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Newspaper, Ver. 8765, Monday, 27/11/2002, P8

(2) Kalam Al-Nas, Requested: a Kuwaiti Christian, Ahmed Al-Sarraf, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 26/11/2002, P13

(3) More elaboration on his life is provided in Chapter Seven of this book.

The US State Department report on religious freedom stated that “many non-Muslim women face severe economic and social pressure to convert to Islam, citing that divorce gave the Muslim father automatic custody of the children.

“A woman who does not convert to Islam is ineligible for nationality, citizenship rights nor inheritance from her husband except when she is the beneficiary in an official will.”

Things got even more complicated when all those factors were coincidentally combined in one case. A Kuwaiti Christian<sup>(1)</sup>, whose wife was a foreign Christian, thought of allowing his wife to convert to Islam so as to be able to obtain the nationality.

“However, he was astonished to know that in case she did convert to Islam, he would be forced to divorce her since Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men.

“Consequently, he found himself obliged to give up one of his rights only because he was Christian. Jamal Nu'man<sup>(2)</sup> commented on such human cases resulting from the enforcement of that law and the example he used was his cousins.

“They were not Kuwaitis since their father passed away before the law had been enacted, and while they decided not to leave Kuwait, they sacrificed the chance of obtaining any other nationality.

“He thought that withdrawing the nationality in such cases was a huge injustice, taking into account that their father died and was buried in Kuwait while they were still very young.

At that time, added Nu'man, the issue of the nationality was not that important and no one stood in need of it because they were busy making their living in a desert country where resources were too scarce.

“He remembered his father who owned a garage to repair cars. People at that time would offer him a piece of land instead of money, and he would reject it, explaining; “what should I do with the land? Am I supposed to feed my children with dust?”

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(1) This case was mentioned in Al-Talia' Newspaper, Ver. 1571, 5/4/2003, P1

(2) Interview conducted by the author on 1/5/2014

**Chapter Seven:  
Prominent Christian Figures in Leading Positions**



## Prominent Christian Figures in Leading Positions

Christian existence in Kuwait left a remarkable impression on all sides and broke any restrictions that would have made it marginal. Many prominent Christians, citizens as well as residents, mirrored this reality when they held leading positions in both public and private sectors.

Some of those were in charge of positions of very sensitive nature, reflecting the political leadership's total trust in their capabilities and efficiency throughout the decades whether in security or diplomatic positions.

It is worth mentioning that very few of those prominent Christian figures were widely known since the majority of them preferred to keep a low profile and work in silence without any propaganda despite their great achievements.

### **Saeed Ya'qub Ibrahim Shammās first Kuwaiti Consul**

He was one of the ambassadors of Kuwait and was born in 1927 and graduated from the Faculty of Politics and Economics.

He was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Aug 18, 1962 and headed the Kuwaiti Consulate in New York until July 14, 1963.

In December 1963, he was appointed Ambassador to the USSR and Socialist Republics, and on Jan 9, 1967, he was appointed Ambassador to France until October 1969 when he was appointed Chief of Protocol Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Nov 23 the same year<sup>(1)</sup>. In 1972, he was appointed Ambassador to Kenya in North Africa.

Through his different diplomatic missions, Ambassador Saeed Ya'qub Shammās was part of many important stages, most important the recognition of the independence of Kuwait on June 19, 1961.

The then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, raised the Kuwaiti flag in front of the UN headquarters. At that time, Shammās was still a Consul and he raised the Kuwaiti flag in 1963 at the Rockefeller Center, named after the Rockefeller family who owns several buildings and squares.

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(1) Abridged Kuwaiti Encyclopedia, Hamad Al-Sa'idan, Part 2, 1st Edition, 1971, P822

At that time, the Kuwait Consulate was based in the Rockefeller Plaza, and was officially invited by the family to raise the flag in the center including a group of Kuwaiti students, who had recently arrived as the first batch of students to the US in addition to the employees of the minOil company.

The wife of Ambassador Shammās, Basima, witnessed the event and said<sup>(1)</sup> “I witnessed Kuwait joining the UN and worked to promote it.”

Another event the Ambassador took part in was in 1969 when, after Charles de Gaulle’s resignation, the Amir of Bahrain Sheikh Issa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, visited France and met the Arab and Gulf Ambassadors, and Shammās was among them. The Bahraini Amir was accompanied by Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Jabra Issa Shuhaibar**

He started his career in occupied Palestine where he worked with the police force in the British Government, before moving to Beersheba and then to Hebron.

He came back later to work as an officer in Nablus for a year and was then moved to Acre where he stayed until the Israeli occupation. As a result, he immigrated with his family to the city of Jezzine in Lebanon.

Having his sons moved to Kuwait, the family followed them after communicating with Izzat Jaafar, one of the secretaries of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Jabra Shuhaibar and his family lived in Qibla, currently known as Fahad Al-Salem Street, in a place called Al-Saheed. A year later, the family moved to the 2nd floor in the General Security building and became neighbors of Al-Khadhra and Al-Qaddoumy families.

Again he switched places, this time to Shuwaikh near the Al-Salam Palace, just when the General Security body was changing into the Police Service. Afterwards, the family was given housing units in Khaldiya in 1963.

Jabra Issa Shuhaibar was assigned to undertake many tasks within the framework of constructing a comprehensive security system. One of these tasks was to organize the Amiri Guard and it was supposedly him who changed their military

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(1) A reportage on the National Day of Kuwait, by Samira Fraimesh & Isra’ Jawhar, Al-Nahar Newspaper, Ver. 173, 25/2/2008

(2) A caption of a photo in Al-Qabas Newspaper, 20/12/2008

uniform into black and white, similar to that of the British Royal Guard, in addition to the head scarf and band.

Jabra Shuhaibar also contributed in improving the General Security Force where he was known as Corporal Jabra.

In the early 1950s, Sheikh Sa'ad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah was appointed Deputy Chief of Police then Head of General Security in 1961.

When the General Security was changed into the Police Service, Jabra Shuhaibar moved to the army with Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, who was the Commander-in-Chief, where he worked on improving the administrative side from his office in the G1 Camp<sup>(1)</sup> until his retirement in 1962. He died after the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait.

Major-General Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar -- founder of the modern police force

Long before the independence of Kuwait, he was known as a distinguished and energetic military man.

He gradually climbed through military ranks until he was appointed Assistant Undersecretary for Security Affairs in the Ministry of Interior in 1975.

Major-General Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar was known for his military and moral discipline. Due to the sensitivity of the Police Force and its huge responsibilities, he used to inspect the police personnel in the night and in the early hours of dawn with his famous shout of (awake.. awake) to make sure every individual was in his place.

Major-General Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar was well known all over Kuwait in general and in Qibla in particular, as the founder and organizer of the modern police force alongside his brother Jabra and Fawzi Al-Khadhra.

Major-General Khalil's sons are: Yusuf (former official at Souq Al-Manakh), Dr. Suhail, Kuwait Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation, Nabil, an officer and Marwan, an employee.

Among the Shuhaibar family are: Raouf, who worked with Izzat Jaafar and was the first migrant from Gaza to Kuwait with Muhammad Farwana, Badi'a, a merchant and Bassem, Senior Pilot at Kuwait Airways.

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(1) It is the G-Zone, a system of numbering adopted by the English Army

This is in addition to Dr. Yusuf Khalil Shuhaibar, Dr. Suhail Shuhaibar, Kuwait's Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation and dean of Ambassadors there, retired General Dr. Nabil Shuhaibar and Basel Shuhaibar.

Ibrahim Jabra Issa Shuhaibar -- health and education icon

He was born on June 25, 1930 in Hebron<sup>(1)</sup> in occupied Palestine<sup>(2)</sup> and was named after the city which took its name from Prophet Abraham. He grew up moving between three cities; his hometown, Jerusalem and Gaza because of his father's military tasks.

He finished his preliminary study in the public schools in Gaza during the British occupation and continued his intermediate and secondary studies in the English School where he obtained his high school certificate, called Matriculation at that time.

Shuhaibar's family, which came from Gaza, was so wealthy that they donated a land free of charge to build the Gaza Airport. Most of the family members were either government employees or merchants who owned large orange groves and other citrus fruit plantation before Shuhaibar was dispersed by the Israeli occupiers and forced to migrate with his family to Jezzine in Lebanon in 1947.

After acquiring his Matriculation certificate<sup>(3)</sup> he was about to take the test in Jerusalem, when some parents arranged for his escape with other students in a rented car that drove them to Nablus and then to Acre where his father was waiting for him before the city was occupied.

At the age of 18 and after a short while in Lebanon, upon the request of his brother, he came to Kuwait in December 1948 with the help of Izzat Jaafar. He was received by his elder brother, his cousin Raouf and Muhammad Salim Farwana.

At the beginning, Ibrahim lived with his brother and cousin Raouf in the Dahla neighborhood at the site of the Baladiya Garden on the Jahra Street opposite the Jews' houses.

He worked as a clerk for Hajj Khalifa Al-Ghanim as a registrar for cars carrying goods from Shuwaikh Port. He later worked for a contracting company that had just won a tender for the forestation of Ahmadi.

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(1) Interview with Ibrahim Shuhaibar conducted by Jassem Abbas, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 3/1/2014, P13

(2) Interview with Ibrahim Shuhaibar conducted by Mansour Al-Hajery, Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 10683, 20/9/1996, P4

(3) The matriculation certificate practically equals the general secondary certificate and remained acknowledged until 1960 when the Egyptian Tawjih system was adopted in Palestinian schools.

He then moved to live with the company workers before they won another tender with the KOC to build an oil pump.

In 1949, his father Jabra Shuhaibar came to Kuwait and won absolute trust of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak who asked him to organize the General Security.

The position his father, Jabra Shuhaibar held, paved the way for him to change his career in life. They met Mr. Jordan, chairman of KOC, and later joined the company's hospital whose ratio of Kuwaiti employees was no more than 2 percent in 1949.

The hospital was located in Maqwa'a and consisted of iron-sheet caravans, had an operation theater and a room for doctors. Ibrahim Shuhaibar lived there for 5 years and started work as a clerk, making use of his fluency in English which enabled him to communicate with other workers who were mostly British and Indian. His salary was 210 rupees plus 30 rupees as a lodging compensation for his stay in the tent.

Ibrahim Shuhaibar continued in this job until 1952 when he moved to health department and 4 years later, became the first Kuwaiti to travel on a scholarship to Lebanon.

He studied Health Education and Preventive Screening in the Faculty of Health at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and came back to Kuwait in 1958 to become the first health advisor in the KOC hospital in Ahmadi where he established the Health Counseling Department with Dr. Tom.

Ibrahim Jabra was not satisfied with what he had achieved at the scientific level. He traveled on a scholarship to Pennsylvania and after two and half years, obtained an MA in administration. He later took charge of the hospital in 1968 until his retirement in 1976.

When he was working at the KOC hospital, he established a travel agency near the old NBK building before agreeing with his brother who lives in Lebanon to import fruits and vegetables. For this purpose, he chartered a plane from Middle East Airlines.

Since his days at the KOC, Ibrahim Shuhaibar was obsessed with the idea of establishing a school, which eventually became a reality in 1968 when a group of

expatriate fathers established the English School under the auspices of KOC and the British Cultural Council.

At the end of that year, the school came under the supervision of the Directorate General for Private Education of the Ministry of Education, thus becoming the first of its kind in Al-Mangaf area.

It was also one of the very first schools to adopt the British education system set by Cambridge University. Ibrahim Shuhaibar managed the school, assisted by his wife Jasmine and son Adib.

The story of his marriage was also exceptional. He knew his wife when he was on his second scholarship in Britain through the British Institute in Kuwait.

By the time he was finishing his study in health counseling and nutrition, he met Jasmine while she was preparing her Ph.D in education. She was Indian, originally from Punjab.

Her father, Pahader Shawardy, was so well respected among the British that he was knighted. Both families rejected their love story and planned marriage, specifically his father and elder brother while his mother was more lenient.

That objection, however, faded away when the family was introduced to his wife-to-be who visited Kuwait for a short time. The bride's family also refused to let their daughter marry an Arab but their insistence and many mutual visits were enough to overcome that obstacle.

### **Suhail Khalil Shuhaibar<sup>(1)</sup> Graduate Of Sabah Al-Ahmed School of Diplomacy**

Born in 1944, he finished his preliminary studies in 1951 in Al-Qibliya School, his intermediate studies at Shamiya and his secondary studies at Shuwaikh School in 1961.

He was late to join university due to Abdul-Karim Qassem's threats of invading Kuwait, but in the following year, he studied architectural engineering in America for a short time before changing his major to political science which he liked ever since.

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(1) Excerpted from an interview with Ambassador Suhail Shuhaibar conducted by Qasem Abdul-Qader, Al-Majales Magazine, 4/2/1995, P74

In 1970, he got his BA in Political Science from the University of Maryland, and in the same year he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two years later, he joined the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the UN in New York, only to become a graduate of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed School of Diplomacy.

Five years later, Suhail Shuhaibar got a scholarship to Oxford University where he acquired his Ph.D in 1980 on the Political Development of Kuwait.

Then he joined the Kuwait Embassy in London, starting a diplomatic career rife with achievements. He moved between many capitals where he was assigned Ambassador to Japan in 1992, then to Tunisia in 2004 and in 2007 he presented his credentials to Swiss Confederation's President Micheline Calmy-Rey, as Kuwait's resident Ambassador to the Confederation.

In 2013, he contributed to the Gulf and Arab efforts to end Switzerland's ban on building minarets, setting an example of Kuwait's religious tolerance due to his own religion.

Ambassador Suhail Shuhaibar was later referred to the Kuwaiti Embassy at The Vatican and he extended the congratulations of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Pope Francis for his new post as head of the Catholic Church.

He participated in the Pope's first meeting with world ambassadors and on Nov 17, 2012 he presented his credentials as the first Kuwaiti Ambassador to Liechtenstein in addition to his ambassadorial duties at the Swiss Confederation.

Ibrahim Dabdoub Banker of exceptional circumstances

Ibrahim Dabdoub is considered one of the most prominent Arab bankers. He started his career with the NBK in 1961 and put an end to it with his resignation on December 18, 2013, pulling down the curtain on a 53-year era with the NBK, 30 years of which were as CEO.

Under his command, NBK turned from a small local bank into one of the biggest and most profitable widespread banks in at the regional and international markets.

Dabdoub is known to have steered the bank through many exceptional circumstances since he was in the very narrow decision-making circle during the infamous Manakh crisis, which tore apart the Kuwait Stock Exchange market,

then through the Iraqi invasion and finally through the world financial crisis in 2008, before making his decision to step down.

What might not be widely known about Dabdoub is that he worked in the NBK by sheer chance. This Palestinian young man coming from Bethlehem after just being graduated from a Turkish university, was about to join the Kuwait Ministry of Finance but he made a last ditch U-turn to join the NBK, a 10-year-old banking institution and the first of its kind in the Gulf and the first joint stock company.

He worked as assistant to Gaby Sanawy, the first Secretary of the Board of Directors in the bank, becoming the 70th employee in the NBK.

Dabdoub showed immediate banking efficiency which helped him to rapid promotions. In 1969, he became Head of Loan Management and over the years became closer to the inner decision-making circle, supported by the conservative policy adopted by the bank's early founders, which he applied in an efficient way.

In 1977, with the initial indications of a possible crisis in the stock exchange market, the bank decided, upon Dabdoub's and his colleagues' advices, to impose more restrictions in granting loans and adopt more options to reinforce the institutional work in the bank.

He kept being promoted when in 1980 he was appointed Deputy CEO; at a time that witnessed a boom in stock prices and trade volumes that reached its height in the last quarter of 1981 and continued until August, 1982.

Too many traders were not able to pay back the value of their checks, and by September, stock trading took a very sharp and sudden fall reaching 72 million stocks compared to 602 million in the previous month, and the great collapse happened.

Kuwaiti banks were in the middle of the storm and the bad debt provisions exceeded the capital in 6 of those banks. NBK was the only bank with a surplus and finished the year notching KD 20 million in net profits.

Those results reinforced the fact that Dabdoub was trustworthy and in 1983 he became the first Arab banker to be appointed CEO since the NBK only hired foreigners for this post.

With him in the driving seat, NBK started a new era of strategy seeking the expansion towards regional and international markets.

Less than a decade after the Manakh crisis, the Iraqi invasion happened, which Dabdoub described as the most difficult situation in his career. In the early morning of Aug 2nd, 1990, Dabdoub was summoned to an emergency board meeting in the bank's London branch where it was agreed the bank would resume its work.

Dabdoub recalled those events. "We only had two choices. We either closed down the branch and go home or we continue." Dabdoub, with his connections and thanks to the bank's reputation, was able to overcome all technical and legal obstacles, and the NBK resumed its activities on Aug 12, less than 10 days after the invasion.

The conservatism remained the main characteristic of Ibrahim Dabdoub's leadership of NBK and it was the lifeline for the bank through the world financial crisis in 2008.

Despite all that, the man remains humble. He says: "I was inspired by the culture of the founding fathers like; Abdul-Aziz Al-Saqer, Muhammad Al-Kharafi, Yusuf Al-Fulajj, Abdul-Rahman Al-Bahar and the current CEO Muhammad Al-Bahar."

Dabdoub's achievements went beyond the NBK itself. He has always followed the ambitious policy of the government of Kuwait in helping other countries. He was within the NBK's team which helped lay the first foundation stone of the Emirates NBD.

He later suggested that the Turks buy Kuwaiti oil and sell it in international markets; an equation that rescued the Turkish economy at that time.

Dabdoub held many leading positions in many international institutions where he helped shape their policymaking. He was a board member in the Institute of International Finance, the Bretton Woods Institution in Washington and a member of the Board of Trustees at the AUB.

### **Jamila Fadhel Khoury<sup>(1)</sup>**

#### **The Nurse in charge of 8,000 employees**

Jamila Khoury started her career in Kuwait (1959-1976) with two ironies. It was the Chairman of the Health Department, Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who signed her contract but when started working; it was his brother, Sheikh Sabah, who was in charge.

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(1) My Life's Journey between Science, Work and Love of Human Beings, Jamila Fadhel Khoury, Dar Al-Ma'aref for Publication, 1st edition

The second irony was her appointment as Head Nurse at the Al-Amiri Hospital rather than at the center where she had applied, where an English nurse was appointed.

Jamila Khoury applied for a first degree job in the Ministry of Health after reading an advertisement in a newspaper. At that time, Sheik Fahad had started 'Arabizing' all leading positions while Kuwait was still under British occupation.

A few days later, she arrived in Kuwait by air and was received by Eric Berry, the British Chairman of Medical Services. Next day, she went to meet the ministry officials.

Right from day one, Jamila Khoury had a clear imprint in organizing and managing nursing services for 400 beds, and she applied a program for the development of the members of the nursing staff data until 1961 when she moved to work at the Al-Sabah Hospital.

There, she contributed to the operation and supervision of the nursing services when the hospital had 750 beds while the other three buildings of the hospital were serving all specialties.

At the opening ceremony, she was the one who gave the scissors to HH the Amir. Jamila Khoury remained in her position until 1963 when the minister of health Abdul-Aziz Hamad Al-Saqer appointed her as Head of the Central Nursing Department, the position she applied for at the very beginning.

That position was responsible for the nursing services all over Kuwait, so she supervised five hospitals with different specializations totaling more than 3,400 beds including sanitariums for men and women and a ward for children, in addition to an orphanage, clinics, complexes, school health and nurses residence.

Her responsibility was mainly to plan and manage nursing services in all sections with a total of 8,000 individuals, taking into account that the total number of employees was around 24,000.

Her duties also included the development of the nursing staff data in accordance with scientific development. One of Khoury's foreign officials was deliberately annoying her, so she filed a complaint against him with the minister Abdul-Aziz Al-Saqer who asked the official to either apologize or resign.

When the official's reply was that he would resign rather than apologize, the minister told him that the apology would follow his resignation. That incident came to prove Al-Saqer's belief in Khoury's efficiency and honesty.

Later, the Kuwaiti government offered her a scholarship from the World Health Organization after she presented the request to the Undersecretary Jassem Al-Hajji.

This came after the ministry had not informed her of her scholarship so as not to lose her services. On January, 1969, she flew to Washington where she joined the University of Columbia, which was ranked among the top ten universities in the world at that time.

In one year, she obtained an MA in administration and another MA in education the following year.

While studying at the university, the government of Kuwait asked her to represent the country in a special conference in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and later she was the only student invited, among many prominent personalities, to a ceremony held by the Kuwait Ruler Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on the occasion of the UD President Lyndon Johnson's end of term in office.

In the 1970s, the Undersecretary of the General Passport and Immigration Department Ali Al-Matrouk, asked to meet Khoury so as to grant her the Kuwaiti nationality for her great services and endless efforts but she refused the offer.

She continued in her post until Minister Abdul-Rahman Al-Awadhiy took charge of the ministry and that was when she returned to her country in 1976.

Four years later, she moved to work in the Department of Health and Medical Services in Dubai until 1993 when she decided to return and settle in her hometown of Mashta Al-Hilu in Syria.

The privileges Jamila Khoury enjoyed during her career were a curtain that hid a life full of difficulties and misery. The young girl who was 40 days away from her graduation from the Medical School at the AUB was devastated by the death of her father at the age of 48 in 1942.

That was a turning point in her life towards more responsibilities in taking care of a family consisting of her older brother, Jamil, and a younger brother, Jerjis.

Her brother Jamil had to walk four km to attend their father's funeral because he could not afford a car drive. He contracted pneumonia because of that journey and he died at the age of 20 in 1946. The death gave her more misery both morally and financially.

Since the youngm age, Jamila had shown great academic supremacy. She finished her preliminary studies at the American School in Mashta Al-Hilu and in 1933 she moved to Tripoli in North Lebanon to finish her secondary studies at the American School for Girls, becoming the first lady to obtain the High School Certificate in the Governorate of Lattakia.

Khoury obtained her High School Certificate at the age of 16 and was qualified to attend the Nursing School at the AUB, also becoming the first lady to do so.

She started her career in 1942 at the Dr. Wahib Al-Ninny's Hospital in Tripoli, Lebanon after the establishment of the International Nursing Department at the Florence Nightingale Institution.

She then moved to the Harbor's Hospital where she stayed until 1950. Afterwards, she contributed in the establishment of the Lebanese Hospital in Jeddah, before embarking on a new phase in her career in 1951 when she joined the Syrian University.

Earlier, Jamila was granted a special scholarship in her own name by the Rockefeller Institute in New York and obtained a BA in Educational Nursing with distinction. In 1956, she returned to the Syrian University for less than a year.

It was ironic that Jamila was arrested in 1958 and accused of sending a Lebanese nurse from the city of Zahle called Salwa Ma'darany to the Guest Palace to poison Jamal Abdul-Nasser when Egypt and Syria enjoyed great unity. However, her very presence in Syria was enough to prove her innocence.

### **Mother Beatrine – Fajer Al-Sabah**

Najiba Yusuf Aqiqi, known as Mother Beatrine, was born in Beirut in 1922. She first came to Kuwait in 1961 just before the independence, when the atmosphere of openness and freedom prevailed suitable for the launch of an educational institution to take care of students.

With the assistance of Monsignor Stella and Mother Anastase Tunb, pioneers of the Arab Rosary Sisters Educational Institution in Palestine more than a century ago, Mother Beatrine and five other nuns established the Rosary School under a new name, Fajer Al-Sabah.

The school started in a small building in Nugra in Hawally on Al-Othman St. with 200 students. A few years later, the school moved to Istiqlal Street before moving to Jabriya in 1978 with around 3,600 students.

Through that chronological and geographical change, only one element never changed, Mother Beatrine. She had been in the school for more than half a century, became inseparable from the school and over the decades provided Kuwait with generations of high achieving student.

Ma Mere is passionately connected to the children and students of the school whom she received for 40 years every morning with her never fading smile.

It was a clear sign of her commitment and discipline and a reflection of a civilized management of the school so much that parents felt safe when she was around.

Mother Beatrine had her own educational philosophy which may not be useful these days. It is based on the idea of sacrifice for the sake of teaching and the fact that money and teaching did not criss-cross.

That is why it is not surprising that a school run by nuns have students who memorize the Holy Qur'an by heart and win first places at the national level. It is one of the noble goals Fajer Al-Sabah School has long been committed to achieving.

### **Anton Yusuf Kafi'ty**

He was Chairman of the International Postal Relations Office and represented Kuwait at many international events such as the 5th Universal Postal Union Conference in Vienna between May 29, 1964 and July 10, 1964.

The Kuwaiti delegation was headed by Ibrahim Yusuf Al-Abdul-Razaq in addition to Nazmi Omar Rassas, Head of External Mail Accounting Department, Abdul-Muhsin Taqi Muthaffar, Chairman of the Central Department of Statistics and Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Husni, Legal Expert at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>(1)</sup>.

(1) History of Postal Services in Kuwait, Muhammad Abdul-Hadi Jamal, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait, 2006, P293-294

## **Professor George Mansour Abouna, Organ Transplant Surgeon**

Known as the most renowned Arab physician, he arrived in Kuwait in 1978 after having moved between many capitals of the world in Europe and America.

His gained fame from organ transplants and became one of the most prominent specialists in liver, bone marrow and spinal cord transplants.

The fame of his medical career, which started in Kuwait, echoed in the entire Arab world and later Europe and America.

In Kuwait, he made many medical breakthroughs which began when on Feb 28, 1979 he performed the first kidney transplant in the Gulf area; a very unique medical success.

Professor George Abouna embarked on his glorious career in Kuwait when he worked as Professor and Chairman of Department of Surgery at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Kuwait.

He played an essential role in establishing the Higher Education in surgery and contributed in supervising and planning the engineering works for the Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital and Hussain Makki Juma Organ Transplant Center.

After a generous initial donation from the Al-Issa family, Minister Abdul-Rahman Al-Awadhi came with the idea of establishing the Hamid Al-Issa Organ Transplant Center, named after a member of the family who died during such a surgery.

For this purpose, Professor Abouna traveled to the University of Seattle for training on bone marrow transplant, becoming the first Arab surgeon to perform such surgeries since it was widely common that hematologists did that kind of surgery.

Having completed his task in Seattle, he returned to Kuwait and the Center was opened in 1986, which also hired specialists from Canada.

It was the biggest independent organ transplant center in the world at that time which witnessed the medical achievements Professor Abouna had accomplished.

Until 1990 he had performed 18 bone marrow transplants and 560 kidney transplants for citizens and residents at the center. His tremendous achievement came in 1988 when he carried out the first pancreas transplant in the world outside the USA for a patient called Rasmy. Part of the pancreas and kidney was donated by his brother Mahmoud Thaher Saeed.

Earlier, because of his overwhelming fame in the Arab world, the Arab physicians sought his help during such surgeries and he took the opinion of HH the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah.

Professor Abouna commented on that incident saying: “He told me: ‘since you did not charge our patients, then we would not charge any’.”

That was permission given to the Ministry of Health to accept Arab patients in Kuwaiti hospitals free of charge and between 1984 and 1990, Professor Abouna performed 290 surgeries.

He remained in Kuwait until 1990, shortly before the Iraqi invasion. He went with his family to the US and later travelled to Bahrain. Later he held different prominent positions in Europe and the US where he worked as professor at the Harvard University.

The career of Professor George Abouna was the hammer that crushed the restrictions imposed by advocates of religious division. It might well be strange to know that his efforts led to the issuance of Islamic Fatwa in 1987 which permitted the transplant of organs from dead people which was banned until early 1980s.

The clergymen issued the Fatwa based on Verse 32 of Surat Al-Maeda in the Holy Qura'n which reads: 'Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely'.

In the very beginning Professor George Abouna worked as a mechanical engineer. After completing intermediate school in his home country, Iraq in 1951, he went on a scholarship to Britain where he worked for 7 months in the area of atomic energy.

His ambition, however, was to help the needy and he asked the university chairman to transfer him to the Faculty of Medicine, following which he became a physician with an engineering background.

### **Emile Bustani: Man of Irony**

Emile Bustani's life was full of ironies. His father died aged 26 and he was raised by many orphanages run by American missionaries in Sidon, the hometown of his mother.

He moved to Sidon with his mother after his father's death. He later moved to the American School and then to the Alia School.

At that time, Emile used to walk barefoot carrying his shoes under his armpits to prevent the shoes from getting wornout – a common behavior among the poor students of those days.

He picked up from there and went to the city of Zahle to meet one of the migrants from the Ma'louf family who was willing to pay the tuition fees of the American University of Beirut for someone who is academically qualified.

He succeeded and obtained his MA in Astrophysics. While studying, he worked parttime as waiter at the well-known Faisal Restaurant which was located just in front of the AUB gate.

He had to give private lessons to be able to provide his family's needs. In 1933, he obtained a BSc in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA and, to his surprise; he discovered that his fees had been paid by the migrating members of his family.

