

**The Formation of the Shi'a Communities in Kuwait: Migration,
Settlement and Contribution between 1880 and 1938**

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Dedication

**This Thesis Dedicate to My Great Helpers and Supporters
Throughout My Ph.D. Program**

My Supervisor

Professor. Vanessa Martin

My Dear Parents

Ibrahim al-Habib and Amna Ali

My Lovely Wife

Shaimaa al-Ruwaished

And

My Sweetheart Children

Saleh, Hussain and Maria

Abstract

The presence of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, which includes groups of 'Ajam, Baharna, Hassawiyya and a few from Iraq, currently constitute between twenty and thirty percent of the Kuwaiti population, and their historical role in building the state of Kuwait has been significant since the early history of Kuwait.

Relying on a variety of primary sources, including British government documents, the writings of western travellers and the reports of American missionaries in Kuwait, the private papers of more than twenty three Kuwaiti Shi'a individual archives, and oral-history interviews with descendants of Shi'a immigrants to Kuwait, this thesis discusses the construction of the Shi'a communities by focusing on the causes of their migrations from their motherland to Kuwait between 1880 and 1938, the period when their migration came to its peak. By analysing the internal political, economic, religious and social conditions of the Shi'a homelands and Kuwait itself, in the overall regional context of the Gulf sheikhdoms, the British and Ottoman empires, and other great powers interested in the Gulf region, this thesis examines the reasons behind the Shi'a migrations. It considers merchants, artisans and labourers who left their places of origin (i.e. southwestern Iran, Bahrain, and al-Hasa) and chose Kuwait as their final destination in which to settle.

The thesis also examines the Shi'a's historical relationships amongst themselves, with the Sunni, and the government. It defines the economic roles of the different Shi'a social groups, (merchants, artisans and labourers), in transferring Kuwait from nascent town to a prosperous city. The thesis will fill a significant gap in Kuwaiti historiography as its subject has so far not been studied in any depth by Persian Gulf scholars.

Acknowledgment

While I was working hard at the beginning of this Ph.D. project, I suffered intermittent depression, just a year after I completed my Ph.D. program. This was due to the withdrawal of my scholarship by Kuwait University for sectarian reasons related to my topic of study. I had to challenge myself, gather my strength, and overcome the depression. I also had to manage myself financially especially with the responsibility of a wife and three children. Indeed, I must confess, at times I thought I would never complete this project while suffering with depression. However, I have overcome these obstacles with help.

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Note on the Transliteration System

In this paper, I follow the International Journal of the Middle East Studies (IJMES), a well-known system adopted by most Middle Eastern scholars when conducting research containing Arabic, Persian and Turkish words. For this thesis I have adopted the Arabic system only, due to the usage of sources without diacritical marks for personal and place names, political parties and organisations, and titles of books and articles except for 'ayn (ع) and hamza (أ).

With regard to the Arabic article I use (al) as a typical Arabic article regardless of whether the form of the article is *al-shamsiyya* or *al-qamariyya*. Some of the Arabic words which have an (al) article like الحساوية will be written without an Arabic article (al) and so will become Hassawiyya. Some of the Arabic words were written with (al) such *al-sukkān* while at other times the same words were written without (al), depending upon the context. I used the word shaykh in Arabic form for religious leader to distinguish it from the English form of Sheikh, for Arab rulers.

Also some words and letters, such as the word (ibn) or (ابن) is also used without (ع) in its commonly accepted English form. Only the letters and words that do not have a common accepted form in English have been transliterated according to their Arabic forms. Examples of a few Arabic letters and words that are used in this study are set out below.

ع = ع	عجم = 'Ajam
ء = ء	علماء = 'Ulama
ط = ط	القطن = al-Qattan
ص = ص	الصباح = al-Sabah
ح = ح	بحارنة = Baharna
إ = إ	إحقاقي = Ihqaqi

It should be noted also that I have converted all *hijri* dates on the private documents of the Shi'a communities, merchants' accounts books, and some of their letters using the Islamic calendar. These dates have been converted to the Christian calendar, (Gregorian dates), by using the following internet source: [www. Islamicfinder.org](http://www.Islamicfinder.org)

List of Abbreviations

Word and title
Captain = Cap
Documents = docs
Document = doc
Senior general staff office = Sgso
Intelligence Office Persian Gulf = IOPG
Register = reg
P.P. = Private Paper
Number = num
State = St
Secretary of High Commissions = S.H.C.
Acting Civil Commissioner = A.C.C.
Consulate = Con
Consulate General = C.G.
Civil Commissioner = C.C.

Country
India = Id
Mohammerah = Mhr
Lingah = Lin
Bandar Rig = BRig
Karachi = Kch
Calcutta = Cal
Muscat = Mus
Basra = Bs
Bombay = Bom
Baghdad = Bgh
Bahrain = Bh
Kuwait = Kw
Bushire = Bsh

High Commissioner = H.C.
Intelligence Summary = I.S.
Government = Gov
Foreign Office = F.O.
Foreign Secretary = F.S.
Vice-Consul = V.C.
Assistance = Ass
Document Number = dn
First Assistance Resident = F.A.R.
Persian Gulf = PG
Political Agency = P.A.
Political Agent = P.A.
British Resident = B.R.
British Residency = B.R.
Intelligence Office = I.O.
Intelligence Officer = I.O.
Senior General Staff Officer = S.G.S.O.
Statistical = Stat
Geographical = Geog
British East Indian Company = BEIC
National Assembly of Kuwait = NAK

Dutch East Indian Company = DEIC
French East Indian Company = FEIC
East Indian Company = EIC

Sources
The Persian Gulf Précis = <i>TPGP</i>
Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf = <i>Gaz. of PG</i>
Correspondence Respecting Affairs of Koweit = CRAK
Political Diaries of the Persian Gulf = <i>PDPG</i>
Correspondence Respecting Affairs of Koweit = CRAK
Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency = ARPGPR
The Persian Gulf Administration Reports = <i>TPGAR</i>

Please note: Abbreviations have been used to shorten books and articles titles only after they have been cited fully in their first mention. This has been done in order to adhere to word count restrictions.

Declaration of Authorship

I, Mohammad al-Habib, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Mohammad al-Habib

Date: 23 October 2016

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Introduction

The Gulf Region in the Context of Sectarianism, Migration, and Transnationalism

Most Persian Gulf historians agree that historically the Persian Gulf region has been a focal cosmopolitan centre and hybrid zone consisting of people who brought and spread different cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities and kinship from elsewhere in the world.¹ This is due to both the maritime trade amongst the Gulf ports, and the oceanic economic exchange between the Gulf region, and the Indian Ocean and East Africa. Such economic exchanges, which were independent of any border restrictions, facilitated the movement of people from one zone to another, thus leading the Gulf to be characterised as a contact zone. This was one impetus behind the exchange of ideas, and cultural and social practices which subsequently resulted in the migration of people, either within the Gulf region states or from the outside world. As a result, the formation of some states of the modern Gulf region were characterised by migration, transnationalism, sectarianism and ethnicity, all phenomena that significantly contributed to shaping the population of the Gulf states, including Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia.

There is no doubt, in the Muslim world, sectarianism between the Shi'a and Sunnis started from the death of the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century and has continued in different phases and levels since then. However, in modern times, it is clear the revival of sectarianism between the Sunni and Shi'a in the Persian Gulf region is associated with the emergence of

¹See for example M Bhacker. 'The Culture Unity of the Gulf and Indian Ocean: A Longue Durée. Historical Perspective' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf in History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 163-172; Abdul Sheriff. 'The Persian Gulf and Swahili Coast: A History of Acculturation over the Longue Durée' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 173-188; Lawrence Potter. 'Introduction' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 1-24.

the Safavids and the Ottomans as major regional ‘Shi‘a-Sunni’ feudal political powers in the Gulf region. The evolution of the Wahhabi-Sa‘udi movement in the mid-18th century exacerbated the sectarian situation between the Shi‘a and the Sunni inhabitants of the Persian Gulf region. However, in this study the religious aspect of sectarianism, though it is important in our understanding of the sectarian practices of the political regimes in the Gulf region, is considered less significant than the political perspectives in the region, which are of considerable complexity. As Ussama Makdisi argues ‘sectarianism as I understand it, refers to a process not an object, not an event, and certainly not a primordial trait. It is a process through which a kind of religious identity is politicalized, even secularized, as part of an obvious struggle for power.’²

A closer examination of the historical literature of Kuwait, al-Hasa and Bahrain shows sectarianism in all these states has existed during their evolution, but it has differed in terms of the level of how it has been politicalised by established regimes. Sectarianism in Bahrain and al-Hasa, can be easily identified in the historical literature of Bahrain and al-Hasa, especially in the period when the al-Khalifa and al-Sa‘ud conquered both regions during the last quarter of the 18th century. To consolidate their political positions as new political regimes over the original native inhabitants, the Shi‘a, they used religious sectarianism among the inhabitants as a tool to maintain political power. The best example of this is the religious-political collaboration between Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Sa‘ud who used religion as a slogan to legitimise their movement which created a situation that Fouad Ibrahim referred to as ‘an ideology of conquest,’³ an instrument to dominate the

²Ussama Makdisi. *Pensée 4: oving Beyond Orientalist Fantasy, Sectarian Polemic, and Nationalist Denial. International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Nov., 2008), pp. 559-560.

³Fouad Ibrahim. *The Shi‘is of Saudi Arabia*. London, San Francisco: Saqi, 2006, pp. 18-22.

Arabian Peninsula and its peripheries. The result was migratory phenomena in the Gulf region, especially for Shi'a inhabitants, who were moving to escape from the areas under the political, social, and religious influences of the Wahhabi doctrine. Such an ideology created social division associated with hate, antagonism, and often violent relations between the two parties, though they co-existed with each other. Thus, religion as David Cairns states, 'functions within the sectarian schema, playing a more sinister role, that of providing a mask for sectarian exercise of power.'⁴

In Kuwait the situation was different. The political regime in the early stages of Kuwaiti history to 1938 did not seek to exploit or use the concept of sectarianism to maintain power. This is because the al-Sabah, similar to other Kuwaiti inhabitants, arrived in a barren land where there was no well-established community with political authority which need to be toppled and substituted by a new one. Neither were there existing inhabitants who carried ethnic or religious identities, similar to those in al-Hasa and Bahrain, where a challenge the new regime could be made. Instead, all inhabitants showed their consent by choosing the al-Sabah family as the legitimate rulers of Kuwait, and they have done so since then. Indeed, throughout Kuwaiti history to 1938, al-Sabah did not confront any serious political challenge from different social groups that could threaten their position in Kuwait. Unlike Bahrain and al-Hasa, as a new state they welcomed everyone from outside Kuwait town as long as they could cooperate in building the state without causing any trouble that would affect the stability of the town. It is why the Shi'a and Sunni residents of Kuwait co-existed together peacefully even though they had different religious and ethnic backgrounds. This does not

⁴David Cairns. The Object of Sectarianism: The Material of Sectarianism in Ulster Loyalism. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Sep., 2000), pp. 437-452.

mean sectarianism did not exist in Kuwait among its inhabitants since its early history, but it did not have a serious political impact because the regime did not utilise it for their own interests, largely because the political situation did not necessitate using such a concept to preserve their political power. Thus, the history of the Shi'a in Kuwait, unlike Bahrain and al-Hasa, cannot be analysed under the framework of sectarianism, especially during the period this study covers.

With regard to the theme of migration within the Gulf region, there is an abundance of academic study which focusses on migration of foreign workers, mainly labourers, to the Gulf sheikhdoms after the discovery of oil. A survey of the historical literature of the Persian Gulf region prior to the discovery of oil however, indicates an absence of sufficient literature on the theme of migration, especially concerning the movements of the local residents (*sukkān al-manṭaqa*) within the Persian Gulf region.⁵ As Fuccaro argues, 'there is no historiography of migrants in the Gulf before oil.'⁶ Indeed, historians usually discuss migration only with regard to the movements of the ruling dynasties of the Arab Gulf (e.g. al-Sabah, al-Khalifa, al-Thani and al-Sa'ud) within the Gulf region, the reasons behind this movement, and how they ultimately settled in the region they controlled as migrants. The migration of local inhabitants and their movements between one area and another is usually absent in such discussion. However, there are studies conducted by Fuccaro and Najmabadi which do focus on the major motives behind the movements of local inhabitants between the east and west coasts of the Persian Gulf, mainly Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, Sharjah and southwestern Iran, in the framework of migration and transnationalism. Fuccaro, for

⁵There are only few studies in Arabic and English conducted on the Arab al-Hawala.

⁶Nelida Fuccaro. 'Pear Towns and Early Oil Cities: Migration and Integration in the Arab Coast of the Persian Gulf' in Ulrike Freitag, ed., *Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity in the Ottoman Empire and Beyond*. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 99-116.

example, argues that prior to the discovery of oil, immigration in the Gulf region, particularly in Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai, developed in phases associated with a ‘process of urban expansion, economic empowerment and state building.’⁷ A number of interrelated elements, according to her, helped the mobility of local inhabitants within the Gulf region and created ‘societies of migrants’ of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic backgrounds that contributed to the evolution of Arab states from different perspectives including urbanisation.

The trade system and the boom of the pearling industry, which prevailed in the Gulf region between 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, attracted not only local inhabitants from the lowest social group (i.e. labourers) to settle in the Arab states there, but also regional merchants and entrepreneurs who sought the lower tariffs imposed by the Arab sheikhs. The latter wanted to increase the volume of trade in their regions as well as their incomes during the 19th and early the 20th centuries through immigrants. Other local inhabitants, such as the local Shi‘a and Sunni clerics, and many residents of southwestern Iran relocated from their place of origin due to political unrest caused by the Wahhabi movement, and the economic insecurity of Qajar Iran respectively.⁸ Regional networks among the old settled Arab and ‘Ajam merchants in the Arab states facilitated the migrations of their friends, relatives and family members, enabling them to leave their place of origin for employment offered in their new regions.⁹

By contrast with Fuccaro, Najmabadi focuses on the migration of the local Arab inhabitants to the Iranian coast mainly to Gavbandi (Gaband in Arabic sources) in Hormuzgan province in southwestern Iran. She argues that the historical mutual migration

⁷Ibid.

⁸I prefer to use the word ‘Iran’ while discussing the historical overview between 18th and 20th centuries, although ‘Persia’ was more often used in the historical context to designate Iran prior to the early 20th century.

⁹Ibid.

phenomenon among Iranian and Arab immigrants from the coastal area of Iran into the Arab states, and *vice versa*, was due to historical economic, social and political interactions between the two regions from the Safavid era and afterwards.¹⁰ These two studies provide the first significant overview of the historical migrations of local inhabitants between the two coastal sides of the Persian Gulf, and their analysis highlights the major factors behind migration in the Gulf region prior to the oil boom. This work follows similar interpretation however, it differs from them in that it is more comprehensive in discussing certain areas of study (i.e. southwestern Iran, al-Hasa, Bahrain and Kuwait) in more depth, and focusses upon the Shi'a by looking at the internal economic, political, social and religious conditions of these areas between the 18th and the 20th centuries.

As mentioned previously, the phenomenon of migration has played a significant part in the social formation of the Persian Gulf, as it has elsewhere in the world. In the modern period, this phenomenon has increased due to capitalism, colonialism and globalization, and it has created minorities that come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and various religious beliefs. When we look at the modern history of the Gulf societies, it is clear that the migration phenomenon has contributed to the rise and formation of the modern states of Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and echoes can be seen in the Shi'a migration to Kuwait between 1880 and 1938. In the last three centuries constant political unrest, religious persecution, tribal conflicts, and trade in the Gulf region have all contributed to and generated migration between the western and eastern coastal regions of the Persian Gulf Sea, and *vice versa*. The new rising sheikhdoms (i.e. Kuwait, Qatar and UAE) have been the main beneficiaries of these migrations, and the ruling families were able to

¹⁰Shahnaz Nadjmabadi. 'The Arab Presence on the Iranian Coast of the Persian Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 129-145.

legitimise their control over their sheikhdoms in order to build new states from the last quarter of 19th century. In the case of Kuwait, from approximately three hundred years ago to the mid-20th century, the migration phenomenon has been crucial in shaping Kuwaiti history. The construction of Kuwait has been built on the heterogeneous migration of groups with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, such as Bedouins, Arabs and 'Ajam, from adjacent regions.

The migratory patterns and decisions of the populations can be conceptualised within the framework of the cause of mobility (i.e. push-pull factors), new migration system theory, and transnationalism.¹¹ In this study, the push and pull model is used in order to understand the process of Shi'a migration from their homeland to Kuwait. As this paradigm illustrates, the causes of migration consist of a combination of push factors which force people to leave their places of origin, and pull factors which attract immigrants to decide to settle in a host country either temporarily or permanently. The push factors, on the one hand, usually constitute elements such as demographic increase, low living standards, lack of economic opportunities, natural disasters, political repression and religious persecution; the pull factors, on the other hand, consist of factors such as the search for a safe place, desire for a decent life and job opportunities, expectations of economic betterment, and the desire for political stability and freedom.¹² In the state construction of Kuwait, settlement into Grane (now Kuwait) was not exclusively limited to Bedouins, Arabs and 'Ajam but included the ruling family of Kuwait, the al-Sabah, who emigrated from Bandar Dailam, a port of southwestern Iran, through Basra to Kuwait roughly in 1701 according to an historical Ottoman document.

¹¹Stephen Castles and Mark Miller. *The Age of Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 22-30.

¹²Castles and Miller. *The Age of Migration*, p. 22.

Myron Weiner asserts, the concept of push-pull is significant in explaining migration from one community to another.¹³ In this context, the push factor typified by economic difficulty and political unrest in the original Shi'a homelands between 1880 and 1938, led many of the native people from the areas in question to leave their place of birth. For example, in southwestern Iran, 'environmental degradation, droughts, floods, famines, and civil conflicts compelled people to flee across international borders'.¹⁴ Many other push factors, such as tax increases, exploitation of people by local Khans and governors, tribal conflicts and revenge, and ultimately Shah Reza's new policy of westernizing Iran and centralizing the far-flung provinces, forced people to move away, as will be further discussed in Chapters Three and Five. In the Bahrain and al-Hasa regions however, political instability and economic betterment were major reasons behind Shi'a migration to Kuwait. Even more significant was religious persecution perpetrated by the ruling families (al-Khalifa and al-Sa'ud). As mentioned previously, borders in the Gulf region were not obstacles to the dynamism of migration until the middle of the 20th century. As a result, these conditions played a crucial role in forcing people to migrate to Kuwait and to other places in the region, such as Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Basra, Qatar and Oman, when they had the opportunity to do so.

By contrast, pull factors such as the political stability of Kuwait throughout its history, and its economic prosperity from 1880 onward attracted not only Shi'a, but also Sunni migrants to choose Kuwait as their final destination. While Kuwait was not considered a utopia, it was considered a safe region; merchants could establish businesses under its rulers' protection in exchange for tribute. Banditry, civil and criminal crimes were fewer, and taxes and customs fees were much lower in Kuwait compared to other areas of the Gulf region. Tolerance of

¹³Myron Weiner. 'Security, Stability, and International Migration,' *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1992-1993): pp. 91-126.

¹⁴Weiner. 'Security' in *International Security*, pp. 91-126.

other religious faiths, such as Christian, Jewish and Shi'a, and the embracing of an 'open door policy' by the ruling family for the sake of building the state of Kuwait, were additional pull factors which helped the Shi'a choose to settle in Kuwait. The presence of Shi'a communities in Kuwait from the second half of the 18th century onward served as another pull factor for additional Shi'a immigrants, and this will be discussed further in this study.

This early Shi'a settlement, according to oral history and the private papers of some Kuwaiti Shi'a families, encouraged a sequence of migratory patterns at different times which created a chain of migrations: initial early migration which would then be followed by others from the same family, friends, relatives or community members, all of which lead to a partial recreation of the home community within the new area of settlement, as Stephen Castle and Paul Boyle and others have described it.¹⁵

An additional approach to the migration phenomenon explored in this study is the new migration system theory, which is based on an interdisciplinary analysis. This theory, according to Castle and Miller, discusses the migration phenomenon based on issues like colonisation, political influence, trade, investment, cultural ties, family links, and social networks between both the sending and receiving countries.¹⁶ Indeed, maritime and overland trade between Kuwait and the Shi'a homelands, and the social networks of Shi'a merchant families in particular, (i.e. Ma'rafi, ibn Ghalib, Behbehani, Abul and al-Matruk), along with native Arab and Iranian agents and commercial companies, facilitated the movement of people, especially from southwestern Iran to Kuwait. The role of old settled merchants through their networks eased the movement of migrants by providing help with work,

¹⁵Paul Boyle, Keith Halfacree and others. *Exploring Contemporary Migration*. Harlow: Longman, 1998, p. 36; Stephen Castle. 'The Factors That Make and Unmake Migration Policies' in Alejandro Portes and Josh DeWind, ed., *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, pp. 35-36.

¹⁶Castles and Miller. *The Age of Migration*, p. 26.

housing and other needs on arrival. These links provided vital incomes for individuals and groups and is referred to by Stephen Castle as, social capital. Such networks also offer the basis for the process of adaptation and community formation which encouraged migrant groups to develop their own social and economic infrastructure, such as places of worship, as will be discussed in depth later in this study.¹⁷

At the same time, the advantages of Kuwait's port were noticed by most western visitors, such as E. Ives, J. Buckingham, L. Pelly, H. Whigham, G. Curzon, A. Locher and many others from early in Kuwait's history throughout the early 20th century. Therefore, it is not surprising that the port attracted not only regional Shi'a merchants and local and international entrepreneurs, but also great powers, such as Britain, Russia and Germany, interested in dominating the Persian Gulf. Mutual commercial exchanges between the Kuwait port and the Gulf ports (e.g. Bahrain and those in southwestern Iran) facilitated the movement of residents and agents within the Gulf region. And so conversely, it is not surprising to note the presence of some Kuwaitis and some Hassawiyya in Bushehr during the first quarter of the 20th century, as Lorimer indicated.¹⁸ Similarly, Iranian Tangistanis and Dashtis arms dealers were constantly visiting Kuwait, travelling by local dhow, to purchase arms and ammunition, with the result that some of them settled permanently in Kuwait, as will be elaborated upon in the Chapters Three and Four.

The domestic maritime transport, the dhow, and the advent of the steamship during the second half of the 19th century provided convenient means of transport and travel. Such maritime transport served as a channel conveying people between the eastern and western coastal regions of the Persian Gulf. The process of migration between the Shi'a motherlands

¹⁷Castle. 'The Factors' in Alejandro and Josh, ed., *Rethinking Migration*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁸John Lorimer. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. II A, Geog and Stat. Farnham Common. England: Archive Editions, 1986, p. 344.

to Kuwait followed two paths, direct and indirect migration, whether by sea or by land. On the one hand, the path of direct migration for 'Ajam led from one of the southwestern Iranian ports, such as Bushehr, Bandar Dailam, Bandar 'Abbas, Bandar Ma 'shour, Muhammerah and Lingah, to Kuwait, while the path of indirect migration for the same people began in similar areas, but sometimes led first to Bahrain, Dubai, Sharjah or Qatar then Kuwait.¹⁹ Thus, some of the Shi 'a settled in these areas of the Gulf while others continued toward Kuwait. The increasingly regular boats conveyed Iranian artisans, labourers and residents to Kuwait, especially those who wanted to work with the British agency there. Passing through Basra after crossing the Shatt-al-'Arab's towns like Qusba and Manyuhi was the only way for the Shi 'a to migrate by land to Kuwait from southwestern Iran. The Baharna mostly followed the 'Ajam sea pattern of migration, whereas the Hassawiyya usually migrated to Kuwait overland using caravans due to their close geographical proximity. Many Hassawiyya also came to Kuwait after traveling to Bahrain for a short visit or trans-shipment.²⁰

When migration as a concept is discussed, the concept of transnationalism must be brought into the discussion as well. In other words, to understand the migration process it is necessary to connect it to a transnational framework. Even though there is lack of a well-defined theoretical framework of transnationalism amongst social scientists, they do agree on a broad definition of transnationalism as a term which 'refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states'.²¹ This required regular and sustained social contacts over time across national boundaries between people from different places. That is why discussion of transnationalism usually cannot be dissociated from

¹⁹See figure 2 in appendix 1.

²⁰See figure 1 in appendix 1.

²¹Steven Vertovec. 'Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, (1999), pp. 1-24.

networks, because it ‘involved individuals, their networks of social relations, their communities and broader institutionalized structures such as local and national governments’.²²

In the Persian Gulf region, there are a number of studies that discuss the Gulf region in the framework of transnationalism from different points of view under the heading of transnational connections and the Arab Gulf. However, the most interesting two studies are conducted by Onley and Fuccaro respectively. One important aspect of both studies is their focus on the transnational networks of local ‘Ajam mercantile families, the al-Safar and al-Sharif, between southwestern Iran and Bahrain, before the oil period. Through their networks, beside other ‘Ajam families such as the Bushehri, as well established mercantile families in Bahrain, they were able to encourage friends and relatives to migrate from their original homeland in the late 19th and early the 20th centuries to enlarge their businesses in Bahrain, and to help them, and feed them when it was necessary. Through their networks in Bahrain they ‘contributed to the accumulation of merchant capital and to the development of the infrastructure and built environment of Manamah.’²³ As a result, in applying the concept of transnationalism to the role of the local Arab and ‘Ajam Shi’a mercantile families, similar to the Onley and Fuccaro studies, this study will add not only value to their knowledge of transnational networks between the west and east coast of the Gulf in the Persian Gulf

²²Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo and Patricia Landolt. The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1999, pp. 217-237.

²³Nelida Fuccaro. ‘Mapping the Transnational Community: Persians and the Space of the City in Bahrain, c.1869-1937’ in Madawi Al-Rasheed, ed., *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*. London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 45-46; James Onley. ‘Transnational Merchants in the Nineteenth Century Gulf: The Case of the Safar Family’ in Madawi Al-Rasheed, ed., *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, pp. 59-89.

literature, through the use of case studies, this study will also add to their contribution to the understanding of Kuwait's economic prosperity, similar to that achieved for Bahrain.

Ethnicity and the Misconception of the Definition of 'Ajam in Kuwaiti Society

When it comes to discussing a minority group, such as the Shi'a in the Gulf region, it is necessary to look at the concept of ethnicity to understand their identity. This raises the question of how the Shi'a communities in Kuwait and the 'Ajam, Hassawiyya and Baharna identified themselves, and how they were regarded by the Arab Sunni, especially in view of the absence of the notion of nationalism prior to the 1930s in Kuwait. In this study the term ethnicity refers to 'the differentiation of groups of people who have shared cultural meanings, memories and descent, produced through social interaction.'²⁴ Weber also defined ethnic groups as 'those which have a belief in common descent arising from either collective memories of colonisation and migration, collective customs, and physical similarities or all three.'²⁵ Other scholars, such as Steve Fenton assert that ethnicity is about descent and culture and how the same ethnic group elaborates these into an idea of community.²⁶ Ethnic group also refers to a social group which is connected by sharing similar principles that include first, a common place of origin which they migrated from and leads them to form a community in their new place of settlement. Second, a common language which can be distinctive in itself from another ethnic group. This distinctive language could help the same ethnic group to share memories and emotions with each other. Third, a certain distinct religion or religious sect as identification that put them in cohesion. Fourth, a common culture

²⁴Ian Law. *Racism and Ethnicity: Global Debate, Dilemmas, Directions*. Harlow, England: Longman, 2010, p. 77

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁶Steve Fenton. *Ethnicity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity; Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003, p. 3.

with distinctive social institutions and behavior including diet, and cloth, associated with common tradition and shared history. Fifth, a sense of belonging to an identity that they can identify themselves and which enables them to be identified by other ethnic groups.²⁷ These characteristics of ethnicity could be applied to the all Shi'a communities in Kuwait as all of them have a distinct ethnicity (i.e. Arab and 'Ajam), different original places of migration and sense of belonging (al-Hasa, Bahrain and southwestern Iran), different languages (Arabic and Farsi) and separate religious identifications (*uṣuli*, *ikhbari*, and *shaykhi*) and social institutions (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*). Even though they share a similar diet and dress, all of them have adopted similar kinds of local Kuwaiti foods and customs since the early history of Kuwait as a part of an assimilation process with the larger 'Kuwaiti society'.

From early in Kuwaiti history to the 1930s the perception in Kuwait of the ethnic composition of Kuwaiti society, which included mainly Arab and 'Ajam, was shaped cultural, based upon a group's ancestral homeland, or according to 'their member of tribe or its subdivisions, the clan and the extended family,'²⁸ as Anh Nga Longva put it. Their reason for this was there were no alternative notions of identity, such as nationalism, nation, nationality or citizenship that could combine these groups of people together under, for example, a concept such as Kuwaiti. As a result, the only way to define themselves was to use ethnic identity or social identity. Thus the people of Kuwait have used specific terms for certain groups residing there, based on their place of origin. For example, the term Najdiyyn or (*niyada* in Kuwaiti dialect) has been used to designate a group of Kuwaiti Sunni families who are descended from immigrants from Najd who settled in Kuwait at the time of its formation. Terms like Zubarra, Hassawiyya, and Baharna have also been used for those

²⁷Ibid., pp. 75, 78.

²⁸Anh Nga Longva. *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997, p. 46.

Kuwaiti families who, at the same time, came originally from Zubayr in Mesopotamia, al-Hasa in Eastern Arabian Peninsula, and Bahrain.²⁹ The word *‘ayam* was a common term used to refer to those families who originally emigrated from Iran, especially of Shi‘a beliefs. These terms have been used not only amongst the people of Kuwait, but also by Kuwaiti Sheikhs and British political agents, as is evident from the correspondence in Arabic documents in the IOR files and in the *al-sijl al-‘ām* files in *al-diwan al-amiri* in Kuwait.³⁰

Terms currently in use by Kuwaitis, such as ‘Kuwaiti’ or ‘Kuwaiti citizen,’ which means (*muwāṭin kuwayti*), did not exist officially prior to the issuing of the Kuwaiti constitution in 1962. However, the concept (*muwāṭin kuwayti*) began to emerge socially and politically in the mind of Kuwaitis at the beginning of the national movement in the 1930s. They were developed by the native intelligentsia, who were influenced by the national movements that had already emerged in other Middle Eastern countries, such as contemporary Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.³¹ Indeed, the notions of nationality and citizenship were new to the residents of the entire Arab area and only emerged after World War Two, as An Nga Longva argues. That is why, according to her, each community in Kuwait reflected a concept of group identity whereby they belonged to a certain community by blood relationship.³²

This is evident from the analysis of the Arabic documents from the reign of Mubarak the Great and onwards, evidenced in British archives and in *al-sijl al-‘ām* files at *al-diwan al-amiri* in Kuwait. If the ruler of Kuwait wished to refer to all Kuwaitis regardless of their

²⁹Until recently, many Kuwaiti Sunni and Shi‘a families carried surnames identical to their place or origin. See table 2 in the appendix 3.

³⁰See for example the documents in IOR R/15/5/89 and files I and II in *al-sijl al-‘ām* preserved in *al-diwan al-amiri* center in Kuwait.

³¹In this study although the word ‘subjects of Kuwait’ or ‘inhabitants or residents of Kuwait’ are the appropriate words to use in the historical context to designate all Sunni and Shi‘a people who lived in Kuwait, I prefer to use word ‘Kuwaiti’ due to word count policy.

³²Longva. *Walls Built on Sand*, pp. 46-47.

religious faith or ethnic background, he used terms such as the inhabitants of Kuwait (*ahl al-kuwayt*) or subjects of Kuwait (*jamā'at ahl al-kuwayt*) or residents of Kuwait (*ra'iyyat al-kuwayt*) or our resident (*ra'āyānā*) or inhabitants of Kuwait (*sukkān al-kuwayt*). However, when the ruler of Kuwait wished to indicate a specific group of people, he used terms like 'Ajam, Arab, and the surnames of the Bedouin families, like the 'Awazim and the 'Ajman. Thus the belief that terms like 'Kuwaiti' or 'Kuwaiti citizen' occurred prior to the national movement is a misconception, as these terms did not exist then. It is also evident that Kuwaitis have not categorised themselves on the basis of their religious faith (i.e. Sunni and Shi'a) but rather based on that of their ethnic background.³³ One possible explanation for their not designating the inhabitants of Kuwait according to their religious faith is the historically amicable relationships evident amongst Kuwaiti residents, regardless of their beliefs. Indeed, unlike in Bahrain and al-Hasa, from the beginning of Kuwaiti history there were no religious conflicts between the Shi'a and Sunni inhabitants that would have created social and political sectarianism. Both groups were composed of immigrants who settled in Kuwait at different times and cooperated with each other to build the state.³⁴ Even when doctrinal differences have existed, the ruling family has not politicized this religious difference.

The concept of 'ayam (sic) in Kuwaiti culture has also been used throughout the history of Kuwait (as well as the Arab Gulf sheikhdoms), and is derived from the standard Arabic language word 'Ajam.³⁵ However, the meaning of the two terms different. In standard Arabic

³³According to the individual primary sources consulted, the word Shi'a is only used in one document. See, 'the 'Ajam and Arab of Southwestern Iran' section in Chapter Three.

³⁴More detailed discussion on the historical relationship between the Sunni and Shi'a inhabitants of Kuwait can be found in Chapter Four.

³⁵The word 'Ajam in standard Arabic is pronounced differently than the word 'ayam Kuwaiti dialect, as all Kuwait substitute the letter j (ج) with i (ي) and 'ayam is a plural word of 'imī in the Kuwaiti dialect.

the term 'Ajam refers to non-Arabs, or people who do not speak Arabic, speak clumsy Arabic, or who speak languages other than Arabic. The term can also include speakers of English, Farsi, Urdu, Hindi and so on. In Kuwait the word 'Ajam is pronounced '*ayam*', and it is used with a different definition to that of the original Arabic. The concept of '*ayam*' in Kuwaiti culture was shaped by the socio-political environment of Kuwaiti society. Different groups in Kuwaiti society use the term in different ways. It is used by most Kuwaiti Sunnis to refer specifically to Kuwaiti Shi'a of Iranian origin even though there are Kuwaiti Sunni families whose forefathers also migrated from southwestern Iran. For instance, though there are some Kuwaiti Sunni families, such as the al-Kandiri, al-'Awadi, al-Bastaki, al-Gabandi, al-Khashti, al-Langawi, Kankuni and many others whose ancestors also emigrated from the land of Fars (*bar faris*),³⁶ and who carry surnames identical to the names of the villages and towns their forefathers originally belonged to, they are not called '*ayam*' by the Kuwaiti Arab Sunni because they are Sunni believers.³⁷ Many Kuwait Sunnis also use the word '*ayam*' for Kuwaiti Shi'a of Arab origin because they are Shi'a, such as the Hassawiyya and Baharna, although they are not '*ayam*' as figure 4 shows in appendix 2.

The Kuwaiti Shi'a employ the term '*ayam*' to refer only to Sunni and Shi'a families whose forefathers emigrated from villages and towns located in *bar faris*, such as Girash, Ashkanan, Lar, 'Awaz, Bushehr, Lamard, Bastak, Charagh, Dasht, Jahrum, Kimashk and many others, regardless of their faiths as figure 5 shows in appendix 2. As a result, the concept of '*ayam*' in Kuwait was not shaped by the official linguistic meaning of the word 'Ajam in standard Arabic, but rather by the socio-political environment. However, each group in Kuwait defines

³⁶Kuwaiti Shi'a and Sunni whose ancestors emigrated from southwestern Iran villages and towns usually use the term *bar faris* as a general indication of the overall region of southwestern Iran except for the area of Khuzestan.

³⁷There are Kuwaiti Shi'a families who carry Kankuni and al-Gabandi as surnames as well.

the term *‘ayam* differently. The Sunnis differentiate according to religion and the Shi‘a according to ethnicity.

The Definition of the Shi‘a Communities in Kuwait

The use of the common political international term, the word ‘Shi‘a’, to label the ‘Kuwaiti Shi‘a communities’, is not appropriate in this study. Nor is the use of the religious term ‘Shi‘a’, which derives from the term *al-mushaya‘a*, as applied to those who followed *imām‘Ali (atbā‘)* following the ‘first election’ of those who were eligible to be caliph, after the prophet Muhammad’s death in 632, which is how the Shi‘a in Kuwait are viewed in this study. The reason behind this difficulty in naming a group of people, is simply because there was no ‘political identity’ of a single unified ‘Shi‘a community’ during the early history of Kuwait. Furthermore, sectarianism was not a dominant phenomenon amongst the inhabitants in Kuwait. Indeed, as this study argues, the term ‘Shi‘a community’ was only invented as a ‘political term’ in the later period, and started to emerge in the political scene of Kuwait after the *majlis al-tashri‘i* movement in 1938, a point this study will clarify. More importantly, according to the private documents of local Shi‘a families, the social and political discourse of the historical context of Kuwait history shows vividly that when each Shi‘a community wanted to address, demand, complain to, and ask for religious or social privileges from the government, when they discussed their intention to establish religious institutions (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*) amongst themselves, or when they donated money to the Shi‘a *waqf*, they clearly defined their communities according to their ethnicity, such as Hassawiyya, Baharna or ‘Ajam (*jamā‘at al-hassawiyya*), (*jamā‘at al-baharna*) and (*jamā‘at al-‘ajam*).³⁸

³⁸P.P. of the al-Qattan and Bu‘layan families.

Due to this complexity, this study will incorporate the religious concept of the term into the ethnical background of each of the distinct Shi'a inhabitants of Kuwait, since their ethnicities have constituted an essential part of their 'political identity'. Besides the major language difference between the 'Ajam Shi'a and the Arab Shi'a (e.g. Hassawiyya and Baharna), economic occupation also played a significant role within the sub-ethnicities that shaped such identity. In other words, even though all these three Shi'a communities shared a similar 'religious identity' in the larger context of Shi'asim as a Muslim doctrine, the differences in their sub-religious identity (e.g. *uṣuli*, *shaykhi* and *ikhbari*), ethnicity, language and economic occupation, created divisions and made them different from each other.

For the purposes of this study, groups of specific local Shi'a inhabitants of Kuwait will be designated with specific, locally appropriate terms. For example, 'Ajam' will be used for the Shi'a who originally migrated from southwestern Iran. (The term used to discuss Sunni migrants from the same area will be 'Sunni 'Ajam'). For local Shi'a who were migrants from Bahrain and al-Hasa, the terms 'Baharna' and 'Hassawiyya' will be used respectively.

The Aim of the Study

This work lays the groundwork for studying the formation of the Arab Gulf sheikdoms, particularly Kuwait during the 19th and 20th centuries. Though similar to the migration patterns of their co-religionists, the Sunnis, the creation of the Shi'a communities were due to constant waves of migration from southwestern Iran and the Arab Gulf regions from the early history of Kuwait to the mid-20th century. This study focuses in particular on the formation of the Shi'a communities who migrated from southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-

Hasa, a province of eastern Arabian Peninsula, between 1880 and 1938, prior to the discovery of oil in Kuwait.³⁹

The presence of large Shi'a communities in Kuwait and the subsequent research on these communities has been conducted for several reasons: Firstly, there is the lack of any significant academic study which addresses the architecture of these communities in Kuwait, despite the fact that they constitute between twenty and thirty per cent of the population, and their contributions to the building of Kuwait as a modern state have been substantial. This project is significant in that it seeks to document the history of longstanding and large communities in Kuwait which have previously received little attention from scholars. Secondly, the historical narrative of the formation of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait is unclear and absent. Kuwaiti political history prior to the early 19th century mostly relied on local legends narrated by those who shared a Kuwaiti ancestry, with the exception of a few descriptions by western and Arab travellers.⁴⁰ In contrast, the post-1880 period contains an abundance of primary sources, particularly British administrative and trade reports, individual Kuwaiti Shi'a merchant archives, private papers of some Kuwaiti Shi'a family members, some Kuwaiti antique and document collectors and local Kuwaiti government documents, all of which are instrumental in shedding light on the internal political, economic, social and religious conditions of Kuwait from local, regional and global perspectives. This allows us to look at the process of the creation of Shi'a communities from different angles.

³⁹Most of the studies about the Shi'a in Kuwait discuss the political impact of the Iranian revolution in 1979 on the Shi'a communities in Kuwait due to its worldwide echo in other Shi'a communities. See for example, Graham Fuller and Rend Francke. *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999; Sami al-Khaldi, *al-Ahزاب al-Islamiyya al-Siyasiyya fi al-Kuwayt: al-Shi'a, al-Ikhwān, al-Salaf*. Kuwait: Dar al-Naba' lilnashir wa al-Tawzi', 1999; Yitzhak Nakash. *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

⁴⁰See the origin of Kuwait and the origin of Kuwait and the rise of al-Sabah dynasty section in Chapter Two.

Finally, many Shi'a labourers, artisans and merchants from southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-Hasa, who arrived in Kuwait between the late 19th century and the discovery of oil in 1938, were encouraged by the ruling family al-Sabah to contribute to building the state of Kuwait. The development of the relationship between the state and the flow of people were not unrelated. Kuwait's attraction for Shi'a settlers from their original homeland arose from, and further enabled, the small country's ability to manoeuvre among the great powers in the Gulf. By concentrating on the structure of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, this thesis completes a comprehensive picture of the process of their formation, and their contribution to the building of Kuwait from different viewpoints. This work will fill a gap previously overlooked in Kuwait historiography and the broader Persian Gulf in general.

In approximately the third quarter of the 18th century, as with their Sunni co-inhabitants, the ancestors of Kuwaiti Shi'a (Arab or 'Ajam) immigrated from Kuwait's neighbours, such as southwestern Iran, Basra, al-Hasa and Bahrain after the settlement of the al-'Utub tribe. Numerically, their presence in Kuwait was less significant compared to that of the Sunnis, according to Kuwaiti oral history. However, due to a number of factors the immigration of both the Shi'a and Sunnis from adjacent regions of Kuwait came to its peak between 1880 and 1938.⁴¹ First, the geographical proximity of the Gulf States and unrestricted movement with no border control led to a constant 'crossing border phenomenon' thereby making the Gulf region an interactive zone.

Second, Kuwait, prior to the reign of Mubarak the Great (1896-1915), who established the modern state of Kuwait, lacked any political recognition. That is, Kuwait was economically

⁴¹This does not mean that the waves of Shi'a and Sunnis immigrants terminated in 1938, but rather it continued due to the discovery of oil, as a significant element in maintaining the continuity of the migration phenomenon. However, the post-oil era is out of the scope of this study.

and politically less significant than other places in the Gulf (e. g. southwestern Iran, Basra, Bahrain and Muscat). It was the competition amongst regional and international powers, such as the Ottomans, British, Russians, and to lesser extent German and French, which dominated the Gulf region, and which helped Kuwait to gain more political and commercial weight during that time. This also led to Kuwait's entry into global politics in general and in the Persian Gulf in particular, so it eventually became a British Protectorate in 1899. Mubarak al-Sabah successfully manipulated all these powers, particularly the Ottomans and the British, and established his official sheikhdom, (*imārat al-kuwayt*). This has led most scholars to assert that Kuwait came to be recognized as a political entity due to Mubarak's subtle character and his political intelligence in manoeuvring regional and international powers. In other words, Mubarak's period was a turning point in Kuwaiti history.

Third, the economic prosperity of Kuwait and increased trade exchanges with the Gulf ports and with India, facilitated the movement of the people, including the Shi'a, and created a pathway for local and regional Shi'a merchants, artisans, and labourers to change their residency seeking the chance of a better economic life. They usually travelled either by native boats (dhow) or, to a lesser extent, by British steamers or via commercial overland routes which connected Kuwait to its neighbours. The movement of Shi'a immigrants in comparison to the Sunnis was not restricted during Mubarak's reign, since encouraging immigrants formed part of state-building policy.⁴²

Fourth, the unrest and backward political, economic, social and religious conditions of the Shi'a original homeland contributed to the Shi'a flow to Kuwait hoping for a better future. Compared to its neighbours, Kuwait was one of the safest places to settle, with unusually low

⁴²The estimates of Kuwaiti demographics, which are the only indications of the population growth including Shi'a communities prior to 1950s, can be traced in British sources. This will be elaborated in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

government taxes imposed by its chief. It also tolerated religious differences, and was an area rarely exposed to natural disasters and diseases, such as famine, earthquake, flood, cholera and smallpox.

Fifth, there were existing Shi'a communities, as told in Kuwaiti narrative history and Kuwaiti Shi'a individual archives, which encouraged new influxes of Shi'a immigrants.

And finally, sixth, based upon the accounts of western travellers and British reports that registered the demographic growth of Kuwait, the period between 1880 and 1938 is considered the peak period, not only Shi'a immigration into Kuwait, but for the migration of Sunnis as well.

The Existing Literature

In order to understand and analyse the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, it is important to know the reasons for their presence in Kuwait, since the Shi'a communities are a significant population, not only in Iran but also throughout the Persian Gulf region. Despite the existence of many scholarly works about Kuwait's history, there is still a dearth of studies which look into the construction of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait. Any Kuwaiti literature which does deal with the formation of Shi'a communities in Kuwait, is unclear with regard to the main causes of the Shi'a migration and presence. For example, the scholar Maymunah al-Sabah points out the economic and political factors of immigrants' homelands and how they played a role in this migration process. Gained privileges, such as opportunities for free trade and the same low rate of customs which local Kuwaiti merchants enjoyed to maximum benefit were another impetus behind their migrations.⁴³ Although al-Sabah's study pinpoints the

⁴³Maymunah al-Sabah. *Al-Kuwayt Hadara wa Tarikh*. Al-Tab'ah. I. Kuwayt: m. al-kh. Al-Sabah, 1989, pp. 286-87.

major causes of Shi'a and Sunni migration, the interpretation offered is still too general to explain the processes of their movement.

Another Kuwaiti scholar, Falah al-Mdairis, discusses the Shi'a movement in Kuwait from a political perspective. Al-Mdairis divides the Kuwaiti Shi'a on the bases of their ancestral ethnic origin (i.e. Arab and 'Ajam), and on that of their religious doctrine (*madhhab*), such as *uṣūli*, *shaykhi* and *ikhbari*. However, Mudiyrīs' view reveals a lack of knowledge of Shi'a history in Kuwait. He does not explain why he believes the Shi'a migration of Iranian descendants took place, particularly in the 19th century. He implies that their migration took place only during the 19th century, and ignores the successive waves of 'Ajam who came in the following century, an assertion which is misleading. Further, his claim that the formation of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait was a consequence of 'British imperialism', or part of its political agenda in the Gulf region, is erroneous because the British foothold in the Arabian Gulf states in general, and Kuwait in particular, was not well established until the end of the 19th century.⁴⁴ For example, although British involvement in the Gulf area began in 1616 at Jask Island, its effective political intervention in the Gulf sheikdoms had not been established physically prior to the end of 19th century.⁴⁵ Indeed, the shift in the role of the (BEIC) (1600-1858) from a commercial project to a political imperial government came only in 1858, despite the fact that its political influence began earlier. The threat to the commercial route connecting the central government in London and the British Raj in India came to a peak during the second Herat war (1856-1857). In addition, the revival of the Ottomans as a regional power in the Gulf, particularly in al-Hasa in 1871-1913 and in Qatar in 1872-1915,

⁴⁴Falah al-Mdairis. *Al-Haraka al-Shi'iyya fi al-Kuwayt*. Kuwayt: Dar al-Qartas, 1999, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵John Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf: At the Periphery of Empire' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 277-293.

and the appearance of international rivals, such as Russia, France and Germany, who were extending their influence and trading activity to the Gulf region, alerted the British to the need to protect their interests in the Gulf. Therefore, the British officially consolidated their position in southwestern Iran after the Anglo-Iranian war and entered into political agreements with Bahrain in 1880 and 1892, the Trucial States (UAE) in 1888 and 1892, Kuwait in 1899, Najd and al-Hasa in 1915 and finally Qatar in 1916, from which date the Gulf became a 'British lake'.⁴⁶ As a result, formal British influence over the Arab Gulf sheikhdoms reached its heyday in the last decades of the 19th century and continued until their full withdrawal from the region in 1971.

Thus the early Shi'a migration that took place during the 18th century and in the first three quarters of the 19th century should not be analysed under the rubric of British imperialism. Furthermore, al-Mdairis does not acknowledge the mutual historical movements of the Arabs to the Iranian coast and *vice versa*, prior to the 19th century, due to the geographical proximity, trade and merchant networks, and the shared history of the Gulf territory. Likewise, al-Mdairis does not provide solid evidence of sources for his statements regarding the cause of their migration. Finally, he fails to provide an explanation of the time period of the Arab Shi'a migration (Baharna and Hassawiyya) to Kuwait, or the reason behind their migration from Bahrain and al-Hasa. Therefore, his analysis should be re-examined.

⁴⁶As will be discussed in the following chapters, the Gulf sheikhdom states entered into different treaties with the British government related to piracy, slaves and the arms trade during the first half of the 19th century. However, this does not mean that the British were controlling the Gulf even though the Gulf rulers themselves did not maintain the regulations of those treaties. James Onley. *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 43- 47; Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 277-293.

A recent interesting study published on the history of the urbanisation of Kuwait, was conducted by the Kuwaiti scholar Farah al-Nakib. She maintains that the economic system of Kuwait before oil, played a role in shaping the internal dynamics and the structure of urban life which contributed -with the oil in a later period - to transforming Kuwait from port city to city state through the relationship between the urban landscape, patterns, and practices of everyday life, and social behaviour and relations in Kuwait. However, her work indicates a lack of knowledge of the Shi'a communities when she addresses some points related to them. This makes Farah no different than many 'outsider' scholars who touch upon the Shi'a communities in Kuwait. For example, when she discussed the division of the Kuwaiti population, especially among the Shi'a communities, she categorised them by ethnic background, and their economic status, which is correct. However, her use of the term 'Persian' instead of 'Ajam' for one of the essential components of the local population of Kuwait, indicates that she falls into the western category of the Kuwait population. Such a category implies that the 'Ajam of Kuwait were 'outsiders' or even 'foreigners' which was typically a 'western paradigm' initiated by western travellers, the B.R. of Kuwait, such as Shakespeare, More, and western scholars, such as Lorimer, Dickson, Crystal and many others. They used the term 'Persians' instead of 'Ajam' to designate the 'Ajam residents of Kuwait town. The term 'Persians' at that time, however, must not be applied to the Shi'a population of Iranian descent ('Ajam) in Kuwait but rather to the Iranian inhabitants only, as clearly appears in the local Kuwaiti documents which discussed the social-political discourse of the historical context of Kuwait and the Persian Gulf.

Another indicative point is her discussion of the rich Shi'a influential families, such as the Ma'rafi and Behbehani who, 'stood as important pillars of the mercantile oligarchy'.⁴⁷ Even though Farah is correct, she did not determine which Behbehani families she meant. There is only one Ma'rafi family while there are different Behbehani families in Kuwait, some of whom are considered rich and influential. Moreover, among the Shi'a communities, the Ma'rafi and Behbehani families did not exclusively represent a 'mercantile oligarchy' within the 'Ajam community, and the larger Shi'a communities. Other families, within the 'Ajam community, as will be explained in this study, carried no less social weight and prestige than the Ma'rafi and the Behbehani families. Therefore, Farah reflects a similar image to the 'outsider' scholars who believe only these two Shi'a families are rich old settlers who belong to the highest social groups within their 'Ajam community.

If we turn to non-Kuwaiti scholars who have contributed to an understanding of Kuwaiti history, we find diverse viewpoints on the formation of the Kuwaiti Shi'a communities and their achievements in the building of the state of Kuwait, particularly in recently published work. They have indeed delved into the subject more than the native Kuwaiti scholars have done, though some of their analysis is misleading. For example, Anh Nga Longva, the wife of a Norwegian diplomat who lived in Kuwait in the 1980s-90, focused mainly on foreign migration to Kuwait after the discovery of oil. However, Longva lacked understanding of the Shi'a communities. For instance, she categorised all 'Persians' ('Ajam) as Shi'a' and described the population of Kuwait town as consisting of 'town-dwellers and Bedouins,

⁴⁷Farah al-Nakib. *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016, p. 28.

Sunni merchants, and Shia labourers.’⁴⁸ She also asserts that ‘most of them [Shi’a] served as crew for the predominately Sunni merchants and captains.’⁴⁹

Lindsey Stephenson, an American Ph.D. candidate of Princeton University, discussed in her MA thesis, ‘The Kuwaiti Houla and names as a site of social navigation’, the historical division of the Kuwaiti population. In her discussion of the Shi’a communities, she divided them under three labels only, the ‘Ajam, Hassawiyya and Iraqi. She left out the Baharna, one important section of the Shi’a communities. She also categorised the Hassawiyya economically as ‘tradesmen and ship builders’ which is misleading because the Hassawiyya historically were not involved in shipbuilding activities and trading. Indeed, the only community who mainly controlled shipbuilding was the Baharna. The Hassawiyya worked in the traditional handicrafts industries, for instance as goldsmiths, blacksmiths and other craftsmen, as this study will indicate.⁵⁰

Graham Fuller and Rend Francke have not only described the demographic origins of the Kuwaiti Shi’a communities, but also distinguished between the old Shi’a settlers (*sukkān al-shi’a al-awā’il*) and the new Shi’a settlers (*sukkān al-shi’a al-judud*) according to Kuwaiti oral history. According to their views, the Shi’a of Iranian descent historically are old settlers in Kuwait and they possibly migrated prior to their co-religionists, the Hassawiyya and Baharna.⁵¹ However, this assumption was not supported by primary documents. Fuller and Francke also do not give either a suggestion as to the causes of the waves of Shi’a migrations, or an indication of whether Shi’a immigrants came from southwestern Iran. They only maintain that the Shi’a exclusively came from Arabistan, which shows the authors’ limited

⁴⁸Longva. *Walls Built on Sand*, pp. 7, 20, 24.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁰Lindsey Stephenson. ‘The Kuwaiti Houla and Names as a Site of Social Navigation’, MA Thesis., Aga Khan University, 2012, pp. 5-7.

⁵¹Fuller and Francke. *The Arab Shi’a*, p. 157.

comprehension of the historical presence of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, since the Shi'a of Iranian descent ('Ajam) migrated from different locations in southwestern Iran, such as Fars and the Iranian Coast provinces.

John Peterson has published two brief articles about the Shi'a in the Gulf from a political perspective. In both 'The Shi'a Dimension in the Gulf Politics', and 'Political activism among the Shi'a of Kuwait', he briefly discusses the early Shi'a migration, the ethnicity of migrants, and the peak period of the Iranian influx into Kuwait. He observes that:

'[t]he Shi'a population of Kuwait, often said to be as much as a third of the total citizen population, is mixed between Persians on the one hand, and Hasawis and Basrawis on the other hand. Persians have ventured across the Gulf since shortly after the arrival of the Al-Sabah; the greatest influx into Kuwait, however, occurred in the 1930s and 1940s in search of jobs and a better way of life, as well as an escape from problems in Iran. These Persian immigrants were predominantly Shi'i. Unlike the *badu*, Shi'i Iranians were employed as tradesmen and skilled and unskilled labor. In addition, the government encouraged thousands of Shi'a to immigrate in the early years of the 1960s because they were seen as natural support for the government.'⁵²

In his second article, 'Political activism among the Shi'a of Kuwait', Peterson also maintains that:

'The Kuwaiti Shi'a community is clearly a minority and poses no demographic threat to the state or to the Sunni community. Estimates of the Shi'a proportion of the population run from 20% to over 30%. The majority are of Persian origin. Some - such as the Behbehani, Kazimi, Abl, and Ma'rufi families - settled in Kuwait a century or two ago- in some cases before prominent Sunni families arrived from the Nejd.'⁵³

Peterson also indicates that the Kuwaiti Sunnis of Iranian origin (Sunni 'Ajam) found it easier to be incorporated within the Kuwaiti community than the Kuwaiti Shi'a of Iranian origin ('Ajam) which is misleading.⁵⁴ To his credit, Peterson discusses points about the Shi'a communities that have not been brought up by other 'outsider' scholars except Stephenson.

⁵²John Peterson. 'The Shi'a Dimension in the Gulf Politics'. *The Arabian Peninsula Background Note*. No. APBN-005, published on www.jepeterson.net. Jul 2007.

⁵³John Peterson. 'Political Activism among the Shi'a of Kuwait'. *The Arabian Peninsula Background Note*. No. APBN-008, published on www.jepeterson.net. Jul 2009.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

For example, he draws attention to Shi'a migrants from Basra (Basrawis), who constituted the smallest proportion of the overall Shi'a communities in Kuwait. He also shows that there were Shi'a families settled in Kuwait earlier than some famous Sunni Najdi families. That means that the term 'first settlers' (*sukkān al-awā'il*) cannot exclusively be applied to Kuwaiti Sunnis of Najdi origin, as most Kuwaiti literature has emphasised. However, similar to Fuller and Francke, his analysis, which is mostly based on oral history, has some erroneous information which reveals his lack of understanding of the complexity of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait. For instance, he has omitted the Baharna immigrants, and emphasised only the 'Ajam, Hassawiyya and Basrawiyya. Moreover, he indicates that the al-Kazimi family is amongst the oldest Shi'a settlers in Kuwait, which is misleading. In fact, the al-Kazimi family is not considered an old settled family among the Shi'a communities according to oral history. In addition, Peterson emphasises the search for employment, economic betterment, and escape from problems in Iran as the major reasons behind the Iranian migration to Kuwait in the 1930s and 1940s. Such a general statement is too broad to explain the complexity of the motives behind Iranian migration to Kuwait.

Furthermore, he indicates that the crest of the influx of the Iranian Shi'a came in the 1930s and 1940s, and notes that the Kuwaiti government encouraged Iranian immigration during the 1960s as well. There is no doubt that the waves of Shi'a and Sunni Iranian migrations continued up to the late 1950s, but their migrations also took place during the reign of Mubarak al-Sabah (1896-1915), as this study will show, by contrast with Peterson's argument. Also, the government of Kuwait did not encourage Shi'a immigration during the 1960s because Ahmad al-Jabir, ruler of Kuwait (1921-1950) tried to stop Iranian migration

to Kuwait'.⁵⁵ However, this does not mean that the Sheikh was fully able to stop Iranian migration, but only that it abated, since the Iranian hegira continued until the late 1950s.

Likewise, Laurence Louër, a French scholar in Middle Eastern studies, has contributed to the study of the Shi'a migration to Kuwait within the framework of Shi'a politics in the Gulf. Louër pays closer attention to the Iranian, Bahrain and al-Hasa context than her scholarly counterparts in Kuwait, and in doing so, provides a broader picture of the causes of Shi'a migration to Kuwait. She rightly observes:

'Shia of Iranian descent(s) form the most important group demographically speaking. The first of them came around the second half of the eighteenth century, shortly after the Bani Utub's settlement. Most of them were maritime traders from the coastal areas of Iran and were first and foremost motivated by developing their economic activities.'⁵⁶

She further adds:

'The flow of Iranians to Kuwait continue[d] throughout the following centuries. It was influenced by internal Iranian developments as well as by the growing prosperity of the Arabian emirates as compared with the southern coastal regions of Iran.'⁵⁷

As for Hassawiyya and Baharna, Louër asserts that they also settled in Kuwait in the second half of the 18th century, either for commercial reasons or to escape persecution and/or political instability.⁵⁸ Louër's account of Arab Shi'a migration to Kuwait shows that there were existing Shi'a communities in the early history of Kuwait. As a result, one can draw the conclusion that the Arab Shi'a (Hassawiyya and Baharna) possibly settled earlier than the 'Ajam, by contrast with the arguments of Fuller and Francke. However, both discussions lack primary sources which could lend support to either the hypothesis of Fuller and Francke

⁵⁵From De Gaury to T. Fowle, no c/189, 27 Apr 1939, p. 187. *IOR R/15/1/549*.

⁵⁶Laurence Louër. *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 47.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 49.

or Louër's analysis. The existence of Shi'a communities encouraged the influx of Arab Shi'a from Bahrain and al-Hasa in the time period that this study covers.

Nelida Fuccaro, an Italian scholar of the modern Middle East and the Persian Gulf, provides a wider analysis than Louër's, focusing on the formation of Shi'a communities in the Gulf, particularly in Bahrain. In 'Mapping the Transnational Community', Fuccaro argues that several forces came into play, pushing a number of people from the coastal regions to scatter into Arabian states, including Manamah and Kuwait. According to Fuccaro, the agricultural region of Bushehr suffered from a scarcity of rainfall, which caused food shortages and famines in the last thirty years of the 19th century, particularly in 1870-1872, 1888-1892 and 1897-1898. As a result, crime, insecurity, and disease had increased which made Bushehr unattractive. Furthermore, new fiscal regimes during the 1900s established by the Iranian customs administration in the major coastal ports of southwestern Iran, also forced local merchants to switch to Arabian ports to escape high tariffs.⁵⁹ Though Fuccaro emphasises the deteriorating internal economic and social conditions in southwestern Iran, her analysis focuses on Bushehr, which is merely one part of the sub-province of southwestern Iran.

Shahnaz Nadjmabadi, an Iranian anthropologist, discusses briefly the historical mutual migration phenomenon among Iranian and Arab migrants from the coastal area of Iran into the Arab states and *vice versa*. She believes that the early Arab migration that took place in the middle of the 18th century from Arab countries to Iran and *vice versa*, contributed to creating an Iranian community in the Arab region. In her view, this was due to 'the

⁵⁹Fuccaro. 'Mapping the Transnational Community' in Madawi Al-Rasheed, ed., pp. 45-46.

geographical proximity, the shared history, and the resulting transnational spaces'.⁶⁰ Interestingly, Nadjmabadi's analysis shows that during the 18th century there were 'reciprocal migrations' between the Arab states and the coastal areas of southwestern Iran. This confirms that the Gulf region was historically an interactive zone and the formation of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait was not just due to British imperialism as some scholars allege (e.g. al-Mdairis). Thus, one can speculate that this continuous mobility led to the creation of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait. Although, in another essay, 'The Arab presence on the Iranian coast of the Persian Gulf', Nadjmabadi emphasises the historical interconnection of the Iranian coast to the Arab Gulf states, and the coexistence of Iranian-Arab settlements in southwestern Iran, introducing a new reason for the migration of inhabitants of the Iranian littoral region, including the Shi'a, during the Pahlavi dynasty. She maintains that the reforms implemented under Reza Shah (1925-1941), including centralisation and required administrative and political restructuring, weakened local rulers and new limitations on religion.⁶¹ Nadjmabadi also indicates that Kuwait was one of the final destinations for Arabs to settle, especially the wealthy Arab Sheikhs (tribal chiefs), who left the Iranian coast for commercial reasons.⁶²

Nadjmabadi's study shows not only the impetus of Shi'a migration in a specific period of time, but also demonstrates that the influx of southwestern Iranian settlers to the Arab sheikhdoms was not exclusive to the Iranian Shi'a, as Arab Sunnis also formed part of this movement. Moreover, the religious motive throughout the Qajar period (1796-1925) was not

⁶⁰Shahnaz Nadjmabadi. 'Iranian Migrants in the Arab Countries of the Persian Gulf'. Conference paper, Migration and the Gulf. *The Middle East Institution*, Washington DC, February, 2010, pp. 52-54.

⁶¹Nadjmabadi. 'The Arab Presence' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 129-145.

⁶²Ibid.

as significant a cause for migration as it was in Reza Shah's reign. This shows the impact caused by the fluctuation of internal conditions in southwestern Iran from one era to another.

The latest study of the Shi'a communities, by French scholar Rivka Azoulay, 'The politics of Shi'i merchants in Kuwait', discusses the politics of the Shi'a merchants and their relation to the state of Kuwait, mainly the al-Sabah, and to the social constituencies from pre-oil era to the contemporary period. Azoulay's main argument is related to the social and political roles of the Shi'a merchants, who acted as mediators between the Shi'a communities and the rulers throughout Kuwait history due to their social prestige and their access to the Sheikh of Kuwait. The discussion is interesting because the topic has not been specifically addressed before, especially regarding Shi'a merchants. However, Azoulay's essay is full of historical errors about the Shi'a communities, as will be clarified below.

First of all, her argument lacks evidence of the political and social connections of Shi'a merchants, in particular with the al-Sabah prior to the discovery of oil, and she mentions only the ruler of Muhammerah Sheikh Khaz'al and Mullah Salih, the Sheikh's secretary. However, Shi'a merchants did play a role, as this study will show.

One possible major reason that 'outsider scholars' have not given an accurate historical background account of the Shi'a communities is the lack of historical literature on them, and the difficulty in accessing primary sources owned by Shi'a families. The adoption of oral history as a methodology to narrate the history of the Shi'a communities during the pre-oil era is the only way to provide historical literature on the Shi'a communities besides a few poor quality books and newspaper articles published by local researchers. To her credit, Azoulay divided the Shi'a communities into three major sections related to their ethnicities (i.e. 'Ajam, Hassawiyya and Baharna) or their religious affiliation (*uṣuli*, *shaykhi* and *ikhbari*) and asserted that the migration of the Shi'a to Kuwait began in the late 18th century (i.e. 'Ajam

and Baharna) and continued in the 20th century, especially for the 'Ajam. The Hassawiyya, Azoulay reports, migrated in the 19th Century due to the Sa'udi conquest only, although many of them came earlier, as this study will discuss. She notes that the Hassawiyya also came in a later period due to Ottoman maladministration in al-Hasa.⁶³

Azoulay focused on only two prominent Shi'a families, the Ma'rafi and Behbehani, as the oldest settlers in Kuwait, although others settled in the same period or even earlier. She asserts that the main reason for the migration of the Ma'rafi and Behbehani families during the early years of Kuwait was the harsh fiscal measures initiated by the Qajar dynasty. She then argues that the migration of the 'Ajam was diversified during the 20th century and many poor farmers decided to come to Kuwait, especially during the Pahlavi era due to administrative reforms by the Shah.⁶⁴ Giving two general reasons, in two different periods of time, associated with only two social groups (merchants and poor farmers) as main causes of the 'Ajam migrations, without appreciating the role of trade and the internal social, political and economic system of Qajar Iran reveals a lack of understanding of the complexity of the history of the Gulf region. Moreover, she emphasises that most of the 'Ajam, especially the 'Ajam *tarakma*, migrated from Tarakma, a town in southwestern Iran; she probably heard this information in oral histories from Shi'a Kuwaitis as I did. However, a close examination of two important sources, the *Gazetteer of Iran* and the *Gazetteer of Persia*, which provide detailed geographical descriptions of the name of towns and villages in southwestern Iran, shows that no town or village called Tarakma existed, in contrast to Azoulay's assertions

⁶³Rivka Azoulay. 'The Politics of the Shi'i Merchants in Kuwait' in Steffen Hertog, Giacomo Luciani, and Marc Valeri, ed., *Business Politics in the Middle East*. London: Hurt Publishers, 2013, pp. 67-99.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

based on statements of her Kuwaiti Shi'a interviewees. Indeed, the 'Ajam *tarakma* originally came from the Lamard area located in southwestern Iran (see map in figure 2 in appendix 1).

Other erroneous information provided by Azoulay includes her discussion of the missing local 'clerical Shi'a class' in early Kuwait; this enabled the Shi'a merchants to act as 'central actors in religious life' as well as the social life of their community. Indeed, the emphasis of Azoulay on the important role of Shi'a merchants in controlling, to some extent, the religious and social life of their communities is correct, as this study will clarify through the use of primary sources. However, there was an existing local Shi'a cleric group in Kuwait exemplified by members of al-Mazidi and al-Sahaf houses since the first half of the 19th century, with three Shi'a mosques that existed prior to the Mubarak reign. The domestic religious shaykhs of al-Mazidi and al-Sahaf were substituted during the late Mubarak al-Sabah reign and afterward by Sayyid Mahdi in 1908-1909, his brother Sayyid Jawad later in 1925-1926, Sayyid 'Isa Kamal al-Din al-'Alawi, Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim during roughly the same time of Sayyid Mahdi for the *uṣuli* Shi'a, and Mirza 'Ali, shaykh Ibrahim 'Ali al-Hussayn Isma' i al-Isma' il for *shaykhi* Hassawiyya around the same period, as Chapter Three will clarify. Thus the 'clerical system' in Kuwait became more influential during Mubarak al-Sabah and was not absent in the social life of Shi'a communities as Azoulay claims. Clerics not only managed the internal social and religious affairs of the Shi'a communities until late in the reign of Mubarak, but also acted as mediators between the communities and the religious schools (*hawza*). They also followed the *imām (maraji')* in Najaf or elsewhere in the Gulf, as will be discussed in this study. Thus, they held social prestige similar to their co-religious the Shi'a merchants in the eyes of the Shi'a communities and successive Sheikhs of Kuwait from the first half of the 19th century. Likewise, they usually solved internal social,

economic and religious matters related to the Shi'a community's interests, as Sayyid Mahdi and his brother Sayyid Jawad did during the first half of the 20th century.

Azoulay's account of the consolidation of the al-Sabah and the Shi'a merchants toward each other is misleading as it is based on inadequate evidence. For example, one case she cites, that of 'Ali 'Abdal, is only discussed by one secondary source which was written by Salah al-Gazali.⁶⁵ However, this work is full of erroneous information about the historical background of the Shi'a communities. Neither he nor Azoulay relied on primary sources to support their arguments about this case of two merchants.⁶⁶

Since the role and achievements of the Shi'a are absent from standard Kuwaiti historiography, Kuwaiti Shi'a scholars and researchers, such as 'Abd al-Muhsin Jamal, Muhammad Jamal and Sami al-Khaldi have made minor contributions to Kuwaiti history and their works cannot be considered essential references on Shi'a history in Kuwait.⁶⁷ Indeed, most Kuwaiti Sunni historians, with a few exceptions, such as Ya'qub al-Haji, have written Kuwaiti historiography subjectively, presenting the specific roles and achievements of only Sunni families in building the state of Kuwait. They claim also that those Kuwaiti Sunni families were the first settlers (*sukkān al-awā'il*), who established themselves in Kuwait during the early history of the country, although there are old Shi'a settlers residing in Kuwait today, as this study will elaborate. Furthermore, from the establishment of Kuwait to the end of the last century, there has not been a single academic study of Shi'a history in Kuwait by

⁶⁵Salah al-Ghazali. *Al-Jama'at al-Siyasiyya al-Kuwaytiyya fi Qarn 1910-2007: Al-Dusturiyun al-Islamiyun al-Shi'a al-Qawmiyun*. Kuwait: al-Ghazali, 2007, pp. 340-341.

⁶⁶Azoulay. 'The Politics', pp. 67-99.

⁶⁷Kuwait historiography, including the two major books by Ahmad Abu Hakima, and 'Abd al-'Aziz Rushid, which are still taught in Kuwait at most levels of education, does not touch on the role of Kuwaiti Shi'a and their achievements in building the state of Kuwait. See Ahmad Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-Hadith, 1750-1965*. Kuwait: Dhat al-Salasil, 1984; 'Abd al-'Aziz Rushid. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*. Al-Tab'ah. II. Bayrut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1962.

Kuwaiti Shi'a except the unsatisfactory booklet written by 'Abd al-Muhsin Jamal. This demonstrates that the Shi'a communities have neglected to register their historical movement and their contribution in building Kuwait, despite the fact that they possess ample individual archival materials, and recognise that they are absent from the historical literature which exists on Kuwaiti history. Therefore, most of the non-Kuwaiti scholars were unable to add or produce a counterview to Kuwaiti historiography which could reflect well upon the Kuwaiti Shi'a during the pre-oil period. The few exceptions include Louër, Crystal, Carter, Fuller and Francke, and Azoulay, although their works still contain inaccurate information on some perspectives.⁶⁸

Sami al-Khaldi, a Kuwaiti Shi'a scholar, asserts that there are two important reasons for the Shi'a influx to Kuwait from the Gulf region. These are, the search for a safer life and for commercial opportunities, especially when their original homeland experienced political disturbances, ethnic and tribal strife and the problem of sectarianism.⁶⁹ Though al-Khaldi's analysis of the broad causes of the construction of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait is correct, he does not specify an estimation of the time period of this formation.

'Abd al-Muhsin Jamal, a native Shi'a scholar and previously a member of the (NAK) (*majlis al-umma al-kuwayti*), has made preliminary attempts to discuss Kuwaiti Shi'a history and Shi'a contributions throughout Kuwaiti history. His work highlights the important economic, military and social roles of the Shi'a that generally have not been discussed by Kuwaiti Sunnis or non-Kuwaiti scholars. Jamal's study, however, lacks primary sources which support his discussion, and he has failed to provide any explanation of Shi'a migration to

⁶⁸See Louër. *Transnational Shia*; Jill Crystal. *Oil and Politics in the Persian Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; J. Carter. *Merchant Families of Kuwait*. London: Scorpion Books, 1984; Fuller and Francke. *The Arab Shi'a*.

⁶⁹Al-Khaldi. *Al-Ahزاب*, p. 91.

Kuwait. Furthermore, he does not offer a historical overview of the origins of the Shi'a presence in Kuwait. He only sheds light on the first Shi'a families who settled in Kuwait in the early 18th Century and afterwards, as the Shi'a oral history indicates, which could be misleading.⁷⁰

Another Kuwaiti Shi'a scholar, Batoul Hassan, in her dissertation 'Ideology, identity, and linguistic capital: A sociolinguistic investigation of language shift among the 'Ajam of Kuwait', provides a brief historical introduction to Shi'a migration, particularly the Iranian emigration to Kuwait. She maintains that the emigration of the 'Ajam to Kuwait could be attributed to the political instability of Iran in the early and mid-1700s when the latter was under threat by regional neighbors, such the Afghans, Ottomans and Russians.⁷¹ Apparently without indicating the precise period of the Iranian migrations, and based upon her interviewees, Hassan attributes the cause of Iranian migration from Bushehr, Behbahan, Haydari and Ginawa to Kuwait to 'a drought that forced [those] depending on farming to seek alternative means of survival in Kuwait'.⁷² Though narrating the origins of the 'Ajam in Kuwait is not the focus of her study, Hassan's approach can be used to analyse the formation process. In a way, Hassan attributes the constant waves of Iranian migrations from the early and mid-1700s to either political (external) factors or economic (internal) factors within southwestern Iran. It is impossible that a continuous migration phenomenon took place for more than two centuries for the same reasons, as Hassan has concluded. Even though

⁷⁰The Arabic sources that he used reflect only the existing literature from the viewpoint of Kuwaiti Sunnis, which say very little about the Kuwaiti Shi'a contribution. 'Abd al-Muhsin Jamal. *Lamhat min Tarikh al-Shi'a fi al-Kuwayt: Min Nash'at al-Kuwayt ila al-Istiqlal*. Kuwait: Dar al-Naba', 2005, p. 14.

⁷¹Batoul Hassan. 'Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Shift among the Ajam of Kuwait', Ph.D. diss., University of Essex, 2008, p. 9.

⁷²Ibid.

Hassan's analysis is broadly correct, like of the work of other previous Kuwaiti scholars, it lacks an understanding of the intricacy of the Iranian coastal region from political, economic and social perspectives.

Hussayn Khaz'al, an Iraqi Shi'a historian and a descendent of Sheikh Khaz'al, the chief of Muhammerah (1897-1925), who wrote five volumes entitled *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-Siyasi* between 1962 and 1970, does not discuss the ethnic origins of the Kuwaiti Shi'a, or even the structure of Shi'a group in Kuwait, although he touches briefly on their role throughout Kuwaiti history. He only indicates that 'Kuwait's population is divided into two sections, Sunnis and Shi'a, the majority of whom are Sunnis. The Shi'a is divided into three groups, *uṣuli*, *shaykhi* and *ikhbari* and all of them agree, there is no distinction among them'.⁷³ Such a statement is misleading as this study will clarify the distinctions between them.

The two volumes of *al-Shi'a fi al-Mamlaka al-Arabiyya al-Su'udiyya*, by Hamza al-Hasan, a Sa'udi Shi'a political oppositionist residing in London, are excellent works that reveal the internal, political, economic, social and religious situation and conditions of the Shi'a in Sa'udi Arabia, especially al-Hasa, during the Ottoman period (1871-1913), and the Sa'udi period (1913-1991). Though his books are not about Kuwait's history, he occasionally discusses the causes of the Shi'a Hassawiyya migration. Al-Hasan argues that the migration phenomenon of the Shi'a, from the al-Hasa region to Iraq and Kuwait, began with the establishment of the first Sa'udi State during the late 18th century. Significant flows of immigrants continued to Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates between 1887 and 1931, especially after al-Hasa was occupied by ibn Sa'ud, the *amir* of the third Sa'udi State, in 1913.⁷⁴ His valuable analysis of al-Hasa from different perspectives furnishes

⁷³Hussayn Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-Siyasi*, vol. I. Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub, 1962, p. 16.

⁷⁴Hamza al-Hasan. *Al-Shi'a fi al-Mamlaka al-Arabiyya al-Su'udiyya*, vol. I. Bayrut: Dar al-Saqi, 1993, pp. 71-80.

evidence for the formation of the Shi'a Hassawiyya group in Kuwait. Moreover, al-Hasan provides a list of Shi'a Sa'udi families, such as Bukhamsin, al-Shawaf, al-Ramadan, al-Buhlika, al-Amir, al-Qattan, al-Baghli, al-Haddad, al-Muhana, al-Saigh and many others, who were originally relatives of the Kuwaiti (Hassawiyya) Shi'a families, with identical family names, migrated to Kuwait during the 19th and 20th centuries.⁷⁵ Therefore, al-Hasan's research makes a valuable contribution to understanding the deteriorated internal conditions of the al-Hasa region that resulted in the shaping of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait.

It is therefore clear to see that all previous accounts, whether by 'insider' or 'outsider' scholars, present only part of the story of the formation of Shi'a communities in Kuwait. What has been accomplished by these scholars is very interesting and worth noting. However, the stories narrated by them remain incomplete. In this light, the causes of the Shi'a migrations to Kuwait from its bordering regions, which form an essential part of Shi'a communities foundation, warrant research based on different perspectives in order to understand its complexities. By looking in greater detail at Shi'a migration from southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-Hasa, and by using primary sources that the abovementioned scholars did not consult, this study provides a richer account of that movement. Therefore, this thesis is a micro-analysis of the formation and establishment of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait and its economic role in Kuwait between 1880 and 1938. It seeks to answer questions about the Shi'a's original homelands such as, what were the internal circumstances of southwestern Iran, Bahrain, and al-Hasa which caused people (e.g. merchants, artisans, labourers) to migrate to Kuwait? Why did migration to Kuwait reach its zenith between the last quarter of

⁷⁵Unfortunately, he fails to specify when the migration of those families took place. However, throughout his book he emphasises that the migration of Shi'a from al-Hasa took place between the late 18th and the second quarter of the 20th century. al-Hasan. *Al-Shi'a*, vol. I, pp. 32-57, 73.

the 19th century and the discovery of oil in 1938, though it continued until the 1950s? Did the commercial endeavours of Shi'a merchants to establish business in Kuwait play any part? Were inter-tribal conflicts or family conflicts reasons to settle in Kuwait? Were religious factors influential in their migration? Were natural disasters and climatic issues, such as floods, earthquakes, and drought-related famines responsible for the Shi'a fleeing their motherlands? Did the spread of epidemic diseases, such as cholera, and smallpox, also play a part? Did the tax policy of the governments of southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-Hasa force Shi'a from different social groups to seek commercial fortune and a better life in Kuwait? This study also seeks to answer some queries about Kuwait itself, such as, could the existing Shi'a communities in Kuwait influence the influx of new Shi'a immigrants? Were the Shi'a welcomed or denied hospitality by the Kuwaiti ruling al-Sabah family and the existing population? What types of relationship existed between new immigrants, the Shi'a communities, and the Sunnis? Also, what were the relationships amongst the migrant communities themselves (e.g. 'Ajam, Hassawiyya, and Baharna)? What were the pull factors in Kuwait which attracted Shi'a from different social groups? What were the economic roles of the Shi'a merchants, artisans, and labourers in building the modern state of Kuwait during the period in question? What were the challenges faced by Shi'a immigrants in Kuwait regarding their identity and sense of belonging? By answering these questions, it is hoped this study will contribute to Kuwaiti historical literature and fill the lacunae of existing scholarship on the Shi'a in Kuwait.

Methodology of the Study

Since this study sheds light on four different regions, (Kuwait, al-Hasa, southwestern Iran and Bahrain), in the Persian Gulf between 1880 and 1938, in the framework of the creation

of the political entity of the Gulf sheikhdoms, it has involved visiting different archives and libraries in the UK and Gulf region, collecting private papers from the Shi'a families, and conducting extensive oral history research within the same group in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Muscat. All these efforts have produced new material, especially that related to Shi'a private papers, and they are discussed here for the first time, particularly in relation to the history of Kuwait, and in general to Gulf history.

First: Primary Source in English (IOR, FO, and Dickson Diaries and Personal Photo Album)

The primary sources that have been used in conducting this research are profoundly varied and numerous, few of which have been consulted by academic researchers (those in IOR and KEW), especially those related to the Shi'a families that are discussed in the British archives. I have consulted British government records, including IOR at the British library, (FO) records at the National Archives and Dickson Diaries at the Middle Eastern Centre in St Antony's College, Oxford University. Some of this material has been republished by Archive Editions and other publishers. The most important sources are *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports*, *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*, *The Affairs of Kuwait*, *Political Diaries of the Persian Gulf*, *Persian Gulf Précis*, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, *Oman and Central Arabia*, *Kuwait Political Agency Arabic Documents*, and *Records of Kuwait*. The author, who is local to Kuwait, has used his unique and in-depth knowledge, and extensive network of local contacts during the course of this study. This local knowledge assisted in the recognition of the Kuwaiti Shi'a family names mentioned within the British official reports and distinguished them from Kuwaiti Sunni families. Information regarding commercial activities within the Gulf region, such as the case of Najaf ibn Ghalib and his brother Muhammad Taqi. This and many others are discussed throughout this study.

With the exception of a few Arabic sources, the British documents are the only sources, which describe the internal political, social, religious and economic affairs of Kuwait and the Shi'a motherlands within the framework of relations between the two regional rival powers, the British and the Ottoman empires, and other imperial powers which were active in the Gulf during the period covered in this study. Despite British misconception of the conditions of the Gulf States and biased attitudes toward certain figures and regional powers, these are the main sources that provide detailed descriptions about the Gulf region because they were the only power that had agencies and official representatives (e.g. P.A. and R.A.) in most of the Gulf States. However, a comparison of such information with secondary sources, private papers of Shi'a individual archives, oral history, and diaries and memories of some Kuwaitis could, on occasion, lead us to question the credibility of the British sources.

Second: Primary Sources in Arabic (Individual Shi'a and Sunni Archival Collections and Primary Contemporary Books)

In addition to the British sources, Arabic language sources and photographs collected from many Kuwaiti Shi'a and Sunni people have also been used. This was a difficult and time-consuming process, particularly for the Shi'a, who were wary of revealing their documents, even to fellow Shi'i country men. It took years of careful negotiation to convince many of them to permit access to study these valuable documents.

Ultimately, after several attempts and through networking with these families, they provided copies and sometimes the originals to scan. The documents obtained belong to the archives of the Kuwaiti Shi'a of all social groups (merchants, artisans and labourers), and private papers related to marriages, property, and land possession in Kuwait, and religious testaments (*wasīyya*) by members of the Shi'a communities, either to transfer their belongings to a Shi'a endowment (*waqf*) or to pass them to their family members. Some of

these documents relating to the Shi'a *waqf* were obtained from the official Shi'a endowment (*al-awqaf al-ja'fariyya*) in Kuwait through Hassawi merchant Jawad Bukhamsin. These documents have not been discussed before in academic research, and for the first time reveal a new story relating to the internal affairs of Kuwait, viewed from various perspectives about the Shi'a communities, and previously unavailable within the British secondary sources. An important source was the extensive collection of the Shi'a merchants' correspondence, namely transactions with banks, shipping agencies and insurance businesses, customs duties, between Kuwait and other states in the Gulf, Indian Ocean and elsewhere in the world. This correspondence was between specific departments, for example, the southwestern Iranian government, Bahrain, and India, written in Arabic, English and Farsi. The correspondence was also between Iranian and Iraqi ports, such as Basra, Duraq, Bandar Dailam and Muhammerah and these provided another important source. They indicate the interactions between Kuwaiti Shi'a merchants and their agents and merchant networks in these neighboring regions, which can be analysed in the context of transnational networks. In addition, the price lists of different kinds of commodities which were exported and imported from India, East Africa and the Gulf region, specifically southwestern Iran, are registered in accounting books and official letters by the Shi'a merchants and provide us with a vivid image of the economic system. Checks, transfers, and letters of credit between the Shi'a merchants and their clients, themselves, and other merchants in the Gulf region reveal their accounting processes. Individual private papers belonging to prominent Kuwaiti Sunni merchants were also obtained. These papers dated from Mubarak's reign onward, such as those of ship's Captain (*nukhudha*) Salim Abu Qamaz. These list maritime crews, such as pearl-divers (*ghaṣah* plural), including Shi'a, who worked in sea-faring activities, and they prove the Shi'a were also engaged in this kind of maritime industry. In addition, many of

Sayyid Mahdi al-Qazwini's contemporary books (in Arabic and Farsi) were obtained from three public libraries in Tehran and Najaf, sources which proved invaluable to this study because they show his attitude toward other Shi'a schools of thought. Finally, Mulla 'Abdin poetry, dating from the early 20th century onward was studied. It provided an eyewitness view of the religious institutions (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*) of the Shi'a communities. These poems took the form of either old original published books which are rare difficult to obtain, the original hand-written documents, or inscriptions engraved on the walls of an institution.

Third: Oral History, Members of the Shi'a Communities in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Muscat

This thesis also draws on oral interviews with members of several Kuwaiti Shi'a families ('Ajam, Hassawiyya, Baharna and few Kuwaitis of Iraqi origin). More than forty-seven productive interviews were conducted with Kuwaiti, Bahrain (Baharna from Bahrain) and Muscati (relatives of Abul family in Kuwait) Shi'a's gentlemen, and with other members of the three Shi'a groups, during 2009 and 2016 field trips to Kuwait, Bahrain and Muscat. The ages of the interviewees range between 63 and 95 years old. In Kuwait, the interviewees were descendants and children of immigrants who came from southwestern Iran, al-Hasa, Bahrain and Iraq from the early history of Kuwait to the early 20th century. In Bahrain, the interviewees discussed the reasons behind Baharna migrations from specific villages in Bahrain to Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf from as early as 1783, the year when Bahrain came under al-Khalifa control. The interviews, which discussed the history of the Shi'a migration from the establishment of Kuwait to the post-oil period, are very helpful. The interviewees reported when, how, and why their ancestors migrated. These interviews are also narratives based on old oral traditions which tell the story of how and why the Shi'a began to migrate from adjacent regions of the Gulf.

These oral histories, allowed a comparison with the primary sources to be made and enabled the analysis of the rationale behind the Shi'a migration from their original homelands. Interestingly, some of these oral history sources concur with material found in written primary sources. As a result, primary sources support the main argument regarding the reasons for the Shi'a migration from their homeland and the period during which these communities were established in Kuwait.

