BUILDING IDENTITIES

Transnational exchange and the authorship of modern Gulf heritage

Michael Kubo

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Among the discursive dichotomies that have governed interpretations of the architecture of Gulf cities over the last half century – constructs like tradition versus modernity, universality versus identity, and image versus ‘authenticity’ – the binary of ‘local’ and ‘foreign’ has served as a uniquely persistent trope. This has been especially true for the built legacy of urban modernization programmes after the 1960s, which often brought international firms based in the USA and Europe into the building economies of the Gulf for the first time. These exchanges reached their peak during the boom in crude oil prices from 1973 to 1983 as a direct corollary to the economic constraints these firms suffered in their domestic practices ‘at home’, a period in which US-based firms in particular were heavily involved in pursuing and developing commissions throughout the region. Paradoxically, post-colonial critiques of such work as alien (at best) or Orientalizing (at worst) insertions into the local context have often served to preclude a more detailed account of the sustained, reciprocal influence between local consultants and engineers, team-based foreign design practices, and the transforming economies of the Gulf states.

Despite the complex history of these large-scale commissions, which were typically produced through transnational networks of designers, clients, builders, and laborers, the local-foreign trope assumes that the design signatures of such buildings can be definitively assigned, based on the primary figures, or authors, whose names are (or can be) attached to their creation. This binary further assumes that such presumptive authors can themselves be easily labelled as ‘local’ or ‘foreign’, via classifications that are often based on simplistic assumptions of national or cultural identity alone, regardless of where a building’s protagonists were trained; with whom or for whom they practiced; where, within which discourses; and through which networks of actors, among other complicating factors of history, geography, and relation. In this sense, a central stake in recent discussions of modern architectural heritage in Gulf cities has been the difficult question of authorship that surrounds many significant buildings of the 1960s and 1970s.

Inevitably, these assumptions can lead to simplifications and omissions of cultural history that complicate and obscure, rather than enable, more nuanced discussions of heritage in relation to modern architecture in the Gulf. As Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi and Roberto Fabbri note in their call to assess the modern heritage of Gulf cities, many major landmarks of urban and social transformation in the region over the last half century have been “blamed for allegedly superimposing foreign narratives to local customs”, with the result that “people and institutions have demonstrated disaffection and a low sense of belonging to the 1960s–1970s city”.¹ In these arguments, the presumed foreignness of such works is tied to a dismissal of their value as deviations

from truer or more 'native' cultural expressions, with which a city's inhabitants might have a more natural affinity, and which would thus be regarded as exemplars of modern heritage more worthy of preservation. In particular, the theoretical framework of 'critical regionalism' – in which a supposedly universalizing and uncritical modernism is seen to demand forms of resistance only possible from local architects rooted in more 'authentic' regional cultures – has often served to obscure a more detailed account of the reciprocal influences between locally based consultants and engineers, international design firms, and the networks of material, labour, and expertise through which much of the post-war urbanization of Gulf cities took shape.² In what follows, I argue that this failure to accurately historicize such transnational practices in the Gulf has erased precisely those questions of exchange that would allow a fuller discussion of heritage around built works of this period and expand what we can mean by 'local' cultural significance.

Local constructs

To gain a sense of the performance of the local-foreign binary within discussions of authorship in Gulf modernism, we might look to a recent article on urban heritage by Yasser Elsheshtawy, "We Need to Talk about the Modernism Fetish in the Gulf", that exemplifies the operation of this mode of argument.³ As one of the most prominent voices on urban heritage in Gulf cities, in this article Elsheshtawy frames his opposition to the indiscriminate "fetishization" of modern architecture from the second half of the twentieth century, implicitly led by a foreign "modernist brigade" that values these buildings for their aesthetics only rather than for their deeper connections to place or local identity.⁴ His primary example of this phenomenon is the Abu Dhabi Central Bus Terminal (1989), designed by Bulgarproject, a Bulgarian state design and construction firm that was responsible for hundreds of projects throughout the Middle East and Africa during the Cold War. ▲ Elsheshtawy claims that, in the eyes of outside observers, the bus terminal "has acquired ... a kind of respect and reverence usually associated with Gothic cathedrals", whereas in his view the building lacks a meaningful connection to the life of the city.

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Elsheshtawy's narrative is pervaded by his account of his participation in a conference in New York on Abu Dhabi's modern architecture and – in his retelling – his heroic stand in the face of an imported or alien modernist dogma from outside, or what he describes as "an angry mob" of preservationists that would seek to keep these buildings at any cost. He takes notable care to highlight the "gasp from the audience" that followed his sanctioning of the demolition of the bus terminal, or to claim that only a single person, "in a face-to-face conversation after the event ... praised [his] bravery for refusing to turn the city into some sort of fossilised version of itself".⁵

fig.1 The Architects Collaborative, Cultural Foundation – Abu Dhabi National Library and Cultural Centre, 1974–1979, and Qasr Al-Hosn at upper left (Source: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, courtesy of the architect, 1985. Reuse not permitted).