He returned to Beirut two years later and for some time worked with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Soon he founded his own Contracting and Trading Company, CAT, in partnership with Kamel Abdul-Rahman who later left CAT.

Following the departure of Abdul-Rahman, Abdullah Khoury and Shukry Shammam joined him and the company witnessed a boom in 1949.

CAT was Emile's ambassador to countries all over the world, from Pakistan to Nigeria, hiring a whopping 17,000 employees, 3,000 more than the Lebanese army.

He managed 35 offices in 19 countries. CAT also enjoyed a powerful presence in Arabian and Gulf countries. In Qatar, for example, it supervised the construction of the Prince's palace.

Since irony was the order of the day in Bustani's life, it is worth mentioning that his father, a Maronite, soon embraced the Protestant doctrine while his mother's family members were Roman Catholics who later converted to Evangelicalism.

Although Emile himself grew as a Protestant, he embraced the Maronite doctrine,

which later enabled him to be elected Member of Parliament in Lebanon representing the Chouf District in 1951, an office he held until his death.

He was also appointed Minister of Public Works in 1956. During the elections, his aircraft used to drop pamphlets promoting his electoral program, and he was the first politician to open a media office.

Bustani was known for his openness and tolerance as well as his endeavors to strengthen the relations between the Arabs and the West.

Muhammad Hassanein Heikal described him as “a man who used his interests to serve politics, not the other way around.” Haikal also said President Jamal Abdul-Nasser had asked Bustani to hand over pictures of the destruction caused by the Tripartite Aggression in 1956 to certain entities in Britain, and he obliged.

Those pictures played a great part to influence public opinion that opposed the war, which later led to the toppling of the government of Anthony Eden.

### **Kuwait and the very special relationship**

Despite all of his worldwide activities, Kuwait still formed a special value for Bustani. He was deeply connected with its rulers and people and enjoyed a very special relationship with them.

His daughter, Myrna, described this relation as: “He (Emile) never considered Kuwait his second home. It was his homeland. He was received like a president whenever his plane landed at the airport.

“He had a very strong relationship with HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah who always visited him at his house, in his Peugeot. He once came to visit him but my father was not there and instead of letting him go, my mother said to His Highness the Amir: ‘it was a good chance for me to beat you in backgammon’, and she did.”

On the 15th of March 1963, Bustani died in his Aero Commander airplane, which crashed into the sea off Beirut harbor, with his friends Dr. Nimr Touqan and Eng. Marwan Khartabil.

It was an accident that the Arab and the world media covered extensively due to his high stature and as potential successor to the former Lebanese President Lieutenant Fuad Chehab.

The Newsweek wrote that CAT was busy during the week prior to the crash, building two hospitals in Kuwait for a total cost of \$30 million, in addition to a power plant in Pakistan.

Ghassan Tueni, Dean of the Lebanese newspaper An Nahar, commented on his death saying: 'Down in the bottom of the sea, beneath the waves, what are you building for us, Emile?'

### **Harold Dickson and his family**

When talking about Christian personalities who have left an important legacy in Kuwait, it is not possible to ignore the Dicksons.

This family had a truly exceptional experience because its role went well beyond the main task for which the British Political Agent, Harold Dickson, came to Kuwait in 1926.

Firstly, the man had an impact on the Kuwaiti political life in many vital stages, such as the Uqair Convention.

Secondly, what made that family's experience so special was the social network it built with the entire society. Dickson's effect reached the Bedouins in the desert where they practiced their customs in the traditional Arab tent.

The family also enriched the Kuwaiti culture with many important books that clearly revealed many significant historical periods but the most important characteristic of the Dicksons' relation with Kuwait was the mutual loyalty.

Colonel Harold stayed in Kuwait until his death while his wife, Um Saud, involuntarily left due to the Iraqi invasion.

The family drew its fame from Harold Richard Patrick Dickson who was born on Feby 4, 1881 in Beirut where his father was the British Consul in Jerusalem.

He spent his childhood there and the many years he spent in Damascus too had an effect on his personality. He was breastfed by a Bedouin woman, which made the Bedouins adore him, and that helped him in the political tasks assigned to him during his presence in Kuwait.

All this made the man and his family permanent guests on the Bedouin community in the desert.

Harold Dickson started his long military life in 1903 when he joined the Infantry Guard Division and then moved between different positions in Battalion 29 in the British Indian Army Cavalry before being relocated to Iraq in 1914 under the command of Sir Percy Cox who admired his personality, and that was his real starting point.

During WWI, he took part in the military operations which led to the surrender of Basra and Naseriya and later he and Sir Cox participated in organizing the civil administration of South Iraq before being appointed Political Agent in Bahrain after the war.

That period gave him the privilege of getting to know the rulers of the area and gaining access to their files.

In 1922, he attended the Uqair Convention and met for the second time with Prince Abdul-Aziz Bin Saud and after having spent a period of time in the Gulf, he returned to Kuwait as the Political Agent where he became one of the main contributors in shaping many of Kuwait's modern history phases in 1929.

The Colonel quickly won the love and respect of Kuwait's leadership and people, taking advantage of his fluent Arabic and pure diplomatic skills.

He was in charge of the negotiations with Faisal Bin Duwish, the leader of Al-Ikhwan and the Prince of Mutair tribe after their assaults on Kuwait starting from 1927. Three years later, Dickson succeeded in ending the Ikhwani invasion of Kuwaiti territories.

Dickson continued as the Political Agent in Kuwait until 1936 but his retirement did not mean staying away from the Kuwaiti scenario. He went on with his social vivacity until his death in 1959.

He was too connected to Kuwait that he demanded being buried on top of the Wara Mountain in the desert; a place he always cherished<sup>(1)</sup>.

Harold Dickson enjoyed the trust of the political leadership of Kuwait, especially, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber whom he used to visit thrice a week.

He was always biased towards Kuwait whenever the British point of view was not correct, and that is exactly what happened when John Kidman, the representative

(1) This piece of information was mentioned by the British Political Agent's daughter, Zahra in an interview with her conducted by Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Habib, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 21/2/2012, P12

of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, came to Kuwait to negotiate the oil concession between 1934 and 1935.

Though Dickson was representing Britain, he advised the Sheikh to reject the offer to raise its value because Kuwait was suffering from lack of financial resources. This stand infuriated Kidman who blamed the Colonel for his feeble stand against the company.

Violet Penelope Lucas-Calcraft Dickson (1896-1991), or Violet Dickson, alias Umm Saud of Kuwait, spent 61 years in Kuwait. She first set foot on the soil of Kuwait on May 23, 1929.

Such a long period was more than enough to enrich the family's legacy and continue from where her husband had left, leaving behind for her an important historical heritage of her memoirs in which she provided a crystal clear image of Kuwait and its social environment, benefiting from everyday contact with the locals.

It is that effect Kuwait had on these parents that made them give their children Arabic names. The eldest son was named Saud then came Zahra, whose name was inspired from an Iraqi girl in Hilla who asked the Colonel for help in 1918 when Dickson was in Iraq with Sir Percy Cox.

Zahra Dickson, alias Zahra Freeth, was born in January 1925 and came to Kuwait four years later. Although she left ten years later to attend the boarding school just like her brother, Kuwait had made a great impression on her mind.

This resulted in her returning to Kuwait albeit intermittently. She came back with her husband who got a job in Kuwait before both of them migrated to the United States after a short visit to London.

Even after that she continued her sporadic visits to Kuwait and kept photographs of the family's memories in Kuwait in her house in Colchester, England.

Zahra Dickson recalls a funny situation when she later met with Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah. He asked her if she had yet seen her house (the Dickson House), and to the Sheikh's surprise, she answered him in the local Kuwaiti accent, saying that she would go the following day.

The Sheikh laughed and turned to one of his aides, exclaiming that she had spoken the local accent.

His son Saud, on the other hand, was named after Abdul-Aziz Bin Abdul-Rahman Al-Saud with whom Colonel Dickson had a very intimate association.

The two men met for the first time in 1918 when Dickson was with Sir Percy Cox, and that meeting was a preliminary step towards strengthening their relationship.

They met again when Dickson was the Political Agent in Bahrain and Bin Saud knew that Harold was expecting a baby, so he asked him to name it after him.

Saud left Kuwait in 1930 to complete his studies. He was known as Hanmer, and also as Dickie, short for Dickson. After finishing his studies in England, he became a soldier in WWII and then worked in the English colonies in Somalia.

The Dicksons left a significant historical legacy. The father recorded the events and developments during his time in Kuwait in two books. The first one was titled 'The Arabs of the Desert' and the second one was 'Kuwait and Her Neighbors'.

Umm Saud also wrote two books; the first one was the famous 'Forty Years in Kuwait', a valuable reference for so many political and social events Kuwait had witnessed, while the other one was about plants and roses in Kuwait which were threatened with extinction.

This eagerness for documentation also hit their daughter Zahra who wrote a book called 'Kuwait was My Home'.

The Kuwaiti government immortalized the family's memoirs by placing the house they had lived in under the umbrella of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters in 1992 and the house was transformed into a museum called the Dickson House Cultural Center on the Arabian Gulf Street. The family had lived in that house since 1929 and it was the property of a member of Al-Asfour family.



*Jabra Issa Shuhaibar*



*Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar*



*The Kuwaiti delegation to the 15<sup>th</sup> Universal Postal Union Conference in Vienna in 1964 from right Abdul-Muhsin Taqi Muthaffar, Nazmy Omar Rassas, Anton Yusuf Kafi'ty, Ibrahim Yusuf Al-Abdul-Razaq and Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Hosni,*



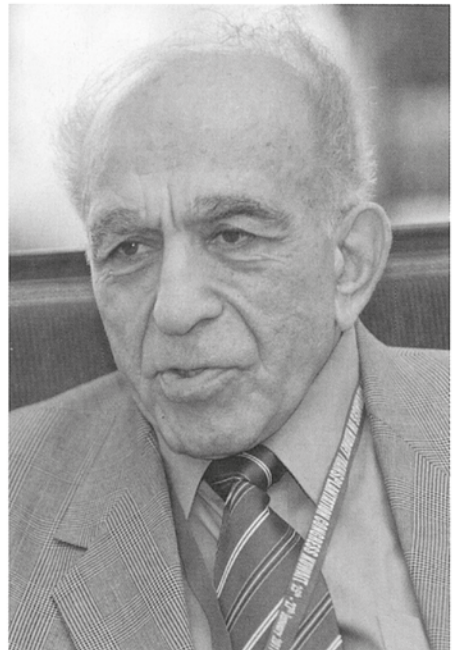
*The then Minister of Health HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and sitting to his left is Jamila Fadhel Khoury*



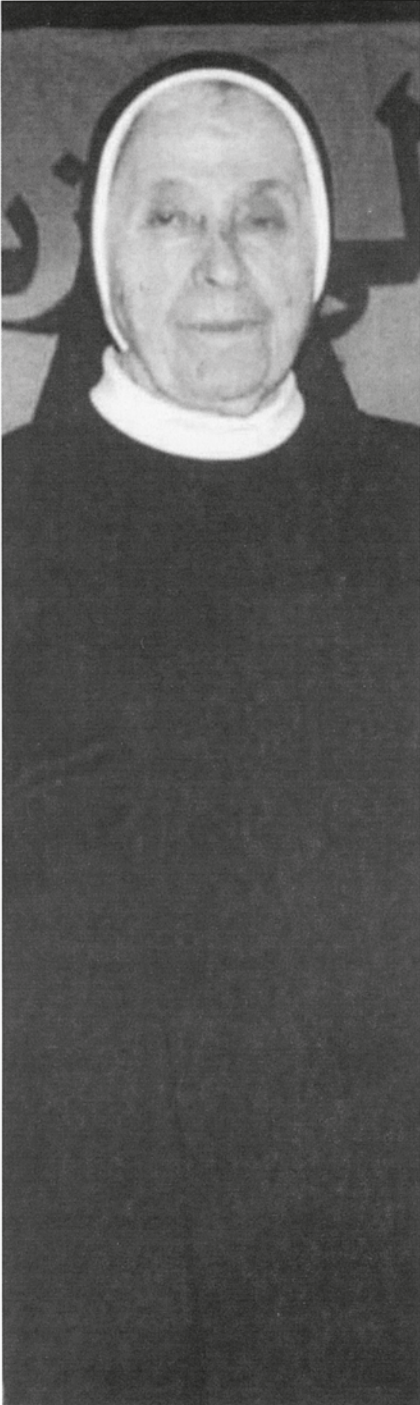
*Diplomat Saeed Ya'qub Shammas and his wife*



*Ambassador Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar*



*Professor George Abouna*



*Mother Beatrine (Fajer Al-Sabah School)*



*Harold Dickson*



*Ibrahim Shukry Dabdoub*



*Ibrahim Jabra Shuhaibar*

## **Chapter Eight: Churches**

- National Evangelical Church
- Catholic Church (Latin)
- Church of Our Lady of Arabia – Al-Ahmadi
- St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
- Greek Orthodox Church
- Anglican Protestant Church – Al-Ahmadi
- The Maronite Church
- Armenian Orthodox Church
- Melkite Greek Catholic Church



## Recognized Churches<sup>(1)</sup>

No.	Name of Church	Location & Date of Establishment	Building
1.	National Evangelical Church	On the sea, near the National Assembly – the Capital (1931)	Separate Building
2.	Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral	Near The Sheraton Hotel (1958)	Separate Building
3.	Greek Catholic Church	Salwa, Block 12 (1960)	Rented
4.	Greek Orthodox Church	Salwa, Block 10 (1961)	Rented
5.	St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church	Hawally (1961)	Separate Building
6.	Armenian Orthodox Church	Salmiya (1962)	Rented
7.	St. Paul's Church – Anglican Protestants	Ahmadi (1948)	Separate Building
8.	Catholic Church of Our Lady of Arabia <sup>(2)</sup>	Ahmedi (1948)	Separate Building

(1) The eight recognized churches are linked with the Ministry of Awqaf through a liaison ad hoc office. According to the Amiri Decree on 7/1/1979, the role of the Ministry is limited to granting permission to open worship houses for the non-Muslims in coordination with other government bodies. This means obtaining approvals from Kuwait Municipality and other ministries when it comes to building churches. However, they are given all the facilities they need to finish their transactions in the state's ministries and institutions.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' responsibility is limited to granting work permits and opening a file for every church to grant its workers residency permits in accordance with article 18 upon which the ministry deals with companies and their employees.

(2) The Catholic Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi is in subordination with the mother church in the Capital (near the Sheraton) although it dates back to 1948. In addition, because they are too remote from the Capital, there are many rented residential houses that are used for prayers and worshipping in several areas in the south and north of Kuwait.

## **Prelude**

There are many different views regarding the number of recognized churches in Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>.

Recognition means the church has a file in both Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. This in turn means the employees can stay in the country according to the due procedures.

Recognition is an admission of the historic existence of a church and that it is an independent entity that is linked with the official bodies by contracts, identification papers and leasing contracts with the owners of the buildings as per the rules.

Being houses of worship, they are also linked with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, as well as the Municipality Council in order to obtain the necessary licenses.

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(1) The churches that are registered at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Awqaf are the following: National Evangelical Church, Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral, Catholic Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi, St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Church, St. Paul's Church – Anglican Protestants in Ahmadi, Armenian Orthodox Church and Greek Catholic Church. The Maronite church is in subordination with the Catholic Church where it holds its prayers since it has no independent entity. Some, like the Kuwait Civil Alliance in 2014, estimate the number of churches at 13 while others say there are 18-30 churches without distinguishing between church premises and rented houses.

## Building New Churches

Building new or unlicensed churches is a tough nut to crack. This issue has been debated in a way that was never objective where advocates of extremism and objection had a say.

As a result, policymakers have distanced this issue from political and religious exploitation so as to find a comprehensive solution that takes all considerations into account.

I was told by caretakers of churches that they need places for worship rather than new or special laws for churches. The Christians are continuously increasing and the available churches cannot cope with that, in addition to the instability when it comes to rented premises whose owners do what they wish.

Another problem is when the premises or buildings move to a new owner which sometimes causes disputes that end up in the court. The bottom line is that, according to those caretakers, it is becoming more difficult to deal with the ever increasing number of worshippers; a fact that often forces them to perform their rituals in public squares.

The decree for the establishment of places of worships by Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs states that the ministry is allowed to open houses of worship and that the licenses for building mosques are granted by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs itself.

As for churches, a request must be submitted to the Ministry of Awqaf which will be directly forwarded to the Kuwait Municipality, the sole entity entitled to grant licenses and determine locations.

So, the only role of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs is to deliver the request to Kuwait Municipality and it has nothing to do with approval or rejection, which means that building new churches is subject to the authority of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and the Municipal Council.

In this context, a member of the Council says that the organizational approval of Kuwait Municipality on the request of the Ministry of Awqaf to build a church does not imply approving the request.

He emphasizes on the importance of the Ministry's Fatwa which allows the building of new churches in the Arabian Peninsula, including Kuwait.

He added that the Kuwait Municipality cannot approve any request unless there is a preceding approval and resolution from the Municipal Council. He also stressed on the rejection to build a church in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh after the construction of a church in Mahboula was also rejected earlier<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) Al-Watan Newspaper, 29/7/2012, P16

## National Evangelical Church Protestants and Orthodox

At the entrance of the National Evangelical Church Kuwait (NECK), located near the National Assembly just behind the old American Mission building which has been transformed into the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, a verse from the Gospel of Mark reads: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'.

This building tells the history of the church as it is narrated and recorded on a CD in the office of Kuwaiti Priest Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, from which the information in this report was taken.

In the finale, there are prayers that the Kuwaiti government grants land to build new churches. The verse at the entrance was substituted in March 2014 with another verse from the Gospel of Matthew that reads: Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'.

NECK was built in 1931 on the location of the American Mission and the first Arab Christian to arrive in Kuwait was the late Ya'qub Shammās Ibrahim in 1919.

He joined the Arabian Mission which tried quickly to build its own church since the late 1920s. In 1931<sup>(1)</sup>, this church was ready and was called the Church of Christ, located within the American Mission's complex, adjacent to the American Hospital on the seashore in Qibla, near the National Assembly.

It was built by the pioneers of the American Mission, especially Samuel Zwemer, upon the approval of Sheikh Mubarak the Great<sup>(2)</sup>.

Kuwaiti, who lived long, Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa is reported to have said that Master Ahmed Abdul-Khaliq Al-Banna<sup>(3)</sup> had contributed to building the church while other sources said it had been Masters Ahmed Al-Shirazy and Ridha.

However, Rev. Gharib says the grandfather of renowned Kuwaiti artist and writer Thuraya Al-Baqsamī was among those who built the church<sup>(4)</sup>.

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(1) All references agreed the church started in 1931 while Dr. Abdul-Malik Al-Tamimy says it was inaugurated in 1932, P91

(2) Mira't Al-Ommah Magazine, Ver. 1142, 7/11/1998, P11

(3) Mansour Al-Hajery, History of Churches in Kuwait, Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, 18/4/1998, P11

(4) Interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib conducted by Sabah Al-Mousa published in Al-Nahar Newspaper, Ver. 1656, 14/09/2012, P12

It was built from sea rocks, mud<sup>(1)</sup>, tree branches, iron sheets imported from England and yellow bricks imported from Basra.

Due to his retirement in 1929, Rev. Edwin Calverley, who had helped design the church, was not able to see it accomplished and it was launched in the era of Rev. Gerrit de Jong<sup>(2)</sup> and was religiously and practically affiliated to the Reformed Church of America (RCA).

Since the 1950s, the ecclesiastical activity witnessed a new momentum, specifically after Kuwait had become one of the main oil exporting countries.

That implied the arrival of great numbers of foreign workers, especially to the KOC in Ahmadi where two new churches were built. The new Consul appointed a translator who had previously worked with the American Army during WWII and had enjoyed close relationships with the American Protestant Mission.

He was an Iraqi friend of the Sheikh called Salem Jaraba, nicknamed Abu Alwan.

The main church in the Capital, on the other hand, registered rapid internal developments. In 1954, it witnessed the establishment and election of its first Arab Council in the name of Mayor of the church, consisting of Kuwaiti Christians Ya'qub Shammas and Sulaiman Sama'n Shammas before being added to an annexed base in 1958 to cope with the increasing number of worshippers.

In 1957, the church asked Rev. Yusuf Abdul-Noor from the Church of the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt to serve as its Pastor, accelerating the phases of Arabicizing the church in line with the nature of the spiritual base of the 'people' of the church.

In 1964, Ya'qub Al-Shammas was ordained the first Kuwaiti Presbyterian in the presence of the representatives of the Church of the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt and the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, the two highest ranking Christian entities in the Middle East.

In 1968, the name of the Church was changed into the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait, symbolic of the loyalty of Kuwaiti Christians.

Later, Sulaiman Shammas was ordained and in 1972 a third Presbyterian was ordained. He was the late Habib Ya'qub Shammas. With the death of the pioneer

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(1) Interview with Muhammad Hussein Al-Khalifa, published in Al-Rai Al-A'am Newspaper, Ver. 11075, 17/1/1997, PP6-7

(2) The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, Andrew Thompson, 1st edition, Saeed & Sameer, 2010, P72

presbyters, new presbyters ought to have been elected, so Emmanuel Gharib was elected and ordained Presbyter in 1992 by Head of the Evangelical Communion in Egypt Rev. Dr. Samuel Habib, setting off a new era which would be discussed within the chapter on churches in Kuwait.

### **A witness on oil competition**

As much as its effect was powerful in medicine and nursing which covered all other activities including the sale of books and teaching, so was the mission's political effect.

It formed a gate for the American political existence in Kuwait and participated in reinforcing it. It was a stage for the hectic American/British competition over oil concessions<sup>(1)</sup> and hosted many meetings to discuss them in order to bridge the widening gap between the two nations over this issue.

While developments unfolded, it became a stage for the agreement between the two sides. Frank Holmes<sup>(2)</sup>, known as Abu Naft (father of oil), came with Archibald Chisholm, representative of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC)<sup>(3)</sup> and editor in the Financial Times, to attend the Sunday Mass with pillars of the mission and expats in the Church of Christ which was opened in 1931.

The two men sat opposite each other; a sign of their deep disagreement regarding the oil concessions in Kuwait. That disagreement lasted until Dec 22, 1934 when they sat together at a prayer held by Fred Barny.

The next day, the famous agreement between the Gulf Oil Company and APOC was signed, giving birth to the Kuwait Oil Company. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber later traveled for the second time to London in the summer of 1935, having visited it in 1919 to extend the congratulations of his uncle Sheikh Salem Al-Mubarak<sup>(4)</sup> to the King of Britain on his victory in WWI.

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(1) Al-Wasat Newspaper, Ver. 25, 5/6/2007, P17

(2) For more details on the American British competition on oil concessions in Kuwait, See Fuelling Kuwait's Development: The Story of the Kuwait Oil Company, Jonathan Fryer, translated by Dr. Abdul-Malik Al-Tamimy, excerpts published in Al-Rai Newspaper, Ver. 11131, 22/12/2009, P34

(3) He was a very smart New Zealander mining engineer who played a major role in oil concessions negotiations in Bahrain and KSA before Kuwait. Along with Syrian-American Amin Al-Rihany, he set up the Eastern and General Syndicate Ltd through which he was awarded a concession for the region of Al-Hasa. He sought to obtain oil concessions in Kuwait to sell them to the Gulf Oil Company in Pennsylvania, which later became Chevron Company, which in turn was seeking a foothold in Kuwait. In 1934, Holmes became a major negotiator for Kuwait Oil Company Ltd and then its representative in London until his death in 1947. See: Ahmed Al-Jaber's Visit Alleviated Fears of Ghazi's Rule, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 29/9/2010, and also Times and Places: Travelling for Oil, Al-Watan Newspaper, 16/3/2010

(4) Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was established in 1908 after discovering an oil well in Sulaiman's Mosque in Iran, becoming the first company to extract oil in Iran and the first oil company in the Middle East. In 1935, it became known as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) before it was transformed in 1953 into British Petroleum Company (BP).

The first prayer in Arabic in Kuwait was held in a house in 1926 and in 1954 the first Arab Council of the Church was elected.

Five years later, Rev. Yusuf Abdul-Noor was asked to be the Pastor of the church while in February 1964 the church celebrated the ordination of two Presbyters: Ya'qub Shammās and Sulaiman Sama'n Shammās.

In 1966, the name of the Church of Christ was changed to the National Evangelical Church and in 1971 it became member of the Near East Council of Churches which became known in 1974 as the Middle East Council of Churches and in 1974, the church became member of the Association of Evangelical Churches in the Middle East.

According to traditions, the church celebrated in 1972 the ordination of the late Habib Shammās as Presbyter of the Church and in 1992 it celebrated the ordination of Nabil Eskandar Ibrahim and Emmanuel Gharib as two new Presbyters.

In 1998, the church celebrated the ordination of Murad Azar, and in January 1999 Rev. Emmanuel Gharib was ordained a Priest and was appointed Pastor of the church, becoming the first Kuwaiti to hold such a position.

In order to improve the level of cultural and advocacy activities, the church opened the Holy Bible Bookshop in cooperation with the Bible Society of the Gulf in December 1999.

In September 2004, it invited Rev. Onsi Anis Younan to help in preaching, teaching and training for a period of two years.

Due to the increasing number of the members of the church, Rev. Freddie Saleh was invited as a Partner Chaplain to serve the church in October 2006.

For the first time ever, Deacons were elected in March 2007, mostly women: Wafa Naomi, Mary Fahmy, Suhair Adly and Emile Fathy.

The church provides many services for its followers such as the singing choir, Sunday school for children, a congregation for the youth of all ages and both genders, helping graduates find jobs and the Christian House Meeting which helps many needy families.

In addition, there is the Wednesday Meeting which is dedicated for worship and teaching members of the church of all ages. Another service is the Servants Program which includes theological, social and psychological studies, and the

Room Service which is dedicated to those who cannot afford to go to church and have the worship service performed at their houses.

There is also a service for female prisoners done by volunteering women who perform the worship service and prayers inside the prison. The NECK also helps rebuild and renovate churches in Egypt and other countries.

There are around 100 members of the church now and the average attendance on Sundays reach 150 individuals. Because of the limited number of churches in Kuwait, the NECK hosts around 85 denominations speaking different languages.

Inside the church, there is the International Peace Academy School and the Church's Nursery, in addition to the Diwaniya, the place to connect with the Kuwaiti community.

It is meant to simulate the traditions of the local community where there is no distinction between people who come to discuss various issues of concern for the public.

The NECK also hosts ghabqa (feast) every Ramadan under the auspices of the Prime Minister where Muslim and Christian clergymen, ambassadors and friends of the church are all invited.

Regarding the legal status of the NECK and other churches, Rev. Gharib<sup>(1)</sup> says there are two levels of relationships. Churches are either linked through lease contracts with the Department of State Properties or through lease contracts with individuals who own the buildings.

The government, represented by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor is the only entity entitled to organize the relationship with churches from one side only which is granting residence permits for the servants of the church or for clergymen.

Regarding the *actio popularis* filed against Qambar Hussein in 1996, Rev. Gharib said that he had heard Qambar had repented and was now a Muslim.

As for Christian Kuwaiti families, Rev. Gharib said some of them had come to Kuwait from the South East of Turkey (Al-Jazeera Area) like the Shammas family while others had arrived from Iraq, Palestine and India like the Shuhaibar family. He mentioned many other families, such as the Nu'man family (from Iraq), Sabih and Mansour.

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(1) Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P185, also see translator Saif Marzouq Al-Shamlan Al Saif's comment on the same page, footnote 1

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With reference to the administrative system of the NECK, Rev. Gharib emphasizes that the Presbyterian system is uniquely special for the National Evangelical Church and accordingly all Evangelical churches have a command group.

This means there is a group of churches in a certain geographical area and each selects a presbyter, archimandrite and a bishop and they all form a synod that becomes entitled to care for the church's matters and ordain archimandrites after being elected by the people.

So, what happens inside the churches of the synod is a complete democratic practice since the people do choose archimandrites and bishops.

Rev. Emmanuel Gharib had already provided a comprehensive view on Presbyterianism<sup>(1)</sup>. According to the constitution of the church, there is the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt and the Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon.

A synod is an assembly of churches in a certain country that consists of a group of clergymen who discuss and decide on ecclesiastical affairs of the church.

The synod committee consists of many archimandrites and bishops from many geographical areas.

The Evangelical Synod of the Nile represents the Evangelical Church in Egypt which is the Presbyterian Church.

The Presbyterianism is one of the Christian denominations where there are many presbyters in the church like the archimandrites who take care of the financial, administrative and religious affairs.

Presbyterianism is limited to Protestantism or Evangelism in addition to the Episcopal denomination which is the Church of England. There is also the Baptist doctrine which believes in the baptism of adults.