However, it should be noted, some subjective information was provided by the Shi'a families, due to a tendency to over-emphasise their historical presence in Kuwait. In oral traditions, there are conflicting views as to which of the three Shi'a communities was the earliest founded and there are few substantiating sources for their claims. These opinions, although not taken at face value, were included to show the reader how they perceived their origins in Kuwait.

Thesis Guide

This thesis is divided into five chapters and six appendixes which includes maps, diagrams, tables, private local Kuwaiti documents, photos and a survey chapter on the ancient Gulf region. Chapter One, discusses the modern history of southwestern Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain and al-Hasa's from political, social, economic, and religious perspectives, in the framework of the Persian Gulf historical context. Chapter Two, examines the early settlement of the Shi'a communities (Baharna, 'Ajam and Hassawiyya) in Kuwait, and the period when each of these communities became established in Kuwait, as historical literature and primary local sources indicate. Chapter Three describes the internal conditions from different perspectives in the Shi'a places of origin and the main elements behind their escape to Kuwait as a destination to settle. Chapter Four discusses the position of the Shi'a communities between 1880 and 1921 from different points of view. It also discusses their social structure

in Kuwait town during the pre-oil era, and their historical relationship with each other, and with the al-Sabah and the Sunni. The chapter also provides an image of how the ruling family benefited from their economic contribution to building the state of Kuwait prior to 1961.

Chapter Five, the final

chapter, examines the internal political and religious circumstances of the Shi'a motherlands which were the major impetus behind their migrations to Kuwait between 1921 and 1938. It also sheds light on the position of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait during the same period, especially during the *majlis* movement (*ḥarakat al-majlis*) in 1938 and their reaction to it. The study, ends with a conclusion which summarises the arguments of this study, and addresses broader questions relating to the current situation of the 'political Shi'a community'.

Chapter I

Southwestern Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain and al-Hasa in the Historical Background of the Persian Gulf 1600-1880

Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion begins by focusing on the historical background of the Persian Gulf region in the modern period. It sheds light briefly on the historical descriptions of scholars, categorising the Gulf region as a cosmopolitan place and contact zone where various local inhabitants of different ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and languages coexisted and mingled with each other. The chapter moves on to analysing the attempts of international imperial rivals (i.e. Dutch, Portuguese, French, and British), under the challenge of the regional powers (Ottomans, Safavids, and Wahhabis), to establish a foothold in the Gulf region for economic and political purposes. The next segment of this chapter provides geographical information regarding the government, population divisions and economic system in Kuwait and the Shi'a motherlands (e.g. southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-Hasa). It also discusses the conflict among scholars over the origin of Kuwait and its association with the al-Sabah migration from Kuwait's neighbours, and in what period approximately Kuwait was founded. Different hypotheses on the historical roots of the Shi'ism, and the arrival of the al-Khalifa in Bahrain, which was an essential cause for migration of the Baharna, are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a small section on the political unsettlement of al-Hasa, when it was veering between the Ottomans and the Sa'udi-Wahhabi authorities from the 18th to the 19th centuries. This period was associated with negative sectarian attitudes to the Shi'a either by the government or by the Bedouin tribes from the last decade of the 18th century onwards.

Historical Trends of the Gulf Region: A Cosmopolitan Centre

Although the period between the late 19th and the third quarter of the 20th centuries has been considered significant in the history of the Persian Gulf for the formation of the modern Arab sheikhdom states, the period before the 19th century has also caught the attention of scholars.⁷⁶ They note that the Gulf is one of the earliest populated regions in the world.⁷⁷ It was the cradle of multiple prehistoric and ancient civilisations which contributed to building early human societies. In addition, the rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula during the 7th century gave the Gulf region a religious importance, with the cities of Mecca and Medina becoming a major focal point in Muslim life. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Persian Gulf was a major strategic geographic location, a hub connecting the trade routes between ancient Mesopotamia, Dilmun and Magan and the Indus Valley.

As a contact zone, the Gulf has attracted immigrants including merchants, artisans, and Iranian tribes were also among those who migrated in search of more favourable political and economic circumstances. As a result, the Gulf is a product of the cross-cultural influences of mixed ethnicities, languages, kinships, and religions, all of which have played an important role in shaping the region.

⁷⁶See for example, Rosemarie Zahlan. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998, pp. 7-10; D. Potts. 'The Archaeology and Early History of the Persian Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 27-56; Potter. 'Introduction' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 1-24.

⁷⁷Zahlan. *The Making*, p. 7; Bhacker. 'The Cultural Unity of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 163-71.

The Commercial European Rivalries and the British Policy in the Gulf 1600-1880

In order to discuss the complexities of Gulf politics between 1800 and 1938, it is important to illuminate the beginning of European involvement in the region as well as British policy. The Gulf entered a new phase and became a centre of international imperial rivalries from the time of the voyage of the Portuguese sailor Vasco de Gama from Europe to India in 1498.

Afonso de Albuquerque, a Portuguese commander, sailed toward the east and consolidated the Portuguese position in Muscat and Hormuz, the two major ports which connected India and the Arab and Iranian worlds, in 1507 and 1515 respectively.⁷⁸ However, some regional powers, such as the Ottomans and the Safavids, were a threat to the Portuguese, though reciprocal coalitions among them were occasionally possible. The Safavids, who controlled ports in southwestern Iran, dislodged the Portuguese from Bahrain in 1602 and attempted to occupy Hormuz and Muscat, the two foremost fortresses of the Portuguese in the Gulf. The Ottoman Empire was another challenge, since it had strengthened its position in the Red Sea after overthrowing the Mamluke dynasty in 1517 and bringing Cairo, Mecca and Medina under Ottoman dominion during the rule of Selim I.

By the late 16th century the Ottoman Empire had reached its heyday, having annexed the Balkans and a section of Eastern Europe; yet, the Gulf region was still part of its imperial expansion schemes. The successful installation of Portuguese power in the Gulf paved the way thereafter for other imperial European powers, such as the Dutch, British and French, to make their way into the Gulf region in the 17th and 18th centuries. During the early 17th

⁷⁸Abdul Aziz Awad. 'The Gulf in the Seventeenth Century', *Bulletin British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1985): pp. 123-134; Joao Teles e Cunha. 'The Portuguese Presence in the Persian Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 207-234; Percy Cox. 'Some Gulf Memories' in *The Times of India Annual*. Bombay, 1928; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I Hist, pp. 3-4.

century the commercial competition between European powers attempting to secure a foothold in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf began with the founding of the English and Dutch East Indian Companies, and later on in the same century, the French East India Company. The British government issued a charter to the (BEIC) to monopolise British commerce in India and its peripheries, including the Gulf region. The (BEIC) obtained permission from the Iranian ruler, Shah 'Abbas, to establish a factory in Jask in 1616, which became a trade station that would in future serve as a market to sell English products, such as woolens, and as a place to obtain Iranian goods including silk. In return, the British helped the Shah to oust the Portuguese from Hormuz in 1622 and later on, the Omani Ya 'ariba ejected the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650. This brought an end to Portuguese hegemony in the Gulf, though they remained in Khunj as a power until the second decade of the following century.⁷⁹

Though the eviction of the Portuguese paved the way for the British company to gain a stronger foothold in the Gulf, the presence of the Dutch in 1623 propelled a new European conflict in the region. The creation of Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), or the (DEIC) , in 1602 was a step towards European company rivalry in the Indian Ocean, and also led the companies to consider the Gulf market for its trade links with Southeast Asia, known especially for spices.⁸⁰ When the British shifted their commercial headquarters to Bandar 'Abbas in 1622 they had to compete with Dutch commercial activity as the latter had installed stations in the Gulf.⁸¹ However, it was not until the mid-18th century that the Dutch begun to lose their long-standing commercial position and had to shut down their factories

⁷⁹Willem Floor. 'Dutch Relations with the Persian Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp, 235-259; Charles Belgrave. *The Pirate Coast*. New York: Roy Publishers, 1966, p.15.

⁸⁰Floor. 'Dutch Relations', pp. 235-259.

⁸¹Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf', in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 277-293.

in the region. This marked the end of 143 years of Dutch commercial involvement in the Gulf, as Floor asserts.⁸²

The last European involvement in the Gulf that the British had to deal with was the French. Though the (FEIC) was established in 1664, its economic and political role in the region was weak compared to that of the Portuguese and the Dutch.⁸³ Unlike other European powers, the French attempted to establish a base first in the Red Sea, and the Gulf, stretching toward India via Iran and Muscat. During the late 18th century French representatives, such as Bruguière and Olivier, were sent to Istanbul, Aleppo, Alexandria, Baghdad and Iran for economic and political purposes. The French presence in Isfahan, and Bandar 'Abbas during the second half of the 17th century, followed by Basra and Muscat and the abortive Napoleonic mission to control the Red Sea in 1798, indicates the level of French ambition in the region.⁸⁴

With the beginning of the 19th century a new chapter opened up in Gulf history. The Russians entered the scene, replacing the French as rivals to the British, and threatening the northern Iranian frontier. Russian imperial ambitions in the Caucasus and the annexation of Georgia in 1805 first alerted the British to possible Russian plans to secure a warm water port on the Gulf.

To confront the Russian presence in Central Asia and possible infiltration of the Gulf, it became important for the British to bring the Gulf under its domination, and also to help maintain its strong hold in India. The Gulf served as a junction for the British, as it was a

⁸²Floor. 'Dutch Relations', pp. 235-59.

⁸³Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I Hist, p. 46.

⁸⁴Awad. 'The Gulf', *Bulletin British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, pp.123-134; Ravinder Kumar. *India and the Persian Gulf Region 1858-1907*. London: Asia Publication House, 1965, p. 11; Muhammad al-'Azawi. 'Nash'at Faransa al-Siyasiyya fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi wa al-Ijra 'at al-Biritaniyya al-Mudadha 1793-1798' in Majmu'at Mu'alifin, eds., *Dirasat fi Tarikh al-Khalij al-'Arabi al-Hadith*, (n.p.) 2008, pp. 79-99.

significant node in the line of communication between India and London.⁸⁵ Therefore, British intervention in Gulf politics was inevitable, and with a new role in 1858, the (BEIC) became a power in the Gulf alongside the government in London. The British created ties with various Gulf rulers through political treaties. Up to the mid-19th century these treaties took the form of commercial privileges, as well as the suppression of maritime piracy and the slave trade. (BEIC) involvement in Gulf politics did not become associated with the official shift in policy from a commercial to a political project prior to 1858. It was due rather to earlier commercial and political treaties with the chiefs of Arab sheikdoms and Iran during the first half of the 19th century, although some of them had not been ratified.⁸⁶ The signing of treaties between the (BEIC) and the Gulf rulers, who were engaged in piracy and the slave trade, was another factor that strengthened British control in the Gulf.⁸⁷ With its naval supremacy, which had become apparent by the end of the 18th century, the British policed the region: they attempted to suppress Qawasim piracy, the maritime plunder of Arab tribes, a growing Wahhabi movement, Mehemed 'Ali's expansion in the Gulf, and the slave (and later arms) trade by regional merchants. Not least, they were also concerned with the security of India, particularly the communication lines between Whitehall and the Indian Colonial Government. The Trucial Sheikhs and Bahrain also signed slave trade treaties with the (BEIC); the former in 1820, 1839, 1847 and 1856 and the latter in 1820, 1847 and 1856.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 276-293.

⁸⁶Charles Aitchison. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds: Related to Indian and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. VII. Calcutta: O. T. Cutter, Military Orphan Press, 1865, pp. 109-11, 127-32, 209-11; Lorimer. *Gaz. of PG*, vol. I part I Hist, p. 173; 'Treaties, Engagements' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf Intelligence: Concerning Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Muscat and Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and the Islands of the Gulf*. Cambridge Oleander Press, 1985, pp. 248-50.

⁸⁷After 1880, British Government imposed arms traffic suppression treaties on the Gulf rulers, with the exception of Qatar.

⁸⁸From B.R. Bsh to P.A. Bh, no, 268/1914, 28 Jan 1914. *IOR R/15/2/5*.

In this respect, the agreements between the (BEIC) on behalf of the British government and the various rulers in the Gulf, indicate the growth of the BEIC's political influence in the Gulf as early as the first half of the 19th century, though Gulf rulers were not fully committed to those treaties. This policy paved the way for establishing British political footholds and administration (i.e. Political Residencies) that brought the Gulf States under their control by the end of the 19th century.⁸⁹

The growth of British influence during the first half of the 19th century shifted to effective power controlling the Gulf region during the second half of the same century, especially after the second Herat War of 1856-1857. After the Herat War, Iran fell increasingly under Anglo-Russian influence culminating in the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention.

The Regional Powers and their Disputes in the Gulf 1600-1880

Regional rivalry in the Gulf was another task that the British had to deal with in order to secure their position. Before the (EIC) appeared, the Ottoman Empire took over the guardianship of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina from the Mamluks of Egypt in 1517. From that time, the Porte gave the right to the Sharifian family to rule over the holy cities under their supervision. The Sultan's authority was already maintained over Mesopotamia and al-Hasa as early as 1534 and 1550 respectively. The Ottomans in 1670 had been expelled from al-Hasa by Barrak al-Khladi, a leader of the Bani Khalid, the major internal tribe that

⁸⁹Wilson argues that the growth of British influence in the Gulf began in the 18th century. However, Floor argues that the Gulf was still under Arab influence. Arnold Wilson. *The Persian Gulf: An Historical Sketch from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928, p. 171; Floor. *The Persian Gulf: The Rise of the Gulf Arab, The Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral 1747-1792*. Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2007, p. 319.

controlled the Eastern Arabian Peninsula after the Ottoman expulsion.⁹⁰ However, more grave political contention in the Arabian Peninsula began with the birth of the Wahhabi doctrine around the middle of the 18th century. It was based on the principal of very strict monotheism, *al-tawhīd* that, according to the Wahhabis, gave them the right to spread a religious call, *da‘wa*. It enjoined believers to purify Islam of heresy (*bid‘a*) as a religious obligation. Those who refused to accept the doctrine had to pay Islamic tax (*zakat*); otherwise holy war (*jihad*) would be waged against them for disobedience. They considered smoking tobacco, visiting holy tombs and trees for grace (*baraka*), and sacrifice to them, to be heretical practices that were not part of the Islamic law (*shari‘a*).⁹¹

Based on a religion-political confederation led by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi ideology, and Muhammad ibn Sa‘ūd, the first *amir* of the House of Sa‘ūd, in Dar‘iyya in 1744, the first Sa‘ūdi state was established between 1745 and 1818. In the beginning, the Sa‘ūdi-Wahhabi movement faced challenges by tribal chiefs in Najd and its surrounding towns in the Arabian Peninsula. However, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries Sa‘ūdi-Wahhabi forces were able to spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula and eject the Ottoman representatives. As a result, the Wahhabis became recognised as a religion-political power among most of the Arabian tribes in central Arabia.

⁹⁰Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, p. 20; Fredrick Anscombe. ‘The Ottoman Role in the Gulf’ in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 261-276; ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Rahim. *Al-Dawla al-Sa‘ūdiyya al-Ula 1745-1818*. Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Jami‘i, 1999, pp. 87, 199.

⁹¹Madawi al-Rasheed. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 16-17; Ayman al-Yassini. *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1985, pp. 26-29.

The 'jihadī movement' went a step further and crossed the Arabian Peninsula border with brutal raids into Mesopotamia and some Syrian cities;⁹² they were a constant threat to Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Muscat.⁹³ Piracy by the Qawasim on local dhows and British ships under the guise of *jihad* became prevalent in the same period. The Qawasim became a maritime instrument of Wahhabi expansion in the Gulf Sea with a view to gaining booty from constant piratical raids. Besides the fact that the British were anxious about their interests in the Gulf, the Sa'udi-Wahhabi expansion annoyed Mahmud II, the Ottoman Sultan. This led him to ask his deputy in Egypt, Mehmed 'Ali (appointed in 1805), to put an end to the Wahhabi expansion in order to restore Ottoman prestige in the Islamic world. The latter dispatched a military campaign under his son, Ibrahim Pasha, to bring the holy cities back under Ottoman sovereignty. In 1818, Ibrahim Pasha destroyed the Wahhabi headquarters in Dar 'iyya and captured 'Abdullah ibn Sa'ud, the Wahhabi *amir*, sending him to Istanbul where he was beheaded.⁹⁴ The destruction of Wahhabi headquarters marked the end of the first Sa'udi State but it did not eliminate all members of the House of Sa'ud.⁹⁵

British concern about stability in the Gulf did not dissipate with this victory and the temporary breakup of the Wahhabi alliance with the Qawasim. The revolt of Mehmed 'Ali against the Porte, and his aim to consolidate his position in the Fertile Crescent, the Gulf region and Yemen, beside those areas that were under Sa'udi dominion, was an additional

⁹²Al-Rasheed. *A History*, p. 22; Ramon Knauerhase. 'Saudi Arabia: A Brief History', *Current History*, vol. 68, no. 402 (1975: Feb.): p. 74; 'Abd al-Rahim. *Al-Dawlah*, pp. 217-230.

⁹³For details on Wahhabi attacks on the Gulf Sheikdoms, see 'Abd al-Rahim. *Al-Dawlah*, pp. 105-124.

⁹⁴The Ottoman troops massacred many Wahhabi '*ulama*' as well. Knauerhase. 'Saudi Arabia', *Current History*, p. 74; al-Rasheed. *A History*, p. 23.

⁹⁵'Abd al-Rahim and Saldanha provide detailed discussion on the Ottoman operation against the first Sa'udi state. 'Abd al-Rahim. *Al-Dawlah*, pp. 305-355; Saldanha. 'Turkish Expansion on the Arab Littoral' in *TPGP*, vol. V, Calcutta and Simla: 1903-1908. Reprint: Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1986, pp. 4-7.

menace to British power and commerce. The Egyptian campaign in the region not only brought anxiety to the Indian Imperial Government for the security of the Gulf route to India, but it also challenged the British presence in the Arabian sheikdoms. Therefore, 'Ali's expansion scheme was ultimately blocked by Anglo-Ottoman military cooperation in 1840. It resulted in the restoration of Istanbul's authority over the regions that had been occupied by its defiant deputy, Mehmed 'Ali.⁹⁶ The destruction of Mehmed 'Ali's authority helped the revival of the second phase of Sa'udi-Wahhabi power in Arabia. However, in 1837 a second Egyptian military expedition was launched against the Sa'udi ruler, Faysal ibn Turki, when he refused to pay tribute to the Egyptian authority in the Hijaz. After the recapture of Riyadh, al-Hasa and Qatif, Faysal was brought to his knees and imprisoned in Cairo. *Amir* Khalid, a member of the Sa'udi house, was appointed as new *amir* in central Arabia on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan. Faysal managed to escape from prison and eventually took over Riyadh in 1843.⁹⁷ Until his death in 1865, Faysal proved a constant threat to the rulers of Bahrain and Muscat but the British were able to protect both of them. Fraternal squabbles for leadership among Faysal's sons, 'Abdullah, Sa'ud, 'Abd al-Rahman, and Muhammad, led to civil wars that weakened the Sa'udi House right up until the last decade of the 19th century. While the brothers were busy fighting each other, Midhat Pasha, *wālī* of Basra, with Kuwaiti aid, occupied al-Hasa in 1871.⁹⁸ Muhammad ibn Rashid, *amir* of Ha'il, led the Rashidi dynasty; his descendants were internal rivals of the Sa'udi family in central Arabia between the mid-

⁹⁶John Kelly. 'Mehemet Ali's Expedition to the Persian Gulf 1837-1840 Part 2', *Middle Easter Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Oct., 1965): pp. 31-65.

⁹⁷Al-Rasheed. *A History*, pp. 23-24; Saldanha. 'Précis of Nejd Affair' in *TPGP*, vol. V, pp. 9-12.

⁹⁸Pelly, a B.R. in the Persian Gulf, roughly estimated the strength of the Ottoman force as 3400 men. Pelly to Sec Gov, Bom, no, 974/254, 28 Aug 1871. *IOR R/15/2/29*.

19th century and the second decade of the 20th.⁹⁹ He captured Riyadh and consolidated himself as a new *amir* of Najd. ‘Abd al-Rahman and his son Sa‘ud were expelled from the region and sought asylum in Kuwait. This marked the end of the second Sa‘udi State.

⁹⁹For historical conflicts between both dynasties, see Madawi al-Rasheed. *Politics in an Arabian Oasis: The Rashidis of Saudi Arabia*. London & New York: I.B Tauris Publishers. 1999, pp. 38-39, 147-58; Saldanha. “Précis of Nejd Affair’ in *TPGP*, vol. V, pp. 47-53.

Southwestern Iran and the Early History of Kuwait, Bahrain, and Al-Hasa

Geography of Southwestern Iran

The region of southwestern Iran forms a sizable segment and historically has been considered a significant territory for Iran. This is due to its strategic geographical location and its global trade ports, Bushehr, Lingah, and Bandar 'Abbas, and its domestic trade ports, such as Muhammerah, Bandar Dailam, Bandar Ma'shour and Bandar Rig, all of which formed key links on the maritime routes between South and East Asia, East Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. It embraces three major provinces (*ustans*): Fars, located in the centre of southwestern Iran, the Iranian Coast, stretching from Fars to Khuzestan, and Khuzestan, or Arabistan, sharing a border with Mesopotamia. The capital of each of the three provinces was the official seat of the general-governor of the province; each province had various sub-provinces (*shahristans*); each sub-province had rural districts (*bakhshis*), and every district had villages (*dihistans*).¹⁰⁰

The province of Fars, which encompassed roughly 44,335 geographical square miles and formed the largest province in southwestern Iran, was bounded in the north by Yazd and Isfahan, in the east by Baluchistan, and in the west by Khuzestan, and finally in the south by the Persian Gulf. Climactic division is another way of looking at the geographical concept of Fars. The warm climate (*garmsir*), and cold climate (*sardsir*), were terms that designated two different regions of Fars. For agricultural produce, people in the *garmsir* terrains relied

¹⁰⁰It should be noted that, there was no exact physical boundary representing specific, districts, towns or villages separating all southwestern Iran's provinces, due to the complexity of Iranian administrative arrangements. Hence, it is difficult to determine the precise physical boundaries of the provinces.

heavily upon periodic rain. The failure of rainfall usually caused drought conditions, resulting in lower agricultural productivity and could cause famines, such as the ones that occurred in 1870-1872 and 1918-1919. The *sardsir* comprised mostly of the mountainous and higher level regions of Fars. The *garmsir* were the lowlands and *sardsir* the highlands of Fars.¹⁰¹

Khuzestan was a province that encompassed approximately 25,677 square miles. It was bordered on the north and east by the province of Luristan, on the south by the Persian Gulf, on the east by Fars, and on the west by the bank of Shat-al-‘Arab and the Mesopotamian border. A number of rivers, such as the Karun, Jarahi, and Dizful, served as sources of water for irrigation. This added a distinctive feature that made Khuzestan the most cultivated region in Iran.¹⁰² Indeed, some of these rivers, especially the Karun, were considered both local and global navigable waterways and benefited mercantile activity by connecting various domestic streams and canals. The Karun was developed from 1888, when the British obtained the right from the Shah to utilise the river for maritime trade.¹⁰³ Similar to the *sardsir*, the lowlands of Fars along the Iranian coast, south Khuzestan, experienced severe hot weather during the summer.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹Ludwig Adamec. *Historical Gazetteer of Iran: Abadan and Southwestern Iran*, vol. III. Graz Austria: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1989, p. 242; John Kinneir. *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*. London: John Murray, 1813 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1973, pp. 54-55; Arthur Arnold. *Through Persia by Caravan*, vol. II. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1877, p. 227; India. Quarter Master General's Dept. Intelligence Branch, *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. III. Simla: Printed at the Government Central Printing Office, 1885-1905, reproduce by Harvard College Library Imaging Services, 1999, pp. 230, 247-248.

¹⁰²Ministry of Information Directorate General of Information. *History of Arabistan and the Status Quo in Iran*. Information Series 13. al-Jamhuriyah: Baghdad, 1969, p. 8.

¹⁰³*Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. III, p. 397; Shahbaz Shahnava. *Britain and the Opening up of the South-West Persia 1880-1914: A Study in Imperialism and Economic Dependence*. London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005, pp. 7, 11 and Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁴Kinneir. *A Geographical Memoir*, pp. 106-107; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II A Geog and Stat, pp. 152, 159.

Inhabitants

Prior to the middle of the 20th century, there was no official census conducted and registered by the Iranian government. Indeed, the first national census of the Iranian population took place in 1956. As a result, between 1890 and 1956 only European travellers, and British and Iranian officials provided various guesses and estimates as to the overall population of Iran.¹⁰⁵ During the period under consideration, there were environmental catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods, famines, droughts, and the spread of fatal diseases all of which affected population estimates for the region. There were also considerable internal migrations within the southwestern Iranian provinces. Internal political disorders, mercantile endeavours, and seasonal employment in the trade ports were all factors contributing to constant migration within the region.¹⁰⁶ For example, during the harvest and sea trade seasons, ordinary people (e.g. peasants and coolies) who lived in the *sardsir*'s small villages and towns, migrated temporarily to the *garmsir* regions. Moreover, the inauguration of the Karun River in 1888 for mercantile navigation, which impacted on the economic and demographic structure of Khuzestan, attracted thousands of Iranian and Arabian migrants to the southern part of Khuzestan looking for work and economic betterment. They came especially from the northern part of Khuzestan and from Fars.¹⁰⁷ Two years after the opening

¹⁰⁵Julian Baharier. 'A Note on the Population of Iran' in Jamshid Momeni, ed. *The Population of Iran: A Selection of Readings*. Honolulu: East-West Population Institute, East-West Center, 1977, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶A. Lambton. 'Land Tenure and Revenue Administration in the Nineteenth Century' in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville, eds. *The Cambridge History of Iran: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, vol. VII. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 469-470.

¹⁰⁷Usually people who came from a specific village or town carried the name of their place of origin. For example, if a Behbehani migrated from Behbahan town and chose to settle in Muhammerah or Bushehr, his surname Behbehani usually referred to his identity and his place of origin. Shavnavaz. *Britain and the Opening*, pp. 123-130.

of the Karun scheme, the overall population of Khuzestan rose considerably. During the last decade of the 19th century, Iranian merchants, originally from the upper north of Khuzestan and towns such as Behbahan, Shushter, and Dizful, migrated to Muhammerah for commercial gain. For example, Muhammad 'Ali, who was originally a merchant from the Behbahan district, settled in Muhammerah to work as an advisor and minister to Sheikh Khaz 'al during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁰⁸ More examples during the early 20th century show that Bushehr attracted many migrants from Dasht for work in the labour industry.¹⁰⁹

The attraction of these burgeoning commercial centres was not confined to the inhabitants of Iran itself, but also included those from other parts of the Gulf region, such as the Arab-speaking areas of Mesopotamia and Bahrain. For example, according to one account in 1892, the population of Muhammerah, which was roughly 3,500, was half composed of Baharna, or native people of Bahrain.¹¹⁰ Although there had been Baharna migration to Muhammerah during the last quarter of the 18th century as a result of al-Khalifa oppression, the opening of the Karun at a time when the political conditions of Bahrain were unsettled provoked more Baharna to leave their country.

In this respect, native inhabitants were moving to contact zones (i.e. sea trade ports), that is to say, more sedentary and urbanised towns that encompassed a variety of markets (*sugs* plural) where people from different parts of the world mingled and interacted. Consequently, this introduced native people to the outside world¹¹¹ and helped them to build networks

¹⁰⁸Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II Geog and Stat, p. 161. Many other people migrated internally from the province of Fars to Muhammerah due to scarcity in their home region. 'ARPGPR for 1895-96' in *TPGAR*, 1873-1947, 11 vols. London: reprint by Archive Edition, 1986, vol. IV, p. 76.

¹⁰⁹Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II Geog and Stat, p. 344.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹Charles Issawi. *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 50; Mansoureh Ettehadieh. 'Crime, Security, and Insecurity: Socio-Political Conditions of Iran, 1875-1924' in Roxan Farmanfarmaian, ed. *War and Peace in*

through many people of different origins including Iranian and Kuwaiti merchants, agents, relatives, and friends who maintained continuous trade links with Kuwait. If they were unable to find employment in the seaports, native Iranians were likely to migrate via these networks to escape unsettled conditions in their own region. A good example is the case of Isma‘il Khan Firuzkuhi, who migrated from Bushehr and arrived in Kuwait in 1921 looking for work.¹¹²

Southwestern Iran itself appeared like a ‘Persian carpet design’.¹¹³ It was composed of tribal and multi-ethnic groups with a majority of Iranians, and to lesser extent Arabs, who predominated in southern Khuzestan and the Iranian Coast. The residents of Khuzestan consisted of three different major ethnic factions, Arab, Iranian and Lurs, with the latter two being in the south, whilst the Arabs were settled in the southern part, where there were numerous Arab tribes, such as the Ka‘b and the Muhiysin of Falahiyya and Muhammerah, and the Bani Turuf of Huwayza, who often rebelled.¹¹⁴ These, along with the ‘Ajam, migrated to Kuwait during the period of this study. Their descendants currently carry surnames identical to their places of origin as table 2 shows in appendix 3. Iranian Tangistanis from Tangistan district, Kanadra, from Kimashk, and Falamarz, and Arab names like al-Shibani, al-Fudiri and al-Huli tribes and Lurs (i.e. Feili, Bakhtiyari, Kuheglue and Mamassani) also formed part of this hegira.

Qajar Persia: Implications Past and Present London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 174-182.

¹¹²From P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, 85-c, 29 May 1921, p. 46. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

¹¹³John Limbert. *Iran: A War with History*. Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1987, p. 19.

¹¹⁴Henry Field. *Contributions to the Anthropology of Iran*. Chicago, 1993, pp. 186-229.

Most inhabitants of Fars were *ithnā ʿashariyya* with the exception of some Arab Sunnis, including the al-Huwala, who came from near the coastal strip.¹¹⁵ Small minorities practiced Christianity and Judaism.

In Khuzestan the Arabs were Shiʿa, controlled by Arab Sheikhs, especially in the southern region. The Iranian Shiʿa mostly lived in the highlands, although some were scattered in the southern districts like Maʿshour and Hindyan. Many on the coast spoke both Farsi and Arabic. Arabic was also spoken particularly in south Khuzestan, in, for example, Maʿshour, Muhammerah and Ahwaz.

Government

The Government of Iran was an absolute monarchy under the Shah. The Shah was the shadow of the God on earth and theoretically had absolute command over life and property.¹¹⁶ However, he had to abide by the *shariʿa* rules. The Qajar dynasty had inherited the political, religious and administrative systems of the Safavids.¹¹⁷ Successive Qajar Shahs tried to centralise the government system, but to control a large region such as southwestern Iran, without a strong army, and with poor communications and inadequate transport between Tehran and the south, the Shah relied on local governors, usually drawn from his relatives, and the heads of the principal tribes. Such alliances helped the government to control tribal forces and local rivalries; in return for their services, the officials and tribal leaders obtained subsidies and grants from the Shah.¹¹⁸ Though Tehran was unable to bring the remote

¹¹⁵Nadjmabadi. 'The Arab Presence', pp. 129-145; Field. *Contributions to the Anthropology*, p. 212.

¹¹⁶George Curzon. *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. I. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966, p. 391.

¹¹⁷Hasan Fasa'i. *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*. Heribert Busse, trans. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972, p. vii.

¹¹⁸Avery, Hambly and Melville, eds. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VI, p. 177.

provinces under its complete authority and enforce law and order, this tactic of alliance enabled Tehran to impose some order and collect taxes.

To extend central control, Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896) built telegraph lines in 1862-1863 between the centre and the peripheries.¹¹⁹ This enabled the government to connect to the outside world. Moreover, due to the expansion of trade and the influx of foreign enterprise in the south, Nasir al-Din Shah recognised the importance of integrating the southern provinces into the central administrative system to secure income.

The southern provinces also had their own governor-general *farman farma* appointed by the Shah himself. Furthermore, every district, town and village had its own governor called Khan or Sheikh, who in theory acknowledged submission to the central government. Whilst cooperating with Tehran, these officials had a degree of autonomous power, which enabled the exploitation of, and extortion from all social groups, and in particular the lower social groups.

The Economy of Southwestern Iran and Regional Trade

Owing to its natural resources and strategic location, southwestern Iran was as prominent in the Gulf as Basra and Baghdad. Its ports served as a market zone, which traded in domestic and global merchandise from the Gulf and elsewhere. However, southwestern Iran was particularly significant because of its fertile soil and abundant water supply, enabling cultivation of a variety of crops.¹²⁰ In addition, the nomadic tribes produced meat and dairy products from their livestock. Pearling and fishing were important for those settled along the

¹¹⁹Ann Lambton. *Qajar Persia: Eleven Studies*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1987, p. 28.

¹²⁰Details are given in *Persian Gazetteer*, vol. III, pp. 61, 94, 95, 104, 110, 146-149; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, pp. 1099-1100, 1861, Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II A Geog and Stat, pp. 370, 531.

shore. There were handicraft businesses in the commercial centres of Khuzestan.¹²¹ However, the middle and lower social groups were exploited and subject to extortion by government officials imposing illegal taxes, especially on the landholders and cultivators if unsettled climatic circumstances produced a poor harvest.

Domestic and global trade constituted the artery of southwestern Iran's economy; however, it was often subject to banditry by regional tribes. This diminished with the use of the Karun River from 1888 and the Shatt al-'Arab marine trade routes, and Khuzestan became as commercially important as Fars. These marine and land trade routes served to link the *sardsir* zone with the gateway ports for commodity exchange. World trade exchange and mercantile connections within the Gulf region formed an essential part of commerce in the southwestern ports. For example, alongside India, southwestern Iran supplied the grain, wheat, rice, flour, sugar, fresh and dry fruits, and vegetables to interior towns like Najd, Zulfi, Riyad, Ha'il, and al-Hasa in the Arabian Peninsula, via Kuwait. In return, southwestern Iran received goods, such as Arab dates, animal products, and spices, and more importantly 'illegal arms and ammunition'.¹²² Such merchandise was originally imported from European countries, such as Britain and France, as part of the expansion of capitalism in the Middle East, to Muscat, the headquarters of the arms traffic supply for the entire Gulf region. The geographic proximity of the southwestern Iranian ports and Kuwait attracted many Iranian merchants and agents, such as Juwhar Salim, Hussayn Tangistani, 'Ali Tangistani, Ghulam Muhammad, and Ghulum Burajuni to frequently visit Kuwait to purchase arms and ammunition.¹²³ Indeed,

¹²¹Shahnavaz. *Britain and the Opening*, pp. 48-49.

¹²²According to one account most weapons went to the province of Fars as a result of local demand. From R.Watts, IOPG to SGSO, Simla, no, i-105, 30 Sep 1920, p. 31. *IOR R/15/5/47*; from A. Lirawi to H. Khan, 10 May 1922, p. 141. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

¹²³Other Iranians habitually visited Kuwait during Salim al-Sabah's reign (1917-1921), see *IOR R/15/5/47*, p. 18.

this is obvious from a letter by Haydar Khan, a Zabit of Hayat Dawud, Kharg and Bandar Rig, sent to G. Anson, secretary to the P. R. of the Gulf in 1922 which says: '[t]he people of Tangistan and Dashti are often at Kuwait for this business (arms traffic) and import them easily'.¹²⁴ These persistent visits, over many years, led the British to put pressure on Kuwaiti Sheikhs to investigate and capture those who were involved in arms trafficking.¹²⁵

In Kuwait, though a few Najdi gun-runners dealt in this business, it was mostly in the hands of the Kuwaiti 'Ajam merchant dealers, who were of Iranian descent, such as members of ibn Ghalib and Ma'rafi families. Iranian merchants, such as Yusuf Kazaruni, and to a lesser extent Muhammad 'Ali Dadallah (known as Madhu), in Kuwait also played a substantial role in gunrunning. Another example was the case of the Bushehri shipmaster (*nukhudha*), Hussayn Ahmad, who settled in Kuwait in the early 20th century, and visited Bandar Rig to sell arms and ammunition.¹²⁶ Iranian shopkeepers, such as Mirza Shirazi who also migrated to Kuwait in 1926 and opened a food shop.¹²⁷ In addition, Iranian merchants like 'Ali 'Awadi (Sunnis) resided in Kuwait in 1902 for business.¹²⁸ It is unsurprising to discover that, due to the network and language congruence, Kuwaiti 'Ajam and Arab Shi'a merchants had Iranian business agents and partners in southwestern Iran. Muhammad al-Matruk and other merchants of the Ma'rafi and ibn Ghalib families are the best examples.¹²⁹ Besides worldwide trade, the discovery of oil in 1908 added another feature to the relationship of Iran with its

¹²⁴From H. Khan to G. Anson, 27 Apr 1922, p. 128. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

¹²⁵Those cases were during the reign of Salim al-Sabah and his successor Ahmad al-Jabir. For more details consult *al-sijl al-'ām in al-diwan al-amiri*, file I, no 434/1, p. 30; no 454/1, p. 21; no 416/1, p. 37; no 246/1, p. 83; no 272/1, p. 76.

¹²⁶See 'Ammunition smuggled from Kuwait' in *IOR R/15/5/48*, p. 11.

¹²⁷See *al-sijl al-'ām in al-diwan al-amiri*, file 2 no 576/2, p. 174.

¹²⁸From W. Grey to P.R. Bs, no, c.45, 22 Dec 1915, p. 21. *IOR R/15/1/513*; from A.P. Trevor to A. Grant, no, 7-c, 4 Jan 1916, p. 28. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

¹²⁹See Chapter Four.

neighbours. Indeed, Iran became highly significant economically and politically, especially for international powers, such as the British.

Ironically with all these economic advantages, it would seem that southwestern Iran would be economically self-sufficient, but several factors hindered the prosperity of the region. First, and probably most significant, was the insecurity of the region, which was caused by constant blocking of roads, plundering, and banditry along major internal caravan routes by rebellious and unruly tribes. Second, there were a lack of sufficient and well-developed irrigation and agricultural schemes which could have benefitted the extraordinarily fruitful land. Third, the dominance of trade by powerful officials and major merchants caused conflict amongst the Arab Sheikhs in the southern parts of Khuzestan and the Iranian officials of Fars, which also hindered the development of the region. Fourth, the tariff increase, agreed with the Russians in 1898, and the price rise of major goods, played a role. Fifth, southwestern Iranian trade was usually affected by the fluctuations in periodical rainfall. The lack of sufficient rainfall sometimes resulted in poor harvests which caused famines and droughts. Sixth, the financial depletion during the late 19th century in Iran, and the fall in the global value of silver that formed the basis of the Iranian currency, undermined the Iranian economy. Finally, the overall mismanagement of Iran under the late Qajar dynasty, from the highest to the lowest levels of government, had a negative impact on economic development. All these elements contributed to making the region an unpleasant place to live; those who had the opportunity often left.

The Early History of Kuwait, Bahrain, and al-Hasa

The Geography of Kuwait

The geographical features of old Kuwait were simple, although it is hard to determine its exact size during its early history.¹³⁰ Old Kuwait was a small town built on a barren flat surrounded by a mud wall on the desert side. It resembled al-Hasa in size and was possibly even smaller, according to the description of Syrian pilgrim Murtada ibn 'Alwan in 1709.¹³¹ Kuwait did not possess any significant natural topography, such as mountains, plains, or rivers, except a strategic port site. This forced the inhabitants to rely on only Gulf Sea resources, like fishing and pearling, and overland trade for economic survival. However, in the later period, when a Kuwaiti border was officially shaped during the first quarter of the 20th century, Kuwait's precise size becomes clearer. It comprised 6,000 square miles or approximately 15,000 square kilometers, although Kuwait lost both Safwan and Umm Qasir to what is now called Iraq in 1913, and two-thirds of its terrain to what is now called Sa'udi Arabia in 1922.¹³² Located on the northwestern corner of the Persian Gulf, Kuwait is about eighty miles south of Basra, a major trade town located in the south of what was then Mesopotamia; one hundred and eighty miles west and slightly north of Bushehr, and two hundred and eighty miles northwest of Bahrain.¹³³ Al-Hasa, which forms part of the Arabian

¹³⁰During the beginning of the 20th century Lorimer estimated the town as about two miles along the shore. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1049.

¹³¹Ben Slot. *The Origins of Kuwait*. Kuwait: Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1998, p. 131.

¹³²Khaz 'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. I, p. 15. This happened at the al-'Uqayr conference; for more details, see Harold Dickson. *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956, pp. 270-278; Michael Casey. *The History of Kuwait*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007, pp. 55-56.

¹³³Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1048.

Peninsula, was located south of Kuwait. Finally, the Persian Gulf, and across it, the southwestern Iranian ports, lie to the east of Kuwait.

The climate of Kuwait has two extreme seasons, a hot summer when the temperature could reach up to 117° F between June and September, and a chilly winter, without snow, when the temperature can drop to 50° F. Spring and Autumn are hardly noticed as Kuwait experiences a moderate climate between March and May, and another period of moderate climate between October and December. Rainfall, scanty and irregular, usually occurs in the period between late October and early March. Kuwait is exposed to different winds but the most famous ones are the *shimāl* and *kūs*. The *shimāl* is a northerly wind that blows continuously for some weeks in the early mid-summer. The *kūs*, a southerly wind resembling a warm breeze, is associated with humidity and also occurs during the summer. Though there were a few wells located in Hawali, Dasma, and Shamiyya, where the residents were able to get water, Kuwait in general lacked pure water and relied heavily on a daily supply imported from the Shatt al-‘Arab up until the late 1950s. However, the dry climate of Kuwait helps keep it free from diseases, such as malaria and fevers that are prevalent in other Gulf ports.¹³⁴

The Origin of Kuwait and the Rise of the al-Sabah Dynasty

When it comes to discussing the historical literature on the origins of Kuwait, better known in its early days as Grane, and indeed the arrival of the al-Sabah in Kuwait, it is important to mention briefly the dispute among scholars over the date from which the history of Kuwait should begin. Nevertheless, all sources agree that the political foundation of Kuwait was

¹³⁴Mary Cubberly Van Pelt. ‘The Sheikhdome of Kuwait’, *Middle East Journal* 4, no. 1 (Jan., 1950): pp. 12-26; ‘Evaluation of Domestic Water Supply to Kuwait’ in Anita Burdett, ed. *Water Resources in the Arabian Peninsula 1921-1960*, vol II. Slough: Archive Editions, 1998, pp. 3-4.

shaped by conflicts. The first name of the old Kuwaiti town, displayed in the geographical maps of the Persian Gulf by Europeans during the first half of the 18th century, was Grane. The word Kuwait was mentioned for the first time in a travelogue written by an Arab Syrian called Murtada ibn 'Alwan, who visited the town in 1709.¹³⁵ The word *kut*, which means a small fort or castle, was the original historic place from which Kuwait derived its name. During the early 18th century, Kuwait, then under the control of the Bani Khalid tribe, was basically a small village with the possibility of a good harbour in the upper Persian Gulf. From about that time it started to accommodate immigrants from its neighbours as it was out of the sphere of influence of the regional powers (i.e. the Ottomans and Iran).¹³⁶

Ben Slot has produced a masterly work on the origins of Kuwait relying on relevant contemporary European cartographic and travelogue sources that discuss direct and indirect indications of the early existence of Kuwait between the 16th and 18th centuries. Slot argues that none of the nautical charts, maps, and written sources on the Gulf, by Portuguese cartographers Lazaro Luis in 1563 and Fernao Vaz Dourado in 1570, an Arab scholar Muhammad al-Idrisi in 1592, French geographer Nicolas Sanson in 1652, and French orientalist Jean de la Roque in 1718, make any mention of Kuwait, although there are references to places, such as Failaka Island, Ras al-Zur and Kazima that become part of Kuwaiti territory in its later history. Thus, the exact origins of Kuwait and the formation of old Kuwait is still vague and likely to remain a mystery forever. Direct reference to the existence of Kuwait as a trading centre and staging post on the land route between the Arabian Peninsula and Aleppo, as Slot emphasises, comes only during the first half of the 18th century. It is found in a descriptive book by Murtada ibn 'Alwan, who visited Kuwait in 1709. Further

¹³⁵Grane means 'horn' because the bay of Kuwait is similar to a horn in shape.

¹³⁶Slot. *The Origins*, pp. 109-113.

references appear in the Dutch and Italian documents found by Frans Canter in 1750 and Pollard also in the same year. An employee of the (DEIC), Tidlo Frederick van Kniphausen, provided more detailed references in 1756 on old Kuwait, which implied that it had become a nascent town under the control of the al-Sabah from the early second half of the 18th century. Two western travelogues written by Edward Ives in 1758 and Carsten Niebuhr in 1772, when they visited the Gulf region, and reports of the *Selection of the Government of Bombay Records*, which were written by British officials stationed in the Gulf, also have more detailed descriptions on Kuwait prior to 1880.¹³⁷

From another point of view, Maymunah al-Sabah, a Kuwaiti historian and member of the al-Sabah family, gives a different interpretation of the origins of Kuwait and estimates the date of arrival of the al-ʿUtub, including the al-Sabah, into Kuwait based on two British documents. The first document was addressed by the ruler of Kuwait, Mubarak al-Sabah, to the Ottoman authority in Basra during the Anglo-Turkish convention negotiation period (1911-1913). It discussed the political status of Kuwait in the Persian Gulf. Thus, Mubarak wanted to clarify the boundary of Kuwaiti territory to the Ottomans. In his letter Mubarak claims that his great forefather, Sabah I, the first ruler of Kuwait, settled in Kuwait around 1613.¹³⁸ However, he did not provide any evidence. The second document is a report about the Arab tribes on the shores of the Persian Gulf, written by Lewis Pelly. Pelly, who visited Kuwait in 1863, indicated that the al-Sabah family had been ruling Kuwait for five

¹³⁷Slot. *The Origins*. pp. 12, 57, 62, 72, 184, 113-42; Ben Slot. 'Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity' in Ben Slot, ed. *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity*. London: Arabian, 2003, pp. 5-27, and see the reports related to Grane or Kuwait in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence*.

¹³⁸See the Arabic report of Mubarak al-Sabah's response to the Ottoman authority in IOR R/15/5/65, p. 92.

generations or about 250 years, but he did not give any specific evidence.¹³⁹ In the light of this information, Maymunah asserts that given an estimate of fifty years for each of the five generations, as Pelly mentioned, Pelly's account matches Mubarak al-Sabah's claim on the early settlement of the al-Sabah in 1613. Therefore, the origins of Kuwait, according to Maymunah, has to be prior to 1756. In this respect, unlike the traditional literature on the early history of Kuwait discussed by Abu Hakima, Rushid, Khaz 'al, and al-Qina 'i, which estimates the arrival of the al-'Utub, including the al-Sabah in Kuwait, as being around 1716 or a few years earlier, Maymunah not only pushes the date of the origins of Kuwait more than a century back, but also argues that Kuwait was established by Sabah I and not by a member of the Bani Khalid, as most historians have stated.¹⁴⁰ Maymunah's analysis about the origin of Kuwait cannot be accepted for four reasons. First, her interpretation does not correspond with the historical literature on the Gulf region, because old Kuwait did not exist, even as a nascent village in the early 17th century, as demonstrated by Slot's primary sources. Indeed, the latter only indicates a few places that later became part of Kuwaiti dominion without even showing whether these areas were inhabited or not. Second, fifty years as the average for each generation is too long making the calculation an overestimation because each generation could only be around twenty or twenty-five years each. Third, Mubarak's statement on the exact date of his great grandfather's settlement cannot be taken into consideration because Mubarak's response to the Ottoman authority was diplomatic rather than strictly historical. On the one hand, he wanted to show the Ottomans that Kuwait had

¹³⁹Lewis Pelly. *Report on the Tribes, &c., Around the Shores of the Persian Gulf*. Calcutta: Foreign Department Press, 1874; Saldanha. 'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰See 'Sabah al- Awal al-Mu'asis al-Haqiqi li Dawlat al-Kuwayt Bimusharakt al-Khalifa wa al-Jalahma,' *al-Qabas Newspaper*, Nov 16, 2011 (access Feb 16, 2013); available from <http://www.alqabas.com.kw/node/29756> and second part in Nov 17, 2011; available from <http://www.alqabas-kw.com/Article.aspx?id=749748&date=16112011>.

been an independent state for the last four centuries and had never been under Ottoman sovereignty; and on the other hand, he wanted to legitimise the rule of the al-Sabah as the only family who had controlled Kuwait from its origins. These were important points for Mubarak to emphasise, especially as the Ottomans were due to sign a convention in 1913 with the British that concurred that the *status quo* of the political position of Kuwait was that of an independent state. Fourth, Mubarak's claims have never been taken up by any other ruler of Kuwait either in the earlier stage of its development or later.

However, the traditional discussion of the constitution of Kuwait, and the early migration of the al-Sabah to Kuwait by most local historians (i.e. Abu Hakima, Rushid, Khaz'al, and al-Qina'i), fits well with Slot's analysis of the contemporary European sources. The traditional account states that one leader of the Bani Khalid tribe, a very powerful tribe which dominated most of the east Arabian Peninsula (i.e. al-Hasa) up to the first half of the 18th century, built the *kut* earlier, around the second half of the 17th century, as a warehouse for weapons and ammunition due to constant wars with other tribes in the region. In the first quarter of the 18th century, the al-'Utub tribe, a branch of the great 'Anaiza tribe, including the al-Sabah, the al-Khalifa and the al-Jalahma, migrated from central Arabia and settled in Kuwait in 1716 under the protection of the Bani Khalid.¹⁴¹ These tribes paid tribute to the Bani Khalid for a short time and the latter, in return, protected them. The root causes of the al-Sabah's, the al-Khalifa's and the al-Jalahma's migrations from their places of origin are subject to disagreement amongst scholars. One theory suggests that they migrated from central Arabia to escape the effects of drought and famine. Another account suggests that after they migrated from central Arabia, they were compelled to move by the Ottomans, from Umm Qasir and Khur Zubayr, which was close to the Shatt-al-'Arab, to *kut* due to their

¹⁴¹ Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, p. 25; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I B Hist, p. 1000.

ruthless practice of piracy and plunder. A different story suggests that they migrated from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula to Qatar but were expelled by Qatar's Sheikh because of a homicide case, after residing there for nearly fifty years, they migrated to *kut*.¹⁴² This last hypothesis, which could be the most accurate, is based on an Ottoman document dated 1701. The document shows that the al-ʿUtub tribe, including the al-Sabah, settled with the al-Khalaifat tribe in Bandar Dailam during the late 17th century in southwestern Iran and fought against the Arab al-Huwala there. The two tribes, the al-Sabah and Khalifat, decided to migrate to Basra in 1701 after suffering internal conflicts with the Iranian governors. They stayed briefly in Basra while the Ottoman *wālī*, ʿAli Pasha, was deciding whether or not to offer them a permanent abode. In the end, they moved to Khur ʿAbdullah and Umm Qasir and from there they settled in old Kuwait.¹⁴³

When Bani Khalid's rule over the eastern Arabian Peninsula weakened, after the middle of the 18th century, due to internal conflict among family members, and the expansion of the Wahhabi movement, it resulted in autonomy for most of the tribes that had controlled their regions on behalf of Bani Khalid, including Kuwait.¹⁴⁴ Though 'how Kuwait was first administrated is not clear',¹⁴⁵ the traditional story is that Sheikh Sabah I was chosen either in

¹⁴²For more details, see 'Introduction' in Bidwell, ed. *The Affairs of Kuwait 1896-1905*. vol. I, 1896-1901. London: Frank Cass, 1971, p. xi; Saldanha. 'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 2; R Serjeant and Robin Bidwell, eds. *Arabian Studies*. vol. II. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 62; Khaz ʿal. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. I, pp. 40-42.

¹⁴³The reason why this theory might be more plausible is because, apart from the Ottoman document that shows where the al-ʿUtub were around in 1700, many Arabs who lived in these Iranian ports like Bandar Dailam, Bandar Ma ʿshour, and Muhammerah carry Arab names like Sabah and Jabir. These particular names prevail as well among the Arab inhabitants of the southern parts of Mesopotamia that were on the trade route to the Iranian ports nearby. Sultan al-Qasimi. *Bayan al-Kuwayt: Sirat Hayat al-Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah*, al-Tab ʿa I. Bayrut: al-Muʿassasa al-ʿArabiyya Lildirasat wa al-Nashir, 2004, pp.12-14; Slot. *The Origins*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁴⁴Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴⁵Alan Rush. *Record of Kuwait 1899-1961: Internal Affairs 1899-1921*, vol. I. Farnham Common: Archives Editions, 1989, p. 194.

1752 or in 1756, according to the Arab tribal custom known as (*shūrā*) or consultation. However, the reason why Sheikh Sabah I was chosen might be because the al-Sabah family was the strongest tribe in Kuwait at that time.

Since there was an influx of immigrants from adjacent regions to Kuwait, the native people were obliged to choose a leader in order to protect themselves from wrongdoers and oppressors. According to a common tale, they chose al-Sabah from among several wealthy al-ʿUtub tribes because ‘[a]l-Sabah were not engaged in maritime trade and remained oriented towards the desert’.¹⁴⁶ Ever since that day, the al-Sabah dynasty has ruled Kuwait. What enabled the al-Sabah dynasty to continue with almost no disturbances, and to the general satisfaction of their subjects, was the nature of the relationship between the Sheikh and the inhabitants regardless of their religious beliefs, whether Sunni or Shiʿa. This relationship was based on what a Kuwaiti sociologist Yusuf ʿAli has called (*ʿaqd ijtimāʿī*) or social contract.¹⁴⁷ This oral contract preserved the rights of both sides until 1962, the date when the constitution of Kuwait was established. The Sheikh promised to rule all his subjects justly and to protect them from outside invasion, while the subjects allowed the al-Sabah dynasty to retain the sheikhdom as long as they could keep their promise. More than that, the Sheikh usually consulted his subjects, particularly the Bedouin chiefs and the elite merchants, in his reception room in an assembly, *majlis*, about the welfare of the state, and he rarely made any major decision unilaterally. In other words, the relationship between the two sides was based on what Maymunah al-Sabah has called a ‘paternal system’.¹⁴⁸ Lorimer described this

¹⁴⁶Louër. *Transnational*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁷Yusuf ʿAli, interviewed by the author, 5 Aug. 2009, Kw.

¹⁴⁸Al-Sabah. *Al-Kuwayt Hadara*, p. 105.

amicable relationship between Sheikh 'Abdullah ibn Sabah (1764-1815) and his subjects as a case in which he ruled 'more as a father than as a governor'.¹⁴⁹

During the early period of its history, neither the British nor the Ottomans paid any attention to Kuwait since it had less economic and political significance than other places, such as Basra, Bahrain, and southwestern Iran.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, as far as Britain was concerned, no action was necessary as long as the commerce of the (BEIC) increased, piracy did not disturb the Gulf, and finally, no other European powers intervened in the region. As for the Ottomans, they were busy fighting the Wahhabi movement, which kept them distracted from Kuwait for a time. This strategic situation was advantageous to Kuwait because it helped the town to evolve, without political instability due to foreign interference, for much of the late 18th century up to the last quarter of the following century. The first contact between the British and Kuwait goes back to 1775, when the (BEIC) and their employees moved temporarily to Kuwait between 1775 and 1779, due to the occupation of Basra by the Safavid Empire. The second contact was in 1793-1795, when the employees of a British factory in Basra left and settled in Kuwait temporarily due to a conflict with Turkish officials. And finally, between 1821 and 1822, the same organisation moved to Kuwait, possibly to Failaka Island, due to political and economic conflict between the British and the Turkish authorities in Mesopotamia. This helped Britain to recognise Kuwait as an alternative place for the (BEIC) as long as it maintained its neutrality in the region, and at the same time Britain helped Kuwait expand its trade opportunities as a new emporium.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I B Hist, p. 1005.

¹⁵⁰Al-Sabah. *Al-Kuwayt Hadara*, p. 10.

¹⁵¹Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part I B Hist, pp. 1001-1005; al-Sabah. *Al-Kuwayt Hadara*, pp.191-195; Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, pp. 176-179.

Economy and Population of Kuwait

Kuwait's land is flat and sandy, covered by deserts. Most of it is barren due to the lack of pure water. Thus 'neither Kuwait town nor its environs can boast of any agricultural resources'.¹⁵² The village of Jahra, which is eighteen miles west of Kuwait town, has the most fertile land in the country due to its soil composition and the availability of wells and oases. Though a few agricultural products, such as vegetables, grew in Jahra, there was not enough to meet the food needs of Kuwaiti residents.¹⁵³ Unlike southern Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran, Kuwait was considered a barren land and it was not possible to produce daily necessities, such as wheat, barley, rice, etc. However, Jahra was a transit point for Bedouin shepherds grazing their cattle. It was also a stop for Bedouin traders who came from the central Arabian Peninsula with their camel caravans to Basra or Aleppo in order to trade animal products, such as dairy and animal hides.

From the establishment of *kut* to the discovery of oil in 1938, the country relied heavily on Gulf Sea resources. Fishing and pearling were the main means of trade, and Kuwaiti sailors and their ships came to be considered the best in the Gulf.¹⁵⁴ Fishing and pearling were seasonal activities that usually took place for three to four months every year during the summer. Otherwise, a few local industries, such as those derived from wool and animal hides, provided the major revenue of Kuwait. Other traditional crafts (*hiraf*), such as weaving, tailoring, goldsmithing, blacksmithing, cotton making, brass working and many others, mostly in the hands of Shi'a communities, also catered to local needs. As a barren land,

¹⁵²Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1052.

¹⁵³Saif Shamlan. *Min Tarikh al-Kuwayt*. Kuwait: Dhat al-Salasil, 1986, p. 86; Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. I, p. 25; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1052.

¹⁵⁴Most of the sailors, fishermen and pearl-divers were Kuwaiti Sunnis. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1053.

Kuwait relied heavily upon importing major daily goods from Basra, the southwestern Iranian ports, and the India Ocean zone in order to provide for its inhabitants. Therefore, trade either with the Gulf Arab states and India through the Gulf, or through land routes with the central Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia and Aleppo, was another important source of revenue for Kuwait. Kuwait imported some goods, such as dates, horses, and camels from Basra and southwestern Iran, in order to transship them to India. Kuwait also imported spices, grains, and tools for shipbuilding, like timbers and ropes, from India. In return, Kuwait exported goods, such as pearls, dates, and different kinds of animals, like camels, horses, and donkeys. Thus Kuwait was a poor country compared to its large neighbours.¹⁵⁵

The nomadic tribes or Bedouin of the Arabian Peninsula moved back and forth throughout the Gulf region since there were not yet any physical borders. They sojourned in different states, grazing their cattle and trading from their caravans by practicing *musābala*,¹⁵⁶ and maintaining tribal ties with far-flung relatives. Kuwait was of interest because it served as a transshipment point between the Gulf and Mesopotamia, on the one hand, and the Gulf and India, on the other hand. It had never been controlled directly or indirectly, since its origins, either by the Ottomans in Basra or by the Iranians, but was well-governed and orderly, unlike the Arabian tribal areas to the west.

For Kuwait's population, as with those of Bahrain, al-Hasa, and southwestern Iran, there was no certified census registered by the government of Kuwait prior to the 1950s. However,

¹⁵⁵There were different kinds of foreign currencies, such as the Maria Theresa Dollar, Indian Rupees, Persian Kiran and Turkish Lira, which circulated in Kuwait. For details, see 'ARPGPR for 1904-1905' in *TPGAR*, vol. V, p.10; Pelly. 'Report of a Journey to the Wahabee Capital of Riyadh in Central Arabia' in *Journal of a Journey from Persia to India: Through Heart and Candahar*. Bombay: Printed for the Government at the Education Society Press, Ryculla, 1866, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶*Musābala* is a land trade that took the form of an exchange of various commodities between the Bedouins of Kuwait and other tribes of Kuwait's neighbours in the desert.

estimations of the growth in the number of Kuwaiti residents can be drawn from British official sources and travelogues, although there are conflicts among their versions in this regard. From its early history Kuwait's population has consisted of a mixture of ethnic immigrants from the Gulf region, more particularly, Arab and 'Ajam. The Arabs are divided into *hadar*, those who settled in the town of Kuwait, and *badu*, those who roamed after their cattle between the border of Kuwait and its neighbours. Arab *hadar* compose the majority of Muslim Sunnis like Nijada and Zubara, and to a lesser extent Muslim Shi'a, such as the Baharna and the Hassawiyya and those who came from Iraq, while the *badu* were mostly Sunni believers with some Shi'a followers.¹⁵⁷

Likewise, the 'Ajam group was composed of two religious sects, where the Shi'a were the majority and Sunni were the minority. Baluch or Balush, who were originally immigrants from Baluchistan and from elsewhere in southwestern Iran, Christians, and Jews also settled in Kuwait at times in the past.¹⁵⁸ The Arab *hadar* and *badu* Sunnis had mostly migrated to Kuwait by four different routes. First, there were those who migrated to Kuwait from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula and its peripheries, especially from the areas of the central Najd plateau, and other towns, such as al-Qasim, al-Zulfi, Burayda, and in Eastern Arabia like al-Hasa and many others. Second, people came from the towns and villages of south Mesopotamia like al-Zubayr and Basra. Third, people moved from Bahrain Island, such as the Arab al-Huwala. Finally, there were those who migrated from the Arab colonies of

¹⁵⁷There were some *badu* families like Fudul, and Shamamra, and to a lesser extent Thufran, Mutran, 'Ajman and some others who were Shi'a but it was not possible to distinguish their faith at the early stage of Kuwait history as they were fully integrated into the tribal system.

¹⁵⁸Many Baluchis migrated from southwestern Iran after internal migration from their province, Baluchistan.

southwestern Iran, though many of them do not admit to ancestors who resided there, even temporarily.

The Arab and 'Ajam Shi'a, likewise, migrated from the same places as their counterparts but from different towns and village. First, families like al-Shimali, al-Hindal, al-Mazidi, al-Zilzilah, al-Kazimi, Maqamis, and Mal-Allah migrated from areas in Mesopotamia, such as Basra, al-Hila, al-Katimiyya and other places. Second, families who carry surnames like al-'Aradi, al-Qallaf, al-Bahrani migrated from villages in Bahrain, known as Sanabis, Nu'im, 'Arad and Bani Jamra towns. Third, families who migrated from al-Hasa and Qatif, such as al-Baghli, al-Ibn 'Ali, al-Haddad, al-Qattan and many others. Finally, those 'Ajam who constitute the majority of the population of countless Shi'a families, migrated from several villages and towns in southwestern Iran as indicated in table 3 in appendix 3.

The Sunni Arabs formed the majority of Kuwaiti people from its early history until the present. Arabic was the major language among Kuwaitis, though Farsi prevailed among the 'Ajam community, and different Bedouin vernaculars and Hindu were practiced as well among the inhabitants who were involved in sea-faring activities and trade.

The few travelogue descriptions and British official reports that estimated the Kuwait population prior to 1880 can provide a sense of its demographic growth. Even though these estimates were not based on an official census and lack accuracy, they still demonstrate the gradual increase of immigrants settling in Kuwait. Such increases were a fundamental element in the economic growth the town. Kniphausen gave the earliest estimate of the number of Kuwait inhabitants in 1756. He maintained that Kuwait was inhabited by Arab tribe's people and their number was around 4000 armed men.¹⁵⁹ Forty-six years later, in 1820, the British official, Colebrooke, estimated that the armed inhabitants of the town consisted

¹⁵⁹Slot. *The Origins*, p. 131.

of between 5000 and 7000 men, including a few hundred of the al-ʿUtub tribe. He assumes that Kuwait was ‘inhabited by a mixed race of Arabs in subjection to the Aula Subbeit [al-Sabah], a branch of the Utubi tribe’.¹⁶⁰ George Brucks, who wrote reports on Kuwait in 1829, suggested that ‘[t]he inhabitants are about six thousand in number, of the Uttoobrr [ʿUtub] Tribe, and strict Mahomedans’.¹⁶¹ In 1845 Kemball provided, in his first report on Kuwait, an estimate for the Kuwaiti population totaling around 25,000 souls.¹⁶² Kemball, in his second report on Kuwait, written in 1854, gave a different reading for the population of Kuwait, estimating 22,000, which was lower than his first report.¹⁶³ He also indicated in his third report, dated 1866, that the inhabitants of Kuwait were exclusively Arab.¹⁶⁴ Lewis Pelly, P.R. at Bushehr, recorded 18,000 people as an estimate of the overall population of Kuwait when he visited in 1863.¹⁶⁵

It can be concluded from these reports, regardless of their possible faults and potential exaggeration, that there was a considerable increase in migrations to Kuwait, especially after the period when Sabah I was chosen to rule in the 1750s, a period when people began to recognise Kuwait in the political map of the Gulf. It can also be noted that there was no indication of a Shiʿa group (Arab or ʿAjam) as a component of Kuwait’s population, although there were three Shiʿa mosques prior to Mubarak’s reign (1896-1915), according to the private papers of Abul and al-Mahmid, well-known old settled Shiʿa families in Kuwait. One possible reason for no indication of a Shiʿa group in Knipphausen’s report, written in 1756, is that there were no Shiʿa communities there, prior the last quarter of the 18th century, because

¹⁶⁰Saldanha. ‘Précis of Koweit Affairs’ in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 1.

¹⁶¹Brucks. ‘Memoir Descriptive’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 576.

¹⁶²Kemball. ‘Memoranda of the Resources’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 109.

¹⁶³Kemball. ‘Statistical and Miscellaneous Information’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 296.

¹⁶⁴Saldanha. ‘Précis of Koweit Affairs’ in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 5

¹⁶⁵See F. Crow report in IOR R/15/1/476, p. 242.

there were no push factors for Shi'a groups, more particularly the Hassawiyya and the Baharna, that might have motivated them to leave their homelands prior to 1783 and 1795, the dates of regime change in Bahrain and al-Hasa. Even if we assume that there were some Shi'a families settled in Kuwait prior to 1783, due to trade between their homelands and Kuwait, their number would be minimal, so 'outsiders' might not have noticed them, especially since they wore a similar traditional gown (*dishdāshā* in Kuwaiti dialect) to the Kuwaiti Arab Sunni, a part of their assimilation since their early settlement in Kuwait.

Moreover, in contrast to Bahrain and al-Hasa, from the early history of Kuwait, the Shi'a communities were fully integrated into Kuwaiti society and there is no sign in any sources which indicates any religious conflict between the two sects in Kuwait. The al-Sabah family was liberal compare to some other Gulf Sheikhs. They encouraged immigrants from outside Kuwait town to settle in order to build up their sheikdom regardless of their religious faiths or ethnicity as long as they were capable of contributing to the nascent society and did not cause political disturbances, religious disputes, or the dismantling of the social fabric of the society. That is why there was even a Jewish community present during the early history of Kuwait. A sign of the integration of the entire population of Kuwait since its early history can be noticed in Kemball's first report when he describes the character of Kuwait residents in 1845, '[t]he energy and courage of the people, who are closely united, and free from feuds and fractions, render them respected and feared by all'.¹⁶⁶

Another reason why the entire population of Kuwaiti society was so well integrated is that most of the population of Kuwait, including the al-Sabah, formed part of the establishment of old Kuwait. That meant that the state building began from scratch and continued from the arrival of the al-ʿUtub. The latter united with the rest of the residents in order to establish a

¹⁶⁶Kemball. 'Memoranda of the Resources' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 109.

new sheikhdom without having to fight with the ‘existing community’ and create divisions in society, such as those that arose in Bahrain and al-Hasa. In Kuwait there was no well-established populated community or presence of a significant number of people prior to the arrival of the al-‘Utab. Most of immigrants came to Kuwait only after the settlement began, as the town was developing. All the inhabitants of Kuwait, as indicated earlier, concurred in the legitimisation of the rule of the al-Sabah in Kuwait from the time of Sabah I. Therefore, the transformation of the old Kuwait village into a prosperous town with a developed port proceeded peacefully a few decades after the Sabah I era, as George Brucks observed when he stated that Kuwait ‘enjoyed peace while all other parts of the Gulf have been embroiled, and to this they owe their maritime greatness’.¹⁶⁷

As a result, the absence of the mention of Shi‘a communities does not mean they were not present in Kuwait after 1783; in fact there are private papers of the Kuwaiti Shi‘a communities which confirm the presence of some Arab and ‘Ajam Shi‘a families, who settled in Kuwait during the second half of the 18th century and afterward. The existence of three Shi‘a *masjid* typified by *masjid al-sahaf*, *masjid al-mazidi* and *masjid al-baharna* prior to Mubarak’s reign, demonstrates the existence of a well-established Shi‘a communities in Kuwait during the first half of the 19th century.¹⁶⁸ In addition, since the early history of Kuwait, the southwestern Iranian ports, with the exception of Basra, were considered the major food suppliers to Kuwait’s inhabitants. Thus, maritime trade routes between Kuwait and the Iranian ports were essential; this is a possible cause of migration from southwestern

¹⁶⁷Saldanha. ‘Précis of Koweit Affairs’ in *TPGP*, vol. V, p.1.

¹⁶⁸P.P. of the Abul family.

Iran to Kuwait. Indeed, early commercial links between the two regions were noticed by some travelogues and British reports from the last quarter of the 18th century.¹⁶⁹

Geography of Bahrain

In standard Arabic, the word Bahrain means ‘the two seas’. However, the derivation of the name of Bahrain Island is unclear and the subject of dispute. Bahrain’s history goes back to antiquity. For centuries, old Bahrain, or Dilmun, was a trading centre and part of the trade network between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley. The importance of Bahrain as a trade centre between Basra and the Indian Ocean, and as a strategic and thriving emporium in the Gulf region, continued until its emergence as a political entity between the end of the 19th century and the mid- 20th century.

Bahrain is a small island situated offshore on the west side of the Gulf. Throughout history, the location of Bahrain was a double-edged sword. The ease of access from different zones of the Island to the Gulf Sea for fishing and pearling placed it in an advantageous position compared to other Gulf sheikhdoms. However, such an advantage made Bahrain continually vulnerable to threats from the regional powers (i.e. Wahhabi, Omani, and Iranian rulers), and tribal invasions (i.e. Bani Hajar and al-Murrah).

Geographically, Bahrain is an archipelago of approximately thirty-three small islands, including the largest, historically known as *awal*. However, the most significant centres with

¹⁶⁹In 1774, Niebuhr indicated that the ‘Iranians’ designated old Kuwait as Grane. That means that the Iranians at that time knew Grane and must have had commercial links with Kuwait. Bruck in 1829 showed that Kuwait had imported tobacco and dried fruits from Iran. In 1839 Jones pointed out that Kuwait was a barren land and its food supplies were imported from Basrah and the ports of the Iranian coast. Slot. *The Origins*, p. 152; J. Jones ‘Extract from a Report on the Harbour of Grane’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 52; Brucks. ‘Memoir Descriptive’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 575; Pelly. *Report on a Journey to Riyadh in Central Arabia (1865): With A New Introduction by R. L. Bidwell*. Oleander/Falcon: Middle East Centre University of Cambridge, 1863, pp. 10-11.

the largest proportion of the population, especially the Baharna, were concentrated in villages on the main island. Though Manama in the north was the commercial capital of Bahrain from the 20th century, Muharraq was the principal administrative town during the 19th century, where the house of al-Khalifa ruled from 1783. The overall size of Bahrain Island is roughly 208 square miles.¹⁷⁰ The geographical characteristics and climate of Bahrain were similar to Kuwait, flat and mostly sandy. Nevertheless, Bahrain possesses fertile soil in the north that produces a variety of crops, including dates, vegetables, and fruits. Since its early history, fresh spring water has been abundant and usually extracted from the principal wells on the island, which were useful for agricultural irrigation. These features helped the people of Bahrain to be economically self-sufficient. The climate of Bahrain, according to Lorimer, was the worst in the entire Gulf region. The temperature, as registered at the beginning of 20th century, was between 107.5° F at its highest during summer and 40° F at its lowest in winter. There is an average temperature from 60 to 85° F between late October and mid-April.¹⁷¹

The Birth of Shi‘asim and the Origin of the Baharna in Bahrain

According to medieval Arab accounts, and archaeological evidence, the roots of Shi‘aism and the origins of the native ancestry of the Baharna in old Bahrain go back a long way. To this day, there has been an argument over the origin of the Baharna and when they first arrived. There are three different interpretations of this issue.

¹⁷⁰Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. VII part. II Geog and Stat, p. 212; Muhammad Rumaihi. *Bahrain: Social and Political Change since the First World War*. London, New York: Bowker, 1976, p. xi.

¹⁷¹Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. VII part. II Geog and Stat, pp. 230-232, 236.

First, according to the Baharna viewpoint, Bahrain was occupied from pre-Islamic times by inhabitants from different ethnic groups, including the Bani Bakir, the 'Abd al-Qays, and other Arab tribes. The 'Abd al-Qays is a branch of a larger Arab tribe called the Rabi'a, and according to Baharna oral tradition, they claim blood relationship with them.¹⁷² From the pre-Islamic era, Bahrain was fully integrated into a larger territory on the western coastal strip of the Gulf known as *hajar*.¹⁷³ The word *hajar* defined the entire occupied western coastal region of the Gulf, from southern Mesopotamia to what is now the Qatar Peninsula.¹⁷⁴ This means the regions of Kuwait and al-Hasa were integrated in the *hajar* as well.

Al-Tajir and Holes, using contemporary Arabic sources, argue for the presence of many Arab tribes settling in Bahrain from before the Islamic period.¹⁷⁵ Shihab al-Din Yaqt al-Hamawi (574h/1187 - 626h/1228) and Yusuf ibn al-Mujawir (601h/1204 - 690h/1298) were two well-known scholars in the Islamic period. Al-Mujawir claims there were 360 villages, nearly all Shi'a *imāmiyya*,¹⁷⁶ while al-Hamawi asserts, all Bahrain inhabitants were *rawāfiḍ* (i.e. Shi'a). Therefore, the Shi'a community already existed in Bahrain during this period.

¹⁷²Al-Hasan. *Al-Shi'ah*, vol. I, pp. 30-31; Louër. *Transnational*, p. 13; Clive Holes. *Dialect, Culture, and Society in Eastern Arabia*, vol. I. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001, pp. xxiii-xxiv; Mahdi al-Tajir. *Language and Linguistic Origins of Bahrain: The Baḥārnah Dialect of Arabic*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1982, p. 7.

¹⁷³Others use old Bahrain *awal* instead of *hajar*.

¹⁷⁴Others believe it was the region that stretched from southern Mesopotamia to what is now Oman. Al-Tajir. *Language*, p. 15; Amal al-Zayani. *Al-Bahrayn 1783-1973: Dirasah fi Muhit al-'Ilaqat al-Duwalliyya wa Tatawir al-Ahdath fi al-Mantaqah*. Bayrut: Dar al-Tarjama wa al-Nashir, 1973, p. 32; Saldanha. 'Précis Turkish Expansion on the Arab Littoral' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵Al-Tajir. *Language*, p. 7; Holes. *Dialect*, vol. I, glossary, p. xxiii.

¹⁷⁶Shihab al-Din al-Baghdadi. *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, vol. IV. Bayrut: Dar Sadir, 1993, p. 150; Yusuf ibn al-Mujawir. *Sifat Bilad al-Yaman wa Maka wa Ba'd al-Hijaz al-Musamat Tarikh al-Mustabsir*, Mamduh Muhammad., ed. Al-Qahira: Maktabat al-Thaqafah al-Diniyya, 2010, p. 331.

However, precisely when the ancestral tribes of the Baharna (i.e. 'Abd al-Qays) became Shi'a is unclear.¹⁷⁷ The Baharna believe that the Shi'a community goes back to the Islamic period, as the 'Abd al-Qays lived there, and were adherents of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. This view is defended by al-Tajir.¹⁷⁸ Others suggest that, in the later period of Islam, mutiny by the Arab Shi'a inhabitants of Mesopotamia and Damascus against successive Muslim caliphates led them to flee to Bahrain to escape oppression, especially after the rise of the Umayyads and Abbasids.¹⁷⁹

Some argue that Shi'aism emerged in old Bahrain, with the ascendancy of the Carmathian Isma'ili Shi'a power in the area, during the 9th century. Nakash emphasises that the establishment of al-Hasa as their capital demonstrates the presence of Shi'aism in old Bahrain.¹⁸⁰ This is possibly why the P.A. in Bahrain suggested that the Baharna Shi'a was descended from the Carmathians in his report in 1916.¹⁸¹ After the fall of the Carmathians, Bahrain remained a Shi'a Isma'ili state until the 15th century though it came under the control of different successive dynasties. Indeed, during the 13th and 14th centuries, old Bahrain became a major destination of Shi'a scholars coming from the Gulf and the Arab world, as it possessed an important learning centre for the Shi'a clerical class.¹⁸² The appearance of the Ottomans, and more particularly the Safavids, on the political scene of the Gulf between the 16th and 17th centuries, however, reduced the importance of old Bahrain as a religious educational centre for Shi'a doctrine as a result of the newly emerging Shi'a state in Iran. Its

¹⁷⁷Al-Tajir. *Language*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 33-34.

¹⁷⁹Nakash. *Reaching for Power*, p. 22; Yusuf Sa'ada. *Al-Quwa al-Siyasiyya fi Kut al-Ihsa' wa Dawruha fi Tashkil al-Ahdath fi Mantaqat al-Khalij* (n.p.): al-Majmu'a al-Duwaliyya, 1997, pp. 55-60; Rumaihi. *Bahrain*, p. 21; Holes. *Dialect*, vol. I, glossary, p. xxvi.

¹⁸⁰Nakash. *Reaching for Power*, p. 22.

¹⁸¹From P.A. Bh to P. Cox, P.R. PG, 2 Mar 1916, pp. 261-262. *IOR R/15/2/32*.

¹⁸²Fuller and Francke. *The Arab Shi'a*, p. 121.

decline was hastened at that time by the growing power in the region of the Portuguese and Omanis, as well as the Safavids. In the meantime, al-Hasa was conquered by the Ottomans. Such a political change not only made Iran the new hope for Shi'a scholars, but also had an impact on Baharna Shi'a doctrine. The Baharna inhabitants adopted Twelve Shi'aism instead of Isma'ili Shi'aism.¹⁸³ Most of the population of Bahrain and al-Hasa continued to follow the Shi'a faith until the last quarter of 18th century, when both regions fell under the al-Khalifa and al-Sa'ud dynasties. Thus, the Arab Shi'a of Bahrain and al-Hasa until today claim long ancestral settlement in old Bahrain based on the fact that they consider themselves the native people (*al-sukkān al-aşliyyīn*) of the area. Their argument is based on the historical perspective, and also on a similarity between their dialect and the early dialects of old eastern Arabia. It is also based upon the blood relationship and shared history of the Arab Shi'a of Bahrain and al-Hasa since the early history of the region (i.e. in old Bahrain).¹⁸⁴ However, Juan Cole's argument about the Baharna, and their conversion from Isma'ili Shi'aism to Twelve Shi'aism, is refuted by Baharna scholars, such as Hussayn al-Jamri and 'Adnan al-'Awami. Using contemporary sources and archeological evidence, both argue that the presence of the Baharna Shi'a goes back earlier than the Carmathians, based on the existence of an ancient Shi'a inscription on *masjid al-khamis* used in research by Diez in 1925, Kalus in 1990 and Frifelt in 2001.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³Louër. *Transnational*, pp.14-16; Nakash. *Reaching for Power*, p. 22; Juan Cole. *Scared Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*. London: I B Tauris, 2002, pp. 31-32.

¹⁸⁴Al-Ttajir. *Language*, p. 18, (Arabic version).

¹⁸⁵For more details on their refutations of Cole, consult Hussayn Muhammad. *Masjid al-Khamis: Al-Hawza al-Ula wa Awal Mismar fi Na'sh al-Qaramita*. Manama: Dar al-Wasat, 2010, pp. 7-21; 'Adnan al-'Awami. *Al-Imbaraturiyat wa al-Shi'a al-Imamiyya: Al-Waqi' wa al-Iftirad*, in *al-Waha*, vol. II, Rabi' al-Thani, 1416h, pp. 122-149.

Finally, another interpretation asserts that Shi‘aism in old Bahrain emerged with the rise of Safavid Iran in the Persian Gulf. This hypothesis means that the ancestors of the Baharna converted to Shi‘aism four hundred years ago, when the Safavid Shi‘a controlled Bahrain.¹⁸⁶ Many other accounts suggest that the Baharnas’ ancestors were either Iranian or semi-Iranian, but without providing evidence.¹⁸⁷ However, regardless of the accuracy of the various theories on the origins of Baharna, there is no doubt as to the existence of the Baharna community at least prior to the arrival of al-Khalifa in the 1783, according to the historical literature on Bahrain, and the contemporary British reports that discussed the internal condition of Bahrain during the first half of the 19th century.¹⁸⁸

The Arrival of the al-Khalifa and the Precipitant Factors of the Early Baharna Migrations

Prior to the arrival of the al-Khalifa in 1783, Bahrain was subject to the spheres of influence of different regional and international powers. From the early 16th century, the Portuguese intermittently occupied Bahrain. The Safavids were able to expel the Portuguese and established a foothold in 1602. After the collapse of the Safavid dynasty in 1717, Bahrain came under the influence of the Arab al-Huwala tribe, Jababirah of Tahiri, and later on under the control of the Arab tribal chief Nasir al-Madhkur, who ruled Bahrain from Bushehr on

¹⁸⁶Holes. *Dialect*, vol. I, glossary, p. xxvi.

¹⁸⁷Rumaihi asserts in his study on Bahrain that a possible accurate interpretation of the ethnology of Baharna is to say that they are Arab, as their dialect is similar to the dialect that was spoken by the Arab residents of Mesopotamia. Rumaihi. *Bahrain*, pp. 25-26; al-Tajir. *Language*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸Nelida Fuccaro. *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 16; Muhammad ibn Hamad. *Al-Tuhfa al-Nabhaniyya fi Tarikh al-Jazira al-Arabiyya*. Altab‘a. II. Bayrut: Dar Ihya’ al-‘Ulum, 1999, p. 85. On the British view, see the section on the early Shi‘a settlement in Kuwait in this chapter.

behalf of the Iranian Shah. The sixty-six years of Arab tribal control plunged Bahrain into chaos and damaged many villages.¹⁸⁹ The European traveler Neibuhr wrote in 1765 that:

‘Bahrein is said at one time to have contained 365 towns and villages; but at present there is only one fortified town on the island, Awal (Bahrein), and not more than forty or fifty villages on the neighbouring islets.’¹⁹⁰

The year 1783 did not put an end to the troubles of Bahrain as it passed into the hands of the Arab al-‘Utub of the al-Khalifa. Along with the al-Sabah, al-Sa‘ud, and al-Jalahma families, the al-Khalifa share the same genealogical origins, as they are descendants of the ‘Anaiza Arab, a sub-division tribe of the al-‘Utub. Their original home, from which they migrated during the late 18th century, partly due to drought, and partly to engage in pearl fishing and trade, was al-Haddar of al-Aflaj in Najd. Some al-Khalifa had already settled in Kuwait earlier in the 18th century. Others claim that their migration from Kuwait was due to tribal conflict.¹⁹¹ After leaving Kuwait, the al-Khalifa first tried to settle in Bahrain but they were prevented from staying there by Nasir al-Madhkur, who was in control at the time. After various attempts to settle elsewhere, the al-Khalifa invaded Bahrain in 1783.¹⁹² Their leader Ahmad al-Fatih (the conqueror), son of Muhammad ibn Khalifa, is considered the first official ruler of the al-Khalifa dynasty over Bahrain, which ruled thereafter.¹⁹³

For many Sunnis, the capture of Bahrain by the al-Khalifa in 1783 is considered to be the commencement of the modern history of Bahrain, while for many Baharna it was the year

¹⁸⁹Al-Tajir. *Language*, p. 30; Fuccaro. *Histories of City*, p. 17, 24; ibn Hamad. *Al-Tuhfa*, pp. 74-79.

¹⁹⁰Taylor. ‘Extracts from Brief Notes’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 26.

¹⁹¹‘Abdullah al-Khalifa and ‘Ali Aba Hussayn. *Tarikh al-Khlaifa fi al-Bahrayn*. al-Juz’ a. II. Bahrain: Markaz al-Watha’iq al-Tarikhiyya, 2005, pp. 18-19.

¹⁹²Ahmad Abu Hakima. *The Modern History of Kuwait 1750-1965*. London: Luzac & Co, 1983, pp. 32-33; Francis Warden. ‘Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee’ in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, pp. 36-65; ibn Hamad. *Al-Tuhfa*, pp. 85-87.

¹⁹³Ibn Hamad attributes the cause of the al-Khalifa occupation of Bahrain to maltreatment of the Shi’a of Bahrain toward the Sunni servants of the al-Khalifa. For the full story, see ibn Hamad. *Al-Tuhfa*, pp. 85-87.

that they began their migrations, which expanded in the following century. Among the Baharna, it has been said that some families, including ibn Rajab, cooperated with the al-Khalifa from their conquest, but there is no evidence of this.¹⁹⁴ The animosity amongst the Baharna villages over who would be the most powerful village in the Baharna community, in addition to the regional identities of the Baharna, and the local dialects which distinguish them, for example Baharna Sitrawi from Baharna Jid Hafsi, or the Baharna Mahuzi from Baharna Samahiji, have created divisions within the Baharna community.¹⁹⁵

After their settlement, the al-Khalifa had to deal with inter-dynastic feuds and regional threats, and imposed various taxes on the Baharna group alone. These two political and economic factors were the major reasons behind Baharna migration to other areas of the Gulf, including Kuwait. From the death of Ahmad al-Fatih in 1795 to the beginning of the reign of ‘Isa ibn ‘Ali (known as ‘Isa *al-kabīr*) in 1869, Bahrain witnessed political strife and civil war among members of the al-Khalifa family, and continuous threats and attempts to occupy Bahrain by local Arab chiefs (i.e. Rahma ibn Jabir al-Jalahma and Ibrahim ibn al-Ofisan), the Omani ruler Sultan Ahmad, the new Wahhabi-Sa‘udi power, and the Iranian Shah.¹⁹⁶ Indeed in 1800 the Omani ruler, Sultan Ahmad, captured Bahrain and defeated the ruler of Bahrain, Salman al-Khalifa (1795-1821). The family of the al-Khalifa were forced to leave for Zubarah, but they were able to return and eject the Omanis with the assistance of the Wahhabi-Sa‘udi power in 1801. Seeking such assistance put Bahrain under the yoke of Wahhabi-Sa‘udi dominion until 1811. From that time, Bahrain not only faced constant abortive occupations by the Omanis in 1816, 1820, 1822, and 1828, and occasional attempts

¹⁹⁴ ‘Isa Amin, interviewed by the author, 21 Mar. 2015, Bh; Muhammad al-Salman and Hussayn al-Jamri, interviewed by the author, 17 Jan. 2015, Bh.

¹⁹⁵ Wissam al-Sab‘ and Sadiq al-Jamri, interviewed by the author, 16 Jan. 2015, Bh.