What is crucial in Elsheshtawy's account is the foreignness of the building's Bulgarian architects and, by implication, the foreignness of both the building and those who would presume to judge its architectural value in the present. In contrast, he advocates for paying more attention to more prosaic, less iconic structures, such as Abu Dhabi's gas stations, for their more meaningful connections to the life of the city rather than as exemplars of stylistic categories imported, in his view, from outside. Such buildings, he claims, belong more authentically to "an Emirati Vernacular ... rather than a top down version of an expatriate architect's fantasy about what constitutes Emirati identity".⁶

As a counter to the ways in which the binary judgment of local and foreign plays into this sort of narrative, we can compare the rather different appearance within Elsheshtawy's argument of another building: the Abu Dhabi National Library and Cultural Centre, or the Cultural Foundation, ● as it is known today. Located on a culturally charged site directly adjacent to Qasr Al-Hosn, the Cultural Foundation was recently restored and reopened to the public in 2018 as a beloved cultural monument but only after surviving years of neglect, closure, and the threat of demolition to make way for the redevelopment of the site.

The Cultural Foundation was designed between 1974 and 1981 by The Architects Collaborative (TAC), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with branch offices in Kuwait and Rome. TAC

fig.1

was a key actor in modernization and nation-building efforts in Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia among other Gulf states after the late 1950s. Yet despite the ostensible foreignness of its architects and unlike the bus terminal whose demolition he favours, Elsheshtawy fully supports the preservation of the Cultural Foundation, which he describes as a modern structure that was “not simply an object to be acquired ... [but rather] performed a significant role in the life of the city”.⁷

A subtle construction of authorship underlies these differing assessments. While the bus terminal is dismissed as an alien insertion, designed by Bulgarian expats, the Cultural Foundation, Elsheshtawy tells us, was designed not by TAC, a US firm, but rather by a ‘local’ to the Gulf, even if not directly to the Emirates: namely, in his words, by “Iraqi architect Hisham Ashkouri, who was a part of TAC”. In other words, in this argument the Cultural Foundation can lay a plausible claim to the city’s modern heritage in part because it was seen to be authored by a ‘local’ architect, thus sanctioning its modernism and thereby making the building available to be counted as part of an Emirati “modern vernacular”.⁸

I dwell on Elsheshtawy’s article not to contest his argument about what should or not be preserved – I am equally in favour of preserving the gas stations, bus terminal, and Cultural Foundation as important elements of Abu Dhabi’s modern heritage – but to point to the ways in which the binary judgment of local and foreign plays into such contested questions of authorship. In fact, the history of the Foundation’s design is more complex than would be suggested by the claim that Ashkouri was the building’s author or by the use of this claim to boost arguments for the building as an example of ‘local’ heritage. The design competition for the Cultural Foundation began in 1973, a year in which Ashkouri worked at TAC in between finishing his master of architecture at the University of Pennsylvania (1973) and a master in urban design at Harvard (1975). The previous year, Ashkouri had left the office of Hisham Munir (TAC’s long-time collaborator on projects in Iraq), and Munir later claimed that he implored TAC to hire the young Ashkouri, as a student in need of work in order to continue his studies in the USA.⁹

The competition entry that was presented in Abu Dhabi the following year was a highly articulated composition of three volumes containing the library, exhibition space, and theatre, arranged in a trefoil (or three-leaf clover) pattern around a shared entry court in the northern quadrant of the Qasr Al-Hosn site. Two of these three volumes (likely those containing the auditorium and exhibition space) were designed as quatrefoils in turn, each with one longer bar of programme connected to three shorter ones around a central crossing in plan. The TAC job files do not record Ashkouri’s specific role on this scheme among others in the office who worked on the project, including Basil Hassan, another Iraqi expatriate and a job captain for many of TAC’s projects in Kuwait

by 1973. Nor do his initials appear on any of the drawing sets I have been able to find, a fact that leaves unsettled the question of his role within the competition team.¹⁰ In any case, Ashkouri was at the time a new employee working under an experienced senior architect, Perry K. Neubauer, who operated in turn under the direction of Louis McMillen, the partner-in-charge for much of TAC's extensive work in the Gulf states after the firm's commission to design the University of Baghdad in 1957.