The National Evangelical Church follows the Presbyterian system which includes archimandrites and bishops. A bishop is called a priest and he has connections with two major references; the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt and the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon.

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(1) Interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib in his office in NECK conducted by the author, March 2014

## **Rev. Emmanuel Gharib the First Kuwaiti Priest**

Priest Emmanuel Gharib<sup>(1)</sup> was born in 1950 on the American Mission Hospital premises. His father worked for the Mission Hospital and they lived in the Qibla neighborhood which was inhabited mostly by Christians.

He started school at the Tariq Kindergarten and then moved to the Al-Muthanna School on the Fahad Al-Salem Street where he studied for two years before moving again to Al-Rashid School then to Al-Die'yya School where he completed his secondary education in 1967.

He joined the Faculty of Science at the University of Kuwait and graduated in 1971 with a degree in chemistry and geology.

He worked for the Ministry of Oil as a research geologist in the Department of Technical Affairs<sup>(2)</sup> for 25 years<sup>(3)</sup> until he retired in 1996 to dedicate himself to the church.

In 1981 Gharib showed a great interest in theology and he attended a religious convention in Switzerland in September. After returning to Kuwait, he participated in different ecclesiastical activities but the turning point came in 1986 when he began a three-year study of theology<sup>(4)</sup> at the Evangelical School of Theology in Cairo which is affiliated with the Evangelical Copts.

He obtained a BA in Theology cum laude and in 1992 he was ordained Presbyterian for the Evangelical Church. He was then elected and ordained Priest and Pastor for the Church in 1999.

He got that privilege in line with the constitution of the church which states that the selection for leading positions is made through elections; symbolic of the approach of the church since the reformation in the 16th century. Hence, he became the first Kuwaiti priest ever.

Rev. Gharib pays great attention to every detail when he attends to the responsibilities of his church. He looks after the interests of the faithful and teaches them the purity of Christian faith.

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(1) Mira't Al-Ommah Magazine, Ver. 1153, 30/1/1999

(2) The name Emmanuel means "God with us" in Hebrew and is commonly used by Christians while the name Benjamin means "the right hand." Ya'qub or (Jacob) means "Ya'b after his brother." See Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 4381/9935, 3/10/2003, PP12-13

(3) Al-Watan Newspaper, Ver. 4381/9935, 3/10/2003, PP12-13

(4) Mira't Al-Ommah Magazine, Ver. 1142, 7/11/1998, P12

He encourages them, citizens and residents, to respect the laws and abide by them. Outside the church, Rev. Gharib works to reinforce the relation between Christians and the Kuwaiti community and has left his mark at many levels in this regard.

Due to his keenness to partake in Muslim festivals, he hosts Sheikhs, ministers and ambassadors for a 'ghabqa' during every Ramadan. The church continuously calls for love and peace and it witnessed great transformation under the leadership of Rev. Gharib.

The biggest change is the way Christians celebrate their festivals, specifically the New Year. That beautiful ecclesiastical scene was once in the shadow and people heard of it more than they had seen it because of their fear of a non-existent reality in terms of the beliefs of some denominations.

Rev. Gharib never shies away when he expresses his opinions that strongly uphold the interests of Kuwait and Kuwaitis, Muslims or Christians.

On the issue of citizenship, Gharib says<sup>(1)</sup>: 'We hope this law will be cancelled as soon as possible, not because we wish to interfere in the sovereign right of Kuwait to give the nationality to whom it desires but because we care about the image of our country in the international arena.

'Our constitution calls for justice and equality. In Bahrain, for example, there is a legislation that grants nationality to the People of the Book, which is relatively better than what we have'.

His name and voice became linked with the existence of Christians in an Islamic country like Kuwait whose constitution states the 'freedom of belief is absolute.

'The State protects the freedom of practicing religion in accordance with established customs, provided it does not conflict with public policy or morals.'

The Evangelical Church was first built in 1931 by the American Mission in Qibla near the National Assembly. It was the fourth church including the Catholic churches. There were two churches in Ahmadi in addition to 9 churches which operated from residential buildings, unlike the four main churches<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) Theology means "discourse on God" and it includes discussing the Bible and its interpretation in addition to the religious intellect of those who had written the Bible and the history of the church, as well as the languages the Bible had been written in; Hebrew and Greek. It also entails reasoning the Deity and God's concept in Christianity.

(2) Interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib conducted by Muhammad Al-Husainy, Al-Anba' Newspaper, Ver. 9708, 13/5/2003, P12

He is the official spokesman of Christian Kuwaitis who follow the Evangelical Church and he believes, like the other 200 Christians, that there is no discrimination in Kuwait.

The government grants them total unbiased freedom and his daughter graduated in 1999 on a government scholarship while his other daughter is currently studying in the US.

He never felt any discrimination against Christians and as a Kuwaiti, has always voted freely whoever he thought was suitable to become Member of Parliament regardless of being Muslim or Christian.

As mentioned in the annual report of the US State Department in 1999, it was Christians in particular who testified for the religious freedom in Kuwait and refuted any claims otherwise.

### **Biography**

<b>Name:</b>	Emmanuel Benjamin Ya'qub Gharib
<b>Place &amp; DOB:</b>	9/1/1950 – Kuwait
<b>Marital Status:</b>	Married, 5 children
<b>Qualifications:</b>	BA in Science (Chemistry & Geology); BA in Theology cum laude – Evangelical School of Theology of Cairo
<b>Experience:</b>	
<b>First - Civil Work:</b>	
<b>From 1/8/1971 until 1/3/1996:</b>	Ministry of Oil as a Geologist then First Degree Geologist then Drilling & Production Monitor then Acting Manager of Information and Computer
<b>Second - Church Work:</b>	1979 to 1991: elected member in the Church Council 1991: Vice President of the Council 1991 - 1997: Financial and Administrative Manager in the Church Oct 12, 1992: elected and ordained Presbyter in the Church 1991 - 1996: elected member in the Executive

- Committee of the Association of Evangelical Churches in the Middle East
- Since 1991:** Church Representative in the Middle East Council of Churches and the Association of Evangelical Churches in the Middle East – Member of the Regional Consultant Committee of the Holy Bible Association in the Gulf
- Jan 8, 1999:** Ordained Priest and appointed Pastor of the Church
- Feb 15, 1999 incumbent:** unanimously chosen to coordinate between Arab Christian Clergymen and the formal entities in the State
- 2000:** elected member in the executive committee of the Arab World Evangelical Ministers Association (AWEMA)
- 2000:** appointed member in the International Council for the Evangelical Association of the Middle East in Cyprus
- 2005:** participated in the foundation of the Council for Muslim-Christian Relations in Kuwait and elected vice-president
- 2010:** elected Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Holy Bible Association in the Gulf.

## Indian Churches and Congregations

The number of the Indian population in Kuwait is about 800,000 and 250,000 of them are Christians of different denominations. There are between 40,000 and 50,000 thousand Sikhs and Hindus and 5,000 Buddhists. Indian Christians are divided as follows: 60,000 Protestant and Orthodox and 75,000 Catholics.

Mr. K.P. Koshy is the Executive Administrator of NECK. He came to Kuwait from Kerala, South India, in 1970 and worked at the Gulf Bank for 35 years before retiring in 2000 to devote himself to ecclesiastical work.

In a special interview, he says there is a union of Indian churches in Kuwait and the first of them was established in 1953. They are called the Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation (KTMCC) and are affiliated to the United Christian Witness in Kuwait.

The Malayalee dialect is spoken by 33 million people in India. It is the common language in the state of Kerala and there are around 134,000 of them in Kuwait.

There are about 500,000 Keralites in Kuwait which has long deep-rooted relationships with this state; the place from where Vasco Da Gama set out to the coasts of the Arabian Gulf.

Most Keralites speak English fluently since their state remained under the English occupation for 200 years. Kuwaitis in pre-oil era visited Kerala by ships to bring wood, rice and groceries.

The Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation started its activities in 1953 and many people held the position of executive administrators starting with Father De Jong (1953-1954) followed by Father McNeil (1955-1962), Father Lille Van Der Werf (1963-1964), Father Harvestol (1965-1966), Father Holler (67-70), Father Dainy Antoth (71-73), Father Lewis Scudder (73-74), Father Hilmy Haneen (1981), Father Nabil Atallah (1995) and lately Mr. Koshy from (2007-2011).

This congregation has a long history in ecclesiastical activity and is one of three groups strongly connected with the Reformed Church's Arabian Mission.

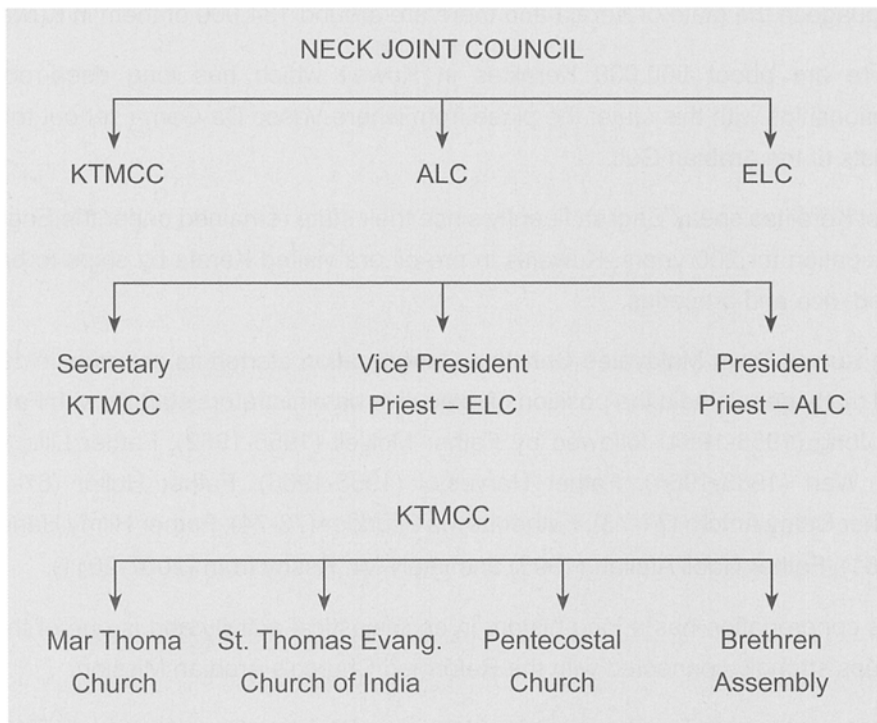
These groups are: The Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation (KTMCC) 1953, Arab Language Congregation (ALC) 1959 and English Language Congregation (ELC) 1962.

These three congregations formed a joint council of three members presided by an English speaking priest.

According to the book<sup>(1)</sup> published by The Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation, there are 85 denominations and congregations affiliated with NECK whose members practice their worship here, and lately Father Emmanuel Gharib was appointed president of the Joint Council.

The Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation (KTMCC) was founded in 1953 after the increase in the number of Indian Christians coming to Kuwait from Malabar to work in oil companies and hospitals and it was launched by Father Ghandi.

The KTMCC comprises of the following five Churches: Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, Church of South India, St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India, Pentecostal Church<sup>(2)</sup> and the Brethren Assembly.



(1) Churches in Our House, Personalities within Events Series, Al-Qabas newspaper, 6/1/2001

(2) The Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation (2012), 60th Jubilee Souvenir



*The Christian clergymen are seen with Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammad Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs during their visit to congratulate HH the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah following his return after a successful medical treatment (Feb 17, 2002)*



*Writer Hamza Olayyan with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib in his office in NECK in 2014*



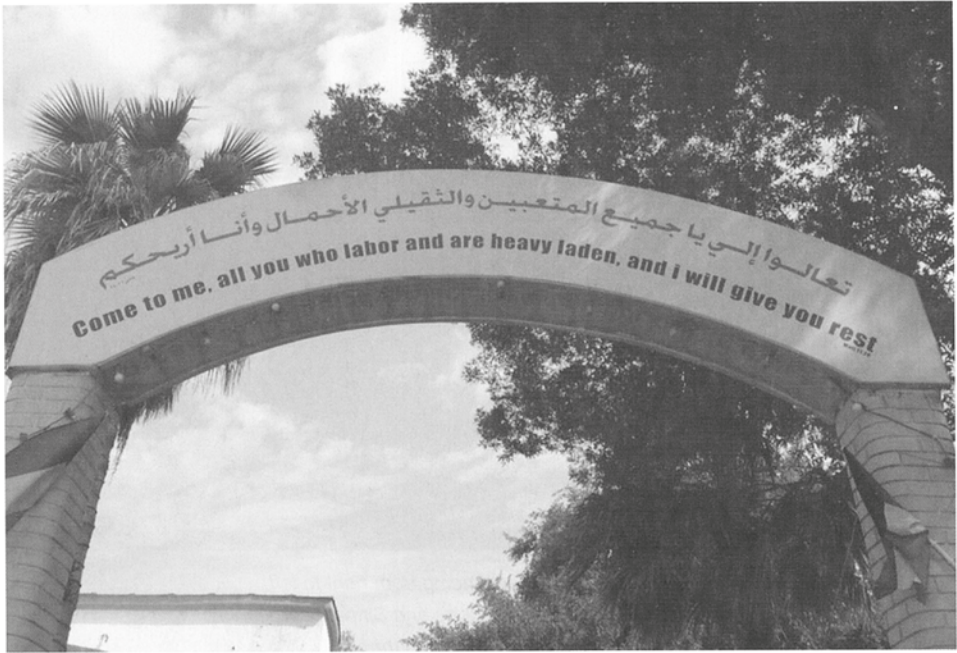
**Christian clergymen who participated in a prayer service at the NECK on Jan 23, 1974:**

1. Fr. Augustine Klavita, Catholic Church of Our Lady of Arabia, Ahmadi
2. Rev. Yusuf Abdul-Noor, NECK, Kuwait
3. E.C. Korian, Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, Kuwait
4. Rev. John Bragnel, Bishop, St. Paul's Church, Ahmadi
5. Rev. L.L. Scudder Jr., NECK, Kuwait
6. Fr. Rev. S.G Taykdavil, Syriac Orthodox Church, Kuwait
7. Monsignor Victor San Miguel, Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral, Kuwait
8. Fr. Hegumen Athanasius Al-Mahraqi, St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Kuwait
9. Fr. Nirus Zubikaray, Catholic, Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral, Kuwait
10. Fr. Jean Sa'dah, Maronite, Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral, Kuwait
11. Fr. Basile Kanakri, Greek Catholic Church, Kuwait
12. Fr. Volgensio Fernandez, Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral, Kuwait
13. Fr. Khoury Barour Sarkisian, Armenian Orthodox Church, Kuwait



*KTMCC members - Standing from right to left:  
Roui Yohana, Babo Vanoges and Siriac George;  
Sitting from left to right:*

*John John, Mathews, Joseph, K.P. Koshy, Executive Administrator of NECK*



*Entrance of NECK*



*The name of the church on the entrance wall*

## Catholic Church (Latin)

The Catholic Church in Kuwait is officially called the Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral. Some call it Al-Watya Church, referring to it after the name where it is located while others call it the Sheraton Church since it is very adjacent to the hotel overlooking the seashore.

Another name this church is known for is the Indians' Church but now it is widely known as the Catholic Church and it is the headquarters of the Holy Family Parish.

According to Bishop Camillo Ballin<sup>(1)</sup>, prayers and masses are celebrated in the church in 13 different languages and 5 rituals. Other than Arabic, these languages include English, Coptic, Tagalog, Korean, Tamil, Sinhala, Konkani, Malayalam, Spanish, Italian, Bengali and Syro-Malabar.

The rituals are practiced inside the church, in the rooms and halls dedicated for worship are devoted to the following churches: Latin, Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, Maronite and Catholic Coptic, all of which are Latin Catholics.

Those denominations perform their rituals differently according to their geographical origins, and they express their love of God as per their environments.

There is a Byzantine - in reference to the city of Byzantium in Turkey - ritual where worshippers give God the honor they used to give emperors.

The prayers of the Copts in Egypt, however, are affected with the monastic style of life in the desert. Their masses consist of simple expressions that make it a very simple monastic ritual.

The church involves 350,000 Catholics living in Kuwait, mostly Europeans, Americans, Arabs, Indians, Filipinos and Sri Lankans. The church was transformed into a cathedral with an ecclesiastical complex.

Regionally, the church is under the administration and presidency of Bishop Camillo Ballin who takes Bahrain as his headquarter under the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

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(1) It is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity known as Pentecostalism which rose in America. It is distinguished by belief in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, provided that it is identical to what the 12 apostles had experienced when the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the 50th day of Christ's ascendance to the sky (the Pentecost Day). The Spirit's descent was evident through many signs; spiritual gifts, divine healing and speaking in tongues.

Ecclesiastically, the church reports directly to the Holy See in The Vatican with another 17-22 churches around the world. Those churches enjoy self-governance since the Melkite Greek Catholic Church has an independent administration. Originally, when we mention Roman Catholics, we mean the Latin Arabs who are referred to as the Church of Rome, in addition to the Melkite Greek Catholics known in the Levant as Roman Catholics.

The main headquarter of the church is in Kuwait and it was allotted by the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Ruler of Kuwait. It is a kind of grant and the new building was completed in 1966 and was later transformed to the Department of State Properties, governed by a lease contract since the 1960s.

In addition to the mother church, there is another Catholic church in Ahmadi called The Church of Our Lady of Arabia, named after the Virgin Mary, which some call the Church of Mary, in addition to some rented houses in Salmiya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh for prayers and rituals because of the increasing number of Christians and lack of churches to cope with that increase.

Just prior to the Good Friday<sup>(1)</sup> and ahead of Easter, I interviewed Bishop Camillo Ballin, Head of the Catholic Church in Northern Arabia, who resides in Bahrain. He talked about inter-relations between the Catholic Church and the State of Kuwait and the rest of the GCC countries.

He came to Kuwait within his usual visits to meet with the people of the church and it was decided that a celebratory mass be held in the church near the Sheraton called the Chrism Mass.

Bishop Ballin insisted that there had never been a single case where government institution supervised "what we do in the church."

He refuted the existence of any hindrances that prevent them from performing their rituals, reiterating that the church and its followers enjoy total freedom within the church compound.

He said there are 350,000 Catholics in Kuwait and almost an equal number or more in Qatar.

In Bahrain, he added, there are between 100 and 140 thousand while Saudi Arabia is host to about 1.5 million Catholics. Bishop Ballin answered a few more questions.

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(1) An interview conducted in the Catholic Church in Kuwait, 16/4/2014

Q: How do you describe your relationship with Kuwait?

A: It is a good relationship. No doubt the Kuwaiti government is tolerant, respects us and grants us complete freedom of worship within the walls of the church.

I assure you no one from the government or the police have ever come to us to see what we do in the church. There is no supervision whatsoever over our activities and we enjoy the utmost freedom delivering our spiritual message to the Christian believers.

Q: To what extent did the existence of a Vatican embassy in Kuwait help improve the relationship between the church and the government?

A: The Embassy can of course elaborate better on this issue whenever there is a problem. I came in 2005 and there has never been any need for them to interfere and solve any problem.

Q: What are the churches affiliated to the Catholic Church in Kuwait? What do you think is the number of Catholics in the GCC countries?

A: We have two churches in Kuwait; one in Ahmadi and the other in Kuwait City. The one in Ahmadi is owned by the KOC and it is the first Catholic Church to be built in Kuwait in the 1950s.

Then came the Catholic Church near the Sheraton Hotel which is the Cathedral that is the central Church for the whole Parish. There are at least 350,000 Catholics in Kuwait and the same number or more in Qatar.

In Bahrain, there are between 100 and 140,000 while Saudi Arabia hosts about 1.5 million Catholics.

Q: What are the churches built in Northern Arabia? And what is the number of Catholics?

A: There are two churches in Kuwait, one in Qatar and one in Bahrain. HH the Amir of Bahrain Sheikh Hamad Bin Issa Al Khalifa had allotted a 9000-square-meter land to build a new church in Awali, south of the kingdom.

### **The beginning in Ahmadi**

Bishop Ballin said the Catholic existence in Kuwait dates back to 1949 when a priest from Basra visited Ahmadi to gather Catholics when they were in small

number. But now it is completely different and we enjoy total freedom of worship within the church compound.

The Catholic Church was built in 1958 and over the past 50 years, many Christian Arab Fathers have taken charge.

The list includes Fr. Angelos Masoud, Pastor of the Coptic Catholics, Rev. Fr. Latif Haddad, Fr. George Haddad, Thomas Habib and Rev. Fr. Maron Souaiby from (1955-1966) having come from Iraq.

This was followed by Bishop Victor Leon Esteban (1966-1981) who was succeeded by Bishop Francis George Adeodatus (1981-2005). In 2011, Catholic followers in Northern Arabia came under the patronage of Bishop Camillo Ballin who resides in Bahrain and was appointed as the Vicar Apostolic of Kuwait in 2005.

Since 2011, the hierarchy stated that Bishop Camillo Ballin was the religious reference for churches and followers in Northern Arabia which includes Kuwait, KSA, Qatar and Bahrain. Second to him in the hierarchy inside the church is Vicar General, currently Adel Nasr. The latter resides in Kuwait.

There are approximately 22 priests working in Catholic churches in Kuwait, a good number of them work in Catholic and Indian schools in many regions.

The Catholic Church in Kuwait is followed by a number of churches which work within its premises and have dedicated places for worship and these include the Coptic Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, the Indian Syro-Malabar Church, the Indian Malankara Church and the Latin Church. Melkite Greek Catholic Church, however, is located in Salwa.

Many churches around the world follow The Vatican directly and have self-governance, such as the Eastern Churches which follow the Bishop of Rome, known as the Pope.

Chief among these are the Maronite Church, Melkite Greek Catholic Church, the Coptic Catholic Church, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Malankara Church, all of which have presence in Kuwait.

I interviewed Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr<sup>(1)</sup>, Vicar General of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, Bishop Camillo Ballin. He is responsible for foreign affairs since 2012.

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(1) An interview conducted in the Catholic Church in Kuwait, Al-Qabas newspaper, 14/4/2014

He said when the Carmelite monks came to Kuwait in 1945 from Basra they stayed not far from the current 'Sheraton Church' to celebrate mass for the Catholic community, including Kuwaiti Catholics.

In 1948, there were 700 Catholics in Kuwait of all nationalities including Kuwaitis. In that year, the Ahmadi Church was built as the first missionary station before becoming the second church in June, 1953.

Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr pointed out all churches in Kuwait deal with the Ministry of Labor as an official entity in the state because it is the one entity entitled to grant work permits for those who serve the church in order to legally stay here.

So it is only a link in terms of residency for the servants of the church of all ranks. As for the relationship between the church and the government of Kuwait, Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr confirmed that it is a very friendly relationship with the leadership and the people alike that has been sincere for decades, on the official level, the relationship is limited to the Ministry of Labor without any specific agreement or order that determines the nature of this relationship in terms of churches and their activities.

In an interview in March, 2014, he said the number of Catholics in Kuwait has rocketed from a staggering 350,000 who now cannot be served by two or three churches. He reiterated their desperate need for buildings and places where they can practice their religious rites easily.

The most important events and developments in the history of The Catholic Church in Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>.

1911: The first Catholic to set foot in Kuwait was a Portuguese sailor from the Portuguese Royal Navy who landed at the Qurain harbor (his name was not mentioned).

1934: The KOC was established and recruited many Catholic workers and others who worked for the Gray Mackenzie Shipping Line. (Mackenzie was a British/Indian company)

1945: A number of Catholics, specifically from India, Lebanon and Europe, came to Kuwait to work for KOC and had not had a priest for their rituals.

The company invited Jesuit Father, Rev. Fr. James Larkin from Baghdad to celebrate Christmas Eve in Maqwa'. (This was the first Catholic gathering).

(1) A face to face interview with Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr in the library of the Catholic Church in Kuwait, March, 2014

1947: the KOC in Ahmadi invited, upon request of the Catholic community, the first priest from Iraq to be their Pastor. His name was Vicar Fredrick.

April 5, 1948: Father Ubaldo Teofano Stella was appointed Priest for the Catholic employees working for the KOC. The mass was celebrated every Friday in the cinema hall and another mass on Sundays in Ahmadi in a smaller temple afforded by KOC.

1949-1950: An important event in the history of the parish was the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of His Holiness the Pope on April 1, 1949 when the Apostolic Delegate for Iraq, the Most Rev. Msgr. Du Chayla visited Kuwait. He returned to Kuwait again in February, 1950 to hold a huge ceremony.

1951: The increase in the Catholic population called for an increase in ministries. So in March 1951, another priest, Rev. Fr. A. A. Clavenna, came to assist Fr. Stella.

1953: A third priest, Rev. Fr. Herman Mizzi, was summoned and celebrated another mass in Kuwait.

2/12/1954: the Holy Father Pope Pius XII raised Kuwait to become a Bishopric (Vicariate Apostolic).

Sept 8, 1955: the cornerstone was laid for the Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi by Bishop Elect Monsignor Stella.

1957: HH Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah granted Bishop Stella the right to use the land where the Cathedral now stands. Bishop Stella chose January 27 as the day for laying the foundation stone of the Cathedral and decided to dedicate the Cathedral to 'The Holy Family in the Desert'.

1959: The Catholic community especially Indians, began to grow in the district of Salmiya due to the availability of Indian schools in the area. Lack of facilities for commuting to and from the city rendered it difficult for the faithful to attend the weekly services at the Cathedral. Thus, the first weekly Holy Mass was celebrated at Salmiya on Tuesday, Nov 3, 1959 by Bishop Stella.

1961: Kuwait became an independent state. Bishop Stella invited the Rosary Sisters from Jordan and Lebanon to start a school in Kuwait. Fajer Al Sabah School was initiated in 1961 and started with 204 students from Kindergarten to Primary Stages.

1964: Bishop Stella brought the Sisters from Iraq to open another school, Al-Amal School. The Sisters left Kuwait because of the invasion by Iraq in August 1990

1966: In accordance with the dictates of the Carmelite Order, Bishop Stella was recalled from his assignment in Kuwait in 1966. Appointed to succeed him as Apostolic Administrator of Kuwait, was Monsignor Victor Leon Esteban who arrived in Kuwait on June 4, 1966 to shepherd a flock of 17,000 Catholics from more than 40 nationalities. The Monsignor did much to develop a diplomatic association between the Kuwaiti Government and the Holy See

1967: A new temple was open when a small villa with a garage was acquired and converted into a big hall sufficient to accommodate over 100 parishioners

March 27, 1969: a band of four Indian Sisters landed in Kuwait and established the Carmel School; Since Fajer Al-Sabah School was only for girls, the Monsignor started the Ikhlas Intermediate and Secondary School for boys. He also brought Sisters from India and the Philippines to take up nursing positions in private hospitals and clinics

1973: The Greek Catholic parish came into existence and the Services were conducted in a separate Chapel

Feb 5, 1974: a new Chapel was opened in Salmiya under the auspices of Monsignor Victor Esteban

July 16, 1976: Apostolic Administrator, Monsignor Victor Esteban, was consecrated as Bishop

1982: Bishop Victor Esteban retired and returned to home country, India. Monsignor Francis George Micallef, Kuwait's third Catholic Bishop, took charge of the Vicariate. His zeal for the spiritual welfare of children remains evident

1990: during the Iraqi invasion, the two churches in Ahmadi and Kuwait City were victims of acts of violence. Bishop Francis Micallef had to celebrate Mass either in his house or in the church

1991: When Kuwait was liberated from the Iraqi aggressors, the church bells rang in Kuwait City in celebration and the damage to the church was repaired with help from volunteers

Oct 15, 1997: The increase in the Catholic population in Kuwait was too significant that the Cathedral was insufficient to accommodate them and Bishop Francis Micallef decided it was time for an expansion. The inauguration took place on October 15, 1997

2000: The Vatican appointed a resident Nuncio in Kuwait who was appointed as Apostolic Delegate for the Gulf States

Sept 8, 2000: the new Bishop's Residence was inaugurated, plans for the new extension hall of the Ahmadi Church were sanctioned and the website of the Vicariate Apostolic of Kuwait was officially launched

2001: The inauguration and opening ceremony of the new extension of the Ahmadi Church was held on April 17 and the new extended Chapel in Salmiya was inaugurated by Bishop Micallef on June 8.

2002: The Indian English Academy School was officially opened.

2004: It was the 'Year of Jubilees', one for the Vicar Apostolic of Kuwait, Bishop Francis Micallef on May 8, and the other Golden Jubilee of the founding of the Vicariate of Kuwait on Dec 2.

2005: Bishop Francis Micallef retired in July. He was succeeded by Msgr. Camillo Ballin who was ordained Bishop on Sept 2, becoming the fourth Vicar Apostolic of Kuwait.