¹⁹⁶ Fuad Khuri. *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 26.

by the Wahhabi-Sa'udi alliance, but also successive rulers were intermittently obliged to pay annual tributes to either or both regional powers.¹⁹⁷ This compelled many Baharna to migrate to safer areas like Muhammerah, Basrah, and other areas of the Gulf, where the Wahhabis lacked influence.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, Holes argues that the early Baharna migrations from Bahrain to other areas of the Gulf took place mainly during the period of political strife in Bahrain. In addition, harmony among the al-Khalifa was broken when an inter-dynastic feud of family members began during the reign of Salman ibn Ahmad (1795-1821), the second ruler of Bahrain, and his brother 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad (1821-1842). As a result, Bahrain, up until 1869, witnessed serious social conflict and economic destruction at the hands of members of the al-Khalifa family due to power struggles between the al-Salman party and al-'Abdullah branch of al-Khalifa. For instance, the 1842-1843 civil war between 'Abdullah Ahmad al-Khalifa and Muhammad al-Khalifa resulted in the migration of some of Manamah's merchants to Kuwait.¹⁹⁹ The antagonism between the two parties did not end until direct interference by the British, who punished the troublemakers of the al-Khalifa, as the latter had threatened Gulf security by breaking the peace treaty. The British assigned 'Isa ibn 'Ali (1869-1923) as official ruler of Bahrain in 1869.²⁰⁰

The chaotic situation in Bahrain, and the internal dissensions of the al-Khalifa prior to 'Isa's reign, contributed to the decrease in population of Bahrain, as Kemball and Palgrave indicated in their reports in 1854 and 1863 respectively, and as Khuri also observes, as a

¹⁹⁷See Saldanha. 'Précis of Bahrain Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. IV, pp. 1-24; ibn Hamad. *Al-Tuhfa*, pp. 89-135; Khuri. *Tribe*, pp. 29-33.

¹⁹⁸Al-Tajir. *Language*, p. 31.

¹⁹⁹Fuccaro. 'Mapping' in Madawi Al-Rasheed. ed., *Transnational Connections*, p. 43.

²⁰⁰Palgrave indicates in his diary in 1863 that hundreds of Baharna during that time emigrated sometimes daily to other Gulf ports due to the detrimental conditions in their own land. William Palgrave. *Narrative of A Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)*, vol. II. London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co, 1865, p. 216; Khuri. *Tribe*, pp. 32-33.

result of Baharna migrations to settle in other areas in the Gulf.²⁰¹ Thus, it is not surprising that in addition to Muhammerah and Lingah, Kuwait was also a major destination during the early first half of the 19th century, as Kemball has noted.²⁰²

Besides political disturbances, the al-Khalifa's extortive economic administrative policy, and social discrimination towards the Baharna, contributed to pushing many to migrate to Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf during the first half of the 19th century. Before the arrival of the al-Khalifa, the Baharna possessed agricultural lands, such as palm groves, and still had control over palm cultivation. Upon the arrival of the al-Khalifa, the original landowners (i.e. the Baharna) were obliged to become tenant-cultivators for al-Khalifa family members and other Arab Sunnis, as al-Tajir asserts. The al-Khalifa began to confiscate the lands and properties of the Baharna for themselves and their supporters as a part of the 'feudal state system' as Khuri notes.²⁰³ Based on this new 'political economic system', the al-Khalifa were able to strengthen their authority in the region by dividing the island into several small states that were controlled by many Sheikhs of the al-Khalifa, for tax collection, especially from the Shi'a.²⁰⁴ The ruler transferred large amounts of Baharna property as a gift to the al-Khalifa. Based on the concept of the 'property of conquerors' as al-Rumaihi puts it, other properties of the Baharna were confiscated, especially from those who fled from fear of persecution.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, many Baharna were subject to forced labour (*sukhra*) for the al-Khalifa without payment. Even those Shi'a merchants who supported the al-Khalifa conquest, and who were allowed to retain their properties, found the new administrative tax

²⁰¹Khuri. *Tribe*, p. 30.

²⁰²See section on the early Shi'a settlement in Kuwait in Chapter Three.

²⁰³Mahdi Al-Tajir. *Bahrain 1920-1945: Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration*. London; New York: Croom Helm. 1987, p.15; Khuri. *Tribe*, p. 35; al-Hasan. *Al-Shi'a*, vol. II, pp. 257-58.

²⁰⁴Khuri. *Tribe*, p. 28.

²⁰⁵Rumaihi. *Bahrain*, p. 50; 'ARPGPR for 1924' in *TPGAR*, vol. VIII, p. 60.

system heavy. For example, those Baharna who possessed agricultural lands had to pay poll tax and water tax irrespective of the volume of yield, and without appreciation of the fluctuation of the weather that could negatively affect the yield. These two types of taxes were only imposed on the Baharna with the excuse that they were not part of a military group, even though they had not been invited to be so. At the same time these two taxes were neither standardised nor fixed, as Khuri and Rumaihi indicate. If they failed to pay, their properties were confiscated and transferred to the state land administration, which was under the control of either the al-Khalifa family members or their supporters. According to oral history, the al-Khalifa relied on some Baharna families who were considered allied to the rulership to help practice sectarianism on their co-religionists, especially those who worked in agriculture and seafaring activities, in exchange for social and economic benefits and privileges. They assigned a position called *al-jākhḍa* to certain villages to collect taxes for the al-Khalifa. These Baharna allies also spied for the al-Khalifa with updates on who had successfully increased his income and could pay higher taxes.²⁰⁶ That is why internal migrations by the Baharna took place before a final decision to migrate to any other Gulf state. To escape maltreatment and heavy taxes they moved to other villages where they could find a local administration which was less oppressive, like the al-Wida' i family, who migrated during the last decade of the 20th century to Basra after internal migration from Jid Hafs to Jid al-Haj.²⁰⁷

This socio-economic administrative policy towards the Baharna was the major reason for the decline in the standard of living of Shi'a peasantry in Bahrain from 1783. Indeed, such a decline became worse in the reign of 'Isa ibn 'Ali (1869-1923) and his son Hamad (1923-

²⁰⁶Wissam al-Sab' and Sadiq al-Jamri, interviewed by the author, 16 Jan. 2015, Bh.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

1942) as they confiscated date-gardens and sold plots of land.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the agreement between a landlord and a tenant on rent contracts for land during the 19th century was usually verbal, with the result that many landlords' promises were broken, especially towards the Baharna, who were powerless cultivators, whilst most landlords were either al-Khalifa or allied to them. In addition, the al-Khalifa and their allies were also representatives of the state land administration.²⁰⁹ Khuri believes that such regulations by the al-Khalifa had nothing to do with sectarian discrimination but were merely part of the 'feudal estate system' which demanded maximisation of economic benefit. Thus, according to him, it was logical to impose such oppressive rules on the Baharna, especially '[i]n the absence of state structures with standardised and centralised authority systems, tribal groupings, and alliances between those who had the power to control the government decision-making, and thus natural resources, emerged as the logical forms of social organisation'.²¹⁰

It can be deduced that the reason why many Baharna were dissatisfied with the al-Khalifa control over Bahrain, and historically considered them as 'invaders' (*ghuzāt*) or 'new settlers' (*al-sukkān al-judud*), was not only because the former had settled earlier than the latter, but also because the latter took the region by sword and initiated a political-economic system that oppressed the Baharna. The discrimination practiced by the al-Khalifa against the Baharna is indeed the foremost reason for the historical legacy of antagonism between both parties, as it undermined the social, political, and even economic status of the Baharna.

²⁰⁸Rumaihi. *Bahrain*, p. 50; 'ARPGPR for 1924' in *TPGAR*, vol. VIII, p. 60.

²⁰⁹Khuri. *Tribe*, p. 46.

²¹⁰*Ibid*, p. 67.

The Economy and Population of Bahrain

From its early history to the discovery of oil in the third decade of the 20th century, modest and seasonal jobs, such as pearl fishing and agriculture, were the major economic resources for Bahrain's population. The possession of a thriving port for transit trade, fertile soil, and fresh water in the north, made Bahrain the commercially and agriculturally richest region on the western side of the Persian Gulf. As in Kuwait, the exchange of a variety of commodities, such as fish, pearls, and dates, between the Gulf ports or with the Indian Ocean area, was another major source of income for those in the seafaring industry. Various domestic traditional industries depending on handicrafts, such as shipbuilding, pottery, tailoring, and weaving were also revenue for some of the population of Bahrain. In Bahraini society, particular jobs were dominated by certain groups of people. For example, while the majority involved in seafaring activities (pearling and fishing) were Arab Sunnis, the Baharna dominated the agricultural and husbandry sectors. Nevertheless, like their Sunni counterparts, some Baharna formed part of the pearling industry (e.g. divers and shipmasters) and the rich among them lived on trade.²¹¹ In the city, the Baharna controlled only about two thirds of the bazaars in Bahrain. After the discovery of oil, many of the rural Baharna were employed in the oil industry but their opportunities in other governmental departments were fewer than those of their Arab Sunni counterparts.²¹²

In the absence of an official census there is no way to provide an accurate picture of the demographic growth of Bahrain's population prior to the first government census in 1941. Estimations made in travelogues, and by British officials, are the only sources on Bahrain's

²¹¹Lorimer provided a list of prominent Baharna rich families. Lorimer, *Gaz. of PG*, vol. II Geog and Stat, p. 208.

²¹²From I.A. P.R. Bh to P.R. Bsh, no, 29-c, 7 Feb 1922, p. 62. *IOR R/15/2/83*; also see *IOR R/15/2/176*, p. 326.

demography between the mid-19th century and 1938.²¹³ For instance, Robert Taylor, in his report dated 1818, estimates the overall population of Bahrain as 23,600 souls including 10,000 Arab Shi'a (Baharna) and 11,600 Arab Sunni, including the al-Khalifa and their allies, and 2,000 slaves.²¹⁴ In 1863, William Palgrave, possibly exaggerating, gives 70,000 souls for Bahrain's population, whilst Grattare Geary in 1878 gives the lower number of 50,000 souls for the overall population of Bahrain, without indicating their religious faith.²¹⁵ From the abovementioned estimations, regardless of their accuracy, it can be deduced that the Baharna constituted the majority of the inhabitants from the arrival of the al-Khalifa on the basis of three factors. First, according to the British official reports of the 19th century and the historical literature of Bahrain, the Baharna were the aboriginal inhabitants of the region. Second, in 1818, according to Taylor's report, the Baharna formed 10,000 out of a population of 23,600, without including the numbers of those who had migrated (which we do not know) since the political regime had changed. Third, based on British reports in the following century, the Baharna were the largest group in Bahrain's population, even though the al-Khalifa ruler continued to provide political citizenship (*al-tajnīs al-siyāsī*) to non-Bahraini Sunni or 'outsiders' (in the view of Baharna) in order to exceed the number of the Baharna.

Due to its strategic location as a trade emporium in the Gulf zone, it is not surprising that Bahrain contained a multi-ethnic population with diverse religious backgrounds. However, the two major groups of Muslim inhabitants in Bahrain were Arabs and 'Ajam. Both groups included Shi'a and Sunnis. The first section of Arab inhabitants was the Baharna, a term used to designate exclusively the Shi'a native Arabs. Unlike its use in Kuwait, the term Baharna

²¹³Rumaihi. *Bahrain*, pp. 22-25.

²¹⁴Taylor. 'Extracts from Brief Notes' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 23.

²¹⁵Palgrave. *Narrative of A Year's Journey*, p. 211; Grattan Geary. *Through Asiatic Turkey: Narrative of a Journey from Bombay to the Bosphorus*, vol. I. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1878, p. 41.

in Bahrain is a synonym for the native Arab Shi‘a only, whilst in Kuwait it is term for only Shi‘a families who migrated from Bahrain. In Bahrain, the Baharna consider themselves the natives of Bahrain (*ahl al-baḥrayn*), or the real inhabitants (*al-sukkān al-aṣliyyīn*). They also call themselves (*halaylī*), which means the landowners.²¹⁶

The tribal confederation of al-‘Utub including the ruling house, the al-Khalifa, other Najdis and Qatari families, and the Bedouins, are Arab Sunnis. Like the Baharna, they consider themselves to be (*al-sukkān al-aṣliyyīn*) on the basis of the arrival of the al-Khalifa. Arab al-Huwala, who shifted their dwelling to Bahrain after a long period of settlement in southwestern Iranian villages, towns, and ports, also formed part of the non-tribal Arab Sunni group in Bahrain.²¹⁷ ‘Ajam and Baluchis, both Shi‘a and Sunni, who were also emigrants from the same place, formed part of the population from the early 19th century. At the beginning of their settlement the ‘Ajam lived east of the port in districts called Kanu and Fadhil, which were called the ‘Ajam quarter (*fīrīj al-‘ajam*). However, many of them had moved by the end of the 19th and first quarter of the 20th centuries to new districts located west of Manamah town, namely Mukharaqa, Mushbir, Laki, and Bu Sirra. They constituted 1,550 souls of the overall population of Bahrain in the early 20th century, according to Lorimer.²¹⁸ Their economic and religious roles were significant, both for Bahraini society and for the Shi‘a community itself. The ‘Ajam were divided into two social groups, the merchant elite, who lived on trade by using the local and regional socio-economic networks

²¹⁶The Baharna claim that the word *halayli* derived from *halal* was given to them by the Sunni to legitimise their violations by their blood, money and honour. ‘Ali al-‘Aradi, interviewed by the author, 19 Jan 2015, Bh. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. VII part. II Geog and Stat, p. 207; Mayy Al-Khalifa. *Muhammad ibn Khalifa 1813-1890: Al-Ustura wa al-Tarikh al-Muwazi*. Altab‘a. I. Bayrut: Dar al-Jadid, 1996, p. 125; Holes. *Dialect*, vol. I, glossary, p. xxiii.

²¹⁷Holes. *Dialect*, pp. xxvii-xxviii; Al-Khalifa, *Muhammad ibn Khalifa*, pp. 125-126.

²¹⁸Fuccaro. ‘Mapping’ in Madawi Al-Rasheed. ed., *Transnational Connections*, p. 50.

connected with their original homeland and elsewhere in the Gulf, such as the 'Ajam families, Saffar, Sharif, Shirazi, Kazaruni, and Bushehri; and poor labourers who worked in humble jobs, like port coolies and cultivators, artisans, builders and bakers.²¹⁹ Sunni Baluchis, on the other hand, were the major guards *fidāwīyya* of the house of al-Khalifa. Other foreigners and non-Muslims had also settled in Bahrain, such as Jews and Indian Banians who had control over the local customs of Manamah's port between the late 19th century and the 1920s. Though the main language of the Arab Shi'a and Sunnis in Bahrain was Arabic, Farsi was also spoken by the 'Ajam community. The main religion in Bahrain was Sunni and Shi'a Islam but each community had their own divisions.

The Geography of al-Hasa

The term eastern Arabian Peninsula is used historically as a synonym for the whole province of al-Hasa including its capital Hufuf, and all villages and towns belonging to its dominion. It was also called *sanjak of al-Hasa* (province of al-Hasa) when it was under Ottoman sovereignty (1871-1913). The province of al-Hasa, similar to southwestern Iran, is located alongside the Persian Gulf littoral, but on the western side. From its northern part to the south al-Hasa extends roughly about thirty-five miles and its breadth is about twenty miles. In general, the climate of al-Hasa is similar to Kuwait, and cooler and drier than Bahrain. However, according to Palgrave and Lorimer, it was not favourable to physical activities or to health.²²⁰ Though al-Hasa in terms of size is small compared to the other areas

²¹⁹For more details on the political, social, and economic roles of the 'Ajam merchants and notables in Bahrain, consult Fuccaro. 'Mapping' in Madawi Al-Rasheed. ed., *Transnational Connections*, pp. 47-51; James Onley. 'Transnational Merchants' in Madawi Al-Rasheed. ed., *Transnational Connections*, pp. 63-79.

²²⁰Lorimer. *Gaz. of PG*, vol. II part. VIII Geog and Stat, pp. 642, 644; Palgrave. *Narrative*, vol. II, p. 157.

discussed, it is composed throughout of towns and villages, and of a variety of natural topographies such as mountains, plateaus, green plains, oases, valleys, and hills. Besides the fertility of many of its town areas, such as Hufuf, Mubarraz and Qatif, and the availability of spring water, the geographically strategic location of al-Hasa was significant in comparison with the rest of Arabian Peninsula areas because it helped its population to trade by two routes, by sea and by land. The province of al-Hasa was the sole zone of the Arabian Peninsula that had access to the sea trade in the Persian Gulf, from the eastern side through its two ports Ojair (al-'Uqayr) and Qatif. Even though these two ports were less significant compared to Kuwait, Bahrain and the southwestern Iranian ports, they served as gateways for importing different merchandise to the interior of Arabia (i.e. Najd). Thus, unsurprisingly, al-Hasa, throughout its modern history, was a target for regional powers and Bedouin tribes due to its natural resources and strategic location.

Al-Hasa between the Early Wahhabi-Sa'udi Power and the Ottoman Dominion

In comparison to the contemporary records that deal with southwestern Iran, Kuwait, and Bahrain for this period, there are only a handful of primary documents that discuss the history of the province of al-Hasa from 1795, the first time that Wahhabi-Sa'udi occupied the region. One possible interpretation for such a limitation is that even though the province of al-Hasa was separated from that main body of the Arabian Peninsula, the modern history of the province of al-Hasa was connected with events there; first, the history of the rise of the Wahhabi-Sa'udi power over the Arabian Peninsula, then the revival of Ottoman influence in the Gulf region following their conquest of al-Hasa province in 1871, and finally, the full integration of al-Hasa province into the third Sa'udi State in 1913. As a result, the primary records that deal with the history of the province of al-Hasa were mostly written by either the

Ottomans or by a few Wahhabi scholars as a part of the overall history of the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, little attention was given in particular to the modern history of the province of al-Hasa itself, because it was perceived as historically integrated with the rest of the Arabian Peninsula zone; the economic artery of the whole region.

Another reason is that the region of Najd and its peripheries came under British influence for a short time from 1915 to 1928. This means that, unlike southwestern Iran, Kuwait, and Bahrain, there was no British P.A. in the Arabian Peninsula, including al-Hasa province, either during the 19th or the 20th centuries, who could record the internal affairs of the al-Hasa region. Nevertheless, especially during the 20th century, the P.A. of either Bahrain or Kuwait produced daily and monthly reports that covered major socio-political incidents that occurred in the Arabian Peninsula, including al-Hasa. Some surviving works written by travellers, British officials, such as Lorimer and Saldanha, and some secondary sources which have used the Ottoman records, such as Anscombe and al-Quraini, give us a picture of the history of the province of al-Hasa from its capture by the Wahhabi-Sa'udi power in 1795.

A close examination of the modern history of al-Hasa province, starting from the first Wahhabi-Sa'udi occupation in 1795 to the date when ibn Sa'ud occupied al-Hasa in 1913, demonstrates that the province of al-Hasa was the region amongst the Arab Sheikdoms that witnessed the most political disturbances, tribal raids, and sectarian discrimination against Shi'a people. The Wahhabi-Sa'udi alliance and the Ottomans exchanged control over al-Hasa province intermittently. The former ruled al-Hasa four times, 1795-1818, 1830-1838, 1843-1871 and 1913 to the present, whilst the latter, actually as opposed to nominally, ruled briefly during the withdrawal of the Wahhabi-Sa'udi alliance. In its last phase in the Gulf region and before its power totally vanished after the First World War, the Ottomans also ruled al-Hasa

but the period was longer (1871-1913).²²¹ Such political fluctuations combined with the lack of stability in the region put social pressure on the Shi'a of al-Hasa, especially during the Wahhabi-Sa'udi period, and subjected them to different kinds of extortion. The best example is from Major Colebrook's report of al-Qatif, one major town of al-Hasa, in 1820:

'The population of Katif has been estimated at 25,000, but the chief part of them [is] connected with the *Bahreinese*, an unwarlike race of *Sheas*, who have been for some generations in subjection to their more martial neighbours. They pay a tax called *Jihad*, the price of exemption from military service.'²²²

The report shows not only that the Shi'a were the native inhabitants of the province of al-Hasa for generations, but also the extortion practiced by the Wahhabi-Sa'udi under the rubric of religious doctrine. Thus, it is not surprising, due to the Wahhabi-Sa'udi policy, many native Shi'a escaped from their towns and villages to elsewhere in the Gulf region, as Palgrave indicated in his description in 1862:

'When Wahhabeeism first appeared in Nejed, its earliest and most farsighted opponents were, as we have already noticed, the rulers of the Eastern coast. But unable long to cope with the superior numbers and military skill, they were at last vanquished, and those of the native chiefs who escaped the sword of Ebn-Sa'ood sought a refuge, some in Persia, some in the desert adjoining Koweyt.'²²³

In addition, Palgrave reported in 1862 that the population of Hufuf, the chief town of the province of al-Hasa, where the Shi'a constituted the majority, had decreased during the most recent generation from 30,000 to 23,000 souls. That meant many of the inhabitants preferred to leave due to Wahhabi-Sa'udi policy.²²⁴ The sectarian discrimination of the new Wahhabi-Sa'udi regime toward the Shi'a of the province of al-Hasa was not the only cause for their migration. Constant tribal raids by al-Murrah, 'Ajman, and Bani Hajar on the Hassawiyya's

²²¹Fredrick Anscombe. *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar*. New York: Columbia University, 1977, p. 14.

²²²Saldanha. 'Précis Turkish Expansion on the Arab Littoral' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 2.

²²³Palgrave. *Narrative*, vol. II, p. 147.

²²⁴*Ibid.*, p.149.

date orchards and properties, and the plundering of caravan trade routes, also played a role in shaking the security of the region, which pushed many Shi'a out of their homes.

The Economy and Population of al-Hasa

Unlike Kuwait, and similar to southwestern Iran and Bahrain, the province of al-Hasa was economically self-sufficient. Fishing and pearling, rudimentary handicrafts and trade, agriculture, which prevailed mainly in al-Hasa, Qatif and Hufuf towns, and livestock in the surrounding desert, were the foremost means of survival. Though different regions of the province produced certain crops, dates, especially *khalāṣ*, were the chief produce of the region. Arab Gulf residents considered *khalāṣ* dates superior to those cultivated elsewhere. It is estimated that during the first part of the 20th century, the whole region of al-Hasa produced 51,000 tons annually, which were exported to its peripheral towns, such as Jiddah and Najd, and other Gulf regions including Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar. With the availability of abundant fresh water, other crops, such as rice, wheat, barley, and a variety of vegetables and roots, such as radish, onion, and garlic, and fruit trees (fig, pomegranate, peach, and apricot) were also cultivated in the region. Animals, including sheep, camels, donkeys, and horses, which were mostly in the custody of Bedouin, were used extensively in agricultural tasks and transportation. They were also sold with other local merchandise to other Gulf regions, including Kuwait and Bahrain, as a part of an exchange in trade.²²⁵ Different domestic handicrafts (*hiraf*), such as cloth making *ʿabā'a*, and pottery, as well as the products of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and other types of workshops, were important in the province of al-Hasa. Beside cultivation, these workshops were mostly controlled by the native

²²⁵Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II part. VIII Geog and Stat, pp. 656-657.

Hassawiyya (i.e. Shi'a) as Sulayman al-Najdi has indicated.²²⁶ The Arab al-Huwala, and to a lesser extent Hassawiyya, were also involved in fishing and pearling. All these features, including natural resources, the availability of spring water, and a variety of crops associated with animal husbandry, explain why the province of al-Hasa was called the Oasis of al-Hasa (*wahat al-ihsa*).

There is no official census from this date to give the accurate percentage for either the Shi'a community in al-Hasa province or for the overall population in general. The population of al-Hasa, similar to southwestern Iran, was divided into settled inhabitants, such as the Arab Shi'a Hassawiyya, the Arab Sunni al-Huwala and the Bani Khalid, and nomadic Sunni Bedouins, namely the 'Ajman, Bani Hajar, and al-Murrah. Other tribes, such as the 'Awazim and Rishayda from Kuwait and Duwasir, and the Mutair, Qahtan and 'Utayba from Najd wandered and camped on the border of the province looking after their cattle. A few Jewish, and some Hindu traders also settled for a while in the region, more particularly in Qatif town.²²⁷ During the early part of the 20th century, Lorimer suggested the figure of 101,000 for the settled inhabitants, whilst he estimated 57,000 for the nomadic population of the entire province. He also indicated that the Hassawiyya composed the entire population of Qatif and at the same time were in general the majority (two thirds) of the overall population of the al-Hasa province during the early 20th century.²²⁸ While each group of Arab Shi'a Hassawiyya

²²⁶Lorimer points out that many of those local people who controlled these workshops migrated to other places in the Gulf region. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II part. VIII Geog and Stat, p. 666; Sulayman al-Najdi. *Tuhfat al-Alba'a fi Tarikh al-Ihsa*. Altab'a II. Bayrut: Dar al-'Arabiyya Lilmausu'at, 2002, pp. 91-92.

²²⁷Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II part. VIII Geog and Stat, pp. 664-665; Muhammad Nakhla. *Tarikh al-Ihsa* (1818-1913). Kuwayt: Dhat al-Salasil, 1980, p. 20.

²²⁸Instead of mentioning Hassawiyya, Lorimer indicates that the Baharna were the majority of the population of the region. As a result, it is possible to assume that he meant the local Shi'a population because both groups (Hassawiyya and Baharna) were Shi'a believers. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II part. VIII, Geog and Stat, p. 665; Nakhla. *Tarikh al-Ihsa*, p.

and Arab Sunni dominated certain towns and villages, in some areas they cohabited as well. For instance, the Shi'a families dominated villages and towns, such as Hufuf, Jubayl, 'Awamiyya, and many others, whereas the Sunni group dominated towns and villages like Fudul, 'Ayun, and 'Aqar. However, both sectors formed similar percentages of towns and villages like Bab al-Jafir, Markaz, and Shaiq.²²⁹ The nomadic Bedouins also were spread out in different zones of the region. For example, the Bani Khalid settled in the northern part, al-Murrah, with the Bani Hajar in the south, and 'Ajman between them in the interior.²³⁰

The main religious denominations in al-Hasa province were Sunni *hanbali* for the Arab Sunni and Shi'a *shaykhi* Islam for the Hassawiyya. Unlike southwestern Iran, Kuwait and Bahrain, where both Farsi and Arabic languages were common, it seems that Arabic was the only language spoken among the inhabitants of the region. However, it should be borne in mind, that although the local Hassawiyya were historically interconnected with Bahrain Island, as both regions had been integrated into one region called *hajar* during the Islamic era, and both groups (i.e. Hassawiyya and Baharna) were linked to each other by blood up until recent times, the Hassawiyya of al-Hasa province did not identify themselves as Baharna, but rather, according to Louër, have proudly separated their identity from the Baharna and designated themselves as Hassawiyya or Qatifiyya, according to the towns they belonged to, whilst the Arab Shi'a of Bahrain still identify themselves as a Baharna.²³¹ It should also be emphasised here that the term Hassawiyya in Kuwait, which is still used by the Shi'a communities, also differs in meaning from its usage by the native Hassawiyya in

20; Hafiz Wahba. *Jazirat al- 'Arab fi al-Qrn al- 'Ishrin*. Altab'a III. Al-Qahira: Dar al-Afaq al- 'Arabiyya, 1955, p. 70.

²²⁹Lorimer. *Gaz. of PG*, vol. II part. VIII Geog and Stat, pp. 645-651; Al-Hasan. *Al-Shi'a*, vol. I, pp. 37-54.

²³⁰Lorimer. *Gaz. of PG*, vol. II part. VIII, Geog and Stat, p. 665.

²³¹Louër. *Transnational*, p. 30.

al-Hasa. In Kuwait this term refers exclusively to the Hassawiyya community, or those Shi'a families whose forefathers migrated from al-Hasa province to Kuwait, whilst in al-Hasa province it is used to mean all the native Shi'a families of the al-Hasa town.

Conclusion

The Gulf region entered a new phase at the time of the establishment of great power rivalries in the area, from the 1500s onward. These rivalries were associated with regional power conflicts and contributed to the population movement of the Gulf region. Many people fled from their homelands, including the Shi'a, due to the changes that occurred to the political regimes in their homelands, mainly in al-Hasa and Bahrain. The appearance of the Sa'udi-Wahhabi movement in the mid-18th century, and the fall of Bahrain under the al-Khalifa sovereignty, caused many of them to choose new residences elsewhere in the Gulf, including Kuwait. By that time the al-Sabah were already a well-established ruling dynasty in Kuwait and their territory was untouched by the sectarian conflicts being experienced elsewhere. This, like Basra, al-Hasa, Bahrain, and southwestern Iran, was partly the result of a lack of political recognition and economic significance. The trade between Kuwait and southwestern Iranian ports also played role in the reconstruction of the Iranian population, searching for a better life away from internal political strife and economic instability, especially for Iranian merchants and entrepreneurs, who sought in Kuwait a new opportunity to establish businesses with minimal taxes in a climate of religious tolerance.

Chapter II

The Early Shi'a Settlement in Kuwait

Introduction

Relying on contemporary sources of the early history of Kuwait, including the private papers of the Arab and 'Ajam Shi'a families, western travelers, and the British officials' descriptions of Kuwait, in the later period- British reports, and to a lesser extent, oral traditions maintained in the Shi'a communities, this chapter examines the possibility of when the earliest migrations of the ancestors of Shi'a families from their homelands took place, and when the three Shi'a communities established themselves and appeared as separate communities in Kuwait.

The Early Shi'a Settlement in Kuwait

Given the lack of sources for the early modern history of Kuwait, and indeed most of the rest of the Gulf, it is impossible to give a precise date for the beginning of Shi'a migration from their forefathers' lands (southwestern Iran, Bahrain, al-Hasa, and south Mesopotamia) to Kuwait. The same applies to the Sunnis, particularly due to the dearth of information on Kuwait before the 18th century. A lack of primary sources that cover the political, social, and economic conditions in old Kuwait, or Grane, also hinders us from drawing a vivid and detailed image of the chronological demographic growth of Kuwaiti residents based on their religious faith, from the early 18th century until the 20th century. However, with the advent of the British presence, the availability of different types of primary sources, such as travelogues and reports written by British officials stationed in the Gulf, provides us with a much more detailed picture. The growth of trade and extensive recordkeeping meant that the private papers of some Kuwaiti Shi'a families have been preserved, and to an extent, an oral history of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait also exists. The latter in particular enables scholars to gain an approximate understanding of when the earliest settlement of some Shi'a families in Kuwait took place.

The Baharna

To begin with the Kuwaiti Shi'a of Baharna origins, Carsten Niebuhr, a European traveler, who visited the Gulf in 1765, wrote a book describing his visit to the region, which includes a brief summary of Failaka Island.²³² His description sheds light on the inhabitants of Failaka

²³²An Island that historically belongs to Kuwait and is located at the entrance of Kuwaiti Bay.

Island and Grane, and it shows that there were settlers from Bahrain on Failaka Island during the second half of the 18th century. Niebuhr notes that:

‘More to the north are several small uninhabited islands, and not far from the town of Grän, there is a well-populated island, Feludsje, which belongs to the Arabs. Most of its inhabitants originate from Bahrain, and at present they are still mainly living from pearl-diving near that island.’²³³

Although Niebuhr neither provided an estimate of the populations of Failaka and Grane nor indicated the religious faith of their inhabitants, he maintained, that the residents of Grane sometimes took refuge in Failaka as they considered the Island to be part of their domain.²³⁴ This suggests that there were already people from Bahrain settled in both Failaka and Grane, as the residents of Grane were moving between Failaka and Grane depending upon circumstances. Thus, it can be assumed that some of those settlers in Failaka might be Baharna (i.e. Shi’a), as the Baharna, according to the British sources and historical literature on Bahrain,²³⁵ were the original settlers in Bahrain and were also the majority population during the second half of the 18th century.

Consultation of Kuwaiti historical literature, the oral history of the Baharna community in Kuwait, the private papers of Shi’a Baharna families, and British primary sources can also support the assumption of an early presence of Baharna in Kuwait. Based on Kuwaiti historical literature, the *al-qalālīf* (single *al-qallāf*) and the *al-istādiyya* (single *al-istād*), who are originally Baharna, are considered ‘the parents of shipbuilding’ in Kuwait. For generations they dominated and controlled the shipbuilding industry of Grane, an essential craft that enabled the residents and merchants to carry on seafaring activities for survival, such as pearling, fishing, and trade in the Gulf Sea and Indian Ocean zones.

²³³‘The Text of Niebuhr’s Book’, trans. Ben Slot in Slot. *The Origins*, p. 152.

²³⁴‘Niebuhr’s description of Kuwait’, trans. Ben Slot in Slot. *The Origins*, pp. 152-153.

²³⁵See section in Chapter One on the early history of Kuwait, Bahrain and al-Hasa.

Hamza al-Istad, a Kuwaiti whose ancestors were originally Baharna emigrants from Bahrain, has narrated the early history of Baharna settlement in Kuwait, including that of his family.²³⁶ He believes, according to his oral family history, that the father of his maternal great grandfather Salman al-Istad, a famous shipbuilder in Kuwait (1840-1918), originally migrated from Bahrain to Kuwait in about the first half of the 19th century. His assumption may be taken into consideration because there is an existing private paper belonging to the father of Salman, Ahmad al-Istad, that shows that he owned a house in Kuwait in 1884.²³⁷

According to Hamza and other common narratives by Baharna in Bahrain, many of the migrants were skilled labourers who came from Bahrani towns, such as Sanabis, Nu‘aim, ‘Arad, and Bani Jamra areas; some, especially the Nu‘aim, had already built reputations in the shipbuilding industry and other local handicrafts.²³⁸ Those Baharna, including his great grandfather, who came at the beginning of their migration to Kuwait, bore different surnames. Most have indicated that they changed their surnames during the later period in Kuwait history to *al-qalālīf* or *al-istādiyya* or other names as table 4 shows in appendix 3.²³⁹ Thus, it is very difficult to determine from Baharna families’ names when exactly in the early period of Kuwait history they arrived.

Furthermore, Hamza argues that the early settlement of Baharna in Kuwait must be connected to the period of the development of the shipbuilding industry. It is logical to ask,

²³⁶Hamza al-Istad, interviewed by the author, 5 Jan. 2011, Kw.

²³⁷P.P. of the al-Jum‘a family.

²³⁸Lorimer also indicates that in the early 20th century Sanabis was a town well known for shipbuilding in Bahrain. Thus, one can assume that his belief reflects a continuous involvement of the Sanabis with shipbuilding for a long time. See Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II Geog and Stat, p. 227.

²³⁹This inadvertent change was to connect different local crafts with the people who engaged in a specific craft. As a result, identical nicknames that derived from the name of their daily jobs or professions, as a part of Kuwaiti culture, were given to a family or group of people.

suggests Hamza, that if there was not a Baharna community settled in Kuwait at least two hundred years ago, who built the ships for the old residents and merchants?²⁴⁰ There are similar accounts by the Baharna community in Bahrain on the causes of the history of the early migration of Baharna to Kuwait, and the specific areas from which they fled.²⁴¹

In this respect, the presence of Baharna in Kuwait could possibly be associated with the first accounts of the shipbuilding craft, written by western travellers in the second half of the 18th century. In fact, many European travellers and British officials who visited either old Kuwait, or its neighbours in 1765 and thereafter, either directly or indirectly mentioned the importance of the shipbuilding industry in Kuwait. Such references took different forms. For instance, Baron Tiddo Frederik van Kniphausen, Carsten Niebuhr, George Brucks and A. Kemball registered the number of ships that were anchored in the Kuwaiti port during the years 1765, 1829 and 1845 respectively.²⁴² Other travellers, like Felix Jones in his report in 1839, shed light on the craft by noting the materials and tools from India and Muscat that were imported by Kuwaitis for shipbuilding needs.²⁴³ Lewis Pelly, a P.R. of Bushehr, during his visit to Kuwait in 1863, reported directly on the significance of the shipbuilding industry in Kuwait and how skillful the Kuwaiti residents trained in this craft were in comparison to workers in the rest of the Gulf regions. He observed, '[t]he Kowaites have a considerable

²⁴⁰Hamza al-Istad, interviewed by the author, 5 Jan. 2011, Kw.

²⁴¹Hussayn al-Jamri and Muhammd al-Salman, interviewed by the author 17 Jan. 2015, Bh; Muhammad al-Tittun, interviewed by the author, 16 Jan. 2015, Bh.

²⁴²George Bruck, in 1829, registers 185 different types of ships in Kuwait. Kemball, in 1845, on the other hand, records that there were overall 431 different kinds of ships in Kuwait. Even if those estimations are not completely accurate, it can be assumed that the shipbuilding industry already existed in Kuwait during that time. See Slot. *The Origins*, p. 152; Brucks, 'Memoir Descriptive' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 575; Kemball, 'Memoranda of the Resources' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 109.

²⁴³For example Jones indicates that material like teak was brought from Bombay and another kind of hardwood was imported from Muscat. J. Jones 'Extract from a Report on the Harbour of Grane' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 52.

carrying trade, and are perhaps the best boat builders around the Gulf'.²⁴⁴ Though Pelly did not indicate the faith of the Kuwaiti boat builders in his report, presumably he was referring to the Baharna, as this profession was largely in the hands of the Baharna group. Nonetheless, a few Kuwaiti families with a Sunni background were involved in this craft according to the historical literature on Kuwait and oral history.²⁴⁵

Six important private documents are possessed by different Shi'a families in Kuwait; mainly two documents by Abul, one paper by al-Sabagh, one by the al-Mahmid, and two by al-Jum'a families. All of them demonstrate the early presence of the Baharna community in Kuwait. The oldest one is a sale contract belonging to the great grandfather of the al-Sabagh family and shows that he bought a house in the 'village of Kuwait' as it is written in this document dated 1848, as figure 15 shows in appendix 4.²⁴⁶ One of the witnesses on this purchase was named Muhammad 'Ali al-Hakim al-Babrani. In present day Kuwait there is a family name of al-Bahrani, which is an indication in Kuwaiti culture of those families who were originally from Bahrain. One forebear was a well-known Shi'a cleric in Jid Hafs village in Bahrain, and his grandson, who was already settling in Kuwait, might have been a Shi'a cleric for the Baharna community. Moreover, the descendants of that witness are still living in Kuwait and they consider themselves Baharna.

A second and more important private document belonging to the Abul family indicates the early establishment of the Baharna community. It shows that there already existed a *masjid al-baharna* as a Shi'a *waqf* in Kuwait in 1868, the date of the document. It dealt with a house

²⁴⁴Pelly. *Report on A Journey to Riyadh*, p. 10.

²⁴⁵More details on the names of Kuwaiti families, particularly Baharna who predominated in shipbuilding from the mid-19th Century onward, can be found in the work of Ya'qub al-Haji, one of the most famed scholars of Kuwaiti maritime history. Ya'qub al-Haji. *Sina'at al-Sufun al-Shira'iyya fi al-Kuwayt*. Markaz al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat: Kuwayt, 2007.

²⁴⁶P.P. of the al-Sabagh Family.

sale between a member of the al-Qattan family and another resident of Kuwait in a specific place near the *masjid al-baharna* as figure 17 shows in appendix 4. Although, to date, no one is able to deduce when exactly the *masjid al-baharna* was built, due to the lack of primary sources that would confirm a date, the Abul document is compatible with what has been said about the establishment of this Baharna mosque during the first half of the 19th century, according to the oral history of the Shi‘a communities.²⁴⁷

The other four documents confirm the presence of *masjid al-baharna* at a slightly later time between 1870 and 1894 as figures 16 and 20 show in appendix 4, and other documents indicate the settlement of some Shi‘a Baharna families in Kuwait, including the house of Ghaith al-Qallaf and al-Jum‘a during the 1880s.²⁴⁸ Therefore, one can assume that not only were the Baharna community well established by 1868, but also they were not small in number.

Zahra Freeth, a daughter of the well-known British agent in Kuwait, H. Dickson (1929-1936), who was settled in Kuwait with his family, discusses the early settlement of the Baharna in Kuwait in her book *Kuwait was my Home*. She emphasises that the shipbuilding industry was in the hands of the Baharna who had been settled in Kuwait for generations.²⁴⁹

When the Baharna and Hassawiyya selected new destinations to migrate to, their choices were not only based on which location would enable them to practice similar professions to those that they followed in their homelands, but also which would offer a safer place to live. Baharna and Hassawiyya immigrants can be classified into two major social groups based on the nature of their daily professions, originally practiced in Bahrain and al-Hasa. Some of

²⁴⁷P.P. of the Abul family.

²⁴⁸P.P. of the al-Mahmid and the al-Jum‘a families.

²⁴⁹Zahra Freeth. *Kuwait was my Home*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1956, p. 106; Zahraa Freeth, interviewed by the author, 5 Aug 2011, Colchester, UK.

them were artisans and others were peasants.²⁵⁰ In this respect, the Baharna and Hassawiyya artisan migrants chose Kuwait or Lingah as their new place to live, whereas the peasants selected other areas of the Gulf as their final destination. Even though Kuwait was a safe place, with the fewest political disturbances of states in the Gulf region, and its inhabitants and the ruling family were tolerant of people from other ethnicities and religious backgrounds, Baharna and Hassawiyya peasants migrated elsewhere. Instead, Muhammerah, Qusba, Ahwaz, and Basra, were their major destination since these places were predominantly agricultural societies, suited their profession, and enabled them to adjust and survive. For them, migration to Kuwait was too risky, as they might not find work that utilised their skills, especially since Kuwait was considered a barren land.²⁵¹

This conclusion about the dates for the early migration of Baharna, and the way we can identify the type of work carried out by the Baharna in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf, can also be drawn from Kuwaiti naval history and the British reports. For instance, Watkinson, a consul in Khuzestan at Ahwaz, in a 1934 report, discusses the early migration of Baharna peasants to Muhammerah and Qusba. One section mentioned the early settlement of Baharna in other regions and he observed, '[a]s you are no doubt aware, the Bahraini community at Muhammerah and at Qusba has been settled there for the most part for several generations'.²⁵² Though, in the report the words 'several generations' does not determine exact dates of Baharna settlement, the early migration of Baharna could still be connected to

²⁵⁰Unlike other social groups, the Baharna and Hassawiyya merchants were not restricted in selecting their new destination in accordance to their profession like the artisans and peasants, but rather had more opportunities in selecting their new destination, as they were traders.

²⁵¹That does not mean that Baharna and Hassawiyya immigrants did not consider other places in the Gulf, as many Baharna in the later period settled and worked in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Dohar as Lorimer indicates. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II Geog and Stat, p. 208.

²⁵²From E. Watkinson to P.R. Bsh and V.C. Mhr, no, 10, 6 Feb 1934, p. 32. *IOR R/15/2/486*.

the period when the political system of Bahrain was changed, or some years after that event. This conclusion can be drawn from another British report that discusses the Baharna community in Khuzestan. The report classified the Baharna community in 1934 into four groups: 1) Baharna who were born in Iran and owned landed property there; 2) Baharna who were born in Bahrain and owned landed property in Iran; 3) Baharna who were born in Iran who did not own landed property; 4) Baharna who were born in Bahrain and employed in Khuzestan in different occupations including as shopkeepers and coolies, and did not own landed property.²⁵³ Another British report, registered in the first decade of the 20th century, indicates that the Baharna also settled in many areas of the Gulf, including Lingah, Muhammerah, Basra, and Baghdad.²⁵⁴

The occupations of all these groups, regardless of their place of birth, not only suggests the reasons for the early migration of Baharna peasants, and to a lesser extent of coolies and shopkeepers, to Khuzestan, but also confirms why Baharna artisans (i.e. shipbuilders) did not select Khuzestan but rather Kuwait and Lingah as their new towns. Moreover, a close analysis of the historical literature on the old arts and crafts of Kuwaiti society leads to the conclusion that the Baharna who lived in Kuwait for generations were largely involved in the shipbuilding industry, whilst those who migrated to agricultural societies were mostly employed in agricultural jobs.

Kemball provides information on the early migration of Bahrain residents to Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf:

‘Numbers of the principal and wealthiest inhabitants, to avoid the effects of increased anarchy and confusion, fled, upon the commencement of actually hostilities, to Koweit, on the Arabian [Coast], and Lingah and other places on the Persian Coast, where they have since temporarily located themselves, in order to watch the course of events, and return with the

²⁵³From T. Fowle P.R. Bh to F.S. to the Gov of Id, Delhi, no, 308- c/1934, 17 Nov 1934, p. 146. *IOR R/15/2/486*.

²⁵⁴See *IOR R/15/2/6*, p. 89.

first signs of peace and established government, and consequent security to life and property.'²⁵⁵

As a consequence, it is conceivable that some of the inhabitants of Bahrain, who intended to leave Bahrain temporarily, as Kemball indicates, never returned, as they probably felt safer and were able to find work in their new places. As Kemball asserts 'Koweit possesses a safe and capacious harbour'²⁵⁶ and remarks on '[t]he energy and courage of the people, who are closely united, and free from feuds and factions, which render them respected and feared by all'.²⁵⁷ In 1829, George Brucks noted that Kuwait has 'enjoyed peace while all other parts of the Gulf have been embroiled, and to this they owe their maritime greatness'.²⁵⁸ Thus, pull factors typified by security, job opportunity, and respect for all people, irrespective of ethnic and religious background, were major characteristics of Kuwait, which helps to explain why there has been a Baharna community in Kuwait from that time until today.

The 'Ajam and Arabs of Southwestern Iran (Bar Fars and Khuzestan)

Turning to the early settlement of Shi'a of Iranian descent ('Ajam) it can be said that it took place around the same time, or some years later, as that of their counterparts, the Baharna. The political disturbances and other social and economic conditions in southwestern Iran led to their flight to Kuwait. Indeed, these migrants were not exclusively Shi'a of Iranian descent, there were some Sunnis families of Iranian origin who migrated as well. Likewise, Arab Shi'a and Sunnis who lived in some areas of Khuzestan and the Iranian littoral, also formed part of a migration to Kuwait, as will be further elaborated. Indeed, there were some Shi'a families of Arab and Iranian ethnicity who settled in Kuwait from the last

²⁵⁵Kemball. 'Memoranda of the Resources' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 106.

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 296.

²⁵⁷Kemball. 'Memoranda of the Resources' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 109.

²⁵⁸Brucks. 'Memoir Descriptive' in R. Thomas, ed., *Arabian Gulf*, p. 576.

quarter of the 18th Century and thereafter, as the oral history and private papers of some Shi'a families and British reports testify.

The oral history of the overall Shi'a communities, including 'Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya concur that, unlike the Baharna groups, some ancestors of particular Kuwaiti families of Iranian descent, such as the Ma'rafi, ibn Ghalib, Shamsah, Khan, , Jamal, Qasim, Sadiq, al-Khabbaz, al-Sabagh, and 'Abd al-Rahim (some of different Behbehani families) and some others migrated to Kuwait between 150 and 200 years or more ago due to political instability, social conflict and economic depression in southwestern Iran. Indeed, Musa Ma'rafi has narrated the story behind his family's migration from Behbahan according to his oral family history:

'The members of the house of Ma'rafi were already merchants prior to their arrival to Kuwait, which is estimated to have taken place two hundred years back. It has always been said that they came from their place of origin in Behbahan via Ma'shour then to Kuwait. Muhammad Rafi' was our great grandfather, who was born in Iran in 1783, and left Iran when he was twenty-seven years old. The reasons behind his migration were family disputes and the instability of Iran during that time. He arrived in Kuwait during the reign of the second ruler of Kuwait, 'Abdullah ibn Sabah [1764-1815]. Therefore, the permanent settlement of the Ma'rafi family could possibly be estimated as dating from sometime around 1810s. However, it has been said that Ahmad al-Ra'is, a grandfather of Muhammad Rafi', had visited Kuwait earlier and returned to Iran.'²⁵⁹

Other Kuwaiti Shi'a families, or those of Iranian descent, belong to the *tarakma*, a term used by 'Ajam Shi'a to designate a group of families whose forefathers emigrated from a specific town in southwestern Iran called Lamard; they are considered to be old settlers among the Shi'a communities in Kuwait.²⁶⁰ One member of the 'Ajam *tarakma*, named Safar 'Ali Safar, maintains that some ancestors of the *tarakma* families, including his great grandfather, escaped from Iran to Kuwait between 150 and 180 years ago due to the danger

²⁵⁹Musa Ma'rafi, interviewed by the author, 25 Dec. 2011, Kw.

²⁶⁰Safar 'Ali Safar, interviewed by the author, 22 Dec. 2010, Kw; 'Abd al-Jalil Bouland, interviewed by the author, 27 Jul. 2009, Kw. See table 6 in appendix 3.

of plague. Some of them, he said, ultimately returned to Iran to bring members of their families to settle in Kuwait, especially when able to find jobs, such as porters in the port of Kuwait.²⁶¹

Furthermore, the existence of private papers dated prior to 1880, in collections of Kuwaiti Shi'a families of Iranian background, agree with the oral history as narrated by the Shi'a communities about the early migration of some of the families mentioned. These documents usually take the form of proof of sale or purchase of property, marriage contracts, and papers expressing the last wishes of the deceased *waṣiyya*, all written and authenticated by a respectable and trustworthy local judge or religious shaykh in the Kuwaiti community. In addition, the judge or religious shaykh usually requested other residents of Kuwait to write their names and signatures on these documents as witnesses in case of any dispute. For example, a private document of the al-Sabagh family, which is one of the oldest local documents proving the early settlement of Shi'a families in Kuwait, indicates that in 1848 one member of their family, Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabagh, purchased a house in Kuwait village from Hussayn ibn Hassan for twenty-two Rials. The witnesses who testified on this transaction were members of the Shi'a communities, including Musa ibn Muhammad al-Mazidi al-Ihsa'i, a well-known Shi'a *ālim* during that time, Muhammad 'Ali al-Hakim al-Bahrani, and 'Abd al-Hussayn 'Abdullah al-Wazzan.²⁶²

Shi'a families of Iranian descent, such as the al-Wazzan²⁶³ and of Arab descent, such as al-Mahmid, whose ancestors migrated from Khuzestan, mainly belonged to the Ka'b tribe, as

²⁶¹Mulla 'Ali, interviewed by the author, 1 Mar. 2015, Kw.

²⁶²There are plenty of local selling and buying documents (better known as *adsāniyāt*) belonging to Shi'a families showing their permanent residence in Kuwait after 1860. P.P. of the al-Sabagh family.

²⁶³The al-Wazzan family claims that their ancestral origin is Turk and they migrated from Tabriz in Iran in the early period of Kuwait.

told in oral history, and are also considered to be old residents (*al-sukkān al-awā'il*) in Kuwait.²⁶⁴ Other Shi'a families who are of *lur* ethnicity of Southwestern Iran also migrated in Kuwait.²⁶⁵

A private document from 1786, possibly the oldest local document to indicate the presence of a Shi'a family in Kuwait, is still retained by the al-Wazzan family and shows that one of the family members named Jasim Muhammad sold his store, which was located in the date and barley market in Kuwait, to 'Abd al-Salam 'Abd al-Ilah.²⁶⁶ Thus, one can presume that the al-Wazzan family possibly settled in Kuwait during at least the last quarter of the 18th century, if not earlier. In fact, Hussayn Khaz'al, who wrote a work of five volumes on the political history of Kuwait, indicates that a member of the al-Wazzan family called Najm al-Wazzan and another member of a Shi'a family called Muhammad al-Shimali died on the battlefield of *al-riga*, a war between residents of Kuwait and the Bani Ka'b of Khuzestan in 1783.²⁶⁷ Thus, the private document owned by the al-Wazzan family not only demonstrates the long settlement of the al-Wazzan in Kuwait, but also corroborates the presence of an al-Wazzan family member during that war.

Many other private papers of Abul, Jamal, al-Mahmid, Behbehani, al-Jum'a, as some of them shown in figures 15, 16, 18, 25, and 26, apparently confirm not only the presence of some Arab and 'Ajam Shi'a immigrants who were originally from the southwestern Iran area, but also indicate that other Arab Shi'a families, who were immigrants from Bahrain and al-

²⁶⁴It has been said that al-Wazzan family belong to the al-Khalifat tribe and al-Mahmid to Bani Ka'b tribe. Qasim 'Abd al-Rahim, interviewed by the author, 4 Aug. 2009, Kw.

²⁶⁵See table 1 in appendix 3.

²⁶⁶See document section *al-Watha'iq* in al-Wazzan family website. [*al-Watha'iq*] (accessed Oct 25, 2012); available from <http://www.alwazzan.info/latest-news.html>.

²⁶⁷It was a war between Kuwait and Bani Ka'b where members of the al-Wazzan and al-Shimali families died defending Kuwait from the Bani Ka'b. Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. I, p. 50.

Hasa, already lived in Kuwait during the early second half of the 19th century. Indeed, surnames like al-Bahrani and al-Ihsa'i are an indication of the place of origin of those witnesses in Bahrain and al-Hasa.

There are private documents that also show the existence of Shi'a mosques prior to Mubarak's reign (1896-1915), such as the *masjid al-mazidi*, *masjid al-baharna*, and *masjid al-sahaf*, which indicates that the Shi'a communities were well established by that time. This viewpoint also appears in oral history among members of the Shi'a families in Kuwait.

The reports of the British political agents in Kuwait shed light on the early settlement of the 'Ajam community. Though these reports discuss the population of Kuwait based upon assumption and guesses, they are consistent with Shi'a oral history on the presence of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait since its early history. These reports also corroborate Shi'a private family papers that prove the presence of Shi'a families in Kuwait during the first half of the 19th century. For example, a report written in 1921 by More, P.A. of Kuwait, gives an estimation of the size of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait. More stated: 'I estimate that there are at present about 10,000 persons of Persian origin in Kuwait town; many of these, however, have been settled here for two or three generations and have presumably lost their Persian nationality'.²⁶⁸ More's comment on the length of settlement of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait was based not only on his time spent there, but also on his interaction with residents of Kuwait from whom he gained knowledge of Kuwaiti society. Thus, from the estimates in More's report, one can assume that the presence of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait goes back to the early 19th century. This conclusion is based on a simple calculation considering twenty-five years as a minimum life span for each generation. More estimated a maximum of three

²⁶⁸From J. More P.A. Kw to the Sec to H.B. the H.C. Bgh, no, 206-c, 4 Dec 1921, p. 36. IOR R/15/1/303.

generations back to the earliest settlement of the 'Ajam community from the date of his report. Thus, it can be said his estimation coincides with the private papers of the 'Ajam and Arab Shi'a communities that we discussed earlier (e.g. the al-Sabagh, Jamal and al-Wazzan families).

Another report, written by Dickson in 1936, also confirms the early migration of 'Ajam to Kuwait: 'Kuwait contains beside Arabs and Bedouins, some 8000 souls of Persian origins whose forefathers migrated to Kuwait during the last century'.²⁶⁹ Though Dickson did not determine an approximate period of time since the migration of the 'Ajam forefathers in the 19th century, we can assume from the earlier report of his colleague More, and from the private papers of certain 'Ajam families mentioned earlier, that their migrations could have taken place in the early 19th century.

A British report that discusses the Shi'a position in the Kuwaiti political scene during the events surrounding the legislative council (*al-majlis al-tashri'i*) in 1938 also provides us with a clue to the date of the early 'Ajam migration to Kuwait. The report shows the number of Shi'a resident applicants who sought British citizenship at the time. They did so for many reasons, including being excluded from political participation in the *al-majlis al-tashri'i*.²⁷⁰ De Gaury, a P.A. of Kuwait, received more than 4500 applications from the Shi'a communities, including Arab and 'Ajam residents. In the same British report, the 'Ajam community was categorised under two different labels that related to the chronology of their migration to Kuwait. The first group consisted of those who settled in Kuwait less than ten years prior to the events of *al-majlis al-tashri'i* in 1938, and the second group consisted of

²⁶⁹From H. Dickson P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, c-40, 3 Feb 1936. p. 67. *IOR R/15/5/311*.

²⁷⁰Further discussion about the Shi'a position in this event will be elaborated in Chapter Five.

those who settled in Kuwait up to 120 years prior to the same event in 1938.²⁷¹ From this report, it can be inferred that the earliest settlement of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait goes back 120 years from the date of the report. This means that the earliest presence of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait could possibly date back to around 1818, according to the British sources.

To conclude, from papers of archival collections of Shi'a families, British reports, and oral history that narrated the history of the early 'Ajam and Arab Shi'a immigrants from southwestern Iran, it can be suggested that there were established 'Ajam and Arab communities who originally came from southwestern Iran during the first half of 19th century; the contemporaneous presence of the *masjid al-mazidi* in Kuwait town suggests that their number was not small.

The Hassawiyya

Unlike the Baharna and 'Ajam, there is a lack of primary evidence, especially from British sources, for the early settlement of the Hassawiyya group in Kuwait. As a result, the analysis of the early Hassawiyya migration to Kuwait must depend on the oral history of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, the private papers of the al-Qattan and Abul families, and the historical literature on the internal political and religious conditions of al-Hasa from the time of the rise of the Wahhabi Sa'udi movement in the region.

Certain Hassawiyya families like the al-Qattan, al-Mahdi, al-Muhammad 'Ali, al-Mutawa' and al-Baghli, and some others are considered to be the ones longest settled in Kuwait according to Shi'a oral history.²⁷² Their migrations to Kuwait, which are estimated to have taken place between the later second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th

²⁷¹Office of P.R. PG. Kw, no, c/806, 19 Oct 1938, pp. 258-263. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

²⁷²For list of some Hassawiyya family names see table 5 in appendix.

century, were due to religious issues and to a lesser extent a desire for economic betterment.²⁷³ Some other Hassawiyya families, such as al-Shawaf, al-Kharss, al-Haddad al-Arbash and Buhamad, also migrated during the early part of the 19th century to Kuwait.²⁷⁴

A private document of sale of the al-Qattan family, dated 1852 and authorised by ‘Abdullah Muhammad al-‘Adsani, judge of Kuwait during that time, shows that one member of a Hassawiyya family called Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Mahdi bought a house from Ahmad ibn Kulaib for 21 Rials. Hamad Hassan al-Mutawa‘, a member of the Hassawiyya community, and Hassan Muhammad al-Mazidi, brother of shaykh Musa al-Mazidi, were witnesses.²⁷⁵

‘Abbas al-Qattan, a philanthropist and a member of the al-Ihqaqi charity foundation and who is in charge of the *hussayniyya al-awhad* in Kuwait, has discussed his ancestors’ early settlement in Kuwait according to his oral family history and the private papers he possesses.²⁷⁶ The private papers that ‘Abbas preserves, and which are related to his great-grandfather, ‘Isa ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Qattan, show that he purchased a house from a person called Barak for a total of 40 Rials in 1860 as figure 21 shows in appendix 4.²⁷⁷ It may be observed that ‘Abbas al-Qattan emphasises that his family migration was earlier than the date of the document in the private papers. However, it should be borne in mind that none of the private papers of Shi‘a communities, including those of the al-Qattan, indicate the exact

²⁷³ ‘Ali al-Mahdi, interviewed by the author, 29 Dec. 2010, Kw; ‘Abbas al-Qattan, interviewed by the author, 27 Dec. 2010, Kw.

²⁷⁴ Qasim ‘Abd al-Rahim, interviewed by the author, 4 Aug. 2009, Kw; ‘Abbas al-Qattan, interviewed by the author, 27 Dec. 2010, Kw; Muhammad al-Baghli, interviewed by the author, 7 Feb. 2011, Kw.

²⁷⁵ Hassan al-Mizidi, (Hussayn in some sources) was a reputed Shi‘a *shaykhi* cleric who migrated from al-Hasa to Basra in the mid-19th Century. See Chapter Four. P.P. of the al-Qattan family.

²⁷⁶ ‘Abbas al-Qattan, interviewed by the author, 27 Dec. 2010, Kw.

²⁷⁷ P.P. of the al-Qattan family.

period for the migration of Shi'a families. They are rather considered only as an indication of the presence of certain Shi'a families in Kuwait. As a result, one can assume that the migration of these Shi'a families could have taken place at an earlier time than the date when the documents were registered.

'Ali al-Mahdi, a member of the Hassawiyya community and journalist in Kuwait, believes that the al-Qattan family is the oldest Hassawiyya family in Kuwait. Though he was not able to provide a precise date for the al-Qattan migration, he argues that the religious harassment practiced by the Wahhabis, which arose during the second half of the 18th century, was the major cause of the Hassawiyya migrations from their place of origin to all parts of the Gulf.²⁷⁸

A private document of the Abul family dated 1895 shows that Muhammad Hussayn al-Sahaf was the shaykh of *masjid al-sahaf*, a Shi'a mosque established for Hassawiyya during the 19th century. The document discusses a house sale between two Shi'a subjects living in Kuwait.²⁷⁹ The document, as figure 22 shows in appendix 4, was not particularly related to the *masjid al-sahaf*; neither does it clarify when the mosque was established by the Hassawiyya group. It can be inferred, however, that by the last quarter of the 19th century there was a well-established Hassawiyya community, as evidenced by the presence of their mosque.

If we consider the historical literature on the internal political and religious conditions of al-Hasa from the time of the first Wahhabi-Sa'udi occupation in the region between 1795 and 1818, it can be presumed that many of the al-Hasa inhabitants migrated to Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf due to religious persecution and discrimination against the Shi'a practiced by the Wahhabis (as discussed in Chapter Two).

²⁷⁸ 'Ali al-Mahdi, interviewed by the author, 29 Dec. 2010, Kw.

²⁷⁹ P.P. of the Abul family.

Conclusion

Due to scarcity of the early primary sources that discuss the existence of the Kuwait population from ethnic and religious backgrounds, to date, no one can confirm which were the oldest Arab and 'Ajam Shi'a families settled in Kuwait. The different viewpoints, based on oral tradition, lack substantiating documentary evidence, especially when it comes to the 18th century.

However, when we consider the 19th century, western travelers, the private papers of some Arab and 'Ajam families, and the official British official reports refer to well-established Shi'a communities during the 19th century. The existence of Shi'a clerics, such as shaykh Musa al-Mazidi, and shaykh Muhammad al-Bahrani during the first half of the 19th century, and other Hassawiyya shaykhs from the al-Sahaf house, such as Muammad al-Sahaf and his sons, confirm the presence of the three Shi'a communities in Kuwait during that time. Moreover, the existence of three Shi'a mosques (*masjid al-baharna*, *masjid al-sahaf*, and *masjid al-mazidi*), during the second half of 19th century, prior to Mubarak's reign (1896-1915), prove that by 1880 the representation of the Shi'a communities was not as small as some British officials have depicted.

Chapter III

Migration to Kuwait 1880-1921

Introduction

To understand the dynamic movements of the Shi'a from their places of origin between 1880 and 1921, this chapter begins with the historical background of the Persian Gulf region from the political, social, and economic perspectives within the framework of the British policy in the Gulf region that was associated with other competitive imperial, international, and regional powers, all of whom were interested in dominating the Gulf region. It sheds light on the different internal conditions of southwestern Bahrain and al-Hasa that were the major factors behind motivating their inhabitants to migrate to Kuwait. For southwestern Iran, events such as tribal conflicts and robbery, economic downturns, and natural disasters, arbitrary political administration, and more importantly, the volume of trade between southwestern Iranian ports and Kuwait, were the major causes of migration to Kuwait. Furthermore, the internal situation in Bahrain, inter-dynasty conflicts among the al-Khalifa family, their maladministration, plagues, and the overall mal-treatment of the Shi'a were the main motives for the Baharna to leave. In al-Hasa, sectarian persecution imposed on the Hassawiyya by the Sa'udi-Wahhib regime propelled them to migrate to Kuwait.

The Historical Background of the Gulf Region 1880-1921

Britain ultimately succeeded in consolidating its position in the Gulf and building its imperial project during the second half of the 19th century due to several factors. First, and most important, was the binding of the Arab sheikhdoms through political protection agreements with the Indian imperial government as a mechanism to legitimise British influence. The result was a strengthening of the British position in the context of heightened European rivalry in the region during the last quarter of the 19th century. For instance, the revival of the Ottomans as a regional power in the Gulf, particularly in al-Hasa in 1871-1913 and in Qatar in 1872-1915, in addition to their claim of sovereignty over Bahrain in 1870 and later Kuwait, was the first regional threat to British interests in the Gulf since the 18th century. The Indian imperial government, as a result, signed a political agreement with Bahrain in 1880 and 1892,²⁸⁰ the Trucial States in 1888, Kuwait in 1899, Najd and al-Hasa in 1915, and Qatar in 1916. These agreements gave the British the exclusive right to control their foreign affairs in return for providing protection against any external aggression. The Arab rulers received a monthly subsidy from the Indian imperial government as well.

Furthermore, the re-emergence of international rivals, such as Russia, France, and later Germany, and to a lesser extent Belgium, challenged the British. In 1894 a French vice-consulate was established in Muscat, and later in 1899, the French attempted to establish a coal depot in order to compete with British influence. French merchants, such as M. Goguyer, opened a shop in Muscat to sell arms and ammunition to the local merchants, which irritated

²⁸⁰In the same year, Muscat was also brought into the British sphere of influence, which obliged the former not to cede any territory without British approval. Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 276-293.

British commercial and political interests.²⁸¹ The Sultan of Muscat allowed French flags to fly on local Omani dhows, which gave local merchants, such as Najaf ibn Ghalib and Isma'il Ma'rafi, opportunities for smuggling arms from Muscat to other Gulf ports, including Kuwait. The Indian government tried to weaken the effect of the 1844 treaty of commerce between the Sultan of Muscat and the French government²⁸² by signing arms traffic suppression agreements with Gulf rulers, (with the exception of Qatar and Najd), especially after unsuccessful negotiations at the Anglo-French Brussels conference, during the first quarter of the 20th century, to suspend arms traffic in the Gulf.²⁸³ As a result, it gave the British a pretext to patrol local Arab and Iranian dhows that carried the French flag in the name of so-called 'regional stability'.²⁸⁴

Russia's more pervasive challenge during the late 19th century continued in northern Iran and expanded into southern Iran and the upper northwestern Gulf. St. Petersburg hoped to obtain a warm seaport. Kuwait was the first target, where the Russians attempted to establish a coaling station in 1898. This provoked Meade, P.R. in the Persian Gulf (1897-1902), to send a telegraph to the foreign office in Simla urging London to bring Kuwait under their sway before it fell into the hands of any rivals.²⁸⁵ The Russian threat affected the Ottoman Empire and put pressure on the British over the question of whether or not Kuwait came under its sovereignty. This precipitated a clandestine political agreement with Kuwait in

²⁸¹For further details on Goguyer's arms business with Arab Sheikhs, see 'The Arms Traffic in the Persian Gulf' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf, 1820-1966*, vol. II. Slough: Archive Editions, 2000, pp. 39-41, 65-68.

²⁸²The treaty gave both parties the right to trade in both states (i.e. Muscat and France) in any kind of merchandise. 'The Arms Traffic in the Persian Gulf' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II. p.76.

²⁸³It began with Iran in 1897; Bahrain in 1898; Kuwait in 1900 and Trucial chiefs in 1902.

²⁸⁴This was generally an excuse for British to reduce commercial and political European influence in the Gulf.

²⁸⁵'Correspondence Respecting Affairs of Koweit', (1896-99) in Robin Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. I 1896-1901, part. I. London Frank Cass, 1971. p. 28.

1899, which prevented any regional or global opponents' from securing a position in Kuwait.²⁸⁶ Similarly, an attempt was made to establish a coaling station in Bandar 'Abbas that was negotiated between Tehran and St. Petersburg when the Russian ship *Gilyak* visited Bandar 'Abbas in 1900. However, by the beginning of the 20th century the Russians had already established consulates in Sistan, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Bushehr, Bandar 'Abbas and Basra. They successfully inaugurated a steamship navigation line, the 'Russian Trade and Navigation Company', with regular calls between Odessa and the Persian Gulf ports.²⁸⁷ The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), according to British views, did not lead to a relaxation of Russian activities in Iran but rather the opposite. For example, in 1905 Russia established consulates in Lingah and Bandar 'Abbas. Also Prince Amatouni, a Russian official of the Ministry of Commerce, sought to increase Russian trade in southern Iran.²⁸⁸ World war in 1914-1918, and the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917-1918, put an end to the 'Russian menace'. The result was the nullification of most Russian privileges and concessions granted by Iran, with a complete Russian withdrawal from the Gulf by the end of the second decade of 20th century.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶Eugene Staley. 'Business and Politics in the Persian Gulf: The Story of the Wonckhaus Firm'. *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Sep., 1993): pp. 367-385; Jywrghy Bundrafyskiyy. *Al-Kuwayt wa 'Ilaqatiha al-Dawliyya Khilal al-Qarn al-Tasi 'Ashar wa Aw 'il al-Qarn al-'Ishrin*. Mahir Salamah trans., Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-Kuwaitiyya, 1993, pp. 111-112.

²⁸⁷Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I Hist, pp. 327-335; Briton Busch. *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1894-1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, pp. 117-121; Bundrafyskiyy. *Al-Kuwayt*, pp.160, 268-269; Staley. 'Business and Politics' in *Political Science Quarterly*, pp. 367-385.

²⁸⁸Details of many other activities by Russia in Iran during 1905 can be found in 'British Assessment of Current Relations with Persian in 1904' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II 1880-1917, p. 297.

²⁸⁹Nikki Keddie and Mehrdad Amant. 'Iran under the Later Qajars 1848-1922' in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VII, pp. 202, 209-210; Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 276-293.

Although Germany delayed entering the Gulf scene and the danger it posed was less significant than that of Russia, in 1899 Germany's grandiose project to build the Berlin-Baghdad Railway brought new challenges to the Indian imperial government in the Gulf region. With the initial cooperation of the Ottoman Empire, Germany attempted to construct a railway, beginning the line in Konya and crossing through Baghdad with a potential termination point at *kazima* Bay in Kuwait. Since Germany believed that Kuwait was under the Porte's sovereignty, they asked Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid for agreement to this plan. The reaction of the Indian imperial government was not favourable.²⁹⁰ The commercial activity of German private firms, such as Robert Wonckhaus and Company, was regarded by the British as not 'merely an energetic business rival[ry] but a direct representative of German political imperialism'.²⁹¹ This suspicion was associated with the growth of German political plans for the Gulf during the late 19th century. Like that of the Russians, the temporary threat of German expansion in the Gulf, however, was terminated with the onset of the First World War.

Second, the British government relied more than other powers on what Onley called the 'native agency system' as a mechanism in building its imperial power in the Gulf. Native agents or *wukalā* 'who worked on behalf of the British government had an effective role in British policy; this was especially true for those who were merchants, due to their familiarity with the region, languages, and networks.'²⁹² The native agents were also able to help the

²⁹⁰For further discussion of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway scheme, consult Saldanha. 'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, pp. 28-30; Kumar. *India and the Persian Gulf*, pp. 163-188; Busch. *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, pp. 187-193; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I Hist, pp. 345-347.

²⁹¹Staley. 'Business and Politics' in *Political Science Quarterly*, pp. 367-385.

²⁹²The British relied on Indian, Arab, and Iranian agents in the Gulf between 1758 and the end of the 19th century. For more details on their names and the place to which they were appointed in the Gulf, see Onley. *The Arabian*, pp. 83-91.

official B.R in his duties, such as keeping up contacts with the Gulf rulers, settling conflicts between Arab chiefs, and imposing treaties. They also provided useful reports and updates of events about the internal situation in different states to the British government, which helped the British maintain control over the Gulf.²⁹³ Some agents were also appointed to carry out clandestine political duties for the British, such as 'Ali ibn Ghulum Rida Behbehani, who was the first native secret agent in Kuwait (1899-1904). The main purpose of Rida's mission was to hide the existence of the Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty of 1899 from rivals, such as the Ottomans and Germany.

Third, the British adopted different methods to facilitate communication between the Indian and London governments, and between India and their Residencies in the Gulf. After coming to the conclusion that communications through mail services had many defects such as long delays, the British relied on the British India Steam Navigation, which began in 1860, for its communications between India and the Gulf. In addition, the construction of the first telegraph line in Iran, which began in 1858, helped with more rapid correspondence between the Indian and London governments, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The latter came under a British controlling interest in 1882. British supremacy in naval power also played an essential part in the 'guardianship' of their regional interests and in preventing any other European power from establishing a military base in the Gulf.²⁹⁴

The period after the First World War was a milestone era in the Gulf region due to the discovery of oil. In this period, in response to the creation of the League of Nations and the

²⁹³Onley provides a good discussion on the role of the 'native agency system' including the positive and negative aspects of the system. Onley. *The Arabian*, pp. 81-103.

²⁹⁴The air force also played an important role in British imperial communication after 1912. Keddie and Amant. 'Iran under the Later Qajars 1848-1922' in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VII, p. 183; Peterson. 'Britain and the Gulf' in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 276-293.

mandate system, for the first time fixed borders were delineated in the Gulf. The British, who had promised Sharif Hussayn ibn ‘Ali, ruler of Hijaz, that he would be ruler of a greater Arab state, broke their promise. Instead, Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916, which divided the remaining Ottoman provinces in the Middle East between them.²⁹⁵ Oil greatly influenced the way borders were drawn. The importance of its discovery led the British to tie the Gulf States, such as Iran, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait with additional agreements regarding oil, gas and pearl-fishery concessions. The British obtained oil concessions from Iran in 1909 (renewed in 1933) and later Bahrain in 1930, Kuwait in 1934 and Qatar in 1935. However, the Americans gained concessions in Sa‘udi Arabia, and the United States was a shareholder with Britain in Bahrain and Kuwait during the first half of the 20th century.²⁹⁶ Thus, it can be noticed the British had successfully eliminated all European rivals by the first quarter of the 20th century, making the Gulf region a ‘British Lake’.

Southwestern Iran in the Political Matrix of Iran and the Gulf Region

A closer examination of the later Qajar Iran, from Nasir al-Din Shah onwards, reveals a complex epoch in Iranian history, as emphasised by Ann Lambton when she observes that ‘Qajar Persia can be seen both as a period looking forward to the birth of new things and also as a period of fading and decay’.²⁹⁷ In addition, external pressure on Iran came from three

²⁹⁵Peterson. ‘Britain and the Gulf’ in Lawrence Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 276-293; Mutlaq al-Balwiyy. *Al- ‘Uthmaniyyun fi Shamal al-Jazirah al- ‘Arabiyya 1326-1341 h /1908-1923 m*. Bayrut: Al-Dar al- ‘Arabiyya Lilmawsu‘at, 2007, pp. 24-25.

²⁹⁶Zahlan. *The Making*, pp. 23-26; John Marlowe. *The Persian in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962, pp. 78-97; John Kelly. ‘The British Position in the Gulf’ in *The World Today*, vol 20, no. 6 (Jun., 1964): pp. 238-249; Khalid al-Sa‘adun. *Al-Sira ‘Hawla Ra’s al-Khlaij al- ‘Arabi Matla’ al-Qarn al-‘Ishrin*. Bayrut: Al-Dar al- ‘Arabiyya Lilmawsu‘at, 2008, p. 157.

²⁹⁷Lambton. *Qajar Persia*, p. xi.

directions, namely the Ottomans from the west, Russia to the north, and Britain to the south, all to obtain a foothold in Iran.²⁹⁸ As a result, Iranian history from the early 19th century is linked to capitalist expansion and foreign imperialism, as each imperial power ‘endeavoured to impose its own hegemony through intimidation, aggression, commerce, and concessions’.²⁹⁹ In fact, southwestern Iran came under increased British influence during the second Herat War in 1856-1857 as it strove to protect India, the ‘jewel in the crown’. Anglo-Russian rivalry continued until the Convention of 1907 and the partition of Iran into formal spheres of influence, Iran and the Gulf region coming under the British. The Gulf was the background for the British domination of southwestern Iran as well as the key communication and trade routes after the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. Furthermore, the advent of the steamship during the first half of 19th century, together with British control over the Suez Canal from 1868, helped the British Empire to assert its control in the region and prevent any other European power from dominating the Gulf region. Bushehr, as a result, became the headquarters for British imperialist policy in the Gulf.

The residents resented the British presence in southwestern Iran. Merchants and Shi‘a clergy (‘*ulama*’), in particular, resisted it. One reason for the resistance of Iranian merchants was the overwhelming competition they faced from foreign merchants. Foreign trade around major Iranian ports had been in the hands of Iranian merchants at the beginning of the 19th century. However, European merchants, including the British, now overshadowed the Iranian merchants, who began to complain about the privileges given to outside traders, which continued until the First World War.³⁰⁰ What made the situation worse and agitated the

²⁹⁸Roxane Farmanfarmanian, ed., ‘Introduction’, in Roxane Farmanfarmanian. *War and Peace in Qajar Persia*, p. 5.

²⁹⁹Shahnavaz. *Britain and the Opening*, p. 8.

³⁰⁰Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VI, p. 600.

Iranians, and more particularly the *'ulama'* and merchants against the Shah, was that Nasir-al-Din Shah and his successors awarded many privileges and concessions to exploit Iranian natural resources to European powers and foreign entrepreneurs. For instance, in 1872, Baron Julius de Reuter, a British subject, was granted a concession for railway building. In 1890, the Imperial Tobacco Corporation, a British company, was granted a monopoly by the Shah for the sale of tobacco in Iran. This concession annoyed the *'ulama'* and Iranian merchants in particular because it meant that the latter could not export tobacco to the outside world.³⁰¹ Under Muzafar al-Din Shah's reign (1896-1906), in 1899 the customs house in southwestern Iran was put under the management of a Belgian administration, which introduced a new customs duty of five per cent.³⁰² In 1901 the Iranian government also awarded a sixty-year oil concession to William Knox d'Arcy to utilise Iranian resources, such as natural gas and petroleum.³⁰³ In addition to these concessions, Muzafar al-Din Shah borrowed heavily from Russia in 1900 and 1920 to cover expenditures, to pay British debt, and to fund his trips to Europe. The 1904-1905 economic crisis, due mainly to the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 Russian revolution, caused a price rise in Iran.³⁰⁴ However, a modernising reform movement was underway among the intelligentsia, and a movement led by the clergy and financed by the merchants brought about a constitutional revolution in 1906. Its goals were the creation

³⁰¹Lambton. *Qajar Persia*, p. 26; Ervand Abrahamian. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 73.

³⁰²H Whigham. *The Persian Problem: An Examination of the Rival Positions of Russia and Great Britain in Persia with Some Account of the Persian Gulf and the Bagdad Railway*. London: Isbister and Company Limited, 1903, pp. 158-159; '2.4 British Assessment of Current Relations with Persian in 1904' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II, p. 280.

³⁰³'2.8.1 Development of Petroleum Interests 1901-1908' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II, pp. 413-415; Lambton. *Qajar Persia*, p. 26.

³⁰⁴Abrahamian. *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 81; Edward Stack. *Six Months in Persia*, vol. I. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882, p. 80.

of a modernised administrative apparatus in all aspects.³⁰⁵ The new regime could not resolve the profound financial crisis that had enabled it to come to power, and conditions in the country deteriorated, with insecurity and grave disorder in the provinces. Lastly, the outbreak of the First World War made some parts of southwestern Iran in particular an undesirable place to live. Though Iran took a neutral attitude, parts of the country were the scene of military confrontations, which had a negative impact on economic life.³⁰⁶ The weakness and disorders paved the way for a new dynasty, the Pahlavis, who replaced the Qajars in the *coup d'état* of Reza Khan in 1921. From that time Iran entered a new phase, fully centralising its provinces.

Unsettled Conditions of Southwestern Iran

Tribal Conflict and Robbery

As mentioned, insecurity made Iran an unpleasant place to live, particularly because of tribal conflict and robbery, which greatly increased as a result of central government weakness. However, the tribes were motivated not only by booty but also by economic distress and social insecurity.³⁰⁷ Mutual rivalry and antagonism exacerbated the problems, and corrupt government officials and soldiers cooperated with the tribes in robbing travellers of all kinds.³⁰⁸ Feuds over land ownership also caused conflict and provincial disorder. The

³⁰⁵Homa Katouzian. *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of The Pahlavis*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000, pp. 82-83.

³⁰⁶For example, the trade in Bandar 'Abbas was paralysed and there no shipments from Europe, causing anxiety among Iranian merchants. Meat was also scarce. 'ARPGPR for 1914 and 1918' in *TPGAR*, vol.VII, pp, 18, 40.

³⁰⁷Mansoureh Ettehadieh. 'Crime, Security, and Insecurity: 1875-1924' in Roxan Farmanfarmaian, ed., *War and Peace in Qajar Persia*, pp. 174 -182.

³⁰⁸Ettehadieh. 'Crime, Security, and Insecurity' in Roxan Farmanfarmaian, ed., *War and Peace in Qajar Persia*, pp. 174-182; Frederic Shoberl. *Persia: Containing a Description of the Country, with an Account of its Government, Laws, and Religion, and of the Character,*

antagonism, for example, between the Khaz 'al and the Bakhtiyari Khans over the Jarrahi lands, which started in 1913, caused frequent raids for years.³⁰⁹

The period from 1907-1921 saw a 'history of multiple conflicts between innumerable small communities: of clan against clan, tribe against tribe, tribe against village, tribe against town, town against village, village against village, village against town ward, and town ward against town ward'.³¹⁰ For example, there was a clash between the people of Girash and Lar villages in 1912, with antagonism lasting for several years.³¹¹ As a result, it was not surprising that this resulted in the emigration of some of the inhabitants of the two villages.³¹²

Already in the late nineteenth century, merchants and others, aggrieved at the authorities' failure to combat insecurity, were impelled to migrate to the Arab Gulf, including Kuwait.³¹³ Lorimer describes the internal conditions of Gaband, a district in Fars, between 1907 and 1915, as depopulated by emigration, 'due to political troubles, chiefly to Bahrain, Kuwait, and Fao, and in the most of the villages a proportion of the houses are empty'.³¹⁴ Not surprisingly, the situations in both Khuzestan and the Iranian Coast were not much better. The tribes not only practiced robbery and banditry but also caused disturbances. For example, the Ka 'b tribe, particularly the al-Nassar branch, continuously disobeyed the law and rebelled against the governor of Muhammerah, Mu 'azz-us-Saltaneh in 1883 and 1887.³¹⁵ Under

Manners and Customs, Arts, Amusements, &c. of its Inhabitants. Philadelphia, J. Grigg, 1828, p. 60.

³⁰⁹'ARPGPR for 1913' in *TPAR*, vol. VII, p. 91.

³¹⁰Abrahamian. *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 27-28.

³¹¹'ARPGPR for 1912', in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, p. 38.

³¹²The Girashi and Lari families are well known in the Kuwaiti 'Ajam communities, and it has been said that some of them left their villages and came to Kuwait between 1920 and 1940 according to oral history.

³¹³Davies. 'A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century'. PhD diss., St. Antony's College, Oxford University, 1984, p. 407.

³¹⁴Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II. Geog and Stat, p. 562.

³¹⁵Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. II Hist, pp. 1684-1685; 'ARPGPR for 1883-84 and 1887-88' in *TPGAR*, vol. III, pp. 9, 12.

Sheikh Khaz'al, the al-Nassar tribal branch declined to pay the annual tax in 1903 and attempted armed rebellion against the governor.⁶⁴ Thus, the Ka' b tribe was sufficiently powerful to challenge governmental control in the region.³¹⁶

As a result of a serious outbreak of insecurity and disturbance in the region, 'a considerable gun running operation passed through Fars, and the majority of people, even simple peasants, were armed'³¹⁷ in order to protect themselves against any repression from the tribes or the Khan as government representative.

Economic Downturns and Natural Disasters in Southwestern Iran

Not surprisingly, given its geology, Iran has historically been the most susceptible to earthquakes among its neighbours. For example, earthquakes hit Behbahan in 1879, Khunj and Firuzbad in 1885, and Fasa in 1893;³¹⁸ Bastak, located north of Lingah in 1880-1881 causing 120 dead and houses destroyed;³¹⁹ Bushehr in 1883 and 1887;³²⁰ Kangoon, Asloo, and coastal Tahiri in 1883;³²¹ and Bandar'Abbas and Shibkuh in 1902 and 1913 respectively.³²²

Constant flooding was another environmental phenomenon which contributed to the tribulations, especially for people on the coast. Fasa, for example, suffered flooding following the earthquake in 1893, rendering 15,000 inhabitants homeless.³²³ In Khuzestan

³¹⁶'ARPGPR for 1893-94' in *TPGAR*, vol. IV, p. 9.

³¹⁷Ettehadieh. 'Crime, Security, and Insecurity' in Roxan Farmanfarmaian, ed., *War and Peace in Qajar Persia*, pp. 174-182.

³¹⁸Davies. 'A History of the Province of Fars', p. 173 (footnote).

³¹⁹'ARPGPR for 1880-81' in *TPGAR*, vol. II, p. 10.

³²⁰'ARPGPR for 1883-84 and 1887-88' in *TPGAR*, vol. II, pp. 8, 14.

³²¹'ARPGPR for 1883-84' in *TPGAR*, vol. II, pp. 8, 14.

³²²'ARPGPR for 1913' in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, p. 40.

³²³During this catastrophe, the government increased the tax rate. See Davies. 'A History of the Province of Fars', p. 517 (footnote).

province, Muhammerah suffered severe flooding in 1896.³²⁴ Floods also overwhelmed Ahwaz in 1893, and Ma'shour and its adjacent villages at the beginning of the 20th century.³²⁵

Finally, diverse fatal epidemics and diseases, such as cholera, smallpox, and plague, were widespread in southwestern Iran, particularly in the major ports linked through trade with the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean regions.³²⁶ Indeed, cholera, the most common epidemic, spread through Iran during the second quarter of the 19th century, and sometimes affected the Iranian economy, as under quarantine rules, trade with the Gulf and the Indian Ocean countries was suspended because of the contagious nature of this disease.

Although numerous outbreaks of disease are mentioned in the sources during this period, this study provides examples to show the region was more vulnerable to deadly diseases than Kuwait. Cholera was experienced in Bushehr in 1851, 1869, 1871, and 1893, and smallpox in 1879 and 1902-1909; cholera appeared in Dasht and Tangistan, in Fars in 1889, on the coast in 1893,³²⁷ and in Arabistan, Behbahan and Shushter in 1893.³²⁸ Muhammerah, Ahwaz, and Dizful were exposed to cholera in 1889 and smallpox visited Muhammerah in 1901.³²⁹ Cholera caused forty-eight deaths in Muhammerah and 912 deaths in Abadan in 1923.³³⁰

³²⁴Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1264.

³²⁵'ARPGPR for 1893-94' in *TPGAR*, vol. IV, p. 10; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I A Geog and Stat, p. 146.

³²⁶Cholera appeared in Iran for the first time in 1821. R Burrell. 'The 1904 Epidemic of Cholera in Persia: Some Aspects of Qajar Society', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 51, no. 2 (1988): pp. 258-270.

³²⁷Davies. 'A History of the Province of Fars', pp. 184-98; 'ARPGPR for 1889-90' in *TPGAR*, vol. III, p. 17 (appendix); Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. II Hist, p. 2555.

³²⁸Shushter and Dizful were exposed to cholera in 1904. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. II Hist, p. 1739.

³²⁹Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. II Hist, pp. 1678, 2555; 'ARPGPR for 1889-90' in *TPGAR*, vol. III, pp. 17, 18 (appendix).

³³⁰'ARPGPR for 1923' in *TPGAR*, vol. VIII, p. 14. (appendix).