Of more significance for the question of authorship is the fact that the competition version of the project bears little relationship to the design that was ultimately built after TAC won the commission in 1974. According to Neubauer, the client's first statement to TAC following the competition was that the master plan would have to be changed completely since it gave the unavoidable impression of a Latin cross, a connotation that was evidently unacceptable for the project.¹¹ Under the direction of McMillen and Herbert Gallagher as partners-in-charge, Neubauer and lead designer Michael Gebhart produced an entirely new scheme, organizing the three programmes of library, exhibition space, and auditorium in a single block, relocated to the eastern corner of the site. Each of the three main programmes occupied roughly a third of this rectangular volume, with an arcaded entry court leading to a central exhibition space flanked by the library to the left and a free-standing, octagonal auditorium to the right. ●

fig.2

Neubauer credits Gebhart with both the decision to consolidate the programme into a single bar and with the idea of introducing a diagonal slice in the plan that frames a direct view of the Qasr Al-Hosn tower and serves as an orienting device through the library portion of the block.¹² Gebhart produced dramatic renderings of this second scheme that were presented to the client in 1975, showing a long, horizontal volume with stacked decks under a projecting frame. Neubauer argues that it was McMillen who insisted on the introduction of semicircular arches into the building's exterior expression, an interest that extended from his work on the University of Baghdad through the firm's numerous projects in Kuwait after 1968.¹³ The building's exterior was later simplified even further to form a largely monolithic concrete volume, animated by a monumental arcade and punctuated by narrow openings topped with semicircular arches.

By the time of this second scheme for the Cultural Foundation, Ashkouri had already left TAC to pursue his postgraduate studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Though he later dismissed TAC's redesign as "essentially about the exterior expression" rather than a more fundamental reconception, Neubauer has characterized the second scheme more accurately as "essentially a brand-new design", with a new location and site plan, a different layout and exterior massing, and a conceptually distinct interior organization focused on views to Qasr Al-Hosn.¹⁴

fig.2 The Architects Collaborative, ground-floor and first-floor plans, Cultural Foundation, October 1976 (Source: The Architects Collaborative Collection, MIT Museum. Reuse not permitted).

KEY PLAN

NOTES:

KEY PLANS ARE FOR GENERAL INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY AND ARE NOT TO BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION PURPOSES.

National Library

Abu Dhabi Town, The United Arab Emirates

المكتبة الوطنية
مدينة زايد أبو ظبي

TAC

THE ARCHITECTS COLLABORATIVE, INC.
46 BRATTLE STREET, CAMBRIDGE
MASSACHUSETTS 02138

PROJECT NO.	02000001
DESIGNED BY	W. J. H.
CHECKED BY	W. J. H.
SCALE	1:1000
DATE	20/01/2000

DRAWING TITLE

KEY PLANS
GROUND &
FIRST FLOOR
PLANS

DRAWING NO.

1.1.01

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By the time Ashkouri returned to TAC around 1975, the development of this second scheme was well underway, directed by Neubauer (who personally assisted on various detail drawings of Arabesque light fixtures and other key functional elements that doubled as references to traditional Islamic architecture) and including Gebhart and Hassan among other team members. While Ashkouri may have additionally claimed that Louis McMillen tasked him upon his return to TAC with redesigning the Abu Dhabi scheme again “in keeping with Islamic ideas and principles”, there is little evidence to support this idea.¹⁵

In light of this more detailed excavation of the Cultural Foundation’s design, it becomes clear that its status as an Emirati building designed by a ‘local’ architect has rested almost entirely on claims made by Ashkouri ● in order to promote himself as the building’s singular author, an argument that stands largely in contrast to the available evidence. This image of authorship has been propagated uncritically in turn in the popular press and in extant accounts of modern architecture in the Gulf. Ashkouri’s argument, by simplifying the public version of this history, cannily exploits the dynamics of the local-foreign dichotomy as a means to claim sole credit for the conception of the Cultural Foundation, while critics and historians alike have been only too content to accept such claims in order to reinforce the sense of the Cultural Foundation as a ‘locally’ designed building within current heritage debates.

By this point, it should be clear that the simplistic dichotomy of local and foreign precludes the ambiguities of authorship through which the material reality of the Cultural Foundation took shape. Nor can these categories allow us to capture the broader production networks and forms of exchange through which such buildings were produced in these decades. In the case of the Cultural Foundation, these included the difficulties of adapting US construction protocols in concrete to the hot climate of the Gulf, for which locally specific techniques for cooling had to be developed in conjunction with Korean contractors – in some cases employing Koreans who were completing their national military service by working on building projects in the UAE.¹⁶ A thorough history of these dynamics would also encompass the cultural history of the materials that make up the building’s concrete, including aggregate mined in Ras Al-Khaimah, created through state changes in land-tenure arrangements that displaced communities of tenant farmers there in favour of industrial sites for gravel extraction.¹⁷ So too, it would attempt to account for the role of other actors in the building’s creation like Dr. Ezzeddin Ibrahim, a trusted advisor to Sheikh Zayed; of Egyptian origin, Ibrahim co-founded the Abu Dhabi Documentation and Research Centre (later the National Archives) and established the Cultural Foundation as an institution, and Neubauer credited him as a ‘guiding light’ in the development of TAC’s design.¹⁸ All of this suggests that we could use the social

fig.3

fig.3 Qasr Al-Hosn, announcement of talk by Hisham Ashkouri on design of Cultural Foundation, November 8, 2015 (Source: @QasrAlHosn, Twitter post).