2006: The Chapel's name was changed to 'Church of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus', erecting it into a Parish comprising of the following areas: Messila, Ras Salmiya, Salwa, Rumaithiya, Maidan Hawally, Sabah Al-Salem, Mishref and Bayan.

2008: HL Bishop Camillo Ballin declared the opening of the Comboni mission center in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on Sept 24. St. Daniel Comboni was proclaimed its patron.

2010: Rev. Fr. Albert Saveriraj was installed as the first Parish Priest. New areas in the Parish included Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Dajeej, Airport, Sabhan and Qurain.

Jan 5, 2011: The Holy See officially proclaimed Our Lady of Arabia Patroness of both the Vicariates in the Arabian Peninsula: The Vicariate Apostolic of

Kuwait and the Vicariate Apostolic of Arabia which includes Kuwait, KSA, Qatar and Bahrain. Bishop Ballin chose to reside in Bahrain.

### **Bishop Camillo Ballin**

The Catholics' Bishop in Kuwait was born in Fontaniva, Padova, Italy in June, 1944. After completing high school, he entered into monasticism and was ordained Priest in March 1969.

He was then sent to learn Arabic in Lebanon and Syria (1969-1971). In the Latin parish of St. Joseph, Zamalek, Cairo, he was appointed Parish Priest (1972-1977)

From 1977-1978, he returned to Lebanon for his Licentiate in Oriental liturgy which he obtained in Italy in 1980.

From 1981 to 1990, he was professor at the Institute of Theology in Cairo and Delegation Superior and Provincial Superior of his religious congregation in Egypt.

In 1990, he was assigned to the province of Sudan where he opened The Training Institute for the Formation of Religion Teachers in Schools

From 1997 until 2000, he was in Rome for his doctorate on the church history of Sudan especially in the Mahdiyyah time (1881-1898 and during that period, the practice of any other religion, except the Mahdist Islam, was strictly forbidden). His research was on how Christians lived in those years.

In 2000, he was appointed Director of the Dar Comboni Center of Arab and Islamic Studies in Cairo, Egypt and Professor of Church History in the Inter-Rite Major Seminary.

On July 14, 2005, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI appointed him as (Fourth) Vicar Apostolic of Kuwait and assigned to him the Titular See of Arna.

His Lordship Bishop Camillo Ballin became the first Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia which includes Kuwait, KSA, Qatar and Bahrain.

He manages to speak English, Arabic, French and Italian fluently. After completing the Arabic studies at the hands of his Syrian teacher Salim Al-Zai'm, who was 100 years old in 2014, he, in collaboration with the Egyptian professors issued two books 'The Way to the Arabic Language' for non-native speakers of Arabic, making use of his Master's Methodology by not using a single word in any other language but Arabic.

The Bahraini monarch King Hamad Bin Issa Al Khalifa granted him the Bahraini nationality in recognition of his stature; hence making easy for him to travel freely between the GCC countries.

Pastoral Letter to all The Catholics of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia  
From Bishop Camillo Ballin, MCCJ Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia

Year 2013 is the year of celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Bahrain; the first Catholic Church was built in the Vicariate in 1939.

The term 'church' comes from the Greek *ekklesia* but its origin is from the Old Testament and means the assembly of the people of Israel, summoned by God.

Now, this term means the new community of the believers in Christ, who form the new Assembly of God.

The founder of the Church is Jesus Christ, not Saint Paul or any human. After Jesus Christ, the twelve Apostles became the representatives of the twelve tribes which formed the people of God in the Old Testament.

The Christian community became the new people of God. Pagans and the Jews entered into this new community and all together formed the church.

The purpose of any meeting in the church is to implement the human and spiritual formation.

The mission of the church is not to organize human and social activities, but to make of us the true image of Jesus Christ. Coming from God, the church wants to take us to God. To more our hearts move near the heart of God, the more we change the world around us: injustice, violence, hatred, divisions and any human conflict are turned into love.

The mission of the church is to change the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of God.

This is the mission of the church! Sacraments, prayer and faith formation are the main ways through which the church realizes her mission.

## **The Western and Eastern Churches**

In all our churches, we have the so-called Latin Rites and Oriental Rites. It is a geopolitical division which, with time, became ecclesiastical.

The Western churches centered mainly on Rome, the Eastern churches around Constantinople. Another broad division was based on the language in use. The predominant language in the Western churches was Latin while it was Greek in the Eastern churches. Eastern churches also include the Syriac churches, of Semitic origin.

Finally, there were Oriental churches also outside the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, like the Armenian Church and the Chaldean Church.

According to the Code of Canons of the Eastern churches, the Oriental churches arise from the Alexandrian, Antiochian, Constantinopolitan, Armenian and Chaldean traditions.

At present, there are six Liturgical Families of which one is Western, which is Rome, and five are Eastern.

They are: Alexandrian Family (Coptic Church and Ethiopian Church), Antiochian Family (West Syrian Church, Maronite Church, Syro-Malankara Church, East Syrian Family (Chaldean Church, Syro-Malankara Church, Armenian Family (only Armenian Church) and the Byzantine Family (13 churches).

The total is 1 Western Church (Rome) and 22 Eastern churches. Except for the Maronite Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, all the other Eastern churches have Orthodox counterparts.

We have faithful from almost all these churches and we celebrate 5 rites in 13 languages.

Our biggest challenge is to form of these many churches, 'One Catholic Church' but liturgies and traditions hinder us. Those churches, in the end, are all but one church.

### ***A conversation with Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr***

His connections with Kuwait go back to the days of his youth. The first time he went out of Italy and was assigned in an ecclesiastical mission abroad was to

Kuwait when he was appointed two years ago as Vicar General of Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia for Public Affairs.

Today, he pastors 350,000 Catholics of all nationalities living in Kuwait and he enjoys a network of relations with the political leadership and people of Kuwait which makes him persona grata.

He is a mixture of both Arab and European cultures. His grandfather was an Arab Christian from the Ghassanids while his grandmother had Latin European roots.

He was raised in a half-Lebanese half-Italian environment and built strong links with the people of the Arabian Peninsula which he used as a bridge for rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Islamic community.

He made his own dream come true when the Pope and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques met. In order to achieve this dream, he was assisted by Bishop Mounjed El-Hachem, the second Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait, whom he knows since college days and was taught Islamic Sciences under his patronage.

He gave him the green light to prepare for the meeting between the two holiest and most blessed places for Islam and Christianity where the Pope, who represents 1.3 billion Catholics in the world, shall meet the monarch of KSA.

The scenario by which Pope Benedict XVI met with King Abdullah gives Fr. Adel Nasr his greatest pride. At that time, the efforts of Prince Saud Al-Faisal and the Ambassador to Rome were essential in addition to the demands of establishing a center for Christian-Islamic debate.

On an unprecedented occasion, the late Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal met the Pope whose receptions were exclusive to presidents but with the now Secretary of State, Monsignor Pietro Parolin, in the Foreign Affairs office at that time, all obstacles were cleared.

They met in 2007 and then the meeting between the Pope of Rome and the King of KSA for the first time ever happened in November of the same year. Their relationship continued to be a cordial.

Adel Nasr works in 50-year-old church in Kuwait where he serves the Catholic faithful and takes great care of Arab Christians. He is preceded by a list of many Reverends who served the Arab Catholic faithful, which included Fr. Angelos

Masoud, Fr. Latif Haddad, Fr. George Haddad, Thomas Habib and Rev. Fr. Maron Souaiby.

The first bishop for the Catholic Church in Kuwait was Bishop Ubaldo in 1953. In 2011, Kuwait, KSA, Qatar and Bahrain were joined within the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia headed by Bishop Camillo Ballin who resides in Bahrain and has a Vicar General in Kuwait, Rev. Fr. Mathews Francis, and a Vicar General for Public Affairs, Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr.

“Kuwait is a wonder.” That is how he describes the country where he would not live as a stranger. He enjoys a network of connections that MPs and politicians would envy, taking care of the faithful, upbringing the Christian youth and performing his duties with the ministries of the State.

He considers Kuwait a society that has been open for centuries which embraced Bedouins, townsmen and dockers all together with the newcomers.

The ruling Al-Sabah family has never imposed their power by sword or blood but the people love them and acknowledge their sovereignty and demand their rule.

Previously, the church used to be empty in the morning but now things have changed. The faithful come in numbers and fill the church after they felt the tangible transformation thanks to Rev. Fr. Nasr.

He is an eloquent preacher and a very affable personality. Outside the church, the thing he likes most is visiting diwanias and meeting the youth who ask for his advice on Italian affairs, especially Italian art.

The oldest diplomatic affair The Vatican has in the Gulf is that with Kuwait where it has been represented by a nuncio for 12 years. People used to call the Church ‘the Indians’ Church’ but now it is known as the ‘Vatican Church’ or the ‘Catholic Church’.

It is officially called the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, which started in 1945 under the name ‘Carmelite Fathers’ and was administered from Basra.

He wishes Kuwait would soon grant churches self-governance instead of the link with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor which is limited to merely issuing work permits to the servants of the church.

The churches, he believes, are not companies and it would suit them best to have a special system where churches are administered through an agreement or a contract, which would in turn make it easier for all parties to have a legally clear situation.

He has great feelings and respect for HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince and the political leadership for all they have done to serve the Church.

He treasures the love of Kuwaitis for him and for what he represents and adores the Diwanis which play a role much bigger than its boundaries.

He narrates an incident when he met the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Rome Sheikh Jaber Al-Duaij Al-Sabah who asked whether he felt comfortable in Kuwait. His answer came: "Yes, as long as we have people who respect the other and embrace all nations of the world. This surely has a positive effect on us."

### ***Painting school***

He established a painting school in Italy to teach iconography using natural colors and a mix of eggs, vinegar and 23-karat gold. He joined a Latin Catholic Church through Fr. Pordenone in North East Italy, near Venice.

### ***A relationship with Al-Sabah***

He has intimate relationships with many members of the ruling family, especially the sons and grandsons of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed and also with Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser whom he met 12 years ago and shares with him his love of the Kuwaiti folklore and cultural heritage.

### ***Languages***

In addition to his fluency in English, Arabic and Italian, he also speaks Latin, Greek and Hebrew which he needs for studying and reading scriptures and researches of the Holy Bible, being the languages of afflatus.

His father, a publisher; his mother, a journalist

His father owned an Arabic publishing house called the Illustrated Arab Society Dar for Publishing and Advertising. His mother, Rene Nasr, worked as a journalist and wrote poetry under the pseudonym Zaina Nasr. From both his parents, Fr. Adel inherited his passion for reading and writing.

### ***Sheikh of Al-Subaia' Tribe***

He maintained a close relationship with Musallam Buthnain, the Sheikh of Al-Subaia' tribe from the Remah City near Riyadh. He visited him 7 years ago during a camel contest where he was introduced to many personalities from the KSA and had continuous relationships with them.

### **Biography**

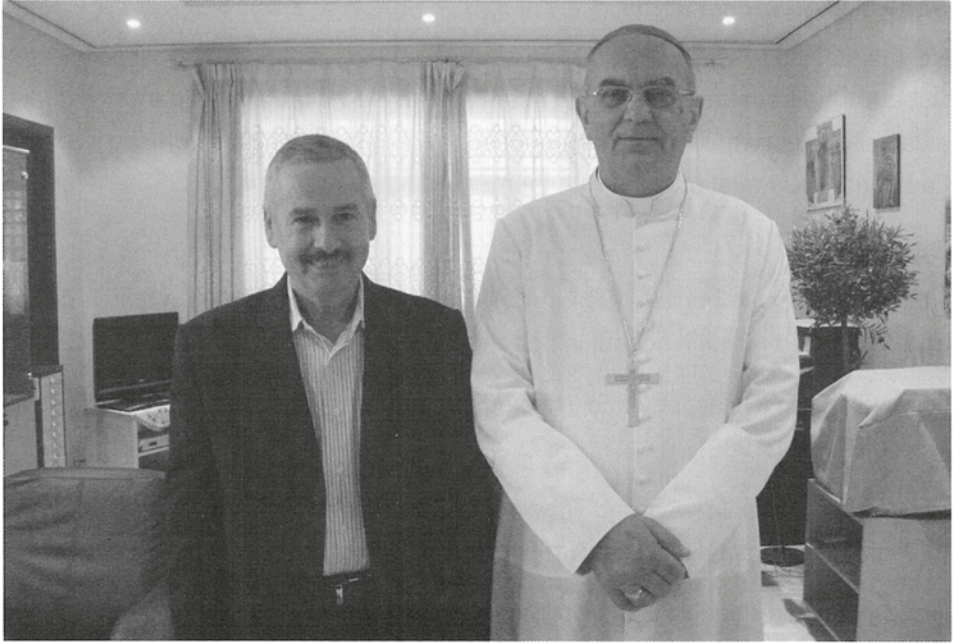
Adel Afif Nasr was born in 1964 in Kafr Shima, Lebanon. He is an Italian citizen and completed his high school in Lebanon and Jordan.

He holds BA in Philosophy and Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome (1984-1989).

He specialized in Liturgical and Theological Studies (4 years) and Human Sciences (3 years) in Padova, North Italy (1991-1993).

He completed his specialization in interreligious Studies (1991-1993) and obtained a Licentiate in Canon Law from the Saint Pius X Institute of Canon Law of Venice (2009-2011).

He was appointed Vicar General of the Catholic Church for Public and Foreign Affairs; the Vicariate includes Kuwait, KSA, Qatar and Bahrain. He resides in Kuwait (the Sheraton Church).



*Bishop Camillo Ballin with the author Hamza Olayan (Kuwait 2014)*



*Bishop Ubaldo Teofano Stella*



*Fr. Adel Nasr in the Catholic Church's yard in Kuwait City*



*The Catholic Church building from the outside*



*Letter of gratitude at the entrance of the Catholic Church*

## **Catholic Church of Our Lady of Arabia (Ahmadi – Kuwait)**

The Church of Our Lady of Arabia is the 'mother church' of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia. It is the first Catholic Church to be built on Kuwait soil.

The Parishioners of the Church are those who reside in the south areas of Wafra, Mina Abdullah, Fahaheel, Mangaf, Abu Halifa, Fintas, Adan, Sabahiya, Riqqa, Hadiya, Mahboula, Magwa, Funaitees and Shuaiba.

It is dedicated to the Mother of God, Mary most Holy. The Church is also dedicated to St. Elias the Prophet and St. Thérèse of Lisieux<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Carmelite Church in Ahmadi has played a fundamental part in the life of the Catholics here and a very important role in the Church history of the State itself.

The Catholics worshipped in a provisional Chapel from 1948 until 1955. This Chapel was previously a Nissen hut but The Chapel was blessed on Dec 8, 1948. On that day, devotion to 'Our Lady of Arabia' started.

Rev. Fr. Teofano Ubaldo Stella, the first resident Catholic priest and later the first Bishop in Kuwait, asked the Kuwait Oil Company management to build a decent-sized Church.

The KOC management supported the proposal and in due course permission was granted for a new church to be built in central Ahmadi in November 1950.

On Sept 8, 1955, the cornerstone was laid for the Church of Our Lady of Arabia by Bishop Elect Monsignor Stella. On Easter, April 1, 1956, His Holiness Bishop Stella blessed the new Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi.

The church is simple and beautiful and a generous gift from the KOC to the Catholics who live and work in Kuwait. The Statue of Our Lady of Arabia is a replica of the statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, venerated in her basilica on Mount Carmel.

In November 1996, The Vatican Foreign Minister, His Grace Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran laid the foundation stone for the new hall annexed to the Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi.

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(1) This information were taken from the website of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia

It was not complete until 2001 when Msgr. Giuseppe De Andrea, Chargé D'affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Kuwait, performed the ribbon cutting ceremony. The addition of the new hall to the existing Church is a gift from the Kuwait Government and the KOC.

## Significant Events in The History of the Church in Ahmadi

1945: First mass celebrated in a tent in Maqwa on Christmas Day

1946-1948: A priest from Carmelite Mission in Basra visited Kuwait periodically to celebrate Mass at different venues in Kuwait, including the indoor cinema of KOC at Maqwa and Ahmadi and at the Protestant chapel of the American Mission

April 1948: Fr. Teofano U. Stella appointed first resident priest in Kuwait

November 1948: An old power station in Ahmadi was converted into a chapel and the First Mass was celebrated in the new chapel

Dec 8, 1948: The rite of the Blessing of the "Church" (i.e. Chapel) was performed by Fr. Stella

December 1949: The Statue of Our Lady of Arabia was requisitioned from Italy by Bishop Stella, and blessed by His Holiness Pope Pius XII. On arrival, the statue was taken in a procession from Shuwaikh to Ahmadi

1952: Permission was requested and granted by KOC to build a new Church. The cornerstone for the new church was acquired from the ruins of an old Dominican Abbey

Sept 8, 1955: The cornerstone was laid at the site of the new church

April 1956: The church of Our Lady of Arabia was consecrated

March 25, 1960: Cardinal Valerian Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay placed a crown of gold on the statue of Our Lady of Arabia

Aug 2, 1990: The ghastly Iraqi aggression and invasion of Kuwait had a devastating effect on Kuwait. Unimaginable acts of violence were committed against its peaceful citizens.

Ahmadi was particularly badly affected. Msgr. Francis Micallef braved all dangerous circumstances and celebrated mass either in a house or in the church.

Fr. Mizzi carried on bravely trying to protect the church from acts of violence. Despite this, the statue of Our Lady of Arabia was vandalized and the culprits were not identified.

It was later restored by parishioners. The church and the priest's house sustained damages as a result of bombs dropped on houses nearby

Feb 26, 1991: Kuwait was liberated from the Iraqi aggressors, and the church bells rang continuously in celebration of this event. The damage to the church was repaired with help of volunteers

Dec 8, 1998: This day marked the Golden Anniversary of the inauguration of the first Church (Chapel) of Our Lady of Arabia

April 17, 2001: Inauguration and opening ceremony of the new hall (extension to the Church). His Lordship Bishop Francis Micallef, Msgr. Giuseppe De Andrea, Chargé D'affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Kuwait and Fr. John Chrysostom performed the ribbon cutting ceremony

Jan 16, 2011: His Eminence Cardinal Antonio Canizares Lovera arrived in Kuwait to personally inaugurate the special occasion

Church of Our Lady of Arabia, Ahmadi First photograph of immolation posted on the internet, presented by Mary Belinda. Cardinal Gracias is shown in the middle. The construction of the church began in 1952 and continued for 3 years. It was inaugurated in 1956 under the auspices of Bishop Stella.



*Church of Our Lady of Arabia - Ahmadi*



*First photograph of immolation posted on the internet, presented by Mary Belinda.  
Cardinal Gracias is shown in the middle*



*The construction of the church began in 1952 and continued for 3 years.  
It was inaugurated in 1956 under the auspices of Bishop Stella*

## St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church

Before we entered his office, Archbishop Anba Bishoy Bigol had been waiting for us at the entrance of the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in the heart of Hawalli, which is the new church that was inaugurated in 2009. Our visit was in the first week of April 2014, just before Easter.

As he has always done with all visitors, he shows great humbleness and openness to all questions without restrictions.

After providing us a comprehensive file containing all the data regarding the history of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait, during our interview he talked about the relationship between the church and other churches in Kuwait.

He stressed, "we are brothers in faith and we can pray together, like the Assyrian, Indian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Ethiopian<sup>(1)</sup> and Eritrean churches."

About the link of the church with Egypt, he says they "follow His Holiness Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, which is the center of the church for all Copts in the world."

And so does the Coptic Orthodox Church. It follows the Catholic Church near the Sheraton and the Pope of Rome, Francis I, despite the fact that there is a tiny number of Copts who follow the Anglican Protestant denomination.

On the other hand, it is difficult to get the exact number of the Coptic Orthodox members due to the lack of official statistics, taking into account there are about 453,000 Egyptians in Kuwait according to a study by the National Assembly (Feb 16, 2014). However, according to Hind Al-Sabih, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, that number was 315,000 (April 1, 2014).

Thanks to his connections with all denominations and churches in Kuwait, he was chosen a member of the Association of Christian Churches.

He has always been open and tolerant and has issued many statements on behalf of the Church and the Association to denounce the attack on Muslims and reiterates tolerance of Islam, confirming that Kuwait is an example of coexistence between religions, denominations and nationalities.

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(1) The information mentioned here is taken from [www.avona.org](http://www.avona.org), the website of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, which covers the activities of the churches in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and KSA.

He hosts a ghabqa (feast) every Ramadan to stay in touch with the Muslim community in general and Egyptian Muslims in particular. The head of the Coptic Church hosts clergymen, politicians and diplomats during this annual festival of fraternity and coexistence.

On many occasions, Archbishop Anba Bishoy Bigol, more than many other Christian clergymen, has defended Kuwait's tolerant nature and respect for other religions which has enabled them to practice their religious rituals freely.

### **History of the Coptic Church**

The history of the Coptic Orthodox Church goes back to the 1950s when an increasing number of Copts began to arrive in Kuwait and needed to practice their rituals. At that time, there were only two churches; the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church of the American Mission.

According to a booklet issued by the Coptic Church in 2014, a group of Coptic workers in Kuwait met in 1959 HE Anba Basilios, Archdiocese of Jerusalem and All the Near East and asked him to help them build a Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait since they were part of the Archdiocese of Jerusalem and All the Near East.

His Eminence promised to exude all possible efforts and asked them to send a representative to continue with the project. Mr. Ramzi Zaki Eskandar was sent as an envoy at the end of December 1959 carrying a plea from the Copts in Kuwait in order for HE Anba Basilios to deliver it to HH Pope Cyril VI who would bless the project and contact Kuwaiti officials to obtain their approval and start the necessary procedures.

Driven by their zeal of having their own church, the Copts delegated Mr. Zaki once again to discuss the issue with Anba Basilios.

On Sept 17, 1960, HH Pope Cyril VI sent a request to HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, thanking him for his utmost grace towards Orthodox Christians in his country, asking for a permit to build a church for the Orthodox Copts and pleaded for financial assistance in case he had agreed to his request.

Mr. Zaki was HH Pope Cyril VI's envoy to the Amir and he delivered it to Mr. Sulaiman, son of Muhammad Sulaiman Al-Otaibyi, the Amir's private secretary, who happened to be in Cairo at the time.

Upon receiving the request, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent the Pope a letter on April 7, 1960 thanking him for his letter, expressing his pleasure to host Orthodox Christians in Kuwait and assuring him his keenness that everybody lives in Kuwait in total freedom and satisfaction.

HH the Amir promised HH the Pope that his request would be studied seriously as per the circumstances and would get back to him at a proper time.

Hegumen Makary Al-Suriani, the Pope's secretary, sent a letter on April 25, 1960 to Muhammad Al-Otaibi, the Amir's secretary; extending HH the Pope's best wishes to HH the Amir for the well-intentioned reply and expressed the Pope's willingness to wait for the decision.

He also pleaded to afford a residence in Kuwait City as a temporary Coptic Orthodox church and delegate a priest for the religious services.

Al-Otaibi's reply to Hegumen Makary Al-Suriani came on June 7, 1960 carrying the approval of HH the Amir to rent a residence for the Coptic Orthodox rituals until he decided upon the right time to start constructing the church.

Once HH the Amir's approval came, Mr. Zaki sent a letter on June 13, 1960 to Hegumen Makary Al-Suriani telling him about the approval which was the first step towards fulfilling that blessed project.

He also asked him to request the Chairman of the Social Affairs Department for permission to start fund raising in order to cover the expenses of the project and assign a permanent delegate of the Patriarchate to carry on with this task.

On Oct 25, 1960, Ramzi Zaki delivered a letter from the Pope dated Sept 27, 1960, to HH Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Deputy Amir of Kuwait, Head of the Police Department and Public Security, notifying him that, based on the consent of HH the Amir of Kuwait on the rental of a resident for religious rites of the Christian Orthodox residents in Kuwait, Father Angelos Al-Mahraqi, Deacon Samir Kheir Sokkar (currently HE Metropolitan Pachomius of Beheira and Pentapolis) and Mr. Ramzi Zaki Eskandar who works as an accountant in Kuwait, as members of the Committee will carry out the religious rituals. He asked HH the Amir for his assistance in accomplishing their mission.

On Sept 27, 1960, Hegumen Mikhail Abdul Massih, Agent of the Patriarchate, sent a letter to the Chairman of the Social Affairs Department in Kuwait asking him

permission to start fund raising in order cover the expenses of the house required for religious rituals through the Committee.

He also sent a letter to the Head of the Department of Housing in Kuwait to prepare a place for the rituals and allow Father Angelos Al- Mahraqi and Deacon Samir Kheir, to will perform religious rites, to be hosted in one of the government Guest Houses until a suitable residence could be afforded.

The Head of the Housing Department at the time (Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah) responded with a letter on Aut 10, 1960 stating his approval on the request.

On Oct 30, 1960, Ramzi Zaki sent a letter to Hegumen Mikhail Abdul Massih, Agent of the Patriarchate, informing him that, by the grace of God, the house, in which religious rites of the Orthodox Christians in Kuwait will be held, was found, and that it is located near the other churches. The rent was 650 rupees per month (Indian rupee was the currency traded in Kuwait before the first Kuwaiti currency was issued in 1961).

A better location was found in the vicinity of the center of Kuwait City. It was used as a graduates' club and was owned by Mr. Khalid Abdul-Latif Al-Hamad. Just opposite the Catholic Church, not far from the Evangelical Church, this location was far away from the residential area and had a large yard which could be used for car parking. All those factors made it the best place to build the church.

Al-Hamad requested permission from the Kuwait Municipality to carry out restoration and expansion works in the old building in order to transform it into a church according to the plan Ramzy had sent him.

The Kuwait Municipality issued construction license No. 253 (File No. A. T. ½/20 - on 02/03/1961) upon the approval of the Licensing and Construction Control Section dated 02/20/1961.

On March 11, 1961, Chairman of the Social Affairs and Labor Department approved fund raising to cover the costs of renovating the house where religious rituals will be performed, for a period of three months starting from the March 15, 1961 until June 14, 1961.

On March 22, 1961, Ramzi Zaki, in his capacity as representative of HH the Pope, sent an application to the Chairman of Electricity and Water Department to

connect power supply to the house which was rented to be turned into church for Orthodox Christians and request to be exempted from paying the cost like other places of worship were. The Chairman approved his request on the same day and electric supply was given to the church on March 22, 1961.

Al-Ahram Newspaper, in its issue dated March 20, 1961, reported that HH Pope Cyril VI had received a delegation of Christians in Kuwait and filed a petition signed by 5,000 Orthodox Christians in Kuwait, including some Indian Orthodox, seeking approval of the subordination of Kuwait Church to the See of St. Mark, now that HH the Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, had approved the construction of the church.

HH the Pope accepted the petition and sent a letter to the ruler of Kuwait expressing his gratitude for his efforts in spreading religious teachings in his country and highly appreciating the spirit of religious tolerance, love and brotherhood among all those who live in Kuwait.

To pastor the Orthodox Christians in Kuwait, Al-Ahram stated the Pope had assigned Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi, Secretary of the Papal Palace Library and one of three monks included in the structural lottery in the last papal elections, with a delegation of church deacons.

Upon the arrival of Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi and Deacon Samir Kheir in Kuwait on April 1, 1961, Ramzi Zaki sent a letter to Hegumen Makary Al-Suriani, Private Secretary of HH the Pope, informing him of their arrival and that a delegate of the Deputy Amir had arranged a reception befitting their religious status.

On April 2, 1961, the Al-Ahram newspaper mentioned that Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi, representative of HH Pope Cyril VI, had traveled to Kuwait to promote the first church which was called St. Mark Church.

On April 15, 1961, HH Pope Cyril VI issued a decree to form the first committee to manage the affairs of the church. It consisted of Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi as president, Kamal Abdul Malek Rizk as vice-president, Ramzi Zaki Iskandar as treasurer, Maher Awadh Labib as member and Deacon Samir Kheir as secretary.

On April 17, 1961, Ramzi Zaki sent a letter to HH Chief of Police and Public Security Department requesting his approval to grant residence to Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi in Kuwait, who was the representative of HH Pope Cyril VI,

and Deacon Samir Kheir Sokkar who both came to Kuwait to perform the religious rituals for the Orthodox Christians and were under the sponsorship of the church.

“Akhbar Al-Kuwait” newspaper reported that the Coptic Orthodox Church would hold a mass at 6 pm on Sunday June 17, 1961 on the occasion of the first anniversary of Kuwait’s independence.

Thus, Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi became the first Coptic Orthodox priest to come to Kuwait, and the first to offer the sacrifice on the altar of the Lord in St. Mark Church in Kuwait, accompanied by Deacon Samir Kheir.

In 1962, Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi was recalled to Cairo to be ordained Bishop on Qalyubia and Qesna Center (The late Anba Maximos, Bishop of Qalyubia and Qesna Center).