Plague was recorded in Bushehr in 1899 and in Lingah in 1904.³³¹ Serious plague visited Bushehr in 1912 resulting in 729 deaths out of 965 recorded cases. The mortality rate was between three and four per cent of the population. Many families were wiped out and there was a sizable emigration to Muhammerah, Basrah and elsewhere, which resulted in a long-term diminution of the population.³³² A severe influenza epidemic was registered in Bandar‘Abbas in 1918, in which one thousand people were reported to have died. In 1923 plague also visited Abadan and caused the deaths of two hundred people.³³³

Scanty rainfall could cause severe droughts and famines, such as the ones that occurred in 1870-1872, 1897-1898, and 1918-1919. Conversely, too plentiful rainfall could destroy the harvests, which occurred in 1884-1885 and 1904-1905.³³⁴ Locusts also damaged crops during the years of 1890, 1893, 1895, 1896, 1902, and 1927 in different parts of the provinces of Fars, and part of Khuzestan in 1919.³³⁵ Inadequate cultivation could affect merchants and paralyse trade in the region, because Iran relied heavily on the commodities produced in its various provinces.

The merchants, notables, and governors took advantage of these disasters by raising prices of essentials in times of scarcity. With the poor harvests between 1885 and 1888, prices of foodstuffs increased.³³⁶ Insufficient rainfall in 1890, 1892, 1895, 1897, 1901, 1902, 1931,

³³¹‘ARPGPR for 1899-1900’ in *TPGAR*, vol. IV, p. 2; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part II Hist, p. 2539.

³³²‘ARPGPR for 1912’ in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, p. 17.

³³³Muhammerah also experienced plague in 1918, 1922 and 1923; numerous people died. ‘ARPGPR for 1918’ in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, pp. 16, 42; ‘ARPGPR for 1922 and 1923’ in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, p. 9 (for year 1922 appendix), p. 14 (for year 1923 appendix).

³³⁴‘ARPGPR for 1897-98 and 1904-05’ in *TPGAR*, vols. IV and V, pp. 9, 1.

³³⁵For more information on the abovementioned years, see *TPGAR*, vols. IV, V, VII, and VIII. pp. 9, 23, 7, 9, 1, 48, 5.

³³⁶In all those years there were constant bread riots and revolts by hungry people against the provincial government. For more details, see ‘ARPGPR for 1885-86, 1886-87 and 1887-88’ in *TPGAR*, vol. III, pp. 7, 8, 11, 13.

1932, 1936, 1937, and 1938 in Fars, and in 1924 in Khuzestan province, had the same effect. Even though grain was imported from India to compensate for the loss, merchants still raised their prices.³³⁷

Thus, rebellions and riots due to food price increases, tax rate increases, and merchants' monopolies show the instability in the region and highlight how Iranians were dissatisfied with their daily life due to a variety of political, social, and economic factors. In other words, life was increasingly difficult for people in the region as conditions continued to deteriorate. The increase in trade between Kuwait and southwestern Iran contributed to continuous internal migration of artisans and labourers seeking job opportunities on Iran's Gulf coast. Therefore, it is not surprising that the records of commercial interactions between the two regions show that Kuwaiti and Iranian visitors and merchants were travelling back and forth either on Kuwaiti or Iranian merchants' boats or on British ships. This was indicated, for example, by the British telegraphic reports, as one observed in 1901, 'Perseus at Koweit. Sphinx leaves Busheher today for same place, conveying residents'.³³⁸

The Arbitrary Political Administration of Southwestern Iran

Although the middle of the 19th century witnessed the beginning of the increase of the Shah's power over his numerous provincial governors, it did not eliminate oppression by the powerful local governors.³³⁹ Control of their activities was limited by their autonomy,³⁴⁰ which was largely due to poor communications, although this had improved by the twentieth

³³⁷'2.1.2 Analysis of Trade in the Gulf' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II, p. 95.

³³⁸'FCRAK' (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affairs of Kuwait*, vol. I part. III, p. 76.

³³⁹Davies. 'A History of the Province of Fars', p. 7.

³⁴⁰Curzon. *Persia*, vol. I, p. 437.

century. Taxes were also remitted only intermittently and often fell short of the full amount. Thus the Qajar government was far from being a centralised power.

The autonomous rule exercised by governors of those assorted provinces was another factor that contributed to make Iran, particularly the southern part, an unsettled region. In fact, those governors had created what Vanessa Martin called ‘their own militia’³⁴¹ to protect their interests no matter what the consequences for the people. As a result, there could be no effective attempt to preserve law and order.³⁴² In this respect, throughout the late 19th century to the beginning of Reza Shah’s reign, governors of Fars were unable to confront tribal plunder, banditry, *a ‘yān* influence, rebellions, tax burdens, crime, or insecurity.³⁴³ These problems grew worse after 1907.

This corrupt and rapacious bureaucratic system played a substantial role in preventing Iran from developing. Extortion from ordinary people by the governors, whether to cover the fiscal obligations of their provinces to the central treasury or for their own interest, which was collected as ‘governmental revenue’, forced residents to migrate to adjacent settled regions if they had the chance.

Different kinds of ‘presents’, called *pishkash* or *hadiyya* (gift) which was a form of a bribe, were exchanged between the official governors and their subjects, including the *a ‘yāns*. This could happen among the governors themselves as well since the wages of government employees, including official local governors, judges, and other minor government representatives, were low and at the same time they had to give presents to the high officials

³⁴¹Vanessa Martin. *The Qajar Pact. Bargaining, Protest and the State in Nineteenth-Century Persia*. London, and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 14.

³⁴²R.M., Burrell and Robert Jarman, eds., *Iran Political Diaries 1881-1965*, vol. II. London: Archive Edition, 1997, p. vii.

³⁴³On governors of Fars see Hasan Fasa’i. *History of Persia*. Heribert Busse, trans., 386-413; Davies, ‘A History of the Province of Fars’, pp. 113-126; Saldanha, ‘Précis of the Affair of the Persian Coast’ in *TPGP*, vol, VII, p. 10; *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. III, p. 232.

in order to retain their positions every year. The solution to this quandary was to increase the taxes on ordinary people, such as the peasants.³⁴⁴ The Shah received a *pishkash* Iranian New Year from his provincial governors. The subjects could raise complaints of maladministration by the provincial governors if they could somehow succeed in passing the complaints by the government officials to the Shah. However, the best way to escape punishment and keep their jobs was by offering a bribe to the appropriate administrator or the judge under the name of *pishkash*.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, many people gave *hadiyya* to the official governors for protection from false accusations.³⁴⁶

Trade between Southwestern Iran and Kuwait 1880-1921

Trade between southwestern Iran and Kuwait existed from the time of the early history of Kuwait, though there is a dearth of primary sources, especially with regard to the early 18th century, that mention such a connection. However, there are grounds for assuming that there was a historical commercial exchange between Kuwait and southwestern Iran on a regional level and with some of the Indian Ocean seaports on a global level, because Kuwait was not self-sufficient economically and lacked primary agricultural crops (e.g. rice, wheat, vegetables and fruits). The existence of an 'Ajam community in the early history of Kuwait, as discussed in Chapter Three, also implies that trade existed between the two regions. From the first half of the 19th century, a number of British reports point to the existence of trade between Kuwait and the southwestern Iranian ports, which could reflect a historical

³⁴⁴Samuel Wilson. *Persian Life and Customs: With Scenes and Incidents of Residence and Travel in the Land of the Lion and the Sun*. New York, Chicago: F.H. Revell, 1895, pp. 179-180; Curzon. *Persia*, vol. I, pp. 440, 444; Curzon. *Persia*, vol. II, p. 485.

³⁴⁵Curzon, *Persia*, vol. I, p. 445.

³⁴⁶For more detail about different kinds of bribes practiced in Fars, see, Hasan Fasa'i. *History of Persia*. Heribert Busse, trans., p. 375.

connection through trading relations that prevailed during the earlier period as discussed in Chapter Two.

In the latter part of the 19th century, especially from the 1880s onwards, there are reports on trade between Kuwait and the southwestern Iranian ports in the western zone of the upper coastal region, including Bandar Dailam, and Bandar Ma 'shour, and more particularly in the middle of the coastal area, Bushehr. For example, in 1882 it was reported that wheat, barley, grapes, raisins, and wool, to a total value of 150,000 Kirans, were exported from Bandar Dailam to Basra, Lingah, and Kuwait. In the same year, Bandar Dailam imported piece goods, sugar, tea, and dates of an overall value of 260,000 Kirans from Kuwait, Basra, and Bushehr. Bandar Ma 'shour also had historical trade connections with Kuwait, according to a report dated 1882. It indicates that between forty and fifty local ships from Kuwait, Basra, and Bushehr visited the port of Bandar Ma 'shour for trade during that year. Wool, grain, wheat, barley, rice, and sheep were major commodities that were shipped to Kuwait with cloths, corn, and dates exported to Bandar Ma 'shour. Bushehr, on the other hand, had an estimate of one hundred regular calls by local ships, travelling from Kuwait, Basra, and Qatif to Bushehr port in 1882. Items like coffee, pepper, and cotton piece-goods (originally English manufactured), with a total value of 32,250 Rupees, were imported during the same year to Bushehr from Kuwait. Kuwait received from Bushehr goods such as tobacco, madder root, nuts, gram, and carpets, with a total value of 16,450 Rupees.³⁴⁷ Bandar Dailam, Bandar Ma 'shour, and Bushehr were not the only ports in upper southwestern Iran that engaged in mercantile exchange with Kuwait. Towns and ports, such as Dasht, Abadan, Tangistan, Hindyan, and Behbahan, and the villages and towns of the Shatt al- 'Arab on the Iranian side, also had trade links with Kuwait. For instance, many Kuwaitis, especially the Bedouin,

³⁴⁷*Persian Gazetteer*, vol. III, pp. 94-95, 151, 152, 154, 157.

trained hawks. These were usually brought from Dasht, from where they were especially sought.³⁴⁸ By the early 20th century, merchandise such as tea was being smuggled into Behbahan from Kuwait, and during the first three decades, arms and ammunition were brought into Dasht, Tangistan, Hayat Dawud and many other areas of southwestern Iran.³⁴⁹ Sand was exported from Kuwait to Abadan and Muhammerah, and water supplies were brought from the mouth of the Shatt al-‘Arab to Kuwait until the 1950s.

More meticulous reports on the percentages of total trade volume between Kuwait and the southwestern Iranian ports, especially Bushehr, were made at the beginning of the 20th century (1905-1921), when the British officially established a representative agency in Kuwait after the protectorate of 1899 ended. Another sign of trade growth between Kuwait and southwestern Iran can be noticed from the number of Iranian sailing-ships that visited Kuwait port between 1910 and 1921, as demonstrated in figure 8 in appendix 3.

Although the reports are estimates, they give an indication of trade volume and historical trade links between Kuwait and Bushehr, and Kuwait and the Iranian coastal ports, as is demonstrated in the figures 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 in appendix 3 taken from *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*.

As is shown from figures 9 and 10 which display the trade relations between Kuwait and Bushehr (1904-1921), the trade increased during the reign of Mubarak al-Sabah (1896-1915), the period when the population of Kuwait also increased significantly, and the number of the Iranian immigrants rose, as will be further discussed below. The trade with other Iranian

³⁴⁸C.G. Bsh, 18 Oct 1916, p. 52. *IOR R/15/5/93*.

³⁴⁹Rates of customs dues levied on goods entering and leaving Kuwait can be found in *IOR R/15/5/53*, pp. 16-20; from B.R. and C.G. Bsh to P.A. Kw, no, 833/ 1921, 25 May 1921, p. 68. *IOR R/15/5/53*; from B.R. and C.G. Bsh to A.C.C. in Mesopotamia and Officiating P.R. PG, no, 282/ 1920, 16 Feb, 1920, p. 55. *IOR R/15/5/53*.

coastal ports (1905-1921) as it appears in figures 11, 12 and 13 in appendix 3 also indicates an increase of commercial exchange with Kuwait at the beginning of the 20th century.³⁵⁰

Thus the level of trade between Kuwait and the southwestern Iranian ports, as demonstrated by figures 11, 12 and 13 increased at the beginning of the 20th century. One reason was the development of Kuwait City, and particularly the modernisation of its harbour (i.e. Khur 'Abdullah). Thus, it began to compete with other Arab Gulf ports as one of the main destinations for transshipment, especially for those traders whose ultimate destination were either Mediterranean cities or Indian Ocean seaports. With regard to the desert route, Kuwait was also a focal trade station for Najdi caravans whereby the Bedouins supplied goods for Najd and its periphery. This internal economic prosperity of Kuwait, which was associated with political stability, caught the attention of potential immigrants who had suffered from adverse conditions. As a result, given the reciprocal commerce between Kuwait and southwestern Iran, people, such as coolies, artisans, shopkeepers, craftsmen, and merchants, who lived in the abovementioned ports or elsewhere in southwestern Iran, migrated to Kuwait for business opportunities or a better life. This accords with 'migration system theory', which proposes that migratory movement normally takes place as a result of existing connections between sending and receiving regions based on different elements, including investment and trade relations.³⁵¹ Indeed, trade between Kuwait and southwestern Iran generated not only historical commercial links between both regions but also created social contacts and networks between the people of the two regions; those who sought work and ultimately settled in the state helped to develop Kuwait. Many Shi'a immigrants, especially the 'Ajam from a social group called *tarakma*, chose Kuwait as their location of settlement in order to

³⁵⁰The decrease in trade between Kuwait and the southwestern Iranian coastal ports and Bushehr can be attributed to the disruption caused by the First World War.

³⁵¹Castles and Miller. *The Age of Migration*, p. 26.

find employment. This pattern is known as a ‘speculative migration’, and falls under ‘labour migration’, as Paul Boyle and others indicate.³⁵² Indeed, the al-Sabah ruling family of Kuwait welcomed the Shi‘a immigrants as long as they were not a threat to the security and stability of Kuwait, an example of how these matters influence global migration.³⁵³

‘Ajam merchants as individuals in particular played an important part in the migration process through trade with the southwestern Iranian littoral area. Through their networks of agents, family linkages, and job seekers of the southwestern Iranian ports, ‘Ajam mediated between their affiliated economic institutions, agents, individuals (e.g. merchants), and Iranian emigrants. As a consequence, it is not surprising to see the impact of trade relations on both sides of the migrations from southwestern Iran to Kuwait, as is indicated in the following reports.

Lorimer noted that the ‘Ajam community who settled in Kuwait during the first quarter of the 20th century usually ‘go and come freely between Kuwait and the parts of Iran to which they originally belonged’.³⁵⁴ This report, written in the early 20th century, is the first British primary source that sheds light on the population of Kuwait from an ethnic and a religious perspective. He emphasises that the ‘Ajam community in Kuwait consisted of roughly one thousand people.³⁵⁵ The number of ‘Ajam merchants amounted to a score, there were over one hundred ‘Ajam shopkeepers, and more than two hundred ‘Ajam working in the labour industry.³⁵⁶ This may be viewed in a context where the overall population during Mubarak

³⁵²Boyle and Others. *Exploring Contemporary Migration*, p. 38.

³⁵³Weiner, ‘Security’ in *International Security*, pp. 91-126.

³⁵⁴Lorimer *Gaz of PG*, vol. II B Geog and Stat, p. 1051.

³⁵⁵His assumption may have underestimated the size of the entire community as the private papers of the particular Shi‘a communities indicate they were larger, especially with the existence of their religious institutions (i.e. *masjid* and *hussayniyya*)

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*

al-Sabah's reign increased significantly (i.e. both Shi'a and Sunni).³⁵⁷ Dickson, P.A. of Kuwait in 1933, indicates that the population of Kuwait town nearly doubled during Mubarak al-Sabah's reign.³⁵⁸

Two 1912 reports of Shakespear, P.A. of Kuwait, demonstrate the influx of 'Ajam to Kuwait for permanent settlement. He emphasises the economic prosperity of Kuwait that helped to draw many 'Ajam to Kuwait as a main destination for residence:

'At the same time the population of the town continued to increase rapidly as trade recovered in sympathy with improvement of the pearl-market, and during the last two years there has been in consequence a large influx of Persians of the artisan and labouring classes, who have taken up a more or less permanent residence in Kuwait.'³⁵⁹

Shakespear also mentions the anxiety of Sheikh Mubarak over the increase of the Kuwait population because of consequent problems with water shortage.³⁶⁰ A report by More says of the 'Ajam community that it 'has greatly increased in recent years and now consists of about ten thousand people'.³⁶¹ More's report not only shows the increase of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait but also discusses the long settlement there of some of them. He raises the issue of their political identity, a point that will be further discussed in Chapters Four and Five.³⁶²

The growth of 'Ajam migration to Kuwait is demonstrated by examples such as those of Iranian' traders and workers who settled in Kuwait for business, mentioned in British reports and *al-sijl al- 'ām* files in *al-diwan al-amiri* records in Kuwait between 1900 and 1940. These

³⁵⁷From Mubarak al-Sabah to P. Cox P.R. PG, 13 Nov 1912, p. 3. *IOR R/15/1/511*.

³⁵⁸'Note on Kuwait principality at the end of the year' by H. Dickson, p. 5. *IOR R/15/5/179*.

³⁵⁹From W. Shakespear P.A. Kw to P.R. PG. Bsh, no, 459, 13 Nov, 1912. *IOR R/15/5/236*.

³⁶⁰From W. Shakespear P.A. Kw to P.R. PG, no, 459, 13 Nov, 1912, pp. 5-7. *IOR R/15/1/511*.

³⁶¹'Trade report of Kuwait 1920-1921', in *TPGTR*, vol. I. Kuwait, p. III.

³⁶²It should be noted that when Lorimer, Shakespear, More and Dickson discussed what so called the 'Iranian' community in their reports it is not clear whether they have meant the Shi'a 'Ajam community only or they have meant also the Sunni 'Ajam as well as it seems they did not distinguish between sects.

included merchants, such as 'Ali 'Awadi, who moved to Kuwait in 1902 to trade;³⁶³ Karbala'i Jahrumi, who settled in Kuwait in 1902 to work as a baker;³⁶⁴ and in 1905 an Iranian merchant from Shushter, possessing a recommendation from Sheikh Khaz'al of Muhammerah, who visited Kuwait to establish a business.³⁶⁵ Later in the period, the P.A. of Kuwait mentions an Iranian called Isma'il Firuzkuhi who arrived in Kuwait in 1921 looking for a work.³⁶⁶ Another report shows that an Iranian trader from Lingah, called Muhammad Khuri, settled in Kuwait in 1922 to open a shop.³⁶⁷

The trade routes between Kuwait and southwestern Iran resulted in an exchange of commodities, which facilitated migration to Kuwait during the first two decades of the 20th century. Kuwait became the hub of the northern Gulf for the arms business, and according to a British report was 'the principal export port connected to the arm traffic'.³⁶⁸ This trade attracted many inhabitants of southwestern Iran, including arms dealers, the Khans of the Bakhtiyari tribe, and others or their representatives for constant short visits that might lead to permanent settlement. Kuwait, as British reports emphasise, supplied arms and ammunition for two major destinations; first, and in a great amount, via local dhows to Iranian coastal ports between Bandar Dailam and Lingah. Some of these areas were supplied via an arms smuggling route that went through the Shatt al-'Arab zone, ultimately entering Iranian littoral villages and cities. Second, and to a lesser degree, arms went overland to Qatar and Dubai. Some of these were transferred ultimately to the Makran coast, mainly to Minab

³⁶³From W. Grey to P.R. PG. Bs, no, c.45, 22 Dec 1915, p. 31. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

³⁶⁴From P.A. Bh to F.A.R. Bsh, no, 1138, 7 Nov 1917, p. 55. *IOR R/15/5/48*; from Ahmad al-Jabir to P.A. Kw, 22 Nov 1917, dn 246/1, p. 83, vol. I, *al-sijl al-'ām*, in *al-diwan al amiri*.

³⁶⁵'Report of Kuwait 1905' in *PDPG*, vol. I, pp. 129-130.

³⁶⁶From P.A. Kw to P.R. PG. Bsh, no, 85-c, 29 May 1921, p. 46. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

³⁶⁷From P.A. Kw to P.R. PG, Bsh, no, 142-b, 16 Sep 1922, p. 148. *IOR R/15/5/96*.

³⁶⁸Report of conference on arms traffic in the Persian Gulf, Karachi from 1 to 5 Aug 1921, p. 61. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

and Chahbar. It is reported also that Bandar Ma'shour and Hindyan received monthly more than twenty thousand rounds of arms and ammunition from Kuwait.³⁶⁹

Kuwaiti 'Ajam merchants, such as Najaf ibn Ghalib and his brother Muhammad Taqi, Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi and his son Isma'il, whose family had settled in Kuwait in its early period, and who controlled much of the arms business there, indirectly encouraged the migration of many Iranian dealers, agents and labourers through their network, language congruence, and shared ethnicity. This type of social network, linking the Kuwaiti 'Ajam merchants and Iranian immigrants, created a migratory process that provided greater security for Iranian immigrants and their families.³⁷⁰ As a result, it encouraged Iranians, especially arms dealers, to settle in Kuwait either temporarily or permanently. Another example is the case of the Bushehri ship captain (*nukhudha*), named Hussayn Ahmad, who settled in Kuwait around the first quarter of the 20th century, and visited Bandar Rig to sell arms and ammunition. He bought them through shopkeepers in Kuwait via his network connection with Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi, a well-known Kuwaiti 'Ajam merchant, who had an agent in Bandar Ma'shour.³⁷¹ Many Iranians from Dasht, Tangistan, and Kazarun often visited Kuwait, which ultimately led to some dwelling there permanently and acting as arms brokers to supply their clients from the southwestern Iranian region. Another example is that of Yusuf Kazaruni who settled in Kuwait with his family, opened a shop and possessed four houses.³⁷² Besides the Kuwaiti 'Ajam merchants, such as Najaf ibn Ghalib and Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi, who were the main arms dealers in Kuwait, Kazaruni similarly acted as an agent for Iranians

³⁶⁹From R. Watts. I.O. PG to the S.G.S.O. Simla, no. i.-105, 30 Sep 1920, p. 31. *IOR R/15/5/47*; 'Ammunition Smuggled from Kuwait' in *IOR R/15/5/48*, p. 11.

³⁷⁰Castles and Miller. *The Age of Migration*, p. 28.

³⁷¹See 'Ammunition Smuggled from Kuwait' in *IOR R/15/5/48*, p. 11.

³⁷²From P.A. Mus to P.R. PG, 13 Jul 1913, p. 78. *IOR R/15/5/46*.

who came over to buy arms,³⁷³ and was the principal arms broker for the Tangistanis.³⁷⁴ He was apprehended by the British and in 1921 agreed to work as their spy and identify those who were involved in gunrunning between Kuwait and southwestern Iran.³⁷⁵

Furthermore, some southwestern Iranian Khans and Sheikhs sent their agents or representatives to Kuwait with a view to buying weapons from either the leading families of 'Ajam arms brokers (i.e. Ma'rafi and ibn Ghalib), or Iranian arms dealers (i.e. Kazaruni) as indicated above. For instance, it was noted that two Bakhtiyari chiefs visited Kuwait in 1908 with a view to buying arms.³⁷⁶ However, although many Khans in southwestern Iran were involved in the arms traffic with Kuwait, others were concerned about the situation. For example, Agha Haydar Khan, chief of the Hayat Dawud, wrote to the British complaining about the continuous importation of rifles from Kuwait via the people of Dilum, Dasht, and Tangistan, who frequently travelled to Kuwait for the arms business. Eventually, according to Haydar Khan, the goods passed on to the Behbahan, Hindyan, Ahwaz, Ramhurmuz, and Dashtistan areas, and other Iranian coastal regions.³⁷⁷

The trade between Kuwait and southwestern Iran not only attracted Iranian immigrants and visitors from different social groups to settle in Kuwait, it also encouraged some Kuwaiti Shi'a merchants, including Arab and 'Ajam, to open offices in areas of southwestern Iran to run their business throughout the Gulf region, profiting from their network and family relations. The best example of such a case is a Kuwaiti Shi'a merchant of Arab origin called

³⁷³I.O. Bsh, no, 1/84, 2 Jun 1921, p. 49. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

³⁷⁴B.R. Bsh, no, 1314/1920, 4 Aug 1920, p. 18. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

³⁷⁵Details of the Kazaruni story can be found in IOR R/15/5/48, pp. 60-62, 72, 83, 134; IOR R/15/5/47, pp.18, 49-50, 55-56.

³⁷⁶'Report of Kuwait 1908' in *PDPG*, vol. III, p. 242.

³⁷⁷From Zabit of Kharag and Hayat Dawud, BRig to P.R. PG, 10 Jan 1922, p. 100. *IOR R/15/5/47*; from Haydar Khan Hayat Dawudi, Zabit of Kharag and Hayat Dawud to Major G. Anson, Sec P.R. PG, 27 Apr 1922, p. 128. *IOR R/15/5/47*.

Muhammad al-Matruk, who preferred to live between Basra and the southwestern Iran area, including Muhammerah, and opened offices in both areas either to work as a main importer and exporter, or as a commissioner-agent who supplied a variety of commodities to other Kuwaiti merchants living in Kuwait, and to Arab merchants in the Persian Gulf, according to his individual archival documents. Al-Matruk was not the only Kuwaiti merchant to settle in one of the southwestern Iranian towns. Lorimer indicates that among the residents of Bushehr, there were ten Kuwaitis, ten Hassawiyya and twenty Baharna, whom he considered permanent residents, who might be traders.³⁷⁸

Between the last quarter of the 19th century to 1921, Kuwait became a significant location on the political map of the Persian Gulf and flourished economically. Mubarak al-Sabah successfully transformed Kuwait from a nascent town to a recognisable small political state (*imārat al-kuwayt*) where many immigrants from Kuwait's neighbours, especially Iran, decided to settle. Besides political instability, and religious and social persecutions in Shi'a homelands that caused many Shi'a to leave their places of birth, maritime trade development between Kuwait and southwestern Iran during Mubarak's reign was a fundamental component in the decision of Iranian immigrants to settle in Kuwait from 1880 onwards. Iranians from different social groups were encouraged to settle permanently in Kuwait as a part of the state-building policy initiated by the al-Sabah. In addition, it is not surprising to find that Kuwaiti 'Ajam and Arab merchants, due to the common networks, language congruence, and connections with Iranian business agents and partners in towns and ports of southwestern Iran, played an essential role in attracting native Iranians to choose Kuwait as a settlement destination, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁷⁸Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. II A Geog and Stat, p. 344.

Bahrain: A Place of Political Unrest and Maladministration

After decades of violent power struggles within the al-Khalifa family, the ascension of ‘Isa ibn ‘Ali to the political power in Bahrain, with support of the British in 1869, still failed to eliminate the inter-feudal dynastic rivalry among the al-Khalifa family members. Nor did it protect Bahrain from any regional threat in the Gulf. Thus, British war vessels were constantly anchored either in Bahrain’s port or remained near the area in case of emergency.³⁷⁹

Possible external political threats came from the Iranian government, and the desire of the Ottomans to conquer Bahrain, and other parts of the Gulf, after re-establishing themselves in al-Hasa in 1871, and a few years later in Bidaa at Qatar, were acts that caused anxiety for both the ruler of Bahrain and the British government. Besides the desire of foreign powers (i.e. French, American, Japanese, and German) to establish themselves in Bahrain, one of the most important commercial centres in the Gulf, both the Ottoman Sultan and Iranian Shah sought to bring Bahrain into their political spheres of influence, on the grounds that Bahrain had been part of their empires in the *longue durée*. Political correspondence was exchanged between both powers and the British government over such claims, only to be rejected by the British. Attempts were made by the Ottomans to obtain a foothold in Bahrain with the intention of establishing a coal depot there in 1879, and there was the subsequent visit of a ship a year later in order to place an Ottoman garrison in Bahrain, similar to those in Qatar and al-Hasa. Moreover, in 1892 the Porte asked the *wālī* of Basra to consider Bahrain as Ottoman territory. That is why the local Ottoman authorities in Basra and al-Hasa treated

³⁷⁹During ‘Isa’s reign, British warships were registered as attending Bahrain ports regularly, especially those of Manamah or nearby. Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I B Hist, pp. 907, 910, 920, 925.

Bahrainis (i.e. all the people of Bahrain regardless of their religious faith) who were settling there (i.e. Basra and al-Hasa) as Ottoman subjects. This is also obvious from countless complaints made by Bahraini subjects against the local authorities of Basra, as well as their demands for British protection between 1892 and 1897. The last attempt to establish Ottoman influence in Bahrain was made in 1897, when the Porte suggested establishing a sanitary house in the region, but all these attempts were blocked by the British.

During the same period, Iran raised the question of its historical claim on Bahrain. The Shah in 1885 planned to assert his authority over Bahrain by sending an Iranian governor there on the grounds of an 1869 letter, from the British Foreign Office to the Persian Minister at the court of St. James, that recognised his sovereignty over the country.³⁸⁰ Even though the endeavours of the Ottoman and Iranian governments to put Bahrain under their dominion continued into the following century, the British succeeded in keeping Bahrain independent, and out of the sphere of any regional or external power. This was especially so after the protectorate treaties between Bahrain and the British government in 1880 and 1892 respectively.³⁸¹

Besides these external challenges, Bahrain under 'Isa's regime, witnessed internal political disturbances among rival members of the al-Khalifa from the al-'Abdullah branch, such as Nasir ibn Mubarak, between 1871 and 1913, and among those from the same family branch as that of the ruler (al-Salman), such as 'Ali ibn Ahmad ibn 'Ali, a nephew of 'Isa ibn 'Ali, from 1888 to 1916. Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Khalifa, a cousin of the ruler and 'Abdullah ibn 'Isa, the youngest son of the chief of Bahrain, Salman ibn Hamad, son of the ruler of Bahrain

³⁸⁰Saldanha'. 'Précis of Bahrain Affair' in *TPGP*, vol. IV, p. 72.

³⁸¹Lorimer. *Gaz. of PG*, vol. I part. I B Hist, p. 922, 935; Saldanha. 'Précis of Bahrain Affair' in *TPGP*, vol. IV, pp. 84, 89-91.

Hamad ibn ‘Isa (1923-1942), also contributed to the political disturbances in Bahrain by initiating frequent local intrigues against the rulers (e.g. ‘Isa and his son Hamad), and undermined law and order by extorting the general public in order to create a chaotic situation in Bahrain. Likewise, two major Arab tribes, the Bani Hajar and al-Murrah, contributed to political uncertainty in Bahrain by entering the whirlpool of political conflict among the al-Khalifa family, and taking sides against one group or the other. Besides political friction amongst the members of the ruling family, the absence of a rigid centralised political administrative system, similar to the situation in southwestern Iran, enabled members of the al-Khalifa to rule their individual spheres in the different towns and villages of Bahrain. This also led to disorder. Moreover, ‘Isa ibn ‘Ali’s status as a political leader was undermined by his authoritative wife ‘A’isha, who fought for the succession of her son ‘Abdullah to the rulership, instead of Hamad ibn ‘Isa, the eldest son of the ruler of Bahrain. This contributed to the maladministration of Bahrain, which in turn adversely affected the Shi ‘a community, mainly the Baharna. Indeed, for generations the continuous maladministration of Bahrain, which was associated with injustice *zulm* practiced by the members of the al-Khalifa, created animosity, and social and religious divisions among the people of Bahrain. This ultimately resulted in sectarianism, which caused social tensions between the Shi ‘a and Sunnis, and encouraged violence, including the murder of the Baharna by ordinary people. This is evident from incidents in the 1920s including the Sitra outrage, which led to frequent protests by the Shi ‘a in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Conflict between the Sheikh of Bahrain and ‘Ali ibn Ahmad al-Khalifa 1888-1916

Further family dissension appeared on the political scene in 1888 after the death of Ahmad ibn ‘Ali, a younger brother of the ruler of Bahrain. Though this was to be a weaker internal

challenge in comparison to Nasir ibn Mubarak al-Khalifa's intimidation,³⁸² 'Isa ibn 'Ali had to confront 'Ali ibn Ahmad ibn 'Ali, his nephew, who sought political recognition and economic privileges parallel to those his father had had. When he failed, 'Ali began to commit lawless acts toward the public, especially harassing the Shi'a, in the hope of gaining attention from the political authorities and obtaining political and economic privileges. One possible explanation as to why his mistreatment was exclusively targeted at the Baharna or the Shi'a in general is because they were a powerless social group and politically and socially marginalised in the larger Bahraini community. Indeed, in the eyes of most of the members of the al-Khalifa, the Baharna community in Bahrain was significant only in that it provided an opportunity for economic exploitation, especially as the majority of Baharna worked either as artisans in a variety of local industries, or as cultivators or peasants serving in the orchards (see the next section below). Given the nature of jobs, this part of the population served the elite minority group (i.e. the al-Khalifa and their allies) as a source of free labour (*sukhra*) particularly in terms of building the state.

For example, in 1905 servants of 'Ali attacked 'Ajam shopkeepers and a servant of Haji 'Abd al-Nabi, a leading 'Ajam merchant of Manamah, which resulted in a riot and an anti-Shi'a movement. 'Abd al-Nabi's father and brother and several members of the 'Ajam community were injured. The 'Ajam closed their shops and confined themselves in their residences. However, the ruler took no steps until the P.A. of Bahrain put pressure on him. Besides making financial compensation to the sufferers, 'Isa banished his nephew to Bombay for five years, also providing him with a salary of six hundred Rupees.³⁸³ Three years later, however, the Sheikh permitted 'Ali to return to Bahrain providing that he signed written

³⁸²More details on Nasir ibn Mubarak can be found in IOR R/15/2/4, pp. 6-70.

³⁸³'ARPGPR for 1904-1905' in *TPGAR*, vol. V, p. 7; Lorimer. *Gaz of PG*, vol. I part. I B Hist, p. 939.

conditions agreed upon with the British, including a promise of loyalty.³⁸⁴ After his return, 'Ali lived in Riffa town for a few years and his manner toward the general public and his uncle was irreproachable, according to the British agent in Bahrain. This however did not last long, as in 1912, he began again to cause problems for the people of Bahrain, especially the poorer classes (i.e. the Baharna). For example, in Malalkya village in 1912, 'Ali forced the Baharna to take his cattle for grazing even though the cattle were sick. He also practiced extortion and cruelly punished those who displeased him, especially the workers in the Hamala and Sehleh orchards, as the British report in 1912 indicated. Such a situation caused some Baharna to leave the villages or other areas under 'Ali's authority. However, 'Ali's vexatious conduct, which caused internal instability, ended when he passed away in 1916.

Continued Persecution by Members of the al-Kalifa Family 1920-1921

This is how the P.A. of Bahrain described the social and economic situation of the Baharna during 'Isa's reign, and the way that the al-Khalifa treated this social group, in his report in 1920:

'These [Baharna], the majority on the Island, though suffering greatly from scarcity of food stuffs, are all strongly pro-British. This I suppose from sheer hatred of the Ruling House. They have seen much too much 'zulm' from the Shuyukh, to have the slightest spark of affection or loyalty for Shaikh 'Isa and his family. Speaking generally, they are a terribly downtrodden people and are mulcted right and left of nearly all they possess. It is the old story of the Sunni Arab in the ascendant over the Shiah. The following are some of the injustices the Bahrain Shiahs suffer under them:

1. They are forbidden to own land.
2. They supply the horses, camels, donkeys of the ruling family house and numerous hangers on with free lucerne all the year around.
3. They have to submit to forced labour, both for themselves and their donkeys and cattle at all times.
4. Fish, dates, [and] vegetables are supplied gratis to the Shuyukhs' table from all villages in turn.
5. Shiah mosques and praying places are defiled and used as rest houses by the Shaikhs whenever the latter travel, as they are always doing.

³⁸⁴From Prideaux to Sheikh 'Ali, no, 395, 8 Jul 1908, p. 277. *IOR R/15/2/19*.

6. Last, but not least, their women are never safe from the hands of the myrmidons of those Shuyukh who indulge in that sort of thing.³⁸⁵

The countless cases of violence and extortion against the Baharna by the al-Khalifa included those by 'Isa's wife, 'A'isha, who had power over state affairs, 'Abdullah ibn 'Isa and his private insuperable secretary Jasim al-Chirawi, Khalid al-Khalifa and his sons (Salman and Ibrahim). The attacks and harassment continued during the second half of 'Isa's reign and the first period of Hamad ibn 'Isa's reign (1923-1942) as well. The situation in Bahrain, as Percy Cox, a P.R. of the Gulf, asserted, was 'undoubtedly difficult and unsatisfactory, and as it is primarily due to the incompetence of Shaikh Isa as an administrator, there is not much hope of material improvement as long as he lives and continues to manage or mismanage his own affairs'.³⁸⁶

This led to serious persecution of the Shi'a community in Bahrain. It commenced in 1919 with 'Abdullah ibn 'Isa, a second son of the Sheikh of Bahrain by 'A'isha, who behaved as if he were the ruler of Bahrain by intervening in the public affairs of Bahrain. 'Isa was in his dotage and completely dominated by his wife 'A'isha. In cooperation with al-Chirawi, she dictated internal policy during the second decade of the 20th century. The root of the oppressive policies of 'Abdullah and his mother toward the public went back to the early years of the 20th century when 'Isa asked the British to support his eldest son, Hamad, as his successor. This collaboration annoyed 'A'isha, who did not want her son to take a subordinate position to Hamad, a brother from a different mother. As a result, she and her son created a chaotic situation in Bahrain that resulted in constant assaults on the Baharna.

³⁸⁵'Report of Bahrain 1920' in *PDPG*, vol. VI, pp. 551-552.

³⁸⁶'ARPGPR for 1911' in *TPGAR*, vol. VI, p. 9.

Major Kaly, P.A. of Bahrain notes that the situation in Bahrain was atrocious under ‘Abdullah’s temporary authority in 1921, when political murders became common, and his administration was so corrupt that there was no security for persons or property.³⁸⁷ To say one report written by Kaly on the unpleasant internal situations in Bahrain were exaggerated would be untrue because, first, criminal cases (i.e. murder, assault and theft) in Bahrain reached their peak during ‘Isa’s reign according to British chronological annual reports on Bahrain that began in 1905. For instance, in 1905-1906 there were fifty-five criminal cases registered in Bahrain’s court. The number rose in 1906-1907 to 206 cases. The criminal cases increased in the following years to 234, 270, 310, 364 and 803 in 1907-1908, 1908-1909, 1909-1910, 1910-1911, and 1911-1912, respectively. There were 382 and 231 criminal cases registered in 1914-1915 and 1921-1930 respectively. These reports demonstrate the problems of law and order in Bahrain during ‘Isa’s reign, as the percentage of criminal cases of 5764 overall cases in figure 14 in appendix 3 reveals. It began in 1905 at one per cent and rose to three per cent between 1908 and 1910. A few years later it increased to six per cent in 1910-1911, and it reached fourteen per cent at its highest in 1911-1912 during ‘Isa’s reign, according to the annual British Administration reports on Bahrain started in 1905.³⁸⁸

Second, several cases show that many Baharna sought protection by the British agency due to mistreatment and persecution by ‘Abdullah and other family members of the al-Khalifa; these actions ultimately led to the Shi’a agitations of the 1920s. One example is the case of Haji Ahmad ibn Khamis, a Bahrani Shi’a pearl merchant of Sanabis, who took refuge in the British Agency in 1920 owing to years of harassment by ‘Abdullah. In his statement, ibn

³⁸⁷Ibid.

³⁸⁸See figure 14 in appendix 3.

Khamis complained about the long period of injustice *zulm* by ‘Abdullah in particular, and the al-Khalifa family members in general, not only toward him but toward all the Baharna. In his petition, he asked the British government to intervene and help him. Otherwise, his intention was to migrate from Bahrain for good, as he could not tolerate the internal situation in Bahrain.³⁸⁹

A similar demand to the British agency occurred at the end of 1921 for the same reason. On behalf of all the Shi‘a community in Bahrain, a large deputation of Baharna submitted several petitions to the British agency, and insisted on meeting Trevor, P.R. of the Gulf, on his quick visit in Bahrain, in order to present their cases and complaints against oppression by al-Khalifa family members. In the beginning, their intention was to gather in a mass protest, coming together from various villages to demonstrate in front of the British agency. However, Muhammad Sharif and Haji ‘Abd al-Nabi, well known ‘Ajam merchants in Manamah, were able to pacify the Shi‘a anger and convinced them to present their cases in a large deputation rather than as a mass body. At the meeting, they provided several examples of the al-Khalifa mistreatment of them. However, the most significant case was one raised against Sheikh Khalid al-Khalifa, a cousin of ‘Isa. Khalid, who had attacked a Bahrani man, cut his throat and killed his father in front of him. Fortunately, the man survived after he was treated in hospital, but immediately after his release he was detained in jail on Sheikh Khalid’s order. He was intimidated and abused in order to prevent him from reporting the attack.³⁹⁰ A large deputation of Baharna subjects, on behalf of all the Shi‘a of Bahrain, drew up a petition stating that:

‘We beg to state to the possessor of great wisdom and good temper, the chief of the Gulf that the Shi‘a community is in a state of great humiliation and subject to public massacre. They

³⁸⁹From P.A. Bh to P.R. PG, no, 284-c, 3 Sep 1920, pp. 3-7. *IOR R/15/2/23*.

³⁹⁰From Trevor, P.A. PG to S. Bray F.P. Dept. Delhi, no 495s/1921, 30 Dec 1921, pp. 16-18. *IOR R/15/2/83*.

have no refuge, the evidence of none of them is accepted, their property is subject to plunder and themselves liable to mistreatment every moment. Injustice is increasing every day.... We appeal to you in the name of God to help us. If you do not give us our rights and do not help us, you are helping the oppressors to continue their practice. Our patience and power are exhausted. If we leave this sanctuary and the Chief does not help us, we will meet with death and he is responsible to God.'³⁹¹

From the abovementioned reports, it can be deduced that the oppression of the Baharna by al-Khalifa members reached a level that could not be tolerated. Some preferred migration to other parts of the Gulf. Thus, such a situation showed that the absence of even a minimum of justice motivated some Baharna to migrate especially to Kuwait, as the manner of dealing with the Shi'a there was totally different.

On the economic level there were factors that possibly affected the Baharna decision to move out of the area. One of them was the random policy of imposing different and distinct taxes on the Baharna. For example, 'Isa imposed taxes on the divers and pearl boats, where some Baharna periodically worked, including in 1893. Indeed, according to the P.A. of Bahrain, 'oppression in the diving trade in Bahrain has of late years greatly exceeded that of any of the other pearling centres in the Gulf'.³⁹² There is no doubt that this led to dissatisfaction among the social group who worked in this industry.

Plague as a Cause of Migration from Bahrain to Kuwait

As in southwestern Iran, the regular outbreak of plague also caused the migration of hundreds of people escaping from death to the neighbouring areas in the Gulf. The location of Manamah port in the centre of the Gulf was significant as a commercial pearling centre, and its direct trade route link for southwestern Iranian ports and Bahrain, as well as being a

³⁹¹Translation of a petition presented to the P.R. on 21 Dec 1921 by a large deputation of Bahrain subjects, pp. 20-21. *IOR R/15/2/83*.

³⁹²'ARPGPR for 1893-94' in *TPGAR*, vol. IV, p. 7; 'ARPGPR for 1921' in *TPGAR*, vol. VIII, p. 63.

transshipment point to other Arab states (e.g. Basra, Kuwait, Muscat, and 'Uqayr). Bahrain was also a focal trade destination for the Indian Ocean ports, such as Bombay, Karachi, and Gujarat. As with some southwestern Iranian ports, and unlike Kuwait, frequent sea travel between ports, especially those of India and Basra, was a significant reason behind the continuous spread of disease. As a consequence, Bahrain's government had to issue quarantine regulations under the supervision of the British agency, as soon as they discovered a disease had broken out in a specific port. For instance, in 1905 a fatal plague broke out in Bahrain, particularly in Manamah, Muharraq, and Hadd towns, causing the deaths of 154 people including twenty Baharna and 'Ajam. Another outbreak occurred in 1907, which resulted in 1889 deaths, including 200 'Ajam, and 3121 seizure cases. As a result, in those years it was reported that many Baharna migrated to al-Qatif, whilst between 150 and 500 'Ajam left Bahrain as well.³⁹³ Similar incidents took place in 1908 and 1909 resulting in the death of twenty-seven in 1908, and twenty-nine people in Manamah in 1909, and the same number in Muharraq in 1909.³⁹⁴ In 1915 a plague occurred in Manamah, Muharraq, and Hadd towns that lasted for five months and killed five thousand people, including five British agency workers, and in 1917 it was reported that a plague had broken out which caused the death of 1393 people.³⁹⁵ To avoid infection from the disease, the British agency and their employees were forced to temporarily shift their residency outside Manamah.³⁹⁶ With all these problematic internal conditions, migration from Bahrain to a place with less political

³⁹³'Report of Bahrain 1905' in *PDPG*, vol. I, pp. 93, 103, 107,112; 'Report of Bahrain 1907' in *PDPG*, vol. II, p. 176; 'ARPGPR for 1907-08' in *TPGAR*, vol. VI, p. 96.

³⁹⁴'Report of Bahrain 1909' in *PDPG*, vol. III, pp. 609, 627, 638, 645;'ARPGPR for 1909' in *TPGAR*, vol. VI, p. 70.

³⁹⁵'ARPGPR for 1915' in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, p. 48; 'ARPGPR for 1917' in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, p. 47.

³⁹⁶'Report of Bahrain 1917' in *PDPG*, vol. VI, p. 344.

strife, with no room for persecution, and which was not so vulnerable to disease, such as Kuwait, was an attractive option.

Al-Hasa between the Maladministration of the Ottomans and the Oppression of the al-Sa‘ud

An assessment of the available primary sources, including the British sources, and the secondary sources that have relied on the Ottoman archival material, such as *The Ottoman Gulf*, and *al-Idara al-‘Uthmaniyya fi Mutasarrifat al-Ihsa’*, shows the unsettled internal conditions of al-Hasa during the Ottoman period (1871-1913), and during the al-Sa‘ud occupation of al-Hasa in 1913 up to the official establishment of the third Sa‘udi State in 1932. These sources demonstrate that the Shi‘a suffered either from maladministration by the Ottoman’s *mutasarrifs* or *wālīs* that affected the stability of the region, or from religious persecution and social harassment by the al-Sa‘ud’s protégées, such as ‘Abdullah ibn Jalawi, *amir* of al-Hasa (1913-1935). This mistreatment caused the migration of the Shi‘a elsewhere, especially to Kuwait.³⁹⁷

The long Ottoman-Sa‘udi conflicts throughout the 19th century ended in occupation by the Ottomans of al-Hasa in 1871, without resistance from the Shi‘a. In the beginning, the Shi‘a and their religious and social leaders looked to the new authority with an expectation of a peaceful life, better social treatment, and freedom to practice their rituals without pressure after the long period of suffering under the Wahhabi-Sa‘udi power.³⁹⁸ They also sought abolition or a decrease of different unfair taxes that had been imposed on them by the previous ruling power, the al-Sa‘ud, especially with the innovative reform policy of Middat Pasha. That is why the Shi‘a leaders met with Nafth Basha, the first Ottoman *wālī* of al-Hasa,

³⁹⁷Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 49.

³⁹⁸*Ibid*, p. 35.

after the occupation, and informed him that they were looking forward to a new peaceful life in al-Hasa, and would probably migrate from the region if the political disturbances continued.³⁹⁹

However, even though the Shi'a of al-Hasa were not exposed to religious persecution during the forty-two years of Ottomans rule, the latter did not bring political stability to the region due to their maladministration, which consisted of a lack of military skills, money, and manpower, slow reactions and decisions, and communication limitations (e.g. of the telegraph), as Anscombe argues.⁴⁰⁰ The Ottomans *wālīs* were also unable to repress the constant raids and piracy of the local tribes (e.g. al-Murrah, Bani Hajar, al-Duwasir and al-ʿAjman), and thus control the security of the region and trade routes. This put all the al-Hasa residents at risk, including the Shi'a and their belongings (e.g. orchards, caravans, and ships), often causing economic loss and sometimes resulting in deaths.⁴⁰¹ For example, in 1908 some Shi'a of al-Qatif were killed due to tribal attacks on the region.⁴⁰² The Ottomans entered into several local wars with these tribes, which brought about an unsettled situation in the region. Even though some *wālīs*, such as ʿAkif Basha, Saʿid Basha, Ibrahim Fawzi, and a few others, tried to repress the tribal robberies and prevent their piracy on the trade and travel routes in the region, either by bribing them or by cooperation with other tribes to suppress them, the security of the region was maintained only for short, intermittent periods.⁴⁰³ During the Ottoman regime, twenty-eight Ottomans *wālīs* of different ethnicities were assigned to rule al-Hasa and adjust its security, but most were unable to bring social and political stability to

³⁹⁹Musa al-Quraini. *Al-Idara al- ʿUthmaniyya fī Mutasarrifat al-Ihsaʾ: 1288-1331 h / 1871-1913 m*. Riyadh: Dar al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAaziz, 2005, p. 102.

⁴⁰⁰Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁰¹Examples can be found in *TPGAR* vol. II, III and IV under Najd, al-Hasa and al-Qatif.

⁴⁰²See IOR R/15/5/8.

⁴⁰³Al-Quraini. *Al-Idara*, pp. 137-141; Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 65.

the region. One main reason for such frequent changes of *wālī* was due to occasional petitions submitted to the Ottoman authority in Basra by the Shi'a against the unfair practices of their Ottoman *wālīs*, such as the petition submitted by residents of al-Qatif in 1893 that resulted in the dismissal of the *wālī*.⁴⁰⁴ Other *wālīs* preferred to resign, such as Ibrahim Basha, after confronting difficulties when he put an end to the tribal conflicts and banditry. Heavy taxes were also imposed on the Shi'a by some corrupt Ottoman officials 'either to enrich themselves or to win promotion by remitting money to the state'.⁴⁰⁵

That was why in 1895 after numerous complaints by the Shi'a of al-Qatif many of them preferred to migrate to Bahrain until the situation improved.⁴⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, some of them went to Kuwait, such as the grandfather of 'Ali al-Mahdi, who decided to settle in Kuwait in 1901 due to the unsettled conditions in al-Hasa, according to family narratives.⁴⁰⁷

The position of the Shi'a in al-Hasa did not improve when the al-Sa'ud restored their control over al-Hasa in 1913. Similarly to the Ottoman occupation in 1871, the Shi'a showed no resistance, but they feared social mistreatment and the strict Sa'udi-Wahhabi ideological regulations that would limit their religious freedom to practice their rituals, which was the case under the earlier Wahhabi-Sa'udi dominion. As a result, the shaykh of Sayhat Hussayn ibn Nasir immediately sought British protection in April 1913, for himself and his 1500 Shi'a followers, in case of any fight between the rival powers (ibn Sa'ud and the Ottomans), which, according to him, could cause loss of life, property, and money.⁴⁰⁸ The British rejected his demand, skeptical of him since, according to Trevor, P.A. of Bahrain, he was considered an

⁴⁰⁴ Al-Quraini, *al-Idara*, pp. 135-136; 'ARPGPR for 1893-94' in *TPGAR*, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 86.

⁴⁰⁶ 'ARPGPR for 1894-95' in *TPGAR*, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁷ 'Ali al-Mahdi, interviewed by the author, 29 Dec. 2010, Kw.

⁴⁰⁸ From Yusuf Kanu to Trevor, P.A. Bh, 18 Apr 1913, p. 19. *IOR R/15/2/31*; from shaykh Hussayn to Trevor. P.A. Bh, 26 May 1913, p. 74. *IOR R/15/2/31*.

Ottoman subject and had participated in negotiations between the Ottomans and ibn Sa'ud. However, shaykh Hussayn refuted the rumours about offering submission to ibn Sa'ud. He emphasised that the inhabitants of al-Qatif were compelled to join ibn Sa'ud military expeditions, not due to their loyalty to him, but due to their desire for peace, especially as they were in a weak position, and that ibn Sa'ud threatened to attack them and destroy their lives, plunder their property, and violate their honour.⁴⁰⁹ In the same light, Haji 'Abd al-Hussayn ibn Jum'a, a Shi'a merchant of al-Qatif, also asked for British protection for the Shi'a of al-Qatif because they 'were much troubled by Bin Saud's exactions etc. and wished to ask the British government to take them under its protection'.⁴¹⁰ However, the British adopted a policy of 'strict neutrality', as P. Cox, P.A. of the Persian Gulf emphasised, in their attitude toward the Shi'a of al-Qatif.

An example of Shi'a persecution can be deduced from the case of 'Abd al-Hussayn ibn Jum'a. Ibn Jum'a, who was considered one of richest and most influential merchants in al-Qatif, was arrested by the *amir* of al-Qatif on the orders of ibn Sa'ud. Different accounts arose about the main reason for his arrest. One suggests the arrest was due to his contact with the Ottomans, asking them to restore their control over al-Hasa, and offering them help.

However, Yusuf Kanu emphasised that such an accusation was erroneous and suggests ibn Sa'ud really wanted to seize ibn Jum'a properties (e.g. gardens and houses), boats, and a very valuable collection of pearls and gold ornaments. His pretext being that he wished to seize debts local divers owed to ibn Jum'a. Finally, ibn Sa'ud killed ibn Jum'a in 1914, and left nothing for his two wives and children, who were obliged to migrate to Bahrain where the 'Ajam and Baharna collected a sum to help them stay alive. Ibn Jum'a's son went to Sheikh

⁴⁰⁹From shaykh Hussayn to Yusuf Kanu, 8 May 1913, pp. 25-27. *IOR R/15/2/31*.

⁴¹⁰From Trevor. P.A. Bah to P. Cox P.R. PG, 14 Jul 1913, p. 32. *IOR R/15/2/31*.

Khaz'al asking for his mercy, especially as he himself was a Shi'a, and requested his assistance in retrieving his father's property. Khaz'al wrote to Mubarak asking him to write to ibn Sa'ud to help the ibn Jum'a family. Ibn Sa'ud finally agreed, but then only returned part of the confiscated property.⁴¹¹

Conclusion

The historical literature of southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-Hasa indicates that internal conditions, including sectarianism, were fundamental in contributing to the migration of local inhabitants, including the Shi'a, to Kuwait between 1880 and 1921. This was the first peak period of migration, especially by the 'Ajam, and can be traced in the British reports. The significant trade between southwestern Iranian ports and Kuwait during that timeframe was also an important factor as it created a route between Kuwait and southwestern Iran, via the 'Ajam Shi'a merchants who facilitated movement. However, it was mainly religious factors, and secondly, sociopolitical elements, which were the foremost impetus behind the Baharna and Hassawiyya migration to Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf region.

⁴¹¹The full story in IOR R/15/2/31, pp. 165-168, 189.

Chapter IV

The Position of the Shi'a Communities in Kuwait up to 1921

Introduction

This chapter, firstly, discusses Kuwaiti history between 1880 and 1921 within the political matrix of the Gulf region. It then addresses the social structure of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait town during the pre-oil era, and considers the three larger Kuwaiti districts (*wasat*, *sharq* and *jibla*) of the town these communities established their enclaves (i.e. *firīj*). In addition, it discusses the early establishment of the Shi'a clerical administrative system in Kuwait, through the al-Mazidi and al-Sahaf houses during the 19th century. The chapter also covers the historical relationship and the conflict between the two competitive Shi'a jurisprudential schools (*uṣūliyya* and *shaykhiyya*), and its reflection on the Shi'a sectarian split between mainly the 'Ajam and the Hassawiyya in Kuwait. It then moves onto the historical relationship between the Shi'a communities, particularly the 'Ajam, and their counterparts the Sunni and the al-Sabah family. Finally, it considers the connection between the 'Ajam Shi'a merchants and the British. The chapter ends with a section on the role of the Shi'a communities in contributing to the economic construction of *imārat al-kuwayt* in relation to three social groups: merchants, artisans, and labourers, including case studies.

From Nascent Town to Emirate of Kuwait 1880-1921

By the late 19th century, political tensions between the British and the Ottomans in the Gulf had a peak. The former began strengthening their foothold in the Gulf region against the Ottomans and other colonial powers by two methods. First, Britain signed agreements and treaties with most of the Sheikhs there in order to legitimise their presence in the Gulf. Second, Britain used rival powers and its own navy against the Sheikhs if it felt threatened.⁴¹² As a British official writing to the Viceroy put it, ‘We don’t want Kuwait, but we don’t want anyone else to have it’.⁴¹³

The antagonism between the two rival powers, (Britain and the Ottomans), during the late 19th century intensified, particularly when Mubarak al-Sabah seized power in Kuwait after assassinating his siblings, Muhammad al-Sabah, the Sheikh of Kuwait who preceded Mubarak (1892-1896), and Jarah al-Sabah, in 1896.⁴¹⁴ Despite this act of combined fratricide and regicide, most Kuwaitis agreed that Mubarak was the legitimate successor to the Sheikhdом.⁴¹⁵ Mubarak had, indeed, politically elevated Kuwait in the wake of the Gulf affair, and he had played a careful diplomatic game, manipulating both great powers in order to retain his own power and establish the modern state of Kuwait. Mubarak first tried to legitimise his position with the Ottoman authorities by gaining the title of *qā’immaqām* via

⁴¹²‘CRAK’ in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I, p. 73; Fatima Furayhi. *Tijarat al-Silah fi al-Khalij al-‘Arabi, 1297-1333 h/1879-1914 m*. Al-Riyad: Dar al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 2004, pp. 34-35.

⁴¹³‘Introduction’ in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I, p. xii.

⁴¹⁴Ben Slot. *Mubarak Al-Sabah: Founder of Modern Kuwait 1896-1915*. London: Arabian Publishing, 2005, pp. 66-76; Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, pp. 307-308.

⁴¹⁵Except for opposition from a few people, including Mubarak’s enemy Yusuf al-Ibrahim. Al-Ibrahim was a wealthy Kuwaiti Sunni merchant and a relative of the al-Sabah family. Khaz‘al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. II, pp. 14-24.

the *wālī* of Basra Hamdi Basha, especially as the Ottoman Sultanate regarded Kuwait as part of the Ottoman Empire in the face of the British threat in the region.⁴¹⁶ However, the Ottoman claim had not been historically recognised because there was no official treaty that considered Kuwait as part of the Ottoman Empire. Mubarak intimated this fact to the British.⁴¹⁷

On one hand, Mubarak showed loyalty to the Ottomans, from whom he sought legitimisation at the beginning of his reign, anticipating that his confirmation as the new *qā' immaqām* would simultaneously endorse him as new ruler and secure his payment of Muhammad's annual stipend.⁴¹⁸ Mubarak did not want the Ottomans to sense that he was following a path different from that of his ancestors. Also, Mubarak intended to secure his position in power without any disturbance which would enable him to confront his local and regional rivals. In addition, Mubarak feared the *wālī* of Basra might confiscate the date orchards he and his siblings owned in Faw, since they were his only reliable source of income. However, Mubarak was not recognised as *qā' immaqām* by the Ottoman Sultanate until 1897.⁴¹⁹

On the other hand, Mubarak sought a special relationship with Britain. He directly asked to be placed under British Protectorate status, especially when the Sheikh of Bahrain, 'Isa al-Khalifa, sent an official letter to Mubarak encouraging him to ally with the British if he would like to 'enjoy peace and quiet'.⁴²⁰ The British hesitated to do so at first. However, in 1898, Russia showed interest in Kuwait, and the Ottomans increased their pressure on the country as well. The Russians wanted to develop a coaling station in Kuwait in 1898, in order to

⁴¹⁶'CRAK' and 'FCRAK' in Bidwell. *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I. part I, p. 82 and part. III, pp. 59, 66, 100; Saldanha. 'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 45.

⁴¹⁷'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, pp. 14, 20.

⁴¹⁸Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 94.

⁴¹⁹'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, p. 61.

⁴²⁰'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, p. 23.

establish a foothold in the state.⁴²¹ Two Russian merchants, 'Abbas Aliuf and Ovanessuf, visited Kuwait for both commercial and political purposes in 1899.⁴²² Indeed, many Russian vessels continually visited Kuwait between 1899 and 1903. Finally, the Russian consul himself visited Kuwait in 1902 and offered Mubarak the Russian government's assistance.⁴²³ As a result, it was now in the British interests to deal with Kuwait. Meade, a P.R. in the Persian Gulf (1897-1902), sent an official letter to Lord Curzon, urging him to bring Kuwait under the British Protectorate before it was too late.⁴²⁴

As a consequence, Kuwait became a British Protectorate on 23 January 1899, however, the Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement remained secret until 1912, which served the interests of both sides.⁴²⁵ Britain did not want to confront the Ottomans politically and militarily, since the latter consented to the *status quo* in Kuwait, although they did not know about the agreement. In addition, Mubarak did not want to be embarrassed and lose his landed property in Ottoman Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, he asked the British to keep their promise to protect his family property in Mesopotamia in case of any eventuality. Although the British tried to help Mubarak in this regard, a British assurance was not included as an essential article in the Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty, so as not to provoke the land issue.⁴²⁶ The Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement, which authorised Britain to officially protect Kuwait from any outside invasion, and recognised Mubarak as an independent ruler of Kuwait, forbade him from receiving the

⁴²¹'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, p. 27; Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 102.

⁴²²'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, p. 58; 'Report of 'Ali Ghulum Rida' in al-Ghinim. *Akhbar al-Kuwayt: Rasa 'il 'Ali ibn Ghulum Rida, al-Wakil al-Ikhbari Libiritaniyya fi al-Kuwayt, 1899-1904*. Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-Kuwaitiyya, 2007, pp. 298-299.

⁴²³'FCRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. II, part. III, IV, pp. 13-14; Al-Ghinim. *Akhbar*, pp. 85-92.

⁴²⁴'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, p. 28.

⁴²⁵Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 113.

⁴²⁶Saldanha. 'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, pp. 68-72.

representative of any other power without previous British agreement, and mandated British consent for the granting of property rights of any kind to any other power.⁴²⁷

In order to ensure Mubarak would adhere to this agreement, the British appointed 'Ali Ghulum Rida Behbehani as a secret agent, who was an Iranian Shi'a relative of Agha Muhammad Rahim Saffar, who recommended him as a British agent in Kuwait.⁴²⁸ The agent's job was to report all of Mubarak's political activities and plans, either with the Ottomans or with other foreign powers.⁴²⁹ The main reason Britain secretly appointed a trusted foreign agent in Kuwait was to deny any foreign powers, including the Ottomans, an excuse to do the same. Behbehani acted as a secret agent in Kuwait for Britain from 1899 to 1904 and sent many reports about Kuwait during that time before an official British agent, Knox, replaced him in 1904.⁴³⁰

The Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty was a useful bargaining tool for both parties in the region. It helped Britain to legitimise its presence in Kuwait. Robin Bidwell asserts that it 'kep[t] the Gulf as a British lake'⁴³¹ and eliminated any attempt by foreign powers, such as Germany, Russia, France, or the Ottomans, to establish a foothold in Kuwait.⁴³²

For Kuwait, the Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement confirmed its independence from the Ottomans and, most importantly, it committed the British to the military protection of Kuwait from

⁴²⁷To see the full version of the Anglo-Kuwait agreement, see 'CRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. I, p. 50.

⁴²⁸He disguised himself as a merchant, which was his real job, so no one could harbour any suspicion about his status. Al-Ghinim. *Akhbar*, pp. 11, 16.

⁴²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴³⁰See 'FCRAK' (1900); and 'FCRAK' (1901) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. II, p. 34, part. III, p. 10; Asser Martin, ed., *Kuwait Political Agency: Arabic Documents 1899-1949*, vol. I. London: Archive Editions, 1994; IOR R/15/5/2, p. 3; IOR R/15/5/221, p. 535, and many of them are available in al-Ghinim. *Akhbar*.

⁴³¹'Introduction' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I, p. xiv.

⁴³²'FCRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. II, pp. 1-6; 'Persian, British and Russian interactions in the Gulf and with Gulf Arab Territories, 1887-1908' in Burdett and Seay, ed., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II, p. 202.

attack by local and regional rivals.⁴³³ Once he had ascended to the throne, Mubarak's local enemies, such as Yusuf al-Ibrahim and Mubarak's nephews, cooperated with other regional powers, for instance, the Sheikh of Qatar, and the *amir* of Najd, in attempts to occupy Kuwait after 1896. Mubarak responded by unsuccessfully attempting to kill al-Ibrahim.⁴³⁴ Initially, al-Ibrahim sought the aid of the Sheikh of Qatar, Jasim al-Thani, who hated Mubarak due to his cooperation with the Ottomans during the attack on Qatar. However, this plot did not succeed thanks to Mubarak's connection with Said Basha, ruler of al-Hasa, who played a vital role in halting this campaign against Kuwait.⁴³⁵ The hostility intensified again in March 1898 when Mubarak attacked the Howair tribe, who were under the protection of al-Thani, and this embarrassed them in the eyes of the Arab Bedouins in the region.⁴³⁶ Ibn Rashid's antagonism toward Mubarak was a result of many factors including tribal rivalries going back to 1892. Mubarak helped ibn Rashid's enemies, ibn Sa'ud, the ruler of Riyadh, and his sons, by protecting and hosting them in Kuwait for several years.⁴³⁷ Mubarak also supported them during their military raids against ibn Rashid.⁴³⁸

However, Mubarak was also involved in tribal warfare outside Kuwait, something the British often discouraged. This explains why the British never supplied him with weapons for this purpose.⁴³⁹ The British adopted this strategy primarily to demonstrate to Mubarak that Britain would not always be supportive of his decisions, and secondarily to avoid confrontations with the Ottomans. However, when Kuwait experienced threats, Britain never

⁴³³Mubarak, on the other hand, had two important regional allies, Sheikh Khaz'al and Sheikh Sa'dun, *amir* of Muntafiq tribe of Basra.

⁴³⁴Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. II, p. 14.

⁴³⁵Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. II, pp. 22-26; Abu Hakima. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, p. 310.

⁴³⁶Saldanha. 'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 118.

⁴³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴³⁸For the motives of ibn Rashid, see Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 117.

⁴³⁹'FCRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. II, pp. 63-64.

hesitated to protect Kuwait to ensure the stability of the region. For instance, although the British did not get involved in the *al-sarif* war in 1901, between Mubarak and ibn Rashid, they were prepared to send a warship to Kuwait when they suspected Mubarak would lose the war.⁴⁴⁰

Another example can be cited in this regard. When the Ottomans and ibn Rashid occupied Bubyān Island, Safwan, and Umm Qasir in 1902 with a view to invading Kuwait, the British sent weapons and its warships, for instance, the *Sphinx*, *Redbreast*, and *Pomome*, to assist Mubarak.⁴⁴¹ The British frustrated all the efforts of Mubarak's enemies and the invaders finally withdrew from the region.⁴⁴² Thus, Kuwait was safeguarded from its domestic and regional enemies, remaining a British Protectorate until it gained its independence in 1961. Mubarak's diplomacy toward all foreign powers, specifically the British and the Ottomans, shows that 'he told each side that he favoured them, but that he would go to the highest bidder'.⁴⁴³ This style of diplomacy ensured Kuwait and its people could live safely and peacefully, although it experienced threats from regional rivals, such as the Ottomans, the Wahhabis, ibn Rashid and al-Ibrahim.⁴⁴⁴ Mubarak's ruthless policy toward neighbouring tribes, and his dream of extending his power and influence in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, continually put Kuwait at risk. However, no serious assault or plunder took place in the town of Kuwait. According to Frederick Anscombe, Mubarak was 'the man who gained the most

⁴⁴⁰'FCRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I part. III, p. 17.

⁴⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 140, 144-148.

⁴⁴²See 'FCRAK' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affairs of Kuwait*, vol. I part. III, pp. 136, 144-148.

⁴⁴³Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 141.

⁴⁴⁴Mubarak also asked for protection from Iran through Sheikh Khaz'al, but his request was rejected. 'Introduction' in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait*, vol. I, p. xxi; Saldanha.

'Précis of Koweit Affairs' in *TPGP*, vol. V, p. 27.

in this period',⁴⁴⁵ because he successfully transformed a small town into an official political Emirate.

The Social Structure of the Shi'a Communities

Shi'a immigrants continued flowing into Kuwait after the establishment of the early Shi'a communities, in what is called in migration theory, a chain of migration. The social networks between the old Shi'a settlers and new Shi'a immigrants, (friends and families), made the migratory process safer and more manageable for the new Shi'a migrants and their families. Migration networks between the Shi'a in Kuwait and other Shi'a in their homelands or elsewhere in the Gulf also encouraged the settlement of communities in Kuwait.⁴⁴⁶ As Castles and Miller argue, 'the informal social networks are developed by the migrants themselves, in order to cope with migration and settlement'.⁴⁴⁷ As it will be further discussed, migrant groups (Ajam, Hassawiyya and Baharna) developed their own social and economic infrastructure, their homes, religious institutions (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*), shops, and professions.⁴⁴⁸

Kuwait was politically stable and hospitable to the Shi'a merchants, artisans, and labourers, who proved useful to the al-Sabah, mutually beneficial to them and Kuwait. Also, religious tolerance was a distinguishing feature of Kuwait at that time. All were accepted, according to Myron Weiner, as long as they were not a threat to security and stability and did not undermine the social fabric of the host country.⁴⁴⁹ Any intervention by the sheikhdom to control their free movement would only apply, as Boyle, Halfacree and others put it, if they

⁴⁴⁵Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 141.

⁴⁴⁶Castles and Miller. *The Age of Migration*, p. 28.

⁴⁴⁷Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁴⁸Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁴⁹Weiner, 'Security' in *International Security*, pp. 91-126.

broke the laws or threatened public health, so introducing ‘contaminating influences’, or took actions leading to violence or jeopardising economic development.⁴⁵⁰

Prior to the discovery of oil, the town of Kuwait was divided into three major neighborhoods or, according to Kuwaiti dialect at the time, *mahalat*: *mahalat wasat* (centre of Kuwait), *mahalat sharg* (east zone of Kuwait), and *mahalat jibla* in Kuwaiti dialect (west zone of Kuwait toward Mecca). The word *hay* was also used in many private Kuwaiti documents, especially *al ‘adsāniyāt*, as a synonym of *mahalat*. The whole town of Kuwait measured roughly three miles along the Gulf Sea with the seaside on the north, where the port of Kuwait, (*alfurda*), and a series of private sea-blocks (*niq ‘a sing*) were located.⁴⁵¹ The harbour was located there, and ships owned by Kuwaiti merchants were lined up from *jibla* to *sharq*.⁴⁵² On the south side a long crescent shape wall, measuring approximately three to four miles, was built to protect the entire town. Another wall, which was built in 1920 to protect Kuwait from any potential tribal threats and regional rivalries coming from the desert side, had five gates and towers as figure 3 shows in appendix 1. People from lower social groups guarded it day and night.⁴⁵³ The economic sectors in the two districts of Kuwait town, as al-Nakib put it, also need consideration. The two main districts were *jibla*, the ‘mercantile quarter’ and *sharq*, the ‘maritime quarter’. In other words, according to al-Nakib, *jibla* was a residential area dominated by local inhabitants, the majority from the Arab Sunni mercantile group who mainly engaged in trade (e.g. trade and pearl merchants). The *sharq* contained diverse social groups (‘Ajam and Arab, Sunni and Shi‘a) who were involved in

⁴⁵⁰Boyle, Halfacree and others. *Exploring Contemporary Migration*. p. 153

⁴⁵¹See the aerial view of Kuwait town in figure 39 in appendix 5.

⁴⁵²See figures 38 and 39 in appendix 5.

⁴⁵³British sources indicate that the wall of Kuwait had three gates only. ‘Abdullah al-Ghinim. *Sur al-Kuwayt al-Thalith: Bina‘uh wa Himayatahu fi Watha‘iq al-Humaydi wa al-Khalid*: Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-Kuwaitiyya, 2013, pp. 19-21; letter from P.R. PG, no, 21-s, 13 Dec 1927, p. 4. *IOR R/15/1/504*.

seafaring activities, such as shipmasters, shipbuilders, sailors, and pearl divers.⁴⁵⁴ However, economic divisions did not necessarily influence the social structure of the entire town, especially regarding 'new immigrants'. As al-Nakib argues, 'during the economic boom of the turn of the twentieth century, new areas were created further inland to accommodate the constantly arriving newcomers, who were primarily mariners and laborers.'⁴⁵⁵ *Murqab*, for example, the newest inland zone located within the larger *sharq* quarter, was an area accommodating new immigrants during Ahmad al-Jabir's reign.

Within these existing divisions of Kuwait's town, the Shi'a was distributed unevenly in the three major neighbourhoods (*sharq*, *wasat* and *jibla*). Like other inhabitants, according to their economic status, they were either homeowners or tenants. Each *mahalat* or *hay* in *wasat*, *sharq*, and *jibla* were divided into many smaller blocks or *firjān* (sing *firīj*) that contained many houses usually connected from different sides. Each *firīj* carried a specific name matching either the family name or the ethnicity of the inhabitants dominating each small block. The names of these *firjān* were not given sectarian labels (i.e. Sunni and Shi'a) but were named for three reasons. First, many of the inhabitants gave an ethnic identity, tribe affiliation, or the familial name of a specific group to the *firīj*, where they were concentrated, such as *firīj al-baharna*, and *firīj al-yahud*, *firīj al-'awazim*, and *firīj al-'awadiyya*. Secondly, being one of the oldest families residing in a *firīj* was also a factor. Thirdly, the economic profession of the majority of inhabitants settled in a *firīj*, such as *firīj al-haka* and *firīj al-qitana*, also influenced its given name.

Although the major proportion of Shi'a immigrants, especially the 'Ajam and Baharna, settled in *sharq*, many Shi'a families, considered old settlers, and those from a higher social

⁴⁵⁴ Al-Nakib. *Kuwait Transformed*, p. 55.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 58.

group, such as 'Ajam merchants, shopkeepers, and shipmasters, including the houses of Ma 'rafi, ibn Ghalib, Qasim, ibn Nakhi, Bu al-Banat, and many others, settled close to the seaside in *wasat*, where most of the old Sunni settlers, other rich Sunni merchants, such as Shahin al-Ghanim, and some members of the al-Sabah family also resided. Some Baharna, as indicated in oral history and private documents, who were old settlers and from the mercantile social group, such as al-Jum 'a, also settled in *wasat*.⁴⁵⁶ The rich Sunni and Shi 'a lived along the seafront of Kuwait town, while those from lower social groups, settled well behind it. According to British sources, the 'Persian coolies [Sunni and Shi 'a] live[d] mainly in the middle east quarter of the town behind the sea front houses'.⁴⁵⁷

The Hassawiyya, who were fully segregated from the 'Ajam and Baharna, were similar to their co-religious counterparts. They established their own community in *firij al-hassawiyya*, which was located in *wasat* near the Hassawiyya religious *majlis*, such as *al-hussayniyya al-ja 'fariyya* and *hussayniyya al-arbash*, and its peripheries that extended toward part of *sharq*. Today, this is an area in Kuwait City better known as *al-sawabir*. The area between *al-sawabir* toward the south of Dasman Street, behind the Khadija and al-Sabah schools, currently the street of Ahmad al-Jabir, was the area where the majority of the Hassawiyya lived.⁴⁵⁸ However, there were some Hassawiyya families who lived in *wasat* and outside *firij al-hassawiyya*, according to the *wasat* map drawn by Muhammad 'Abd al-Hadi Jamal, a Kuwaiti researcher. The map includes names of many Kuwaiti families who resided in *wasat* before 1951. One possible explanation for the choice made by the Hassawiyya, is like many other residents of Kuwait, they could not afford property near their own community, and

⁴⁵⁶ 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jum 'a, interviewed by the author, 26 Jan. 2015, Kw; Muhmmad Jamal, second interview by the author, 28 Jan. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁵⁷ 'Notes on Koweit Harbour', p. 10. *IOR R/15/5/55*.

⁴⁵⁸ 'Isa al-Mazidi, interviewed by the author, 2 Feb. 2015, Kw.

found later that there was a lack of space. This is why some Hassawiyya immigrants settled outside their own community in *wasat* and why some of them settled in *sharq* or *jibla*, similar to some 'Ajam and Baharna.

Oral history also suggests many Kuwaiti families, including Shi'a and Sunni, living in *wasat*, are considered old settlers because this was the first zone the immigrants settled in during Kuwait's early history. As a result, *wasat* is considered an area composed of old Kuwaiti inhabitants, Shi'a and Sunni. Due to a lack of space, and because of the increase in Kuwait's population, especially during Mubarak al-Sabah's reign, *sharq* became a desirable new living area. It is currently the street of al-Maydan separating *sharq* from *wasat*, and is the oldest residential neighbourhood in Kuwait. Being larger than *wasat* it could accommodate a larger population as well. The tendency to live in *sharq* is indicated in More's report in 1927 when he states that: '[t]he [t]own of Kuwait now measures about three miles along the shore, having extended considerably in recent years toward the east. Its greatest depth, about one mile, is near the centre of the town, where the long suburb called Murqab has grown out from it toward the east'.⁴⁵⁹

Thus, *sharq* was a destination for people who moved from *wasat* and for the new settlers., where the majority of the Shi'a communities lived in different small blocks or *firjān*. Similar to Bahrain, there was a specific *firīj* or block for the 'Ajam called *firīj al-ajam* in *sharq*. However, it differed from Bahrain in that the one in Kuwait contained linked sequences of smaller blocks called *firjān al-ajam* (plural). These smaller blocks were dominated by 'Ajam and given specific names matching the surname of the 'Ajam inhabitants dominating each small block, or sometimes for the oldest family settled in this block. For example, within the larger *firīj al-ajam*, there were *firīj jamal* so named because that area contained houses

⁴⁵⁹Letter from P.R. PG, no, 21-s, 13 Dec 1927, p. 4. *IOR R/15/I/504*.

occupied by members of the Jamal family (i.e. brothers and cousins). Other 'Ajam Sunni like 'Awadiyya (from the 'Awadi family) also settled in *sharq* in their own block called *firīj al-awadiyya*.

Similar to *firīj al-hassawiyya* in *wasat*, there were smaller blocks within this larger blocks, which carried the identical names of the dominant family in occupation. For instance, *firīj al-sagha*, a specific small block in *wasat*, was so called because the al-Saigh family, who worked as goldsmiths in the *al-sibagha* handicraft industry, owned the majority of houses.⁴⁶⁰ In *wasat* there was also a small block called *firīj al-mazidi*, where members of the al-Mazidi family owned a chain of houses. The al-Mazidi mosque (*masjid al-mazidi*) where most *uṣuli* 'Ajam and Arab Shi'a used to pray prior to Mubarak al-Sabah's reign and afterwards, was also located in the same block.⁴⁶¹

However, many 'Ajam families lived outside *firīj al-ajam* and were spread throughout *sharq*. They lived in different Sunni smaller blocks in *wasat*, and to a lesser extent in *jibla*, where they were scattered in the whole area and interconnected with other Sunni families who were considered the majority in *jibla*. There were even a few Shi'a families, such as the al-Sadiq family, who lived in *firīj al-awazim*, a small block located in *wasat* and dominated by members of the Arab Sunni tribe known as 'Awazim.⁴⁶²

The 'Ajam *tarakma*,⁴⁶³ who were considered the lowest social group by the 'Ajam community, and who constitute roughly seventy to seventy-five per cent of the overall 'Ajam

⁴⁶⁰ See section on the role of Shi'a artisans below.

⁴⁶¹ 'Isa al-Mazidi, interviewed by the author, 2 Feb. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁶² 'Abd al-Hamid Sadiq and 'Abd al-Majid Sadiq, interviewed by the author, 4 Jan. 2015, Kw; Muhammad Jamal, second interview by the author, 28 Jan. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁶³ The word *tarakma* designated all 'Ajam Shi'a families whose ancestors were immigrants from an area in southwestern Iran called Lamard. The term is still used among the Shi'a to categorise specific 'Ajam Shi'a families. List of some *tarakma* family names can be found in table 6 in appendix 3.

community today, also created a block for themselves in *sharq* called *firj al-tarakma* or *taraf al-tarakma* (side of *tarakma*) as a local Shi'a family document indicates. The district was dominated by 'Ajam from *tarakma* families.⁴⁶⁴

Likewise, the Baharna also formed their own enclave in *sharq*; there was a Baharna block in *sharq* called *firj al-baharna*, located behind Dickson house and nearby *masjid al-baharna*, where the majority of Baharna lived.⁴⁶⁵ Sunni families like the al-'As'usi, al-Rumi, and al-'Asfur, who were involved in maritime activities with Baharna, lived on the peripheries of *firj al-baharna*. In *sharq*, for example, there was *firj al-bulush* where most of Shi'a and Sunni Bulushi resided. Both Sunni and Shi'a Bulushi who worked as bodyguards in Kuwait market resided in *jibla*.⁴⁶⁶

For those who came to Kuwait from the 1920s onwards, *jibla* was where many Sunni and some Shi'a families settled. 'Abbas area (*barāḥat 'abbas*) also known as *firj al-'ajam*, contained houses belonging to 'Ajam families, including the Khurshid family.⁴⁶⁷ It also contained the house of Taqi, an 'Ajam family who were immigrants from Ashkanan and lived in the Sa'ud block (*firj sa'ud*), in which the majority of families were Sunni.

The sub-division system of these three major areas of Kuwait town (i.e. *wasat*, *sharq* and *jibla*) to smaller blocks (*firjān*) was not exclusively practiced by the Shi'a communities. It was also characteristic of Kuwaiti society prior to the modern urbanisation that occurred from the 1950s onwards. Many members of the al-Sabah household lived in a specific block in *sharq* once called *firj al-shiyukh*. Other ethnic groups, such as the Jews, were influenced by

⁴⁶⁴P.P. of the Ma'rafi family.

⁴⁶⁵'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jum'a, interview by the author, 26 Jan. 2015, Kw; Arabic doc in IOR R/15/5/23, p. 49.

⁴⁶⁶Hamza al-Istad, second interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁶⁷'Isa Al-Mazidi, interviewed by the author, 2 Feb. 2015, Kw; Muhammad Jamal, second interview by the author, 28 Jan. 2015, Kw.

this neighbourhood characteristic; there was a small block called *firj al-yahud* located in *wasat*.

The Early Establishment of the Administrative Shi‘a Cleric System in Kuwait

Before the Mubarak era, Kuwait had well-established Shi‘a clerics who represented a school of thought or a *marji‘*, and different Shi‘a communities relied on them depending upon their religious affiliations. According to private family documents, including those of the Maqamis, Jamal, al-Qattan, Bash, al-Jum‘a, and al-Sabagh, the Shi‘a communities, both Arab and ‘Ajam, who followed *uṣuli* jurisprudence relied on local Kuwaiti Shi‘a clerics from the al-Mazidi house. The Baharna *ikhbari*, initially followed the Shi‘a clerics from al-Bahrani and al-‘Asfur houses in Bahrain, although clerics of al-Mazidi house managed their religious and social affairs. The Hasawiyya *shaykhi* depended on the al-Sahaf house who linked them to the Hassawiyya *ikhbari* in al-Hasa.

The al-Mazidi Family: The First Shi‘a Clerical Family Established in Kuwait

Private documents preserved by Shi‘a families, especially those relating to marriage, divorce, and testament certificates, and also sales and purchase contracts dated from between the first half of the 19th century to the later Mubarak period, show these papers were ratified by the local shaykhs from the al-Mazidi house, a Shi‘a family who were originally Arab immigrants from the al-Hila area in Mesopotamia and who settled in the early period of Kuwait.⁴⁶⁸ It has been said that members of the al-Mazidi family settled in different areas of the Gulf region, and became prominent Shi‘a shaykhs in al-Hasa, Basra, Kuwait, and parts of Khuzestan (e.g. Falahiyya). Shaykh Hussayn ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Musa ibn

⁴⁶⁸ ‘Isa al-Mazidi, interviewed by the author, 2 Feb. 2015, Kw.

Ibrahim al-Mazidi (and later his sons) was the first member of the family to migrate to Basra in the mid-19th Century and became a shaykh there. In Basra, they were considered the Shi‘a leaders of *rukniyya*, a smaller branch of a larger *shaykhiyya*, and followed Muhammad Karim Khan al-Kirmani (1846-1906), the leader of *shaykhi* school in Kerman.⁴⁶⁹ One family member, shaykh Musa ibn Muhammad al-Mazidi, migrated from al-Hasa to Kuwait at approximately the same period, as is indicated by two local Shi‘a family documents which he authorised in Kuwait in 1848 and 1855.⁴⁷⁰ In one of these documents his name was written as (*musa ibn muhammad al-mazidi al-ihsa’i sākin alkuwayt*) which means, Musa al-Mazidi who is from al-Hasa settling in Kuwait.

Shaykh Musa’s son shaykh Muhammad and his grandson, shaykh Ibrahim, continued the familial religious legacy as legitimate Shi‘a shaykhs in Kuwait between the reign of Sheikh ‘Abdullah al-Sabah (better known as ‘*Abdullah al-Thani*) (1866-1892) and Sheikh Sabah al-Salim’s reign (1950-1977), though they were moved around. Indeed, some of the descendants of the al-Mazidi family, to date, are still affiliated to the Hassawiyya *shaykhi* of the Shi‘a clerical institution, such as shaykh Usama al-Mazidi and shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Mazidi, currently, the *imam* of *masjid al-sadiq* located in Kuwait City.

In Kuwait it is not clear whether the al-Mazidi family represented the *uṣuli* ‘Ajam and Arab Shi‘a, the *ikhbari* Baharna, or the *shaykhi* Hassawiyya at the same time. Indeed, close examination of local documents and secondary sources provide contradictory information on which school they represented. However, it is possible that the *shaykhi* school of jurisprudence influenced them because, according to oral history, after leaving Mesopotamia,

⁴⁶⁹Toby Matthiesen. ‘Mysticism, Migration, and Clerical Networks: Ahmad al-Ahsa’i and the Shaykhis of al-Ahasa, Kuwait, and Basra’. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 26 Nov. 2014, pp. 1-24.

⁴⁷⁰Hashim al-Shakhs. *A‘lam Hajir min al-Madin wa al-Mu‘asirin*, vol. 4. Mu‘assasat Umm al-Qura liltahqiq wa al-Nashr: Bayrut, 1996-2006, pp. 15-17.

they migrated directly to Kuwait from al-Hasa, which was the headquarters of the *shaykhiyya* school.

However, members of the al-Mazidi family did not represent the Hassawiyya in Kuwait alone, although al-Shakhs emphasises this point, because they intermarried with *uṣuli* Arab and 'Ajam Shi'a of Kuwait, such as the 'Abd al-Rahim and Jamal families. The Jamal, al-Sabagh and al-Jum'a papers also show they ratified the private papers of members of both the 'Ajam community, such as the Behbehani and Tankisiri, and the Baharna community, such as the al-Istad, al-Jum'a and al-Qallaf as figures 15 and 25 shows in appendix 4.⁴⁷¹ This could have been because there were no other Shi'a clerics for the three existing Shi'a communities, except shaykh Muhammad al-Hakim al-Bahrani, whose father and grandfathers are mentioned as reputed Shi'a clerics in Jid Hafs in Bahrain, where he probably migrated from.⁴⁷²

Moreover, Sayyid Mahdi, as will be discussed further, does not include members of the al-Mazidi in his anti-*shaykhi* works, and shaykh Ibrahim al-Mazidi's mark is found in documents belonging to the 'Ajam community. Nonetheless, they may have been *shaykhiyya*, and didn't reveal their political attitudes to the Shi'a of Kuwait vividly to avoid being on bad terms with other Shi'a communities whose social and religious affairs they managed. This may have been because there was no cleric Shi'a by the time they arrived, except shaykh Musa. In other words, during that time, Kuwait had not yet entered the whirlpool and division of the larger Shi'a-Shi'a sectarian conflicts already evident in some parts of the Persian Gulf, starting with the establishment of the *shaykhiyya* doctrine during the 18th century. Equally, during the early establishment of the Shi'a cleric system in Kuwait, the religious

⁴⁷¹P.P. of the al-Jum'a family.