and material constructs of these buildings to piece together a very different and expanded idea of the 'local', one that might build a heritage discussion around these histories of matter and labour rather than solely around tropes of identity or authorship.

Concrete exchanges

A more nuanced picture of what this sort of heritage discussion might look like beyond the local-foreign binary emerges when we shift our attention from Abu Dhabi to TAC's work in Kuwait, the centre of its transnational practice in these decades. In particular, it is here that we can trace TAC's relationship with Pan-Arab Consulting Engineers (or PACE), established in 1968 by Kuwaiti architect and planner Hamid Shuaib, Palestinian architect and planner Charles Haddad, and Kuwaiti engineer Sabah Al-Rayes. PACE was one of the largest construction firms in the

Gulf by the 1970s, and its presence was crucial for TAC's work in the Gulf as the consultant for nearly all of their projects in Kuwait as well as those of other large US firms in the country.¹⁹

In the same year as PACE's founding, TAC received its first commission in Kuwait, to design the headquarters of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (1968–1974), an entity established shortly after national independence as the major lender of development aid within the Arab world. When TAC engaged PACE by the end of 1968 to provide consulting services on the Kuwait Fund project, the two firms initiated a sustained collaboration that lasted nearly two decades: the cooperation stands as one of the earliest examples of shared expertise within an emerging network of partnerships between local consultants and foreign firms.²⁰ The inauguration of the first Kuwait Fund building in 1974 began a 30-year period of sustained work in Kuwait for TAC, one which subsequently served as the hinge point for later built and unbuilt projects in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Oman. TAC and PACE's joint projects in Kuwait over these decades ranged from iconic cultural and institutional buildings – including the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (1979–1983), Kuwait News Agency (1981–1987), and Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (1982–1986) – to more anonymous infrastructures, most significantly including a series of commercial parking garages commonly referred to as modern 'souks' – combining ground-floor shopping with parking, offices, and housing (1973–1979).²¹ ▲

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The partnership between TAC and PACE challenges the conventional narrative of their joint commissions as purely 'foreign' buildings, or what Al-Qassemi and Fabbri have described as a persistent tendency to show such modernization efforts as "a one-directional phenomenon, a West-to-East technical knowledge export and not a bijective relationship".²² PACE's presence was key to TAC's proficiency across as many as 50 built and unbuilt projects in Kuwait from 1968 through the collapse of the oil boom in 1983, a body of work that fuelled TAC's own rise to become the largest dedicated architecture firm in the USA by the 1970s. The success of these projects led TAC to create a branch office in Kuwait in 1976 to pursue work in the Gulf, known as TAC Middle East. Conversely, PACE's early growth was due in large part to its involvement with TAC, a relationship that PACE's founders credited for the firm's rapid acquisition not just of professional drawing and detail standards but also of managerial protocols in its formative years.²³ The TAC-PACE partnership anticipated the physical expansion of PACE's offices in Kuwait: the firms collaborated on an apartment complex for Sheikh Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah (1974–1976) on what subsequently became the site of the vast Nugra project, designed by PACE for the same client in multiple phases from 1975 to 1986, the last of which included its own purpose-built headquarters.²⁴ ●

fig.4

fig.4 PACE (Pan-Arab Consulting Engineers), Kuwait City offices with model of Nugra complex in foreground, c. 1970s–1980s (Source: PACE, Kuwait. Reuse not permitted).

The imbrication between the two firms extended to TAC's design of the logotype, stationary, and office interiors for PACE (1976) and later signage and graphics for PACE International (1977), a branch office established in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by partner Charles Haddad in response to the firm's large volume of commissions with TAC.²⁵

The evolving relationship between PACE and TAC can be divided roughly into two phases. While the first began with their collaboration at the Kuwait Fund, a second, more developed stage began around 1973 with the initiation of a series of TAC-PACE projects through the framework of the joint venture, a newly mandated legal structure which required foreign architects seeking to practice in Kuwait to form partnerships with local firms. This body of work included numerous, large-scale residential and commercial developments throughout Kuwait for wealthy private clients – combining a variety of housing types with retail, office, and other programmes – as well as major institutional headquarters for clients including the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (1981–1987), Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (1979–1989), and a tower addition for the Kuwait Fund (1975–1981) adjacent to its original building.