HH the Pope sent Rev. Gabriel Kamel to replace him. After the arrival of Rev. Kamel, members of the Governing Council of the Church of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Society were elected by the Coptic faithful.

In March 1963, the Pope sent Hegumen Timothy Al-Maqary (The late Anba Timothy the Bishop-General) to pastor the church in lieu of Rev. Gabriel Kamel.

The church was one of the institutions that were subjected to law No. 27-1963 on Statistics and Census and the decree of the Planning Council No. 3/1967, as described in the letter signed by the Chairman of the Planning Council at the time of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Hegumen Timothy Al-Maqary.

In a letter dated Sept 24, 1973 addressed to the members of St. Mark Church in Kuwait, HH Pope Shenouda III, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, ordained Hegumen Timothy Al-Maqary Bishop-General and sent Rev. Athanasius Al-Mahraqi to carry on the pastoral work of the Church in Kuwait.

HE the late Anba Basilios took over the presidency of the Church within the Archdiocese of Jerusalem, the Near East and the Arabian Gulf until his death on Oct 13, 1991.

He was succeeded in the Archdiocese by HE Anba Abraham who was ordained by HH Pope Shenouda III as a Bishop then as Bishop of Jerusalem on Sunday, Nov 17, 1991.

The service in Kuwait was not limited to St. Mark Church only. Since 1975 and until now, they were allowed to hold the Divine Liturgy service every Wednesday at the altar of the Catholic Church in Ahmadi from 6.30 to 9 pm to serve the Copts who lived in the southern areas of Kuwait. They were also allowed to present the Ecclesiastical Education service every Friday morning.

### **Renovation and expansion works of the church**

At the end of 1992, the problem of rainwater leaking from the roof of the church exacerbated and there was a desperate need of many other necessary repairs.

The church filed an application with the Department of State Properties for restoration works which was forwarded to the Municipality in a letter No. 12605 dated Dec 7, 1992.

On Dec 29, 1992, the Church sent a letter to the Director-General of the Municipality asking for approval for restoration works on the building (Property No. 1 of plan No. M/32995 - inside Qibla area).

The Kuwait Municipality informed the Department of State Properties of its letter No. BK/93/343 dated Jan 6, 1993, stating the highway projects were deferred. In effect, on Jan 7, 1993, the Ministry of Finance decided to postpone the evacuation of the property and allowed restoration works and asked the Kuwait Municipality to provide a restoration license for the building.

The Municipality issued the required license No. 2205 dated Jan 14, 1993 allowing the restoration of the property. Also, the Chief Engineer on Feb 13, 1993 gave his approval on the restoration of the ceiling in the church building.

Having completed all necessary repairs, on the Easter Eve on April 18, 1993, the Divine Liturgy was held in light of the Church's new look.

HE Anba Abraham consecrated the icons and vessels of the altar in the Holy Mass held to celebrate this occasion.

### **The new church**

In 2002, Kuwait needed to construct a new ring passing through the location of the church near the sea, not far from the Sheraton. It had to be removed, and a new location had to be found.

The number of Egyptian Christians had grown very rapidly and they asked for land not less than 5,000 square meters in order to cope with the great number of the Coptic faithful. To their surprise, the Kuwaiti government gave them 6,500 square meters.

On Oct 13, 2004, HE Anba Abraham, Metropolitan of Jerusalem and the Near East, visited HH the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Waiting for him was Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammed, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs.

In a very friendly meeting, HE Anba Abraham delivered a letter of appreciation from HH Pope Shenouda III to HH the Amir. He expressed his great gratitude for HH the Amir's generosity and respect for Egyptian Christians in Kuwait and for allotting them a very spacious plot of land to build their church (the current one).

Construction of the new church began on March 23, 2006 and was divided into phases. The first one was digging; the second was the outer structure and the third finishing.

Upon the permission of HE Anba Abraham, it was decided that the church be moved to the new building in Hawalli. In order for prayers and social activities not to stop, they were exceptionally held in the Church's basement upon permission from the Municipality until a temporary building adjacent to the church was ready. They continued praying in the basement from Oct 6, 2008 until Jan 5, 2009.

On Jan 6, 2009, the first mass was celebrated in the temporary building of the church prepared by the State until the new church was ready.

On Friday, Oct 28, 2011, the first mass was celebrated in the new church presided by HE Anba Abraham (Metropolitan of Jerusalem and the Near East and the Gulf). Also taking part in the prayer service were Hegumen Bigol Anba Bishoy, Hegumen Joseph (America), Father Abadir Anba Bishoy, Father Pola of Jerusalem, Father Mikhail Ibrahim and Father Bishoy Husni.

On Friday, Dec 23, 2011, the church completely moved to the new building and so did the entire service while the old temporary building was delivered to the State.

#### **Fathers who served at the church**

Hegumen Angelos Al-Mahraqi (the late Anba Maximos, Bishop of Qalyubia and Quesna Center) 1961-1962, accompanied by Deacon Samir Kheir (currently HE

Metropolitan Pachomius of Beheira and Pentapolis); Father Gabriel Kamel: 1962-1963; Hegumen Timuthaus Al-Maqary (the late Anba Timuthaus Bishop-General) 1963-1973; Hegumen Yohanna Jirjis Fahmy 1973; Hegumen Athanasius Al-Mahraqi 1973-1985; Hegumen Zusima Al-Suriani 1982-1990; Father Isaiah Anba Bishoy 1990-1992; Father Ezra Anba Bishoy 1992 May 2001 (currently HE Anba Agathon, Bishop of Magaga and Adwa).

This is in addition to Father Sawiris Anba Bishoy 1996-1998; Father Esothoros Anba Bishoy 1999-2000; Hegumen Bigol Anba Bishoy May 2001 - incumbent; Hegumen Theophan Anba Bishoy June 2001 - February 2004; Hegumen Elarion Anba Bishoy April 25, 2002-July 2006; Father Abadir Anba Bishoy Nov 19, 2006 - incumbent; Father Mikhail Ibrahim Dec 31, 2009 - incumbent; Father Murqus Mejally Dec 31, 2009 - incumbent and Father Bishoy Hosni Dec 31, 2009 - incumbent.

### **Praying for the Nile as for Kuwait**

Analyzing the personality of Anba Bigol, Pastor of the Coptic Church, will lead us to following depiction<sup>(1)</sup>. As he celebrated a Divine Mass, praying that the water of the Nile come on its time and never flood, Father Bigol now also prays for the water of Kuwait and the Gulf.

From the Church building behind the Sheraton to that in Beirut Street in Hawalli, St. Mark Church is still practicing its rituals since 1960 in a very tolerant environment that embraces Copts and Christians in general in an atmosphere of openness and religious freedom.

Twelve years in Kuwait, 4 years in the UAE and a total of 53 years, the age of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait, all gathered in one person.

He has the characteristics of monasticism and openness to all Christian and Muslim denominations and has been a role model of the clergyman who advises his people to abide by the laws of the country they live in. His motto is: No to extremism and no to indulging in controversial issues in religion as well as in politics.

The real image of the Coptic Church is revealed in religious Islamic occasions where he often hosts 'ghabqas' (feasts) in the holy month of Ramadan and participates in private and public occasions.

(1) The head of the Ethiopian Church used to an Egyptian bishop sent by the Pope of Alexandria since the church in Alexandria was the mother church for the Ethiopian Church. This changed, however, in 1909 and the Ethiopian Church became independent in 1959.

During Christmas festivals, the Church is crowded with the faithful and it would be enough then to visit the church to see the snaking queues of people waiting to enter a yard and the hall that are filled with roses from Kuwaitis as well as residents.

“When you say Copt, you mean Egyptian.” That was his reply when I asked him about the number of Copts in Kuwait. He does not discriminate on the basis of religion because he believes rituals are performed according to everyone’s faith.

This man has nothing to hide and says exactly what he believes in even when some foreign diplomats try to drag him into unnecessary conversation.

He takes pride in Kuwait, its Amirs, Sheikhs and people. “This country has given us what we have never been given anywhere in the world.”

In 1960, when they were allowed to practice their rituals in Al-Hamad house, they had no church either in London, Australia or America. It would never have happened without the approval of the late Amir Sheikh Abdulla Al-Salem Al-Sabah who accepted the request of Pope Cyril VI to build a church for the Orthodox Copts.

When he was told the old church would be moved to another location, he said: “It is our pleasure. We only have one request which is not obligatory. Help us find a place to pray in.” The reply was the same: “It is our pleasure.” That was the relationship Hegumen Bigol Anba Bishoy embodied and cherished.

It happened once that a citizen from Upper Egypt came to ask for his help. Anba Bigol welcomed him and asked what he could do for him. The man wanted to work in a mosque and what Anba Bishoy did was he talked to some of his contacts and arranged for the man to work where he wanted; as he wanted.

He considers himself, the faithful and the Church as partners in social responsibility towards Kuwait and he is always keen on being where ever it is morally necessary for him to be.

He was helping clean the shores of Kuwait after the dead fish was washed ashore. He called on the faithful in his church to remain committed to rationing of electricity and water consumption and raised his voice in support of his Muslim brothers whenever needed. He was the true voice of wisdom, rationale and coexistence.

He added: "Leave the church to our Muslim brothers and we will search for a church to pray in." That is what he was reported to have said during Christmas festivals, showing the deep-rooted relationship with Islamic sects.

As for Orthodox masses, it is imperative that no single word be added without the consent of the Holy Synod, the highest ecclesiastical authority for the Orthodox Copts.

A few years ago, Hegumen Bigol Anba Bishoy asked HH Pope Shenouda III to pray for the water of the Gulf as he did for the water of the Nile, and to discuss the request within the Holy Synod. The Pope's reply came immediately: "You live in Kuwait and drink its water, so the Coptic Orthodox Church must pray for Kuwait, its people and its Gulf water."

Ever since that incident, prayers for the water of the Gulf are performed side by side with that of the water of the Nile.

Since the beginning of his service in Kuwait, he embarked on setting very minute arrangements for the service in the church. He established an accurate system and introduced modern work systems and a large group of educational, cultural and spiritual activities.

This organization was adored by different churches worldwide and it was considered an example to be followed in the churches of Egypt as well as churches of Arab countries, Europe and America. He paid great attention to the empowerment of youth and deeply planted inside them the values of love, tolerance and coexistence.

He followed in the footsteps of HH Pope Shenouda III in considering the holy month of Ramadan an opportunity to express love towards his Muslim brothers.

He transformed the ghabqa into an occasion of warmth that is elegantly organized. It became so alluring that it attracted prominent figures from the Kuwaiti and Egyptian societies; leaders, clergymen and citizens from all different denominations.

He also imitated Pope Shenouda in organizing festive masses where Kuwaiti and Egyptian high ranking officials were permanent guests.

## **Origin of the Title**

Anba Bishoy is a title held by the Hegumen Bigol and it refers to the monastery where he had novitiated. It is a very famous monastery which is now around 1600 years old. It was founded by Anba Bishoy the Great and that is the reason why many hold this title preceded by another name; such as Ezra Anba Bishoy, Elarion Anba Bishoy and Abadir Anba Bishoy.

## ***His personal characteristics***

Former Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Abdul-Rahim Shalaby described him as a person who would best suit the position of foreign minister of the Orthodox Church.

He is a man of an affable personality; so kind despite his firmness. He is an example of the tolerant Egyptian man and he always reminds everyone that the first Egyptian Orthodox Church to be built outside Egypt was in Kuwait, even before America, Europe and other continents.

## **Successor of Pope Shenouda**

He was one of the 17 candidates to succeed Pope Shenouda III who died on March 17, 2012. Choosing the candidates is done by Copts and bishops who believe the candidate must have the efficiency and qualifications.

He knew about his candidacy by chance and his withdrawal was rejected. However, he was relieved when it turned out he was not among the final five short listed candidates.

He thanked God for accepting his withdrawal and allowing him to stay at St. Mark Church in Kuwait. The candidacy is usually based on ecclesiastical characteristics, experience and the period of novitiation.

## **History of the church's leaders**

The first one to take charge of the Coptic Church in Kuwait in 1960 was Father Angelos Al-Mahraqi. The word Mahraqi is derived from a monastery in Asyut called Al-Mahraq (meaning fire in Arabic), which was famous for the frequent fires that broke out in it.

He was accompanied by a Deacon called Samir Kheir Sokkar, (currently HE Metropolitan Pachomius of Beheira and Pentapolis) who headed the church for a short time.

They were succeeded by Father Zusima Al-Suriani, one of the Syrian Monks who had come from the Levant to Egypt. Then Isaiah Anba Bishoy came and was followed by Ezra Anba Bishoy.

### **Biography**

Before his notitiaion the name of Bigol Anba Bishoy was Fathy Habib Wahba.

Born in 1951 in Egypt, he joined the Anba Bishoy Monastery on Aug 8, 1984 and novitiated on Oct 31, 1990 in Wadi Al-Natrun. He headed the Orthodox Church for the Egyptian Copts in Kuwait on May 19, 2001.

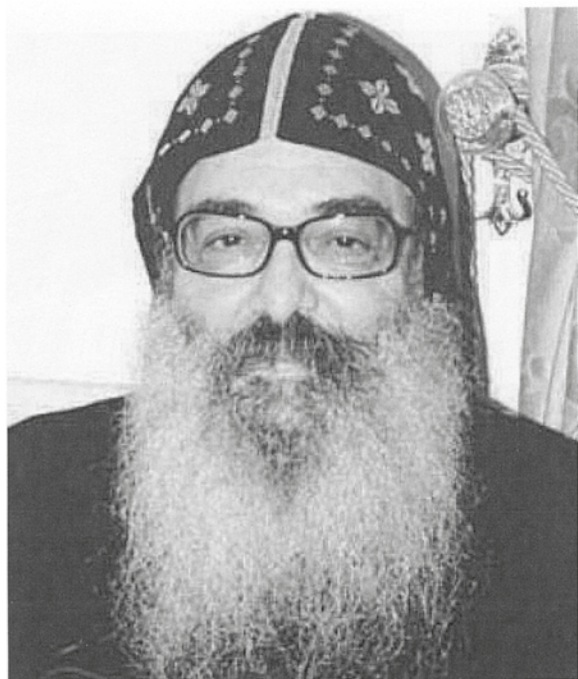
He graduated from the Faculty of Engineering in Al-Minya University, with a major in Mechanics. He spent four years in the Coptic Church in Al-Ain, UAE and is the chairman of the Association of Christian Churches

He is also Member of the Egyptian Community Council in Kuwait. He has written many researches and studies such as 'The Christian View of Jerusalem and the Israeli Claims' and 'The Humanity of the Human Being.

He is also the honorary president for the natives of Sohag Governorate; Member of the Council for Muslim-Christian Relations in Kuwait (Media and Public Relations).



*The new premises of the Coptic Church in Hawalli*



*Hegumen Bigol Anba Bishoy, Patron of the Coptic Church in Kuwait*



*A look from the inside. An architectural masterpiece*



*The construction of the new premises of the Coptic Church*

## Greek Orthodox Church

On the second day of Easter, we had a meeting with Archimandrite Ephrem Toumi, Assistant Undersecretary for the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Baghdad & Kuwait & Dependencies. We met him in the Church premises on Muhammad Al-Wasmi Str., Salwa. It was a rented building since 1984.

The first clerical existence in Kuwait goes back to 1961 at the hands of 'Abouna Abdu' or Priest Abdul-Masih who came to Kuwait from a parish in Beirut to officiate in masses and prayers in rented halls, mostly in the Catholic Church near the Sheraton since many Orthodox families gave donations to the church.

In 1963, Patriarchal Vicar Sergios (Abd), now the Patriarch of Santiago and All Chile, came to Kuwait and was succeeded by Priest George Bandali for the next four years (1966-1969).

He was resident Priest to be sent by the Patriarchate in Damascus and the faithful contacted him when they needed to rent houses or halls for their rituals.

After the election of Papa Constantine Stefanus as Metropolitan of Baghdad, Kuwait and Dependencies in 1969, the church in Kuwait became subordinate to the Patriarchate center in Baghdad which was presided by His Beatitude John X (Yazzigi) who resided in Syria after having been elected in December 2012, thus becoming the 158th Patriarch.

The Archimandrite became equivalent to a first priest in the church in Kuwait where many priests pastored the faithful, the last of whom was Archimandrite Ephrem Toumi who took charge in 2002.

According to church records and Archimandrite Ephrem Toumi, the overwhelming majority of the faithful were Palestinians until things changed in 1990.

The human reservoir was Palestinian and they reached a total of 2,800 families, which equalled 14,000 Orthodox individuals. In 2014, however, that number was a staggering 800 families only, which equalled 3 to 4 thousand Orthodox individuals living in Kuwait.

The Archdiocese in Baghdad takes care of the Orthodox population in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf. There is a church in Bahrain (around 80 families), two in the UAE (Dubai & Abu Dhabi, around 12,000 individuals), one in Qatar (between 200

and 250 families) and one in Oman (60 families). Prior to the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, there were more than 10,000 Orthodox individuals in Baghdad alone.

The Orthodox Antiochian Seat, which has been transferred from Turkey to Damascus, takes care of the Orthodox faithful outside the Antiochian Range; that is outside Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the Gulf.

It is responsible for the Arabic speaking faithful in addition to Arab Orthodox, Bulgarians, Cypriots and Russian Ukrainians. The Orthodox Church is Eastern by identity but it is nationalistically committed to Arab countries to the extent their Patriarchs are sometimes called the 'Arab Patriarchs'<sup>(1)</sup>.

According to Archimandrite Ephrem Toumi, the total number of Orthodox, Arabs and foreigners, is now to 300 families or 1,200 individuals. Most of the foreigners work in sports training and engineering.

Archimandrite Toumi explains before 1900, there was a group of Indians and Arabs from the Syriac Orthodox and they had a priest. After 1993, the Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox Churches agreed that the Orthodox Church be the headquarters for the Syriac Orthodox in case they did not have a priest or church, and vice versa.

Hence, there are scores of Syriac Orthodox families who have reference in Damascus that represents the head of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the world which is the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, presided by Patriarch Mor Ignatius Apherem II, who was enthroned as Patriarch and Supreme Head of the Church on May 30, 2014 in Saidnaya near Damascus.

In Kuwait, however, they join the Orthodox Church, according to Jamal Kamel Nu'man, a Kuwaiti Orthodox whose family is Syriac Orthodox despite having some Catholic members.

The Antiochian system is conciliar. Antiochian Patriarchs in the Mother Land and abroad meet twice annually to discuss the matters of the Church and this synod has the final say.

On the other hand, each patriarch remains head of his church, and now His Beatitude John X (Yazzigi) presides over the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East.

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(1) This was published in Al-Qabas Newspaper, 18/5/2013

The Kuwaiti Christian family of Jabra Shuhaibar is a faithful of the Greek Orthodox Church. Jabra himself took charge of training the Kuwaiti army during the reign of Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem.

Other members of the family include Suhail Shuhaibar, former Ambassador in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim Shuhaibar, owner of a private school, Bassem Shuhaibar and Jamal Kamel Dawood Nu'man.

They all came from Iraq and Nu'man is a member of the Board of Directors of the Church and an activist in this field.

Masses in the Orthodox Church are celebrated in three languages; Arabic, Greek and Slavic. The first sect to be known as Christians was the group in Antioch; i.e. the Orthodox.

As for the relationship between the church and the state, Archimandrite Toumi says: "On the level of leaders and officials, we enjoy the best relations which we highly appreciate, in addition to their tolerance.

But on the legal level, we deal with two bodies in the government. The first one is the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor which grants residence permits for us and for the servants of the church according to Article 18.

This means we are considered as a company but the only difference is that the church sponsors itself. To the best of my knowledge, there are 8 churches which have 8 files in the Ministry of Labor.

The second body we deal with is the Ministry of Awqaf which grants the representatives of the church the right to buy and sell and open bank accounts. And these two bodies cooperate to a great extent."

To elaborate more on the good treatment and strong relationship, Fr. Filimon Saifi<sup>(1)</sup> agrees with what Jamal Kamel Dawood Nu'man says.

"It is true that we do not have a legal license for the entity of the church but whenever somebody asks us about this, we present them with a letter from the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem in 1961 to Patriarch Theodosius VI of Antioch containing his consent to build a church for us.

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(1) Excerpted from HB John X Yazzig's speech in the Conference of Civilizations and Culture in Bahrain, Al-Safir Lebanese Newspaper, 6/5/2014, P13

“Once they see it, the problem is solved as if it is a passport. We very highly appreciate this and take pride in it.”

The church’s main headache, however, results from the original problem of not having a permanent building which would relieve them from instability. It is the fact that they rent buildings; a thing that is always related to problems of inheritance.

The solution he said is allotting a land to build the church, building an ecclesiastical complex or renting directly from the state, whether through the Amiri Diwan, Ministry of Awqaf or the Cabinet, but not from individuals<sup>(1)</sup>.

In this regard, Fr. Saifi, who has spent 24 years in the church in Kuwait, said the first rented building was in the 1960s on Cairo Street in Hawalli near the Al-Salam School before it was moved to Rumaithiya in 1962 where they celebrated masses in the Armenian Church in Salmiya.

In 1975, they came to Block 10, Muhammad Al-Wasmi Street in Salwa. “This is supposed to give you an idea of how much we have suffered regarding the headquarter issue”, added Fr. Filimon.

When asked whether he had a license, Fr. Filimon Saifi says “we do not have official documents to prove the church is licensed but when we show any officer the letter from Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, they just say ‘you are welcome’. That is the license signature confirmation we have.”

Jamal Kamel Dawood Nu'man (Bu Issa) elaborates more on this matter. “Residence permits for the servants of churches are granted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor which treat churches as if they are companies.

In the Ministry of Awqaf, however, we are acknowledged and registered within worship houses. Four years ago, my signature was confirmed as a Kuwaiti citizen to give a 2-year residence for the servants of the church.”

The bottom line is that the church has two references; the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor for residence permits and the Ministry of Awqaf for the registration of the church as a worship house.

His Beatitude Theodosius VI, May the Lord save him  
Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East  
Damascus

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(1) An interview conducted in the Orthodox Church in Salwa on 1/5/2014

**My great respect**

I received your Beatitude's letter dated July 21, issued from your Patriarchal residence in Damascus, from your Attaché Fr. Elia Issa with whom I had the pleasure of listening to his sweet speech from a pure soul, which is never strange since he, for sure, represents our pure souls and generous personality.

It is my pleasure to inform you that we allowed your Attaché to take the procedures necessary to build a church for the Orthodox faithful.

We will also be pleased to keep you informed of the results of his endeavors which we pray to God to make successful.

We also pray to God the Almighty to lead us all to where our welfare is and bestow on you the blessing of good health and happiness.

15th Jumada Al-Awwal, 1381

25th October, 1961



*Bishop Constantine Papa Stefanus Metropolitan of Baghdad, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE and Muscat with the owner of the building rented by the church, Ghloum Ridha Taqi Ashkanani. Ashkanani never received a single penny for 25 years*



*Archimandrite Ephrem Toumi in front of Kamel Dawood Nu'man's grave in the Christian Cemetery in Sulaibkhat*



*Archimandrite Ephrem Toumi, Pastor of the Greek Orthodox Church in Salwa with the author (2014)*



*A photograph for all members of the Nu'man family*



*Kamel Dawood Nu'man,  
father of Jamal Nu'man*



*Jamal Nu'man,  
member of the Orthodox Church*

## Anglican Protestant Church – Al-Ahmadi

Ahmadi City<sup>(1)</sup> was built in the 1940s as a modern English-style city where everything reminds you of the London neighborhoods. The houses were built for the workers in the oil sector and national as well as foreign companies.

Non-Kuwaitis and non-Arabs, mostly from Britain, Europe and America working in the oil sector in Kuwait lived in these houses. The construction of those houses was triggered by the discovery of oil in Burqan well which stretched from Maqwa' to South of Wara.

Among the residents were Arabs, specifically Palestinians, who came with the British to the Gulf after their exodus from Palestine in the 1940s.

The companies had to build churches for them to worship, so the first church, Our Lady of Arabia, was built for the Catholics followed by the St. Paul's Church for the Anglican Protestants. Special cemeteries for the Christians were also built but are now closed and Christians bury their dead in the Sulaibkhat Cemetery for non-Muslims.

On Saturday, April 26, 2014, accompanied by my son Salman, I embarked on a 30 kms journey to Ahmadi to explore the Anglican Protestant Church<sup>(2)</sup> which is located in South Ahmadi, Block 6, in an independent building.

We met Rev. Harrison Chinnakumar, the Church Chaplain, at his house, adjacent to the Church, where he lives with his family since 2012 having arrived from Tamil Nadu<sup>(3)</sup>.

The church follows the Anglican Protestant Church in England which is headed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II<sup>(4)</sup>. Asked about their relationship with the National Evangelical Church, Rev. Harrison said NECK represents them in government

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(1) Fawzy Owais, a seminar organized by Al-Watan Newspaper on 24/12/2013 where Archimandrite Ephrem Tourni represented the Orthodox Church

(2) It was named after Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, ruler of Kuwait (1921-1950). It was called the Arab Village before the completion of its construction.

(3) The Anglican Church is the spiritual house for more than 15 Christian denominations which makes it rich with languages and nationalities.

(4) Tamil Nadu is one of the 28 states of India and had a population of 72 million inhabitants in 2011 speaking Tamil. Located in the far south of India, it has been home to the Tamil since 500 BC. Hindus form 88% of the population while Muslims and Christians form around 11%. Christians concentrate in the southern suburbs of the state. Tamil Tigers organization was established in 1976 in Sri Lanka in response to Buddhism being announced the main religion of the country.

institutions and official procedures in terms of residence permits and sponsorship since 2010.

Rev. Harrison added the Church started its work in 1948 and that, because of its subordination to the English Church, the British Ambassador represents the UK in Kuwait as much as he represents the church, which means he represents the Queen. He explained his predecessor had come from Britain.

The church, built by KOC, is frequented every week by 15 groups of Indians and Pakistanis who make around 3,000 worshippers. "There were about 12,000 British citizens registered in the Embassy", Rev. Harrison elaborated.

"Eighty percent of those were faithful of the English Church and the total number of the church faithful in Kuwait reached 15,000."

They are not obliged to come here and the Church does not force anybody to come because they are democratic. They were from different nationalities and countries and could perform their rituals wherever they wanted; whether here or any other place in the world.

He said the land on which the church was built was owned by the KOC and that the church was sabotaged during the Iraqi invasion but the company restored it and rebuilt it.

Asked whether they had any Kuwaiti faithful, he said there were 5 Kuwaiti Anglican Protestant citizens.

The church used to supervise the cemetery in Ahmadi before it was delivered to the Municipality after it was closed a long time ago.

The church celebrated a commemoration mass for 47 British soldiers from the Allied Forces who lost their lives during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The mass was attended by the families of soldiers<sup>(1)</sup>.

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(1) It is a 500-year-old tradition since King Henry VIII that the King be the head of the church which was separated by the time from the Catholic Church. Today, HM Queen Elizabeth II is the head of the church (Al-Rai Newspaper, Elias Nasrallah, 26/4/2014).



*Rev. Harrison Chinnakumar, priest of the Anglican Protestant Church in Ahmadi, with his wife*



*The building of the Anglican Protestant Church in Ahmadi. Framed is the church's address*

## The Maronite Church

The Maronite Church is originally a Syriac Church of Antioch and was named after St. Mor Maron. It is in communion with the Patriarchate of Antioch in Bkerki, Lebanon, presided by His Beatitude Moran Mor Bechara Boutros Al-Ra'ee, the 77th Patriarch of Antioch and the Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch. Most Maronites are in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, part of Cyprus and in Diaspora.

The Maronites lived in Kuwait since the 1950s. When they came to settle here they had no church for them. According to Rev. Fr. Raymond Eid<sup>(1)</sup>, Pastor of the Maronite faithful in Kuwait since October 2012, the Congregation of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries used to send priests to pastor their faithful and they practiced their church life through a Latin monk delegated by the Pope, Head of the Catholic Church.

Later, Monsignor Maron Sai'by served the Maronite faithful for 25 years and was succeeded by Father Yusuf Fakhry for 11 years before the selection of Rev. Fr. Raymond Eid in 2012. All those represent the Maronite Patriarchate in Kuwait.

During an interview, Rev. Father Raymond Eid said that the responsibilities of the pastor were organized by the Maronite Patriarchate which, 11 years ago, limited the period of service to 5 years, in agreement with His Lordship Camillo Ballin, Head of the Catholic Church and the Apostolic Vicar.

"We coordinated with them through the Parish of the Holy Family Cathedral", added Fr. Eid.

Speaking about the history of the Maronite Church, Fr. Eid explains "it is a Maronite Syriac Church of Antioch, with Syriac referring to its rituals while the name is derived from St. Mor Maron.