⁴⁷²See Salim Al-Nuwadri. *A'lam al-Thaqafa al-Slamiyya Khilal 14 Centuries*, vol. 2. Mu'assasat al-'Arif: Bayrut, 1992, pp. 454-455, 577.

consciousness of the three distinct schools of thought in Kuwait had not yet acquired the acrimony that had developed in other places. Unlike Bahrain, al-Hasa, southwestern Iran, Najaf, and Karbala' where there had been controversy over Shi'a jurisprudence for decades, Kuwait was a new state and there was no well-established administrative Shi'a cleric system to cause divisions.

Therefore, the al-Mazidi family did not specifically label themselves as *shaykhi* Hassawiyya (even if they were) or *uṣuli* 'Ajam, and evidently occupied a neutral position, at least during the early history of Kuwait.⁴⁷³ Indeed, according to the Jamal and al-Sabagh private documents, the first prominent Shi'a cleric in Kuwait was shaykh Musa al-Mazidi, who assumed the position of Shi'a judge and religious leader in the first half of the 19th century. His son, shaykh Muhammad al-Mazidi, established *masjid al-mazidi* prior to Mubarak's reign. His descendants inherited his position up to the arrival of Muhammad Mahdi Salih al-Khashwani al-Musawi al-Katimi al-Qazwini (better known as Sayyid Mahdi) in 1908/09 and Sayyid 'Isa Kamal al-Din al-'Alawi and another Shi'a cleric called Sayyid 'Abdullah Hashim al-Musawi (known Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim) during the same period.⁴⁷⁴

This is not to say that when the new clerics arrived in Kuwait, the al-Mazidi role of managing the social and religious affairs of the Shi'a ended, but it was overshadowed by the new line of Shi'a clerics who took advantage of the lack of religious leadership and who were managing the internal religious and social affairs of the Shi'a communities by the first decade of the 20th century.

⁴⁷³P.P. of the ibn Ghalib family and another from the al-Qattan family.

⁴⁷⁴P.P. of the al-Sabagh, Jamal, Safar, Khajah and Maqamis families.

The al-Sahaf Family: The Second Shi'a Clerical Family Established in Kuwait

The al-Sahaf family was a prominent cleric Shi'a *shaykhi* family in the Persian Gulf, between the 19th and 20th centuries, mainly in Basra, Najaf, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatif, and al-Hufuf, the place where the family belonged. It has been said that Muhammad Hussayn Nasir al-Sahaf (1795-1895) was the first member of the al-Sahaf family to migrate to Kuwait and officially establish the *shaykhi* school of thought, as the representative of shaykh Muhammad Abu Khamsin (1210-1316), the official *marji'* of *shaykhiyya* in al-Hasa.⁴⁷⁵ He was asked by members of the Hassawiyya in Kuwait, via Abu Khamsin, to stay in Kuwait and act as the latter *wakīl* in order to manage their religious and social affairs.⁴⁷⁶

No one knows exactly when shaykh Muhammad al-Sahaf migrated to Kuwait due to the paucity of the primary sources that indicate signatures on the private papers of the Hassawiyya in Kuwait, even though it has been said the establishment of the *masjid al-sahaf*, the first *masjid* of the Shi'a, told in the oral history of the Hassawiyya, was related to his efforts. However, it can be assumed that from the 1880s onward Muhammad al-Sahaf and his descendants were *shaykhi* religious scholars in Kuwait, evidenced by local documents indicating the authentication of shaykh Muhammad al-Sahaf in 1889, his son shaykh 'Ali ibn Muhammad (1826-1903) in 1895, and the latter's sons shaykh Ahmad ibn 'Ali (?- 1901) in 1900, and shaykh Nasir 'Ali al-Sahaf (unknown) in 1905.⁴⁷⁷ When shaykh Muhammad died in 1895, his descendants ('Ali and Ahmad) took over his position until the arrival of a new

⁴⁷⁵The local documents show that his son 'Ali has authenticated social contracts in Kuwait in 1889. That means, the family was already established by 1880s. Thus, al-Shakhs assumption was incorrect. P.P. of the al-Qattan family; Al-Shakhs. *A'lam Hajir*, vol. 4, p. 229.

⁴⁷⁶Al-Shakhs. *A'lam Hajir*, vol. I, p. 361, vol. 4, p. 229; Kathim al-Sahaf. *Tathkarat al-Ashraf fi Tarjamat al-Ashraf*, n.a; n.a, 1957, pp. 3-7; Matthiesen. 'Mysticism', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, pp. 1-24.

⁴⁷⁷P.P. of the al-Qattan, Maqamis and Bash families. See figures 23 and 24 in appendix 4.

familial line of the *shaykhi*, the al-Ha'iri family. Mirza 'Ali Musa al-Isku'i al-Ha'iri (better known al-Ihqaqi) settled in Kuwait during the first decade of the 20th Century, as indicated in the earliest private papers he authenticated.⁴⁷⁸ His father Mirza Musa was a famous Shi'a *shaykhi* cleric in Basra, who published *ihqaq al-haq* on the principles of Ahmad al-Din al-Ihsa'i.

Between al-Bahrani and al-Mazidi Clerical Shi'a Families

Due to the scarcity of sources, it is unclear how the religious affairs of the Baharna were managed prior to Mubarak's reign, even though their mosque were built before 1868. Firstly, at the early stage (i.e. between first half of the 19th and the 1930s) it could be that shaykh Muhammad al-Hakim al-Bahrani arranged their affairs as indicated by two private documents of the Jamal and al-Sabagh families.⁴⁷⁹ Secondly, the Baharna were probably assisted by the al-Mazidi house, as indicated in documents belonging to members of the Baharna families.⁴⁸⁰

The Establishment of New Familial Shi'a Cleric Lines (al-Qazwini vs al-Ha'iri): The Origin of the Sectarian Conflict of the Shi'a Communities in Kuwait

The arrival of both the al-Ha'iri and al-Qazwini families' official representatives of the *shaykhi* and *uṣuli* schools of jurisprudence respectively, during the first decade of the 20th century, opened a new chapter for the history of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, which is associated with an increase of 'religious consciousness' among the Shi'a settlers in Kuwait. By that time, the Shi'a communities in *wasat*, *sharq*, and few in *jibla* were not uniform, but

⁴⁷⁸P.P. of the al-Qattan family.

⁴⁷⁹See figures 15, 18 and 23 in appendix 4.

⁴⁸⁰P.P. of the al-Jum'a family.

were divided according to origin (e.g. 'Ajam, Hassawiyya and Baharna). Within the Shi'a communities themselves these three Shi'a groups kept themselves separate and usually did not have social or religious interactions. Each group tried, as far as they could, to settle among their own group (*jamā'a*), as explained before, especially those who came after the old settlers.

The 'Ajam created an 'Ajam enclave', Hassawiyya a 'Hassawiyya block' and the Baharna a 'Baharna community' not only for various religious reasons, but also because they had differences in social practices and economic lifestyle. All Shi'a groups in Kuwait were influenced (after the arrival of new Shi'a familial clerics) by the existing religious conflicts in the three major schools of jurisprudence, established from the early 17th to the 19th centuries, especially among the *uṣuli*, *shaykhi*, and to a lesser extent, the *ikhbari* schools, who brought their differences with them from Najaf, Basra, Bahrain, Iran, and al-Hasa, with new arrivals of the Shi'a clerical houses of the al-Qazwini and al-Ha'iri.

Before examining the reason behind the religious split of the Shi'a groups in Kuwait, it is important to briefly discuss the origin of the historical conflict of the Shi'a schools of jurisprudence (*uṣuliyya*, *shaykhiyya* and *ikhbariyya*). Among the three Shi'a schools, both the *ikhbari* and the *usuli* schools claim historical precedence as existing as early as the *imams* era, although this is subject to dispute among scholars. Others assert that the school was established in 1624 by Mirza Muhammad Amin al-Istrabadi, the founder, and was later revived by Mirza Muhammad 'Abd al-Nabi al-Nishaburi during the early 19th century, which is a more plausible view. Instead of relying on the interpretation of religious texts, by using deductive methodology (*ijtihād*) to jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fīqh*) like the *uṣuli* school, the *ikhbari* refused to use the concept of *ijtihād* in religious provisions and referred instead to the original records of the prophet and the Shi'a 'imams, (i.e. deeds and words) that had been

conveyed throughout history by narrators. Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the movement spread among the Twelver Shi'a scholars in Iran, Mesopotamia, Eastern Arabia, and India, and begun to fade during the 19th century due to the efforts of Muhammad Baqir al-Behbehani, (better known al-Wahid al-Behbehani), the leader of the *uṣuli* school at that time.⁴⁸¹ However, the emergence of a *shaykhi* school of jurisprudence in the 18th century, led by Ahmad al-Din al-Ihsa'i, attempted to reconcile *uṣūl al-dīn* and philosophic principles.⁴⁸² After the death of al-Ihsa'i, the school split into different branches included mainly *kashfiyya* and *rukniyya*.

By the end of Mubarak's reign each Shi'a community had their own cleric. It is possible that those shaykhs who led the prayers in the three Shi'a mosques represented their *marji'* in the *hawzas* of al-Hasa, Bahrain, Najaf, or Iran in Kuwait.⁴⁸³ The individual archives of Shi'a families, such as Abul, Qasim, Safar, and Khajah indicate that from late in Mubarak's reign, Sayyid Mahdi (1855-1939), Sayyid 'Isa Kamal al-Din al-'Alawi (1877-1950), and Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim (died in 1956), began to take over the position of the al-Mazidi family, even though shaykh Ibrahim's son, Habib al-Mazidi, continued in his father's position until his death in 1977.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹Robert Gleave. *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrine of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 3-10; Jawdat al-Qazwini. *Al-Marji' iyya al-Diniyya al-'Ulya 'Inda al-Shi'a al-Imamiyya: Dirasa fi al-Tatawur al-Siyasi wa al-'Ilmiy*. Bayrut: Dar al-Rafiddin, 2005, pp. 168-169.

⁴⁸²Muhamad al-Taliqani. *Al-Shaykiyya Nash'atuha wa Tatawuruha wa Masadir Dirasatuha*. Bayrut: Al-Amira. 2007, pp. 112, 177.

⁴⁸³According to oral history and private papers of Bash family, the al-Sahaf was in charge of leading prayers in the *masjid al-sahaf* until the arrival of Mirza 'Ali at the later period of Mubarak al-Sabah's reign. Shaykh 'Ali al-Jadi, interviewed by the author, 11 Aug. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁸⁴'Ali al-Mazidi, interviewed by the author, 3 Mar. 2015, Kw. See documents authenticated by Sayyid Mahdi and 'Isa Kamal al-Din in figures 26 and 27 in appendix 4.

Sayyid ‘Abdullah al-‘Alim, as oral history emphasises, was the religious leader for the ‘Ajam *tarakma* in particular; they invited him to Kuwait from Iran to run their religious affairs, as marriage contracts of al-Salman and Qasim dated 1910 and 1915 respectively indicate.⁴⁸⁵

The al-Salman family is considered to be from the *tarakma* social group and Sayyid ‘Abdullah authorised their marriage contracts as figure 28 shows in appendix 4. This does not mean that he was acting as a cleric for *tarakma* families only. Another private document indicates that along with Sayyid Mahdi, he authorized ‘Ajam purchase contract.⁴⁸⁶ With *tarakma* families’ donations, Sayyid ‘Abdullah was able to establish *masjid sayyid ‘abdullah* in 1912/13, according to an inscription engraved on the wall of the *masjid*, after a member of a *tarakma* family called Haji Salim donated a plot for a Shi ‘a religious *waqf*, the *masjid sayyid ‘abdullah* became a religious and social gathering place for *tarakma* Shi ‘a families.

As for the Hassawiyya, Mirza ‘Ali, who originated from Usku’ near Tabriz in Iran, took over al-Sahaf’s position and established *al-hussayniyya al-ja fariyya* in 1920, and *masjid al-haka* (now *masjid al-imam al-sadiq*) in 1926/27, next to the existing Hassawiyya mosque *masjid al-sahaf*.⁴⁸⁷ However, although these two Hassawiyya Shi ‘a institutes remained and represented the same social group, their locations were moved to different places by a decree issued by the Kuwaiti government.

Thus, by the 1920s and after, there were two rival Shi ‘a groups who had their own local religious institutes (e.g. *masjid* and *hussayniyya*) and represented two different Shi ‘a doctrinal orientations. Sayyid Mahdi, Sayyid ‘Isa, and Sayyid ‘Abdullah were the main

⁴⁸⁵P.P. of the al-Salman family.

⁴⁸⁶P.P. of the Qasim family.

⁴⁸⁷P.P. of the al-Qattan family.

religious leaders for the *usuli* Shi'a 'Ajam and Arab, while Mirza 'Ali and shaykh Ibrahim 'Ali al-Hussain Isma'i al-Isma'il were the Shi'a clerics for the mainly *shaykhi* Hassawiyya, as well as a few *shaykhi* Shi'a 'Ajam families who were connected to Hassawiyya religious foundations, such as *masjid al-sahaf*, *masjid al-haka*, *hussayniyya al-ja' fariyya*, and *hussayniyya al-arbash*.⁴⁸⁸

This can be deduced from a close examination of preserved documents belonging to the Hassawiyya and 'Ajam families. Mirza Musa, his son Mirza 'Ali, and shaykh Ibrahim al-Isma'il were the only Shi'a clerics who authorised papers belonging to the Hassawiyya and a few *shaykhi* 'Ajam families, while most of the 'Ajam community and Arab Shi'a, who were immigrants from Basra and from the villages and towns of Khuzestan, used Sayyid Mahdi, his brother Sayyid Jawad (from 1925 onward), Sayyid 'Isa, and Sayid 'Abdullah to authenticate their documents. For example, there are four important documents in the al-Qattan private papers related to the Hassawiyya religious endowments in Kuwait dating back to 1912, 1914, 1919, and 1921, signed and authorised by Mirza 'Ali. The document dated 1912 is signed by Mirza 'Ali and his father Mirza Musa as figure 29 shows in appendix 4. This indicates that during Mubarak's reign Mirza 'Ali was already settled in Kuwait, according to the private papers of al-Qattan family.⁴⁸⁹

Other documents of Qasim, al-Salman, and Khajah show that during Mubarak's reign documents related to marriage and testament among the 'Ajam families were ratified by the Shi'a clerics who belonged to the Sayyid Mahdi group as figures 26 and 27 show in appendix 4.

⁴⁸⁸ See figure 6 in appendix 2.

⁴⁸⁹ 'Abbas al-Qattan. *Album Suwar*, pp. 36, 52, 56, 66.

In Kuwait, Shi'a clergy, such as Sayyid Mahdi, and his rival Mirza 'Ali, who served the Shi'a communities (i.e. mainly 'Ajam and Hassawiyya), reflected the differences between the schools of jurisprudence of *uṣulis* and *shaykhis*, not only in Kuwait but also in parts of the Gulf region, as indicated by the religious discourse between the two schools which is discussed in their books.

It seems that Shi'a-Shi'a conflict began late in Mubarak's reign. Kuwait was not secluded from the influence of the broader Shi'a world and the doctrinal conflicts among the three schools of jurisprudence. Due to clerical influence, this religious conflict and social hostility was found in the Shi'a communities in Najaf, Karbala', and Samara', al-Hasa, Iran, and to lesser extent in Bahrain.

In Kuwait the conflict was mainly between *uṣuli* and *shaykhi* clerics. Sayyid Mahdi, who was born in 1855 in Kazimiyya, was invited by the *ulama*' of *hawza* in Najaf, mainly shaykh Muhammad Kazim al-Khurasani in 1909, shaykh Muhammad Taqi Shirazi and the 'Ajam *uṣuli* community, especially the Behbehaniyya merchants, to settle in Kuwait during the late reign of Mubarak al-Sabah in order to act as a cleric for the *uṣuli*.⁴⁹⁰ A second narrative suggests that the 'Ajam merchants chose him not only for his intellectual and religious reputation in Basra but also for his fluency in both Farsi and Arabic since he would have to deal with followers spoke both languages.⁴⁹¹ It is also possible that he was invited because of the death of shaykh Muhammad al-Mazidi in 1908.⁴⁹² Though shaykh Ibrahim al-Mazidi followed his practices, (in later period) it seems that the Shi'a *marji*' wanted a direct

⁴⁹⁰Sayyid 'Ala' al-Qazwini, interviewed by the author, 27 Dec. 2014, Kw; Khaz'al. *Tarikh Al-Kuwayt*, vol. IV, pp. 30-31; Ja'far al-Timimi. *Amir Muhammad al-Kazimi al-Qazwini (1918-1971) wa Dawruhu al-Ijtima'i wa Athrahu Alfikri wa al-Siyasi fi al-Basra*. Basra: Jam'at Al-Basra, Risalat Majistir, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁹¹Ibrahim Behbehani, interviewed by the author, 11 Feb. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁹²'Ali al-Mazidi, interviewed by the author, 3 Mar. 2015, Kw.

representative of the *uṣuli* school in Kuwait, especially given the continuous *uṣuli* and *shaykhi* tensions. Moreover, it seems that the tendency of the *uṣuli* school was to expand their authority in the Gulf. This would strengthen their position in Mesopotamia, as it would increase the income to the *hawza* from *khums* and *sahm al-imam* (imam sharing).

Therefore, Sayyid Mahdi, who was intellectually more able than the local clerics, stayed in Kuwait for seventeen years managing Shi'a *uṣuli* affairs, mainly those of the 'Ajam.⁴⁹³ Other accounts suggest that he left due to his aggressive attitude toward the *shaykhi* during his regular speeches in his *majlis*, or *diwaniyya*, at his home in Kuwait.⁴⁹⁴ In 1925/26 his brother, Sayyid Jawad, took over his position, and was less aggressive toward other Shi'a groups even though the historical antagonism between 'Ajam and Hassawiyya continued.⁴⁹⁵

Although the social relationships among all Shi'a groups in Kuwait prior to the arrival of Sayyid Mahdi is unclear, though they may have been amicable, it is clear that Sayyid Mahdi was the first Shi'a cleric in Kuwait who adopted an aggressive sectarian attitude toward *ikhbari* and *shaykhi*, especially because he believed they had founded a new and unorthodox school of jurisprudence in Shi'a doctrine. He published many books in Arabic and Farsi, including responses to the rival Shi'a schools of jurisprudence (e.g. *shaykhi* and *ikhbari*).⁴⁹⁶ Some produced repercussions among the Shi'a communities in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf, mainly Basra, Najaf, and al-Hasa. His arguments helped for the first time to create religious sectarianism and social division among the Shi'a communities in Kuwait and

⁴⁹³Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. IV, p. 31; al-Timimi. *Amir Muhammad*, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁴al-Timimi. *Amir Muhammad*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁹⁵Sayyid Jawad al-Qazwini, interviewed by the author, 28 Feb. 2015, Kw.

⁴⁹⁶For more details on the names of his books consult 'Ala'al-Din al-Qazwini. *Masa'il Aqa'diyya fi al-Ghuluw wa al-Tafwid al-Khalqi wa Alrizq al-'Ilm Bilghayb al-Haqiqah al-Muhamadiyya*. Altab'a. IV. Bayrut and Qum: Dar al-Wilaya, 2003, pp. 28-31.

elsewhere in the Gulf region, mainly between Shi'a *uṣuli* 'Ajam and Shi'a *shaykhi* Hassawiyya, and to a lesser extent between Shi'a *uṣuli* 'Ajam and Shi'a *ikhbari* Baharna.

Sayyid Mahdi wrote an influential book, *bawari alghalin*, while he was in Kuwait in 1914, as a refutation of the *shaykhiyya*. In his introduction, he indicates that upon his arrival in Kuwait, he found a group of Shi'a *shaykhiyya* involved in ignorant dogmatic practices. He emphasised that he advised them to return to the right doctrinal Shi'a practices (i.e. *uṣuli*) but they refused due to their fundamentalism (*ta'aṣṣub*) of their belief in *shaykhiyya*. At the same time, Sayyid Mahdi used harsh words against the *shaykhiyya* leaders in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf, such as *kufār* and *zanādiqa*, afterwhich no one challenged him in public debate. He also refuted the historical emergence of the *shaykhiyya*, describing the founder of the *shaykhiyya*, shaykh Ahmad al-Ihsa'i, as (*ahmad al-hadām*) 'the destructor', for promoting the *shaykhiyya* as the right Shi'a school of thought.

In his conclusion, Sayyid Mahdi prayed for God to protect Kuwait from the *shaykhiyya*. He also thanked Muhammad Hussayn Nasir Allah Behbehani (Ma'rafi), a 'Ajam merchant of the Ma'rafi family who established the *hussayniyya ma'rafi* in 1906-1907 according to Mulla 'Abdin poetry, for his motivation and encouragement to publish a book against the *shaykhiyya*.⁴⁹⁷ This means that the 'Ajam merchants, especially the Behbehaniyya, not only supported Sayyid Mahdi's aggressive attitude toward the *shaykhi* Hassawiyya, but they also agreed with Sayyid Mahdi's point of view.

The Baharna *ikhbariyya*, and a few of their scholars, such as members of the al-Khaqani family, were also targeted by Sayyid Mahdi in his three books entitled, *al-Qadi al-'Adl*, *Hilyat al-Najib wa Hilyat al-Labib*, and *Darbat al-Muhadithin 'Ala al-Haq al-Mubin*.

⁴⁹⁷Muhammad al-Qazwini. *Bawari al-Ghalin*. Bombay: Al-Mustafa'i, 1914, pp. 206, 208.

In the latter book, published in 1929, Sayyid Mahdi asserted that in Kuwait there was group of fundamentalists, [*ikhbariyya*], who were infidels and outside the right religion.⁴⁹⁸ This book was published as a response to many *ikhbariyya* who, in turn, had asserted that he was responsible for the sectarian division amongst the Shi'a communities in Kuwait. Sayyid Mahdi denounced the *ikhbariyyas'* accusations against him and asserted that they were unable to refute his previously published book. In response, he stated, 'the population of Kuwait admit that I am the one who harmonises relations between the Sunni and the *muhadithin* [*ikhbariyyin*] as well as other Shi'a, and I am the one through my management who saved the Shi'a from the Wahhabi in al-Jahra [the al-Jahra war]'.⁴⁹⁹

Continuous publications by Sayyid Mahdi revived the earlier conflicts among the three Shi'a schools of thought and created regional discussions between mainly Sayyid Mahdi, his rival Mirza Musa, and the latter's son 'Ali. To confront the anti-*shaykhiyya* which prevailed in the Gulf region, Mirza Musa also published *Ihqaq al-Haq*, in 1924, with financial aid from the Hassawiyya group in Kuwait. It was an indirect response to Sayyid Mahdi, and other disputants (*rad alshubhāt*). It also challenged the credibility of the *shaykhiyya* and shaykh Ahmad al-Ihsa'i. It concluded that religious conflict among the Shi'a must stop because the issues were comparatively minor but could lead to serious discord. .⁵⁰⁰ Mirza Musa's book prompted Sayyid Mahdi to publish *Zuhur al-Haqiyya 'Ala al-Shaykhiyya* in 1928, accusing him of distorting the Shi'a religion and misleading his audience. He advised the followers of the *shaykhiyya* to read responses to the *shaykhiyya* and compare them with the original texts of *shaykhiyya's* 'ulama'. More importantly, he indicated that the justification of

⁴⁹⁸Muhammad al-Qazwini. *Darbat al-Muhadithin 'Ala al-Haq al-Mubin*. Basra: Matba'at al-Katimiyya, 1929, p. 14.

⁴⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp.11-14.

⁵⁰⁰Musa al-Ha'iri. *Ihqaq Alhaq*, n.a: n.a, 1924, pp. 2-6, 382-386.

shaykhiyya scholars in not responding against his works, was that they feared sectarian strife (*fitna*) among the Shi'a.⁵⁰¹

Sayyid Mahdi's response to Mirza Musa did not stop him from continuing his 'reformatory campaign' against *shaykhiyya*. In 1933 he published a book against *rukniyya* entitled *Ghash al-Rukniyya Ghaflet al-Bariyya* which contained, besides contempt for the *rukniyya* leaders, mainly Karim Khan, and his son Zayn al-'Abidin, an analysis of what he called 'cheating' in interpretation of religious knowledge on different issues.⁵⁰²

The debates between mainly *uṣuli* and *shaykhi* scholars in daily social life, and published books, created two groups in Kuwait. The public disagreement between the Shi'a communities in Kuwait were evident from the patterns social daily life and discussions amongst the Shi'a. This can be deduced from a letter written by Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim which contained promises to influential *uṣuli* Shi'a figures, including Sayyid Mahdi and *uṣuli* 'Ajam, and Arab merchants in Kuwait, that he would keep away from the Hassawiyya and remain under the guidance of Sayyid Mahdi. In the context of the letter, he emphasised that he cooperated with public *uṣuli* Shi'a merchants in Kuwait, including the sons of Muhammad Rafi', 'Abd al-Karim Ma'rafi, and others, asking them not to associate and meet with the Hassawiyya in Kuwait as long as they still believed in the *shaykhi* doctrine.⁵⁰³ That means one of two things; first, al-'Alim could have a *shaykhi*, before his admission in this

⁵⁰¹Muhammad al-Qazwini. *Zuhur al-Haqiyya 'Ala al-Shaykhiyya*. Al-Matba'a al-'Alawiyya: Najaf, 1928, pp. 1-7.

⁵⁰²Muhammad al-Qazwini. *Ghash al-Rukniyya Ghaflet al-Bariyya*. Matba'at al-Huda: al-'Amara, 1933, pp. 2-11.

⁵⁰³Though the letter is undated, it was probably written when he first arrived to Kuwait. Another indication that this letter was possibly written prior to 1920 is because Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim refers to Katim al-Yazdi al-Najafi al-Tabataba'i, the Shi'a *marji* during that time. Jawdat al-Qazwini. *Al-Marji' iyya al-Diniyya al-'Ulya 'Inda al-Shi'a al-Imamiyya: Dirasah fi al-Tatawur al-Siyasi wa al-'Ilmi*. Bayrut: Dar al-Rafidiyn, pp. 236, 263. See figure 30 in appendix 4.

letter, on not interacting with the Hassawiyya in Kuwait. Secondly, even if he was not *shaykhi*, the letter demonstrates the high level of tension between the two groups in the daily social discourse.

Indeed, the continuous ‘reformative campaign’ by Sayyid Mahdi over the *shaykhiyya* put such pressure on their scholars that some of them converted from *shaykhi* to *uṣuli*, for example, Habib ibn Qurayn, who admitted in 1927 in an official letter, attached within Sayyid Mahdi’s book, *Zinat al-‘Ibad: Mutaba‘at al-Rashad*, that he believed in the *uṣuli* and disowned the *shaykhiyya*.⁵⁰⁴

The religious conflict between these two major Shi‘a groups not only prevented members of each party from mingling with each other in a social context and in *majalis al-hussayniyya*, but it also went deeper; From that time until only a few decades ago, it was unpopular for any intermarriage to take place between the ‘Ajam and the Hassawiyya. A similar attitude applied to the Baharna. The religious antagonisms amongst the Shi‘a communities also motivated the establishment in *wasat* to have two different cemeteries between late Mubarak’s reign and Ahmad al-Jabir reign,⁵⁰⁵ *maqbarat al-‘ajam* for the ‘Ajam and *maqbarat al-hassawiyya* for the Hassawiyya, even though prior to Mubarak’s reign all Shi‘a were buried in one cemetery in *al-sawabir* area.⁵⁰⁶ The two cemeteries, which were near the *suq al-safafir*, remain in the same location but are not in use today.⁵⁰⁷ The Baharna used to be buried with the ‘Ajam.

⁵⁰⁴See Muhammad Al-Qazwini. *Zinat al-‘Ibad: Mutaba‘at al-Rashad*. Al-Matba‘a al-‘Alawiyya: Najaf, 1927.

⁵⁰⁵Others suggest it was during Salim al-Sabah reign.

⁵⁰⁶Mullah ‘Ali, interviewed by the author, 1 Mar. 2015, Kw.

⁵⁰⁷When I visited the two cemeteries I noticed that some names on the graves in *maqbarat al-‘ajam* belonged to the Hassawiyya group and this also applied to some ‘Ajam who were buried in *maqbarat al-hassawiyya*. This means that not all ‘Ajam and Hassawiyya families in Kuwait were affiliated to the jurisprudential schools that their overall communities followed.

The Establishment of the Shi‘a *Ikhbari* School in Kuwait by Mirza Ibrahim Jamal al-Din

The Baharna, who belonged to the *ikhbari*’s school of jurisprudence, were not involved, at the beginning of the Shi‘a-Shi‘a conflict. They took a neutral position and segregated themselves from other Shi‘a parties. One explanation for this was because they did not have a direct representative of their *marji*‘ in Kuwait, similar to the ‘Ajam and Hassawiyya. Also, the Baharna, in accordance with their beliefs as *ikhbari*, would follow their *marji*‘ in Bahrain from the al-‘Asfur and al-Bahrani houses, such as shaykh Hussain al-‘Asfur and shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani, because they did not have a *marji*‘ representative or *wakīl* in the region where they lived, in contrast to the ‘Ajam and Hassawiyya. This means that the Baharna did not necessarily emulate a living *marji*‘ like the ‘Ajam and Hassawiyya, which was the main reason for Sayyid Mahdi’s criticisms. Moreover, the difference between *uṣuli* and *ikhbari* was not as fundamental as the difference between *uṣuli* and *shaykhi* in term of Shi‘a doctrine.

Therefore, many Baharna families, as indicated by a few of their families, were inclined to manage their social and religious affairs through an *uṣuli* cleric, such as Sayyid Jawad al-Qazwini, prior to the arrival of their *ikhbari* shaykh, Mirza Ibrahim Jamal al-Din, sometime in the 1930s.

Like the ‘Ajam and Hassawiyya communities, in the 1930s, the Baharna leaders, such as Ahmad al-Istad, and Maki al-Jum‘a, decided to have their own Shi‘a cleric to represent their school of thought, the *ikhbariyya*. They asked Mirza Ibrahim, who was a Shi‘a *ikhbari* cleric in Qusba and Faw, to settle in Kuwait and manage their religious and social affairs. Mirza Ibrahim, who was born in Najaf in 1913, and considered a descendant of the *ikhbari* familial school, agreed to live in Kuwait permanently, in *firīj al-mattba* in *sharq* near *masjid al-baharna*, as an official *ikhbari marji*‘, although he moved between Qusba and Faw to

establish endowment projects (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*), as his private letters show.⁵⁰⁸ He became the official *imam* for *masjid al-baharna* in *sharq* until the second *masjid* of the *al-baharna* which was built in al-Di'iyya in 1962. In 1972, he established *hussayniyya* called *dar al-hussayn* for Baharna *ikhabriyya* in the 'Abdulla al-Salim area.⁵⁰⁹

The Baharna community were not involved in the Shi'a-Shi'a conflicts prior to the arrival of Mirza Ibrahim. They only entered this sectarian conflict when Mirza Ibrahim responded to the sectarian campaign initiated by other Shi'a clerics, mainly *uṣuli* scholars, in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf region. He published numerous leaflets in response to whomever was suspected of supporting the *ikhbari*. Moreover, he published pamphlets called *al-Sirat al-Sawi fi al-Rad 'Ala Kitab Darbat al-Muhadithin* and *Naqd wa 'Atab Ma'a al-Asafi*, as responses to Sayyid Mahdi, Muhammad Mahdi al-Asafi and whoever opposed the *ikhbari* school and their principles.⁵¹⁰ Ultimately, the '*ulama*' from the al-Khaqani family joined the Baharna community to cooperate with Mirza Ibrahim after the 1950s in managing their affairs, as they do up to now.

Other Factors Contributing to the Sectarian Divisions of the Shi'a Communities

Besides the religious conflict and social and ethnic identity which affected the social relationships amongst the 'Ajam, the Hassawiyya, and the Baharna, involvement in different businesses was another factor in hindering daily interaction. For example, the Hassawiyya and Baharna were well known for handicrafts in Kuwait, while a few were merchants, such

⁵⁰⁸Sayyid Jawad Jamal al-Din, interviewed by the author, 3 Jul 2016. Kw; P.P. of the Jamal al-Din family; Murtada Jamal al-Din. *Hawiyyat al-Muhadithin: fi Thikra Ayat Allah Sayyid Ibrahim Jamal al-Din*. Published by the author: Kuwait, 2000, p. 36; Ibrahim Jamal al-Din. *Naqd wa 'Atab Ma'a al-Asafi*, n.a: n.a, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁰⁹Jamal al-Din. *Hawiyyat*, pp. 54-55.

⁵¹⁰Jamal al-Din. *Hawiyyat*, pp. 3-19; P.P. of the Jamal al-Din family.

as the al-Istad, al-Jum‘a (Baharna) and al-Shawaf, al-Arbash, al-Baghli al-Mutawa‘ (Hassawiyya) families, whereas the ‘Ajam Shi‘a community was divided into three sections: merchants, artisans, and labourers. Also many of the jobs of the ‘Ajam Shi‘a artisans were different to those of their counterparts, the Hassawiyya and Baharna.⁵¹¹ Therefore, there was little chance of daily interaction through their jobs. This applies to the Hassawiyya and the Baharna as well because they worked in different handicraft markets.⁵¹²

The Farsi language could also have played a part in preserving ‘Ajam identity, and isolating them from connecting with the Arab Shi‘a (i.e. Hassawiyya and Baharna), because they were the only group who spoke Farsi within all the Shi‘a communities. However, with this Shi‘a-Shi‘a conflict, the Shi‘a groups, especially the Hassawiyya and the Baharna, succeeded in integrating with their counterparts, the Kuwaiti Sunni. Their shared Arab ethnic identity (i.e. Hassawiyya and Baharna) may have enabled them to integrate into overall ‘Kuwaiti society’. Similarly, the old ‘Ajam settlers of Kuwait had no difficulty in integrating into Kuwaiti society since they considered themselves residents of Kuwait, or subjects of Kuwait. This can be deduced from the discussion in More’s reports on the ‘Persian community’ in Kuwait in 1921. He estimated they were an old community who had settled in Kuwait two to three generations prior to the report date, totaling no less than 10,000 individuals. Those old ‘Ajam settlers, according to him, ‘have presumably lost their Persian nationality’.⁵¹³ More examples found in British sources indicate that the old ‘Ajam Shi‘a and Sunni of Kuwait identified themselves as subjects of Kuwait (*ahl al-kuwayt*), as was exemplified by Ja‘far Hussayn and

⁵¹¹See figure 7 in appendix 2.

⁵¹²The Baharna used to work with some Hassawiyya in shipbuilding, especially those who worked as *alḥidāda* (blacksmiths) and *alkhiyāta* (tailors) as the shipbuilding industrial work needed such handicrafts, which were dominated by the Baharna.

⁵¹³From J. More. P.A. Kw to H.C. Bgh, no, 206-c, 4 Dec 1921. *IOR R/15/1/303*.

Ghulam Kankuni, in their cases related to civil and criminal issues in 1913 and 1920 respectively.⁵¹⁴

The structure of the all the Shi'a communities, in terms of gender and size, cannot be discussed due to the dearth of sources addressing these issues. However, the 'Ajam community, according to oral history and British officials' estimations, was very large when compared to their counterparts, the Arab Shi'a communities, especially when we look at their estimated numbers, regardless of the accuracy of the British documents between the early 20th century and 1938. This was why the 'Ajam were more involved in a wider range of activities than the Arab Shi'a, and had more political weight in the sheikhdom of Kuwait.

The Historical Relationship between the Shi'a, the Sunni and the Ruling Family

A close reading of the history of Kuwait from its early history reveals no serious sectarian conflict between the Sunni and the Shi'a created by either members of the al-Sabah family or the Sunni group, except for a few examples from after Mubarak's reign. By contrast with Bahrain and al-Hasa, doctrinal differences were not utilised politically by members of the al-Sabah family, Sunni merchants, or other ordinary Kuwaiti Sunnis, even if they held grudges against each other. Indeed, unlike al-Hasa and Bahrain, from the early history of Kuwait to the period this study covers, the Shi'a practiced their rituals freely without serious harassment. According to oral history, from the early 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century the Shi'a were able to practice their faith in three mosques, and in small traditional *hussayniyya*, such as *hussayniyya sayyid 'ali al-khabbaz* (now *hussayniyya al-'umran*), *hussayniyya al-shimali*, *hussayniyya jamal*.⁵¹⁵ The increase of the Shi'a

⁵¹⁴See the docs in IOR R/15/5/51, p. 161 and IOR R/15/5/20, p. 8.

⁵¹⁵Muhammad Jamal, second interview by the author, 28 Jan. 2015, Kw.

communities and the economic prosperity of Kuwait between the late 19th and the second decade of the 20th centuries enabled the Shi‘a merchants to establish two official *hussayniyya* and one *masjid* for ‘Ajam and ‘Arab Shi‘a whose ancestors were originally immigrants from southwestern Iran (*hussayniyya ma‘rafi* and *hussayniyya al-khaz‘aliyya* and *masjid sayyid ‘abdullah al-‘alim*), *hussayniyya bu‘layan* for Baharna, and *hussayniyya al-ja‘fariyya* and *masjid al-haka* for Hassawiyya.⁵¹⁶

In Kuwait history and among the Shi‘a communities, the first official *hussayniyya* is *hussayniyya ma‘rafi* and was established in first decade of the 20th century. The private papers of Ma‘rafi family show that Muhammad Hussayn Nasir ‘Allah Ma‘rafi bought three houses in 1906-07 and converted them into a Shi‘a religious endowment (*waqf*) in order to establish *hussayniyya ma‘rafi*.⁵¹⁷ Later, when Sheikh Khaz‘al of Muhammerah visited Kuwait during *muharram* and attended the *masjid al-mazidi*, he suggested building a separate *majlis* for the *hussayniyya* near that *masjid*. He then encouraged the Shi‘a by promising a large donation toward it. This decision motivated the *uṣuli* Shi‘a to raise funds and ‘Abd al-Karim Ma‘rafi, an ‘Ajam merchant, donated his house to the project. Shi‘a merchants bought other houses nearby for the project.⁵¹⁸ A house belonging to Sheikh Mubarak, and another to Sheikha Mudi al-Du‘aj al-Sabah, were given freely to the Shi‘a to expand the space of the *hussayniyya*. The establishment of *hussayniyya* for the *uṣuli* ‘Ajam was accompanied by an Arab *hussayniyya bu‘layan* in 1902 for the Baharna, and a *hussayniyya al-ja‘fariyya* in 1920 for the Hassawiyya, also with the concurrence of the al-Sabah family. This development was essentially part of Mubarak’s state-building policy and his pursuit of financial advantages from ‘Ajam merchants, especially with the arms trade, which helped him in his wars against

⁵¹⁶P.P. of the al-Jum‘a and al-Qattan families.

⁵¹⁷P.P. of the Ma‘rafi family.

⁵¹⁸P.P. of the ‘Idi family.

regional rivals. Moreover, the Hassawiyya and the Baharna dominated the most essential local industrial crafts (e.g. shipbuilding). More importantly, Mubarak and his successors sought Shi'a satisfaction in religious practice because they formed at least a third of the overall Kuwaiti population and would therefore be a useful support base in the event of internal al-Sabah rivalry. During the later period, the case of the *majlis al-tashri'i* in 1938 is a good example of how the al-Sabah utilised the Shi'a to 'legitimise' their rule against the mercantile Arab Sunni party.

Also, longstanding business partnerships between Sunni and Shi'a merchants reflected a degree of harmonious rapport within the larger 'Kuwaiti community'. The partnership between Muhammad al-Matruk (Shi'a) and 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Kharafi (Sunni), between Zayd al-Kazimi (Shi'a) and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bishir (Sunni), and between Mansur al-Mazidi (Shi'a) and Khalid al-'Adsani (Sunni) during the first half of the 20th century all reflected the cordial relationship between the Shi'a and Sunni Kuwaiti.

However, according to oral history and to British documents, the relationship between the Shi'a communities, especially the 'Ajam and the Sheikh of Kuwait changed during the reign of Salim al-Sabah (1917-21), who held conservative religious views. As the P.A. of Kuwait put it in 1918:

'Firstly. At various times I have heard that the Persian Community in Kuwait [is] desirous of placing themselves under British protection and on two occasions I have been definitely asked if this could not be done. On the second occasion my questioner, the leading Persian merchant here, said that in the time of Shaikhs Mubarak and Jabir the Persians always got impartial treatment and justice and that no difference was made between Sunni and Shi 'ah in that respect, while the policy of the present Shaikh was the reverse.'⁵¹⁹

Such indignation over the internal situation in Kuwait was 'widespread', according to the P.A. of Kuwait, but it also applied to the Arab Sunni, who were dissatisfied with Salim's

⁵¹⁹From P.A. Kw to C.C. Bgh, no, 130-c, 19 Sep 1918, p. 60. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

administrative policy. There were two reasons for this. First, his negative attitude toward free trade, especially on imported goods from India, and the full customs duties he imposed on goods brought to Kuwait for transshipment to other Gulf ports. Second, he neglected policy, especially in 'investigating and punishing crime and murder, and the futility of his general methods of government and his boorish manners toward his people'.⁵²⁰ In another report, the British emphasise the public dissatisfaction with Salim, demanding the British interfere:

'The people want a government modelled on our own and especially so with regard to the administration of justice. Foreigners complain bitterly of the unfair treatment they are receiving and the Persians are considering the submission of a petition to the P.A. to take them under his protection as is done in Bahrain.'⁵²¹

Kuwaiti discontent with Salim reached its zenith during his continuous wars with the 'Ajman and Mutair tribes, and his antagonism toward ibn Sa'ud, due to border matters which ultimately led to the *al-jahra* war in 1920. Therefore, the British thought of appointing Jabir al-Sabah, Mubarak's brother, under the supervision of a *majlis* and under their influence. The role of the *majlis*, which was to be composed of eight or nine people from different religious backgrounds (four Arab Sunni, two 'Ajam' Shi'a, one Jew, and one or two representatives of other sections of the community), was to guide Jabir.⁵²² However, this suggestion was not enforced, and doubtless the proposed British role would not have been popular.

However, the idea of establishing a *majlis* did not die with Salim, especially with the rise of a new and influential faction within the al-Sabah family. The Kuwaiti elites, led by the Sunni merchants, Hamad al-Saqir and shaykh Yusuf 'Isa al-Qina'i, took advantage of Salim's death to insist on establishing an official council (*majlis*) where they could officially discuss the internal affairs of Kuwait and its interests. They also rejected the idea of accepting

⁵²⁰Ibid., p. 61; Ass P.A. Kw, 4 Sep 1918, p. 63. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

⁵²¹Ass P.A. Kw, 4 Sep 1918, p. 63. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

⁵²²Ass P.A. Kw, 4 Sep 1918, p. 63. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

an absolute ruler of Kuwait without their consultation. They submitted a paper that had five major requirements. First, the al-Sabah family members must avoid quarrelling among themselves regarding the future succession. Second, they would nominate three eligible successors such as Ahmad al-Jabir, Hamad al-Mubarak, or ‘Abdullah al-Salim. Third, the British government must approve whoever would be selected from those three nominees, especially if the members of *majlis al-shūrā* were in a conflict. Fourth, the Sheikh selected would be appointed head of a council named the consultative council (*majlis al-shūrā*). Finally, the council should consist of two members from the al-Sabah and four members representing Kuwaiti inhabitants, mainly from the Sunni merchant social group. The latter would be nominated annually by the al-Sabah and residents of Kuwait.⁵²³ Other accounts suggest there were to be twelve, mainly Sunni members, which included ‘six from the eastern half of the town, [*sharq*] and six from the west [*jibla*]’.⁵²⁴ The council was finally established without the presence of any representatives of the Shi‘a communities. The primary sources do not explain why the Shi‘a were excluded from the *majlis al-shūrā* in 1921. After all, Ahmad al-Jabir’s rule was approved by most members of the al-Sabah (except ‘Abdullah al-Salim), members of the council (mainly Sunni figures), and the British government.⁵²⁵ The Sheikh was not supposed to take any important steps without consulting the *majlis* first. He was also to meet frequently with members of the *majlis al-shūrā*, not once or twice a week as some suggested, but every day if needed.⁵²⁶

Ahmad al-Jabir also agreed on the following demands regarding members of the council (*majlis al-shurra*):

⁵²³From P.A. Kw to H.C. Bgh, no, 49/c, 26 Feb 1921, p. 70. *IOR R/15/1/513*; Khaz‘al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. IV, pp. 317-318.

⁵²⁴Letter from P.R. PG, no, 21-s, 13 Dec 1927, p. 2. *IOR R/15/5/1/504*.

⁵²⁵See Chapter Five.

⁵²⁶From P.A. Kw to H.C. Bgh, no, 49/c, 26 Mar 1921, p. 80. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

‘Firstly, criminal cases will be decided in accordance with law of Islam. Secondly, in case of appeal, written statements of both parties and the Qadhi’s judgment will be submitted to the Ulema, whose decision will be final. Thirdly, if both parties in a dispute agree to accept arbitration of third party, his decision will hold. Fourthly, the ruler will take advice in all matters internal and external, which affect the town. If [anyone] has any suggestion for the benefit of town or people, he will lay it before the ruler, who will discuss it with his people and adopt it if approved.’⁵²⁷

However, the council did not achieve the goal that it was established for. Therefore, a few months later, *majlis al-shūrā* was dissolved due to continuous conflict among its members.⁵²⁸

Thus, the idea of the participation of the residents of Kuwait through their representatives died after the dissolution of the council, and was only revived during the 1930s.

The Relationship between Shi‘a Merchants and the British

According to the available primary sources, mainly British and individual archives of the Shi‘a families, the British relationship with most of the Shi‘a merchants, mainly the ‘Ajam, was cordial.⁵²⁹ This could be due to the amicable relationship between the Shi‘a merchants and the successive rulers of Kuwait since the early history of Kuwait. The Shi‘a merchants followed the sheikdom’s attitude toward the British. By contrast with the Arab Sunni merchants, since the early history of Kuwait to 1938, there is no single incident that shows that the Shi‘a merchants took a position against the wishes of the political rulers, as it will be explained in Chapter Five regarding 1938. Moreover, secret letters written by the P.A. of Kuwait during the period of this study describes some Shi‘a merchants, as the section below will show, as ‘pro- British’, while in similar reports, some Arab Sunni merchants are

⁵²⁷From P.A. Kw to H.C. Bgh, no, 59/c, 1 Apr 1921, p. 83. *IOR R/15/1/513*.

⁵²⁸Other accounts assert that after the election the council never met and the internal administration was in the hand of Sheikh Ahmad, similar to his predecessors. Khaz‘al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol, v , pp.16-18; Letter from P.R. PG, no, 21-s, 13 Dec 1927, p. 2. *IOR R/15/1/504*.

⁵²⁹See the role of Shi‘a merchants in the section below.

described as 'anti-British'. Moreover, the British assigned two 'Ajam to work for them. 'Ali Ghulum Rida Behebhani, the first secret agent in Kuwait (1899-1904), was assigned to write daily reports on the internal affairs of Kuwait. Muhammad 'Ali Ma 'rafi also worked as a British newsagent and as 'spy' and interpreter for the P.A. of Kuwait during the early 20th century.⁵³⁰

Furthermore, the relationship between the Shi'a merchants and the British representatives in Kuwait is evident in the celebrations which were occasionally organised by the British Agency, to which members of the al-Sabah and notable Arab and Shi'a merchants were invited. For instance, in 1906 the P.A. of Kuwait invited members of the al-Sabah, notable merchants, and public and influential figures in Kuwait to attend the celebration of the birth of King Edward VIII at the British Agency. Muhammad Taqi and Muhammad 'Ali Ma 'rafi, 'Ajam, merchants, were among the guests.⁵³¹ In 1911, the P.A. of Kuwait invited Kuwaiti public figures to celebrate the birth of King George V. Haji Mahdali (Muhammad 'Ali Ma 'rafi) son of Haydar Ma 'rafi, his brother Yusuf Ma 'rafi, another member of Ma 'rafi family, 'Abd al-Karim Ma 'rafi, and another 'Ajam merchant, 'Abd al-Hussayn Mataqi, were among the guests.⁵³² Additional events took place for the same purpose, in 1912 and in 1913 respectively.⁵³³ As always, besides many Arab merchants and notables, members of the Ma 'rafi family, including Muhammad 'Ali Ma 'rafi and his brothers, 'Abd al-Karim Ma 'rafi and Yusuf Ma 'rafi, and members of the ibn Ghalib family, including 'Abd al-Hussayn Mataqi and his brothers were invited by W. Shakespear.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁰From Mubarak to Knox, P.A. Kw, no 8m, reg 442, 15 Jun 1908, p. 2. *IOR L/P&S/7/226*; 'DPR for 11th Mar 1906', in *PDPG*, p. 299.

⁵³¹P.P. of Muhammad Kamal.

⁵³²*Ibid.*

⁵³³See figure 31 in appendix 4.

⁵³⁴P.P. of Muhammad Kamal.

However, even though the Shi'a clerics, mainly Sayyid Mahdi and Sayyid 'Isa Kamal al-Din, stood against the British during the First World War, the attitude of the Shi'a merchants toward the British at the same time is unclear due to the scarcity of primary sources that touch on such a topic. However, it is likely that the 'Ajam merchants took a similar attitude to the clerics due to their religious and social influences on the Shi'a communities.

The Role of the Shi'a Communities in Building Kuwait Sheikhdom Economically: Merchants, Artisans and Labourers

Even though there are Arabic and English secondary sources on Kuwaiti merchants during the pre-oil era, there is a vacuum on their post-1918 contributions to the economy, and to the evolution of Kuwait's community through their social and commercial networks in the Gulf region, particularly in comparison with their Sunni counterparts. One possible interpretation for this lack is the difficulty for scholars, especially foreigners 'outsiders', in recognising the names of Shi'a merchants in the primary sources, mainly those in the British archives. This is evident in Jill Crystal's *'Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and the Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar'*, published in 1990. Her study focuses on the shift of the social and political relationship between the Arab Sunni merchants and the rulers of Kuwait before and after the discovery of oil. She relies heavily on the British documents, which contain substantial material on Shi'a merchants, but it seems that she was not able to recognise and distinguish them from the Arab Sunni merchants, with some exceptions.

Another possibility is the difficulty experienced in the past in accessing the private papers of some families of Shi'a merchants who were reluctant for various reasons to allow consultation of their documents. An example of such a case is Carter's small commercial book *'Merchant Families of Kuwait'*, published in 1984. He relied on oral history without

consulting primary and secondary sources. Carter shed light on selective Kuwaiti families which included thirty-eight Sunni merchants and only two Shi'a, mainly the Ma'rafi and Behbehani families. The discussion in his book covers only brief oral histories on the roots of the grandfather of each Kuwaiti merchant family and their historical business from the early history to the recent past. He also provides good genealogical information for each family, according to oral history, though some of it contains errors. Regarding the Shi'a merchants, Carter, like other foreign scholars, thought there were only two prominent Shi'a families (i.e. Ma'rafi and Behbehani). He fails to include other Shi'a families, such as the ibn Ghalib, Abul, Qasim, Maqamis, al-Matruk and more, all of whom contributed no less significantly than the Ma'rafi and Behbehani. However, these omissions may be due to circumstances at the time which have now changed.

If we turn to the economic evolution and prosperity of Kuwait, it can be seen that the Shi'a communities, such as merchants, artisans, and labourers, contributed greatly to the prosperity of Kuwait. Up to present day they consider themselves as significant participants in the economic system because most of the essential industrial crafts are under their dominion. In fact, although the Shi'a artisans and labourers formed an important social group in contributing to state building, their roles have not been discussed in the British documents and the private papers of Shi'a families. Their participation, however, has been discussed in Arabic secondary sources that are mainly based on oral histories.

From the rulership's viewpoint on Shi'a migrants, Mubarak recognised trade as a major source of revenue for establishing a modern state. This was obvious from the amicable relationships between the Sheikh of Kuwait and affluent Kuwaiti Arab and 'Ajam (Shi'a and Sunnis) merchants who enjoyed some degree of political influence over the Sheikh during

the pre-oil era.⁵³⁵ Arab Sunni merchants, such as Hilal al-Mutairi, Shamlan ibn Saif, Ibrahim ibn Mudaf, Jasim Budai, Ahmad al-Humaidi, Hamad al-Saqir, Fahad al-Khalid, and many others, and 'Ajam merchants like 'Abd al-Karim Abul, Najaf ibn Ghalib, Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi, and his sons Isma'il, and Mullah Salih, the secretary for the Kuwait sheikhdom, are examples of some of the most influential Shi'a merchants and professionals in Kuwait prior to the discovery of oil.⁵³⁶ Their influence was profound because: '[a] substantial portion of the rulers' revenues came from the merchants through customs duties, pearl boat tax, rents and other revenues that flowed from a prosperous *entrépot* economy. Rulers also depended upon occasional loans and financial gifts from the wealthiest merchants'.⁵³⁷ Such a statement sometimes implies 'voluntary donations', and sometimes suggests mandatory fundraising, as in most cases of 'Ajam merchants and shopkeepers, for what was called 'sheikh's need'. Evidence of this type of activity is provided by British documents and private papers preserved by Shi'a families. For example, in 1907 Mubarak asked the foremost merchants of Kuwait to an assembly and raised a mandatory amount by obligating all merchants, including Najdi, Sunni, and 'Ajam, to cover his war expenses against the 'Ajman tribe.⁵³⁸ Similar cases were recorded in 1910, according to the report of the P.A. of Kuwait. He indicates that Mubarak sought support either in cash or in kind from all the people of Kuwait, including the 'Ajam community, to prepare for the next regional war against Sheikh Sa'dun, the chief of the Muntafiq tribe. The report points to the 'Ajam contribution when it states that; 'foreigners such as Persian merchants are assessed in cash at whatever sum the shaikh

⁵³⁵ After the discovery of oil in 1938, relationships between the Sheikh and the merchants changed, since the former became independent of the merchants. Crystal. *Oil and Politics*, p. 73.

⁵³⁶ The influence of Shi'a merchants related to their interest as a Shi'a communities.

⁵³⁷ James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf. 'Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study'. *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (Sep. 2006), p. 197.

⁵³⁸ 'DPGPR for 31st March 1907' in *PDPG*, vol. II, p. 111.

considers he can safely extract from them'.⁵³⁹ The same agent that year indicates that Mubarak financed his troops from the money levied on the inhabitants of Kuwait, including Jews, 'Iranians' and 'other foreigners', besides recruiting men and obtaining materials for his wars from 'Kuwaiti people'.⁵⁴⁰ After Mubarak's defeat in the war with Sheikh Sa'dun, he launched another expedition, and the 'rich Persian merchants', as Shakespear put it, were asked for financial contributions for the military mobilisation.⁵⁴¹

Another document, preserved by Muhammad 'Ali Kamal, a Kuwaiti Shi'a antiques and documents collector, indicates fifty-nine Arab and 'Ajam merchants with the exact amounts of their contribution to Kuwait affairs. The list designates the financial contribution of 'Ajam merchants, including 3,000 Rupees of Haji Mahdali (Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi), and 2,000 Rupees of Haji Mataqi (Muhammad Taqi). Though the document neither indicates under which Kuwaiti Sheikh this document was written nor shows the purpose of the fundraising, it is likely that it was written before 1930 because the names of most of the merchants listed lived during that time, according to the oral history and historical literature of Kuwait. The Baharna were not excluded from 'occasional loans' and 'financial gifts' to the Sheikh of Kuwait. In 1908, Haji Salman al-Istad, a famous Bahrani boat-builder, was obliged to pay Mubarak 240 Dollars on behalf of himself and his crews and apprentices. Mubarak also demanded an extra forty Dollars under the pretext of 'sheikh's need' which was resented by al-Istad.⁵⁴² Even daily discussions in the Shi'a communities emphasise that, before the discovery of oil, the rulers of Kuwait were poor and were usually borrowing money (*sulfa*)

⁵³⁹From Sec of St Id, no, 17m. Arabia: Sheikh of Koweit's defeat by Sheikh Sa'dun, reg no 756, pp. 4-5. *IOR L/P&S/7/239*.

⁵⁴⁰From W. Shakespear P.A. Kw to B.R. PG, no, 1618, 18 May 1910, pp. 288-289. *IOR R/15/1/479*.

⁵⁴¹From W. Shakespear P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, c14, 30 Mar 1910, 268-69. *IOR R/15/1/479*.

⁵⁴²'DPGPR for 12th July 1908' in *PDPG*, vol. III, p. 214.

from Shi‘a merchants (*al-tujār al-shi‘a*), including the Ma‘rafi, Behbehani, ibn Ghalib, and Abul families. For example, Muhammad Taqi and Muhammad‘Ali Ma‘rafi lent Sheikh Mubarak money by buying on his behalf Sheikh Khaz‘al’s date crop in order to cover Mubarak’s debt of 50,000 Rupees to Sheikh Khaz‘al.⁵⁴³

However, despite all the financial aid to the Sheikh of Kuwait, no record in contemporary sources (i.e. British and private papers) indicates that the Kuwaiti Shi‘a merchants had the kind of political influence on the Sheikh of Kuwait that their Sunni counterparts did during that period.⁵⁴⁴ One possible explanation could be their preoccupation with trade rather than internal political affairs, especially as their relations with the government and their Sunni counterparts were harmonious, and they were not vulnerable to socio-religious persecution as a minority community in Kuwait. In other words, the Shi‘a merchants and clerics were usually not involved in political affairs as long as their standard interests related to their religious rituals, social affairs, and economic privileges as a communities remained secure. Some merchants and clerics also acted as mediators between the rulership and members of the Shi‘a communities regarding their interests, complaints, or any other issues. Another possible explanation for why the Kuwaiti Shi‘a merchants carried less political weight than their Sunni counterparts is, the role of the former was connected more within regional and transnational trade which ultimately did not require influence in Kuwait’s internal political affairs. As the majority group, the Sunni merchants had a major impact on all seafaring activities and other areas of employment, and on economic revenue in general for most of the sheikhdom and many of the people. Therefore, their opinions were influential and they

⁵⁴³‘DPGPR for 20th August 1906’ in *PDPG*, vol. I, p. 442.

⁵⁴⁴There is only one document indicates that Mubarak in 1901 invited the Arab and ‘Ajam merchants to his *majlis* to inform them his decision of being under British Protection. From ‘Ali Rida, Kw to Kemball P.R. PG, 21 Dec 1901, p. 403. *IOR R/15/1/474*.

were usually consulted by the Sheikh regarding certain internal political affairs. The best example is in 1910 when Mubarak increased taxes on the pearl merchants because he sought more revenue for his tribal wars. This caused resentment amongst most of Kuwaiti merchants, especially the Arabs, who rejected his decision. Therefore, Mubarak, during that year, prohibited them from pearling and fishing as a punishment, although Kuwait was heavily dependent on these activities for income. In addition, prominent rich Arab merchants, such as al-Mutairi and ibn Mudaf, decided to migrate to Bahrain, while another Arab merchant called Saif, left for al-Hasa. Although Mubarak sent messengers, including his sons Sheikh Jabir and his brother Salim, instructing them to return, they refused. The merchants sought British protection in the Political Agency in Bahrain for themselves and their crews, and they told Mubarak that they would not return unless he guaranteed he would not harm them again or cancel his order. Although they had already received offers from the Sheikhs of Qatar and Bahrain to settle in their states, they returned to Kuwait, but only after Mubarak himself visited Bahrain upon recognising how much they had enriched Kuwait's economy, and that their departure resulted in losses for Kuwait and its inhabitants.⁵⁴⁵

The Role of Shi'a Merchants: Cases Studies

Although its trade within the Gulf region extended to all Gulf States, Kuwait traded most intensively with Basra in southern Mesopotamia, Bushehr, Bandar 'Abbas, Bandar Ma 'shour, Bandar Dailam, Hindyan, and Muhammerah in southwestern Iran, Manamah in Bahrain, and Muscat in Oman. Unsurprisingly, the old settled Kuwaiti Shi'a merchants such as

⁵⁴⁵For more details of the full story, see Rush, ed., *Record of Kuwait*, vol. I, pp. 543-561; Shamlan. *Min Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, pp. 151-157; and Khaz'al. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, vol. II, pp. 280-286; 'Extracts from Kuwait news for week ending 31st Aug 1910', p. 184. *IOR R/15/5/18*.

Muhammad al-Matruk, ‘Abd al-Karim Abul and his sons, and members of the Behbehani, Qasim, Ma ‘rafi, and ibn Ghalib families, all played pivotal roles in fostering Kuwait’s trade through their networks during the first half of the 20th century. Long established merchant settlers in Kuwait settled under foreign jurisdiction for the sake of commerce, but preserved ‘their distinct identities as members of a trading diaspora, cultivating their networks across space, and traveling back and forth in pursuit of their commercial ventures.’⁵⁴⁶ The ‘Ajam merchants, for example, who were long domiciled in Kuwait, supplied Tangistani merchants of Iran, and vice versa, through their friends and relatives on both sides.⁵⁴⁷ They also participated alongside the Arab Sunni merchants in building the economic system.

The port of Muhammerah, however, was the commercial hub for Kuwait and a contact zone for merchants of Kuwait, Mesopotamia, and southwestern Iran. Indeed, Muhammerah was the closest Iranian port to both Basra and Kuwait. Sheikh Khaz ‘al’s relations with his closest friend Mubarak also helped increase the trade between the two regions. Khaz ‘al and Mubarak exchanged frequent visits from 1896. This habit continued until Reza Shah arrested Khaz ‘al in 1925. Indeed, due to the special relationship between the two parties, Khaz ‘al was the only Arab Sheikh in the Persian Gulf who was allowed to buy plots and houses in Kuwait during Mubarak’s reign. His prominent castle (*qasir khaz ‘al*) still remains in Kuwait. Therefore, it was not surprising that Kuwait had more flourishing trade relations with Muhammerah than with any other southwestern Iranian port, due to this amicable relationship. The *Persian Gulf Administration Reports* and the individual archives of Najaf ibn Ghalib and Muhammad al-Matruk, who had a commercial office in Muhammerah from the beginning to the middle of the 20th century, confirm Muhammerah’s importance to

⁵⁴⁶ Alejandro, Luis and Patricia. *The Study of Transnationalism*, pp. 217-237.

⁵⁴⁷ ‘Note on the contraband problem of Iraq with her neighbours and in particular how it affects Kuwait’, p. 59. *IOR R/15/5/128*.

Kuwait. Both sets of documents show continuous trade relations between the two regions from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries.

Although Kuwait's Shi'a merchants were fewer than their Sunni counterparts, they still significantly enriched Kuwaiti trade, specifically the trade between southwestern Iran and Kuwait. A closer examination of the British sources and private papers of some Shi'a families show that during the first half of 20th Century there were approximately forty-two Arab and 'Ajam Shi'a merchants in Kuwait (see table 7 in appendix 3). However, this study will focus only on five cases of the most influential Shi'a merchants, though there are plenty of primary sources for some others. It is worth noting, however, that Kuwaiti Shi'a merchants were not limited to southwestern Iranian ports. Some went beyond the Gulf and carried on trade in Muscat, Bahrain, India, East Africa, and even in Britain, similar to their counterpart the Arab Sunnis.⁵⁴⁸

The al-Matruk Family

Muhammad 'Abdullah al-Matruk, was a Kuwaiti Shi'a merchant, whose father migrated from Bahrain during the 19th century, as the Baharna community emphasise. Due to his extensive trade in Basra, it is possible he originated from Mesopotamia, although his grandsons claim, without evidence, that their roots were in the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Matruk was born in Kuwait in 1875 and lived in *sharq*. As a result of intermarriage between them, the family of al-Matruk is related to the al-Jamali family in Baghdad, the al-Tittun family in Bahrain, and al-Jum'a family in Kuwait.⁵⁴⁹ Haji Muhammad was commercially active in the Gulf region from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries. He developed commercial and

⁵⁴⁸Most of the Sunni merchants dominated trade between Kuwait and India.

⁵⁴⁹Hamza al-Istad, second interview by the author, 22 Jan. 2015, Kw; 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jum'a interviewed by the author, 26 Jan. 2015, Kw; Aslan al-Matruk, interviewed by author, 30 Dec. 2010, Kw.

business acumen from his father 'Abdullah, who was a successful merchant as well as being involved in various types of food, consumer products, and real estate businesses. The son followed his father's commercial legacy between Kuwait and the Gulf region and had to learn Farsi.⁵⁵⁰ He had commercial offices in Basra (the main office), Kuwait, Ahwaz, and Muhammerah, but also traded with Lingah, Bahrain, Calcutta, Bombay and Karachi in India, and East Africa. Al-Matruk did not settle in Kuwait and preferred to sojourn between the southwestern Iranian ports, Basra, and to lesser extent Kuwait. He became Kuwait's commissioner agent in Basra and Muhammerah, supplying Kuwaiti and Gulf merchants with various items, as his private papers show. Interestingly, al-Matruk obtained privileges from the Iraqi government by being registered in the Basra Chamber of Commerce in 1939, although classified as a Kuwaiti merchant, according to his private papers.⁵⁵¹ One possible reason for such a status, was his high reputation as reportedly being from an old merchant family in Basra who were important for the Gulf trade. Obviously he obtained membership for the connections and privileges it assured him.

It seems he preferred Muhammerah to other ports because it was closest to his home office in Basra, and the town had installed a telegraph early on. Another explanation might be that the southwestern Iranian zone was a hub for products he could export to the Kuwaiti market. The existence of international banks, such as The Eastern Bank Limited, The Imperial Bank of Iran, and The Banque Nationale De Perse, situated in southwestern Iranian towns, helped al-Matruk to facilitate his trade with merchants in the Gulf region and worldwide. These facilities helped al-Matruk to expand his trade network with the Iranian, Arab, and foreign merchants in southwestern Iran, the Gulf, and India regions, and to deal with them in a timely

⁵⁵⁰Many private papers of Muhammad al-Matruk can be found in the official website of the al-Matruk family, (accessed Jan 3, 2014); available from www.bin-matook.com

⁵⁵¹P.P. of the al-Matruk family.

fashion for bills, claims, and other issues. This is obvious from a close examination of more than 10,000 private documents in Arabic, Farsi, and English including letters, invoices, checks, and accounting books dated between 1902 and 1958.

Al-Matruk established businesses with Kuwaiti Shi'a and Sunni merchants, such as Salih al-Fadhil and his brother Ibrahim in Karachi, Khalid al-Fayiz al-Khamis, Muhammed al-Marzuq, Yusuf Haydar Ma'rafi (Shi'a), Hamad al-Saqir, 'Abd al-latif al-Ibrahim and his son Yusuf, and ibn Sinan. However, his longest partnership, which continued for forty years, was with Nasir 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Kharafi, whose family today, is considered one of the richest Sunni families in the Arab world. This partnership is also indicated in British documents in 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁵² The private papers of al-Matruk trace the transnational networks of their grandfather. In 1958 al-Matruk was killed in Basra by an anonymous assassin for an unknown reason; his son 'Abdullah continued running his father's business. There is no indication that al-Matruk was involved in politics either in Kuwait or in Basra.

The Ma'rafi Family

Another example of the role of Kuwaiti Shi'a merchants is the Ma'rafi trading family. The word Ma'rafi is a compound name Muhammad Rafi', the lead merchant of the family in the 20th century, whose great-grandfather Ahmad al-Rai'is, migrated to Kuwait from Behbahan in the early 19th century.⁵⁵³ The official family website claims their original ancestors were Arabs, the Bani Mathhij of Yemen, but does not provide any evidence.⁵⁵⁴ Some of them have denied their 'Ajam identity', although it is widely known that they migrated from

⁵⁵²'Report on the trade of Kuwait for the year 1939-40' in *TPGTR*, Kuwait, vol. II, p. 2.

⁵⁵³Musa Ma'rafi, interviewed by the author, 25 Dec. 2011, Kw.

⁵⁵⁴For more details consult Diwan Ma'rafi website (accessed March 25, 2015); available from <http://www.diwanmarafie.com>

southwestern Iran. Their last name is Behbehani in many private letters and British documents, and it was only changed to Ma'rafi in the later period.

The Ma'rafi were wealthy before their arrival in Kuwait and almost all members of the first and second generations were rich merchants. Many of their members, including Muhammad 'Ali Haydar Ma'rafi (1842-1928), his son Isma'il Ma'rafi (1870-1943), Yusuf Haydar Ma'rafi (1860-1939), Muhammad Hussayn Nasr Allah Ma'rafi (1865-1935), Mansur Muhammad Zaman Ma'rafi (1891-1964), 'Abdullah Muhammad Hussayn Nasr Allah Ma'rafi (1895-1966), Ahmad Muhammad Hussayn Ma'rafi (1900-1956), 'Abd al-Karim Ma'rafi (1857-1918), and some others, were engaged in the import export trade. During the peak of the Ma'rafis' maritime trade, the family possessed many ships for various purposes.⁵⁵⁵ Their businesses included trade in arms and ammunition, timber, dates, spices, and rice, with Basra, southwestern Iran, Muscat, and India. The volume of business they handled generated considerable revenue for the Kuwait sheikdom.

In 1911, the P.A. of Kuwait provided a genealogical sketch of the principal members of the Ma'rafi house and their ancestral origins, presenting 'the more important members, there being a number of others, both present in Kuwait and in Behbahan, from which district the family originally came'.⁵⁵⁶ He also gives a meticulous report of their commercial activities.⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, throughout his networks in southwestern Iran, 'Abd al-Hussayn 'Abd al-Karim Behbehani (Ma'rafi) acted as a commissioner agent for the Gulf merchants. In 1912 he travelled to Ma'shour and Hindyan to purchase barley, commissioned by the merchants of Baghdad, such as Alexander Forage and 'Abdullah Germani.⁵⁵⁸ Ma'rafi trade rapidly

⁵⁵⁵For Ma'rafi ships' names, see Carter. *Merchant Families*, p. 61.

⁵⁵⁶'Note on the Marafi family (Persians) of Kuwait' by W. Shakespear, P.A. Kw, 18 Sep 1911, pp. 481-482. *IOR R/15/5/45*.

⁵⁵⁷*Ibid*.

⁵⁵⁸'Note', 3 May 1912, p. 39. *IOR R/15/5/78*.

expanded on a worldwide scale during the 1910s and 1920s. Muhammad Hussayn Nasr Allah Ma'rafi (1865-1935), known in the British records as, Muhammad Hussayn Behbehani (Ma'rafi), was agent for five global steamship companies, including the Mogul Line Limited, the Eastern Steam Navigation Company Limited of Bombay, the Bombay Persia Steam Navigation Company, the Oriental Steam Navigation of Hong Kong, and Hansa Line Limited Company.⁵⁵⁹ Thus the Ma'rafi are one of the oldest and wealthiest Kuwaiti Shi'a families.

After the Protectorate treaty with Mubarak in 1899, Britain became concerned about the stability of Kuwait because of the constant imports of arms and ammunition from Muscat, which could lead to it becoming a central port for the arms trade in the northwestern Gulf region.⁵⁶⁰ Therefore, in 1900, the British signed an agreement with Mubarak prohibiting him from importing and exporting arms via Kuwaiti merchants.⁵⁶¹ Mubarak needed arms for his tribal wars and so did not keep his promise. However, he pretended to warn Kuwaiti merchants against the arms business. This did not deter the Ma'rafi, ibn Ghalib, and others from engaging in the arms trade, as British documents testify, this being especially true of the Ma'rafi.⁵⁶² However, most of the Kuwait Sunni merchants usually purchased arms and ammunition from the 'Ajam merchants.⁵⁶³

The Ma'rafi network and local agents, such as the Iranian merchants Mirza Hussayn and 'Ali Khan in Muscat, and Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi's agent in Ma'shour, smuggled goods from Kuwait to tribes (i.e. Qashqai, Bakhtiyari and Kuhiglu) via the southwestern Iranian

⁵⁵⁹From Yusuf Behbehani, Kw to Mr. Ihtesham Daulah Khan, Kw, 10 Jul 1925, p. 90. *IOR R/15/5/77*; from Yusuf Behbehani, Kw to B.R. Kw, 20 Aug 1928, pp. 327-328. *IOR R/15/5/77*; from P.A. Kw to Mahomed Bahbani, no, 826, 27 Sep 1919, p. 181. *IOR R/15/5/87*.

⁵⁶⁰Furayhi. *Tijarat al-Silah*, p. 87.

⁵⁶¹For the agreement, see 'Trade and Traffic in the Gulf, 1880-1906' in Burdett and Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II, p. 80; and in *IOR R/15/5/45*, pp. 397-398.

⁵⁶²For more details, see Kuwait section in, *PDPG*, vol. I-V.

⁵⁶³*Ibid.*

ports, and to Bedouins in the Arabian Peninsula.⁵⁶⁴ During Mubarak's reign, local Khans and Sheikhs sent representatives to purchase arms and ammunitions from Kuwaiti 'Ajam merchants.⁵⁶⁵ Mubarak himself benefited from the Ma'rafi and ibn Ghalib business, obtaining arms, without permission, from the British. Reportedly Muhammad 'Ali Ma'rafi provided Mubarak with rifles and ammunition while Muhammad ibn 'Ali, a Kuwaiti Sunni merchant, provided him with money. This partnership was the origin of a common proverb used amongst old Kuwaitis that said '*al-flus ibn 'ali wa al-silah muhammad 'ali*', which means 'the money came by ibn 'Ali and the arms came by Muhammad 'Ali'. Mubarak also gained funds from the tax on the arms trade. As a result, the Ma'rafi family was exceptionally close to Mubarak.⁵⁶⁶

From 1908 the Ma'rafi were involved as Kuwaiti agents for the Persian Steam Navigation Company,⁵⁶⁷ and Haji 'Abd al-Karim helped Bushehr agents smuggle commodities from Kuwait to Iran in 1910.⁵⁶⁸

The Behbehani Shirin Family

There are several mercantile families with the name of Behbehani, who were 'Ajam merchants during the first quarter of the 20th century, but there are few sources available showing their commercial activities. Therefore, this section will focus on the Behbehani *Shirin* family, particularly Yusuf Muhammad Hussayn Behbehnai (1892-1964), better

⁵⁶⁴'Ammunition Smuggled from Kuwait', p. 11. *IOR R/15/5/48*; 'Note on Firearms', p. 265. *IOR R/15/5/45*.

⁵⁶⁵See, *IOR R/15/5/45*; *IOR R/15/5/48* and *IOR L/P&S/7/226*.

⁵⁶⁶'Note on the Marafi Family (Persians) of Kuwait', by W. Shakespear, P.A. Kw, 18 Sep 1911, p. 481. *IOR R/15/5/45*.

⁵⁶⁷'DPGPR for 23rd Feb 1908' in *PDPG*, vol. III, p. 74; 'DPGPR for May 1911' in *PDPG*, vol. IV, p. 375.

⁵⁶⁸From A. Trevor First Ass. R. Bsh to Sect to Gov. Id in F.O, no, 401, 6 Feb 1910, pp. 1-2. *IOR L/P&S/7/238*.

known as Yusuf *Shirin*, and the latter's son Murad Behbehani (1918-2005). Families who are known as the *behbehaniyya* are shown in table 8 in appendix 3.

During the first half of the 20th century, Yusuf Behbehnai and his five sons were amongst the richest merchants in Kuwait.⁵⁶⁹ The word *Shirin* or *Shirini* in Farsi means honey and he acquired the nickname due to his eloquent tongue.⁵⁷⁰ It is not known when the family migrated to Kuwait, but they are considered old 'Ajam settlers, and certainly the family were resident in Kuwait in the 19th century.⁵⁷¹ The Behbehani *Shirin* family were involved in global commercial activities. Haji Yusuf and his sons imported cigarettes and dried food, such as nuts and fruits, most notably from Bahrain and Bandar 'Abbas,⁵⁷² and, as reported in 1919, tobacco from Muhammerah.⁵⁷³ In 1927, documents show he imported Chinese sugar from Bushehr.⁵⁷⁴ British reports and documents in the collection of 'Ali al-Ra'is, a Kuwaiti Shi'a antique and document collector, indicate Haji Yusuf's trade also extended to Faw, Kazimiyya, Baghdad, Muscat, and Dubai.⁵⁷⁵ His correspondence shows his large network included merchants in Muscat, Baghdad, Dubai, and Kazimiyya.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁶⁹From P.A. Kw to R. Hay, P.R. Bh, no, r/42, 14 Jul 1948, p. 234. *IOR R/15/5/179*.

⁵⁷⁰Jasim Behbehani, interviewed by the author, 11 Mar. 2015, Kw. See also from H. Dickson P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, 96, 17 May 1933, pp. 52-53. *IOR R/15/5/170*.

⁵⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 53. See 'Prominent People', figure 34 in *IOR R/15/5/179*, p. 9 on the family.

⁵⁷²'Customs Department Kuwait' from P.A. Kw, no, 16/g, 14 May 1927, p. 31. *IOR R/15/5/89*; 'Customs Department Kuwait' from P.A. Kw, 28 Jan 1928, p. 95. *IOR R/15/5/89*.

⁵⁷³'Customs Department Kuwait' from P.A. Kw, no, 220/a, 7 Aug 1929, p. 306. *IOR R/15/5/89*.

⁵⁷⁴'P.R. Persian Gulf', 8 Oct 1927, p. 63. *IOR R/15/5/89*.

⁵⁷⁵From Ahmad al-Jabir to P.A. Kw, no, 2/774-r, 21 Dec 1932, p. 58. *IOR R/15/5/170*. See figure 32 in appendix 4.

⁵⁷⁶P.P. of 'Ali al-Ra'is. See example in figure 34.

In the 1930s they also sold radios⁵⁷⁷ and by the late 1930s their goods included sporting guns, automatic pistols, and watches.⁵⁷⁸ In the 1940s Haji Yusuf and his son Murad were the sole merchants who sold West End hand watches as figure 45 shows in appendix 5. In 1947 the firm established the first Kuwaiti music radio station, which had a one-mile radius.⁵⁷⁹

Haji Yusuf also engaged in the Shi'a corpse trade, between Kuwait and the holy cities of Iraq, for burial, and was at one point punished for it. He charged one Dinar per body. An attempt to punish him was cancelled by Sheikh Ahmad al-Jabir.⁵⁸⁰ Apparently, Haji Yusuf regarded this business as an honourable deed, given the desire of the Shi'a to be buried near the shrines of the *imams*. In addition, in the 1930s and 1940s, he acted as a contractor providing land transportation for the Kuwaiti Shi'a from Kuwait to Mecca and Medina for pilgrimage.⁵⁸¹

The ibn Ghalib Family

The family of ibn Ghalib, which is currently a surname of two sub-families better known as Mataqi and ibn Ghalib, is in fact one family related to the same father, Ghalib ibn Hassan al-Huwayji. The ibn Ghalib are considered one of the oldest mercantile 'Ajam settlers in Kuwait, and were influential during Mubarak's reign, due to their involvement in the arms traffic in the Gulf region, mainly with Muscat, but also other areas in the northern Gulf. This trade in particular brought them closer to Mubarak. The family is said to have migrated originally from Behbahan. Two British reports, however, note that the family was originally

⁵⁷⁷'Report on Trade of Kuwait for 1935-36' and 'Report on Trade of Kuwait for 1938-39' in *TPGTR*, Kuwait, vol. II, pp. 6, 2.

⁵⁷⁸For more details about Yusuf *Shirin* commercial activities in weapons see, IOR R/15/5/308 and IOR L/P&S/12/342.

⁵⁷⁹I.S. of P.A. Kw for the period 16th to 31th Oct 1947, no, 19/1947, p. 30. *IOR L/P&S/12/3759A*.

⁵⁸⁰'Kuwait I.S. for the period from 1st Nov to 15th Nov 1937', no, 14/1937, pp. 568-569. *IOR L/P&S/12/3758*.

⁵⁸¹P.P. of 'Ali al-Ra'is.

from Bushehr; one member was called Haji Najaf of Bushehr.⁵⁸² This may indicate that Bushehr was his ancestral place of origin. Certainly he regularly travelled to Bushehr on business. Another view, adopted by one of their descendants, maintains that they migrated from Bandar Ma'shour for the purpose of trade.⁵⁸³

In any case it seems that they settled in Kuwait in the early 19th century, or possibly even earlier, in *wasat* neighbourhood and had a famed *diwaniyya* called *diwaniyya mataqi*, where Kuwaiti gathered and interacted.⁵⁸⁴ Haji Najaf in partnership with his older brother Muhammad Taqi built commercial interests that extended to the Gulf ports and towns and beyond.

They held real estate in southwestern Iranian areas, mainly orchards in Falahiyya, trading in essential daily foods with Bombay, southwestern Iran, and southern Mesopotamia, but for more than twenty years their main business was the arms trade, such as Martini, Metfords, Mausers and Browning weapons. The expertise of the ibn Ghalib family was remarked upon by Mubarak himself, who described Haji Najaf as an expert in arms dealing (*ra'ī ṣanf*).⁵⁸⁵ For this reason the ibn Ghalib, more than any other Shi'a mercantile family, are mentioned by the British. Indeed, more than 130 British documents registered their activities, mainly in the Mubarak al-Sabah period. The British were particularly anxious to monitor this trade in order to protect their interests in the Gulf and the trade links between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. However, they also wished to ensure the delivery of arms to their regional allies. This can be inferred when we see the European cities and ports where these weapons

⁵⁸²From Kw to Bh, by 'Ali Rida, 14 July 1900, p. 62. *IOR R/15/1/473*; from P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, 65, 26 Oct 1910, p. 28. *IOR R/15/5/49*.

⁵⁸³Najaf Ghalib, interviewed by the author, 19 Dec. 2014, Kw; al-Shaikh Jalal al-Din al-Baghdadi. *Mu'jam al-Alfath al-Kuwaitiyya fi al-Khatat wa al-Lahjat wa al-Bi'a*. Baghdad: Matba'at Assad, 1964, p. 330.

⁵⁸⁴Najaf Ghalib, interviewed by the author, 19 Dec. 2014, Kw.

⁵⁸⁵From Sheikh Mubarak to W. Shakespear P.A. Kw, 27 Oct 1910, p. 28v. *IOR R/15/5/49*.

were manufactured and from which they were exported. For instance, Manchester, London, Cardiff, Newport, Dover, and Folkstone in the United Kingdom, Marseilles in France, Belgium, Germany, and Romania all supplied weapons via the port of Muscat. Moreover, between 1902 and 1906 the total value of arms and ammunitions imported into Muscat from the United Kingdom and France was 3,578,204 Dollars, while the value of Belgian arms imported by the British and other foreign firms between 1903 and 1906 was 1,235,740 Dollars.⁵⁸⁶

As a result of the ibn Ghalib familiarity with the arms traffic in the Gulf, and their long-standing connections with tribal Sheikhs (e.g. Khaz 'al of Muhammerah and 'Abd al-Muhsin of Falahiyya), their ability to speak Farsi, and the availability of their commercial office in Bushehr, Haji Najaf became Mubarak's arms agent in Muscat, Bandar Ma'shour, and Bushehr, as correspondence between Mubarak in Kuwait and Haji Najaf when he was either at Bushehr or Muscat demonstrates as shown in figure 33 in appendix 4.⁵⁸⁷

At the commencement of his reign, Mubarak ostensibly promised to assist the British to decrease arms traffic, signing a contract in 1900 prohibiting the import and export of arms in Kuwait, and giving permission for the British to inspect any Kuwaiti vessels with suspicious cargoes within Kuwaiti territorial waters.⁵⁸⁸ However, British reports, and correspondence between Mubarak and Haji Najaf, reveal the opposite. The British accused Mubarak of

⁵⁸⁶ 'Value in Dollars of Arms and Ammunition Imported into Maskat', *IOR L/P&S/7/198*.

⁵⁸⁷ From A. Trevor, P.R. Bsh to F. Sect. Cal, reg no, 364, report no, 109, 3 Feb 1910, p. 65. *IOR L/P&S/7/237*; 'Extract from Arms Traffic Diary no, 19 from March 15th to April 30th 1914', p. 150. *IOR R/15/5/46*; from Najaf, Mus to Shaikh Mubarak, Kw, 24 Mar 1913, pp. 271-2. *IOR R/15/5/49*; from Shaikh Mubarak, Kw to Nejef, Bsh, 22 Dec 1910, p. 76. *IOR R/15/5/49*.

⁵⁸⁸ See Mubarak proclamation to his subjects and his agreement to the British in *IOR R/15/5/45*, pp. 397-398.

‘playing ducks and drakes’.⁵⁸⁹ Even though British agents in the Gulf, especially in Kuwait and Muscat, were able to track the arms traffic between the two regions from 1900, until late in his reign Mubarak continued importing weapons from Muscat via two ‘Ajam merchants, Isma‘il Ma‘rafi and Haji Najaf, and their relatives, whether or not they had British permission. The reason why Mubarak, at the beginning of his reign, did not follow British orders, was because his regional rivals, (i.e. ibn Rashid, Yusuf al-Ibrahim and their allies the Ottomans), still threatened his position as the legitimate ruler of Kuwait. This resulted in occasional wars either with his regional rivals, such as the *al-sarif* war in 1901, or with their tribal allies. However, when the threat from al-Ibrahim and ibn Rashid diminished after their deaths at the beginning of the 20th century, Mubarak felt more secure. The official British recognition of Mubarak and his descendants in 1907, as the only legitimate family to rule Kuwait, and the Anglo-Ottoman convention a few years later which confirmed the Kuwait political *status quo* under British protection, all served to reassure Mubarak making him more responsive to British pressure. He did not, however, fully commit to the British regulations regarding the arms traffic in the Gulf.

His accounts book (*daftar alḥisābāt*) lists the Sheikhs, merchants and others in Kuwait, and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf, with whom he dealt between 1912 and 1915. Among the listed names is Mubarak al-Sabah’s debt to him and demands for different types of weapons and other items from southwestern Iran, especially Bushehr and Faw in Mesopotamia. For instance, in 1912 and 1914 Mubarak ordered dates from Faw, cloaks (‘*abā’a*’) from Bushehr, and different types of rifles, such as Martini and Mausers, from Muscat for himself, his sons, and his troops.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁹From Percy Cox P.R. PG to W. Shakespear P.A. Kw, 15 Oct 1912, p. 277. *IOR R/15/5/45*.

⁵⁹⁰Accounting book of Najaf ibn Ghalib.