Throughout their partnership, TAC and PACE developed a recognizable repertoire of forms and details in precast and poured-in-place concrete, transacted through the shared bureaucratic language of standardized drawing protocols and technical specifications in both English and Arabic. These material exchanges began in 1968 with TAC's engagement of PACE to act as its local partner in the design of the Kuwait Fund, the first major landmark of a collaboration that became increasingly centred on assessing the quality of concrete as a material measure of the evolving relationship between the two firms. While it remains unclear what first led Kuwait Fund director Abdulatif Al-Hamad to commission the US firm to design its building or how TAC first came into contact with PACE, by May 1969 the Kuwaiti office had been contracted to prepare bills of quantities, specifications, and contract documents for the building, followed by an agreement in August 1970 to undertake construction supervision.²⁶ The mutual congeniality between the firms continued into the construction phase of the project: after visiting the construction site in December 1971, McMillen wrote to Al-Rayes to commend PACE's work, noting that he had been "very impressed with the excellent quality of the concrete and by the general handsome look of the building as it is beginning to merge [*sic*] from the foundation".²⁷ In its annual summary of progress on the project later that month, PACE explained that the achievement of such results relied on raising the standards of Kuwaiti contractors as much as on its own work: "While the quality of the reinforced concrete work has been an achievement on its own", the firm wrote, "the most important aspect has been the overcoming of the difficulty of getting the Contractor to accept the quality expected and to co-operate with the Consultants in trying to achieve a high standard".²⁸ Al-Rayes reiterated in a monthly report sent to TAC the following July, a year prior to the opening of the building, that "the construction is quite new to any contractor in Kuwait".²⁹

In this sense, the Kuwait Fund's importance as a benchmark for the developing construction industry in Kuwait was well understood even before the project was complete. In July 1972, a year before the inauguration of the new building, Adnan Ghantous, TAC's job captain in Kuwait, wrote to inform McMillen that the chairman of the financial committee of the Kuwaiti Parliament had offered praise to Abdulatif Al-Hamad, the director of the Kuwait Fund, for its choice of architect as well as for the quality of its new headquarters. Ghantous reported not only that the chairman had "commended [The Kuwait Fund] on the good workmanship that they have introduced to Kuwait" but also that he had been sufficiently impressed to implore the Ministry of Public Works "to consider our building as the standard for workmanship and supervision that should be followed" for all future construction projects in the country.³⁰ "It seems", Ghantous

concluded, “this job will constitute a turning point in construction work in Kuwait”.³¹

fig.5

A significant element of this development of a shared concrete language through these early projects was the material's unique capacity to signify as alternately local and foreign in the Kuwaiti context, as a hybrid in which imported details and on-the-ground matter and labour were synthesized. Edward O. Nilsson, the project architect for Souk Al-Manakh and Souk Al-Wataniya – two of the TAC-PACE projects that immediately followed the completion of the Kuwait Fund – later recalled that, for the poured-in-place concrete in these buildings, ● “It was necessary to have a specialised consultant design the concrete mix, because one could not use the local sand as it was”.³² In other words, technicians from abroad were required to mediate the insufficiency of using Kuwaiti raw materials in the making of ‘Kuwaiti’ concrete.³³ Beyond such material constraints, the concrete mix at Souk Al-Wataniya was required to accommodate a complex hybrid of structural systems, including cast-in-place concrete girders, a Freyssinet precast framing system allowing up to 20-metre spans without columns, and steel roof framing for the residential units at the upper levels of the building. ▲

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Stylistically, however, concrete was implicitly required to sublimate the transnational mixture of structural and material technics through which it was formed, solidifying this aggregate into the image of a ‘local’ architectural expression. Such images were built through a language of forms that included semicircular arches, opaque walls with narrow openings, deep window sills and horizontal sun shades, and other elements intended to situate these new building types within Kuwait's rapidly changing urban conditions. Yet despite these efforts, TAC and PACE's buildings and their monumental forms in concrete were often admired by local architects as examples of a properly modern Kuwaiti architecture more for their technical sophistication than for their stylistic attributes.