"On the ecclesiastical administrative level, all Catholic Churches in the world are in communion with the Vatican; that is the Pope in Rome, which is the inclusive cathedral in the world for all denominations, Assyrian, Chaldean, Latin, Indian and others."

He says the Maronite Church is 1700 years old and has churches in Qatar and Oman in the Gulf in addition to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

(1) Andrew Thompson P.P 33 - The Christian Church in Kuwait, Religious Freedom in the Gulf, 1993

In Kuwait, there is full coordination and coherence with the Apostolic Vicar of the Catholic Church. He added: "There are 7,000 Maronites in Kuwait; the overwhelming majority of whom are Lebanese while the rest are Syrians and Jordanians."

As for the headquarters, Fr. Eid says: "We are not an independent entity and our prayers and rituals are performed in the Catholic Church near the Sheraton. It includes more than 10 denominations under one roof.

"This is a real problem for us. Can you imagine that 33 appointments for masses were scheduled during the festive season? This means 200,000 people will enter the Church.

"We had to ask for help from the police to control traffic. On Easter Sunday, the number of Maronite worshippers reached 3,000 and that is why we keep asking for permission to establish an independent entity.

"We practice our rituals and prayers in total freedom without any inconvenience and we live in peace and very highly appreciate the tolerance and respect of the Kuwaiti Government for Christians in general and the Maronites in particular.

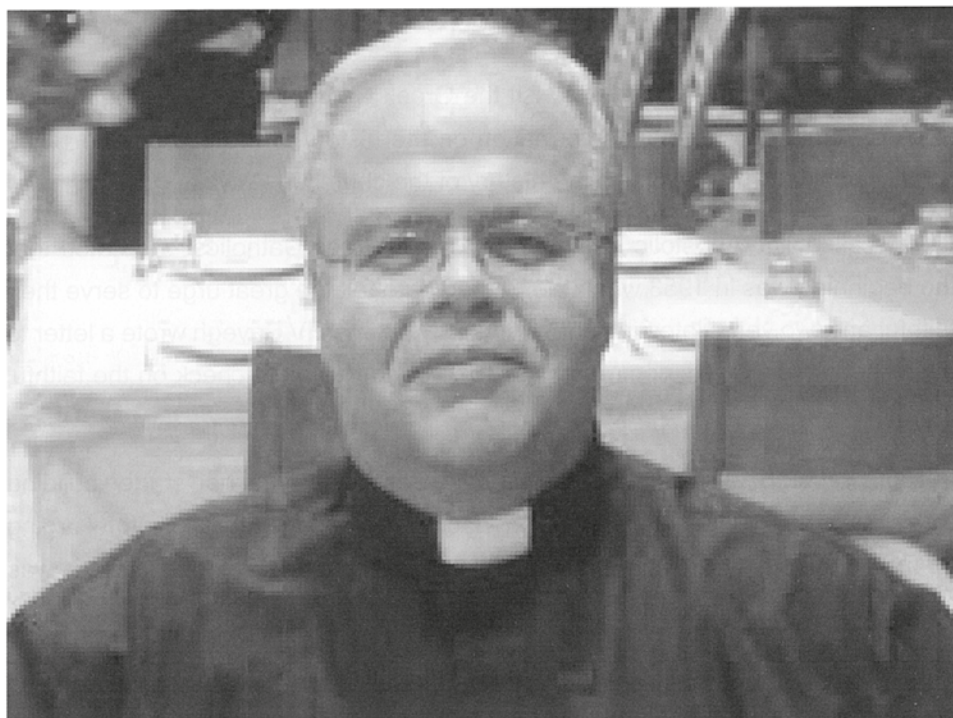
"We plead to the decision-makers to take our status into their kind consideration."

During the interview, Fr. Eid reiterated the blessings of religious freedom they enjoy in Kuwait. He assured me that the Church had never ever witnessed any interference or surveillance from whosoever and that they performed their rituals in complete security.

It is worth mentioning here that the Maronite Church, unlike other churches, does not have a file in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor or the Ministry of Awqaf due to its subordination to the Catholic Church and not having an independent ecclesiastical entity.

On Feb 7, 2014, the Maronite Church celebrated the Anniversary of Mor Maron, the founder of the Maronite denomination, marking the 55th celebration of this occasion on the soil of Kuwait.

The celebration was held at the Catholic Church and the mass was celebrated by Patriarch Yusuf Khairallah who came from Lebanon especially for this occasion.



*Rev. Fr. Raymond Eid, Pastor of the Maronite Church in Kuwait*

## Melkite Greek Catholic Church

I went to Salwa area, Block 12 to visit the Greek Catholic Church during the last week of April 2014 to obtain information on the history of the church and I was given a booklet which explains the history of the church in Kuwait.

It was called The Apostolic Patriarchate for the Greek Catholics<sup>(1)</sup>. It stated that the beginning was in 1953 when the Patriarchate felt the great urge to serve their faithful and two years later, in 1955, Patriarch Maximos IV Sayegh wrote a letter to his Deputy in Baghdad, commanding him to go to Kuwait to check on the faithful there.

In 1960, Father Basile Kanakri of the clergy of Bethlehem, who had started building a church in the Holy Land, was delegated to carry messages for the faithful urging them to donate for the Patriarchate's projects, telling them that the Patriarch was fully aware of their status in Kuwait who had come to work in this land.

Father Kanakri came to Kuwait on a month-long visit and held prayers in the house of Mr. Salim Zabbal, the Al-Araby magazine writer and journalist.

In 1972, Father Kanakri was inaugurated Patriarchal Vicar of Baghdad and Kuwait of the Greek Melkites, entitled to preside over charities and sisterhoods, and to represent the Church in Kuwait.

He was also in charge of the Patriarchate's endowments, signing lease contracts, receiving money, filing lawsuits and other procedures.

The Patriarchal Vicar arrived in Kuwait and was received by Monsignor Victor San Miguel, Head of the Latin denomination, and a large number of the faithful.

He exuded great endeavors to improve the status of the church, expand its premises, introduce new departments and focus on family care.

The church first gathered in a house on Amman Street in Rumaithiya before moving to Baghdad Street in Salwa in a villa rented on an annual basis.

In 1992, he was succeeded by Archimandrite Boutros Gharib as the Patriarchal Vicar of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf of the Greek Melkites.

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(1) An interview conducted by the author in the church on Wednesday, 23/4/2014

He improved the church premise and the number of worshippers grew. This church premise is now about 20 years old and is very well known among the faithful.

In spite of the intimate human relations and mutual trust between the custodians of the church and the ruling Al-Sabah family, the problem of a permanent headquarter remained persistent all through the church's history in Kuwait.

With the increasing number of worshippers and the continuous shifting from one place to another, the place became too crowded to cope with them.

Consequently, the Municipality<sup>(1)</sup> ordered the removal of some halls and facilities which the church had built on its own in the last few years to accommodate the increasing numbers of its followers. The Municipality also removed a garden built for children because it was unlicensed and built on state property.

Archimandrite Boutros Gharib spoke about the enormity of the problem in a press statement. "The issue of worshipping houses was still a very huge problem. We got tired of applying for a place for worship.

"We have 60 Greek Catholic families consisting of around 7,000 people. We have been asking for this for the past 11 years<sup>(2)</sup>." He added that the church was using a rented house and it was the owner's choice to either raise the rent or "ask us to evacuate".

Father Joseph Hanna Al-Nouh made the attitude of his church crystal clear in a seminar organized by Al-Watan newspaper and hosted by Fawzi Owais<sup>(3)</sup>.

"In the Greek Catholic Church, we used to pray in the basement", he stated. "Many years ago, we had a letter from HH the Amir that stated our right to have a piece of land dedicated for our church.

"HH the PM Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak and the Minister of the Amiri Diwan had supported us and so did the embassies of the USA, Syria and Lebanon.

"What happened next was that they allotted us a piece of land in Ahmadi just to cripple us. Ninety percent of the faithful live in Hawalli, how could they possibly go to Ahmadi to pray?

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(1) It is in full communion with the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, and Alexandria and Jerusalem. Its headquarters is in Damascus and has branches in Beirut. It is presided by Patriarch Gregory III Laham. The church enjoys self-governance but refers directly to the Holy See in the Vatican.

(2) A booklet issued by the Greek Catholic Church in 2014 entitled The Apostolic Patriarchate for the Greek Catholics.

(3) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 19/4/2014, Interview with Archimandrite Boutros Gharib.

“We refused that only to be granted a land in Mahboula with no infrastructure whatsoever. How could we go to a desert? The solution was to build an ecclesiastical complex, just like what Qatar did, with a vast car park.

“Now they have granted us a 2000 sqm piece of land in Mishref. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has given its approval since the building would be in the embassies area, and now we are waiting for the approval of the Department of State Properties and the Municipality.”

The church is keen to register the names and addresses of its faithful to make contacting and coordinating with them easier. There is also a special registrar for non-Kuwaiti businessmen and company owners.

The church dedicates one day of a week for religious education and spring camps in addition to an annual exhibition to raise money for the needy families who cannot pay their rents, residence fees, burial costs or tuition fees.

The church held a requiem for the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah which was attended by many members of the ruling family topped by Sheikha Fariha Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah who is widely considered a faithful personality, always supporting religious sects and Christian denominations. She is a true symbol of coexistence between religions.

In order to be able to fulfill its financial duties, the church has established a special fund for donations which mainly come from wealthy members of the church who live in Kuwait.



*The building of the Greek Catholic Church in Salwa suburb*



*Rev. Boutros Gharib, Patriarchal Vicar of Kuwait of the Greek Melkites*

## The Armenian Church

The Armenian Orthodox form about 95 percent of the Armenian Christians in Kuwait, most of who came from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

The Armenian Church is in communion with two Catholicosates; one in Antelias in Lebanon and another in Armenia. Both are equivalent, which means each has its own Catholicos but in fact they are one church with two heads.

In general, there are Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical Armenians. The Catholicos of the Catholic Armenians reside in Achrafieh district in Beirut but they are very few of them while the Protestant Armenians form a small sect that follows the Evangelical Church.

The Armenians were in Kuwait since the 1940s<sup>(1)</sup> and the first Armenian to enter Kuwait was from the family of Malkoun who came from Basra.

There are between 3,500 and 6,000 Armenians in Kuwait today and most of them are Syrians, Lebanese, Iraqis and a few Iranians. In recent years, some Armenians have come from France and the USA.

However, before the Iraqi invasion in 1990, the number of Armenians was about 12,000 while in 1954 there were only 500 including six families from Iraq, four from Iran and the rest were from Lebanon and Syria<sup>(2)</sup>.

As for the history of the Armenian School, the Encyclopedia (documented reports on the events starting from the late 1950s) published in the Armenian language by the church in Kuwait states that it was started in the late 1950s while the church itself followed in 1962.

In 1958, a committee was formed from the Orthodox Armenians including Parvan Tarzian and Zakaria Mahran to work on the establishment of a school dedicated for Armenian students. An agreement was reached with a Lebanese Armenian called Harutian Sahakian to be appointed the school manager.

At that time in 1960, 1,200 rupees was raised to pay the rent of the building. The committee contacted the Knowledge Management as well as Sheikhs asking for

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(1) Fawzy Owais, a seminar organized by Al-Watan Newspaper on 24/12/2013 attended by churches' representatives in Kuwait.

(2) Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Interview with Malik Malkian, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 22/2/2008, P35

financial help after they had submitted an application to Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to establish the school and he immediately agreed and donated 5,000 rupees.

It was called the Arab Armenian School and they obtained a license numbered (18) on Oct 14, 1960. The school was built in Salmiya and a special class for nursery was later added.

In the first academic season which began on Oct 15, 1960, the number of students was 210 including 140 Pakistanis, Indians, Arabs, Muslims and Christians in addition to 70 Armenians. The tuition fees were set at 50 rupees but the poor were exempted.

The constituent committee of the school addressed the patriarch in Armenia, confirming its desperate need for a land to build a church, and demanded that a priest come from Basra to celebrate the Christmas in the school since they did not have a church.

It was within the limits of tradition that the school and the church were adjacent so that students are taught modern education in the school and got connected to the church every Sunday afternoon for prayer.

In 1962, the Armenian Christians held the prayers at the Evangelical Church and wrote a letter to the Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah asking him to allot a piece of land to build the Armenian Church in Kuwait.

The Cabinet replied on May 10, 1962 giving its consent to build a church for the Armenian denomination on the basis of a lease contract that is in compliance with the Kuwaiti laws.

The school, which was built in 1960, moved its location to Surra area in 1974 having rented a special building for the education of the students of the Armenian community while the church remained in Salmiya.

The number of students, from KG to high school, reached 500 who studied the same syllabi as in public schools under the umbrella of the General Administration for Private Education whereas tuition expenses were paid through donations by the Armenians.

In the mid-1950s, there were some prominent Armenian figures in Kuwait; chief among them was Ohans Okian who came through Basra and worked in a car repair shop in 1954 owned by an Armenian whom he had already met and known when he came in 1952<sup>(1)</sup>.

The current church does not have room anymore for worshippers because the Armenian population has crossed the 6,000 mark. It is a building rented on an annual basis and the church does face many problems in this regard which have forced them to address the officials<sup>(2)</sup>.

Very Rev. Fr. Archimandrite Masis Zobouyan, Catholicos Vicar Legate to the Region, is in charge of the church in Kuwait ever since he was assigned in 2013 as a Vicar for Patriarch Aram I in Kuwait and the Gulf Arab states.

Born in 1975, he was appointed manager of the Cilicia Museum for Christian Education and was responsible for the class for priests and interrelations between churches in Lebanon. He was also a member of the Central Authority of the Great House of Cilicia.

### **Pastor of the Church**

To provide a more comprehensive view about the Armenians, this news report which was published in Al-Qabas newspaper (March 29, 2014), sheds more light on the Pastor of the Armenian Church Bishop Shahe Panossian.

Despite the existence of an Armenian embassy in Kuwait, the Church continues to pastor and care for the Armenian community since the 1950s.

It is their reference in matters of life and religion due to their living memories of the massacres and Diaspora they have endured in their modern history.

The Church, and later the Catholicosate, has worked to maintain solidarity of the Armenian community and the preservation of their language and belief.

The fifth Armenian Catholicos in Kuwait since 1981, coinciding with the assigning of the first Catholicos to pastor the Armenian community in Kuwait and the Gulf Arab states, was Bishop Oshagan Choloyan (1981-1998) who was succeeded by Bishop Sebouh Sarkissian (1998-2000).

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(1) Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Interview with Ohans Okian, Al-Qabas Newspaper, 8/6/2007, P15

(2) Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, Al-Qabas Newspaper, previous source

Later came Bishop Yeprem Tabakian (2000-2002) and Goriun Babian (2002-2011). They all pastored the Armenian community stretched all over the Arabian Gulf. They numbered 25,000 each in Kuwait, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain.

Although Kuwait is the first Arab country ever to embrace Armenians as a Christian community with an ecclesiastical activity since 1961, they are still suffering in terms of having a permanent headquarter; unlike Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Doha where donations are made and land allotted to build headquarters for Armenian churches.

Since the 1960s, the Armenian Church and School remained in the same place, Salmiya, because this pairing was applied in many places wherever the Armenians have lived.

However, they were separated in 1974 when the school shifted to Surra, keeping the church in its old location with no clue about its future.

From the Syrian city of Kessab where he was born, a place equivalent to the Lebanese city of Anjar for the Armenians came Father George, who before being ordained Bishop saw the theological and ecclesiastical world through the gate of studies and monasticism.

He went to the US and moved between several states then headed to Canada before returning to Greece. He settled in Lebanon before finally coming to Kuwait to undertake his position as the Catholicos Vicar of Kuwait and Arab States of the Gulf.

His Arabic does not help him a lot, albeit in Lebanese accent since he has spent most of the studying and service in Lebanon. He had to learn Greek, English and French. Being also fluent in Armenian, he became a reference in Eastern and Western cultures thanks to his vast experiences in those communities.

It is hard to talk to Bishop Panossian and Fr. Ardak without referring to the crimes and miseries the Armenians have endured. It has remained alive in the memory of Armenian for generations although their history dates back to 5000 years.

They are a civilized people who lived in the regions and on the outskirts and experienced all the events in terms of identity and independence.

These people always rekindle the memory of those who subjected them to injustice, manslaughter and execution.

Catholicos Shahe and Fr. Ardak are an extension of the Armenian history in Kuwait. Despite coming from different countries and nationalities, they all descend from the same ethnicity; the Iranians coexist with the Lebanese and the Greeks with the Basrawis.

In 1950, there were around a 1,000 Armenians pastored by the Patron of the Diocese of Basra Fr. Furin Heet who used to visit them frequently.

In 1961, the community was organized and had a Pastor assigned to them, Fr. Barouyr Sarkissian. Now there are around 7,000 Armenians who live in Kuwait; a much lesser figure of 15,000 than before the Iraqi invasion.

The Catholicosate started in 1992 making Kuwait its residence and it is in communion with the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia headquartered in Antelias, Lebanon.

Since 1962, the Catholicosate took charge of managing the Armenian School which despite being shifted to Surra, the electric meter in the Church remains registered in the School's name.

During their existence in Kuwait, neither the church nor the school faces any problems while practicing their religious rituals. All Catholicos and clergy are keen to abide by the state laws, communicating with the leadership and the statesmen and being open to all denominations and social constituents of the Kuwaiti society.

For eight years, Catholicos Shahe is present on the Church Council in Kuwait which holds joint occasions and prayers in addition to meetings as well as the Council for Muslim-Christian Relations which works to improve coexistence in an open Muslim-Christian environment.

Armenia has been collecting all its nationals (males and females) from Diaspora and the relationship between the church and the embassy became that of a spiritual twins. Now, every Armenian in Diaspora can apply to obtain his homeland's nationality.

His biggest concern is to secure a piece of land to build the headquarters for the Catholicosate and the Church. His work is not limited to the church or school as he also follows up the churches in Dubai and Sharjah where there are 9,000 Armenians, 3000 in Abu Dhabi, 2,000 in Qatar and other places like Khubar, KSA.

He enjoys intimate relationships with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, the Evangelical Church Pastor, Bigol Anba Bishoy, Patron of the Copts and Father Aphrem, Pastor of the Greek Orthodox Church.

He has strong relations with Kuwaiti statesmen and he visits Diwanias which is a new experience for him. He is an avid reader specifically of religious books in English and he recently entered the world of Internet.

After the decision of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia to publish information about Armenians in Arabic, he felt relieved because many vital creative productions of the Armenians in history, culture, poetry and music will now be available for Arabs to become acquainted with.

### **Armenians in the Arabian Gulf**

The Armenian Ministry of Expatriates in 2012 published a documentary book written by Lilit Harutyunyan and Araks Pashayan on the life of Armenian communities in the GCC countries in Armenian language. The book was published by the Council of Studies in the National Academy of Science.

### ***Allocation of land by Al-Qasimi***

In 1995, during the visit of HH Catholicos Karekin II to the UAE, he asked Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah, to allocate them a piece of land to build a church. In 1996, the Sheikh allotted them the land they wanted. The construction work began and the church was inaugurated in 1998.

### ***Qatar on the wait***

In 2011, during the visit of Catholicos Aram I to Qatar, he asked the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, for a piece of land to build their church. The Amir promised to allocate one very soon.

### ***Pastor of the Church***

The Armenian Church in Kuwait was pastored by two personalities; Fr. Barouyr Sarkissian (1961-1998) and Father Ardak Kehyayan (1998 - incumbent).

### ***Catholicosate of Kuwait***

A Catholicosate is an administrative center that is responsible for churches as places of worship and the Catholicosate of Kuwait supervises the Armenian Churches in the Gulf region.

### ***Armenians in Kuwait***

The Armenians have lived in Kuwait for more than 50 years and they work in many professions and crafts in which they excel and others, in addition to jewelry and freelance business.

### ***Languages***

The Armenians have two forms of language; the Eastern Armenian language and the Western Armenian language which is spoken in the Armenian Diaspora. In the church, however, the old classical language is used only in prayers. The Armenian alphabet consists of 38 letters.

3000 sq meters to build a church in Abu Dhabi

In 1998, during the visit of Catholicos Aram I to the UAE, he asked the then Ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, for a piece of land to build a church.

In the same year, Sheikh Zayed granted \$100,000 to the Armenian community. In 2006, the promise of Sheikh Zayed was realized by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi who allotted the Armenians a 3,000 sqm land in Safah to build their church.

In 2011, the land was delivered to the Armenians and construction works of the church and house for the priests began. Early in 2013, the government allocated another 1,045 sqm land near the first one to be used a parking lot. All construction works were to be finished by the end of 2013.

### **Biography of Bishop Shahe Panossian**

Shahe Panossian is the name he was given after his ordination. His name given at birth is George Panossian. Shahe is derived from Farsi while in Arabic it means the peregrine falcon.

He was born in 1958 in Kessab, Syria. He is the Bishop of the Armenian Church in Kuwait and the Gulf Arab states.

He studied in the School of Theology in Antelias, Lebanon (1972-1978)

He started as a deacon for two years in the headquarters of the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon.

He was later in charge of the Armenian Church in Salonika, North Greece in 1986 before moving to Florida 1986-1988 then to Manhattan, New York and Chicago for 5 years.

From 1995 to 2003 he took charge of the church in Toronto, Canada. Later he returned to Lebanon in charge of the Armenian Orphanage in Jbeil 2003-2005. He was transferred again, this time to New Jersey for two years after which he returned to Lebanon to continue his theological studies until 2011.

In 2011, he was elected Bishop of the Armenian Church in Kuwait and the Gulf Arab states.

### ***Archimandrite Masis Zobouyan Catholicosal Vicar***

Archimandrite Masis Zobouyan was born in Bourj Hammoud, Lebanon in 1975. He finished preliminary school in Abkarian Private School before joining Mesrobian Catholic Institute.

In 1991, he was accepted in a monastery in the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia headquartered in Antelias where he studied for 7 years and was ordained as priest in 1997 by Bishop Surin Kataroyan.

He was appointed supervisor in the monastery then deputy manager of the Cilicia Museum for Christian Education in Antelias, Lebanon.

He was then assigned as a companion to His Holiness while continuing his archeological studies St. Joseph University in Geneva.

He moved to Salzburg, France to study in the state owned University of Theology. After returning from France, he was appointed Catholicosal Vicar for the Diocese of Al-Jazeera.

Three years later, he was appointed deputy manager of the Catholicosate monastery in Bikfaya, Lebanon. Then he worked for 18 months as a pastor in Diocese in Salonika, Greece.

After his appointment as manager of the Cilicia Museum for Christian Education he was responsible for the class for priests and interrelations between churches, he became member in the Holy Bible Society in Lebanon and the Middle East. He is also member in joint committees to write Christian religious school syllabi and rehabilitate Palestinian refugees.

He is also a member of the Central Authority of the Great House of Cilicia.

In 2013, he was assigned as a Vicar for Patriarch Aram I for Kuwait and the Gulf Arab states.



*Entrance of the Armenian Church in Salmiya, Kuwait*



*Very Rev. Fr. Archimandrite Masis Zobouyan, Pastor of the Armenian Church*



*The Armenian Private School in Kuwait celebrating its Golden Jubilee (2011)*



*The inauguration of the Armenian Arabic School in Kuwait in 1960  
Government of Kuwait Council of Ministers General Secretariat*

Government of Kuwait  
Council of Ministers  
General Secretariat

Date: 20 / 5 / 1962

No. : 312

His Eminence Head of the Armenian Church Council

Regards

It is the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers' pleasure to inform you of the Council of Ministers' approval to your request of building a church for the Armenian community. You are kindly requested to contact the Municipality Department in order to commence with the required procedures.

All Due Respect

General Secretary

Council of Ministers



**Chapter Nine:  
Christian Cemeteries**



## Christian Cemeteries

According to the table prepared by the Services Sector of the Funeral Management Department of the Kuwait Municipality regarding the Christian cemeteries, called the non-Muslim Cemeteries<sup>(1)</sup> by official Kuwaiti authorities, much to the dislike of those denominations, there were five such cemeteries.

They were:

- 1) The Jewish Cemetery, numbered 7, in Sharq area, near Behbehani Mosque, Al-Mutanabbi Str., closed in 1948<sup>(2)</sup>.
- 2) The Buddhist Cemetery, numbered 48, near the Sulaibkhat Cemetery, closed in 1970.
- 3) The Old Christian Cemetery, numbered 49, opposite the Buddhist Cemetery in Sulaibkhat, closed in 1975.
- 4) The Christian Cemetery in Ahmadi, numbered 38, opened in 1950 and closed on June 1, 1960<sup>(3)</sup>.
- 5) The New Christian Cemetery, numbered 44, the only one still open, located behind the Jaafari Cemetery in Sulaibkhat<sup>(4)</sup>. It is one of 5 cemeteries dedicated for Muslims (Sunni and Jaafari), with two others in Jahra and one in Sabhan.

The number of cemeteries all over Kuwait has never been accurately determined. Some estimate say there were 75 cemeteries during some period in Kuwait's history<sup>(5)</sup> while the Funeral Management Department in Kuwait Municipality documents 67 cemeteries in all six governorates: the Capital (Al Asimah), Hawalli, Farwaniya, Ahmadi, Jahra and Mubarak Al-Kabeer.

However, researcher Muhammad Sulaiman Al-Nefaisi, who resorted to a book 'An Illustrated Survey on the Locations of the First Cemeteries in Kuwait City', says there are more than 23 of them<sup>(6)</sup>.

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(1) This description refers to Christians from all denominations; Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, Maronite, Coptic, Armenian and others in addition to Baha'is who have their independent private corner in the cemetery.

(2) There is confusion between the Jewish Cemetery behind Khalijiya Tower and the one behind the Fisheries Building and Madwa Cemetery in Khalid bin Al-Walid Street.

(3) Ahmadi Cemetery was built in 1950 due to the increasing number of Christian employees in KOC and was closed in 1960. British Colonel Harold Dickson, who died aged 78, was buried there at 5 o'clock on 15/6/1959 after a requiem was held for him in the church nearby, "Forty Years in Kuwait 1929-1969, Violet Dickson (Um Saud), Dar Qirtas for Publication, 1st Edition, 1995, P262"

(4) Sulaibkhat Cemetery was opened in 1961 overlooking Jahra Road, 17 km from Kuwait City.

(5) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 4/6/2007, interview with Muhammad Rashed Al-Dahham, Services and Maintenance Supervisor in the Funeral Management Department in Kuwait Municipality.

(6) See the images appendix: locations of the first cemeteries in Kuwait.

He divided them into 4 categories: cemeteries that are public and old, cemeteries that are unknown and 'disappeared', small-sized cemeteries that are unknown but well-located and finally small-sized cemeteries that are unknown and of unknown locations.

He puts arrows displaying their names which are mentioned here as they are in the map with no distinction between a big cemetery and small one.

They are Hilal Cemetery (first & second), Al-Qna'at Small-sized Cemetery, Al-Nasrani Cemetery, Al-Sawaber Cemetery No. 2, Small-sizes Jewish Cemetery No. 7, Al-Zal (Al-Gharabally) Market Cemetery, Non-Arabs Cemetery, Al-Hasawiya Cemetery, two unknown cemeteries on both sides of the Sha'ab Gate inside the Wall area, Abdul-Razaq Gate Cemetery, Mubarakiya Cemetery, Bin Bahar Mosque Cemetery, Wajif Market Cemetery, Dahla Cemetery, Bin La'boun Cemetery, Al-Khalid Cemetery, Safat Cemetery, a Nasrani cemetery and unknown cemetery outside the Maqsab Gate.

The map indicates the existence of three non-Muslim cemeteries; one for Christians, another for Jews and the third is a Nasrani cemetery overlooking the sea towards Shuwaikh area.

Considering the Jewish Cemetery behind Khalijiya Tower is a cemetery for Christians, the number would be three cemeteries for Christians and one for the Jews, other than the one in the known location.

Fr. Emmanuel Gharib says that cemeteries date back to early existence of Christians in Kuwait<sup>(1)</sup>. The oldest of the known cemeteries where Christians were buried is "the one near Khalijiya Tower in Sharq area.

There is also another cemetery in Sulaibkhat that was used until 1975 when it was closed due to lack of space. The area of that cemetery, opposite Sulaibkhat Cinema, was small while the cemetery in Sulaibkhat where Christians are buried nowadays still hosts burials of different Christian denominations and it is called the non-Muslim cemetery. There is another cemetery for Christians in Ahmadi that is owned by the KOC."

To better know the cemetery referred to by Rev. Gharib, we, accompanied by Muhammad Ridha Ibrahim from the Funeral Management Department at the

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(1) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 5/6/2007, interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, Pastor of NECK

Kuwait Municipality, explored the cemetery behind the Khalijya Tower in the Capital which was known as the Jewish Cemetery and remains closed since 1948, which made it 65 years old in 2014. We found no graves for Jews; only two graves for two Armenian Iranians.