The relationship between Mubarak and the ibn Ghalib family was not limited only to business, but went beyond that to friendship. Mubarak benefitted from the regional networks of the ibn Ghalib and Ma'rafi families, especially in Muscat and southwestern Iran. For example, the native agent in Kuwait, 'Ali Ghulum Rida Behbehani, in his report in 1900, documents Najaf's close relations with Mubarak. He indicates that Haji Najaf accompanied Mubarak on a trip to Faw and Basra.⁵⁹¹ The same agent in another report records that Haji Najaf, through his network in Bushehr, sent a local physician from Bushehr to Kuwait. Although the purpose is not indicated in the agent's report, the oral history of the Shi'a communities recounts that the doctor treated members of the al-Sabah family, including sometimes the Sheikh himself.⁵⁹²

The relationship between ibn Ghalib family and Mubarak could be categorised as one of 'mutual benefit'. Najaf himself took advantage of his position as the agent of Mubarak in Muscat by using it to gain permission from the British to import arms for Kuwaiti troops. Despite the extensive British watch on arms movements, Mubarak exceeded his permitted order of arms to gain a personal profit by selling them in Kuwait or to regional arms dealers through Najaf, as the accounting book of Najaf indicates. For instance, according to Najaf's accounting book between 1912 and 1915 he sold different kinds of arms and ammunition to local merchants, such as Yusuf al-Nisf, Ibrahim Mudaf, Ahmad al-Fuzan, Nasir al-Najdi, 'Abd al-Latif 'Abd al-Jalil, Yusuf Kazaruni, 'Abd al-'Aziz Uthman al-Rashid, and Ya'gub al-Yahudi (Jewish), and regional merchants like 'Abd al-Rasul Barat, Hassan 'Ali Bushehri, Muhammad 'Alwan, and Sheikh 'Abud Zayir Thiyab in southwestern Iranian ports

⁵⁹¹From Kw to Bh, by 'Ali Rida, 14 Jul 1900, p. 62. *IOR R/15/1/473*.

⁵⁹²From Kw to Bh, by 'Ali Rida, 14 Jul 1900, p. 63. *IOR R/15/1/473*.

and towns, Salih al-Mani ‘ and Muhammad ‘Abd al-Latif al-Mani ‘ in Qatar, Sayyid Hamid al-Naqib in Mesopotamia, and Mirza Hussayn al-Asfahani al-Najafi in Muscat.⁵⁹³

With such wide regional and global networks, the ibn Ghalib family was linked to regional Arab and Iranian merchants in towns and ports in the Gulf region, including Muhammerah and Ahwaz, Falahiyya, Bandar Ma ‘shour, Bushehr, Ramzhurmuz, Duraq, and Basra. Using his merchant connections, he bought dates, wheat, and grain from Faw, Qusba, Manyuhi, and Falahiyya and sent them to Kuwait and Indian ports. A few documents showed that he also purchased dates from Khaz ‘al’s orchards as well.⁵⁹⁴ In return, he imported Indian rice, sugar, lentil, and various coloured fabrics via Muhammad al-Sidarawi, a Kuwaiti Arab Sunni merchant who worked as an agent for Mubarak in Bombay, and sold them in southwestern Iran and Kuwait. In return al-Sidarawi provided a variety of items to Najaf from his local networks in Bombay, which he usually was asked by Najaf to send to Kuwait.⁵⁹⁵

The family’s commercial activities extended from the Gulf Sea to European cities, as the private letters of ibn Ghalib and al-Sidarawi archives reveal. They were involved in trade with companies in Manchester in the United Kingdom. For example, according to the private papers of the ibn Ghalib archive, in 1911 Najaf imported from Gray Paul’s agent a bale of cloths to be delivered to his commercial office in Bushehr. The next year, he imported from Messrs. Sassoon in Manchester different types of patterned cloth and shawls that included design sketches, as figure 34 shows in appendix 4.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³Accounting book of Najaf ibn Ghalib.

⁵⁹⁴P.P. of the ibn Ghalib family; ‘DPGPR for 20th Aug 1906’ in *PDPG*, vol. I, p. 442.

⁵⁹⁵P.P. of the ibn Ghalib and the al-Sidarawi families.

⁵⁹⁶P.P. of the ibn Ghalib family.

The Abul Family

The Abul family is a sub-family of a larger family group known as 'Abd al-Rahim that consists of the families of Abul, Naqi, 'Abd al-Rahim, and Sultan (better known now as the Buftiyn family). According to oral history, their forefather 'Abd al-Rahim, migrated with his brother Ja'far from southwestern Iran, specifically Behbahan, to Kuwait almost two hundred years ago.⁵⁹⁷ Their descendants claim that their great grandfather settled in Kuwait between the last quarter of the 18th and early 19th centuries for commercial reasons. The larger family of 'Abd al-Rahim used to live in *firj al-jin'at* in *wasat* neighbourhood. The great grandfather, 'Abd al-Rahim, preferred to settle permanently in Kuwait while his brother left and chose to settle in Muscat, where until present day, his descendants are considered Omani citizens.⁵⁹⁸ Other members of the family settled in Bahrain and Muscat as well, and today they carry Darwish and 'Abd al-Rarhim as a surname, names associated with well-known merchants, such as Muhsin Haydar Darwish and Ja'far 'Abd al-Rahim. Now the two families are classified under Baharna category in Oman and Bahrain.⁵⁹⁹ The family of 'Abd al-Rahim claims that their historical lineage belongs to the Arab Shi'a of the Ka'b tribe for two reasons: first, the majority of their members, since the first generation who settled in Kuwait, only speak Arabic; second, most of the names they carry according to their family tree are derived from Arabic names.⁶⁰⁰ However, British reports and their private documents indicate they are Kuwaitis of Iranian origin (i.e. 'Ajam) of Behbehani, as will be discussed below.

⁵⁹⁷P.P. of the Abul family.

⁵⁹⁸Nabil 'Abd al-Rahim interviewed by the author, 5 Feb. 2015, Kw.

⁵⁹⁹Basil Ja'far, interviewed by the author, 23 Mar 2016, Mus; Muhsin Darwish, interviewed by the author, 22 Mar 2016, Mus; al-Harith Darwish, interviewed by the author, 26 Feb 2016 Bah.

⁶⁰⁰Nabil 'Abd al-Rahim interviewed by the author, 5 Feb. 2015, Kw.

Since the early history of Kuwait, the four sons of 'Abd al-Rahim ('Ali Naqi, Abul, Muhammad, and Sultan) have been involved in different types of commercial activities either in Kuwait or within the Gulf region. For example, members of the family of Naqi were famous as one of the first families in Kuwaiti history to make a traditional dessert called *rahash*, still a well-known Kuwaiti dessert today. Other members engaged in the real estate business, food sales, and trading in household utensils. The descendants of Muhammad, another son of 'Abd al-Rahim, worked in the currency exchange business, real estate, and also selling household utensils from their shops in the Kuwait *suq*. The descendants of the Sultan family were involved in trade too, but were the poorest when compared to their relatives. However, the richest branch, and the most eminent merchants of the entire family, was that of Haji Abul and his sons, 'Abd al-Karim and his siblings Habib, Muhammad, Ja'far, 'Abdullah, and Mansur. They were engaged in the same commercial activities as their relatives.

The most important merchant and influential person in the sheikhdom of Kuwait within the Abul family was 'Abd al-Karim and in the later period, his sons Ahmad and 'Ali. 'Abd al-Karim, who was born in the 1880s, was assigned by al-Sabah to a very sensitive and important position in the sheikhdom. He controlled the private funds and daily expenditures of the al-Sabah family from Salim's reign to his death in 1945.

There is no clear reason, either from the British perspective or from private papers, as to why he was chosen in particular from among other Kuwaiti merchants to control the private funds of the al-Sabah, except that he may have been perceived as unusually trustworthy. Moreover, after the death of Salim it seems that Ahmad deliberately did not substitute him with any other Sunni merchant, not only because he was already assigned to this office by his uncle, but also because there was an opposition movement by many Sunni

merchants against the Sheikh. This opposition was supported by his rival, 'Abdullah al-Salim, in an attempt to depose him from the early years of his rulership of Kuwait. Also, most of the Shi'a merchants were historically considered major allies to the ruler of Kuwait as they never showed any sign of disobedience to the rulership.

British sources provide some information on 'Abd al-Karim's commercial activities and consider him as one of the most prominent figures in Kuwait during that time. One report, written during Ahmad al-Jabir's reign, when 'Abd al-Karim was sixty-three, states that he was a 'Persian born in Kuwait and an astute man who has control of the Subah private funds and acts as treasurer. He is pro-British and does a lucrative business in grains and piece goods. Now very near sighted and in consequence seldom returns a salutation'.⁶⁰¹ In another report showing the list of 'Ajam merchants in Kuwait during Mubarak's reign, Haji 'Abd al-Karim was mentioned as one of the 'Persian merchants' on the list.⁶⁰² Likewise, there is some evidence from private papers that he acted as treasurer for the Sheikh of Kuwait since Salim al-Sabah. For example, in 1920 Salim, in a private letter, asked 'Abd al-Karim to pay Salim al-Suwaiti on his behalf the amount of 318 Rupees in exchange for goods that Salim bought from al-Suwaiti.⁶⁰³ Another example was when Ahmad al-Jabir asked him to pay to 'Abd al-'Aziz Salih al-Ihsa'i 521 Rupees for a list of items provided to the Sheikh Ahmad by al-Ihsa'i.⁶⁰⁴ Plenty of local papers of this kind, of orders to 'Abd al-Karim from different Kuwaiti Sheikhs, who hold different positions, confirm his influential position with the al-Sabah family. Moreover, on behalf of Kuwaiti rulers (from Salim to Ahmad), he acted as the main representative dealing with Kuwaitis in real estate, to the benefit of the Sheikhs.⁶⁰⁵ Until

⁶⁰¹ See figure 6 under 'Prominent Persons' in IOR R/15/5/179, p. 191.

⁶⁰² 'List of Persian Firms of Importance in Kuwait', p. 25. *IOR R/15/5/48*.

⁶⁰³ P.P. of 'Ali al-Ra'is.

⁶⁰⁴ P. P. of the Abul family.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

his death he was in charge of the treasury, as the charts of statements of receipts and expenditures of Kuwait's finances in 1940 show. The charts confirm that he received amounts of 20,000 Rupees once between May and June and once between June and July in 1940.⁶⁰⁶ It seems that this money was allocated for monthly salary disbursements to the members of the al-Sabah family. It is indicated also in his accounts book that he was responsible for distributing the monthly stipends for members of the al-Sabah family.⁶⁰⁷

From a young age, 'Abd al-Karim followed the business interests of his father, Haji Abul, as private documents reveal. For example, in 1904 Haji Abul sent a letter from Karachi to his son 'Abd al-Karim informing him of his safe arrival there before the ship that carried his goods. He also reported to his son on the price rates in Karachi, particularly for goods such as dates, wheat, and rice.⁶⁰⁸ In this respect, it was not surprising that the son continued his father's commercial ventures in regional and global towns and ports, as shown by evidence from multiple sources. Similar to other Kuwaiti merchants, 'Abd al-Karim benefitted from his regional networks with merchants in Basra, Qusba, Duraq, Bahrain and southwestern Iranian areas by buying local merchandise, such as date, wheat, grain and many other items, for importation into Kuwait and Indian Ocean ports and cities. For example, a private letter between 'Abd al-Karim and a Kuwaiti merchant, 'Abdullah Khalid al-Badir, about the price rates in Basra, as well as Abul's orders for coffee, cooking oil, wheat and grain as figure 35 shows in appendix 4.⁶⁰⁹ In Basra, he also dealt with Muhammad al-Matruk, who supplied 'Abd al-Karim with items that he was able to provide from towns in Mesopotamia, such as al-Hilla, Baghdad, and al-'Amara, as letters exchanged in 1921 between them

⁶⁰⁶See the charts in IOR R/15/5/196, pp. 137-138.

⁶⁰⁷Accounting book of the Abul family.

⁶⁰⁸P.P. of 'Ali al-Ra'is.

⁶⁰⁹Ibid.

clarify.⁶¹⁰ ‘Abd al-Karim dealt also with another merchant of Basra, ‘Abdullah al-Khalil, according to the letters between them in 1927.⁶¹¹ His business in Basra went beyond trading in daily items, as he engaged in investments in a domestic Mesopotamian company by buying stocks and shares from that company. For instance, in 1926 he bought fifteen stocks valued at 750 Rupees, which made him a partner in the Iraqi-Kuwaiti Car Company.⁶¹² That is probably why in 1930 Haji ‘Abd al-Karim gave his Mesopotamian lawyer, Sulayman Faidhi al-Musali, the power of attorney to represent him for any lawsuits relating to his business there.⁶¹³

As for other places in the Gulf region, ‘Abd al-Karim traded in Bahrain, exchanging items of traditional wool, date, green coffee, Iranian nuts, and tea, Indian sugar and rice, and many other items with Ahmad Mahmud Hussayn in 1921.⁶¹⁴ He also invested some of his money in Iran, especially in Muhammerah, with The Imperial Bank of Persia. In 1931 ‘Abd al-Karim received an official letter from the bank regarding the terms and conditions relating to the interest rates of his deposited money, the sum of 100,996,85 Kirans, with an interest rate of 2.5 per cent per year.⁶¹⁵ Plenty of Farsi correspondence within the private collection of ‘Ali al-Ra’is, between ‘Abd al-Karim and his sons with Iranian merchants, such as Muhammad ‘Ali Shushtari, show the family’s transnational networks with southwestern Iranian merchants.

Not surprisingly the trade of ‘Abd al-Karim reached the Indian Ocean ports, such as Karachi, due to his father’s early involvement in trade there. During the 1940s, ‘Abd al-Karim

⁶¹⁰P.P. of ‘Ali al-Ra’is and the al-Matruk family.

⁶¹¹P.P. of ‘Ali al-Ra’is.

⁶¹²P.P. of the Abul family.

⁶¹³See, IOR R/15/5/89, p. 484.

⁶¹⁴P.P. of ‘Ali al-Ra’is.

⁶¹⁵P.P. of the Abul family.

was among several Kuwaiti merchants who imported tea from India through his mercantile networks living in Bombay. For instance, he imported fifty boxes of tea in 1941 via Hamid al-Qadi, and one hundred boxes via his relative Ja'far 'Abd al-Rahim (settled in Muscat), and a further fifty boxes from Hamid al-Qadi again between 1942 and 1943.⁶¹⁶ The two sons of 'Abd al-Karim, Ahmad and 'Ali, helped their father to increase the family's financial profits. This can be deduced from 'Abd al-Karim's letters exchanged with his sons. From the private documents of 'Ali al-Ra'is, it seems that while 'Abd al-Karim was travelling abroad catching up with his business, his sons acted on his behalf in Kuwait, either to run his private business or to work temporarily as the treasurer for the al-Sabah family. For instance, in 1933 'Ali sent a letter to his father with the suggestion that he buy a house located near the *masjid 'abd al-ilah* with a value of 310 Rupees, as part of the family real estate investment.⁶¹⁷ Also in the absence of his father, Ahmad acted as treasurer for the al-Sabah family. For instance, in 1925 one member of al-Sabah family called Fahad al-Sabah asked Ahmad to pay twenty Rupees to Thiyab and eight Rupees to Humud al-Mizini.⁶¹⁸

Due to the sensitive and significant position that 'Abd al-Karim held in the Kuwait sheikhdom, he was presumably considered a powerful and influential Shi'a merchant. There are no primary sources to indicate that he was politically involved in Kuwaiti internal affairs, but it is reasonable to believe he did engage, at least indirectly, in the political, social, and economic affairs of Kuwait, especially regarding the general interest of the Shi'a communities, particularly the merchant social group. This can be inferred from two private letters from Kuwaiti merchants asking 'Abd al-Karim to speak to the ruler of Kuwait to

⁶¹⁶See the charts of the list of tea quantities by Kuwaiti merchants imported from India in IOR R/15/5/204, pp. 126-135.

⁶¹⁷P.P. 'Ali al-Ra'is.

⁶¹⁸P.P. of the Abul family.

resolve some issues relating to their business. For example, in 1925 Yusuf *Shirin* sent a letter to ‘Abd al-Karim in Failaka Island, where he was probably accompanying the Sheikh, asking him to intervene by informing the Sheikh about the new order that might be issued from the customs inspector of Muhammerah, who had recently visited Kuwait port and inquired about goods travelling to Iran. The latter intended to ban money and cargo belonging to the merchants, without giving any reason, as was indicated by Haji Yusuf in his letter to ‘Abd al-Karim. Sunnis also realised his influence; a private letter sent by a Sunni merchant, ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Kharafi, to his partner, Muhammad al-Matruk, in 1922, indicates that Haji ‘Abd al-Karim was the right person to speak to about a matter they wanted to resolve with Sheikh Ahmad al-Jabir.⁶¹⁹

The Role of Shi‘a Artisans

The role and significance of Kuwaiti Shi‘a artisans in developing the economy during the pre-oil era was considerable. Kuwaiti Shi‘a dominated the traditional crafts, such as weaving, goldsmithing, tailoring, cotton production, beadwork, blacksmithing, and brassware.⁶²⁰ In this regard, the Shi‘a artisans contributed enormously to building the state of Kuwait. They were very skillful and professional in handicrafts (*al-ḥiraf wa al-mihan*). Interestingly, their surnames, such as al-Qallaf, al-Istad, al-Haddad, al-Kharraz, al-Saffar, al-Saigh, al-Qattan, al-Jazzaf, al-‘Attar, al-Khaiat, al-Halwachi not only indicate their faiths but also the types of jobs they performed.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹P.P. of the al-Matruk family.

⁶²⁰For more information about all traditional crafts in Kuwait, see Muhammad Jamal. *Al-Hiraf wa al-Mihan wa al-Anshita al-Tijariyya al-Qadima fi al-Kuwayt*. Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-Kuwaitiyya, 2003, pp.151-283.

⁶²¹On the Shi‘a artisan communities see Jamal. *Al-Hiraf*.

In addition, the Kuwaiti Shi'a controlled and dominated at least half of the Kuwaiti Market (*suq al-kuwayt*) since many of them were shopkeepers.⁶²² They owned stores in the market and sold fruit, vegetables, and dates, which were brought from Basra and southwestern Iran. Muhammad Jamal's book on traditional crafts and commercial activities in Kuwait indicates that roughly seventy per cent of the vegetables were sold by the Shi'a.⁶²³ Jobs that involved the cloth, bakery, and dessert markets were also dominated mostly by Kuwaiti Shi'a. Moreover, many families, such as al-Wazzan, al-Tarah, al-Shimali, Bu 'Abbas, Maqamis, Khan and Bash, worked in the *al-tirāḥa* profession, selling daily foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables in the ground of *alfurda* in the Kuwait port.⁶²⁴ To secure the market and encourage business, the government put a twenty-four hour guard inside the marketplace. Many of the guards were Baloushi Shi'a.⁶²⁵

Moreover, the most important craft was shipbuilding; the industry was managed by the al-Qallaf and al-Istad families who were responsible for building diverse types of ships for fishing, pearl diving, and trade. These families designed and built ships for a variety of purposes. For example, for travel and trade, Kuwaitis used ships called *baqara*, *baghla*, and *bum*; for diving, *sanbuk*, *shiyu 'i*, *baqara* and *bum*; for pearl diving, *bum*, *jalbut* and *shiyu 'i*; for fishing, a small *shiyu 'i* and a small *jalbut*; for carrying sand, *duba*, *ablam*, and *bum alqata 'a*; for carrying rocks, a small *jalbut*; and *tishala* for carrying water.⁶²⁶ As Muhammad Jamal said, 'the shipbuilding industry was a very old traditional craft in Kuwait. Ninety-five

⁶²²The Kuwaiti Sunni families dominated other important professions as well, such as fishing, pearl diving, butchering, knitting, spinning, and many others, see Jamal. *Al-Hiraf*, pp. 285-293, 554-555.

⁶²³Muhammad Jamal and Habib Hayat, interviewed by the author, 29 Jul. and 3 Aug. 2009, Kw.

⁶²⁴Abdullah al-Wazzan, interviewed by the author, 17 May. 2015, Kw.

⁶²⁵Muhammad Shamsah, interviewed by the author, 6 Aug. 2009, Kw.

⁶²⁶For more details about different kinds of Kuwaiti ships and their purposes, see IOR R/15/5/55, pp. 81-82; Jamal, *al-Hiraf*, p. 33; al-Haji. *Sina 'at al-Sufun*, pp. 15-40.

per cent of the builders were Shi'a and Kuwait relied on shipbuilding for many commercial activities. Thus the credit should go not to whoever sailed on the ship and went to India but to those who made it'.⁶²⁷

By the same token, Kuwait, among its neighbours, was considered not only one of the best states for trade and commerce but also the best for shipbuilding, with a supply of efficient sailors as well. This was confirmed by Pelly, a P.R. in the Persian Gulf, when he visited the Gulf States, including Kuwait, during the second half of the 19th century. He stated, 'Kowaitees have a considerable carrying trade, and are perhaps the best boat builders around the Gulf'.⁶²⁸ He also considered Kuwaiti sailors the best in the region.⁶²⁹ The skill of the Baharna in shipbuilding is also mentioned in the British archives, and the archive of the al-Istad family indicates the importance of this craft in Kuwaiti history. In the 1920s a British report indicates that, in comparison to its neighbours, 'Kuwait is famed for [b]oat [b]uilding, and quite the best boats in the Gulf are built there'.⁶³⁰ Among the Baharna community, Salman al-Istad and his son Ahmad (1890-1959), were the most famous builders in Kuwait and in the entire Gulf region during the first half of the 20th century. The son, who was born in Kuwait in *sharq* in 1890, was a merchant and a leader of the Baharna community, and was the main building contractor for Kuwaiti and Arab Gulf merchants, the Sheikhs of Kuwait and other Arab States between the 1930s and 1940s. He was described in one British report during Ahmad al-Jabir's reign as a 'ship owner & well known builder in the Gulf'.⁶³¹

⁶²⁷Muhammad Jamal, interviewed by the author, 29 Jul. 2009, Kw.

⁶²⁸Pelly, 'Report of Journey to the Wahabee', p. 11.

⁶²⁹Ibid.

⁶³⁰See IOR R/15/1/504, p. 247.

⁶³¹See names of the prominent figures of Kuwait, their occupation and remarks on them in IOR R/15/5/179, p. 224.

Haji Ahmad had his own *‘imara*, an open area for shipbuilding, which he inherited from his father after his death in 1918, where hundreds of different types of ships were built for either Kuwaiti merchants or the Kuwait Water Company.⁶³² Due to his high reputation and professionalism, as British sources and private papers of al-Istad family confirm, the American government, through the British, sought his help during the Second World War in the 1940s, constructing and assembling barges and pontoons that could be transferred to the Shatt al-‘Arab zone to help the Americans in their military operations. For example, in 1942 an agreement between Foley Brothers, Inc. and Spencer White & Prentis, on behalf of the War Department of the United States Army, asked Haji Ahmad to construct and assemble fifty-five barges at a rate of 1,200 Rupees per barge.⁶³³ Another US agency in Basra also signed agreements with Haji Ahmad between 1942 and 1944 for the same purpose.⁶³⁴ In 1946, after the war, George VI rewarded Haji Ahmad with an ‘honourable badge’ in appreciation for his cooperation with the British government.⁶³⁵

The Role of Shi‘a Labourers

Prior to the discovery of oil, the majority of the Kuwaiti population, whether Shi‘a or Sunni, were involved in the labour industry, especially in work related to seafaring activities, uploading and downloading goods from the ships, moving water, sand and rocks, portage, especially in the port, and building houses. The ‘Ajam *tarakma*, many of whom migrated to Kuwait during the last quarter of the 19th century, worked especially as porters (*hamāmīl*),

⁶³²‘Kw I.S. for the Period from 1st to 15th Nov, 1945’, no, 11/1945, p. 33. *IOR L/P&S/12/3758*.

⁶³³P.P. of the al-Istad family.

⁶³⁴British sources also refer to the business between the two parties in *IOR L/P&S/12/3758*; P. P. of al-Istad family.

⁶³⁵See figure 43.

and were recruited by their leader Haji Hassan 'Ashur, the head of *ḥamāmīl* (single *ḥamālī*).⁶³⁶ Prior to the 1930s many members of the al-Shimali family, who were immigrants from Iraq, worked also in *alḥimara*, a job where they carried water cans by using donkeys.⁶³⁷ The economic prosperity of Kuwait under Mubarak and afterwards, and the arrival of steamships, increased the demand for porters. Therefore, *hamal bashi*, a company who recruited porters to work between the customhouse in *al-furda* and ships, was later established. A few *tarakma* families were merchants, such as the Khajah family, and some of them worked as shipmasters, such as ibn Nakhi and ibn Haydar, in pearl diving as Abu Ghamz private documents indicate, and in currency exchanges, such as the al-Sarraf family, the majority of them were labourers.⁶³⁸ Indeed, two reports written by More, P.A. of Kuwait, in 1926 and 1927, assert that the majority of 'Ajam were 'mostly engaged in menial pursuits'.⁶³⁹ In the second report he estimated the 'Persian community' as 10,000 consisting of 'only two families of any importance, a few small merchants and petty shopkeepers, and all the rest - the enormous majority - are water-carriers, porters and other labourers'.⁶⁴⁰ Likewise, Dickson in 1933 remarked on the social divisions in the 'Ajma community according to their economic status in Kuwait. He emphasises that labourers formed the largest 'Ajam social group amongst the overall 'Ajam community when he states,

'The Persian community, which has increased enormously in recent years, now consists of about 10,000 souls. Even those who are permanently settled in Kuwait go and come freely between Kuwait and the parts of Persia to which they originally belonged. There are over a score of Persian merchants and many shop keepers, but the great majority [is] employed as

⁶³⁶Muhammad Jamal, second interview by the author, 28 Jan. 2015, Kw.

⁶³⁷Habib al-Shimali, interviewed by the author, 15 Jun. 2015, Kw.

⁶³⁸In Abu Ghamz accounting book list of Shi'a who worked as divers during Ahmad al-Jabir reign. Accounting book of the Abu Ghamz.

⁶³⁹Letter from P.R. PG, no, 21-s, 13 Dec 1927, p. 4. *IOR R/15/1/504*.

⁶⁴⁰From J. More. P.A. Kw to P.R. PG, no, 8-s, 11 Jan 1926, pp. 42-43. *IOR R/15/1/526*.

labourers. The water carrying trade from the water boat to the house is almost entirely in their hands.’⁶⁴¹

Although Dickson’s report clarifies the social and economic divisions within the general ‘Ajam community, which included the Shi’a ‘Ajam, and their estimated number, it seems that, like More, he confused the Shi’a ‘Ajam and the Sunni ‘Ajam by calling them the ‘Persian community’. In fact, the Sunni ‘Ajam, such as the *kanadra* group (derived from al-Kandari family) who migrated to Kuwait during later period of Ahmad al-Jabir’s reign, were recruited exclusively for specific types of labour, mainly as water-carriers, bringing water cans from the ships to houses.⁶⁴² However, one can still assume that a few ‘Ajam possibly worked at this job as well.

Haji Hassan ‘Ashur, during the first half of the 20th century, was a leader for the ‘Ajam porters; he controlled hundreds of labourers who were mostly from his own group, the *tarakma*. Jamal remarks that there were, ‘more than two or three hundred *ḥamālī* under Haji ‘Ashur, and he was doing daily contracts with the merchants and was using *tishala* [a specific type of ship that was used to upload and download the cargo from the ship] between *al-furda* and the ships. He used to charge the merchants a large amount of money per day and provided only one or two Rupees per labourer for daily work, taking the rest of the money for himself’.⁶⁴³ Zayir ‘Abdullah (Zar ‘Abdullah), according to the British, was also a leader of ‘the Persian coolies’ with many ‘Ajam under his charge in the early 20th century. The system was that *tindīl* (i.e. ‘Ashur and ‘Abdullah) were notified by the main agent, or by telegram from the place the ship came from, to fix the day that the labour crew were needed. British

⁶⁴¹‘Note on Kuwait Principality at the end of the Year by Dickson, 1933’, p. 4. *IOR R/15/5/179*.

⁶⁴²Muhammad Jamal, second interview by the author, 28 Jan. 2015, Kw.

⁶⁴³*Ibid.*

sources also confirm that wages were low. For example, the local price was one Rupee per head, per day, and extra charges were applied if night work was needed.⁶⁴⁴

It seems that the 'Ajam dominated portage in Kuwait port, and were reputed to be good workers, which is why the 'Ajam labourers were encouraged to settle in Kuwait during and after Mubarak's reign. One undated British report maintains that the 150 'Iranian' labourers who worked with one company, Wharf & Lightermen, were the most hardworking in comparison with their co-workers, the Bulushis and Najdis. They were physically stronger and able to sustain a full day's labour, unlike the Najdis.⁶⁴⁵

In the same light, Kuwaiti Shi'a also participated in building Kuwait's wall (*sur al-kuwayt*) in 1920, to protect against any foreign assault, specifically by the *ikhwān* movement.⁶⁴⁶ During that time, Sayyid Mahdi supervised the people who built Kuwait's wall, as oral history indicates. Furthermore, the Busha'bun family was one of the main *tarakma* families responsible for transporting rocks from a distant zone, called *'ashirij*, to the area where the wall was to be built.

Shi'a labourers were also recruited as soldiers for regional wars to defend Kuwait, as in the *al-jahra* war in 1920 between the *ikhwān* (ibn Sa'ud troops) and Sheikh Salim. The *ikhwān* raid in 1920 on *qasir al-ahmar* in *al-jahra* town, roughly eighteen miles west of Kuwait town, turned into a siege of Sheikh Salim and his troops inside the castle. Thus they demanded full military conscription of the inhabitants of Kuwait to deter them from complete control over *al-jahra*, which might ultimately lead them to invade Kuwait town. The British information and that of American missionary Malary, who was a doctor in the American

⁶⁴⁴ 'Notes on Koweit Harbour', p. 5. *IOR R/15/5/55*.

⁶⁴⁵ The average labour wages according to specific items and weight can be found in *IOR R/15/5/55*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁶ Abbas Hayat, interviewed by the author, 21 Jul. 2009, Kw.

Hospital in Kuwait treating the wounded refugees from the war, confirm that 'Ajam labourers volunteered in the recruitment campaign and served on the battlefield. In Malary's report, he asserts that the campaign to defend Kuwait, two days prior to the war, included every house in Kuwait town. He also indicates that, when Salim's position was in danger, during the second day of the war, reinforcements included, 'Persian coolies, Baghdadis, and catchem alive's of all descriptions were dispatched to Jahera by water in the Sheikh's launch'.⁶⁴⁷ According to him, this action saved the day and helped Salim to defeat the *ikhwān*.⁶⁴⁸ The British also reported that 'Ali Dashti, who worked as an agency boatman in Kuwait town, was killed in this battle.⁶⁴⁹ These contemporary reports not only confirm the oral version of the Shi'a contribution on the battlefield, but also negate the accusation of 'disloyalty' of the 'Ajam in particular for not fighting in the battle of *al-jahra*.⁶⁵⁰ This view has been advanced by local historians of Kuwait, such as Saif al-Shamlan and 'Abdullah al-Hatim. As indicated above, this view is disproved by the British sources. As a result, it can be inferred that the Shi'a communities were involved in defending Kuwait when necessary. According to oral and other accounts this also happened in the *al-riga* war in 1783 and *al-sarif* war in 1901, which resulted in deaths amongst members of Shi'a families, such as the al-Wazzan, al Shimali and 'Idi, and al-Ramzi.

⁶⁴⁷C. Stanley Mylrea. 'The Enemy at the Gate' in *The Arabian Mission: Field Reports Quarterly Letters: Neglected Arabia: Arabian Calling*, vol. IV, no, 117, 1921. Gerrards Cross: Archive Editions, 1988, pp .3-7.

⁶⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁹From P.A. & Con. Mus to J. More P.A. Kw, 16 Mar 1921, p. 106. *IOR R/15/5/20*.

⁶⁵⁰For details on the Shi'a role in al-Jahra war consult, Mohammad al-Habib. *Al- Shi'a fi Ma'rakat al-Jahra': Qira'a Watha'iqiyya Jadidah*. Kuwait: Dhat al-Salasil, 2014.

Conclusion

After consolidating his position as a legitimate Sheikh of Kuwait, Mubarak al-Sabah encouraged immigrants from Kuwait's neighbours as part of state-building policy. The process of settling the new Shi'a immigrants alongside the existing three well-established Shi'a communities in the *sharq* and *wasat* districts of Kuwait town proved manageable. However, the 'sub-religious identities' of these communities were not similar due to the spilt between the 'Ajam and Hassawiyya initiated by Sayyid Mahdi after his arrival in Kuwait in 1908. The rivalries between the two communities came to its peak during the time of Sayyid Mahdi in Kuwait (1908-1925). It created a widening gap mainly between the two communities, the 'Ajam and Hassawiyya, and increased the ethnical and language differences already evident between them, though they had been coexisting with each other, as with the Sunni, since the early history of Kuwait. This did not prevent the Shi'a from being integrated into the larger 'Kuwaiti community', as can be seen in the historical and amicable relationship with the Arab Sunni, on the one hand, and the Shi'a merchants on the other, in building an amicable relationship with the al-Sabah family for mutual benefit. The economic roles of the different social and religious groups, especially the merchants, helped to transform Kuwait from a nascent town to a prosperous city by 1938.

Chapter V

The Position of the Shi'a Communities in Kuwait in 1938

Introduction

This chapter firstly discusses Kuwaiti history in terms of the regional disputes associated with the creation of the Arab Gulf sheikhdoms under British policy and influence. It then sheds light on the second peak period of Shi'a migrations to Kuwait (1921-1938) arising from internal conditions in the Shi'a motherlands. Changes in the political regimes accompanied by new political, social, economic and religious regulations and continuing sectarian problems caused a rise in migrations. In southwestern Iran, the problem was not discrimination against the Shi'a, but rather the modernising and centralising policies of Reza Shah. In Bahrain Sunni-Shi'a clashes and al-Kahlifa persecution of the Baharna in the 1920s, led to adverse reforms there. Likewise, the *ikhwān* practice of sectarianism over the Shi'a of al-Hasa caused them to leave. In comparison with other states, the attitude towards the Shi'a communities in Kuwait was tolerant until 1938. In the *majlis* movement, however, for the first time 'political sectarianism' appeared in Kuwait against the Shi'a communities, blocking them from voting in the *majlis* elections of 1938, at least partly because of the rise of a national movement there.

Regional Disputes in the Gulf and the Creation of the Gulf Sheikdom States 1880-1932

The disorder in the Gulf region, sparked by Wahhabi claims on Bahrain and Muscat, coincided with intense conflicts among regional powers and Arab chiefs. The Ottoman victory in Eastern Arabia encouraged the Porte, during the last quarter of the 19th century, to lay claim to Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Turkish garrisons were established in al-Bidaa in Qatar despite British objections. During the entire 19th century Bahrain was subject to Sa'udi, Omani, and Iranian influences. Bahrain also claimed Qatar, and in 1867 Sheikh Muhammad ibn Khalifa attacked Qatar, which had been disputed by the British.⁶⁵¹ The British had to discipline the defiant Arab rulers who challenged their policy, and put an end to constant disputes among the Arab sheikdoms for the sake of regional stability.

The Ottoman Empire had never exerted much control over the Gulf area, and Istanbul regarded it as something of a backwater. Although the Ottomans succeeded in occupying Eastern Arabia, they were more welcome to the Shi'as than to the Sa'udi regime. With the rise and extension of British influence, the Ottoman Empire found itself at a disadvantage because of what Abscombe calls 'communications limitations', '[t]he empire did not have the ships, roads, railroads, and telegraph lines needed to gather sufficient information for decision-making in Istanbul and to ensure that policies were implemented properly'.⁶⁵² Also, Istanbul did not give attention and power to her local provincial governors except when dangerous threats became apparent. For example, when Mubarak assassinated his siblings, Muhammad and Jarah (pro-Ottomans), and seized power in 1896, the Porte did not recognise

⁶⁵¹'Trade and Traffic in the Gulf 1880-1906' in Anita Burdett and Angela Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf*, vol. II. p. 8; John Kelly. 'The Persian Claim to Bahrain'. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Jan., 1957): pp. 51-70.

⁶⁵²Abscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 6.

him as *qā'immaqām* (i.e. ruler of Kuwait) until 1898. Istanbul knew Mubarak's inclination toward the British and they did not want Kuwait under his authority but they failed to remove him. Likewise, in contrast to the British, the Ottomans failed to build a rigorous relationship with Arab chiefs and local elites in the region. Furthermore, the Ottoman government during the late 19th century was unable to deal with frequent tribal raids (i.e. the Bani Hajar and the al-Murrah) into al-Hasa until the latter fell into the hands of 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman (ibn Sa'ud) in 1913. In addition, by the end of the 19th century, debt repayments had depleted the Ottoman treasury. During the first decade of the 20th century, the Young Turk revolution and the overthrow of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid crippled the continuity of Ottoman authority in the Gulf region.⁶⁵³

The decline of Ottoman authority in the Gulf not only paved the way for British hegemony in the region but also provided an opportunity for the last revival of the Sa'udi State, this time by ibn Sa'ud. In 1902, with Mubarak's aid, ibn Sa'ud consolidated power in Riyadh and resumed challenging ibn Rashid over Central Arabia. Though ibn Rashid was backed by the Ottomans against Mubarak and ibn Sa'ud, the latter occupied al-Hasa. He was able to convince the Ottomans and the British to legitimise his authority in central Arabia, as they had done for Mubarak in Kuwait. In the beginning the British set more value on the Sharif of Hijaz, a rival of ibn Sa'ud, as an ally, and were not alarmed at the growth of Sa'udi power. The Government of India suggested that ibn Sa'ud's friendship be maintained without engaging in a definite treaty with him and declared that '[b]in Saud could be ignored with impunity as long as his operations were confined to Al Hasa.'⁶⁵⁴ In addition, in 1913 the two governments signed the Anglo-Ottoman convention that ratified the *status quo* in the Gulf

⁶⁵³Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, pp. 6-7, 75, 86, 159.

⁶⁵⁴F.O. to B.R. Bsh. No, 324-s, 24 Aug 1913, p. 46. *IOR R/15/2/31*.

region. This meant that the Porte acknowledged the British authority in the Arab Gulf states, except for Qatar.

While the Wahhabi *amir* tried to negotiate with the Ottomans for recognition as *mutaṣarrif* of Najd, meetings occurred between ibn Sa‘ūd and the British Residents in the Arabian Peninsula.⁶⁵⁵ During these meetings, ibn Sa‘ūd tried to persuade the British either to intervene in the reconciliation with the Ottomans or to allow him to enter the British sphere of influence, as other Arab Gulf rulers had done, in order to guarantee his position as a legitimate ruler.⁶⁵⁶ Though the British ultimately agreed that the Ottoman-Sa‘ūdi reconciliation might be arranged under their arbitration, the parties arrived at an impasse. Like the Arab chiefs during the First World War, ibn Sa‘ūd ultimately joined the British side and signed an official treaty in 1915.⁶⁵⁷ After being recognised by the British as ruler of Najd, al-Hasa and their dependencies, ibn Sa‘ūd, with the aid of the British, *muṭāw‘a* (Najdi religious specialists) and *ikhwān*,⁶⁵⁸ was able to defeat the Najdi tribes and his major Arabian rivals, ibn Rashid in Ha’il in 1921 and the Sharif of Mecca in the Hijaz in 1926. The *muṭāw‘a* and *ikhwān* established a reciprocal alliance with ibn Sa‘ūd between 1902 and 1932, largely on his initiative. The former were volunteers who enforced Islamic ritual in accordance with *ḥanbali* practice under a framework of what al-Rasheed calls ‘discipline and punishment’. The latter were a tribal military force created by *muṭāw‘a* to practice *jihad* against those disobedient to fundamentalist Islamic practice in Arabia.⁶⁵⁹ The roles of the *muṭāw‘a* and the *ikhwān* were

⁶⁵⁵Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 163.

⁶⁵⁶Trevor to P.R. Persian Gulf, Bsh, no, t-805, 20 Dec 1913. *IOR R/15/2/31*. Ibn Sa‘ūd to Trevor P.A. Bh, 2 Apr 1914, p. 88. *IOR R/15/2/31*; Trevor to P.R. PG, Bsh, no, t-805, 20 Dec 1913 *R/15/2/31*; Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, p. 164.

⁶⁵⁷Al-Rasheed. *A History*, p. 41. For the full version of the Anglo-Sa‘ūdi treaty, see *IOR R/15/2/32*, p. 325.

⁶⁵⁸See the glossary in al-Rasheed. *A History*.

⁶⁵⁹Al-Rasheed. *A History*, pp. 49-62.

essential in the establishment of the Sa‘udi State. However, the *ikhwān* alliance with ibn Sa‘ud ended when they finally defeated him in 1928-1929. Sa‘udi Arabia joined the League of Nations as a nation-state in 1932. As a result, by 1932 Eastern and Central Arabia were unified as the Kingdom of Sa‘udi Arabia.

Thus, by the third decade of the 20th century, all the rulers of the Arab Gulf states had legitimised their dynastic position in their countries, which ultimately led to the creation of the modern Arab Gulf state system. Some Gulf states faced assaults from stronger adversaries and initially sought support and protection from regional powers (e.g. the Ottomans, Iranians, and the Wahhabis).⁶⁶⁰ The Gulf ruling families also faced challenges from internal rivals who attempted to depose their dynasties. However, as Britain was the dominant imperial power, the Arab Gulf rulers were forced to seek its support to legitimise their authority.⁶⁶¹ It was Bahrain that benefited the most from such support because it had to combat frequent claims by Iran, the Ottomans, the Wahhabis, and Oman. The British involvement in the Gulf was crucial to the creation and shaping of the modern Gulf States for the introduction of modern facilities, and for the suppression of piracy and arms trafficking. However, it must be remembered that other factors, including the political skill of Mubarak al-Sabah and ibn Sa‘ud in dealing with the Anglo-Ottoman clash added significantly to the development of their own states. The British remained in the Gulf region until 1971, when all Arab Gulf states acquired independence.

⁶⁶⁰See, Saldanha. ‘Turkish Expansion on the Arab Littoral’ in *The Persian Gulf Précis*. vol. V. p. 4; Saldanha. ‘Précis of Bahrain Affair’ in *The Persian Gulf Précis*. vol. IV. p. 1; Anscombe. *The Ottoman*, pp. 20-21.

⁶⁶¹Onley and Khalaf. ‘Shaikhly Authority’. *History and Anthropology*, pp. 189-208.

Migration to Kuwait between 1921 and 1938

The second considerable wave of Shi'a migration to Kuwait occurred during the period 1921 to 1938, due to political instability and religious persecution of the Shi'a in their motherlands, mainly in Bahrain and al-Hasa. Besides these factors, the importance of Kuwait as a transit station for Iranian pilgrims to Mecca, and the continuous trade between southwestern Iran and Kuwait generated movements of people from southwestern Iran to Kuwait. This was true of southwestern Iran, particularly during Reza Shah's reign (1921-1941). At the same time, Bahrain under Hamad al-Khalifa (1923-1943) and Iran entered a new phase associated with reform, similar to Kuwait in the 1930s. However, throughout the process of reform in both states in the 1920s and 1930s, each government confronted challenges that created unsettled situations and lead ultimately to migrations (Arab and 'Ajam) to the Arab Gulf states, including Kuwait, Dubai, Sharjah, and Qatar as people fled turbulent political conditions.

Reza Shah's New Administrative Policy

In southwestern Iran the problem was not discrimination against the Shi'a, but rather the modernising and centralising policies of Reza Shah. One policy that caused migration was that of unifying the coastal zones (i.e. Fars and Khuzestan) by removing them from the control of semi-independent influential local Khans and powerful Arab Sheikhs, such as Khaz'al. He was arrested in 1925 due to his attempt to cooperate with *lur* tribes with the ambition of seceding from Iran and becoming the major chief in southwestern Iran, mainly Khuzestan.⁶⁶² Many other tribal chiefs, such as those of the Bakhtiari and Qashqai, and the headstrong chiefs of Tangistan and Dashtistan, who were hostile to the Shah, either faced a

⁶⁶²'ARPGPR for 1924' in *TPGAR*, vol. VII, pp. 4, 7.

similar destiny to Khaz ‘al or escaped successfully from Reza Shah’s punishment to the Arab Gulf region after several abortive revolt attempts, such as the one by the Qashqai tribe in 1929. Indeed, Reza Shah’s military campaigns between 1921 and 1938 against specific tribal chiefs of the coastal region are well recorded in the British sources, which note the absence of security due to constant fighting between the tribes and the military.⁶⁶³

To achieve his aim, the Shah had to subdue local powerful tribes (e.g. the Qashqai, Bakhtiyari and Khamsah) and force them to settle permanently, abandoning their seasonal migrations for resource extraction. To bring order to the country, he had to stop their practices of looting and banditry. Military expeditions were sent to disarm them not only to prevent future revolts, but also to implement a new centralised administrative system.⁶⁶⁴ For example, in 1934 three important Bakhtiyari Khans were imprisoned and executed due to their revolt against the Shah.⁶⁶⁵ With trained troops, a developed military, advanced equipment, and cooperation with allied tribal chiefs, the Shah’s military campaign was too strong for the tribes and the positions of *illkhani* and *illbegi* were brought to an end by 1933.⁶⁶⁶ The substitution of local Khans and Sheikhs with military commanders was no better for the inhabitants in terms of exploitation because many were corrupt and mistreated the local population, which led to either internal migration within Iranian provinces or to the Arab Gulf states.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶³More details of their names and the villages and towns affected can be found in *TPGAR*, vols. VIII, and IX.

⁶⁶⁴Wilfrid Knapp. ‘1921-1941: The Period of Riza Shah’, in Hossein Amirsadeghi, ed., *Twentieth Century Iran*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977, p. 34.

⁶⁶⁵Gene Garthwaite. *Khans and Shahs: A History of the Bakhtiyari Tribe in Iran*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, p.139.

⁶⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶⁶⁷‘ARPGPR for 1933’ in *TPGAR*, vol. IX, p. 5.

Besides the chaotic situation due to the Shah's suppression of local tribes, the introduction of a new decree that imposed conscription on the inhabitants of southwestern Iranian villages and towns, the imposition of western headgear and dress, and the enforcement of a ban on *hijab* for Iranian women in the 1930s, were other precipitating factors for migration to Kuwait or elsewhere in the Arab Gulf. Ample examples in British sources indicate a decline in the population in southwestern Iran during the 1930s due to the abovementioned reasons. For example, it has been reported that over 3,000 people in 1933 fled from Bandar 'Abbas and Lingah to the opposite coast to escape conscription.⁶⁶⁸ Another report maintains that for several years prior to 1937 there was migration by Bushehr's merchants and the poor, which led to a sharp decline in the number of its population from 20,000 to 8,000.⁶⁶⁹ Indeed, during Reza Shah's reign, the overall population of Fars in 1937 is estimated as having declined to 400,000 because 60,000 to 80,000 tribesmen migrated throughout these years to the Arab Gulf coast in order to avoid conscription and enforced settlement.⁶⁷⁰

Other issues, such as a plague that broke out in Muhammerah and Abadan in 1923 and caused thirty-two deaths in the former and two hundred in the latter; the increase of the land revenue tax, and imposition of higher taxes on all commodities in the 1930s besides the high price of foodstuff in Bushehr and its hinterlands during the same period, contributed to making survival difficult in some areas of southwestern Iran.⁶⁷¹ As a result, as British reports indicate, in 1932 around 2,000 Iranian refugees and many poor fishermen migrated to the

⁶⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶⁶⁹'ARPGPR for 1937' in *TPGAR*, vol. IX, p. 10.

⁶⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p.16.

⁶⁷¹'ARPGPR for 1923' in *TPGAR*, vol. VIII, p. 14; 'ARPGPR for 1931' in *TPGAR*, vol. IX, p. 11; 'ARPGPR for 1938' in *TPGAR*, vol. IX, p. v.

Arab Gulf, including Kuwait, escaping from ‘the hunger and callousness of their own officials’.⁶⁷²

Shi‘a Persecution in Bahrain

Bahrain between 1920s and 1930s was heading gradually toward administrative reforms, which were not initially welcomed by some members of the al-Khalifa and Arab Sunni community, especially those reforms that advocated advancing the Shi‘a to a similar social and economic situation as the Sunni. However, major incidents, such as the Baharna agitation in 1922, Najdi - ‘Ajam clashes, the Sitra outrages in 1923 and 1924, Baharna agitation in 1935 and other Shi‘a - Sunnis conflicts, show that the Shi‘a of Bahrain (i.e. Baharna and ‘Ajam) were still constantly harassed and persecuted during that time by their counterparts, the ruling family, and the Arab Sunnis. Thus it was not surprising that many left to settle in other areas in the region including Kuwait.

Baharna Agitation in 1922

After several decades of silence, the Baharna voice suddenly came out through a ‘considerable demonstration’, as the P. A. of Bahrain put it, to put an end to the mistreatment by members of the al-Khalifa. They demanded administrative reforms that would provide them with a decent, respected, and peaceful life similar to the Arab Sunni of Bahrain. An assessment of the historical literature of Bahrain shows that the Baharna agitation in 1922 was not due to a single incident of Shi‘a persecution during that year but rather an accumulation of several historical incidents of social, political, economic and religious oppression that ultimately erupted during that year in particular. For example, before the

⁶⁷²‘ARPGPR for 1932’ in *TPGAR*, vol. IX, p. 54.

agitation of 1922, it was reported by the British agency in Bahrain that some of the ruling family forced the Shi'a subjects of Bahrain to work during the tenth day of *muharram*, though this day was dedicated by the Shi'a to commemorate the martyrdom of *imam* Hussayn. Many were obliged to pay a fine as a punishment due to their refusal to work.⁶⁷³ The P. A. of Bahrain, prior to the agitation that occurred in 1922, reports numerous stories of oppression of the Baharna by members of the al-Khalifa.⁶⁷⁴

After several such incidents, the Baharna closed their shops, paralysing business in Manama, about two-thirds of which were under their control, and decided to demonstrate on Manama streets as a sign of protest; they sought redress from Sheikh 'Isa by submitting a petition against the general internal policy toward them (e.g. unauthorised taxes and *sukhra*). The main incident that paved the way for the Baharna upheaval was the arrest and brutal treatment of one member of their community of Bilad al-Qadim, but there were other examples of mistreatment by members of the al-Khalifa. At the beginning their intention was prepare to create disturbances and to come to the British Agency to protest. Though the P. A. of Bahrain tried to pacify the Baharna, the latter gathered in a large number, succeeded in releasing the Bahraini prisoner by force and were able to defeat the guards (*fidawīyya*) of Sheikh 'Isa, who was 'sitting on a volcano', as the P. A. described it.⁶⁷⁵ The Baharna also took advantage of the presence of the P.R. of the Gulf in Bahrain to complain about al-Khalifa family mistreatment. The P.R. delivered a warning message to the Sheikh of Bahrain and his son 'Abdullah about their maladministration of Manama and persecution of the Baharna. The Baharna ended their demonstration when an official meeting of their representatives with

⁶⁷³The agency, no, c/1922, 17 Jan, 1922, p. 43. *IOR R/15/2/83*.

⁶⁷⁴More stories of Shi'a persecution in Bahrain during 1922, see *IOR R/15/2/83*.

⁶⁷⁵From the agency of Bh to P.R. PG. Bsh, no, 29/c of 1922, 7 Feb 1922, pp. 62-63. *IOR R/15/2/83*.

Sheikh 'Isa was arranged; they submitted a number of demands for government reforms related to their welfare:

1. No one except the ruler and Sheikh Hamad, to decide cases or to have the right to punish in any way.
2. Cases which Sheikh Hamad cannot decide to the satisfaction of both parties to be referred by him to the shar'a, Majlis al-Urfi, or Salifeh as the case may be.
3. No one to be dragged off to the Rulers court without notice but to be served with a summons signed by Sheikh Hamad.
4. Documents concerning gardens leased to subjects by the ruling family to be in duplicate, a copy in a possession of each party, & to be witnessed by independent witnesses. No conditions other than those written in a document to be enforced.
5. Steps to be taken to stop the Sheikh's camels being allowed to enter and graze in private gardens.
6. 'Sukrah' of donkeys to cease.
7. The practice of placing calves belonging to the ruling family with Bahraini [Baharna] bakers to fatten free of charge, to cease.
8. The prison to be put in proper order and a reasonable house provided for the same.⁶⁷⁶

From the abovementioned proposals, it is evident that the Baharna suffered from general internal administrative policies relating to the economic, social, and religious matters they were attempting to change. After a long discussion with members of his family, Sheikh 'Isa approved all of their demands except the one regarding taxes that had been imposed historically on the Baharna, including the religious tax. Instead of abolishing the 'arbitrary and annoying taxes' in the view of the Baharna, a 'new tax scheme' was brought in with the aim of levying taxes on the Sunnis as well, the group who had been hitherto immune from most taxation, which had applied only to the Shi'a. Such a rejection of one of the essential demands (i.e. no unauthorised taxes)⁶⁷⁷ claimed by the Baharna gave an excuse to some

⁶⁷⁶ 'ARPGPR for 1922' in *TPGAR*, vol. VIII, p. 51; Al-Tajir. *Bahrain*, p. 36; from agency, Bh to P.R. P.G, Bsh, no, 1/c of 1922, 13 Feb 1922, pp. 66-69. *IOR R/15/2/83*.

⁶⁷⁷ Shi'a subjects were paying various taxes, including date garden tax, poll tax called 'raqābiyya', fish tax, pearling tax, special tax imposed during the *muharram* ritual, and a variety of taxes collected in kind from them exclusively. Al-Tajir. *Bahrain*, p. 37.

members of the al-Khalifa, including the ruler, his wife, his son 'Abdullah, and the Arab Sunnis (i.e. al-Duwasir) to continue oppressing the Shi 'a during subsequent years.⁶⁷⁸ Thus, it can be deduced that the government of Bahrain did not take the Baharna proposal seriously and adopt a new progressive policy. This explains why demonstrations by the Baharna for political, social and economic rights, which included submitting many petitions to the British government, occurred frequently until the 1930s.

The Bahrain Government in a Dilemma

The proposal of a new tax scheme initiated by the Bahrain government as part of the reform movement caused them anxiety due to opposition by the Sunnis, on the one hand, and the refusal of the Baharna to obey the orders, on the other hand. Another concern for many of the al-Khalifa was related to losing power and authority over the regions under their influence, which would prevent them from manipulating a range of tax duties, imposed by the 'central government' on the Baharna, and deprive them of essential regular income usually extracted from the Baharna only. Among themselves, the Baharna were divided into two groups; those who imported arms and advocated a slogan of 'open rebellion', as the P.A of Bahrain put it; and those who were disappointed due to the lack of serious support from the British government, especially after submitting the petition.⁶⁷⁹

For the Arab Sunnis, the introduction of reforms, including the new tax scheme, would not only put them on the same social level as the Shi 'a, but also would permit the government to henceforth collect regular taxes, an unwelcome change from the past. Thus, some of the

⁶⁷⁸The best example of how Sheikh 'Isa and his wife continued persecuting the Shi 'a in Bahrain after the Baharna agitation in 1922 is the case of Mahdi al-Jishiy, a Qatifi Shi 'a merchant who owned properties in Bahrain, some of which were confiscated by 'Isa's wife. For more details on the al-Jishiy story, see IOR R/15/2/83, pp. 76-86.

⁶⁷⁹From P.A. Bh to P.R. PG, no, 1/15 c, 13 July 1922, p. 4. *IOR R/15/2/87*.

Sunni social group, including the al-Duwasir tribe, threatened to migrate from the island and settle within ibn Sa'ud's sphere of influence. The latter were also concerned that the 'reform movement' of Bahrain might influence the Shi'a of al-Hasa and Qatif, especially as the Shi'a subjects of Bahrain were in close touch with their relatives who lived in ibn Sa'ud's sphere of influence. As a consequence, the movement could extend to ibn Sa'ud's region which might encourage specific demands by the Shi'a to put them and the Sunni subjects, to some extent, on an equal footing in emulation of their counterparts the Baharna in Bahrain. Therefore, ibn Sa'ud encouraged the al-Duwasir and other Najdis tribes to resist any form of taxation that might be imposed by the ruler of Bahrain. He also offered to provide a suitable place for them to settle.⁶⁸⁰

The reform movement initiated by the government meant that Bahrain was entering a new phase which would ultimately lead to the centralisation of all the Islands of Bahrain at all levels. Thus, some members of the al-Khalifa, who were against the new administrative developments, and the al-Duwasir tribe, who objected to the taxation proposal, put pressure on the government by creating chaotic internal conditions in Bahrain, especially after the refusal of Hamad ibn 'Isa to stand beside the al-Duwasir, who had offered full support to Hamad prior to his father's succession as Sheikh of Bahrain. Both parties victimised the Baharna to help create political and social disorder. Thus, during the 1920s they constantly attacked Baharna villages, committed murders and caused casualties among the Shi'a, which exacerbated the relations between the Shi'a and Sunnis of Bahrain.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰From P.A. Bh to P.R. PG, no, 1/15 c, 13 July 1922, p. 2. *IOR R/15/2/87*; Al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920-1945*, p. 40.

⁶⁸¹From P.A. Bh to P.R. PG, no, 1/15 c, 13 July 1922, p. 2. *IOR R/15/2/87*.

The Sunni - Shi'a Clashes in 1922-1923

The years 1922-23 were witness to crucial political disorder resulting in an increase of sectarianism associated with the violation of the rights of Shi'a subjects of Bahrain (i.e. Baharna and 'Ajam) by the Sunnis of Bahrain:

'The British government [was] unable to tolerate such a state of affairs. It was hopeless to expect Sheikh Isa, on account of his age, to enter on the path of reform, and the government ardently desired that Sheikh Isa would, in his own interests, see the advisability of abdication but unfortunately our old friend could not be brought to see this and it was necessary for me under the direction of my government, to tell him that while he might remain in Bahrain and retain the titular dignity of Sheikh, he was to stand aside and allow his heir apparent, Sheikh Hamad, to endeavour to set Bahrain affairs in order and bring that government up to the plane of modern civilisation without interference or dictation of any kind from his father.'⁶⁸²

The first quarrel broke out in Manamah bazaar during *Ramadan* in 1923 between unarmed 'Ajam and armed Najdi subjects because of an argument between Muhammad Sharif 'Awazi, the leader of the 'Ajam community, and 'Abdullah al-Qasabi, ibn Sa'ud's agent in Bahrain, over suspicions of the theft of a watch belonging to al-Qasabi, found in the possession of an 'Ajami watchman, who claimed that he had bought it earlier. Shortly afterwards, rumours spread that transformed the case into serious religious and ethnic strife associated with seven or eight deaths and many wounded from both groups. The unrest continued for a few days and included an attempt by a force of armed Najdis coming from Muharraq to support their party in Manamah to revenge those who were killed.⁶⁸³ However, from an investigation conducted by the British and eyewitnesses, including J. B. Mackie, representative of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and T.D. Bora, director of Customs, it appears that religious differences sparked the unrest. As a result, ibn Sa'ud's agent, al-Qasabi, was deported from

⁶⁸²From Knox P.R. PG to 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman, Sultan of Najd and dependencies, no, 174/1923, 15 Jun 1923, p. 80. *IOR R/15/2/86*.

⁶⁸³For more details on the story, consult *IOR R/15/2/86*, pp. 1-11, 20-22, 50-56.

Bahrain for planning the outbreak.⁶⁸⁴ In May, a letter of warning was sent by Knox, P. R. of the Gulf, to ibn Sa'ud asking him not to send agents to Bahrain and confirming that al-Qasabi's party was responsible for the sectarian incident.⁶⁸⁵ Ibn Sa'ud, however, disagreed with the British view and blamed the 'Ajam, especially Muhammad Sharif 'Awazi.⁶⁸⁶

The Baharna were not immune from Sunni attack during the period of the Najdi - 'Ajam clash. In May 1923 a group of Sunnis originally from Budai' and Raffa' attacked the Shi'a of al-'Ali village, resulting in casualties and destruction of Baharna property.⁶⁸⁷ In August 1923, the 'ālim of the Baharna, shaykh 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad, and another person, were murdered by the al-Duwasir tribe as a revenge over a fine imposed by the government for their earlier attack on the Shi'a of al-'Ali village, which had resulted in the death of some Shi'a.⁶⁸⁸ While the Baharna submitted petitions to the British government complaining about long-standing persecution by the al-Khalifa, many al-Duwasir prepared to escape to al-Qatif where ibn Sa'ud offered them asylum in al-Damam. The Baharna found the situation intolerable, and informed the government that they intended to migrate from Bahrain if the mistreatment continued.⁶⁸⁹

Attacks on the Baharna in Sitra 1923-1924

Less than a year after the al-Duwasir attack on the Baharna, two other serious assaults against the Baharna occurred in Sitra. In September 1923 Sheikh Khalid al-Khalifa, brother of Sheikh 'Isa, who controlled Raffa', with his sons 'Ali and Sulayman and their followers,

⁶⁸⁴From P.A. Bh to P.R. PG, no 62a/c, 14 May 1923, p. 6. *IOR R/15/2/86*.

⁶⁸⁵From Knox P.R. PG to ibn Sa'ud, ruler of Najd and its periphery, 18 May 1923, p. 56. *IOR R/15/2/86*.

⁶⁸⁶From ibn Sa'ua, ruler of Najd and its periphery, to Knox P.R. PG, 5 *shawal* 1341h (1923), p. 87. *IOR R/15/2/86*.

⁶⁸⁷From P.R., no, 60/c, 10 May 1923, p. 1. *IOR R/15/2/86*.

⁶⁸⁸From P.A. Bh, to P.R. PG, Bsh, no, 106/c/1923, 22 Aug, 1923, pp. 4-5. *IOR R/15/2/88*.

⁶⁸⁹To see the full contents of Baharna petitions, see *IOR R/15/2/88*, pp. 34-42, 45-47.

attacked Sitra and killed a Baharna and looted houses. This caused the Baharna to shut their shops and cut off supplies of market products as a sign of grievance.⁶⁹⁰ The court condemned the culprits and imposed a 2000 Rupees fine on Sheikh Khalid, to be paid to the family of the village, and ordered banishment of members of his family.⁶⁹¹

A few months later another armed assault on the Baharna of Sitra occurred at the behest of Sheikh Khalid, involving his sons and a few members of the al-Raffa'. It resulted in two deaths and several injured. The Baharna immediately submitted petitions to the British government complaining about constant oppression and the increase of crimes and looting practiced by members of the al-Khalifa. They asked for severe punishment of Sheikh Khalid's sons who both absconded after the incident. They also asked for British protection to prevent such attacks of their rights by a guarantee of security and justice to the inhabitants of the villages; otherwise they would seek the help of another regional powers, such as Iran.⁶⁹² In addition, they closed their shops and thousands demonstrated in the streets surrounding the British agency, demanding serious action against the culprits and shouting 'justice'.⁶⁹³ In the beginning, Sheikh Hamad was incapable of taking action against Sheikh Khalid due to fear for his own position. Also, Hamad was not convinced that the culprits were guilty. However, under British pressure, he ordered punishment of the culprits, including confiscation of their properties, and the death penalty for Khalid's sons and other fugitives, whilst others were imprisoned for life. However, afterwards, a few culprits were released, and Sheikh Khalid's son and others returned to the island in 1928 without punishment. Sheikh Hamad also convinced Baharna representatives to drop their claim against Ibrahim and

⁶⁹⁰From P.A. Bh to P.R. PG, no, 118/c, 19 Sep 1923, p. 86. *IOR R/15/2/83*.

⁶⁹¹See *IOR R/15/2/83*, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁹²See more details of their petitions in *IOR R/15/2/88*, pp. 71,72.

⁶⁹³From P.A. Bh to Trevor. P.R. PG, no, 19/c, 13 Jan 1924, p. 73. *IOR R/15/2/88*.

Sulayman. The Baharna finally agreed to allow Sheikh Khalid's son to reside in Muharraq only. Sheikh Hamad was to be responsible for preventing further mistreatment.⁶⁹⁴

The Grievances of the Baharna in the 1930s

The punishments inflicted for serious aggression against the Baharna in the 1920s did not serve as a lesson to either the members of al-Khalifa or other Sunnis, since the crime rate in Bahrain during late 1920s and 1930s did not decrease, as figure 15 shows in appendix 3, especially with the lack of any serious reaction to the wrongdoers from the government in most of the cases. However, the oppressive policy in the 1930s against the Baharna took a different form. Many complaints from tenants (the Baharna) against landowners (the al-Khalifa) regarding an unfair policy toward garden leases increased during these years. Without appreciation of the enormous decline in the value of crops (e.g. dates) at the beginning of the 1930s, the Baharna were obliged either to pay the full amount of the rent to the al-Khalifa or to give up their houses and all their belongings (e.g. their animals) and be left to starve, especially as the value of the crops could not cover the land rent. Whoever was not able to cover his debt was imprisoned. The Baharna also complained of frequent raids on their gardens by al-Khalifa camels, especially those belonging to Sheikh Hamad; their grazing destroyed the crops. Hamad justified the freedom of the camels by stating that the Island of Bahrain belonged to the al-Khalifa.⁶⁹⁵

The Baharna also submitted petitions to Sheikh Hamad and the British government asking for fair representation in governmental administrative institutions, such as the Municipal Council (*majlis al-baladi*), Education Council (*the al-ma'arif*), the Merchants Council (*majlis al-tujar*) and an equal right for education with the Sunni since the Baharna constituted

⁶⁹⁴For details on the Sitra incident, see IOR R/15/2/88.

⁶⁹⁵See IOR R/15/ 2/126, pp. 8, 18-19.

the majority in 1935, two-thirds of the overall population according to the British estimation.⁶⁹⁶ With all these problems many of Baharna and even sometimes the 'Ajam preferred to migrate to Kuwait, where there was less political disturbance or religious and social persecution.

The Ikhwān Pressure on the Shi'a

As they had expected, when the Shi'a returned to al-Sa'ud's dominions, they were unable to practice their religion freely, especially when the fanatical *ikhwān* movement reached its zenith in 1920. The *ikhwān* considered the Shi'a, who invoked the name of *imam* Hussayn and *imam* Hassan at prayer time as *kufār* (plural). They were also prohibited from visiting or decorating shrines and tombs, and the death penalty could apply to anyone caught doing so.⁶⁹⁷ Such regulations confirm British reports that '[i]n Hassa, Shiahs are not allowed to celebrate Husain's death in the way they do in Basra nor are they allowed to call to prayer',⁶⁹⁸ and that '[t]he Shiah population of Hasa is forbidden to smoke even in their own houses, or have readings in Husainiyahs. Failure to obey the rules is visited with direct penalties'.⁶⁹⁹ Another British, report written in 1921, indicates continuous mistreatment of the Shi'a when it states, 'that there was a good deal of resentment at Qatif against the treatment they were receiving'.⁷⁰⁰ As a result, with all these restrictions and oppressive rules associated with mistreatment, many Shi'a migrated to other states, where religious tolerance was practiced, such as Kuwait.

⁶⁹⁶From Belgrave to Loch, no, c/129, 28 Jan 1935, p. 18. *IOR R/15/2/176*.

⁶⁹⁷From P.A. Bh to C.C. Bgh, 5 Mar 1920, pp. 113-114. *IOR R/15/2/36*.

⁶⁹⁸From P.A. Bah to D.R.R Bsh, 20 Feb 1920, p. 63. *IOR R/15/2/36*.

⁶⁹⁹From P.A. Bh to C.C. Bgh, 5 Mar 1920, pp.115-116. *IOR R/15/2/36*.

⁷⁰⁰From H. C. Bgh to P.A. Bh, no, 1080-s, 1 Nov 1921, p. 288. *IOR R/15/1/588*.

The Settlement of New Arrivals and their Overall Relationship with the Existing Communities

When it comes to discussing the position of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, not only between 1921 and 1938 but also throughout Kuwaiti history, British sources have given more attention to the 'Ajam than their counterparts, the Baharna and Hassawiyya. One reason could be that they constituted a considerable number in comparison with the other Shi'a groups. In addition, they were more commercially active as their merchants were profoundly involved in the Kuwait trading system unlike the Baharna and Hassawiyya, the majority of whom were artisans and labourers. Even though the old 'Ajam considered themselves Kuwaiti, their ethnic background and language differences meant that they had a distinct identity in the eyes of other Kuwaiti Shi'a and Sunni who shared a similar ethnic identity. Moreover, the 'Ajam were connected directly with the rulership through their merchants (e.g. 'Abd al-Karim Abul, Najaf ibn Ghalib, Isma'il Ma'rafi and Mulla Salih). As a result, the 'Ajam group, unlike the Baharna and Hassawiyya, was more deeply involved in the politics of Kuwait, which led the British to discuss their position in more depth than any other Shi'a group. Otherwise, the Baharna and Hassawiyya were discussed in the British sources only when complaints and grievances were submitted by their members, as the case of the *majlis al-tashri'i* in 1938 will clarify. As a result, one can argue that the 'Ajam community was more important not only to the Kuwaiti Sheikhdom but also to the British Government because they were more commercially active and had closer relationships to the successive rulers of Kuwait than other Shi'a groups.

Between 1921 and 1938 the position of the Shi'a communities, according to the British sources and historical literature of Kuwait, was no different from earlier decades. In exchange for economic, religious, and social privileges in Kuwait, the Shi'a supported the al-Sabah during Ahmad al-Jabir's reign just as they had with preceding rulers since the early history

of Kuwait. That is possibly why ‘Abd al-Karim Abul and Mullah Salih continued to hold important and sensitive positions in the Kuwaiti Sheikhdom administration during Sheikh Ahmad’s reign. Mulla Salih, who was a Shi’a and a member of the ‘Ajam community, kept his position as a secretary of Sheikh of Kuwait from Mubarak’s reign to those of Mubarak’s sons, Jabir and Salim, and also in the most of the reign of Sheikh Ahmad. He was appointed to this position due the influence of Sheikh Kaz ‘al on his friend Sheikh Mubarak. Kaz ‘al brought Mullah Salih to Kuwait from southwestern Iran during the early period of Mubarak’s reign; his descendants, to this day, are considered one of the wealthiest Sunni families in Kuwait.⁷⁰¹ By securing two sensitive positions (the Sheikhdom secretary and treasurer of the al-Sabah) in the Kuwaiti Sheikhdom, the Shi’a have successfully preserved their position as a major ally to the al-Sabah family from 1921 to 1938.

By 1938, the Shi’a communities were increasing in size, according to the British estimation, especially the ‘Ajam, and the number of their religious institutes and traditional schools increased as well. For example, in 1927 it was reported that the ‘Ajam community had eleven traditional schools that had courses in subjects like the Quran and arithmetic.⁷⁰² More *hussayniyya*, were also built during the same period, for the *tarakma* community such as *hussayniyya ‘ashur* that was established by Haji Hassan ‘Ashur in 1925, and *hussayniyya sayyid ‘ali al-musawi* that was established by Sayyid ‘Ali in 1934.⁷⁰³

A close examination of the British reports that discuss the Shi’a position in Kuwait, al-Hasa and Bahrain shows that the Shi’a communities in Kuwait by the 1920s enjoyed a peaceful life which was absent in both Bahrain and al-Hasa. This can be deduced from a comparison

⁷⁰¹It seems that either Mulla Salih or his descendants at later stage converted to Sunnism as the British indicated that he was a ‘Ajam Shi’a in more than four documents. See, IOR L/P&S/12/3758, IOR R/15/1/468, IOR R/15/1/548, IOR R/15/5/205.

⁷⁰²From P.R. PG, no, 21-s, 13Dec 1927, p. 4. *IOR R/15/1/504*.

⁷⁰³Poetries of Mulla ‘Abdin al-Jahrami. See figures 36 and 37 in the appendix 4.

of the number of British protections sought, and official letters of complaints registered by the British on behalf of the Shi'a communities or their members in Kuwait and Bahrain, the two regions in which a British P.A. resided. In Kuwait from the 1920s to 1937 there was no single official complaint or request for British protection submitted by either the Shi'a communities itself, or their social and religious leaders and their members. However, for Bahrain there were many cases of persecution of members of the Shi'a communities, as indicated earlier. Moreover, by tracking the civil and criminal cases in Kuwait in the British sources from 1925 to 1937, registered by More, Dickson and De Gaury, only one criminal case can be found in 1928, two civil cases happened in 1935, and one trial for a criminal case occurred in 1936.⁷⁰⁴ Regardless of the accuracy of the British reports on these cases in Kuwait during that time, a comparison between Kuwait, Bahrain, and Fars shows that Kuwait was the safest and most secure place to live.⁷⁰⁵

Another indication of the peaceful life that the Shi'a communities enjoyed, especially the 'Ajam in Kuwait during the 1920s, can be deduced from the British reports on an official demand by the Iranian government to the British regarding their so-called subjects residing and trading in Kuwait. The Iranian government in 1924 sought British help and proposed either to send a representative to Kuwait or to appoint one member of the 'Ajam community to issue certificates of nationality or passports to the 'Ajam living in Kuwait in order to facilitate their movement between Kuwait and Iran. They also proposed to establish an Iranian consulate, or 'good offices' in Kuwait under the pretext of protecting them from supposed mistreatment and injustice. The British conveyed the Iranian government's message to Sheikh Ahmad with hesitation because it ignored the British protection agreement

⁷⁰⁴See IOR R/15/1/308.

⁷⁰⁵There were no registered reports of such cases in al-Hasa and this probably because British did not have an official P.A. there.

with Kuwait of 1899 whereby no foreign power could establish a foothold in Kuwait without their permission. The British also knew that there were no serious sectarian problems in Kuwait, unlike Bahrain and al-Hasa, but they wanted to satisfy Reza Shah, as the British P.R. in Bushehr asserts.⁷⁰⁶ However, Sheikh Ahmad refused the Iranian demand on the grounds that they had no convincing reason for such a demand. He declined on five grounds: first, there was no basis for the Iranian government claim that the 'Ajam were treated unjustly, and he asked the Iranian government to provide evidence of such a case of persecution. Second, the law of Kuwait did not require subjects of Kuwait, or foreigners, to possess a passport and there was only a 'certificate of identity' issued and authorised by the P.A. in Kuwait, which was used for all subjects of Kuwait who intended to travel throughout the Gulf region, including southwestern Iran. Third, if he agreed to establish a consulate for the 'Ajam, the Najdi, Muscati, Iraqi, Bahraini, and other Arabian states would seek the same benefit and privilege for their 'subjects' which could leave him with no control over them. If he allowed them consulates in Kuwait, it could lead to their claiming protection over Kuwait in the future. Fourth, Sheikh Ahmad could lose his power and prestige in the eyes of his subjects if he was unable to issue orders and regulations for all his subjects to follow. Fifth, he classified the 'Ajam as a part of the Kuwaiti community and said their members were resident of Kuwait (*jamā'at ahl al-kuwayt*). The Kuwaiti Sheikhdom did not historically approve this argument, but the 'Ajam were treated as subjects of Kuwait according to the Order in Council, established by the British because they were Muslim inhabitants of Kuwait.⁷⁰⁷

Accordingly, unlike the Baharna and Hassawiyya in Bahrain and al-Hasa, there was no serious dissatisfaction amongst the Shi'a communities, especially the 'Ajam, regarding their

⁷⁰⁶From P.R. Bsh to P.A. Kw, no, 83-s, 3 Mar 1925, p. 60. *IOR R/15/1/526*.

⁷⁰⁷More details about the discussion on the Iranian demand of consulate in Kuwait and Ahmad al-Jabir view can be found in *IOR R/15/1/526*.

social and religious daily life. Such a conclusion can be deduced from a report of More, P.A. of Kuwait, in 1926 when he states that:

‘A certain amount of discontent undoubtedly exists among them, and any case given against a Persian is usually attributed to Sunni bias, but I cannot find any specific case which will stand investigation. In the course of a recent friendly conversation with the head of the Persian community, the latter was bewailing the lack of sanitation, etc., in the town which he and other Persians did not like; I tried to lead him on, and said ‘Are not you Persians treated the same as anyone else?’ He said ‘Yes, Shaikh Ahmad is absolutely fair, but there are no proper arrangements for anything’.’⁷⁰⁸

Even though More’s report does not discuss the position of the Hassawiyya and Baharna as a part of the Shi’a communities, one can assume that if the ‘Ajam, who had a different ethnic background to other Shi’a groups, did not suffer persecution, other Shi’a groups would be in the same position. In addition, More’s report indicates not only the amicable relationship between the ‘Ajam and the rulership in 1920s, which confirms the absence of sectarianism in Kuwait, but also counters the unrealistic claims and erroneous information provided by the Iranian government about the position of the ‘Ajam community in Kuwait. As a result, the Iranian government’s claim of unjust treatment by either the ruler of Kuwait or its Sunni inhabitants, not only to the ‘Ajam but also to the overall Shi’a communities, had no solid basis in Kuwait between 1921 and 1937; no single British report testified that the Shi’a complained of prejudicial attitudes by the rulership from 1921 to 1937, and there is no evidence to support the Iranian government’s claim. Moreover, if their claim had been true, Iranian immigrants would have stopped migrating from their home to Kuwait during the 1920s and 1930s, a period which actually shows an increase of ‘Ajam migrants to Kuwait, significantly from 10,000 in the 1920s to 20,000 in the 1930s, according to the British estimation. This is also confirmed by Forester, a British Vice Consul in Bushehr, when he

⁷⁰⁸From C. More. P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, 8-s, 11 Jan 1926, p. 42. *IOR R/15/1/526*.

states that, '[t]he Persian community [in Kuwait] has increased greatly in recent years and now numbers about 10,000'.⁷⁰⁹

More importantly, the economic position of Kuwait during the 1920s was difficult due to three regional and global events. First, in 1922 ibn Sa'ud initiated a blockade on the Kuwaiti-Saudi border as a sign of objection to customs duties on goods passing from Najd to Kuwait, and vice versa, because Kuwait was the only place that benefited from the customs duty. Second, during the mid-1920s there was a significant drop in the pearl market due to the emergence of the artificial pearl market in Japan. Finally, the global economic crisis occurred in 1930. These three economic elements certainly played an essential role in the ruler's caution in dealing with the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, especially the 'Ajam, because the only way to revive the economic situation and keep it stable was the trade connection between Kuwait and the southwestern Iranian ports, which was under the control of the 'Ajam merchants. As a result, any kind of political pressure, prejudicial attitudes, or sectarian conflict toward the Shi'a could cause social divisions in Kuwait society. It could put pressure on the 'Ajam community, especially the merchant group, which might possibly lead to paralysis in the trade between Kuwait and southwestern Iran in particular, and that ultimately could result in economic stagnation.

Depression in Kuwait and Political Block of the Shi'a Communities in the Legislative Council in 1938

During Ahmad al-Jabir's reign (1921-50), Kuwait, similar to Bahrain and Dubai, entered a new critical phase that was associated with reformation and development in the internal

⁷⁰⁹'Economic conditions in the Persian Gulf' by Commander Forester, Apr 1929, in *TPGAR*, vol. II, Bushire, p. 24.

administrative system in various branches, (e.g. education, municipality, police, jurisdiction etc.), in response to the economic and political changes that were occurring in the Gulf region. After the discovery of oil in Abadan in 1908, the British recognised that the Gulf region was undergoing economic transformation. An expectation of further discoveries in the future led the British to enter into oil negotiations with Kuwait in 1923, and to sign oil concession agreements with the Gulf States, including Kuwait, in 1934, especially after the discovery of oil in Bahrain in 1932. This new source of energy was to profit the British in compensation for their declining influence over the trading system between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea ports. They were aware that they had to maintain their control over the developing oil industry in the Gulf region in order to sustain their presence there and thereby continue to be a world power, especially with the rise of a new political rivalry in the Gulf after the First World War with the United States.

During that time, there were two major regional elements that contributed to political change in Kuwait. First, the shift of the economic system from dependence on seafaring activities and trade to booming profits relying on oil consumption after the discovery of oil in 1938. Such a change not only contributed to shaping a new political system in Kuwait but also changed the social relationship between the successive rulers and the Kuwaiti merchants, as Crystal argues.⁷¹⁰ The political influence of the merchants on the internal affairs of Kuwait due to the Sheikh's dependence on the merchants as a group for his financial needs, declined in the oil era and they were no longer able to put pressure on the Sheikh's internal policy as they had in the past. The conflict between the merchants and the ruling family started when the Sheikh began to rely on the oil industry for 'new state revenue' with British assistance arising from the oil exploration treaty signed in 1934. This, as Mudiyriz shows, undermined

⁷¹⁰Crystal. *Oil and Politics*, pp. 45, 73.

the social prestige, economic importance, and political influence of many merchants. As a result, they united and supported the idea of the Legislative Council movement.⁷¹¹ Equally significant, the rise of nationalist movements in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, associated with anti-British slogans during the 1920s, influenced the internal developments in the Gulf region and resulted in a demand for political and administrative reforms in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Dubai in the 1930s. The principles of freedom, justice, equality, and participation in state welfare, and more particularly the concept of self-determination that arose after the First World War as a result of the influence of President Wilson, also had worldwide repercussions. In particular, the rise of the intelligentsia in the Arab world led to hostile attitudes toward the British and colonialism after the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 and the Belfour Declaration in 1917. These ideas, principles, and ideologies transferred into the Kuwait political scene through the Kuwaiti intelligentsia, who were influenced by regional and global political ideas, as some of them were either educated in India, Egypt, and more particularly in Iraq, or obtained knowledge of these ideas through the radio, communication networks, the press, and books published in these states.

Besides the two major regional elements that had an impact on Kuwait politically, accumulated political and economic internal incidents throughout Ahmad al-Jabir's supremacy brought about a general depression in Kuwait, which helped to generate the legislative council in 1938. Alongside the dissatisfaction about Sheikh Ahmad's administrative policy regarding issues related to improvement of education, the municipality, health facilities, the administration of justice, and the good management of state income from oil, there were other factors that contributed to public resentment.⁷¹² First was the constant

⁷¹¹Falah al-Mdairis. *The Arab Nationalist Movement in Kuwait from its Origins to 1970*. Ph.D., University of Oxford, 1987, pp. 77-78.

⁷¹²See the list of the main grievances against Sheikh Ahmad in IOR R/15/5/205, p. 111.

oppression practiced by members of the al-Sabah toward the residents. Sheikh ‘Abdullah al-Jabir, who was the head of the general court occasionally encroached on the power of Kuwaiti *qadis* by changing their decisions. Sheikh Subah al-Da‘ij, the director of the police in the Kuwait *suq*, frequently confiscated property without justifiable reason.⁷¹³ Secondly, the taxes rose dramatically, reaching 10 per cent, especially on imports from outside Kuwait town. The monthly protection fees imposed by the ruler on bakers and shopkeepers were even higher than their rent charges.⁷¹⁴

Third, Kuwait in 1922 lost part of its territory to ibn Sa‘ud in the al-‘Uqayr conference after Sheikh Ahmad was too apathetic to attend the conference to claim Kuwait’s borders with Najd, which his predecessor Sheikh Salim had fought to obtain from ibn Sa‘ud. Fourth, there were constant threats from the *ikhwān* movement between 1921 and 1928 that ultimately led to anxiety over a possible invasion of Kuwait territory that resulted in the *al-rig‘i* war in 1928. Although, as in the *al-jahra* war that occurred in 1920, the *ikhwān* were not able to invade Kuwait town due to British military intervention, the Kuwaitis were relieved when ibn Sa‘ud demolished the *ikhwān* movement in 1928 after a revolt. Fifth, the blockade of 1922, initiated by ibn Sa‘ud and the sharp decline in the Kuwaiti economy due to the Japanese export of artificial pearls in the 1920s, led to a drop in the pearl market and the economic crisis of 1930. Sixth, the social tension and hostility between Sheikh Ahmad, and his rivalry with his cousin Sheikh ‘Abdullah al-Salim, created divisions among the merchants and intellectuals, some of whom supported the latter. Indeed, Sheikh ‘Abdullah was ambitious and sought to succeed his father who died in 1921, but Sheikh Ahmad took over with British and al-Sabah support. From that time, both Sheikhs built their alliances

⁷¹³An example of oppression can be found in IOR R/15/5/205, pp. 95-97.

⁷¹⁴al-Mdairis. ‘The Arab Nationalist’, p. 79.

(e.g. of relatives, merchants, intellectuals, and other social groups) indirectly and the conflict did not come to a head until 1938.

The First Legislative Council

In the years up to 1938, for the first time, some Kuwaiti notables participated in the administrative system of Kuwait through their selective election to the Municipal Council (*majlis al-baladi*) established in 1930, and the Education Council (*da'irat al-ma'arif*) founded in 1936. However, occasional conflicts between its members, these two councils, and the ruler, due to corruption, led to the latter dissolving them and re-establishing the councils through governmental nomination.⁷¹⁵ With public resentment arising from maladministration, and the rise of the above-mentioned national movements in the Arab world, agitation occurred between February and March 1938 against Sheikh Ahmad, led by prominent Arab Sunni merchants, especially those who had resigned from the Municipal Council and the Education Council due to corruption, such as Mash'an al-Khudayr, Mishari al-Badir, Sayyid 'Ali al-Rifa'i and Sulayman al-'Adsani, and a number of leading political activists, including 'Abdullah al-Saqir, Khalid al-'Adsani, 'Abd al-Latif al-Thinayan, Yusuf al-Marzuq and Sultan al-Kulayb. Some merchants were in debt to Sheikh Ahmad and bankrupted due to the significant economic decline, such as 'Abdullah al-Saqir, Yusuf al-Marzuq and Salih al-Rashid.⁷¹⁶ With these economic grievances, they successfully created an opposition party ('Abdullah al-Salim party) against the ruler by forming a secret Kuwaiti assembly (*al-jam'iyya al-kuwaitiyya al-sirriyya*), constituted of twelve Sunni Arab activists, from *jibla*, who gathered clandestinely in the houses of party members 'Abd al-Latif al-

⁷¹⁵More details can be found in Fayhan al-'Utaybi, *al-Harak al-Siyasi wa al-Sira 'al-Dimuqrati fi al-Kuwayt*. Kuwait: Dhat al-Salasil, 2010, pp. 30-31; Khalid al-'Adsani. *Muthakarat Khalid Sulayman al-'Adsani*. n.p: n.d.

⁷¹⁶From P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, c/113, 17 Mar 1939, p. 104. *IOR R/15/5/206*.

Thinayan and Sulayman al-‘Adsani, as Khalid al-‘Adsani, the secretary of the first and second *majlis*, indicates in his diary.⁷¹⁷ They also used to call themselves (*al-kutla al-wataniyya*) or National Bloc.

The movement expanded publicly through posting nationalist and reform slogans and other anti-government statements against the ruler on the street walls, and by the efforts of other insiders and outsiders (i.e. Kuwaitis and Arab nationalists) who wrote critical articles in the Iraqi press, such as *al-Majlis*, *al-Nass*, *al-Zaman*, *al-Sijil al-Basriyya* and *al-Istiqlal al-Baghdadiyya*, in the Egyptian press, such as *al-Shabab* and *al-Rabita al-Arabiyya*, in the Syrian press, such as *La Chronique* and *al-Shabab*, and in the Lebanese press like *al-Nahar*. They provided information on Kuwait, suggested immediate reforms, and threatened to depose the ruler of Kuwait and substitute Sheikh Ahmad with either Sheikh ‘Abdullah, the British, or the Iraqi government.⁷¹⁸ This caused panic in Kuwait town where the ruler hid in his residence and many people escaped to Iraq. Though the political agitation seemed to favour the main rival of the ruler, Sheikh ‘Abdullah, the latter feared that this unrest might turn not only against Sheikh Ahmad but also the entire al-Sabah family. Initially, the British did not interfere, although they recognised the danger of the situation, especially as most members of the al-Sabah families were also dissatisfied with Sheikh Ahmad’s administrative policy, and were unhappy with regard to their allowances and their limited participation in Kuwait’s government.