Joint ventures

The local-foreign binary is challenged in particular by an examination of the more dedicated joint-venture framework that developed between TAC and PACE after 1973, as an example of the changing legal and financial relationships between local firms and foreign architects seeking to operate in the Gulf. In the same year, a circular was issued to all government departments by Abdulatif Al-Hamad requiring all non-Kuwaiti firms to team with local offices in order to work in the country, as a counter to governmental bias towards foreign companies.³⁴ Henceforth, firms like TAC would be obliged to form joint-venture partnerships with Kuwaiti engineering and construction conglomerates, as offices like PACE became newly empowered mediators of imported technical expertise and

fig.5

The Architects Collaborative with PACE, Souq Al-Wataniya, Kuwait City, 1974–1979, construction photograph (Source: PACE, Kuwait. Reuse not permitted).

design details with on-the-ground regulations and building protocols. The draft of a single, joint-venture contract covering all future TAC and TAC-PACE projects dates from August 1975, after which the team was officially renamed the TAC-PACE Supervisory Establishment.³⁵ By the end of the decade, PACE's repertoire of services, as rendered in an office portfolio produced around 1978, had expanded to include structural, mechanical, electrical, civil engineering, architectural, and interior design as well as urban planning, quantity surveying, photography and graphic design, and construction supervision and management.³⁶

By the time of the TAC-PACE joint-venture agreement in 1975, the pair's work extended to a wide array of large-scale residential and commercial projects in Kuwait designed primarily in concrete, including the Salmiya (today Al-Anjari) Commercial Complex (1974–1978), designed for the Kuwait Investment Company as part of the development of Salem Al-Mubarak Street after 1970, and the unbuilt Northeast Sawaber Housing scheme (1977), designed for the National Housing Authority.³⁷ Yet within a few years the ties between these two firms had apparently begun to fray under the pressure of market competition to design Kuwait's new concrete landmarks. Their relationship suffered in particular after the Joint Banking Centre competition, in which Sabah Al-Rayes had backed the winning entry of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) over Charles Haddad's allegiance to TAC. Other fissures were exposed in the process of designing the Kuwait Fund addition, a project that TAC may have initially intended to develop independently prior to PACE's insistence on the joint-venture framework after 1975. By the time the tower went into construction, PACE had consolidated all structural as well as mechanical, electrical, and plumbing design for the project in its offices for the first time, presaging its ability to execute similar commissions without the US firm.

By 1976, TAC had begun to pursue commissions in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf states in earnest through its TAC Middle East branch while PACE developed both its independent design practice and its partnerships with other US firms in the wake of the Joint Banking Centre. Some of PACE's projects apart from TAC, like the United Arab Shipping Company (1980), were unconvincing attempts to imitate the forms of the Kuwait Fund, perhaps to channel the aura of the institution that had established the reputation of both firms at the outset of their practices in Kuwait. Others, like the Nugra complex and high-rise buildings including the Behbehani (1978–1982), Imad (1979–1983), and Al-Khaleejia (1981–1984) Towers, better exemplified PACE's in-house expertise in concrete by the end of the 1970s, extending the techniques of sand-blasting and bush-hammering that the firm had learned from TAC despite their stylistic variance.³⁸ As the landscape of commissions in the Gulf shifted for US firms after the end of the boom in

crude oil prices in the 1980s, PACE went on to gain its own significant commissions in the region prior to the interregnum of the First Gulf War in 1990–1991 and the economic recovery that followed. These commissions were no longer developed in partnership with TAC, however, but rather in-house or else with other US firms like SOM, which collaborated with PACE in designing the United Gulf Bank (1981–1987) in Manama, Bahrain.

For its part, TAC's increasing presence in the region after its arrival in Kuwait quickly reaped benefits in other booming construction markets across the region, including projects in Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt by the early 1980s. In these projects, pursued separately from PACE, TAC often employed concrete forms and motifs that it had developed in their shared work in Kuwait. Unable to continue this steady stream of work following the end of the boom in crude oil prices and the collapse of the Souk Al-Manakh stock exchange – a financial crisis precipitated from one of the commercial parking garages built at the height of the TAC-PACE partnership – TAC largely divested itself of its work in the Gulf states and its relationship with PACE and other Arab consultants after 1983. By the time of its tentative return to working in Kuwait at the end of the decade, its collaborations with consulting firms like Archicentre and Kuwait Engineering Bureau proved to be short-lived, definitively concluded by the Iraqi invasion in 1990.