The majority of the graves were for Christians<sup>(1)</sup> and among them was Colonel William Shakespeare<sup>(2)</sup>, the second British Political Agent in Kuwait who died in 1915.

His grave is frequently visited by English Ambassadors to Kuwait as well as British delegations. He served in Kuwait for 6 years (1909-1915). There is also the grave of the famous British Dr. Stanley Mylrea who died in 1952<sup>(3)</sup>.

The center of the cemetery seemed totally empty while the marble gravestones surrounded the walls from almost every side.

Later, the Kuwait Municipality provided every grave with a marble gravestone on which the name of the deceased is written. One of the graves was for Francis Habib Zogby, born in Bethlehem in 1907 and died in 1954.

I also tried to inquire about the number of Christian deaths of all denominations. Faisal Abdul-Karim Al-Awadhy, Supervisor of Sulaibkhat Cemetery, told me during a special interview<sup>(4)</sup> that the number of deaths registered at the Administration is 2,645 for both sexes until Jan 1, 2014.

When asked whether this number was true since there were more than half a million Christians in Kuwait, he answered that the Administration began to number and register fatalities through the Automated Information Center in 1993.

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(1) Researcher Adel Muhammad Abdul-Mughny confirmed the description of the cemetery as the "Old Christian Cemetery" and detailed its history since its foundation in 1906 until the last grave dug in it in 1954 (Al-Qabas Newspaper, 15/10/1997, P33)

(2) Bader Khalid Al-Bader commented on Abdul-Mughny's opinion (Al-Qabas Newspaper, 29/10/1997). He said that Captain Shakespeare served in Kuwait as a Political Agent under Sir Percy Cox from 1909 until 1914, not 1915. He was killed in the battle of Jarrab which broke out between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid in KSA and his body was brought to Kuwait. However, when I visited the cemetery, I found the phrase "To The Memory Of" written on the gravestone, which does not necessarily mean he was buried here after having been killed in KSA. In many cases around the world, a gravestone is put in a cemetery in memory of someone who might have been buried elsewhere. Answers have not been confirmed regarding Captain's Shakespeare's real grave's whereabouts.

(3) Dr. Stanley Mylrea supervised the construction of the American Mission's hospital. He started his career in 1911 and died in March 1952 while he was visiting Kuwait, in the same house where he lived for a long time. He was buried in the Old Christian Cemetery in Kuwait, as Zahra Freeth says in her book *Kuwait Was My Home*, translated by Futouh Abdul-Muhsin Al-Khatrash, P130. There is an engraved sentence on his gravestone that reads: "Oh, Son of Man came not to help others, but to be helped." Also buried there is Dr. Scudder and Dr. Nykerk whose wife continued to work in Kuwait until a week before 2/8/1990 when she travelled to USA. Her house in Al-Watya behind the hospital had been looted and the furniture had been stolen.

(4) The interview took place on the first week of March 2014 in his office in Suleibkhat Cemetery and prior to that in the administration premises in Khaitan.

Prior to that date, registration was done manually depending on paperwork and deaths during that period have not yet been computerized and are still kept in drawers.

There are death reports of people who are still unknown in addition to a great number of people who died without being reported nor registered and whose remains were transported out of Kuwait.

In the first week of March, 2014, Muhammad Ridha Ibrahim, from the Maintenance and Services Section of the Funeral Management Department where he has been working for 41 years, took us on a tour of the Non-Muslim Cemeteries in Sulaibikhat<sup>(1)</sup>.

He informed us that all these cemeteries became hideouts for weaponry during the Iraqi invasion in 1990. Iraqi soldiers forbade burials in the afternoon and during the first few weeks after the liberation, 11 big truckloads of guns, ammunition and weapons were moved out of these cemeteries.

He filmed this incident and delivered the tapes to the Public Relations Department of the Kuwait Municipality.

Heading towards the Christian cemetery, the first thing you come across is a large grave surrounded by iron fences in which 4 Indians<sup>(2)</sup> are buried, one Muslim and three Christians: Abdul-Shakur Botober Brambil Muhammed, Shjan Korban, Ramy Bilawy Kumar and Kothy Bilawy Karon.

They died when an oil tanker caught fire on July 28, 1998 and were buried in a neutral private area on Aug 31, 1998 after permission was granted by the coroner.

This accident forced the cemetery officials to ask the Ministry of Awqaf for a special fatwa on how the four Indians should be buried. The fatwa ordered that they be prayed upon all together and buried outside the cemeteries of Muslims and Christians. The grave in which they lie is still there in a neutral area with no gravestone.

We headed towards a cemetery for Christian children of Indians, Filipinos and Arab nationalities. We took a few photographs of the gravestones which had writings in English, Chinese and Indian language.

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(1) I have read in some reports that it is divided into 4 corners each dedicated to a Christian denomination; the first for the Evangelicals, the second for the Orthodox, the third for the Catholics and the fourth for other sects.

(2) Document made by Faisal Abdul-Karim Al-Awadhy and Muhammad Ridha Ibrahim Mousa. See the images appendix

Next to this cemetery, there is the group of 'forensic medicine graves'. They are from different nationalities and were either murdered or died of unnatural causes.

On the outskirts of the Christian cemetery, there were great numbers of coffins which were used to carry dead Muslims from outside Kuwait and then thrown away.

Some of them are often given to poor Christians who cannot afford to pay for coffins which cost around KD 600 each according to its type and specifications. The Kuwait Municipality sometimes gives them to those who cannot afford to pay or have no relatives in Kuwait.

In the Christian cemetery, there were gravestones showing Kuwaiti, Arabic and other names. Sabih Ya'qub Mansour, born 1935 and died in 2013, Egyptian poet Fuad Saliba Benjamin Al-Sayegh, born 1934 and died in 1999, Romanian lion trainer Elena Tepp, born 1941 and died in 1994 and Retired General Khalil Yusuf Shuhaibar who died in 1993.

Usually, gravestones have verses from the Bible engraved on them, like that of Eng. Dr. Mubde'a Zaki Jirjis, born 1903 and died in 2012, whose gravestone reads: 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies'.

Muhammad Rashed Al-Dahham<sup>(1)</sup> says there is a grave for a British Christian military commander called Shakespeare in the Jewish cemetery behind Khalijiya Tower in Sharq.

He added members of his family, as well as many British officials, visit his grave often<sup>(2)</sup>, pointing that the cemetery includes a number of Christians.

Ibrahim pointed to the grave of Chinese Dr. Fatima Zhoa Junli who died in 1993 while she was on duty. She was the first national of the PRC to obtain a PhD in Arabic Literature and contributed in the project of maintenance of the Mina Al Ahmadi Refinery. Chinese ambassadors to Kuwait do sometimes visit her grave.

We moved to the Baha'i cemetery which is located in a special corner. Among those buried there is Ghulam Hussein Ridha'e who died in 1988 and whose gravestone has the following writing: 'From God I came and unto Him I return'.

(1) Zakariyya Ahmed, previous source

(2) Captain Shakespeare was the second Political Agent in Kuwait and served from 1909 until 1915. In December 1915, he travelled to KSA for negotiations with Ibn Saud and was killed in the battle of Jarrab and buried in Kuwait.

Another writing is found on the grave of Khorshid Yanofarakh Qarkhazay, wife of Muhammad Saeed Fikri, which reads: 'You are my possession and my possession never deteriorates'.

The coffin is taken down into the grave by a rope then it is covered with sand before the marble gravestone is mounted on it. This is how I heard from some undertakers in the cemetery but Muhammad Rashed Al-Dahham<sup>(1)</sup> believes there are no special requests for Christian fatalities except that the coffin be made of wood or other material as per the deceased family's capacity and that there are special entrepreneurs who provide those coffins.

As for the church's role when one of its faithful passes away, Fr. Yusuf Fakhry<sup>(2)</sup> says that "once the priest knows that someone is dying, he goes to his place to pray for him and ask God to cure him.

Those prayers are said by his family members, relatives and friends. There is a secret we call Patient Anointing which is one of the seven secrets of the Church.

St. Jacob says in his letter: 'whenever there is a patient, a priest has to be summoned to anoint him with sacred oil to help him recover physically and spiritually. If it is God's will that he recovers, and then he will, and if not, then he shall die in peace'.

We also ask the worshippers in the church to pray for him. After the death, the body is transferred to the hospital where a priest goes to perform the first prayer on the body before it is washed and clothed.

A date is set and announced for the requiem in the church and it usually takes two days until it is performed due to the preparations of the funeral, especially if it is arranged for the body to be taken to its homeland.

"The overwhelming majority of the faithful are taken to their homelands and those who are buried in Kuwait are usually either the poor or members of families who have spent a long time in Kuwait.

"The priest moves to the hospital before the funeral to confirm the identity of the deceased, pray for him and lay him in the wooden coffin.

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(1) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 4/6/2007, interview with Muhammad Rashed Al-Dahham

(2) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 6/6/2007, interview with Rev. Fr. Yusuf Fakhry, Vicar for the Maronite Patriarch in Kuwait and the Gulf States

“A vehicle from the Municipality carries the body from the hospital to the church which he enters preceded by the Cross and the priest holding the incense burner. Hymns are recited to open the doors for the deceased.

“Hymns are recited in either Arabic or Assyrian and the family of the deceased sits in front of the body. When mourners start flocking, the prayers begin and last for an hour, focusing on the mortality of Man who is created from dust and ordained to die. The worshippers also ask the Almighty for forgiveness and pardoning of the deceased.”

In a press conference, Fr. Emmanuel Gharib elaborated more on the funeral services in the Evangelical Church<sup>(1)</sup>. “We do not offer requiems but rather we have a mourning service because we believe that the relationship between the living and dead people terminates with the death. Asking for forgiveness is connected to life and ends with death. How come God has mercy upon those who have finished their lives?

“The body is brought to the church and the mourning prayer is held so as to alleviate the pain of the family of the deceased. Prayers include readings from the Holy Bible and Psalms followed by religious hymns.

Had the deceased been frequenting the church and had a favorite hymn, then we would perform it or any other hymns requested by his family. Afterwards, the Pastor delivers a short homily encouraging the faithful to commit to the principles of Christianity.

“The sermon concentrates on the fact that life is never immortal and that we should work to guarantee immortality in the afterlife through the belief in Jesus Christ.

This prayer is attended by the family of the deceased that had already announced its timing so that friends and relatives are able to attend. Later, women head to the house while some close family male members accompany the body to the cemetery.

There, a short prayer is read by the Pastor to ask for mourning then the body is lowered into a 1mx2m grave with a rope. There is no specific position when laying down the body which is buried with the same outfit the deceased was wearing at the time of death.

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(1) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, interview with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, previous reference

"Afterwards, men exist in a certain place and so do women to receive condolences and the Pastor may read from God's Word and a hymn might be recited to help ease the family's sorrow."

As for the writings on gravestones and the location of graves, Fr. Gharib says that "there are gravestones with the names and dates of birth and death written on them, and they are made awhile after death.

Usually, a verse of the Holy Bible is engraved or a phrase 'here lies' which reflects the hope of resurrection. I would like to pay tribute to Kuwait Municipality which represents the government for their absolute care.

They provide Kuwaiti citizens with everything from cradle to grave; affording the hearse and the grave free of charge. The only thing we pay for is the coffin.

"There is a Christian tradition where graves are annexed to the church. In the Vatican, for example, Popes are buried in cellars below the church while in other countries; the graveyards are adjacent to the church yard.

In the Evangelical Church, we have three graves for three people and they will be renovated. One of those graves is for a Kuwaiti whose name is Issa bin Ibrahim"<sup>(1)</sup>.

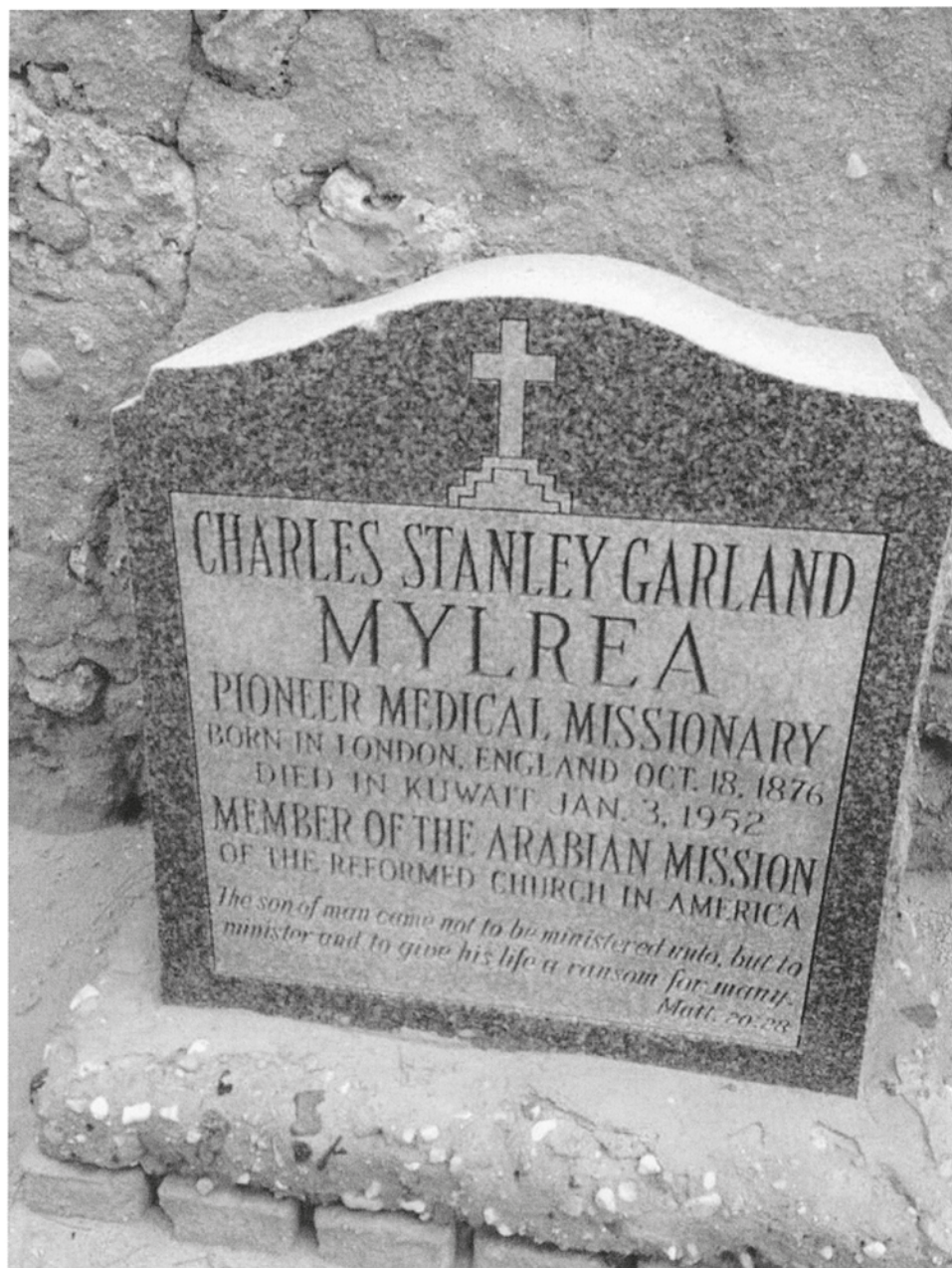
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(1) When asked whether that grave was really there, he replied: "yes, it is there." That was in interview with him in the NECK Church near the National Assembly on March 2014.

**The Old Christian Cemetery  
(Khalijiya Tower)**



*Captain Shakespeare's grave*



Charles Mylrea's grave



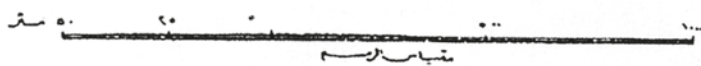
*A grave for an Armenian Christian from Iran*



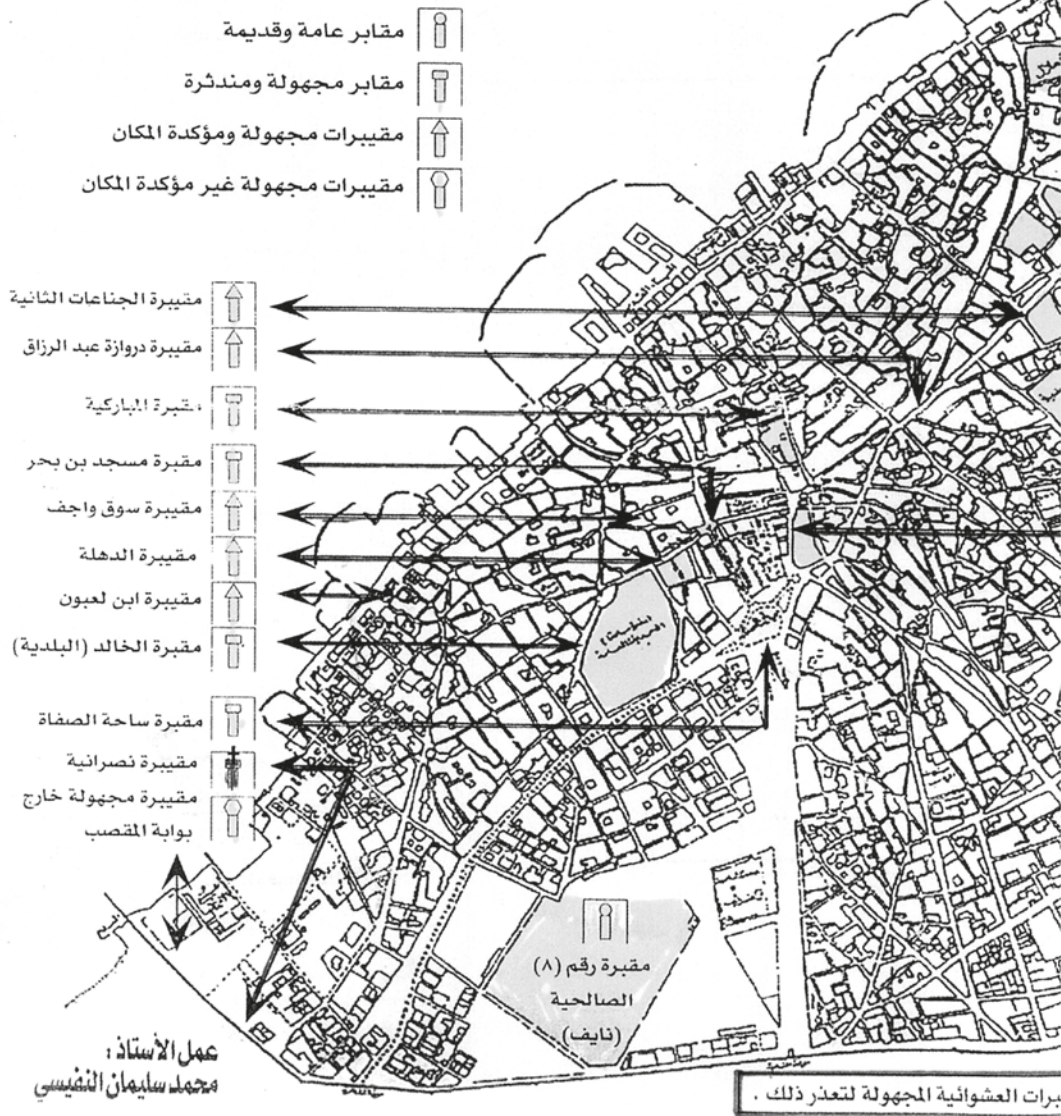
*Hamza Olayyan and Muhammad Ridha Ibrahim with employees from the Maintenance and Services Section in Kuwait Municipality in the Old Christian Cemetery next to Khalijiya Tower*



*Francis Habib Zogby's grave (born in Bethlehem, Palestine)*



### مفتاح الخريطة :



Map for cemeteries and small-sized cemeteries  
(made by researcher Muhammed Sulaiman Al-Nefaisy)



ملاحظة : الخريطة التقريبية هذه لا تشمل كل مواقع

## The New Christian Cemetery Suleibkhat – (44)



*Christians Cemetery entrance*



*Christians' graves*



Sabih Ya'qub Mansour's grave



*Muhammed Ridha Ibrahim inspecting the graves*

## First Ahmadi Christian Cemetery (38)



*Ahmadi Cemetery entrance*



*Inside view of the cemetery*

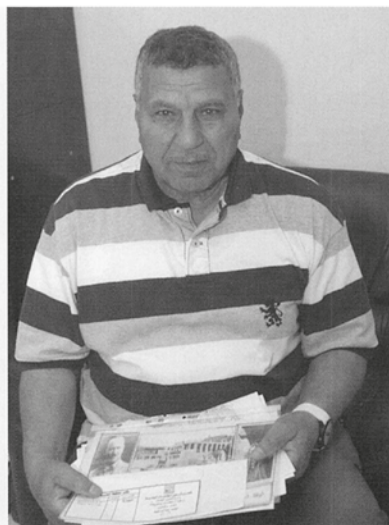
## Funeral Management Department Kuwait Municipality



*Faisal Abdul-Karim Al-Awadhy, Supervisor of Suleibkhat Cemetery*



*Muhammed Hadi Abdul-Rahim  
(Bu Abdul-Aziz), Supervisor of Failaka  
Cemetery since 1961*

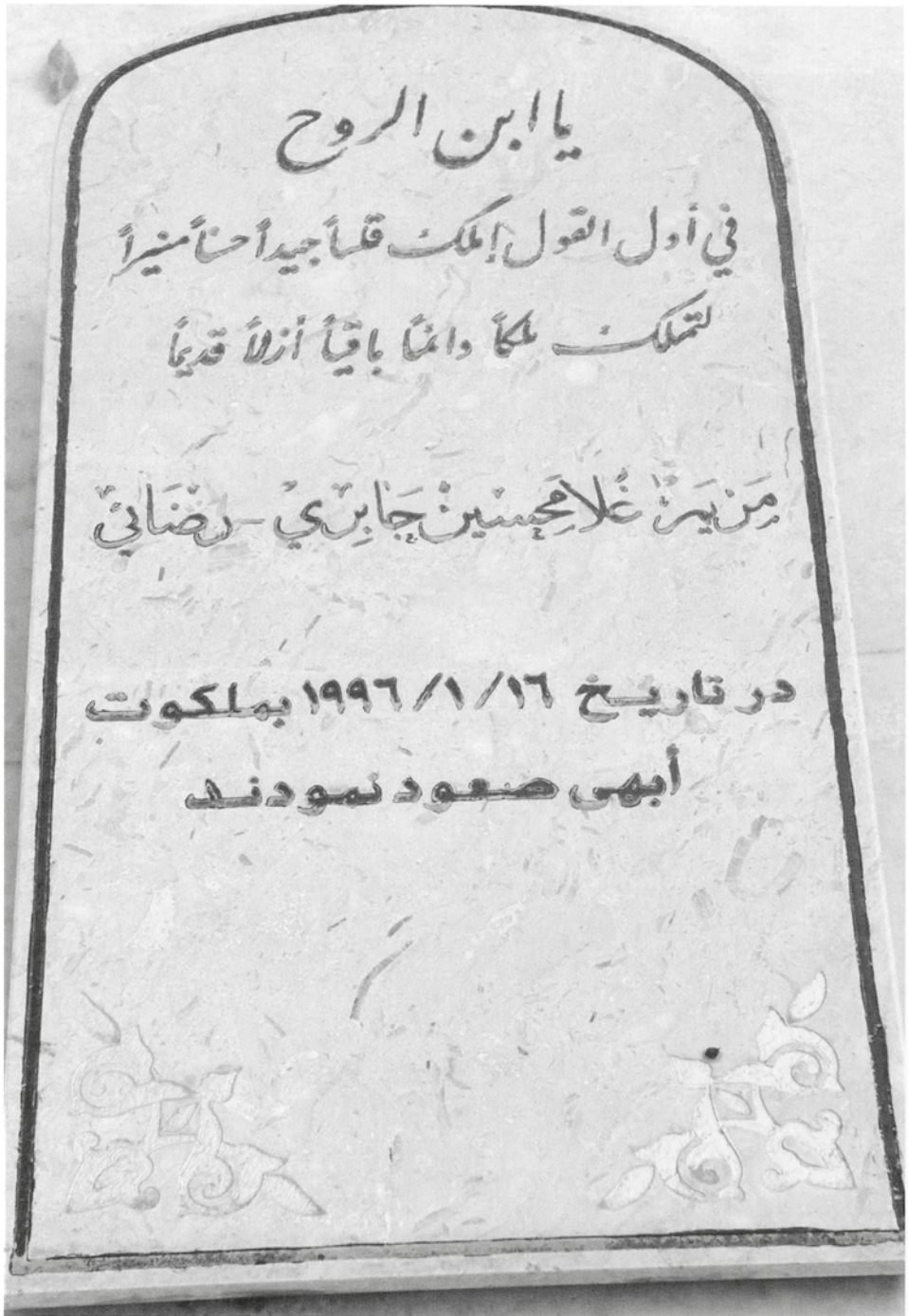


*Muhammed Ridha Ibrahim  
(Abu-Shireen), (Maintenance and  
Services Section in Kuwait Municipality -  
Funeral Management Department)*

## The Baha'i Cemetery

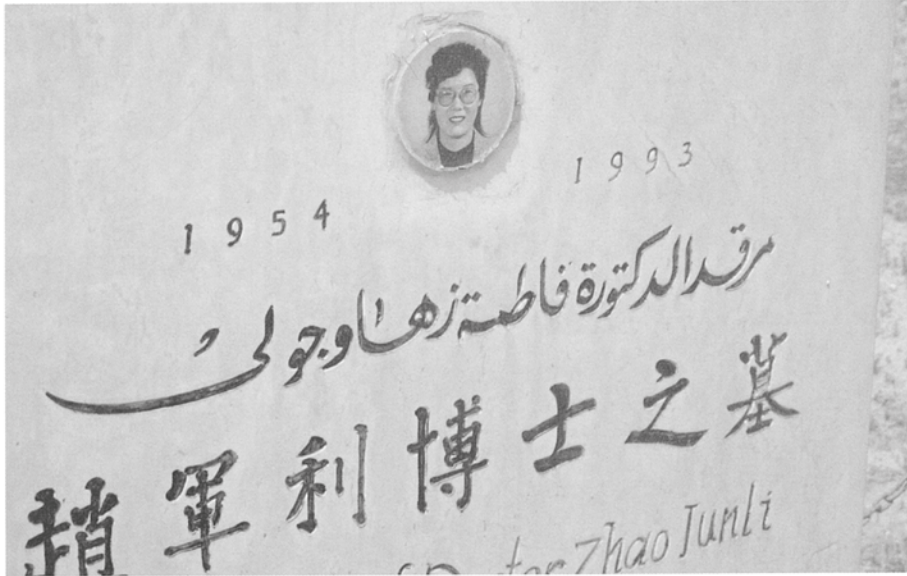


*The Baha'i Cemetery in a private corner within the Christian Cemetery in Suleibkhat*



A grave of a Baha'i

## The Chinese Cemetery



*Dr. Fatima Zhao Junli's grave, the first person in the PRC to obtain a PhD in Arabic Literature*



*Part of the Christian Cemetery with graves for some non-Arab foreigners*

## Christian Childer Cemetery



*Children are buried in adjacent graves as in this picture*



*A grave for a child with roses on it*

## A Neutral Grave



*A neutral grave at the entrance of the Christian Cemetery where 4 Indians (a Muslim and three Christians) are buried. They died when an oil tanker was burnt in 1998*

## Coffins



*Piles of coffins in the Christian Cemetery*



*Muhammed Ridha Ibrahim standing in front of coffins in the cemetery*



## Live Testimonies and Documented Narratives: Where is the Jewish Cemetery Located?

Common narratives transferred from one source to another in the writings about Jews in Kuwait state that the Jewish cemetery is located behind Khaleejiya Tower in Sharq area near Behbehani Mosque.

Trying to prove this fact, many writers, authors and newspapers published photographs claiming they were for Jewish people, especially the famous one with a rose carved on the gravestone.

The questions remains: to what extent are these narratives correct?

When I was collecting material and data on Christian cemeteries in Kuwait, and having read a collection of books, studies and reports, in addition to the publication of my book 'Jews in Kuwait: Facts and Events', which included a photograph of a Jewish grave that was found in many other sources, I came up with a lot of facts that might form an entry to the discussion of historical events that caused a great deal of controversy.

I went to that cemetery and took some photos of the graves there, including those of Colonel Shakespeare, Dr. Stanley Mylrea and some other Christian and Jewish graves.

I showed those photos to Rev. Fr. Adel Nasr, Vicar-General of the Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia, who studied Hebrew and assured me the writings were in Armenian, not in Hebrew.