The British also feared some members of the opposition party, such as ‘Abdullah al-Saqir, who owned large properties and date orchards in Iraq, and who sought Iraqi citizenship in order to save his properties. Like other Kuwaiti oppositionists, such as Khalid al-‘Abd al-

⁷¹⁷Al-‘Adsani. *Muthakarat*.

⁷¹⁸Some of these translated articles can be found in IOR R/15/5/126, IOR R/15/5/162, IOR L/P&S/12/3758.

Latif, and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-‘Abd al-Wahid, he also had an amicable relationship with members of the Iraqi government. This pro-Iraqi faction constituted, according to a British report, between ten and eighty people under their leader ‘Abdullah al-Saqir who wanted Kuwait to join Iraq. The British heard that officials of the Iraqi government had promised to give him a seat in the Iraqi parliament after the integration of Kuwait with Iraq. The situation encouraged the Iraqi government, who were awaiting an opportunity to revive a claim to Kuwait as historically part of its territory.⁷¹⁹

More than a year after the first unrest, a media campaign against Sheikh Ahmad, through leaflets (*manshūrāt*) and via the Arab press who had sympathy with the Kuwaiti reform movement, was organised by members of the national movement. Even though the Arab press was banned from entering Kuwait, it was still the only way that oppositionists were able to convey their demands for reforms and warning messages to Sheikh Ahmad. They would either write their demands and criticisms under anonymous or fake names, such as in the case of Sayyid Hashim al-Rifa‘i, who hid under the name ‘Shakir’ while he was publishing articles in the Iraqi press. Through their network in some Arab states, members of the opposition party also disclosed information regarding the internal reaction of the Kuwaiti government toward the reform movement.⁷²⁰ The Iraqi government was happy to circulate such information not only to distort Sheikh Ahmad’s reactions and mistreatment of the opposition party, but also to utilise this movement to its political advantage in order to advance the view to Kuwaitis and the Arab world in general that Kuwait must be incorporated

⁷¹⁹From P.A. Kw to British Consul, Bsh, no, c/129, 19 Mar 1938, p. 164-165. FO371/21832; from P.A. Kw to British Consul, Bsh, no, c/112, 12 Mar 1938, p. 171. FO371/21832; from R.Peel to H. Eyres, P.Z. 1978/39, 5 Apr 1939, p. 108. IOR R/15/5/127; from Fowle P.R. PG to Trenchard, no, c/68, 24 Feb 1939, p. 229. IOR R/15/5/126.

⁷²⁰Khalid al-Sa‘dun. *Al-‘Ilaqat al-Siyasiyya al-‘Iraqiyya al-Kuwaitiyya Zaman al-Malik Ghazi*. London: Dar al-Hikma, 2013, pp. 235, 248-250.

into the Iraqi state. Some members of the opposition adopted this view, as British reports indicate.⁷²¹ King Ghazi of Iraq established a private broadcasting network called *itha 'at al-zuhur* or *itha 'at qasir al-zuhur*, which he used for propaganda against Kuwait's internal conditions that was transmitted to the Arab world and which advocated the integration of Kuwait into Iraq, either peacefully or by force through an Iraqi military campaign.⁷²²

Through leaflets and articles in the Arab press, the opposition demanded political participation via the establishment, by election, of an official *majlis* which would be involved in state affairs. Other demands, relating to the improvement of internal affairs, were written in leaflets and Arab newspapers. They cited the following demands. First, that the *amir* of Kuwait must admit that the Kuwaiti nation (*al-umma al-kuwaitiyya*) was the only legitimate authority in Kuwait and absolute rule should be abolished. Second, financial resources and taxes should come under a new administrative system. Third, the profit of about 50,000 Rupees that the state gained annually from the oil concession agreement must go to the Municipal Council in order to help to build and improve Kuwait. Fourth, the profit that Kuwait gained from customs duties must be spent on projects in the interest of Kuwait. Fifth, water pipes should be laid from Iraq to Kuwait with the permission of the Iraqi government in order to avoid drought and famine. Sixth, the Sheikh's corrupt entourage, who had misled him on the welfare of Kuwait, should be punished.⁷²³ Seventh, an expansion of technical education facilities must be taken into consideration. Eighth, economic and financial reforms should be implemented. Ninth, a free state hospital for Kuwaitis should be established. Tenth, the state must end employment of refugees. Eleventh, permission should be given to Arabs

⁷²¹See the Second Legislative Council.

⁷²²Kuwait intelligence summary for the period from 15th to 28th Feb 1939, no, 4/1939, p. 476. *IOR L/P&S/12/3758*; from Fowle P.R. PG to Trenchard, no, c/68, 24 Feb 1939, p. 229. *IOR R/15/5/126*.

⁷²³See *IOR R/15/5/205*, p. 76A.

to visit Kuwait without hindrance.⁷²⁴ Twelfth, two courts, one legal and the other an appeals court, should be established. Thirteenth, a security department responsible for general supervision and the town security should be set up. Fourteenth, a proper administrative customs revenue should be established. Fifteenth, there should be a committee of counsellors to which all affairs of the country must be referred. Sixteenth, a passport and residence office should be established. Seventeenth, negotiations should begin with neighbouring Arab governments for the conclusion of treaties of alliance, offensive and defensive against any foreign state inimical to Kuwait. Eighteenth, works and employment should be limited to the Kuwaitis and if foreigners were needed, Iraqis should be preferred. Nineteenth, funds from the state budget should be allocated to send pupils to study mechanics and other courses abroad in order to prepare for work in the oil industry. Twentieth, permission must be given to Arab nationalists to visit Kuwait. Twenty-first, the *amir* should get in touch with all classes of Kuwaitis and hear their complaints and conduct affairs on a basis satisfactory to the majority. Twenty-second, the Kuwaitis were to be acquainted with all major projects in process.⁷²⁵

At the beginning Sheikh Ahmad did not comply with all these demands and indeed his reaction was severe. Muhammad al-Barrak was accused of promoting propaganda and intrigue against the Sheikh and was harshly beaten and publicly tortured more than once. Some of the opposition escaped to Iraq after unsuccessfully attempting to obtain British citizenship, such as Yusuf al-Marzuq.⁷²⁶ However, with political change in the Gulf region,

⁷²⁴ Al-ʿAdsani. *Muthakarat*; from P.A. Kw to P.R. Bh, no, c/150, 4 Apr 1938, p. 167. FO371/21832.

⁷²⁵ More details of these demands can be found in FO371/21832, pp. 184-186, 223.

⁷²⁶ Other members of the *majlis* also asked for British citizenship for the sake of their safety. From P.A. Kw to British Consul, Bah, no, c-303, 21 Sep 1938, p. 17. IOR R/15/1/548; P. A. Kw, no, c/131, 19 Mar 1938, p. 337. IOR L/P&S/12/3894A.

and the challenges by the American and European powers attempting to get a foothold in the Gulf region due to the discovery of oil, the British became more concerned about Kuwaiti public opinion. As a result, the British encouraged the Sheikh to adopt a more liberal attitude toward the reformers, because such a movement, according to them, was only to be expected, especially with the rise of democratic movements worldwide. The British had confronted a similar situation in Bahrain with the ‘Shi‘a agitation’ in the 1920s. Therefore, they proposed a British advisor to Sheikh Ahmad, similar the position that Belgrave had had in Bahrain in the 1920s, but at first the Sheikh showed no interest.⁷²⁷ They also promised not to interfere in the internal situation as long as the administration was carried out properly. The British also warned Sheikh Ahmad about the way he treated al-Barrak, as arresting and punishing his subjects in such a way would strengthen the movement, especially considering the public support for it.⁷²⁸

Finally, with extensive public pressure and agitation for more than three months, along with the British advice to the Sheikh, the latter agreed to establish the first legislative council in July 1938; it consisted of fourteen Sunni Arab notables elected exclusively from among 150 leading Arab Sunni families.⁷²⁹ However, on the other side, first Sheikh Ahmad and his relatives from the al-Sabah families, and their Bedouin supporters, established a pro-government party. In the meantime, groups emerged to challenge the Legislative Council: first, the Shi‘a communities, second; the ‘conservative’ Arab Sunni merchants from *sharq*, and third, the monopolist merchants.⁷³⁰ Mulla Salih, the Sheikh’s secretary, and other Sunni merchants, such as Khalid al-Zaid, Muhammad and Thunayan al-Ghanim, Yusuf al-‘Adsani,

⁷²⁷From Peels to Baggallay F.O, P.Z. 2962/38, 11 May 1938, p. 190. *FO371/21832*.

⁷²⁸Note by Sir Trenchard Fowle, 25th April, pp. 194-196. *FO371/21832*.

⁷²⁹More information about the members of the *majlis* can be found in IOR R/15/1/468, p. 75 and L/P&S/12/3758, p. 464.

⁷³⁰Al-Mdairis. ‘The Arab Nationalist’, pp. 100-104.

Nisf al-Nisf, ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Kharafi, Yusuf al-Ghanim and ibn Bahar wanted to destroy the opposition movement as it conflicted with their commercial interests as well as the privileges obtained through their administrative positions in Kuwait. The Shi‘a communities, especially the ‘Ajam, who were deprived of full participation in the election, were unhappy. Some of these groups, especially the Sunni notables, made every effort to prevent the establishment of the *majlis*, by offering bribes and privileges to members of the opposition party if they would resign or boycott the election, but to no avail.⁷³¹ Similarly, when members of the pro-government party (Mulla Salih party) failed to win the election and take seats to confront the opposition party (‘Abdullah al-Salim party), they tried to distort the goal of the *majlis*.⁷³² As a result the three opposition groups united and used propaganda against the *majlis* to dissolve it. They asked Sheikh Ahmad asking to dissolve the council, to which he responded by asking them to write a petition showing their reasons for disagreement with the *majlis*.⁷³³

However, after the success of the election, the members of the *majlis* obliged the ruler to sign a law recognising the rights of the *majlis*. This can be considered the first primitive constitution of Kuwait consisting of five articles related to the *majlis*’ power, and suggested reforms related to justice, public security, education, the budget, and many other issues.⁷³⁴

Although the British ostensibly welcomed the *majlis*, since it was a public demand, and tried to build up cooperation and trust between the Sheikh and the *majlis*, they were concerned about their relationship with the *majlis* and the Sheikh on one hand, and the official political relationship between the Sheikh and Britain on the other. This meant that the *majlis*

⁷³¹Muhammad Thunayan al-Ghanim was the only one who resigned due to family pressure

⁷³²Al-‘Adsani. *Muthakarat*; from Fowle to Peel, no, 396-s, 18 Jul 1938, pp. 257-258. FO371/21832.

⁷³³Al-Mdairis. ‘The Arab Nationalist’, p. 105.

⁷³⁴Details on the articles and reforms suggested can be found in FO371/21832, pp. 264-265.

had to understand that the Sheikh was a symbol of authority and he was responsible for the official relationship with the British government. In turn, the British provided full support for the al-Sabah as the legitimate ruling family, and for the integrity of Kuwait from any external foreign threat. In order to balance the two conflicting authorities and obtain the trust of the *majlis*, and to sustain the privileges they obtained from the oil concession agreement, the British suggested that the function of the *majlis* would be confined to legislative and judicial responsibilities. Regarding the administration, its role should be advisory only, and the Sheikh should remain the main authority with regard to foreign affairs in Kuwait.⁷³⁵ Accordingly, the establishment of the *majlis* could not affect the existing arrangements of the long-standing British policy toward Kuwait, based on the treaty of 1899.

Over a six month period, the *majlis* was able to introduce a number of economic, educational, judicial, and social reforms.⁷³⁶ However, the members of the *majlis* raised demands for greater reforms, such as the removal of the Sheikh's two secretaries, the 'Ajami Mulla Salih and the Egyptian-Syrian 'Izzat Ja'far, who were both involved in corruption in the eyes of the *majlis*. This resulted in serious disagreements between members of the *majlis* and the Sheikh, who sought British support in this matter and insisted on retaining the two secretaries in their positions, but the British did not interfere since it was a public demand. However, the Sheikh was waiting for just such an opportunity to justify dissolving the *majlis*, an enemy in his view. As part of their reform agenda, the *majlis* had issued many decrees that restricted the Sheikh's power, prevented him and the al-Sabah from controlling state income, and reduced their privileges.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁵From H. Weightman to H. Peel, no, c/554, 22 Aug 1938, pp. 318-320. FO371/21833; H. Weightman, the Agency Bah, p.z, 6062/38, p. 338. FO371/21833.

⁷³⁶See the list in FO371/21833 pp. 392-393.

⁷³⁷Crystal. *Oil and Politics*, pp. 48-49; al-'Utaybi. *Al-Harak*, p. 51.

The Second Legislative Council

The removal of the Sheikh's secretaries, after pressure from the *majlis*, was associated with the dissolving of the first *majlis* in December 1938, after a battle between members of the *majlis* and their supporters, and the Sheikh and his followers, which resulted in a defeat to the former. A decree by the ruler was issued for new elections with a larger electorate of four hundred families and twenty electors (another source says fifty)⁷³⁸ on the conditions that the Sheikh had the right of veto and that arms reserves in the entire town must be under his control in order to avoid another fight with firearms.⁷³⁹ An agreement was made between the 'reformative party' and the 'oppositionist party' to form a committee of eight members, half representing each of them. Using this tactic, Sheikh Ahmad expected to gain the majority in the new council, but was unsuccessful as two thirds of the victors were members of the first *majlis*.⁷⁴⁰

Sheikh 'Abdullah assigned a president to the second *majlis* that met in late December 1938, with a change whereby it constituted eight new members of the pro-governmental party, in addition to the twelve old members. However, conflict arose over the constitution, which lead to a second dissolution by the Sheikh in March 1939 on the excuse that the old constitution suited neither the al-Sabah family nor Kuwait. He asked instead for a new constitution, similar to Transjordan's, allowing him to appoint half the members of the legislative council. His request was rejected by the 'reformative party' of the *majlis*.⁷⁴¹ This followed a serious clash between the opposition party and the government after the arrest of

⁷³⁸Al-Mdairis. 'The Arab Nationalist', pp. 109-110.

⁷³⁹From P.R. PG to Sec State of Id, 21 Dec 1938, p. 400. *FO371/21833*.

⁷⁴⁰Al-Mdairis. 'The Arab Nationalist', p. 109.

⁷⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 110.

one oppositionist, Muhammad al-Munayyis, who distributed leaflets declaring that after the dissolving of the *majlis*, the al-Sabah were no longer rulers of Kuwait, and Kuwaitis must resist them until the Iraqi army arrived. Shooting between the police and supporters of al-Munayyis, Yusuf al-Marzuq, and Muhammad al-Qitami resulted in the death of al-Qitami and the injury of both al-Marzuq and Sheikh Ahmad.⁷⁴² The Sheikh, through his military and tribal support, was able to regain control of the situation. He ordered the immediate execution of al-Munayyis, and the arrest and conviction of five other members of the opposition party who were not able to escape abroad, such as Khalid al-ʿAdsani and ʿAbdullah al-Saqir.⁷⁴³ Even though official petitions for their release by the people of Kuwait, including the wives and mothers of convicted members, were submitted to the Sheikh, the Sheikh banished them until 1944.⁷⁴⁴ As a result, the Sheikh was able to control Kuwait’s internal affairs and quell the rebellion, enabling the political stability to continue until his death in 1950.

Ultimately, Sheikh Ahmad dissolved the *majlis* on the grounds that it was harming Kuwait by generating discord between the executive and legislative powers. Instead, to placate the reformist party, he created a consultative *majlis*, consisting of fourteen appointed members, four members from the ruling family, and eight of those who were against the existence of the legislative council.⁷⁴⁵ This new *majlis* did not include members of the Shiʿa communities even though the ʿAjam had supported the Sheikh throughout the struggles against the ‘oppositionist party’.

⁷⁴²From P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, c/88, 10 Mar 1939, p. 77. *IOR R/15/5/206*.

⁷⁴³From P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, c/95, 12 Mar 1939, pp. 89-92. *IOR R/15/5/206*.

⁷⁴⁴The petitions can be found in *IOR R/15/5/206*, pp. 125, 151, 157.

⁷⁴⁵Al-Mdairis. ‘The Arab Nationalist’, pp. 114, 119.

The Position of the Shi'a Communities in the Two *majlises* and their Reactions

As with the *majlis al-shūrā* in 1921, the Shi'a was prevented from running candidates in the 1938 elections, had limited electoral rights, and were politically isolated. However, this time they did not keep silent; they joined the Sheikh, especially after they had heard rumours about the intentions of the opposition party to expel the Shi'a from Kuwait from the Sheikh's secretary Mulla Salih, the main figure who incited and organised the 'Ajam community against the nationalist movement, mainly after an insistent demand from the *majlis* to dismiss him.⁷⁴⁶ Propaganda and exaggerations about the position of the 'Ajam community in Kuwait, promoted by the Arab press and King Ghazi's broadcasts (*itha 'at qasir al-zuhur*), alleged that Sheikh Ahmad encouraged the migration of foreigners (i.e. 'Ajam) in order to control his own people and to weaken the strength of the Arab race in Kuwait. Other rumours claimed that the ruler had employed the 'Ajam in the police department and that early in 1939 he had secretly donated amounts of 2000 Rupees and 5000 Rupees to a fund for the establishment of an 'Ajam school (*al-madrassa al-ja 'fariyya*).⁷⁴⁷ However, De Guary, P.A. of Kuwait, confirmed to the British that no such thing had happened, especially regarding the alleged 'Ajam migration and employment in the police. Shi'a oral history, on the establishment of *al-madrassa al-ja 'fariyya* (i.e. Persian school mentioned in British reports), provides different views. One emphasises that it was self-funded by Shi'a 'Ajam merchants

⁷⁴⁶Extract from Kuwait Intelligence Summary, no,15 for period 1st Aug to 15th Aug 1938, p. 65. *IOR R/15/1/548*.

⁷⁴⁷The Residency, Bsh, no, 434-s, 3 May 1939, p. 188. *IOR R/15/1/549*; al-Nahar Bayrut, 13 May 1939, p. 322. *IOR R/15/5/162*; Kuwaitis are demanding to be granted their full rights, p. 238. *IOR R/15/5/126*.

and popular donations only, while another states that the Sheikh donated 2000 Rupees as was reported in the Arab press.⁷⁴⁸ Dickson, however, supports the Arab press view in his daily diaries in 1939, the same year that *al-madrasa al-ja 'fariyya* was found, by saying that the 'Persian community were given Rs 2000 by H.H. in aid of a new school for loyalty during the crisis'.⁷⁴⁹

During that time, the estimated number of the 'Ajam varied. One report suggests they constituted 20,000 out of an overall 50,000 population, while another asserted that they were 18,000 out of 65,000. However, overall, the Shi'a were estimated by the British as being 25,000 in number.⁷⁵⁰ Thus, it was not surprising that the Shi'a as a social group supported Sheikh Ahmad's position against the opposition, especially, according to a British report, since the opposition party, led by the president of the *majlis* and their followers, constituted about 20,400 armed men, while the Sheikh's party was composed of his followers of 500 armed people, the al-Sabah family with their members of 1,000 armed men, the Sheikh's allied tribesmen of 8,000 men and Najdis and another 5,000 partly armed people.⁷⁵¹ This means that the opposition party was greater numerically than the Sheikh's party without Shi'a support. As a result, one can argue that the existing number of the Shi'a communities were enough to confront the opposition party without the Sheikh encouraging migrations, as the Arab press alleged.

⁷⁴⁸Muhammad Jamal, interviewed by the author, 29 Jul 2009, Kw; P.A, Kw, no, c/189, 27 Apr 1939, p. 187. *IOR R/15/1/549*.

⁷⁴⁹Dickson Diaries, box 4, file, 1939, St Antony's College, Middle East Library, University of Oxford. p. 15.

⁷⁵⁰See *IOR R/15/5/205*, p. 223; from British Embassy, Bagh to P.R. Bsh, 20 Oct 1938, p. 64. *IOR R/15/1/548*; office of P.R. Kw camp, no, c/806, 19 Oct 1938, p. 258. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁵¹See *IOR R/15/5/205*, p. 223.

With the formation of the two *majlis*, all Shi'a groups felt resentment because only some of them (old Shi'a residents) were allowed to vote, but without having the right to elect candidates from their social group because of their national origin and religious background.⁷⁵² A British report asserts the loyalty of the Shi'a to the Sheikh saying that:

'The Shiahhs. This section of the Kuwait community forms more than half of the total population and is composed of merchants of Persian, Bahraini and Iraqi extraction, and also of the labouring classes. On the whole they are well disposed to the present regime, but despite their numbers, unfortunately, have not the influence of the Sunnis.'⁷⁵³

Moreover, the 'Ajam viewed the nationalist movement, supported by the Arab Sunni intelligentsia and merchants, as racist and prejudiced because it undermined their group as Kuwaitis of non-Arab origin. Arab Baharna and Hassawiyya viewed it as a sectarian movement because they were not invited to participate, although they shared the same ethnicity as Kuwaitis of Arab origin. This is why Arab Sunni merchants and political activists, exclusively ran the movement and it did not include either 'Ajam or Arab Shi'a.⁷⁵⁴ As a result for the first time in Kuwaiti history the Shi'a-Sunni division was utilised politically, and ultimately created a sectarian social divide.

⁷⁵²Al-'Adsani asserts that only some old Hassawiyya and 'Ajam were allowed to vote while the two British reports indicate that at one time all Shi'a groups participated, while another emphasised that only old established 'Ajam Shi'a families were allowed to vote. 'A note on the elections of the majlis of Kuwait', p. 206. *IOR R/15/5/205*; *IOR R/15/1/548*, p. 123; Al-'Adsani. *Muthakarat*.

⁷⁵³Even though to this date in oral history among the Shi'a communities asserts that at a certain time in the first half of the 20th Century the Shi'a reached more than half of the population their number subsequently decreased due to the governmental policy of providing citizenship to the new immigrants of Bedouins after the 1950s. This assertion by either British reports or oral history is possibly exaggerated as there is no evidence of any historical claim that the Shi'a were greater in number, though the Shi'a constituted a large number that could have been close to just less than half of the overall population in 1938 according to the British reports indicated earlier. From P.A. Kw to P.R. Bsh, no, c/292, 20 Jun 1938, p. 35. *IOR L/P&S/12/3894A*.

⁷⁵⁴Mansur al-Mazidi was the only Arab Shi'a who was pro-opposition, as al-'Adsani asserts. Al-'Adsani. *Muthakarat*.

The Shi'a reaction toward the establishment of the *majlis* without their participation took different forms. Many of the 'Ajam gathered in the *hussayniyya al-khaz'aliyya* to discuss their position and demands. Sayyid Jawad al-Qazwini gave a supportive speech resulting in an 'Ajam demonstration in the streets demanding their rights. They walked from *hussayniyya al-khaz'aliyya* to *qasir al-sif*, around *qasir nayif*, and around the police station chanting slogans supportive of Sheikh Ahmad, and statements were made against the nationalist movement, such as *kharrib 'isha qabil la yikbar tayrah*, which means, 'Destroy the nest before the bird grows up.' Also, one of the Shi'a, named Mansur, a follower of Mulla Salih, spoke publicly against the *majlis*, for which he was arrested.⁷⁵⁵

After the establishment of the first *majlis*, al-Qazwini sent an official letter to the P.A. on behalf of the Shi'a, especially the 'Ajam, asking for British protection by obtaining British citizenship because of his fears about the future of the Shi'a, especially as they were 'unarmed'. His request was refused due to lack of specific qualifications according to British rules (e.g. long residency in British territory). Al-Qazwini responded to De Gaury, asking for at least a guarantee of British protection if abuses occurred against him and the other Shi'a.⁷⁵⁶ The Shi'a also feared mistreatment by the *majlis* due to notices posted in their bazaars indicating that their properties were liable to be confiscated.⁷⁵⁷ In his letter al-Qazwini also made the following demands. First, representatives of the Shi'a must participate in the *majlis* and Municipality. Second, the formation of a Shi'a school, paid for by the education department. Third, some Shi'a had to be employed as government officials. Fourth, judgments of cases among the Shi'a had to be referred to a Shi'a 'alim. Fifth, an enquiry

⁷⁵⁵Muhammad Jamal interviewed by the author, 29 Jul. 2009, Kw; Al-'Adsani. *Muthakarāt*; from P.A. Kw to British Consul, Bsh, no, c/303, 21 Sep 1938, p. 225. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁵⁶The Arabic letters can be found in *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁵⁷Note for the Hon'able P.R. Kw Situation 1-10-1938, pp. 228-229. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

should be made about the unjustified arrest of Mansur.⁷⁵⁸ There were many Shi'a applications, including from old settlers, seeking the safety of British protection (i.e. British citizenship). Two British reports by the P.A of Kuwait summarise the reasons for the Shi'a demands for protection. One states:

'The immediate reason for the applications is therefore anxiety for the future, under the somewhat zealous rule of the new council, who are naturally very suspicious of the Shia, with a lack of confidence in the ruling family, which is widely criticised for self-interest or ineptitude, or both.'⁷⁵⁹

Another report maintains that:

'All these Shi'ahs have lived contentedly in Kuwait up to within a few months ago, i.e. up to the formation of the council. Since then, however, they have shown signs of discontent. The reason for this is presumably as follows. Under the one-man rule of the Shaikh the Shi'ahs were at any rate no worse off than the Sunnis. Moreover the Shaikh's State Secretary, himself a Persian Shi'ah by origin, gave them a way of access to the head of State in case of grievances. With the coming of the council, however, - an entirely Sunni body, on which the Shi'ahs are not represented- they feel that they are unlikely to get a square deal, though up to date they have indeed suffered no actual tyranny from the council. This discontent culminated lately in applications being received by de Gaury [P.A. of Kuwait].'⁷⁶⁰

As a result, in September 1938, male and female members of fifty-nine old 'Ajam families, including Ma'rafi and Behbehani, submitted applications for British nationality.⁷⁶¹ The number of applicants increased in October to more than 4,500, constituting 983 Baharna, 37 Hassawiyya, and 170 'Ajam, who had settled in Kuwait less than ten years previously, and finally 3,457 old 'Ajam families who had resided in Kuwait for at least 120 years. This caused resentment in the *majlis*, which declared through public notice that whoever sought a foreign nationality (e.g. British) would be deported from Kuwait. The British notified Sayyid Yusuf, the judge of the Shi'a religious court, of the decision in order for him to let the Shi'a know;

⁷⁵⁸Letter from the chief of the Shi'a 'ulama' of Kuwait to P.A, p. 228. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁵⁹From P.A. Kw to British Consul, Bsh, no, c/303, 21 Sep 1938, pp. 225-226. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁶⁰Office of P.R. PG, camp Kw, no, c/806, 19 Oct 1938, p. 259. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁶¹For their names, see 'Extract of applications for British Nationality', 20 Sep, p. 227. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

this ended the submission of applications to the British Agency.⁷⁶² To pacify the Shi'a agitation, Fowle, the P.R. of the Gulf, suggested supporting Shi'a demands, especially those related to seats for their representatives in the *majlis* and Municipality. According to him a 'single Shi'ah representative on the council could not affect the council's decisions but would give the Shi'ah an opportunity of letting off steam'.⁷⁶³ Such a proposal by Fowle would not only quell the Shi'a grievances but also respond to the fear of external repercussions which could come from the Iranian government claiming to represent the 'Ajam on the basis of their Iranian descent. However, the British proposal was rejected by the *majlis* who insisted that Kuwait was an Arab country and they wanted to keep it free from Iranian influence or intrigue.⁷⁶⁴

As a result, by the end of 1938, the Shi'a had little weight in the political system compared to the Sunni other than their continued connection with the ruler. This was despite the fact that they constituted a large part of the population, and their role in contributing to economic affairs through their different social groups had been significant throughout Kuwait history. Even though 'Abd al-Karim Abul kept his position as treasurer of the al-Sabah family after the *majlis* movement, and his son Ahmad inherited it in 1945, the Shi'a political position did not alter. Although Sheikh Ahmad had utilised them to overcome the *majlis* movement and 'legitimise' his rulership, after this political crisis their position returned to the same status as before. It basically constituted being allied to the rulership in exchange for social, economic, and religious benefits. However, this political attitude toward the Shi'a changed

⁷⁶²It seems that the British were confused about Sayyid Yusuf, who they asserted was a Shi'a judge. They confused him with Sayyid Jawad al-Qazwini, who was during that time the judge and the leader of Shi'a, mainly the 'Ajam. No such a name as Sayyid Yusuf exists in the oral history and local papers of the Shi'a communities. Office of P.R. PG, camp Kw, no, c/806, 19 Oct 1938, p. 261. *IOR R/15/5/205*.

⁷⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁷⁶⁴*Ibid.*

in 1961, when Kuwait ceased to be dependent on Britain and an official constitution was established. The next year, an official constitutive council (*al-majlis al-ta'sisi*), the first Kuwaiti official parliament, was established, and two members of the old families of the Shi'a communities (Muhammad Ra fi ' Hussayn Ma 'rafi and Mansur ' Isa al-Mazidi) were returned through an official election that resulted in eighteen seats for the Sunni and two for Shi'a.

Conclusion

Political disturbances and sectarian discrimination against the Shi'a in Bahrain and al-Hasa, either by the government or by the Arab Sunni, continued in the 1920s and 1930s. In Iran a new factor emerged in Reza Shah's westernising policies. Thus, Iranian Shi'a and Arab Sunni migrated to the Arab coastal regions, including Kuwait. However, for first time in its history, Kuwait was exposed to social conflict between the Shi'a and Sunni due to several factors, including the rivalries within the al-Sabah family between Sheikh of Kuwait, Ahmad al-Jabir, and his cousin 'Abdullah al-Salim, the economic downturn due the appearance of the artificial Japanese pearls, the global economic crisis, the Najd blockade on Kuwait by ibn Sa'ud, and finally, the rise of the Arab nationalist movement. Consequently, Shi'a political identity was officially reshaped after the *majlis* movement.

Thesis Conclusion

This study discusses the creation of the Shi'a communities in Kuwait between 1880 and 1938; a period when Shi'a migration came to its peak. This research tries to provide a micro analysis of the social structure of these communities in Kuwait by analysing the internal conditions of the places they migrated from, (southwestern Iran, Bahrain and al-Hasa), and comparing them to similar conditions in Kuwait. This analysis is situated in a larger framework which examines the historical background of the Gulf region and discusses these minority groups within that context until 1938, the year when Kuwait entered a new economic and political phase, due to the discovery of oil and the emergence of the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement. In modern times, few studies have been conducted by Persian Gulf scholars on the mobility of the native people (*sukkān al-maṭāqa al-aṣliyyīn*) of the Gulf region, even though they were part of the formation of some of the modern Arab Gulf states. The Shi'a communities, ('Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya), of Kuwait are examples of ethnoreligious groups who have been overlooked by the scholars, probably due to a lack of available primary sources. In discussing the Shi'a communities in Kuwait, this thesis has used thematic interpretations, namely sectarianism, ethnicity, migration, and transnationalism to gain a better understanding of the complexities of the social, political, religious, and economic synthesis of these communities.

From the 18th to the 20th centuries, some parts of the Persian Gulf, especially southwestern Iran, Bahrain, and al-Hasa, were exposed to difficult and uncertain circumstances, such as political strife, sectarianism, tribal conflicts, high taxes, the outbreak of plague and disease, and natural catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods, and famines, all of which generated migration between the 18th and 20th centuries in the Gulf region, and which made a significant contribution in shaping the social structure of the modern Arab States, such as Kuwait, UAE,

and Qatar. From the early history of Kuwait, the 'Ajam, Hasswaiyya and Baharna inhabitants who chose to escape their homelands created 'societies of migrants', which carried distinct ethnic and sub-religious identities. After long settlement periods these 'societies of migrants' were transformed into 'sub-ethnic communities', ('Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya), which were assimilated into the 'Kuwaiti community', although the 'Ajam in particular kept their language. The absence of notions such as nationalism and citizenship, prior to the 1930s in Kuwait, that could confederate all these different 'sub-ethnic communities' under one social identity, contributed to creating multi 'sub-ethnic communities' among Kuwaiti residents.

The signs of early migrations of Shi'a people from their homelands to Kuwait began as early as the second half of the 18th Century. The historical literature of the Gulf region and some reports of the officials of the (EIC) indicate, the formation of these communities occurred after 1880, when the characteristics of these three communities appeared as distinct communities, where each of them had their own official institutions (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*) and '*ulama*' who represented them separately, evidenced in the private papers of the Shi'a communities and the British records.

This study uses the concept of sectarianism, beyond its regular meaning which focuses on 'conservative religious ideology,' and follows the 'Makdisi analysis' of the concept which focuses on discussing how 'religious identity' is politicised or secularised, as a part of the fight for power.⁷⁶⁵ In other words, it is how a certain authority (e.g. the Gulf Sheikhs) used religion, within a framework of sectarianism, in such a way as to make it 'only the coloring, not the essence, of sectarianism' as Cairns emphasises.⁷⁶⁶ The rise of two sectarian political

⁷⁶⁵Makdisi. 'Pensée 4'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, pp. 559-560.

⁷⁶⁶Cairns. 'The Object of Sectarianism'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, pp. 437-452.

powers, (the Safavid and the Ottoman), in the Gulf region, followed later by the fanatic Wahhabi-Sa‘udi movement during the mid-18th century, revived the earlier sectarianism of the Muslim inhabitants of the Gulf region. Religion was utilised politically by two new rising Arab regimes, (al-Khalifa in Bahrain in the 1780s and the al-Sa‘ud in al-Hasa in the 1790s), to control their subjects, especially the Shi‘a, as they consolidated their political power in new areas. This attitude forced the native inhabitants, (*al-sukkān al-aşliyīn*), in some Gulf areas, (i.e. Shi‘a), to relocate themselves to other places in the Gulf, including Kuwait, especially the latter, which was relatively free of ‘political sectarianism’ before 1938, to escape religious persecution.

That is not to say that ‘social sectarianism’ or ‘religious identity’ in Kuwait did not exist amongst the residents of Kuwait prior to 1938. However, it was not used by the al-Sabah to create social and religious divisions among the ‘Kuwaitis’. Furthermore, ‘political sectarianism’ was not practiced by the al-Sabah, particularly regarding the three Shi‘a communities because they constituted minorities, in comparison with their counterparts the Kuwaiti Sunni; also, because they were not united, due to the existing sectarianism within these communities, which increased existing division arising from ethnic differences. These differences provided an opportunity for the al-Sabah to structure the role of the Shi‘a communities in Kuwait in order to control them socially, economically, and politically. This also contributed to shaping the social position and political weight of each Shi‘a community throughout Kuwait history.

The position of the Shi‘a in Kuwait can be compared with the situation in al-Hasa and Bahrain. There they constituted the majority of the overall population, having one ethnical and religious identity, (except the ‘Ajam in Bahrain). The Baharna *ikhbari* and the Hassawiyya *shaykhi* were each united in their society and also shared a common history,

culture, language, and memory. Although 'sub- regional identities' existed among the Baharna and Hassawiyya, whereby certain groups related to specific villages and towns where they resided, influenced to some extent the unity of the Baharan and Hassawiyya communities in their regions, they still represented themselves to the ruling families, (i.e. al-Khalifa and al-Sa'ud), as one coherent 'Shi'a community'. Therefore, sectarianism was used to weaken their social position and political weight against the newly arrived minority Sunni community. However, because they came to Kuwait as migrants, they did not represent a threat to the political authority of the al-Sabah there or threaten the Kuwaiti Sunni as 'native residents' (*al-sukān al-aşliyīn*), as they did to the regimes in Bahrain and al-Hasa.

The reasons for the Shi'a migrations from their homelands, from the 18th to the mid-20th centuries, were dissimilar. In Hassawiyya and Baharna, sectarianism by the new al-Khalifa and al-Sa'ud regimes, and the ensuing oppression, through their administrative system, of the Shi'a residents in Bahrain and al-Hasa, were the main reasons throughout that period for migration to Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf. This attitude of both regimes influenced the Sunni behavior toward their Shi'a cohabitants which resulted in many cases of violence against them. However, other lesser reasons, such as trade between these two areas and Kuwait, the use of Kuwait as the main route for Shi'a pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala', especially for those from al-Hasa, and the spread of plague and disease, also led many to settle in Kuwait.

In southwestern Iran, the internal conditions behind the Iranian Shi'a migrations were different. The administrative system of Iran, was both corrupt and more complicated than those of Bahrain and al-Hasa. However, the state doctrine, Shi'a *uṣūli*, was also that of the migrants from southwestern Iran to Kuwait. Therefore, sectarianism never played a role in causing Iranians to migrate to Kuwait during the Qajar period. In fact, it was economic,

social, and political problems which drove them to leave, for example, exploitation by local powers, tribal raids and village feuds, arbitrary tax rises, famine, disease, natural disasters, and latterly, the new centralised 'religious-administrative' injunctions imposed by Reza Shah in 1925.

Simultaneously, Kuwait, as a nascent town, benefited from these internal disturbances in the Shi'a original homelands, and the al-Sabah family encouraged settlement of the Shi'a immigrants as well as other Sunnis, to build the economy. Through the economic assets of these Shi'a from different social groups (i.e. labourers, artisans, and merchants) Kuwait transformed itself from a small town to a prosperous city by the second quarter of the 20th Century. Throughout the continuous waves of Shi'a migrations, the different social groups established their own distinct sub-communities, though they were successfully assimilated within Kuwaiti society. These three ethnoreligious communities, (i.e. 'Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya) had a common proper name to identify themselves, in accordance with the arguments of Law, Hutchinson, and Fenton. They also shared a common place of origin, which played a role in linking them into the idea of 'a society of migrants' which further developed into an idea of community. They also shared a distinctive language, (i.e. Farsi for the 'Ajam) which contributed to building and sharing memory and emotional attachment as a different ethnic group. Common religion, (Shi'asim), and the sub-religious identity of the Shi'a communities, (*uṣuli*, *shaykhi* and *ikhbari*), and a culture with different social and religious institutions (*masji*, *hussayniyya*, and *diwaniyya*), of each ethnic community, were factors which also played a part in categorising them into different ethnic groups within 'Kuwaiti society'.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁷Law. *Racism and Ethnicity*, p. 78; Fenton. *Ethnicity*, p. 3; John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, ed., *Ethnicity*. Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1996, pp. 6-7.

Unlike Bahrain and al-Hasa, in Kuwait there were no longstanding Shi‘a communities who considered themselves native inhabitants, (*al-sukkān al-aṣliyyīn*), or who could challenge the new dynasty, al-Sabah. Likewise, Kuwait’s political history only began after the settlement of the al-Sabah, at the beginning of the 18th century, where neighbouring multi-ethnic groups started migrating to the area and contributed to building a ‘new Arab sheikdom’ with al-Sabah. To date the ‘Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya all considered themselves the main pillar of economic prosperity in Kuwait and there is a dispute amongst them about who settled earlier and established themselves in Kuwait. However, due to the scarcity of primary sources, it is difficult to establish, from amongst these three communities, who settled earlier and it is likely to remain unresolved.

These minority Shi‘a groups, especially those who came after 1880, were attracted by ‘pull factors’ because they saw Kuwait as a safe place to live, with new opportunities for economic betterment associated with a strategic port connecting the trade routes of the Gulf region from Muscat to Basra, where some Shi‘a merchants and entrepreneurs could find new places for business investment. Unlike Bahrain and al-Hasa, the ‘Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya also felt comfortable in practicing their rituals freely without obvious political pressure or social harassment under the rubric of sectarianism by either the government or the Sunni residents, according to the British records and oral history. They successfully built and financed three official Shi‘a *masjids* for three different Shi‘a groups prior to Mubarak al-Sabah’s reign (1896-1915), *masjid al-mazidi* for the ‘Ajam community, *masjid al-sahaf* for the Hassawiyya community, and *masjid al-baharna* for the Baharna community.

The firm establishment of the communities, ‘Ajam, Baharna. and Hassawiyya, in three different quarters of Kuwait town, (i.e. ‘Ajam and Baharna in *sharq*, and Hassawiyya in *wasat*), motivated more Shi‘a immigrants to seek economic improvement in Kuwait. From

1880 onward, the Shi‘a migration, particularly the ‘Ajam, as indicated in British records, came to its peak at two points: first during Mubarak’s reign (1896-1915), and second during Ahmad al-Jabir’s reign (1921-1950). Trade between the southwestern Iranian ports and Kuwait, as demonstrated by the new migration system theory, played an essential role. The transnational networks of ‘Ajam and Arab Shi‘a mercantile families, such as Ma‘rafi, ibn Ghalib, Behbehani (*Shirin*), Abul and al-Matruk, encouraged relatives and friends in southwestern Iran to choose Kuwait over other Arab regions, between 1880 and 1938, as indicated in Chapter Three and Four. The multiple ties, and the interaction over long distances, of the social networks which linked Shi‘a merchants settled in Kuwait with merchants and agents in other places, can be categorised under the framework of transnationalism. These networks, as Vertovec argues, played a role in transferring different kinds of social, cultural, economic, and political relationships between the two regions. Social and cultural indications of this can be found in specific Iranian terms used and Iranian style cuisine enjoyed in the ‘Ajam community, and even generally in ‘Kuwait society’.⁷⁶⁸ Kuwait was also a major transit point for Iranian pilgrims to Mecca and Medina, who subsequently chose to settle there, as British records demonstrate.

Contrary to the wider current view of the historical solidarity and unity of the Shi‘a communities, Kuwaiti history shows they were not unified from their earliest presence in Kuwait. Though they share a similar religious identity, their ethnic backgrounds, sub-religious identities (*uṣuli*, *ikhbari* and *shaykhi*), language, economic professions, and their different places of settlement, all played essential parts in dividing them into three sub-ethnic groups within ‘Kuwaiti society’. The existence of three *masjids* and the representation of two

⁷⁶⁸Vertovec. ‘Conceiving and Researching’ in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, pp. 1-24.

Shi'a clerical families, (al-Mazidi and al-Sahaf), prior to Mubarak's reign, indicate the three communities perceived themselves as different to each other. Sectarianism within these three Shi'a communities and social animosity typified by a 'war of words' came with the arrival of Sayyid Mahdi al-Qazwini to Kuwait in 1909, who started a sectarian dispute against *shaykhi* and *ikhbari* principles, and accused their clerics in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf of promoting unorthodox principles of Shi'ism. The Shi'a communities entered a new phase during Sayyid Mahdi's sojourn in Kuwait, as he caused further sectarian divisions amongst Shi'a. His campaign, was to awaken and advise the Hassawiyya and Baharna Shi'a, who respectively followed the *shaykhi* and *ikhbari* schools of jurisprudence in Kuwait. Though a division did exist due to ethnic variances, Sayyid Mahdi's sermons in the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya*, and his books, profoundly influenced the social and political discourse in Kuwait and caused considerable discord amongst the three Shi'a communities, leading to the establishment of separate cemeteries, (*maqbarat al-'ajam* and *maqbarat al-hassawiyya*), and the consolidation of their pre-existing, separate habits of religious institutions, (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*). The result, for a long period of time, was decreased intermarriage.

The Kuwaiti government benefited from the Shi'a communities, economically and politically. From the early period history of Kuwait history to 1938, the al-Sabah gradually built up the 'Shi'a community' as a significant ally in their rulership of Kuwait, in exchange for social, economic, and religious privileges, but not political power. In particular, they utilised them politically to strengthen their position against any sudden challenge from the Sunnis, such as, the case of the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement in 1938. However, from the early history of Kuwait to the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement, the Shi'a communities did not carry the same political weight in comparison to the Sunni, for economic reasons; seafaring activities, economic revenue in general, and other areas of employment were mostly in the

hands of the Sunni merchants, who also outnumbered the Shi'a communities. Among the three Shi'a communities, however, the 'Ajam historically carried more political weight than the Baharna and Hassawiyya, in the eyes of the al-Sabah. This was because they outnumbered the two other Shi'a communities, and because this community included influential wealthy mercantile families, such as the ibn Ghalib, Ma'rafi, Behbehani (*Shirin*), Abul and others. In comparison, the Hassawiyya and Baharna were mainly labourers and artisans dominating the local handcraft industries and humble economic activities (*al-hiraf wa al-mihan*) in Kuwait. Through their merchants, the 'Ajam were able to provide financial aid, such as 'occasional loans' and 'financial gifts' to the Sheikh when needed, as discussed in the case of Ma'rafi and ibn Ghalib in Chapter Four. They also contributed to the economic prosperity of Kuwait, similar to the 'Ajam mercantile families, (i.e. al-Safar and al-Sharif), in Bahrain, from Mubarak's reign onward, via their unique and privileged transnational networks with southwestern Iranian ports, merchants, and agents, networks no other ethnic communities in 'Kuwaiti society' could achieve, due to language barriers, historical background, and local knowledge of their forefathers' areas.

This study of the 'Ajam merchants' transnational role in Kuwait, significant because of their connection with southwestern Iran, demonstrates connections similar to those found in Fuccaro and Onley's studies of the transnational role of the al-Safar and al-Sharif in building a cordial relationship with the al-Khalifa which resulted in mutual benefits. Furthermore, in Kuwait, Mubarak al-Sabah also had amicable relationships with members of the Ma'araifi and ibn Ghalib families, enabling him to use their expertise in arms trading to smuggle arms on his behalf in order to help his efforts to consolidate his position and authority in the Gulf region as the legitimate ruler of Kuwait. His use of the 'Ajam merchant, Najaf ibn Ghalib, as his agent in Bushehr and Bandar Ma'shour, shows the extent of the latter's transnational

network in southwestern Iran. In addition, during Ahmad al-Jabir's reign, particularly in the 1920s, when Kuwait was in economic recession due to Ibn Sa'ud's blockade, discovery of artificial pearls and the world economic crisis, the 'Ajam merchants played essential roles in supplying daily food and goods to Kuwait from southwestern Iranian ports.

The 'Ajam merchants and the Kuwaiti government had a similar partnership when Salim al-Sabah and his successor, Ahmad al-Jabir, assigned the 'Ajam merchant 'Abd al-Karim Abul as treasurer to the al-Sabah family, to run their business and invest their money until his death in 1945, as British records and private papers of the Abul family indicate. Such an assured relationship, between a number of 'Ajam merchants and the rulers, represented a strong mutual economic benefit to both parties and did not involve the 'Ajam merchants influencing the political decisions of the Kuwaiti Sheikh.

As this thesis argues, using the political identity of the Shi'a (*al-hawiyya al-shi'iyya*) or the term the Shi'a (*al-shi'a*) to encompass all Shi'a communities as a unified community under the rubric of 'Shi'asim' in Kuwait history prior to the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement is misleading. In other words, the terms 'Shi'a' or 'Sunni' cannot be used in a scholarly sense, or categorise any ethnic groups in Kuwait, including the Shi'a group, ('Ajam, Baharna, and Hassawiyya), prior to the 1938, since these terms were not used in the society itself. Regarding the Shi'a, the social and political discourse in the private documents of each community demonstrate their perceived separation from each other. In other words, they categorised themselves as, *jama'at al-'ajam*, *jama'at al-baharna*, or *jama'at al-hassawiyya*, and that is how they presented themselves to the government. This is also obvious from one British report which discusses the representation of the three different Shi'a groups when

they sought political protection (i.e. from British residency) in 1938.⁷⁶⁹ Moreover, sectarianism was not politicised, as argued by Makdisi in his interpretation, by the ruling family prior to the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement because it was not politically necessary as long as the ruling family did not face any challenge from opponents that could endanger their position and authority. Thus, the Shi'a communities were categorised based on their places of origin, which indicated their ethnic background. Ahmad al-Jabir, at the time of the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement, however, used all the Shi'a groups, especially the 'Ajam, politically against the 'opposition party' to legitimise his rulership against his cousin 'Abdulla al-Salim. This struggle for power for Kuwaiti rulership initiated a process whereby 'religious identity' can be politicalised and secularized as Makdisi argues. Among their demands, the 'Ajam asked for representatives in the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* and the *al-majlis al-baladi*, and also for the establishment of an 'Ajam school (*al-madrassa al-ja'fariyya*) but all their demands were denied by the Sunni delegates of that *majlis*. This response was not unexpected, given their previous attempt to block the Shi'a communities from participating in that *majlis*.

However, although the Sheikh had overcome the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* threat through the support of the Shi'a groups, he subsequently ignored the demands of the Shi'a communities, especially the 'Ajam. When he assigned himself a new consultative *majlis* (*majlis al-sūrā*), after he dissolved the two 'elected *majlis*' in 1938, he did not include any members of the Shi'a communities, because he did not see them as being of significant political weight, and to avoid further antagonising the Sunnis.⁷⁷⁰ He rewarded them by allowing them to establish

⁷⁶⁹See the section on the position of the Shi'a communities in the two *majlises* and their reactions to them in Chapter Five.

⁷⁷⁰He only substituted 'Abd al-Karim Abul ('Ajam merchant) and Yousif al-Khalid al-'Abd al-Latif in this *majlis* after two of its Sunni members resigned in 1939. 'Kuwait Intelligence

al-madrasa al-ja'farriyya donating 2000 Rupees to the school to indicate his satisfaction with their deeds. To expand, such a reaction from the Sheikh demonstrates two major points.

Firstly, the 'Ajam who might have been thought to carry political weight after the '*majlis crisis*', were, in the view of the Sheikh, only a minor ally whom he could bring into play whenever he desired. There is also an indication that he was cautious of exasperating the Kuwait Sunni, particularly the opposition party, who might exacerbate the political situation if he assigned a Shi'a member to the new consultative *majlis* (*majlis al-sūrā*). The political weight of the Shi'a was not sufficient to be the worth such a risk, and they represented no danger to his authority, in contrast to the Sunni mercantile families. Secondly, it appears from the demands of the Shi'a themselves, especially the 'Ajam, they were not pressed as forcefully as they might have been, especially about having political representatives in *al-majlis al-tashri'i* and *al-majlis al-baladi*. They probably sensed the weakness in their position, and feared if they made such a demand, they could end up being deported from Kuwait to their forefathers' places of origin, particularly as they were designated 'non Kuwaiti' in the nationalist propaganda campaign against them. Traditionally, they had not politically participated in the Sheikhs' decisions, so asking for a new role and position for their communities would not have been accepted either by the ruler, who had successfully crushed the 'revolution', or by the 'opposition party'. Instead of complying with the three Shi'a demands, the Sheikh preferred allowing the 'Ajam to establish their official school, which was the simplest demand, particularly since it was consistent with historical requests from the Shi'a communities to establish their own religious institutions (*masjid* and *hussayniyya*). Although the Sheikh could have appointed one member of the 'Ajam

Summary for the period from 16th to 31st December 1940'. No. 24 of 1940 in *Political Diaries of the Persian Gulf*. Vol. XIV. 1940-1941, p. 273.

community to the fourteen Sunni members of the consultative *majlis* (*majlis al-sūrā*), he did not do so because the Shi'a were accustomed to demonstrating to the rulership that their demands were restricted to their religious, economic, and social privileges only in an exchange for loyalty and obedience to the Sheikh. Finally, the lack of political, economic and social weight of the Hassawiyya and Baharan, meant they did not obtain any 'reward', such as a school, after their support of the Sheikh Ahmad in the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement. The majority of these communities was comprised of the lower social groups of 'Kuwaiti society' and their main economic contribution was limited to the development of the local handcraft industries.

The term 'Shi'a' as a political identity imposed on these three different Shi'a groups started to emerged in the political discourse on Kuwait history during the *majlis al-tashri'i* movement. The Shi'a support of the government in the *majlis al-tashri'i* movement created a 'Shi'a block' against the Sunni resulting in sectarian polarisation for the first time in Kuwaiti history. The construction of the term 'Shi'a' was imposed politically by the government on the three distinctive Shi'a communities, although it was not their choice to represent themselves this way. As a result of these political circumstances, economic development and social life changed in Kuwaiti society. The ethnic identity and regional identity derived from their migratory place of origin, previously the way three Shi'a communities had originally been identified, abruptly changed. Instead, these communities were perceived by the Sunni as being 'the Shi'a', they were defined by religious identity alone. As a result, there was a greater likelihood of sectarianism emerging. The term 'Shi'a', created and used by the Kuwaiti Sunni at the beginning of the *al-majlis al-tashri'i* movement to cover all the three 'Shi'a communities', developed politically negative connotations. It became a common designation during the Pan-Arabist movement in the 1950s, and later

during the Iranian revolution in 1979. It was also used during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s and continues to be common to this day. The concept of Shi'ism has been politicised and incorporated into the framework of sectarianism in political events.

To date, especially in political and social discourse in Kuwait, most Kuwaiti Shi'a and Sunni deal with the Shi'a communities as one united community. They use the term the 'Shi'a community' (*al-mujtama' al-shi'i*) to refer to them, for example, in the (NAK) (*majlis al-umma*), and in the daily newspapers they are called The House of the Shi'a (*al-bayt al-shi'i*) when any issues are discussed relating to the Shi'a communities. However, to date the 'Shi'a community' (*al-mujtama' al-shi'i*) is not formally united and its representatives in the assembly come from different 'political Shi'a parties' who follow different Shi'a clerics and individually represent each separate sub-ethnic background within these three Shi'a communities. From a political perspective, one can observe the continued sectarian divide of the Shi'a communities ethnically, socially, religiously, and politically. These groups are only united when they sense a serious threat from either the government or the Kuwaiti Sunni in the form of religious discrimination or persecution which might prevent them from accessing their political rights or deprive them of their economic and social advantages.

From the 1970s onwards the Shi'a communities have created 'political parties' and 'social organizations' and they continue to follow different *marji'* as taught by the Shi'a schools of jurisprudence, (*uṣuli*, *ikhbari* and *shaykhi*), which are represented by official Shi'a clerics in Kuwait, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the Republic of Iraq, and in the Lebanon. Over time, the divisions have been deepened and become more complicated because of the establishment of 'Shi'a political parties' and 'social organizations', such as National Islamic Alliance (*al-tahaluf al-islami al-watani*), the Assembly of Justice and Peace (*tajammu' al-'adala wa al-salam*), the Islamic Movement of National Coalition (*harakat al-tawafuq al-*

watani al-islamiyya), the National Covenant (*al-mithaq al-watani*), the Assembly of the Muslim Shi‘i Clerics in Kuwait (*tajammu‘ al-‘ulama‘ al-muslimin al-shi‘a fi al-kuwayt*), and finally, the Assembly of the Humanitarian Message (*tajammu‘ al-risala al-insaniyya*).⁷⁷¹ Such divisions are not restricted to the longstanding conflicts already in existence among the Shi‘a schools of jurisprudence, but also include the varied political agendas of the parties who represent the different *marja‘* and communities.

The *al-majlis al-tashri‘i* movement of 1938 paved the way for a new political phase in Kuwait history which continued when the new democratic *majlis* were elected in 1961 after Kuwait became fully independent, and in the *al-majlis al-ta’sisi* which was established as part of the Kuwaiti Constitution in the following year. However, the Shi‘a communities have retained their historical position as a major ally of the al-Sabah family through their influential clerics and political delegates in the *majlis* (NAK). This has remained the case despite a few political and social exceptions,⁷⁷² and despite the sectarianism suffered on several occasions, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s during the ‘*masjid sha‘ban*’ movement, the Iranian Revolution, and the Iran-Iraq war.

It is hoped this examination of the formation of Shi‘a communities in Kuwait will provide scholars with a wider understanding of the complexities of the longstanding ethno-religious communities in Kuwait, and potentially encourage further discussion and open debate on these communities after the *majlis al-tashri‘i* movement in 1938. It is hoped this work may also lead to additional comparative studies which would include similar ethnoreligious

⁷⁷¹Hamad Albloshi. Sectarianism and the Arab Spring: The Case of Kuwaiti Shi‘a. *The Muslim World*, vol. 106, issue 1. Jan 2016, pp. 109-126.

⁷⁷²For details of the shift of different Shi‘a ‘political parties’ and ‘social organizations’ attitudes towards the Kuwaiti government from the 1970s to the Arab Spring, consult Albloshi, ‘Sectarianism and the Arab Spring’, *The Muslim World*, pp. 109-126.

groups in other Arab states, such as Bahrain, the UAE, and Oman, areas as yet unexamined by Persian Gulf scholars.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Maps

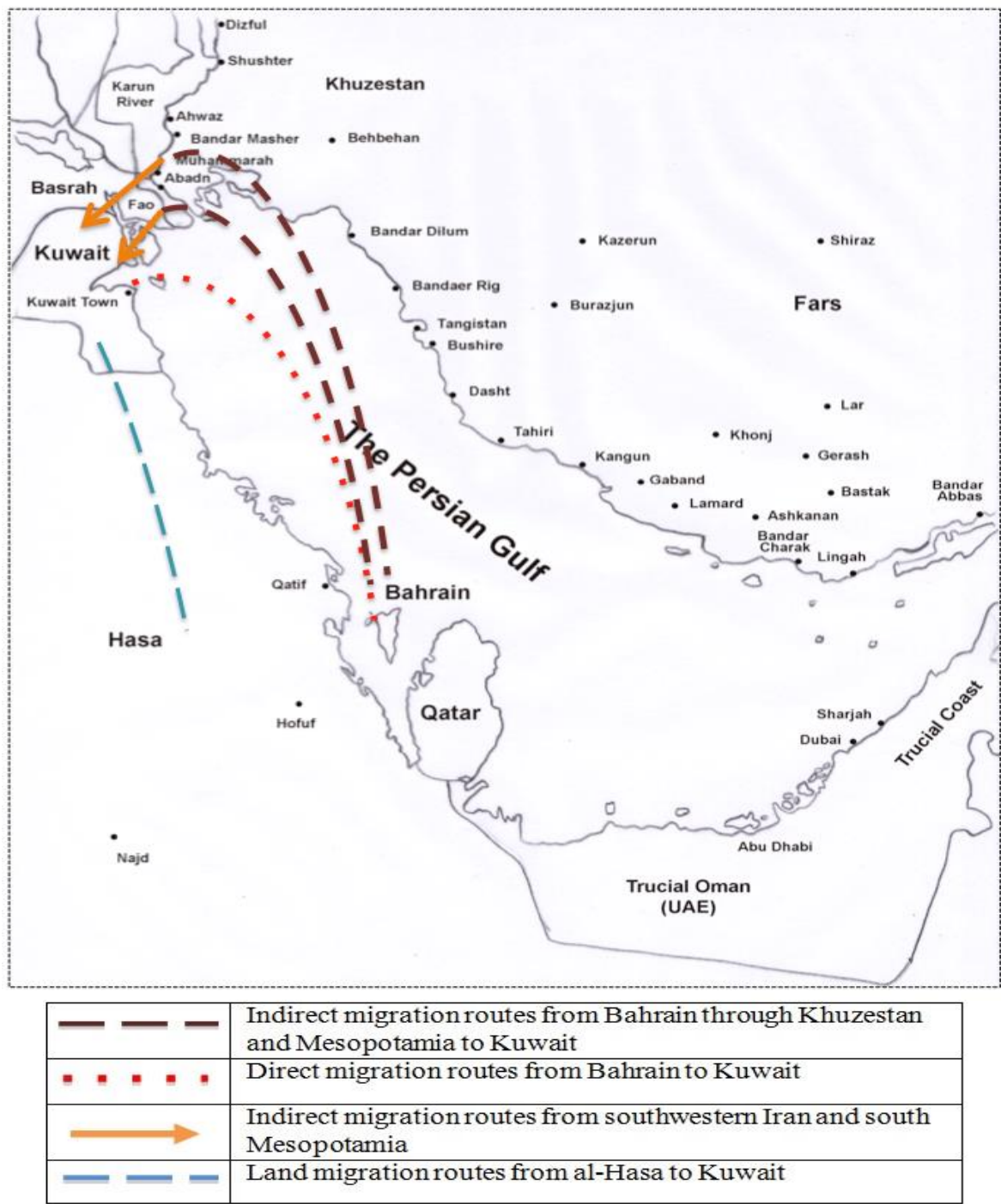


Figure 1 Map of Migration Routes from Bahrain and al-Hasa to Kuwait

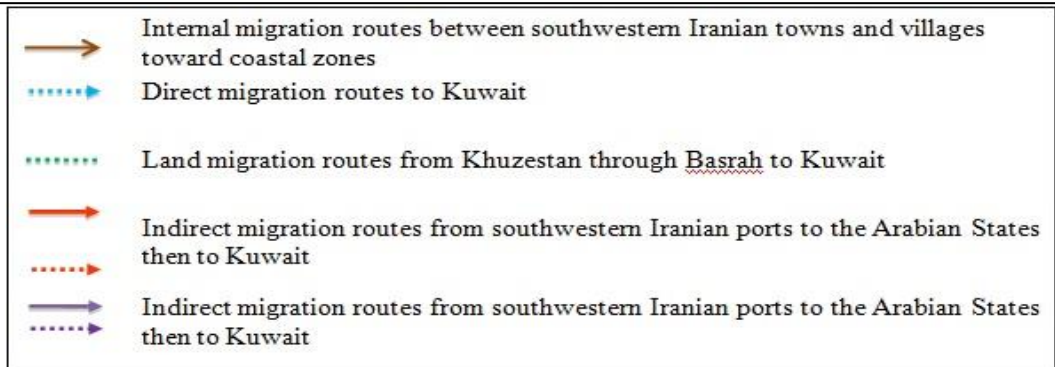
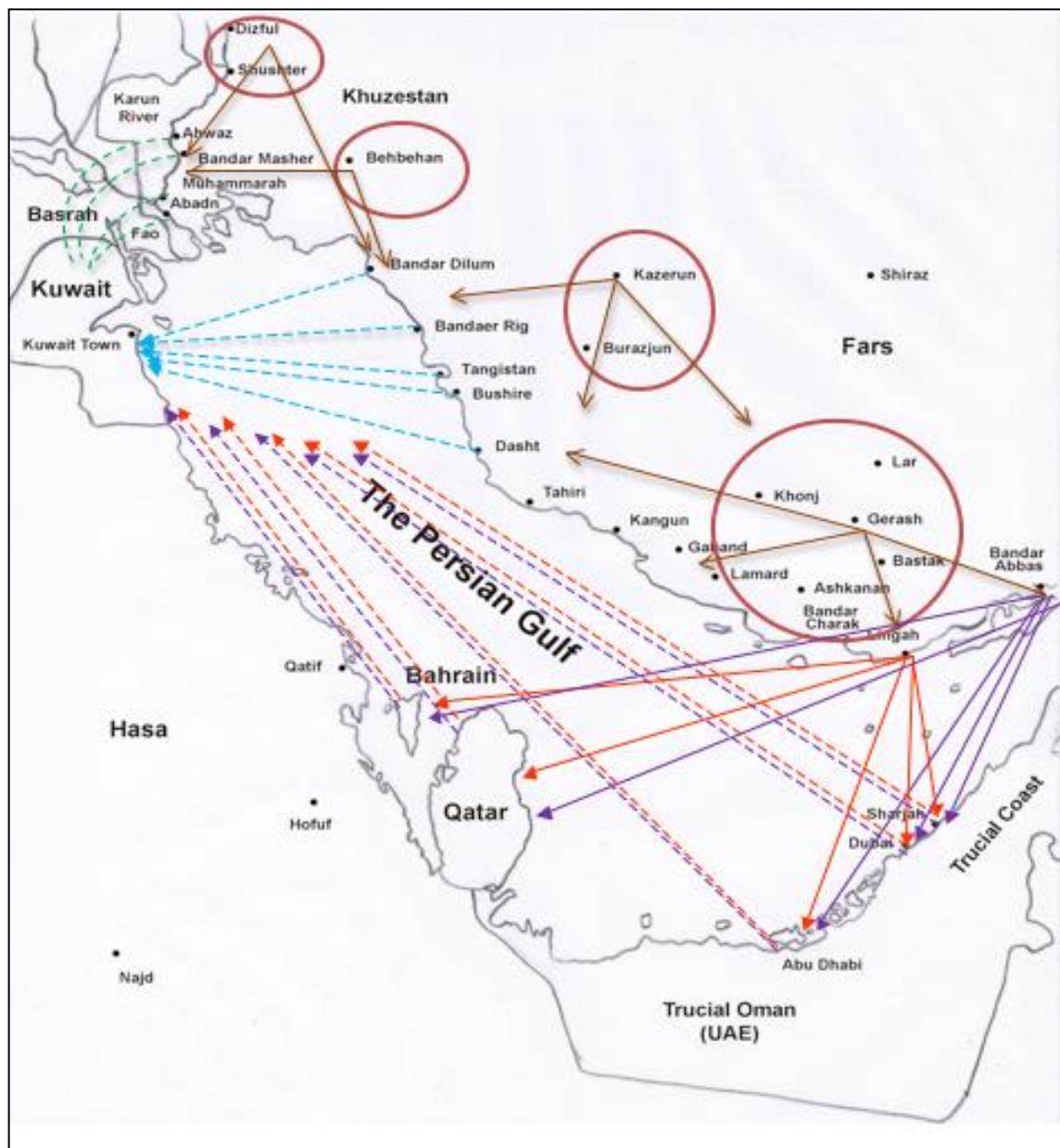


Figure 2 Map of Migration Routes from Southwestern Iran to Kuwait

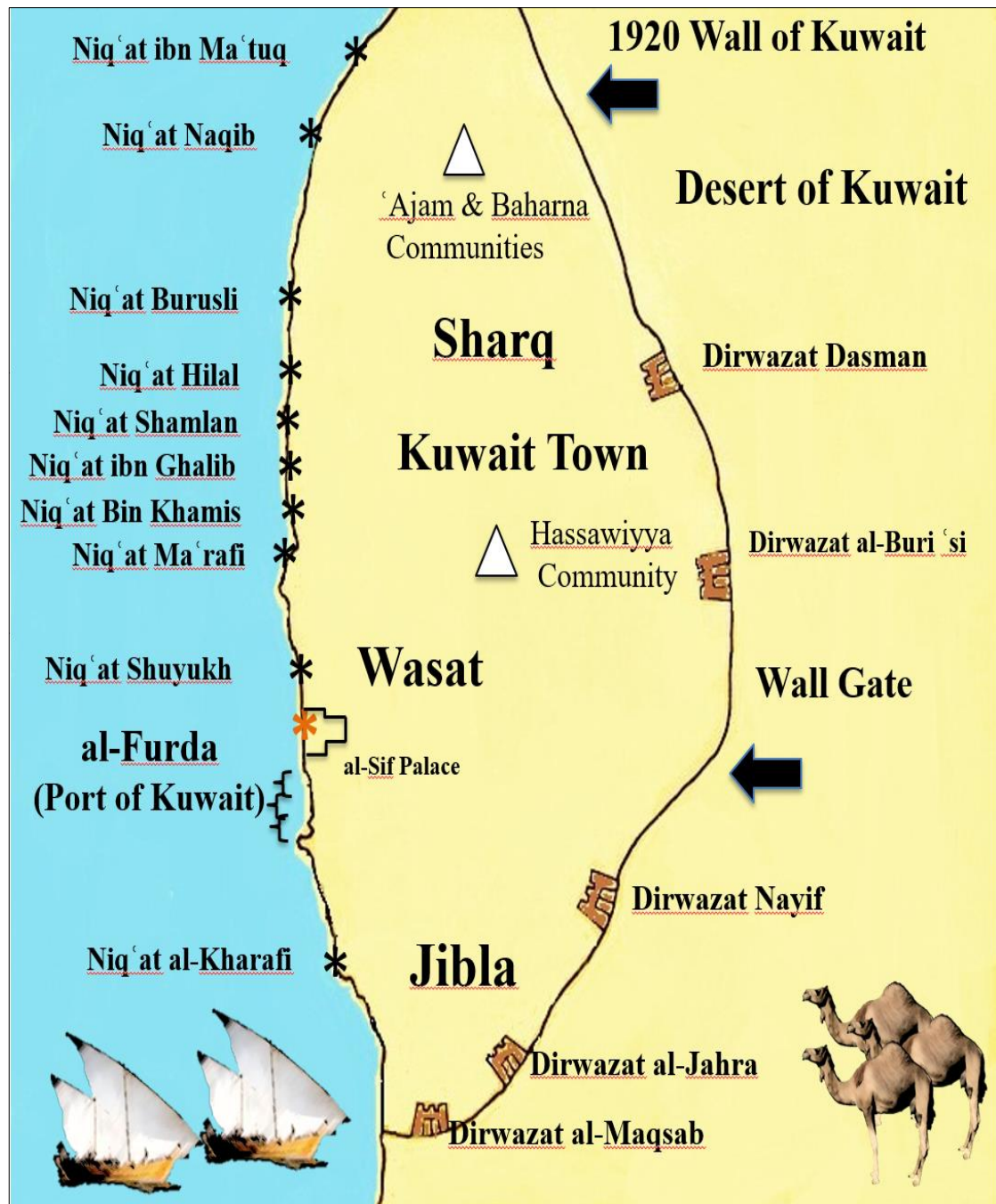


Figure 3 Division of Kuwait Town (*wasat*, *sharq* and *jibla*) Where Different Shi'a Communities Settled During the First Half of the 20th Century

Appendix 2

Diagrams

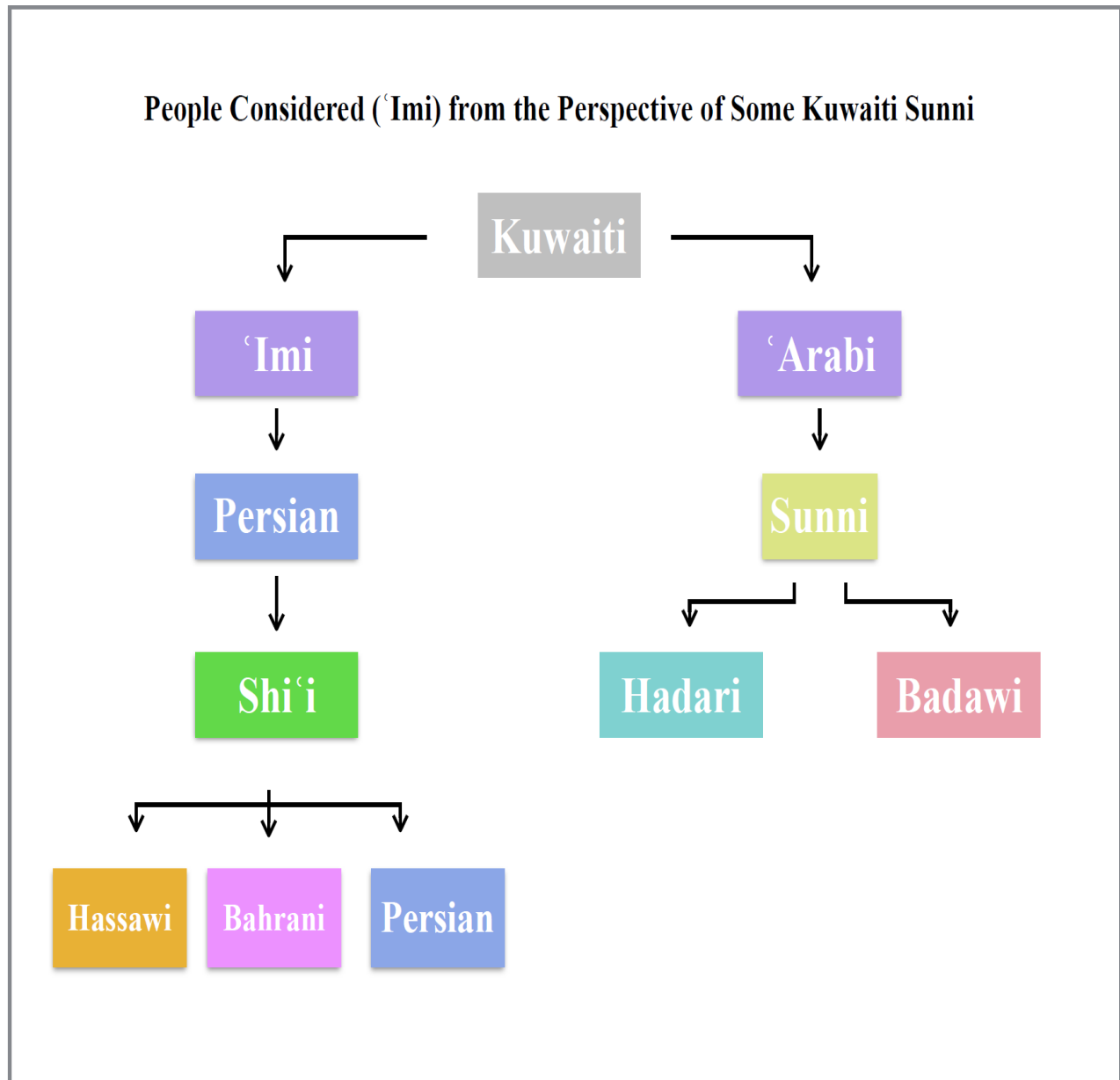


Figure 4 Perception of 'Ajam According to Some Kuwaiti Sunni
(This Concept was Taken from Batoul Hassan and Revised by the Author)

People Considered ('Imi) from the Perspective of Some Kuwaiti Shi'a

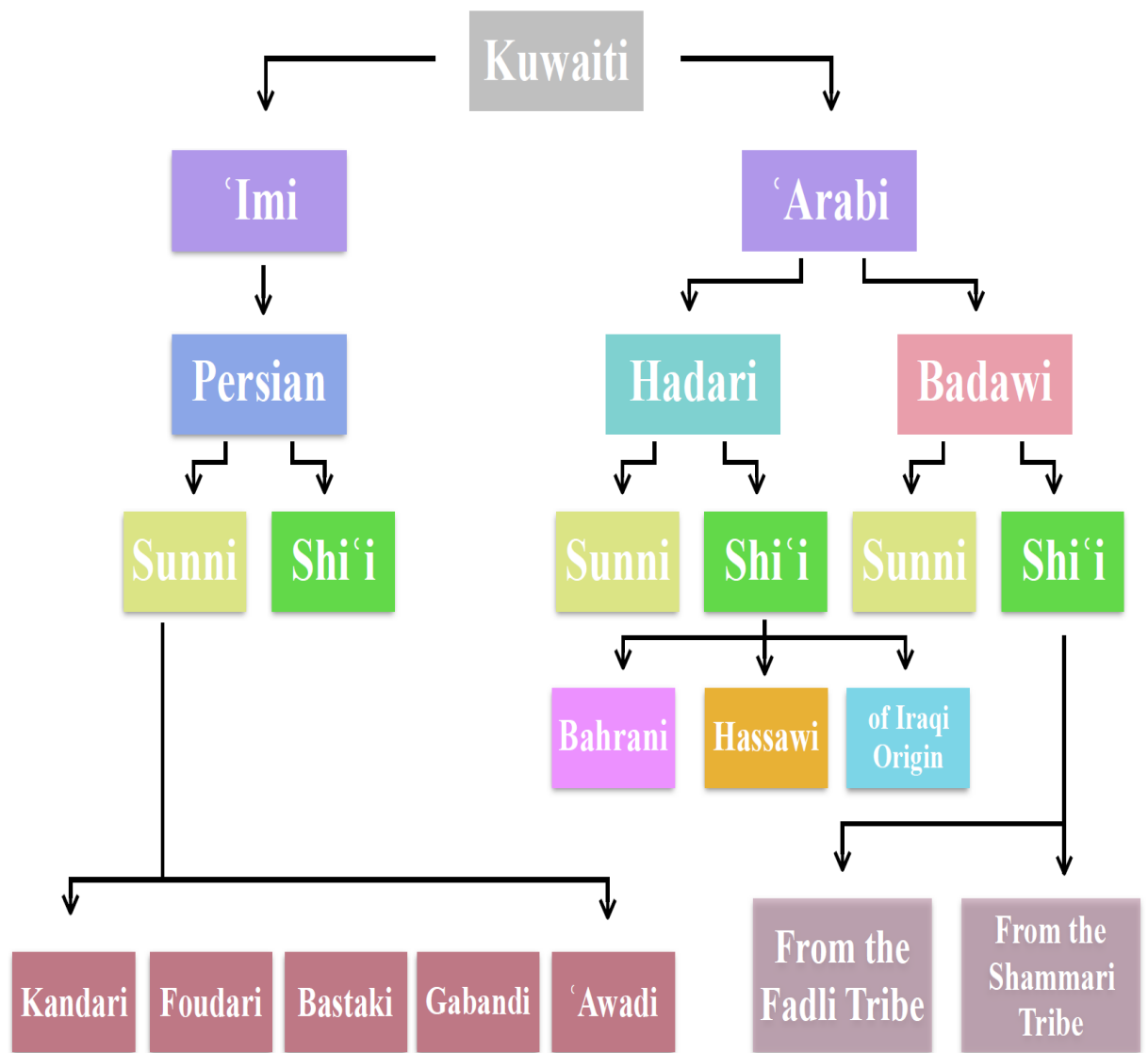


Figure 5 Perception of 'Ajam According to Some Kuwaiti Shi'a
 (This Concept was Taken from Batoul Hassan and Revised by the Author)

Jurisprudential Schools and Scholars of the Shi'a Communities Between the First Half of the 19th and First Half of the 20th Centuries

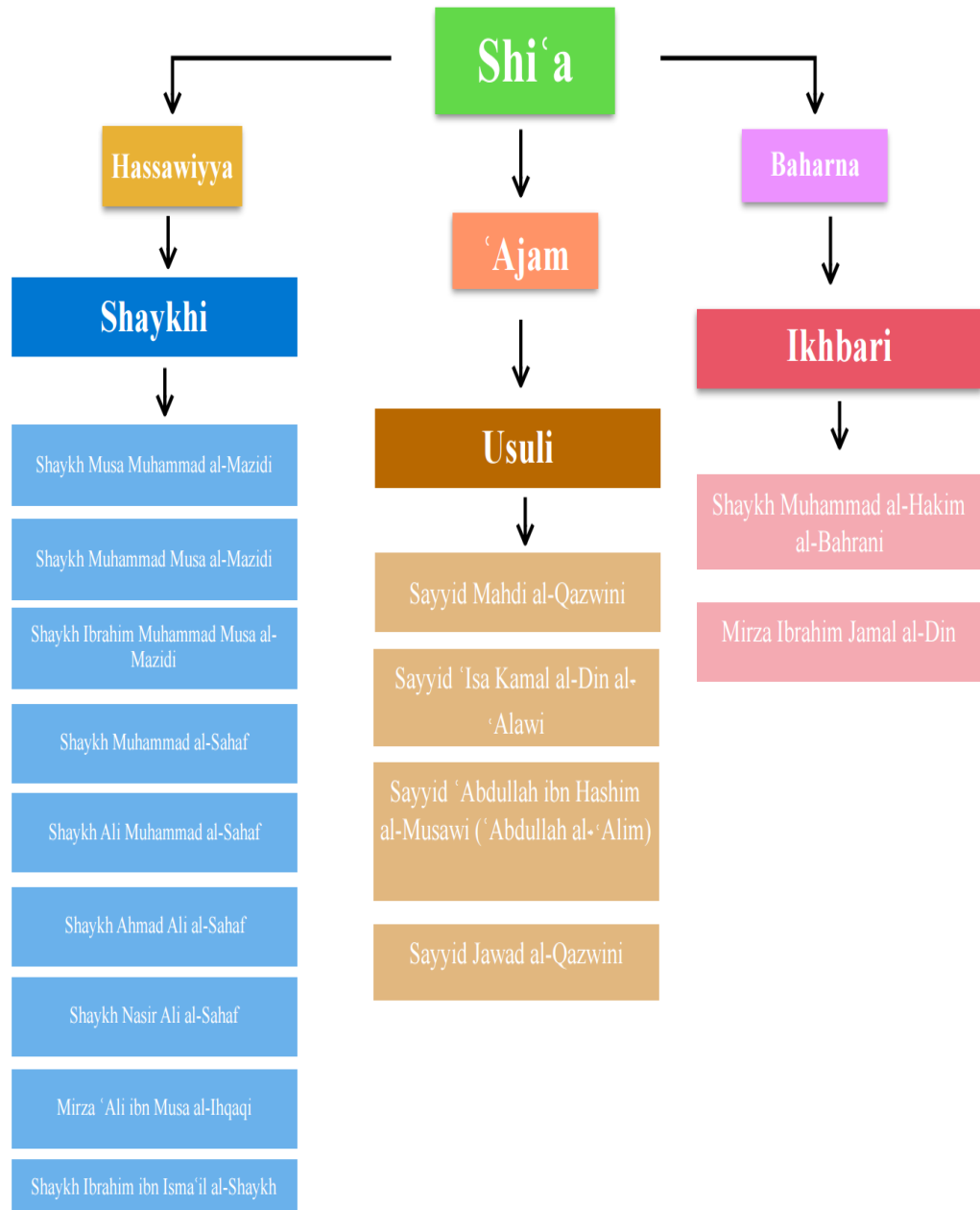


Figure 6 The Division of Shi'a Jurisprudential Schools in Kuwait and their Religious Representatives Between the First Half of the 19th and the First Half of the 20th Centuries

Social Division of the Shi'a Communities by Economic Status

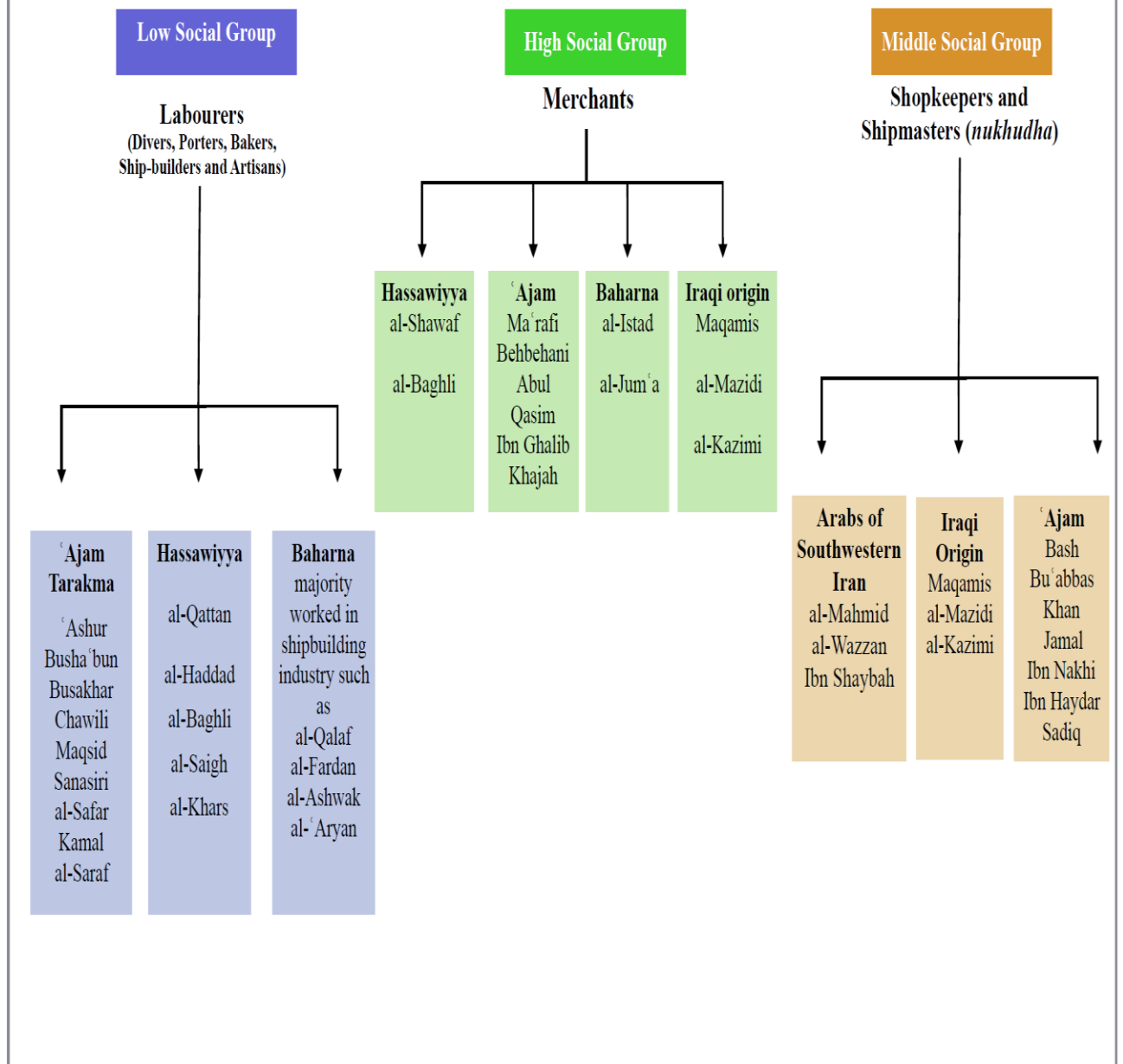


Figure 7 List of Some Shi'a Families Classified According to their Economic Positions in Kuwait between 1880 and 1938

Appendix 3

Tables

Table 1 List of Some Kuwaiti Shi'a Families who are Considered to be of *Lur* Ethnicity of Southwestern Iran

Hayat (lur)	Baruni
Shamshiri	al-Nukhitha
Fulukat	Qabazard
Shihab (lur)	Bahruh
Gurguh	Barun

Table 2 List of Kuwaiti 'Ajam and Arab Family Names Which Carry Surnames Identical to the Original Names of the Villages and Towns of Southwestern Iran they Migrated from.