Cultural foundations

In the present context, a handful of TAC and PACE's institutional buildings in Kuwait have achieved prominent places within contemporary understandings of modern Kuwaiti heritage. Chief among these is the Kuwait Fund headquarters, a building that symbolized the newly independent nation's outsize economic power within the Arab world and has continued to be well maintained by its private owners, even if it remains largely inaccessible to the public. Yet many of the buildings from this period involving international architects have fared far less well within recent discussions of built heritage and cultural memory. This is particularly true of the concrete souks built by TAC-PACE and other joint ventures: these structures are uniquely local building types that have, nevertheless, had a markedly different reception history than that of cultural icons like the Kuwait Fund – or the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation – in the decades since their construction. Despite their central role within the history of Kuwaiti urbanization – as crucial elements of the city's modernizing urban fabric and as prominent examples of the new, hybrid, building types that marked the transformation of the city centre after the 1970s – the souks have remained generally neglected within discussions of Kuwait's modern heritage, leaving them highly vulnerable to recent threats of demolition or alteration. They have been commonly regarded – if

they are regarded at all – simply as anonymous elements of the city's infrastructure, despite their provenance from the same collaborators (and featuring many of the same design techniques and motifs) as signature icons of Kuwaiti nation-building like the Kuwait Fund. In this respect, their cultural status today is not unlike that of the bus terminal in Abu Dhabi whose demolition Elsheshtawy favours, regarded as marginal to the city's modern history even if they have been fundamental to its lived experience.

I would argue that the marginalization of the Kuwaiti souks has been exacerbated by the popular impression of these buildings as either unauthored and anonymous, or else – if granted authorship in critical debates – as 'foreign' insertions into the traditional building fabric of the old town, designed by non-Kuwaiti architects and thus dispensable with regard to the construction of a 'local' urban identity. Indeed, the material history of such buildings, as complex transnational products of labour and matter, escapes not only the tropes of the local-foreign binary but often the conventional assignation of authorship altogether. As such they have remained largely devalored by critics as well as by the public, even though to my mind they were no less important in shaping the cultural experience of Kuwaiti modernization after the 1970s than were more prominent public buildings like the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation in the UAE.

In this sense, a comparative study of the production and reception of the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation and Kuwaiti souks offers valuable lessons for the broader history of transnational design networks that shaped the construction of modern Gulf cities after the 1960s, a persistent omission within histories of both modern architecture at large and heritage discussions in the Gulf in particular. By unpacking the differing assessments of value which I argue have conditioned the contemporary status of these buildings in the midst of ongoing preservation challenges and heritage debates, we might develop new tools to understand the distributed mechanisms of authorship and exchange through which such emblems of Gulf modernism took shape.

Notes

- 1 Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi and Roberto Fabbri, "Re-Engaging with the Gulf Modernist City: Heritage and Repurposing Practices", call for 10th Annual Gulf Research Meeting, Gulf Research Centre, Cambridge, UK, July 2019, 2, <https://gulfresearchmeeting.net/documents/1584361672Desc&AbstractWS10.pdf>.
- 2 See in particular Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 16–30.
- 3 Yasser Elsheshtawy, "We Need to Talk about the Modernism Fetish in the Gulf", *Dubaization*, December 26, 2017, <http://dubaization.com/post/168964409563/we-need-to-talk-about-the-modernism-fetish-in-the-gulf>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Hisham Munir, interview with author, Washington, DC, August 20, 2015. According to Munir, Ashkouri also later falsely claimed credit for projects by Hisham Munir Associates, including the Amanat Al Asima in Baghdad (1982–85), designed after Ashkouri left the office.
- 10 Nick Leech, a journalist in Abu Dhabi, claims implausibly that "Ashkouri was assisted" by Hassan, working as an "associate architect" on the project. Like similar claims, this account appears to come solely from Ashkouri himself, whom Leech interviewed for this and other articles. Leech, "Abu Dhabi's Cultural Foundation to be revitalised", *The National*, February 12, 2015.
- 11 Perry Neubauer, presentation on the history of TAC International with Michael Gebhart and Deborah Bentley, Boston Society of Architects, June 10, 2016. The resemblance of the competition scheme to a Latin cross may cast further doubt on Ashkouri's claim that he was lead designer of the competition scheme, since the Iraqi architect presumably would have been aware of this iconography and its unsuitability for the project.
- 12 Neubauer presentation, June 10, 2016.
- 13 Ibid. On TAC's commission to design the University of Baghdad after 1957, see Michael Kubo, "'Companies of Scholars': The Architects Collaborative, Walter Gropius, and the Politics of Expertise at the University of Baghdad", in Ines Weizman, ed., *Dust & Data: Traces of the Bauhaus Across 100 Years 1919–2019* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2019), 496–515.
- 14 Neubauer quoted in Leech, "Abu Dhabi's Cultural Foundation to be revitalised".
- 15 Ashkouri quoted by Mark Kyffin, Head of Architecture for the Department of Culture & Tourism Abu Dhabi and director of the revitalisation projects for the Cultural Foundation and Qasr al Hosn, interview with author, May 23, 2016. Extant construction drawings of the Cultural Foundation in the MIT Museum archives, dated to October 1976, include the initials of team members including Vladimir S. Florek, Perry Neubauer, and William J. Higgins, but Ashkouri's initials do not appear on any available drawings.
- 16 Neubauer presentation, June 10, 2016. TAC used white cement for the Cultural Foundation concrete, as the firm had in its Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development headquarters (1968–74), the first use of white cement in Kuwait.
- 17 See Matthew Maclean, *Spatial Transformations and the Emergence of 'the National': Infrastructures and the Formation of the United Arab Emirates, 1950–1980* (PhD Dissertation, New York University, 2017).
- 18 Ibid. According to Neubauer, Ibrahim's influence on the design included sending members of TAC to Cairo to study the Egyptian National Library, an important precedent for the Abu Dhabi project.
- 19 Much of what follows in this section is abridged and adapted from Michael Kubo, "Concrete Ventures: TAC, Pace, and Transnational Exchanges in the Construction of Modern Kuwait", forthcoming in Dalal Musa'ed Alsayar, Ricardo Camacho, Sara Saragoça Soares, ed., *Pan-Arab Modernism: The History of Architectural Practice in The Middle East* (Barcelona: Actar, 2020).
- 20 The project number given to the Kuwait Fund project by PACE was 68006, with the first two digits indicating the year of the commission, indicating that this was the sixth project the firm undertook in the year of its founding.
- 21 See Edward Nilsson, "History, Memory, and Narratives of the Past and Future: The New Souks in Kuwait", 180–197, in this volume.
- 22 Roberto Fabbri and Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, "Introduction: Re-Engaging the Modern", in *Urban Modernity in the Contemporary Gulf: Obsolescence and Opportunities*, eds. Roberto Fabbri and Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 12.
- 23 Tarek Shuaib, current head of PACE and son of founding partner Hamid A. Shuaib, interview with author, August 1, 2012.