Afterwards, I showed the photos of the Jewish graves, which were common among researchers and readers alike, to Professor Dakis Dakessian, a Lebanese Armenian who graduated from the AUB.

He translated the writings and told me that the famous grave with a rose carved on the gravestone belongs to an Armenian Christian from Iran whose name was A.N. Moraz and the word 'death' was written on top of the gravestone.

The next photo, where a cross was carved on the gravestone, was for Samuel Badalian, who was born in Iran in 1928 and buried in Kuwait in 1956.

I have not come across a single Jewish grave in most, if not all, the current graves. They were all for British, Arab and Armenian Christians including the grave of Dr. Stanley Mylrea from the American Mission and that of Colonel W.H.I. and Shakespeare, the Political Agent in Kuwait, whose gravestone bore the phrase 'In His Memory'.

To remove any ambiguity, we sought the help of a colleague, Jassem Abbas Ashkanani, who found what we were looking for during an interview with Mubarak Hussein Dashti.

Dashti was born in 1926 and owns a shop for selling dates. He also works as a real estate auctioneer and his office is a magnet for both the old and the young.

When he asked him about the Jewish cemetery and where it is located, he said: "I knew it very well because I used to hunt birds and I saw with my own eyes a funeral for a Jewish man.

That was between 1938 and 1940 when we were young and we watched them as they buried him. Later, I worked in preparing mud bricks in the cemetery when Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber passed away in 1950.

"Me and my colleague, Yusuf Shabkouh left the work and headed to Nayef Cemetery for the Sheikh's funeral." When asked what place he was referring to, he assured it was in the Balouch Neighborhood in Sharq area, exactly now in Khalid bin Al-Walid Street, just behind Madwa Cemetery, near the old buildings of the Religious Institute and Kazma School (currently training center for PAAET). It has no walls, it is 100m long and 50m wide, and it is located on a hill."

On the next day, April 3, 2014, Ashkanani accompanied Dashti to the location he determined just behind Madwa Cemetery. There is a way that directly leads to it and he stood on a small hill and pointed with his finger, saying: "A Jew was buried here'.

He took a photo of him on that hill after which Dashti said: "At this spot I was preparing mud bricks and I hunted birds and saw more than one funeral. The land is empty as you see. The farms of Awazim used to be here, such as Fares Duwaihees' farm (Bu Muhammad)."

Duwaihees used to go with Dashti's uncles on diving trips and near his farm, there was the Bin Roumi Yard before the Religious Institute was built and the cemetery was surrounded by Christ's thorns trees.

Another testimony came from Ashkanani's brother, Hamza, who was born in 1925. He said the cemetery referred to as the Jewish cemetery was in fact a Christian cemetery.

He confirmed that the Jewish cemetery was located behind the Fisheries Building and was barren with graves raising 5-6 cm above the ground with no gravestones.

Next to the cemetery, there was a house rented by a Jew and owned by Hassan Pasha who used it to manufacture alcohol.

On Nov 4, 2008, Fadhel Khalaf wrote in Al-Watan newspaper in reply to columnist Fuad Al-Hashem' article, saying there was a misconception between the Christian and Jewish cemeteries, the latter being located behind the Fisheries Building while the one thought to be the Jewish cemetery is truly the Christian cemetery or the British cemetery as it is called sometimes, which was shut down by the Municipality.

He added that "since 1938, we were students in Sharqiya School and used to play football near the church our teacher the late Mr. Hashem Al-Aqeel used to take us there once a week."

Anwar Al-Rifai'y, head of the Kuwaiti Heritage Team (Beit Al-Othman is part of it) says in an interview with Jassem Abbas in April 2014 that the Nasara Cemetery is located behind Khaleejija Tower and that he has a photo to prove his claim.

He recalls that King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud sent a condolence letter to the family of Colonel Shakespeare who is buried in this cemetery. Rev. Emmanuel Gharib referred to this fact when he said that the oldest known graveyard where Christians were buried is the one next to Khaleejija Tower (Al-Watan newspaper 5/6/2007).

Researcher Adel Muhammad Abdul-Mughny also described the cemetery as the old Christian cemetery (Al-Qabas newspaper Oct 15, 1997) and so did the writer Khalifa Musaed Al-Kharafi who confirmed that the Christian cemetery is located next to Khaleejija Tower and the Jewish cemetery is next to the Fisheries Building.

Depending on all those facts, we are closer to believing that the cemetery known as the Jewish Cemetery located behind Khaleejiya Tower and Behbehani Mosque is in fact the Christian Cemetery while the one behind the Fisheries Building and Madwa Cemetery overlooking Khalid bin Al-Walid Street is the Jewish Cemetery.

It might be useful here to mention that Jews lived in Kuwait long before the Christians. They settled during the era of Sheikh Sabah Jaber Al-Sabah, fourth ruler of Kuwait, from 1859 until 1866.

However, some sources believe they came to Kuwait during the era of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah, second ruler of Kuwait, which is a very well based belief.



*Mubarak Hussein Dashti pointing to the location the Jewish cemetery  
next to the current location of PAAET*



*On the way to the Jewish cemetery, they pass in front of the southern cemetery of Madwa No. 4*



*The site of the Jewish cemetery between the building of a residential complex for the employees of the Marriott Hotel and the fish building*

## The Buddhist Cemetery

The Buddhist Cemetery is numbered 48 and has been shut down since 1970. It is located just before the Sulaibkhat Cemetery on the outskirts of Al-Andalus residential area. It is where Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists used to be cremated and carry some of their ashes in glass bottles which they either keep or throw in a river in order to be blessed<sup>(1)</sup>.

The cemetery is surrounded by a thin cement wall. When people residing opposite the cemetery near Jawhar Restaurant, adjacent to the Sulaibkhat Cinema, saw the smoke rising up from behind the wall, they used to gather near the wall trying to figure out what was going on behind that wall before it became a normal scene that drew no attention.

Khalid Yusuf, a 48-year-old Iranian who lives in the area with his older brother, said those rituals stopped after the 1970s by an order from Mullah Yusuf Hamada, Fatality Supervisor in the Municipality, who died in 2013.

He ordered those who want to cremate their dead to find a place somewhere else. I went to that cemetery accompanied by Muhammad Ridha Ibrahim, from the Maintenance and Services Section in the Funeral Management Department who opened the iron gate for me.

We took a walk inside the cemetery which had nothing left to indicate the existence of any graves, except for the place where bodies were cremated.

It was a pyre of wood built above the ground. Ois was smeared on the pyre to ensure the body is totally burnt.

“We no longer allow the cremation of any Hindus,” said Muhammad Rashed Al-Dahham, Services and Maintenance Supervisor in the Funeral Management Department.

He told Al-Watan newspaper that<sup>(2)</sup> “those bodies are now taken back to their countries since Kuwait is an Islamic country and cremation is not allowed in Islam.

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(1) In a phone call, researcher Yusuf Ya'qub Al-Ibrahim said it should not be called a cemetery because it was really a crematory rather than a cemetery in the Islamic, Christian and Jewish meaning. He said there was a difference in the burial procedures between the Sikh and the Hindus. He added that cremation is held in the presence of a priest and that the majority of them live in north India and Nepal while the majority of Hindus are Indian citizens.

(2) Ahmed Zakariyya, Al-Watan Newspaper, 4/6/2007, Kuwait: Land of Tolerance (four episodes)

This is done by the Ministry of Health and our role is limited to moving the bodies from hospitals to any air or land port where they are carried in specially equipped vehicles. Sometimes, many bodies remain unclaimed and stay in the morgue for months.”

Buddhists believe the soul reaches transcendence to God after the vanishing of the body which is a hindrance to the soul's communication with God. They believe the vanishing of the body means getting rid of the materialistic world.

Hindus cremate their dead because they believe it is necessary to the soul's transcendence to the sky. They believe fire is the ultimate purifier for the soul after water.

According to their beliefs, when a person dies, his soul remains near his body and they perform their rituals for 13 days so that the soul rests in peace.

The soul in Hindu belief is a mixture of water, dust, fire, air and the sky, so cremation brings the soul back to its original status, allowing the soul of the dead to begin its new journey.

In the Hindu ritual, relatives of the dead gather at the crematory where logs of wood of certain weight are placed longitudinally within iron slates that are fixed to the ground. The dead body is placed over the wood and the face is painted with burn-enhancing materials.

After the rest of the wooden logs are placed over the dead body, the cremation starts using cow dung which Hindus believe is blessed.

A relative start throwing some dung and other things after most of the body had already burnt. The family then collects the ashes and throws it in the sacred River Ganges; a ritual shared by the Sikh.

In the Tibetan Plateau (south Asia, near the Himalayas) where Buddhism is the predominant religion, Buddhists perform a rite called the Ecclesiastical Burial.

They believe in incarnation and, out of their generosity, comes the way they treat their dead. They in fact serve them as food for animals and birds in order to prolong the lives of these creatures.

Those rituals send the dead to the sacred high areas of the sky via eagles. At the beginning, the family members of the dead gather to perform some rituals

after which they take the body to a mountain top where it is cut into pieces by a specially qualified man. Each area has a mountain top dedicated for those rituals, just like graveyards, and when there, they have two methods.

The first method is to drop the entire body from the mountain top and this is how the poor are treated.

In the second method, the body is chopped into small pieces. It is very expensive since the man who does the chopping is paid the equivalent of three months salaries.

After predatory birds have eaten the entire body, that same man collect the bones, crushes it with a sledge hammer, mixes it with flour, butter, milk and sugar, brooms the area and allows the eagles to finish their meal. Thus, the body is vanished completely.

Historically, Christians consider cremation an insult to the dead because they believe in the sanctity of the body; created from dust to return to dust. It is very much adored.

Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox in Lebanon, George Khoder, explains. "In Christianity, there is consideration of certain continuity, even of the body; a bond between the body and the soul. Even when theologians describe death as a separation of the soul from the body, they do not actually mean a definitive separation in terms of entity. There is always a bond between body and soul."

Theologian and Priest Dr. Issa Diab<sup>(1)</sup> says the Christian Orthodox and Catholic ban on cremation remained unchanged but a sect of Protestants introduced new interpretations of resurrection.

They consider it spiritual and never carnal. There is a religious group that believes spiritual resurrections occurs immediately after death, so the body will vanish any way; either quickly through cremation or slowly in the dust." Dr. Diab pointed to a liberal theological movement that announced its acceptance of cremation.

### **World cremation statistics**

Statistics published in Pharos specialized magazine in 2011 show that cremation is witnessing an annual increase with varying percentages while Arab countries are absent from the list.

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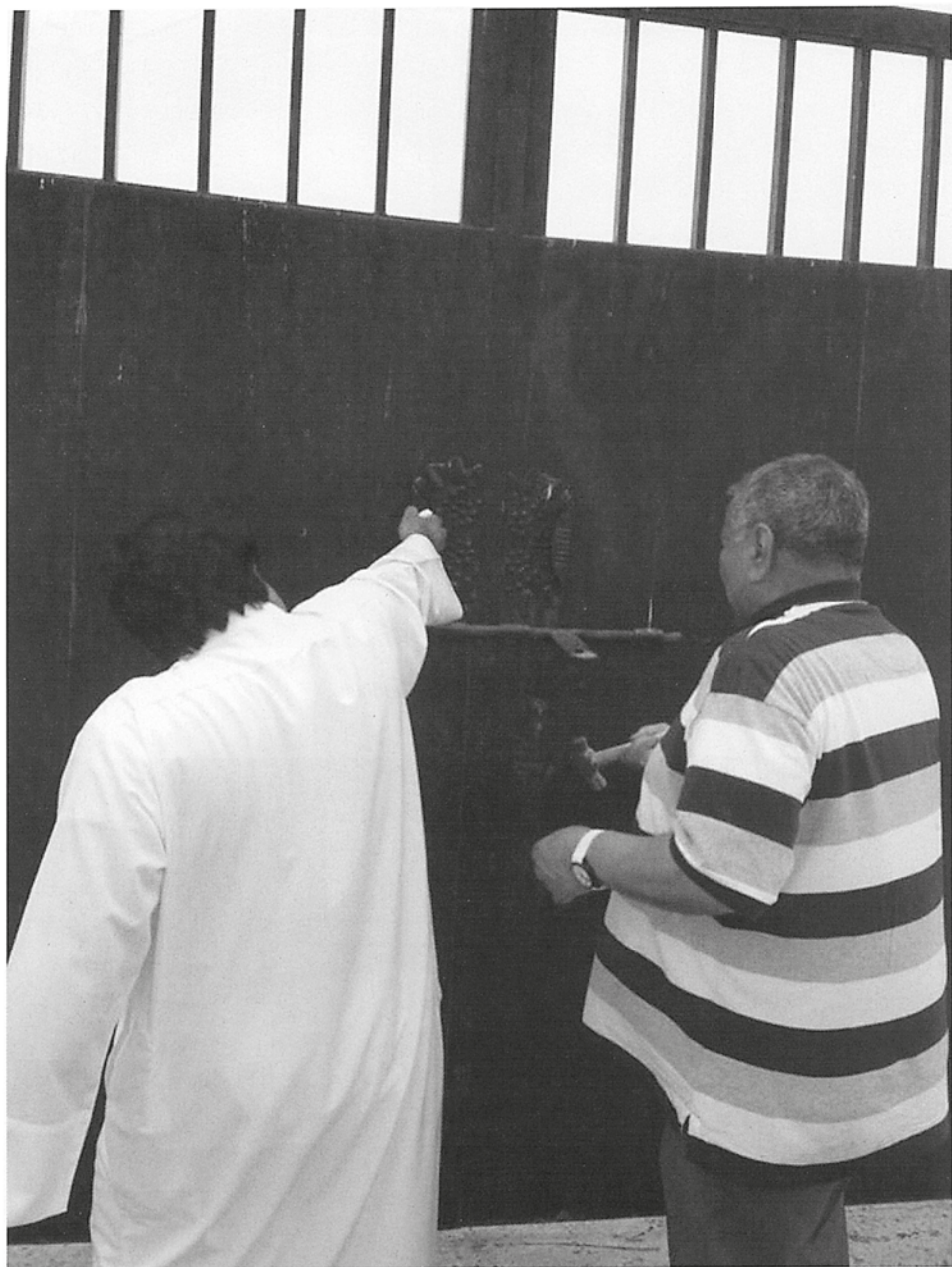
(1) Hala Homsi, Al-Nahar Lebanese Newspaper, 5/2/2003

Japan spearheads the list with 99, 94 percent with 1,545 crematories, followed by Taiwan (90), Hong Kong (89), Switzerland (85, 18), Czech (80, 87), Thailand (80 with 2,077 crematories), Slovenia (78, 29), Singapore (77, 82), Denmark (77, 34), Britain (73, 15), Australia (69, 23), China (49 with 1,724 crematories), Finland (41, 47), United States (40, 62, with 2,113 crematories) and France (30, 90). Those numbers indicate a thriving market for cremation in the world.

((Source: Al-Nahar newspaper, Feb 5, 2013, from the Union Catholique Internationale de la Presse (International Catholic Union of the Press), Lebanon)).



*Entrance to the Buddhist Cemetery*



*Muhammed Ridha Ibrahim and his assistant opening the door of the Buddhist Cemetery*



*Name of a deceased Buddhist*



*Crematory of the Buddhist Cemetery*

**Christians**  
In Kuwait



**Chapter Ten:**  
**Christians and Churches in the Arabian Gulf**

## Christians and Churches in the Arabian Gulf

### Language of Numbers

Discussing Christians and churches in Kuwait needs an appropriate entry, most suitably the language of numbers.

The total population of GCC countries in 2013 was 49,309,498 million, 14 million of whom were non-citizens. Twenty percent of that population was Christian or around 4 million people in the six countries.

The overwhelming majority of those were in KSA where there is no church or temple for the non-Muslims.

Christians in the Gulf are a blend of Arabs, Asians and Europeans. That number does not include Hindus, Buddhists or Sikhs. It includes only Orthodox, Catholics, Armenians, Maronites, Copts and Protestants.

In general, Christian denominations enjoy religious freedom in the Gulf area through their churches except for KSA where building non-Muslim temples is banned.

However, a few years ago it was rumored that negotiations between KSA and The Vatican were underway to allow the construction of a Catholic Church there, taking into account that 900,000 Catholics live and work in KSA.

Many new churches were built in many Gulf capitals in recent years, reflecting the real interreligious dialogue, freedom of worship and coexistence.

Christians in the GCC countries celebrate Christmas freely inside the recently built church complexes, most of which were donated by Gulf governments.

A guest in the Sheraton Hotel in Kuwait City, Abu Dhabi and Abu Hamour Religious Complex in Doha can easily spot human masses frequenting churches from the midst of trade centers.

The churches are not allowed to practice any missionary activities or distribute pamphlets that promote Christianity. This has been agreed upon by all church officials.

The percentage of Christian Gulf citizens is very low. They count in hundreds and most of them are in Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain; the first capitals to host Christians.

Kuwait is very distinguished in this regard for it has the first Kuwaiti priest Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, Pastor of the Evangelical Church.

Most constitutions of Gulf States guarantee freedom of worship and practicing religious rituals as per the rules.

The ringing of church bells is still 'low' in the Gulf cities unlike many other Arab cities such as Beirut, Cairo, Aleppo and Baghdad. The reason for that is the special privacy of the Gulf societies and rejection of those rituals.

### **Christians in Kuwait**

In April 2010, Fr. Andrew Thompson from the British Embassy published a book 'Christian Church in Kuwait - Religious Freedom in the Gulf' where he pinpointed that Kuwait is a striking example of a joint religious society.

He documented the story of Christians in Kuwait and the religious freedom they enjoy; noting that many Brits thought Kuwait had no religious freedom because it is an Islamic country.

He reiterated that the religious freedom in Kuwait is a living example of the religious freedom in the Gulf; a proof that Christians are a constituent of the society.

Christian denominations established the Church Council which encompasses all sects; Catholic, Evangelical, Coptic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Churches.

Bahai's, Buddhists and Sikhs are not allowed to build temples.

As for statistics, the numbers remain a matter for guessing from unofficial non-governmental Kuwaiti sources, one of which is the annual report of the US State Department.

During discussions on religious freedom in the world for 2014, the report spoke of the religious demography in Kuwait and the numbers of minorities.

It mentioned there were a few hundred Christian and Baha'i citizens in addition to 600,000 Hindus, 450,000 Christians, 100,000 Buddhists, 10,000 Sikhs and 400 Baha'is.

As far as freedom of belief is concerned, the report said despite the Kuwaiti Constitution guaranteeing that freedom, there were other laws and policies that

restricted religious freedom. It also focused on the difficulty of getting land to build new houses of worship 'Al-Anba'a newspaper - July 30, 2014, P3.'

On the other hand, the comprehensive periodical review made by the Kuwaiti Civil Alliance, a national alliance founded on Jan 14, 2014 consisting of many civil societies, stated that the number of non-Muslims was 921,996 and that 235,547 of them were followers of religions unknown to the authorities.

The rest of the number, 686,449, were Christian; a number that was out of proportion with the number of available churches, which is 13. That meant one church for every 52,803 Christians 'excerpted from the report.'

### **Churches in Oman**

Modern Christianity in the Sultanate of Oman dates back to 1893 when a Christian group arrived in Muscat and bought a big house and was granted a vast land by the Sultan.

This mission was affiliated to the Reformed Church in America and came for the purpose of evangelism. They later focused on providing healthcare for the community and pasturing Christians.

There are about 500 Protestant Christians in the Sultanate while the Catholic Church was established in 1971, followed by the Orthodox Church. There is also a Syriac church in Salalah and a Coptic church in Muscat.

There is exact census available for the number of Christians in Oman where the population is 3,855,206. Out of this 1,100,000 are foreigners who form no more than 29 percent of the population.

There are between 200 300 thousand Arab, Asian and European Christians in Oman who, according to Omani statistics, form 3 percent of the population.

Experts in Christian issues point out there is an ecclesiastical complex in the Sultanate which includes Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants who have founded church councils comprising all 26 dominations.

What distinguishes Oman from other GCC countries is that it allowed the Sikhs and Hindus to build their temples; a fact reiterated in the US State Department report on religious freedom. The Buddhists, however, are still struggling to have their own temple.

## **Christians in Bahrain**

According to reports, Bahrain hosts the oldest church in the Gulf area. Built 100 years ago, the National Evangelical Church (Protestant) was founded by American Evangelists Missionaries in 1906.

Secretary of the Church and its Arab Group, Yusuf Haidar, says there are 1,000 Bahraini Christians and confirms that the American Mission post office number is ONE because it is the oldest in the Kingdom which automatically makes it the first post office in the history Bahrain.

The total number of churches is four and a complex will soon be built as in Oman and Qatar after the Bahraini Monarch King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa donated a land for the project pending the government's approval.

Among the famous churches are the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, St. Christopher Church and St. Mary's Church. In addition, there are 30 officially registered churches that have no premises, one of which is the Coptic Church.

As in all Gulf states, churches are Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox which enjoy total religious freedom to practice their rituals. According to statistics, out of a total population of 1,200,000 there are 300,000 Christians.

The Shura Council in Bahrain has two Christian female members; Alice Sama'n (of Iraqi origin) and Hala Ramzi Fayez (of Egyptian origin).

## **Churches in the UAE**

Demographic reports indicate there are around 940,000 Christians in the UAE most of whom are concentrated in Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain, Dubai and Sharjah.

This Gulf State does not embrace hundreds of nationalities who were neither allowed to publicly perform their religious rituals nor have their churches built.

However, in the mid-1990s, the federal government allowed the building of churches and there are seven of them now, with the local authorities banning evangelical pamphlets.

Four churches were built in Abu Dhabi in addition to the Dubai Evangelical Church Center and St. Mary's Church in Al-Ain.

A majority of Christians are Catholics, amounting to up to 100,000. In addition to Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox Copts churches, the cornerstone for St. Elias the Living Church for the Greek Orthodox was laid on a 5,000 sq.m land in Musaffah, Abu Dhabi, donated by UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

In Dubai, there is the St. Francis Church in Jabal Ali while the Russian Orthodox Church was built in Sharjah in 2007 on a 2000 sq.m land donated by the Emirate worth AED 30 million.

The Greek Orthodox denomination represents the Russian, Ukrainian, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Moldovan, Romanian, Bulgarian and Serbian communities. The government of Sharjah also hosts St. Michael's Catholic Church which has 50,000 faithful.

### **Christians in Qatar**

Following in the footsteps of her Gulf sister countries, Qatar allowed the establishment of the first church for the Evangelical denomination in 2005 on a land granted by Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem Al Thani worth \$20 million.

Around 240,000 Catholics live in Qatar while the number of the Evangelical Church faithful is about 7 to 10 thousand who were using an English school in Doha as a place of worship.

The first Catholic Church was inaugurated in 2008 without use of any Christian symbols like crosses, bells, paintings or statues. It was named The Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Rosary.

There is a Religious Complex now in Abu Hamour, Doha which houses all denominations - Orthodox, Evangelical, Protestant and Catholic, serving 240,000 Christians from a total population of 2,100,000.

**The number of Christians in churches in GCC countries is 49,309,498.**

Country	Christian Population	No. of Churches	Total Population	Remarks
Kuwait	500.000	8 acknowledged churches, other than churches that operate in private houses	4 million: 1.251.361 citizens 2.751.242 non-Kuwaitis	150-200 Christian Kuwaiti citizens
Oman	200 – 300.000	5 churches	3.855.206 inhabitants	Tens of citizens
Bahrain <sup>(1)</sup>	300.000	4 acknowledged churches 15 churches operating in halls, houses and villas	1.200.000 inhabitants	1000 Christian Bahraini citizens
UAE	940.000 (according to Pew Research Center)	7 churches (Al-Ain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharja)	8.200.000 inhabitants	
Qatar <sup>(2)</sup>	240.000	5 churches	2.100.000 inhabitants	1 million individuals
KSA	1.500.000	none	29.994.272 inhabitants	
Total <sup>(3)</sup>	3.780.000		49.309.498 inhabitants	

(1) There are about 120 families (1000 individuals) of Egyptian Coptic Orthodox in Bahrain. Four years ago, the Bahraini Monarch issued an order by which they were granted a land to build a church. There are also around 20 Egyptian families who obtained Bahraini nationality. Egyptian Copts who work in KSA come to Bahrain for their prayers. According to US based Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life, the Christian population in Bahrain in 2011 was 180 thousand. The first church to be built was the National Evangelical Church in 1906.

(2) The first church to be built in Qatar was The Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, or the Virgin Church as some call it.

(3) Demographical statistics are taken from national consensus in every state while the numbers of churches are taken from a survey published in Al-Qabas Newspaper on 22/2/2012. The Christian populations are taken from US based Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life.



*Dubai Evangelical Church Center*



*St. Mary's Catholic Church in Doha, Qatar*



*Catholic Church in the Muscat, Oman*



*Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Doha, Qatar*



*Sheikh Muhammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, receives HH Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria (2014)*



*Sheikh Muhammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan receives HB John X, Patriarch of Antioch of the Greek Orthodox and All the East (2014)*

## **Separate Footnotes provided by the author**

- Kuwaiti Christian families arrived in Kuwait since the 1920s, mostly from southeast Turkey and Iraq while some of them had arrived from Palestine and India.
- Christian monuments in Failaka Island proved they dated back to the 6th century AD. Modern Christian existence in Kuwait, however, began with the arrival of the American Mission of the Church early in the 19th century.
- According to the US State Department report in 2015, the number of Kuwaiti Christians was 264 individuals comprising around 8 families -Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelist denominations.
- Christians come second place in terms of the number of population, according to the PACI's statistics published by the Al-Seyassah newspaper on April 30, 2016. They were 774,406 Christians - 263 Kuwaitis, 62,683 Arabs, 661,765 Asians, 31,832 Africans, 9,064 Europeans, 575 South Americans and 413 Australians.
- Al-Rai Newspaper, 2/11/2015, an interview conducted by journalist Ahmed Zakariyya with Rev. Emmanuel Gharib, Pastor of NECK .

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## Author's Biography

- Name: **Hamza Salman Olayyan**
- Occupation: Editorial Secretary - Al-Qabas Newspaper (2015), researcher and expert in press information centers Lebanese, born 1950
- Current Occupation: Director of the Center for Information and Studies - Al-Qabas Newspaper - Kuwait, from 1976 till date.
- Scientific Qualification: university degree in Social Sciences, Lebanese University, Beirut, 1976.

### ***Head of Information Departments in the following press institutions:***

Al-Hawadeth Magazine (Beirut) 1964-1972 Al-Dustour Magazine (Beirut) 1972-1974 Al-Safir Newspaper (Beirut) 1974-1976 Al-Qabas Newspaper (Kuwait) 1976 - present Al-Khalij Newspaper (UAE) 1990 (7 months during the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait)

### ***Book Publications:***

- Masonry - published by Dar Al-Qabas Press Printing, Publishing and Distribution
- Water.. Crisis and Conflict - the Euphrates Basin and Scenes of Explosion (2000), Dar Asdiqa' Al-Harf, 1996.
- Kuwaiti Lebanese Relations (1962-200): Similarity and Joint Destiny - Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait.
- 14 Years of the Al-Qabas Age -published by Dar Al-Qabas Press Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1986.
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***Contributions:***

Kuwait Cultural Encyclopedia - Dar Suad Al-Sabah for Publication, - 1997

Encyclopedia of Prominent Figures of Kuwait, Dar Al-Hadath - Madhi Al-Khamis

***Contributions in Media and Journalism:***

Publishing a weekly page entitled Issues and Personalities in Al-Qabas Newspaper starting from 2001, depicting a prominent figure in events and analyzing the most important Kuwaiti, Gulf and Arab issue.

Publishing a weekly file entitled Al-Qabas Issues (1988-1989).

Publishing several articles, reports and studies in Al-Qabas Newspaper.

Researcher in Gulf Affairs carried on many journalistic tasks abroad; chief of them was covering the issue of water and dams in Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

***Production Works:***

He designed the first comprehensive plan in information technology and established the Information Computerization project in Al-Qabas Newspaper and issued a special CD-Rom for Al-Qabas. He continued the construction and automation of the Center for Information and Studies which became one of the most important centers of its kind in the Arab World.

***Specialized Training Courses:***

He joined many specialized training courses in indexation, documentation and information centers management. He took part in several scientific conferences and exhibitions in Kuwait and the GCC countries on press, electronic publication, and information and communication technology.

Under the auspices of the Minister of Information Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, he was honored by the Arab Media Forum along with 47 Arab journalists and media figure who spent 30 years in Kuwait (28/12/2012).




*This is the purpose of this book. It is meant to be a small participation regarding the relationship between Kuwait and Christians and their role in the sequence of events that this country has witnessed since its birth and up till now. It is an example of its civilization that lightens up its history.*



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