Kuwaiti 'Ajam and Arab Family Surnames	Their Original Towns/Villages in Southwestern Iran
Ashkanani (Shi'a)	Ashkanan
'Awadi (Sunni)	Awaz
Bastaki (Sunni)	Bastak
Behbehani (Shi'a)	Behbahan
Bushehri (Shi'a)	Bushehr
Charagh / Charak (Shi'a)	Charagh / Charak
Dashti (Shi'a)	Dasht
Girashi (Shi'a)	Girash
Gabandi (Shi'a) (Sunni)	Gaband
Kankuni / Kanguni (Shi'a) (Sunni)	Kankun / Kangun
Khunji (Sunni)	Khunj
Lari (Shi'a)	Lar

Shushtari (Shi'a)	Shushter
Khashti (Shi'a) (Sunni)	Khasht
Sanasiri (Shi'a)	Sanasir
Bayrami (Shi'a)	Bayram
Jahrumi (Shi'a)	Jahrum
Shirazi (Shi'a)	Shiraz
Arati (Shi'a)	Arat
Muhri (Shi'a)	Muhr

Table 3 List of Shi'a Family Names whose Forefathers Migrated from Specific Towns and Villages of Southwestern Iran According to Oral History among the Shi'a Communities

Original place of migration	Name of families
Ashkanan	Ashknani, Akhbar, Bahman, Kalmad, Sharaf, al-Jazzaf, Taqi, Abul (Ashkananiyya), Khayrallah, Bakhsh, Gharib, 'Abdin (Ashkananiyya)
Girash	Jabur al-Habib, Zaynal, Mukhtar, Ja'far, Girashi, Asad, al-Naqi (Girashiyya)
Lar	Lari, al-Saffar (Lariyya), Nuwruzi, Junshah, Mishtaqi
Bairam	Mullah Jum'a, al-Sarraf, al-Kut, al-Bayrami
Jahrum	Mullah 'Abdin
Kazarun	al-Saffar (Kazaruniyya)
Dizful	Jamal (Dizfulliyya)
Hindyan	'Idan, al-Hindyan, Juhar Hayat, al-Hussayni, Rajab (Hindiyaniiyya)
South Khuzestan (Ka' b area)	al-Mahmid, al-Taylichi, al-Nassar, Bu al-Milh, al-Shatti, al-'Ali, Khaz'al, Sahar, Duhrab, 'Idi, Dihrab, al-Faras, al-Dabi al-Ka'bi
Tangistan	Ibn Haydar, Murad Rida, Kamal, 'Awad, Khudir

Table 4 List of Some Baharna Family Names in Kuwait whose Grandfathers Originally Migrated from Bahrain

al-Istad	al-Zaid	Humud ibn Hassan
al-Badir	al-Bazzaz	Ibn Khalaf
al-Qallaf	al-Jum'a (Baharna)	al-Silasil
al-Mibaryyg	Ibn Hassan	al-Ashwak
al-Jazzaf (Baharna)	Khalaf 'Abd al-Hussayn	Humud ibn Makki
Habib al-Musawi (Baharna)	Ibn Qambar	al-Bahrani
al-Khabbaz (Baharna)	al- Aswad	al-Sammak
al-Rashid	Bu 'layan	Kruf (Gruf)
al-Khaiat (Baharna)	al- 'Aradi	al-Sibagha
al-Zibari	al-'Amiri	al-Faraj
al-Qafas	Ibn Karam	al-Matruk
al-Mansur	al-Ni 'ma	al-Shama 'c
Bu 'ashur	al-Ghadban	al-'Alawi
al-Marzuq	al-Musawi al-Khabbaz	al-Marhun
al-Sabti	Al-Thuwani	Ibn Zaid
al-Naybari	al-Sayrafi (Baharna)	Ibn Hamid
Ibn Humud	Ibn Hussayn	Ibn Yusuf
Madan	al-'Abassi	

Table 5 List of Names of Some Hassawiyya Families whose Ancestors Originally Migrated from al-Hasa

al-Qattan	Buhamad	al-Sayafi
al-Saigh	al-Mijadi	al-Mahdi
al-Silaymi	al-Sayrafi (Hassawiyya)	al-Batharr
al-Hazim	al-Haddad	Bukhamsin
al-Faili	al- 'Attar	Khuraibt
al-'Awad	al-Muwail	al-Shawaf
al-Muhammad 'Ali	al-Arbash	al-Nasir
al-Mutwa '	al-Hirz	al-Khilayfi
al-Salih (Hassawiyya)	al-Tihu	al-Khars
al-Mazidi (Hassawiyya)	al-Ramadan	al-Musa
al-Baghli	al-Jadi	al-Hamad
al-Mihana	al-Shakhs	al-Mu' min (Hassawiyya)
al-'Amir	al-Qurani	al-Yassin
al-Mashmum	Bumijdad	al- Sahaf
al-Misri	al-Dirai '	al-Hawaj
al-Khawaja	al- 'Abd al-Salam	al-Baghshi
al-Ja 'far	al-Bahawiyd	

Table 6 List of Names of Some Well-Known *tarakma* Families whose Forefathers Migrated from Lamard in Southwestern Iran

Karam (<i>tarakma</i>)	Salim (<i>tarakma</i>)	Mirza
Shamsah (<i>tarakma</i>)	Sadiq (<i>tarakma</i>)	al-Turkumani
Abul (<i>tarakma</i>)	al-Salman (<i>tarakma</i>)	Qadanfari
Mahmid (<i>tarakma</i>)	Chawuli	Shukri
Rajab	‘Ashur	Sanasiri
Asiri	al-Sarraf (<i>tarakma</i>)	al-Ra’is
Kamal	Khajah	Bouland
Busakhar	Kabuli	Atash
al-‘Abdullah	Layri	Bumarium
Hayati	al-Hashimi	Gharib
Ibn Nakhi	Mundigar	al-‘Ali
Safar	Maqsid	al-Ansari
Jamali	Shawkat	Ibn Haydar
Lari	Jum’a (<i>tarakma</i>)	Baw Baqir
Mandani	‘Abd ‘Ali	Shawatanq
Mulla Ghulum	Zar Haji	Bahman (<i>tarakma</i>)
Kakuli	Malik (<i>tarakma</i>)	Hayat (<i>tarakma</i>)
al-Sigayir	Akbar	Sadiqi
Dickson	al-Musawi (<i>tarakma</i>)	Badi ‘i

Zar Akbar	Muhsini	Masyn
al-Khashawi	‘Abdin (<i>tarakma</i>)	Busafar
Sana	Furman	Hajiyya

Table 7 List of Famous Shi‘a Arab and ‘Ajam Merchants in Kuwait during the First Half of the 20th Century According to British Archives and Individual Archival Collections of Shi‘a Merchants

Abul ‘Abd al-Rahim	‘Abd al-Rida Ma ‘rafi	Faraj Muhammad Behbehani
‘Abd al-Karim Abul	Muhammad Hussayn Nasr Allah Ma ‘rafi	‘Abbas ‘Ali Maqamis
Ja ‘far ‘Abd al-Rahim (Abul)	‘Abd al-Hussayn ‘Abd al-Karim Ma ‘rafi	Musa Muhammad al-Mazidi
Ahmad ‘Abd al-Karim Abul	Yusuf Haydar Ma ‘rafi	‘Abd al-Nabi Haji Qasim
Sayyid Zahid Sayyid Ahmad	Hussayn Ma ‘rafi	‘Abd al-Hussayn ‘Ali Naqi
Muhammad ‘Abdullah al-Matruk	‘Abdullah ‘Abd al-Muhsin Ma ‘rafi	Muhammad Salih ‘Ali Naqi
‘Abdullah Muhmmad al-Matruk	Muhammad Rafi ‘	‘Abbas Abu al-Hassan Behbehani
Najaf ibn Ghalib	Muhammad Hussayn Behbehani	‘Abd al-Rasul Haji Faraj
Muhammad Taqi	Yusuf Muhammad Hussayn Behbehani (Yusuf Shireen)	Ahmad Salman al-Istad
‘Abd al-Hussayn Muhammad Taqi (Mataqi)	Murad Yusuf Behbehani	‘Abd al-Karim Haji Qasim
Muhammad ‘Ali Haydar Ma ‘rafi	Sayyid Isma ‘il Behbehani	‘Abd al-Hussayn al-Kazimi

Isma‘il Muhammad ‘Ali Haydar Ma‘rafi	‘Abd al-Rasul Behbehani	Muhammad Hussayn Qabazard
‘Abd al-Karim Ma‘rafi	Sayyid Hashim Behbehani	‘Abd al-Muhsin Ma‘rafi
‘Abbas Mirza Hussayn Khajah	‘Abdullah Abul	Murad Ghulam Rida Behbehani

Table 8 List of Shi‘a Families who do not Carry Behbehani as a Family Surname but are Actually Considered *behbehaniyya* (originally from Behbehan) among the Shi‘a Communities in Kuwait

al- Sarraf (Behbehani)	al-Usta	Abu al-Hassan
Ma‘rafi	‘Abdal	Sayyid Zahid
Kalrashid	Yali	Jamal (Behbehani)
Tabtaba‘i	Faraj (Behbehani)	Karam (Behbehani)
Machaki	Nasir (Behbehani)	Shamsah (Behbehani)
al-Sabagh (Behbehani)	Qasim	Ibn Ghalib (Mataqi)
Bu al-Banat	Ghulum Shah	Sayyid Isma‘il (Behbehani)
Bu ‘Abbass	Mustafawi	Muqaddas
Mashhadi	Bash	al- ‘Aryan
‘Akhund	‘Agha ‘Ali	Fairuz
‘Awad (Behbehani)		

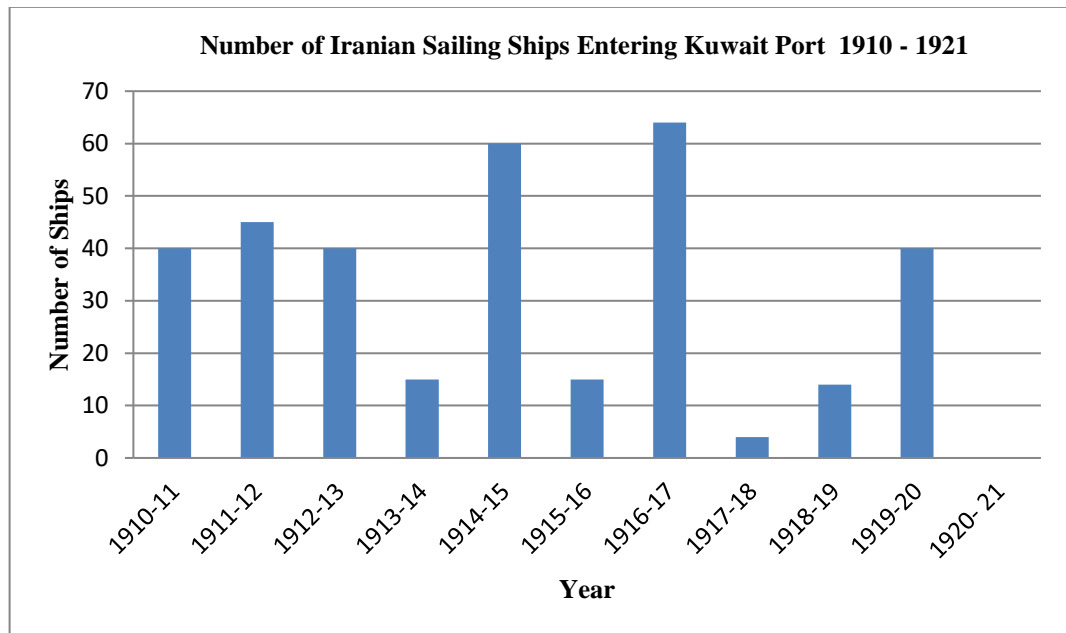


Figure 8 Number of Iranian Sailing Ships Entering Kuwait Port 1910-1921
(Source: *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*)

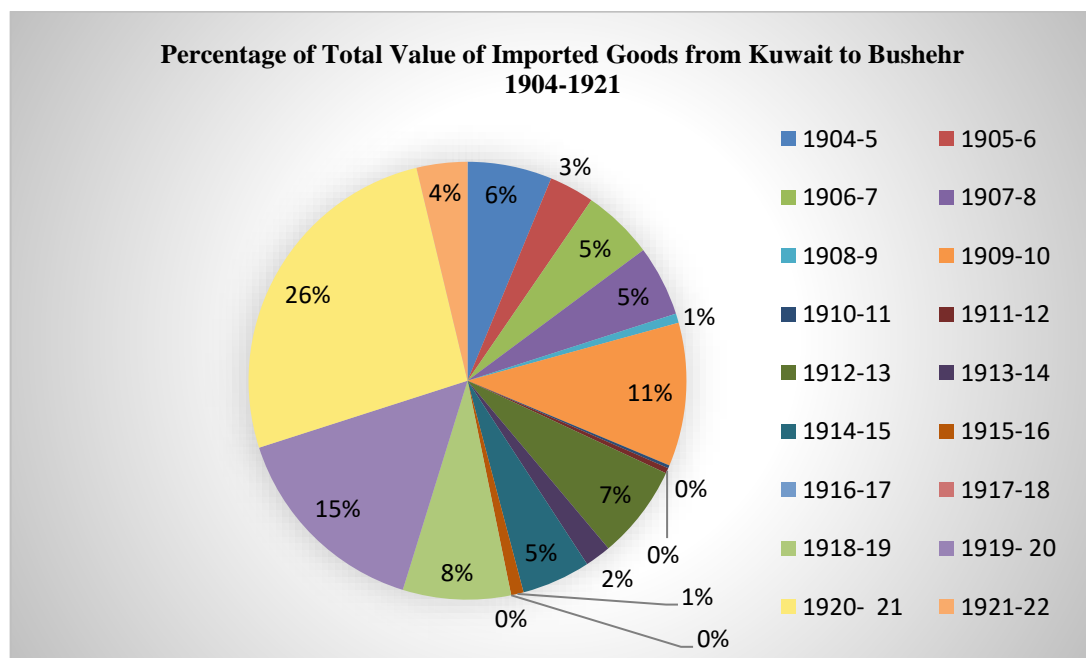


Figure 9 Percentage of Total Value of Imported Goods from Kuwait to Bushehr 1904-1921
(Source: *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*)

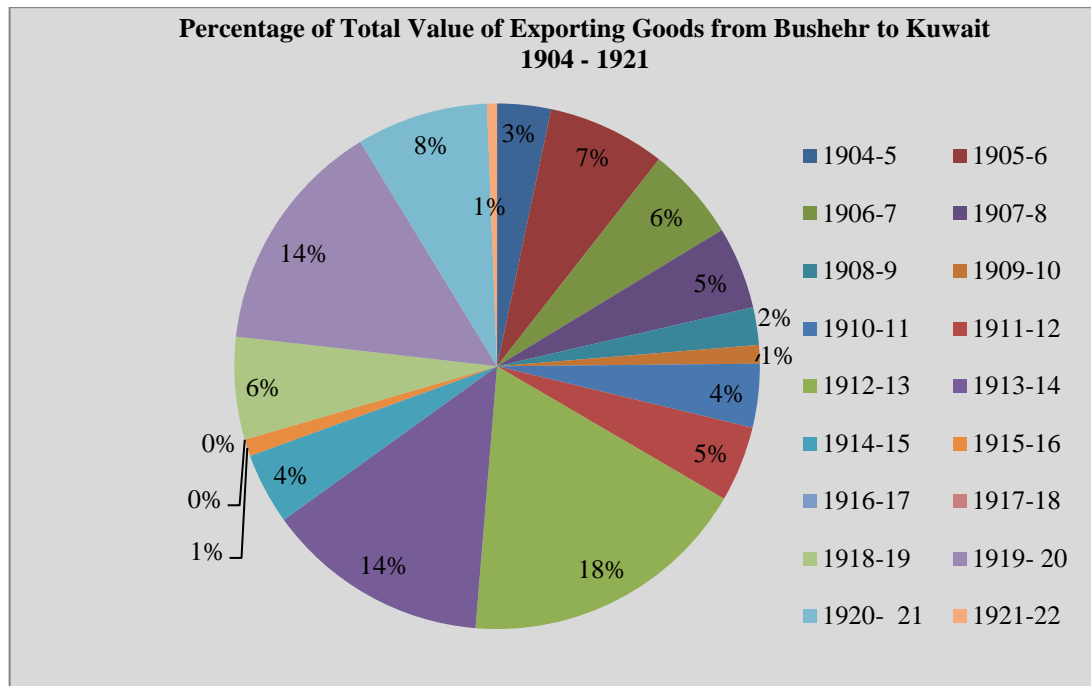
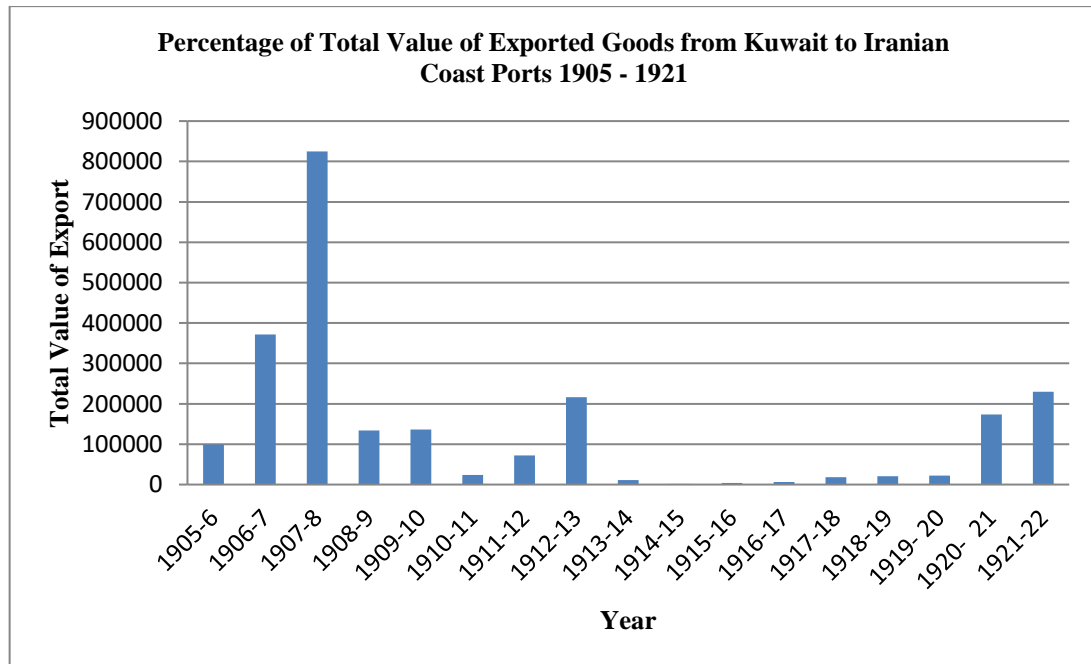


Figure 10 Percentage of Total Value of Exporting Goods from Bushehr to Kuwait 1904-1921
(Source: *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*)



**Figure 11 Percentage of Total Value of Export Goods from Kuwait to Iranian Coast
Ports 1905-1921**
(Source: *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*)

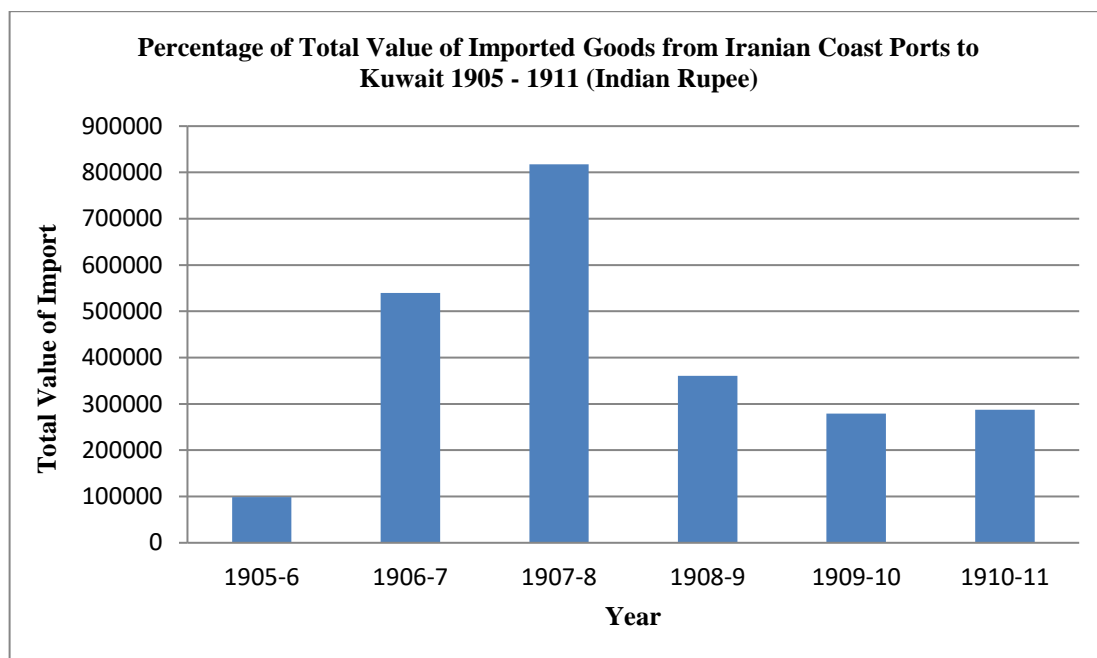


Figure 12 Percentage of Total Value of Imported Goods from Iranian Coast Ports to Kuwait 1905 -1911
(Source: *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*)

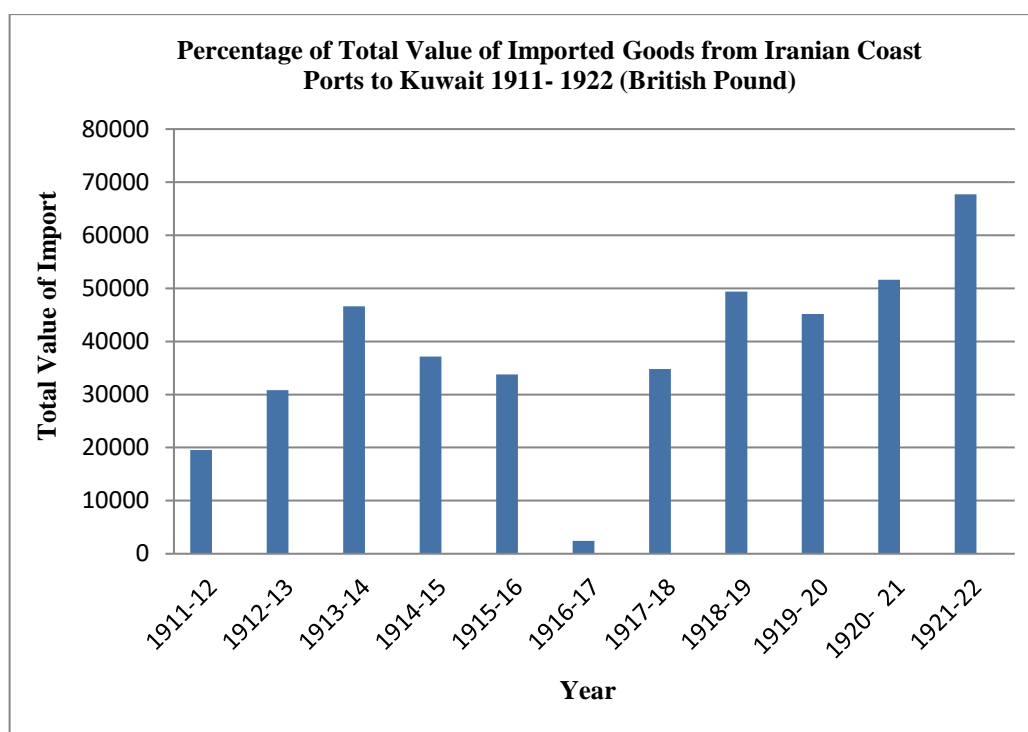


Figure 13 Percentage of Total Value of Imported Goods from Iranian Coast Ports to Kuwait 1911-1922
(Source: *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports*)

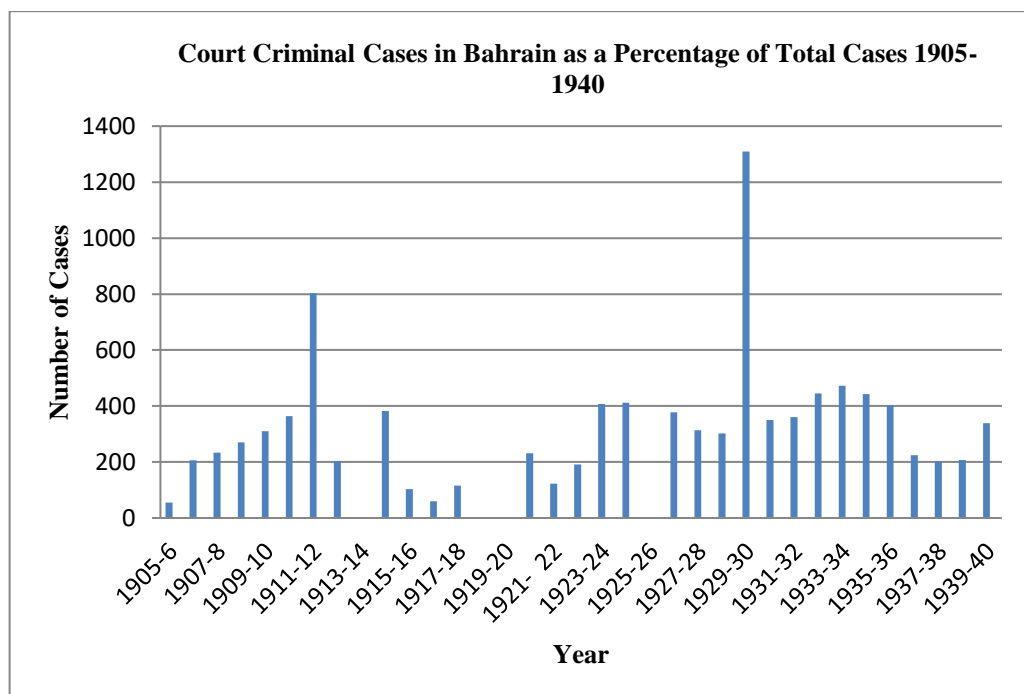


Figure 14 Court Criminal Cases in Bahrain as Percentage of Total Cases 1905-1940
 (Source: *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports*)

Private Local Kuwaiti Documents



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Figure 16 A Private Paper Showing the Presence of *masjid al-baharna* in (1287h/1870) the Date When the Document was Written.
(Source: al-Mahmid Archival Collection)

الحمد لله بحانه جاكلا ذكر ليدى وانا العبد الفقير
محمد ابن عبد الله بن عبد الله بن عبد الله



الباعث الخويلد هو انه قد باع ابنه ابراهيم ابو
مكي من حامد هذا الكتاب سليمان ابن عبد
الله القطان وهو ايضا قد اشترى منه ما
هو ملكه الى حين صدور هذا البيع منه
وهو بيته طحور وقاتا امير علي ابن
عبد المحسن ومثالا الطريق النافذ و
مشرقا بيت ابو قنبر وجنوبا بيت وقف
مسجد البحار نه بثمن قدره و عده
خمس وعشرين ريال ساهم لثمن بها
مه وكلاله المشتري المذكور بيد البايع
بع المذكور فموجب ما ذكر صار لبيت
المذكور مالا و ملكا سليمان المذكور
يتصرف فيه كيف يشاء ويختار حتى
لا يخفى جارا و حرا في بيع الثاني

Figure 17 A Sale Document Between Members of the Shi'a Communities in (1285h/1868) Shows the Presence of *masjid al-baharna* in Kuwait as a Shi'a *waqf* Prior to Mubarak's Reign (Source: Abul Archival Collection)

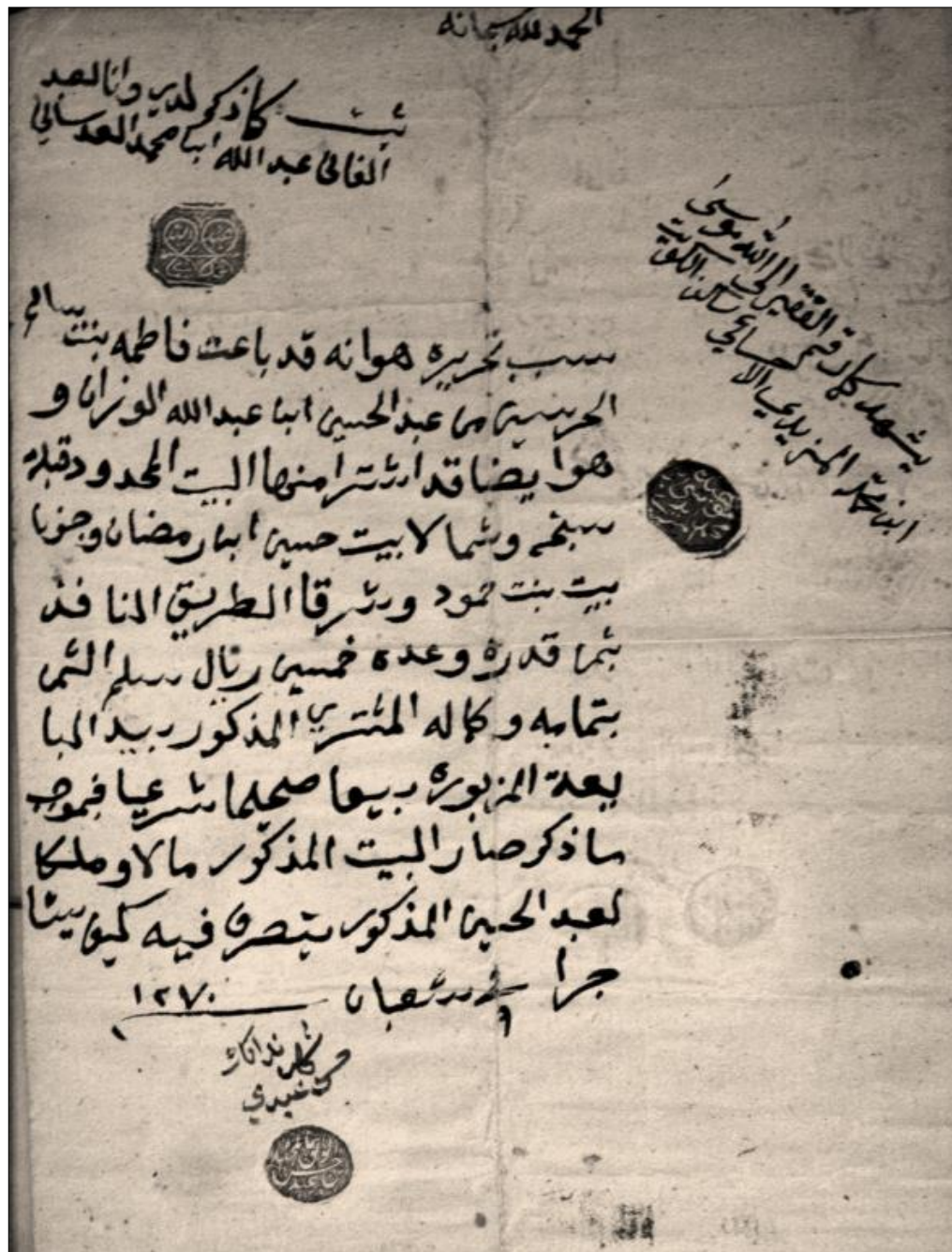


Figure 18 A Document of Sale Between 'Abd al-Hussayn al-Wazzan and Fatima Salim in (1270h/1854) Authenticated by Judge of Kuwait Muhammad 'Abdullah al-'Adsani and One of the Oldest Shi'a Cleric in Kuwait Shaykh Musa Muhammad al-Mazidi al-Ihsa'i (Source: Jamal Archival Collection)

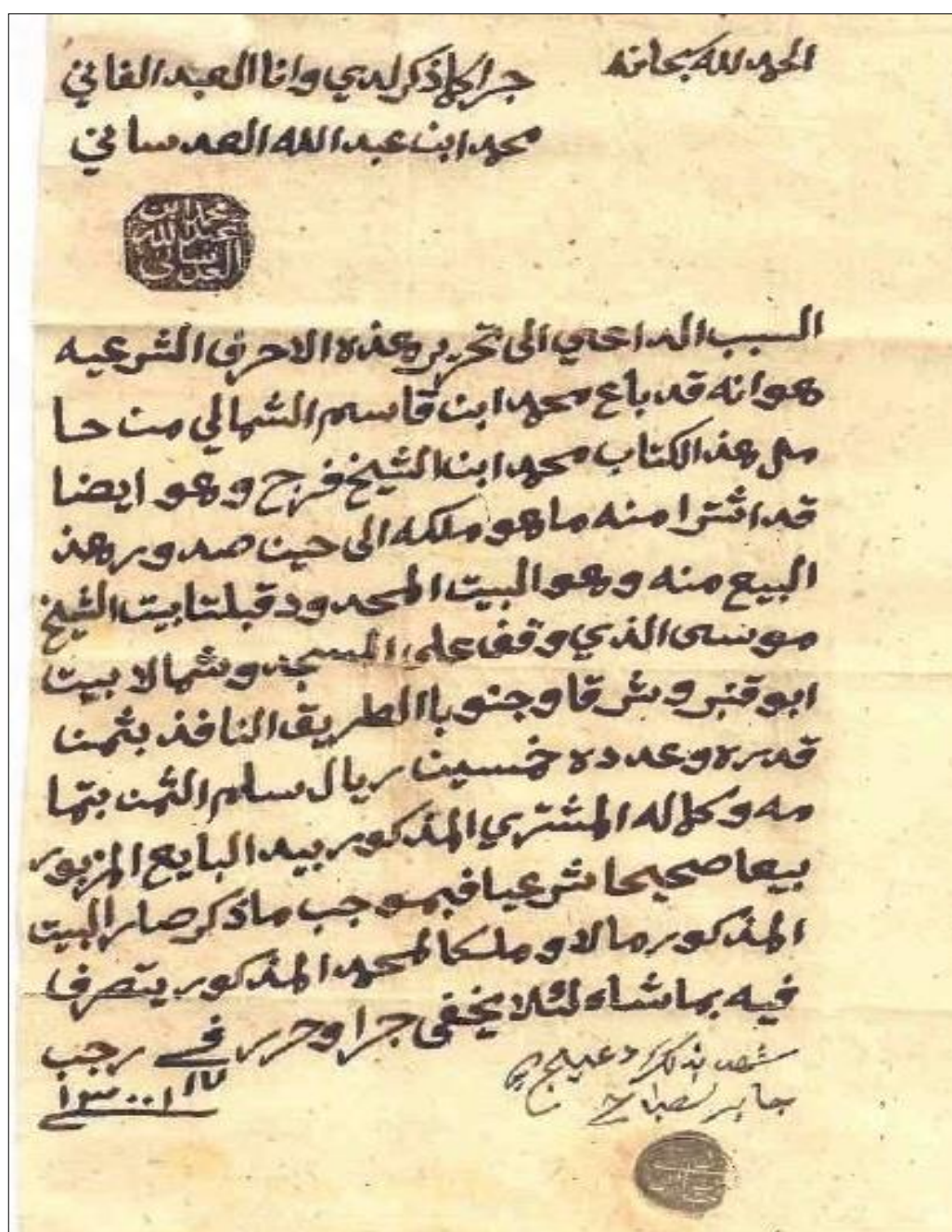


Figure 19 A Private Paper Between Members of the Shi'a Communities in (1301h/1884) Which Shows that masjid al-mazidi was a Shi'a waqf During that Time
 (Source: Abul Archival Collection)

الحمد لله كحافه

جاءكم ذكر لدي وانا العبد الفقير
في محله ابن عبد الله العبد ساني



السبب الداعي الى تحرير هذه الاخرى الشرعية
هو انه قد باع خليفه ابن المرحوم الشيخ عبد
الله ابن صباح بوعكالة عن سكينه ومرتبه بنان
ابو قنبر من حامل هذا الكتاب محمد ابن فري
و هو ايضا قد اشترا منه ما هو ملكه موكليه
الى حين صدور هذا البيع منه وهو البيت المحمد
ودقلا بيت عاي ابن مغانم وبيت وقف
مسجد الشيعة ونشالا الطريق النافذ وشرقا
الطريق النافذ وجنوبا بيت المشتري محمد ابن
فري بثمن قدره و عدد مائة ريال وسبعة
و ثمانين ريال وسلم الثمن جتامة وكل له ا
لمشتري المذكور بيد الوكيل البايع المرحوم
بغا صبحي حاشري عيا وصار البيت المذكور مال
وملكا للمحمد المذكور يتصرف فيه بما يشاء
تخفي جرا وحرر في شهر شوال سنة ١٣١١

Figure 20 A Private Sale Document Written in (1311h/1894) by the Judge of Kuwait Indicating the Presence of *masjid al-shi'a* (*masjid al-baharna*) in Kuwait Prior to Mubarak's Reign (Source: Abul Archival Collection)

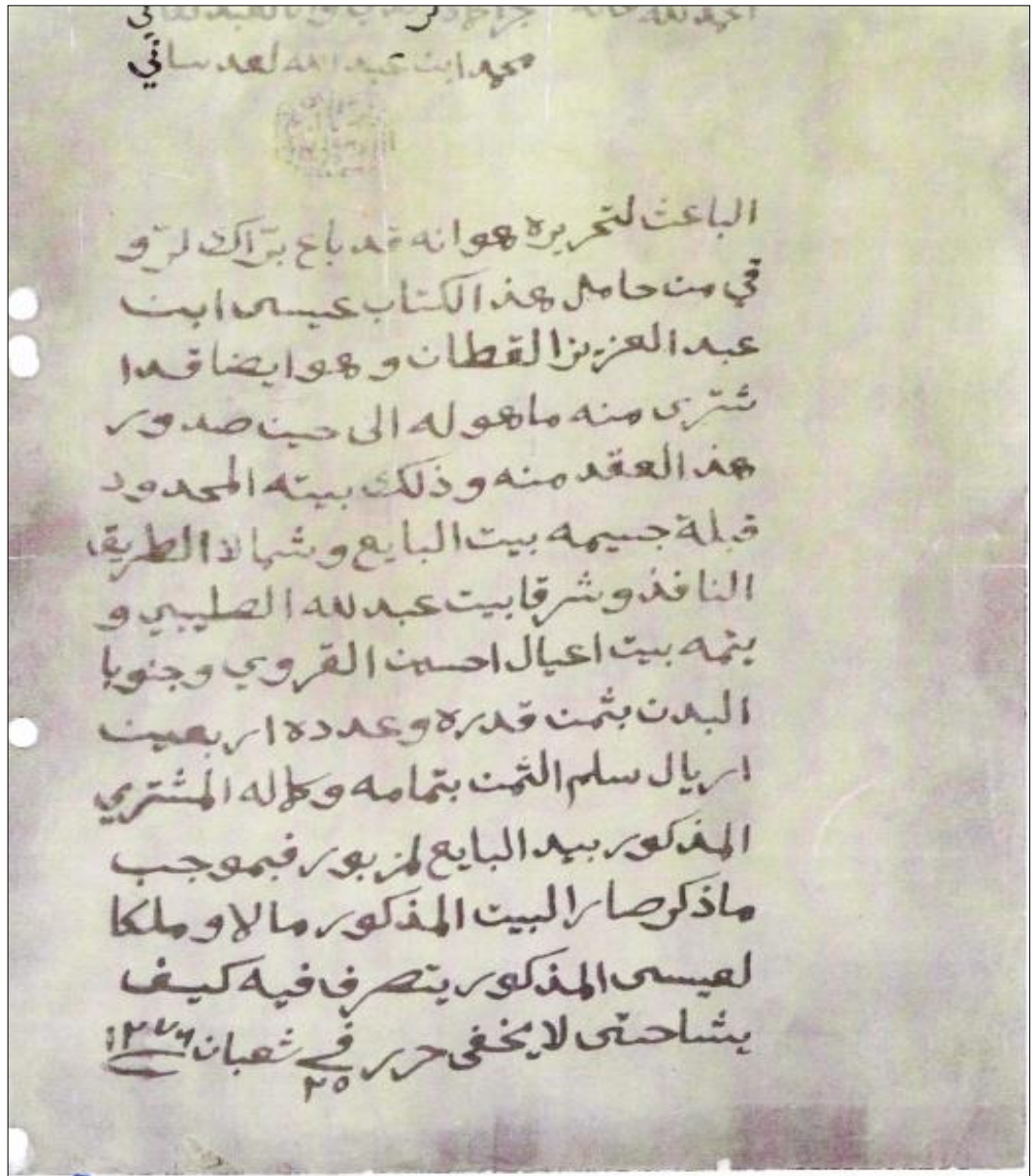


Figure 21 A Sale Document Between 'Abbas al-Qattan's Great Grandfather and Another Resident of Kuwait in (1276h/1860)

(Source: al-Qattan Archival Collection)

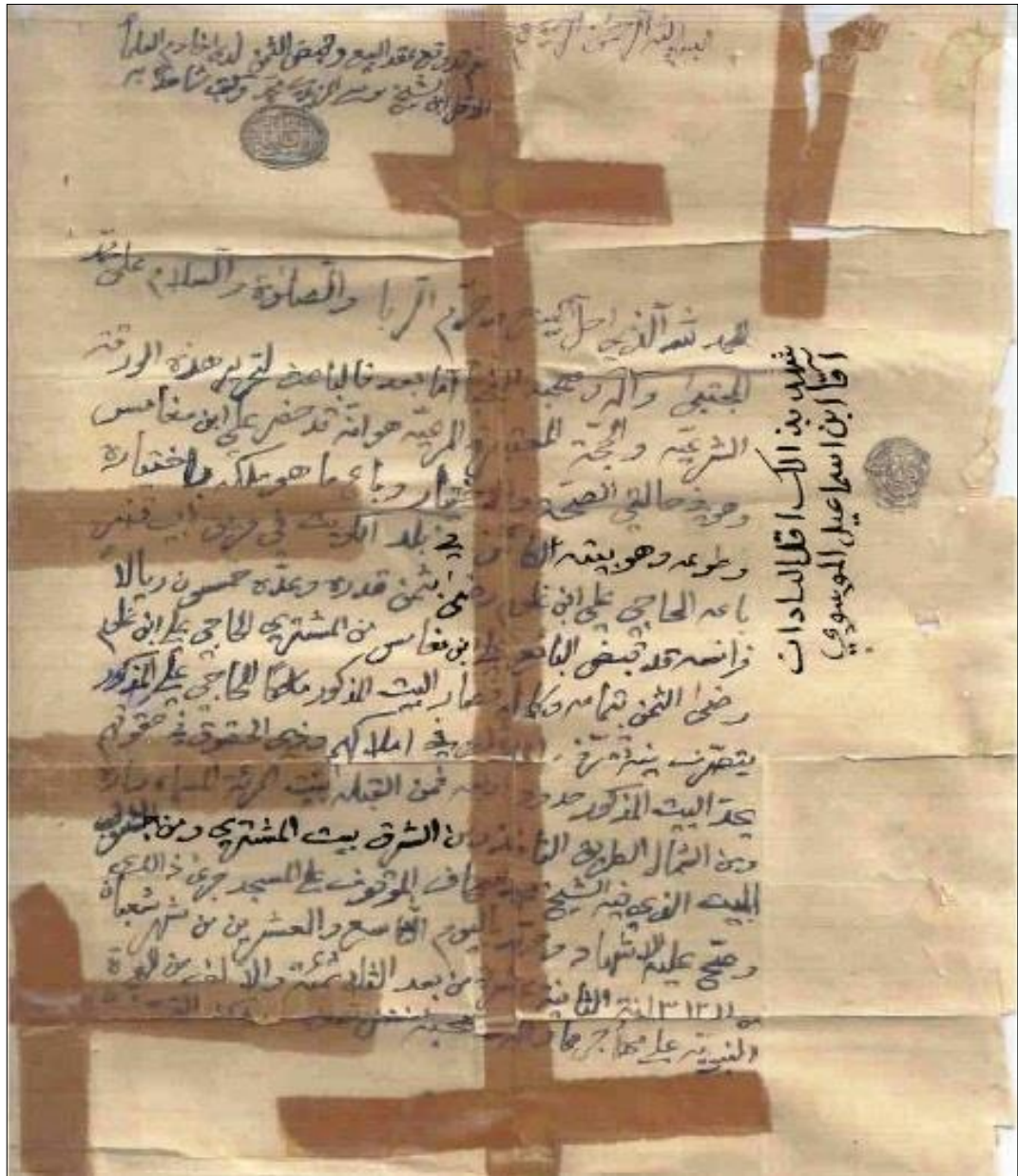


Figure 22 A Sale Document to (1313/1895) Between Members of the Shi'a Communities in Kuwait Authenticated by Shaykh Muhammad Musa al-Mazidi, Son of Shaykh Musa al-Mazidi. The Document Shows the Presence of the *masjid al-sahaf* Prior to Mubarak's Reign When Shaykh Muhammad Hussayn al-Sahaf was *imam* of the *masjid* (Source: Abul Archival Collection)



Figure 23 A Private Sale Document Authenticated on the Left by Members of the al-Sahaf Family (Shaykh 'Ali and Shaykh Ahmad) for a Member of the Hassawiyya Family Who Transferred the House that was Bought in (1318h/1900) to a Shi'a waqf to Hassawiyya. On the Right is a Private Letter of Testament (waṣīyya) Authenticated by Shaykh Muhammad al-Bahrani, Shaykh Musa al-Mazidi and his Brother Shaykh Hassan al-Mazidi in (1271h/1855)
(Source: al-Qattan and Jamal Archival Collections)

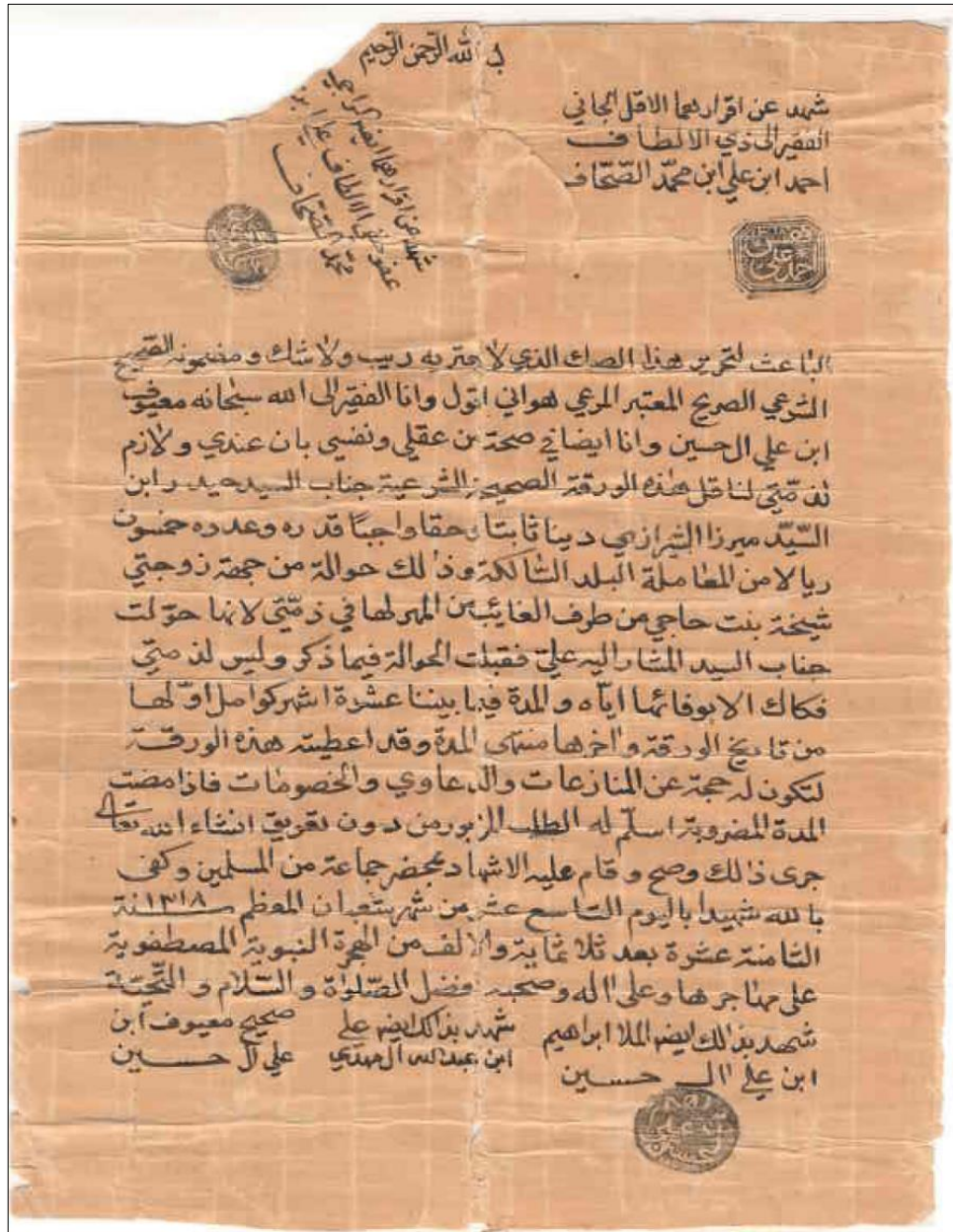


Figure 24 Testament Letter (*wasīyya*) of Member of Hassawiyya Family in Kuwait Authenticated by Shaykh 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sahaf and His Son Ahmad ibn Ali Muhammad al-Sahaf in (1318h/1900)

(Source: Bash Archival Collection)

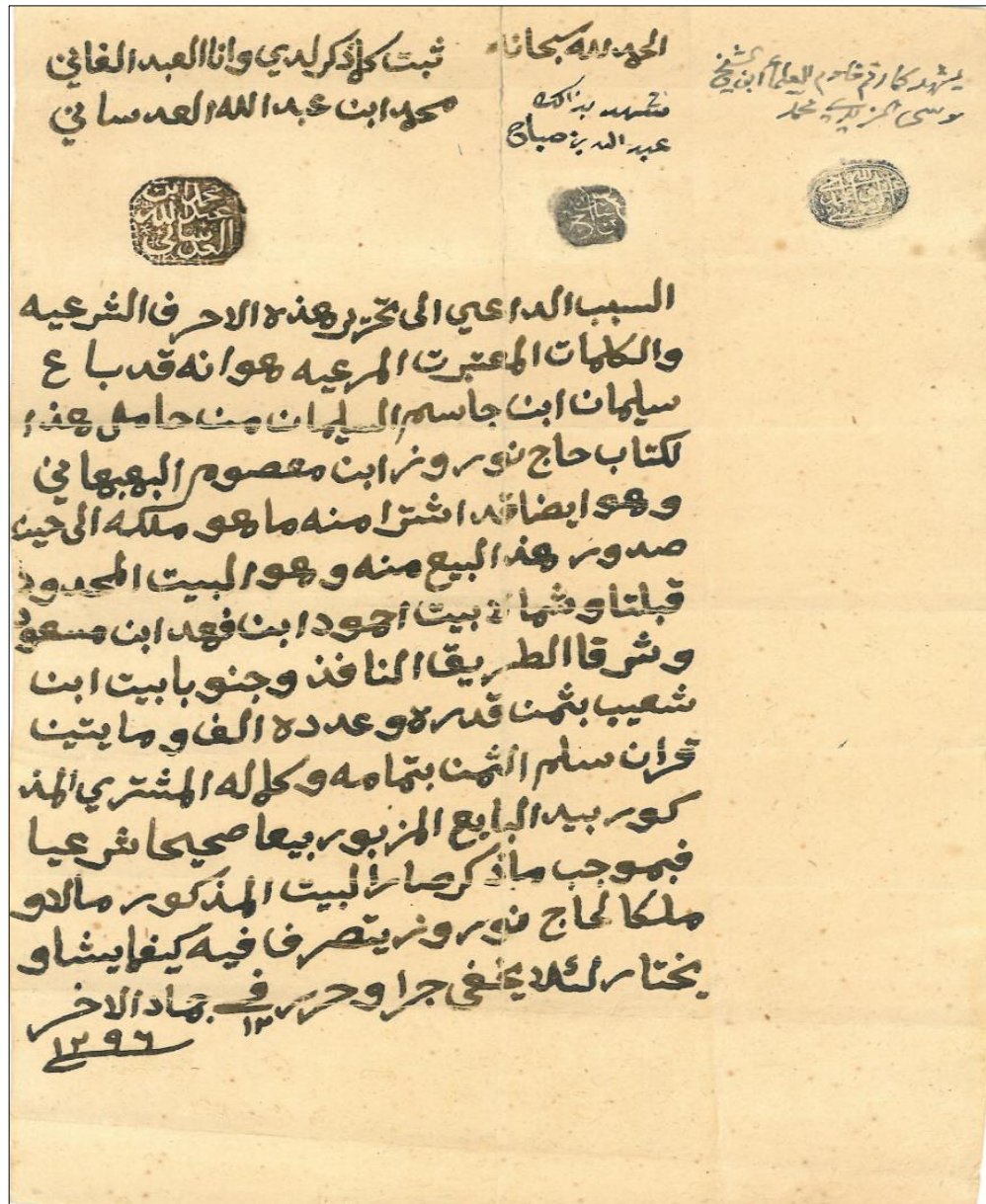


Figure 25 Private Sale Document Between Members of the 'Ajam Community (Behbehani and al-Sulayman) Authenticated by Shaykh Muhammad al-Mazidi in (1296h/1879) and Witnessed by Sheikh 'Abdullah ibn Subah al-Sabah, Ruler of Kuwait (1866-1892)
 (Source: al-Jum'a Archival Collection)

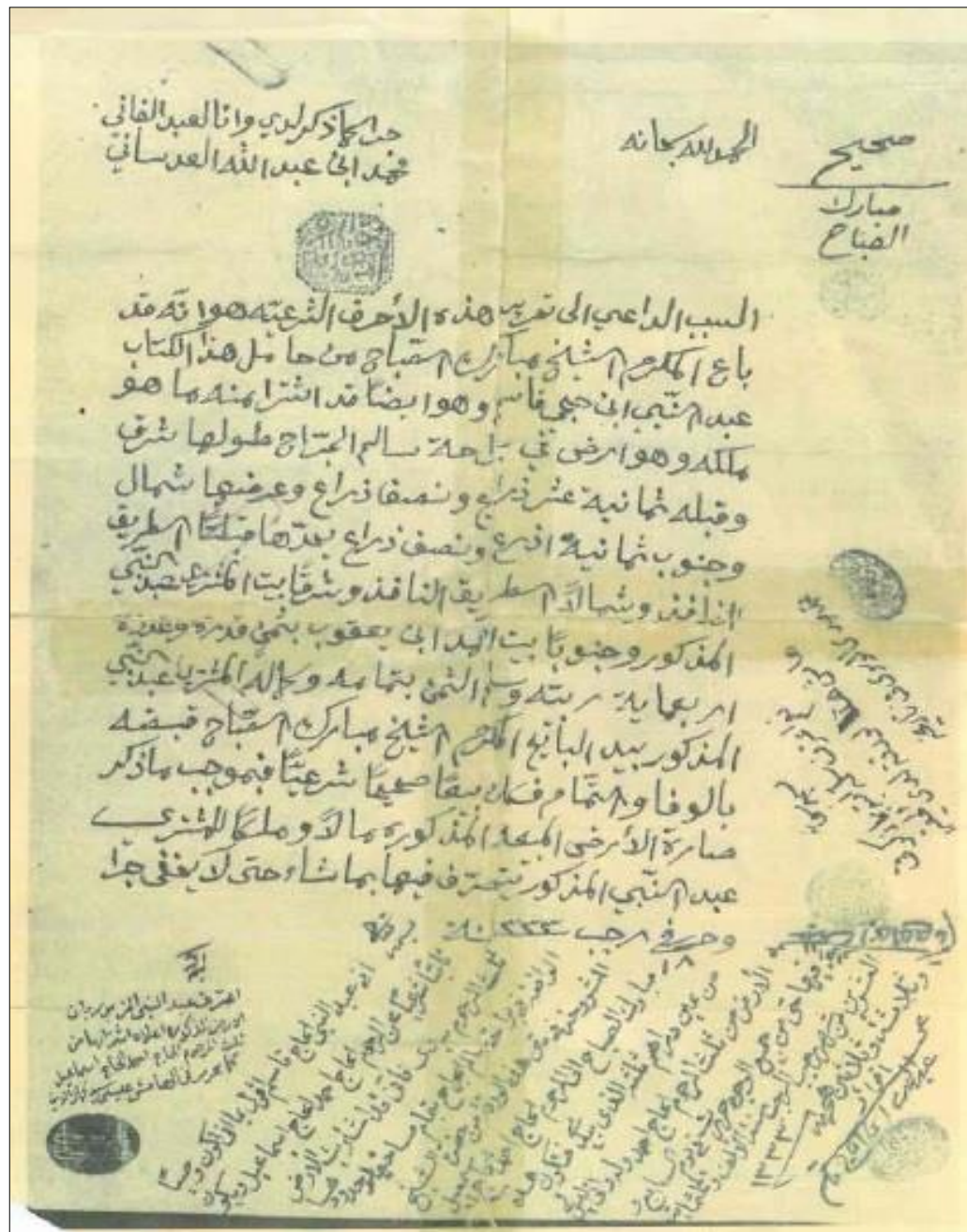


Figure 26 A Sales Document of Sheikh Mubarak's Land to Shi'a Merchant Haji 'Abd al-Nabi Haji Qasim in (1333h/1915) Authenticated by Judge of Kuwait, and Shi'a *uṣūlī* Clerics, Sayyid Mahdi and Sayyid 'Isa Kamal al-Din
(Source: Qasim Archival Collection)

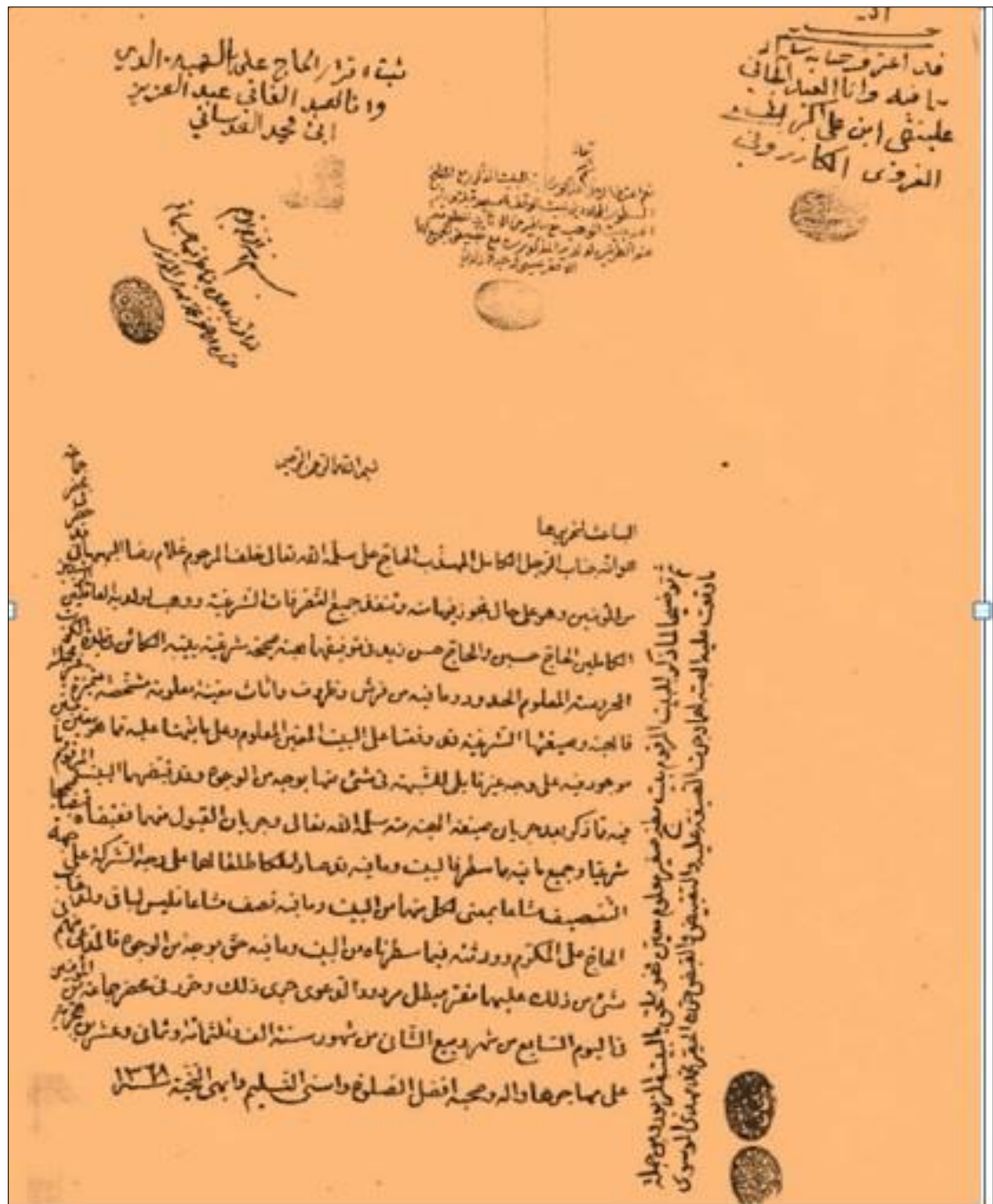


Figure 27 A Testament Letter (*waṣīya*) of One Member of the Shi'a Community Indicating His Agreement to Transfer His Property in Kuwait to His Sons in (1328h/1910) Authenticated Also by the Same Judge of Kuwait and Shi'a Clerics (Sayyid Mahdi and 'Isa Kamal al-Din)
(Source: Abul Archival Collection)

فكن لك زينة العابد بن
 ابن محمد اللوسي
 ثم قد وقع العقد المبارك الميمون الذي لا يقل
 خاتم العلماء وعبد الله ابن خاتم الموسوي

والفق
 الحمد لله الذي احل التزويج والتكاح وحرم الزنا
 والصلوة والسلام على محمد وآله سادات البطاح
 بعد فالباعث لثمر بر هذه الفبالة هو ان الرجل
 لا يرشد يمين ابن حاي ملا يوسف قد تزوج
 بالحرثة الرشيد البالغة الباكرة ناء ولبنت غلام
 حين بعد ما وقع بينهما التراضي والاتفاق بمهر
 وعدة مائة وثلثون ريالاً آفرانه وقد بذل لها
 من المهر المذكور ثمانين ريالاً معجلاً وبقي لها عليه
 خمسون ريالاً مؤجلاً عند البهر للطالب حري
 وحررت في يوم الثاني عشر من شهر ذي الحجة سنة
 من الهجرة النبوية

محطع ابن عذبة الخراساني
 والشيخ الحكيم لا يبرم

Figure 28 A Marriage Contract of a Member of the Shi'a Communities (particularly *tarakma* community) Authenticated by Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim in (1328h/1910)
 (Source: al-Salman Archival Collection)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلوة والسلام على خير خلقه ومظهر لطفه محمد وآله الطيبين
 الطاهرين أما بعد هو انه انا سيد عبد الله ابن الحاج السيد هاشم قد حضرت
 بحضور جماعة من المؤمنين منهم خير الحاج حاجي عبد الكريم والحاج يوسف والحاج حسين
 والحاج محمد حسين اولاد الحاج محمد رفيع رحمة الله عليه وحناب الحاج حاجي علي غلوم رضا
 والحاج عبد الحسين ابن الحاج الحاج علي وحضرة السيد زاهد ابن الحاج السيد احمد وجماعة
 من المؤمنين وقد صالحت بامر حضره حجة الاسلام والمسلمين جناب السيد محمد كاظم البرزنجي
 الصفي الطباطبائي قد ظله العالی وبموجب وصي الجماعة المذكورة والمؤمنين مع جناب سيد
 العلماء الحاج سيد محمد حفظه الله بان لا يخالفوا عمل من الامور الشرعية وذلك بشرط
 على الفرض بموجب رضو السيد محمد والحجاة المذكورة بان لا اعاشروا ولا ياتواهم ولا يجلسوا
 مجلس الجماعة العنصرية ما داموا يعتقدون هذه العقائد المذكورة من على انهم التسمية
 وقد التزموا الجماعة المذكورة على انفسهم والى ان يكرهوا ويجتنبوا والمؤمنون
 صلوات الله عليهم مثل ما يكرهون جناب الحاج سيد محمد ابيه الله والسلام
 على المؤمنين ومن اتبع الهدى ورحمهم الله وبركاته
 محمد الوكيل خادم الشريعة
 عبد الله ابن هاشم الموسوي

Figure 30 Commitment Letter of Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim Indicating His Promise to Follow Sayyid
 Mahdi and Shi'a *uṣuli* 'Ajam Merchants and Keep Away from the Hassawiyya Community
 (Source: Muhammad Kamal Archival Collection)

بيان المدعوين لليلة ولادة الملك جورج الخامس
 من مرقطان شمس يوم ١٧٤١ هـ الموافق ١٩٢٠
 ١٣٠٠ مطابق ٤ شوال ١٣٤٢ هـ

الشيخ طاهر المبارك
 الشيخ سالم المبارك
 ناصر المبارك
 حمد المبارك
 سلطان وسالم ابنا احمد
 احمد ولد جابر
 عبد الله ولد سالم
 الشيخ عجيل
 عبد العزيز بن زين
 حمد وعبد الرزاق آل خاله
 احمد وصالح المحيطي
 بشير بن روي
 حسين وشمسان اولدو وعي بن شيخ
 محمد خان
 صفوة وحماد ابنا عبد الله الصقر
 الشيخ موسى احمد الرزاق وحماد عبد البر
 عبد الله بن نصيف
 ديفق المنيس
 علي بن عمر
 محمد علي وعبد الكريم وديفق ابنا محمد رفيع
 عبد المحسن ولد محمد قتي واهلانه
 عبد الرزاق العدواني
 جابر الهلالي وحميد للذخيرة وشايع النصار
 محمد بن عبد العزيز الطرعي
 محمد بن يوسف الطرعي
 يوسف الطرعي
 ابراهيم الطرعي
 خالد بن سليمان البدر
 ناصر البدر

اهل البيت فحان
 ابراهيم بن نطف
 احمد الناصر
 يوسف بن ماثع

وفيه المبرم ما ورد عن
 محمد طيب بن جليل عنه
 ايضا ليصل الف خير

Figure 31. List of Names of Kuwaiti Sheikhs, Arab and 'Ajam Merchants of Kuwait, Who were Invited by W. Shakespear P.A. of Kuwait in (1330h/1912) to Celebrate the Birthday of King George V (Source: Muhammad Kamal Archival Collection)

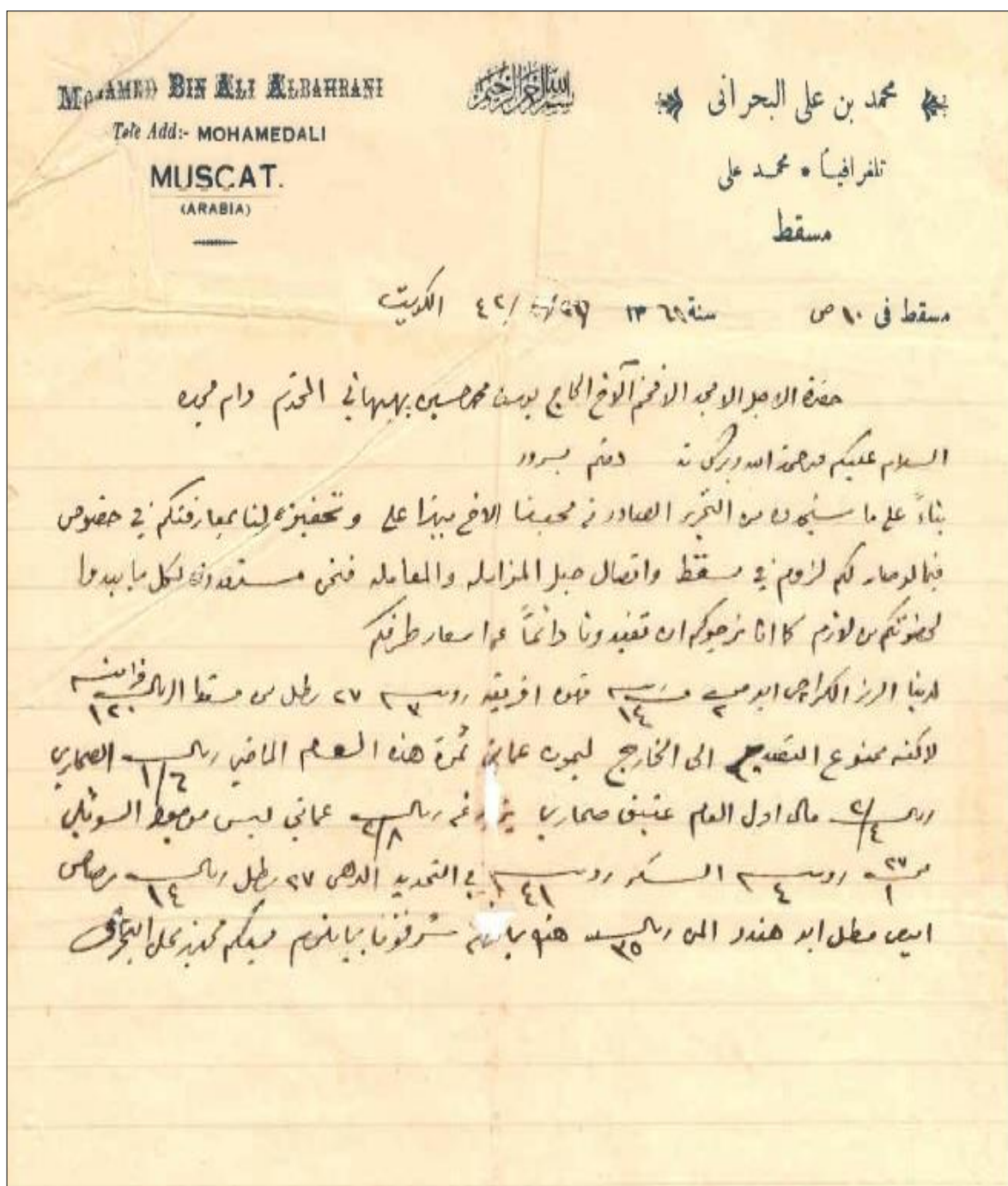


Figure 32 A Private Commercial Letter Written in (1360h/1942) Between Muhammad 'Ali al-Bahrani in Muscat and Yusuf Behbehani (*Shirin*) in Kuwait Indicating List of the Items and the Prices that al-Bahrani Provided to *Shirin*
(Source: 'Ali al-Ra'is Archival Collection)

جناب الاشيم الحاج نجف بن غالب المحترم سلام على
 بعد السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته بعد فلهذا ارسلنا لك كتاب عرفناك بهدري
 وفيه الكفاية حالاً وردنا كتابكم المورخ ٥ شوال وما ذكره صار معلوم عرفه انكم الآن
 متوقفين عن التحويل بواسطة الكتبة الذي نصيب على السلاح وتنتظر امرنا عن هذا الخصوص
 ونحن برغبة الدفع كتبنا الى حصة كرنل كوكس والى مجنبا ميخائيلس هاليوز انت
 انشاء الله تراجع المؤمن اليه ومروا يا امر امثل عرفة انك استدعية من الحاج علي
 خان ٥٠٠ نفق موزر راجس وانك بعد سفر الميل تواجه حصة مجنبا ميخائيلس
 تطلبون من الرخصة في تحويلها بدون رسم لا يلبس انشاء الله واجهته وامرك
 في تحويل ذلك بدون رسم المخزن وقد صمم ارسالها وانت انشاء الله تباشرو
 مستر التحويل حاجتنا ٢٠٠٠ نفق مع كل نفق ٤٠٠ نفق وزيادة نفق
 لاجل الاسلام القديمة عشر لك نفقة نصف موزر ونصف مارتين وسهم
 على بنجار نفقك عن العطل وزيادة المصاريف عرفة منجوبة ام اصبع
 جنسني طويل وقصير اخذنا من كل جنس مائتين عن ٤٠٠ ومع كل
 نفق ٤٠٠ نفق ونحن مثلاً عرفناك عرضنا الى حصة كرنل والى مجنبا
 ميخائيلس عن الكتبة الذي على الاتفاق وان رسم يفتي اذا سمعوا الكتبة
 والا نسمع امرهم وارادتهم هذا ما له ودرهم المائتين
 اخذ عشر الف نفق ام صبع من عتبة
 العشرة لاجل اعذنا منهم من قديم

مبارك
 الصباح

Figure 33 Official Letter from Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah to Haji Najaf ibn Ghalib in (1330h/1912)
 Asking Him to Purchase Different Types of Arms and Ammunition on His Behalf
 (Source: Ibn Ghalib Archival Collection)

E.D. Sassoon & Co
 Manchester Feb 22 1912
 Messrs E.D. Sassoon & Co
 Particulars of Fancy Patterns
 Haji Rajah bin Ghafar Esq.
 Seremban

Fan No	Description	Width	Length	Pcs per Case	Minimum per new design	Make-up	Price C.I.F	Approximate Shipment
5986	Red Shell Shawl	51	51				8 1/4 yards	Good
5987	"	"	"				8 1/4 "	"
5988	"	"	"				8 1/4 "	"
6086	Red Printing	29 1/2	60				12 1/2 yards	"
6087	White Ground Print	25	"				1 3/4 yards	"
6088	Persian Stipes	34	40				3 1/2 "	"
6089	American	31	48				15 1/2 yards	"
6090	Black Swirl	33	38				1 1/2 "	"
6091	Cambric Print	24	60				1 3/4 yards	"
6092	Claret Printing	29 1/2	"				12 1/2 yards	"
6093	Red Swirl	"	38				3 1/2 "	"
6095	Red Shell Shawl	51	51	520	any stock		13 1/4 yards	"
6096	Woven Shawl	41	41				2 1/2 "	"

١٥٠٠٠٠

[illegible]



Figure 36 Poetry of Mulla 'Abdin Written by Himself in (1324h/1906) on the Occasion of the Establishment of Hussayniyya Ma'rafi in 1906. (Photo Taken by the Author in the Hussayniyya Ma'rafi Where this Poetry Hanged on the Wall)
 (Source: Ma'rafi Archival Collection)

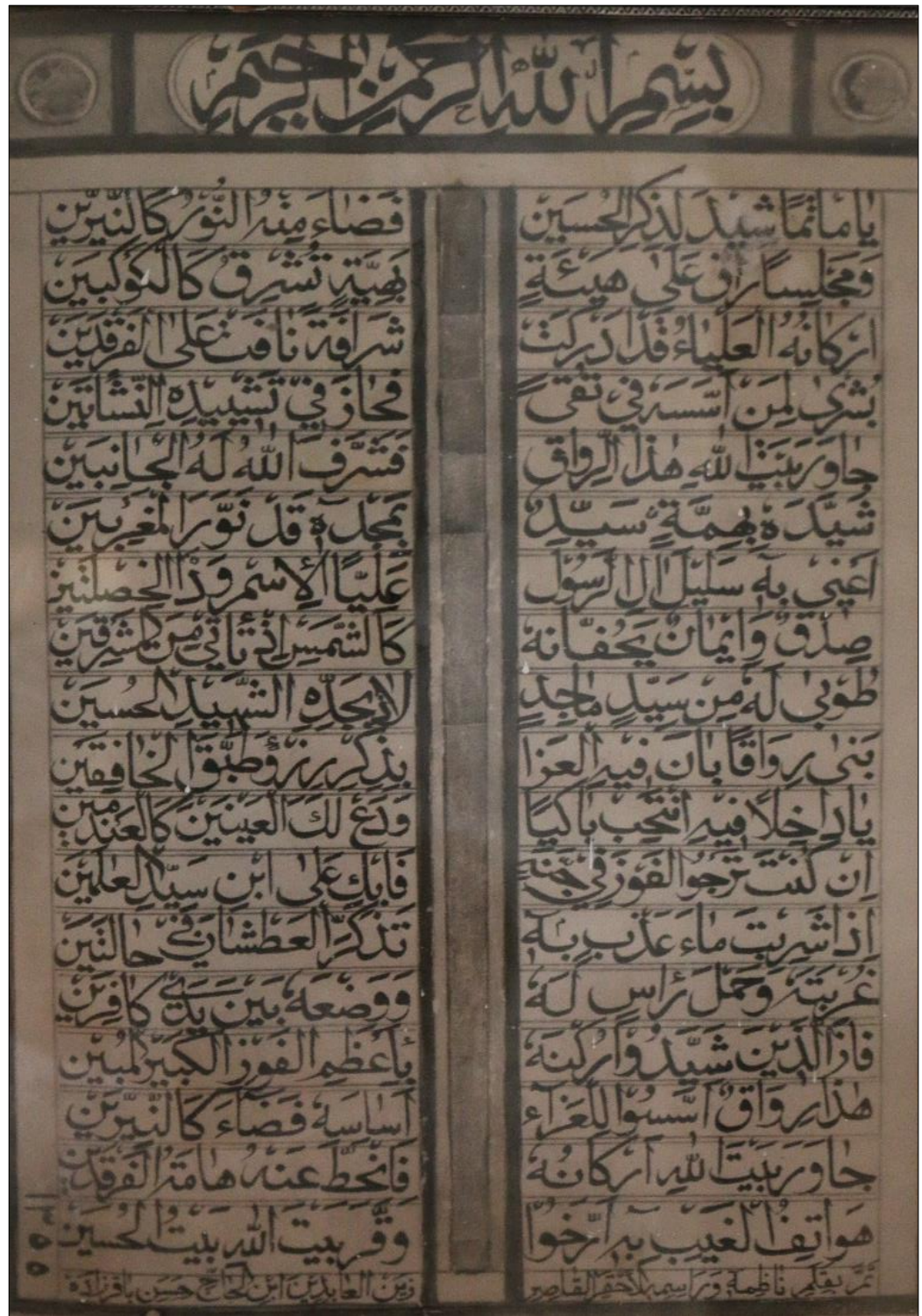


Figure 37 Poetry of Mulla 'Abdin Written by Himself in (1355h/1936) on the Occasion of the Establishment of *Hussayniyya Sayyid 'Ali al-Musawi* in 1936.
(Photo Taken by the Author in the *Hussayniyya Sayyid 'Ali* Where this Poetry Graved on the Wall
(Source al-Musawi Archival Collection)

Appendix 5

Photos



Figure 38 Kuwait Port During the First Half of the 20th Century Where Various Types of Ships Anchored in Different *nig' a*

(Source: Hassan Ashkanani Photos Archival Collection)



Figure 39 Aerial View of Kuwait Town During 1920s

(Source: Dickson Photograph Album 2, St Antony's College, Middle East Library, University of Oxford)



Figure 40 Photo of *al-jahra* Gate of Kuwait Wall in 1920
(Source: Zahra Dickson Photo Archive on Kuwait)

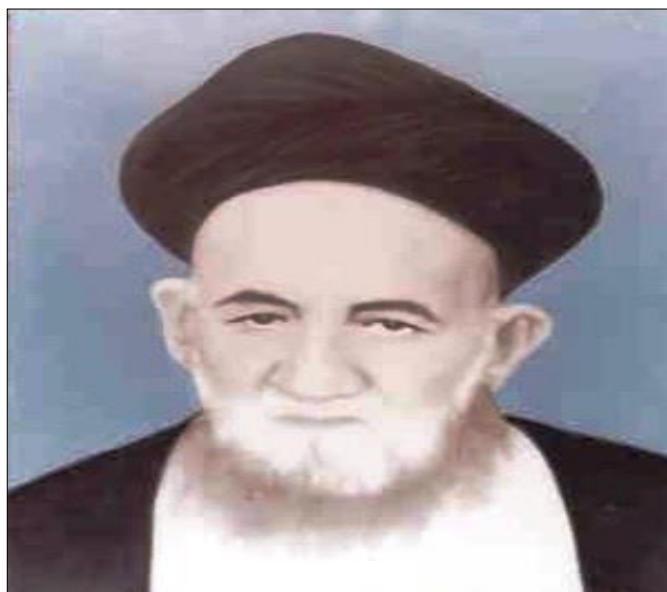


Figure 41 Photo of Sayyid 'Abdullah al-'Alim
(Source: al-Musawi Photos Archival Collection)



**Figure 42 Sayyid Jawad al-Qazwini Setting in the Middle Surrounded by Shi'a Sayyids and Shaykhs in
His House in Kuwait in the 1940s
(Source: al-Mazidi Photos Archival Collection)**

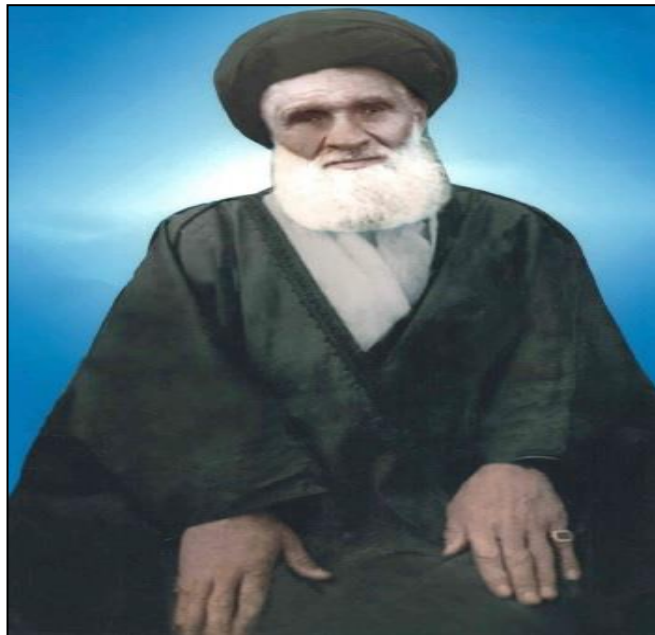


Figure 43 Photo of Sayyid Mahdi al-Qazwini
(Source, al-Qazwini Photo Archive)



Figure 44 Photo of Arab and Ajam Shi'a Merchants Taken in Shiraz in 1920s.
(Source: al-Matruk Photo Archival Collection)

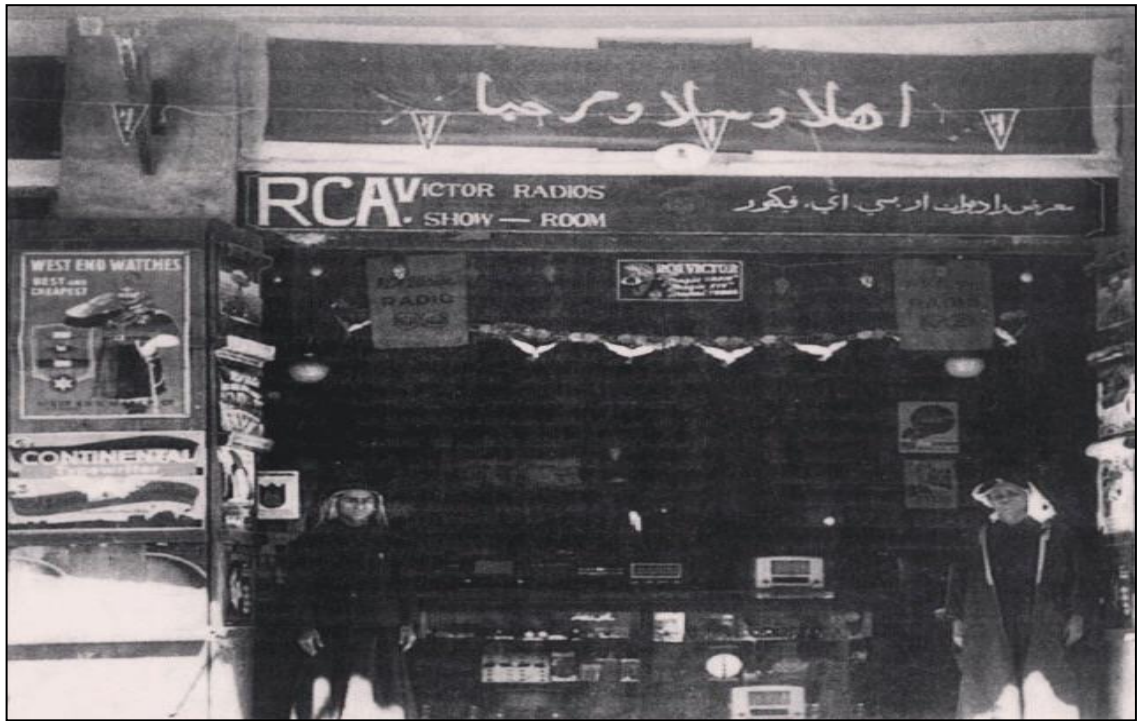


Figure 45 Yusuf Behbehnai (*Shirin*) Standing with His Son Murad before His Electronic Shop in the 1930s

(Source: Hassan Ashkanani Photo Archive, Taken from Ya'gub Behbehani)



Figure 46 Ahmad al-Jabir Standing on the Balcony of the al-Sif Palace (*qasir al-sif*) in 1940s
(Source: Source: Dickson Photograph Album 2, St Antony's College, Middle East Library, University of Oxford)



Figure 47 'Abd al-Karim Abul Sitting on the Right of Sheikh Ahmad al-Jabir in the 1940s
 (Source: Picture Post Magazine 13 July 1946, Vol, 32, No, 2: Taken from Fahad 'Abd al-Jalil Photo Collection)



Figure 48 Different Types of Kuwaiti Ships Anchored in Kuwait Port in the 1930s
 (Source: Zahra Dickson Photo Archival Collection on Kuwait)



**Figure 49 Haji Ahmad al-Istad (Second one on the Right) Sitting in Front of al-Nisf House in 1930s
(Source: Zahra Dickson Photo Archival Collection on Kuwait)**



**Figure 50 Photo of One Example of a Kuwaiti Ship Type that was Built Under the Supervision of Haji Ahmad al-Istad in the 1930s
(Source: Zahra Dickson Photo Archive on Kuwait)**



Figure 51 Photo of the Honourable Badge that Haji Ahmad al-Istad Obtained in 1946 from George VI
(Source: al-Istad Photo Collection)



Figure 52 Photo of Some Kuwaitis Loading off Water Cans from a Ship in 1946
(Source, Zahara Dickson Photo Archive on Kuwait)



Figure 53 Workers Near the Seashore in Kuwait Using Donkeys to Help them Deliver Items in the 1930s

(Source: Zahra Dickson Photo Archive on Kuwait)

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IOR R/15/1/548

IOR R/15/1/473

IOR R/15/1/476

IOR R/15/1/504

IOR R/15/1/588

IOR R/15/1/549

R/15/2 series

IOR R/15/2/4

IOR R/15/2/5

IOR R/15/2/6

IOR R/15/2/19

IOR R/15/2/23

IOR R/15/2/29

IOR R/15/2/31

IOR R/15/2/32

IOR R/15/2/36

IOR R/15/2/83

IOR R/15/2/86

IOR R/15/2/87

IOR R/15/2/88

IOR R/15/ 2/126

IOR R/15/2/176

IOR R/15/2/486

R/15/5 series

IOR R/15/5/2

IOR R/15/5/8

IOR R/15/5/18

IOR R/15/5/20

IOR R/15/5/23

IOR R/15/5/45

IOR R/15/5/46

IOR R/15/5/47

IOR R/15/5/48

IOR R/15/5/49
IOR R/15/5/51
IOR R/15/5/53
IOR R/15/5/55
IOR R/15/5/65
IOR R/15/5/77
IOR R/15/5/78
IOR R/15/5/87
IOR R/15/5/89
IOR R/15/5/93
IOR R/15/5/96
IOR R/15/5/126
IOR R/15/5/127
IOR R/15/5/128
IOR R/15/5/162
IOR R/15/5/170
IOR R/15/5/179
IOR R/15/5/196
IOR R/15/5/204
IOR R/15/5/205
IOR R/15/5/206
IOR R/15/5/221
IOR R/15/5/236
IOR R/15/5/308

IOR R/15/5/311

L/P&S 7 series

IOR L/P&S/7/198

IOR L/P&S/7/226

IOR L/P&S/7/237

IOR L/P&S/7/238

IOR L/P&S/7/239

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Document, no. 576/2

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Accounting book of the Abul family.

Accounting book of Najaf ibn Ghalib family.

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Private Papers of the Jamal al-Din family.

Private papers of the al-Jum'a family.

Private papers of the ibn Ghalib family.

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Private papers of the al-Istad family.

Private papers of the Khajah family.

Private papers of the al-Mahmid family.

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Private papers of the Qasim family.

Private papers of the al-Qattan family.

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Private papers of the al-Sidarawi family.

Photo Collections of Dickson family.

Photo Collections of the al-Istad family.

Photo Collections of Hassan Ashkanani.

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