- 24** PACE information sheets on the TAC scheme for H.E. Sheikh Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah suggest that the project may have originally been located in Fintas circa 1974 prior to being moved to the later Nugra site in Hawally. Drawings by TAC in the PACE archives clearly show the Hawally site, indicating that TAC initially remained involved with the project after its relocation.
- 25** Haddad claims that by the mid-1970s TAC preferred to develop these projects in-house according to their own requirements rather than working in Kuwait, requiring PACE to establish an office in Cambridge, MA close to TAC's headquarters. This was an inversion of the arrangement Haddad described for the Iraq Consult projects and TAC's work on the Kuwait Fund in PACE's early years, in which each firm sent an architect to work with PACE in Kuwait, with PACE paying their salaries and maintaining a say in the final design. Interview with Charles Haddad in *Essays, Arguments & Interviews on Modern Architecture Kuwait*, 110–114.
- 26** PACE, letter to Louis A. McMillen, May 23, 1969. Louis McMillen, letter to Sabah Al-Rayes, received August 24, 1970. PACE Archives.
- 27** Louis McMillen, letter to Sabah Al-Rayes [sic], December 10, 1971. PACE Archives.
- 28** "Monthly Report No. 5 with an Annual Summary, KFAED HQ Office Building", December 31, 1971, 1. MIT Museum Archives.
- 29** "Monthly Report No. 11, KFAED HQ Office Building", enclosed with letter from Sabah Al-Rayes to Louis A. McMillen, August 13, 1972. MIT Museum Archives.
- 30** Adnan Ghantous, letter to Louis A. McMillen, The Architects Collaborative International Limited Inc., March 13, 1972. MIT Museum Archives.
- 31** Ibid.
- 32** Interview with Edward Nilsson, in *Essays, Arguments & Interviews on Modern Architecture Kuwait*, 178.
- 33** TAC hired a U.S. firm, Concrete Associates Inc, to develop these specifications for the concrete mix.
- 34** Rod Sweet, ed., *SSH Design: The First 50 Years*, http://issuu.com/sshdesign/docs/50_years_book, 47. Sweet claims that Abdulatif Al-Hamad was a government minister responsible for finance and planning at the time, though officially Al-Hamad was Minister of Finance and Planning only from 1981 to 1983. SSH, already one of the largest consultants in Kuwait, claimed that this requirement came as the result of lobbying by partner Salem Al-Marzouq, a U.S.-educated civil engineer then in the Ministry of Public Works and a member of the National Assembly.
- 35** "TAC/PACE Supervisory Establishment Joint Venture Agreement", August 26, 1975. PACE Archives.
- 36** *The Pace Story: Pan Arab Consulting Engineers*, office portfolio c. 1978. PACE Archives.
- 37** The Salmiya Commercial Complex project began in 1974 according to the TAC job number (74022), and the latest drawings available for the design are dated to August 1978 (MIT Museum Archives). The construction dates for the project remain unclear.
- 38** Interview with Sabah Al-Rayes in *Essays, Arguments & Interviews on Modern Architecture Kuwait*, 69.