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INFLUENCES AND ASPIRATIONS IN THE PRODUCTION OF NATIONAL PROJECTS IN LEBANON AND KUWAIT: SELECTED ICONIC PROJECTS BY SAMI ABDUL BAKI

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Influences and aspirations in the production of National projects in Lebanon and Kuwait: Selected iconic projects by Sami Abdul Baki

ABSTRACT

By looking at a selection of Iconic Modern projects designed by or commissioned tothe prominent but not well-examined Architect Sami Abdul Baki both in Lebanon and Kuwait during his most productive years in the 50's, this paper attempts to identify first main trends, influences and ideologies that shaped these works at the peak of modern architectural development in the region. Through these examples, the paper then aims at retracing predominant trajectories of intellectual capital exchange and transfer of knowledge between Lebanon and Kuwait. These can go far beyond their territorial boundaries, without claiming a single grand-narrative that describes the modern architectural development in any of the two countries. The data collected from discourse analysis, interviews, and biographical notes were mapped into a schematic diagram illustrating a complex network of connections and multidisciplinary involvement in projects. However, the outcome did not generate a dominant theme for the projects or expertise of the architect. It is very likely that Sami Abdul Baki's strong political dimension and quality as a mediator or facilitator in addition to his strong network of contacts played a significant role in the project commissions that he has won as an Architect/Engineer in Kuwait, Lebanon, Germany, and other countries.

Keywords:modern architecture; nation building; influences; aspirations, international relations; local politics; map of knowledge; visual comparisons; micro-narratives, corporate architecture.

1 INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 50's and during the peak of modern architectural development in Lebanon, Sami Abdul Baki - a prominent but not well-examined architect, built an eclectic collection of iconic modern projects in some of the most significant places of the capital Beirut and on highly visible sites. This paper attempts to identify the main trends, influences and ideologies that shaped the works of the architect, built relatively early in his professional career in Lebanon. The paper attributes equal importance to his un-built projects, as they considerably contribute to a better understanding of the architect's original ideas. The investigation also extends beyond the country's borders, to Kuwait where Sami Abdul Baki was also able to seize important architectural opportunities for building a national identity for the emerging Gulf state at the time. By examining some of his work starting from his graduation from the engineering school at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1947 and until the late 50's, when he completed his most important commissions in Kuwait, this research covers a decade of the architect's most productive years.

By mapping AbdulBaki's professional journey in Lebanon and Kuwait, this paper aims at reconstructing predominant trajectories of intellectual capital exchange and transfer of knowledge between both countries and placing Beirut on an international Map of Knowledge. The paper also emphasizes the role of the architect in importing and exporting different architectural languages and re-questioning his contribution to the development of the modern movement.

2 BEIRUT AND KUWAIT CITY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

2.1 Beirut transformations: from a provincial Ottoman town to the capital city of a new state

Throughout the centuries, Beirut has proven its capacity for reinvention and transformation, due to migrations, conquests, trades, and internal conflicts. The transformations of the city have been documented in the literature by different scholars (Tabet et. al., 2001; Nasr and Verdeil, 2008; Larkin, 2009; Alaily-Mattar, 2016). Many of them argue (Tabet, 2001; Saliba, 2000) that Beirut was the result of Ottomans urban planners, who were responsible for the first phase of Beirut's modernization. In fact, the "Tanzeemat" regulated constructions and upgraded the infrastructure of the city. Saliba (2000) on the other hand, described these reforms as "second-hand," because they were initially designed for Istanbul and later applied to the other Ottoman capitals. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Beirut remained a small provincial Ottoman town. It then gradually developed from a small medieval city of Arab-Islamic character to a "Ville bourgeoise Mediterraneene", at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Saliba, 1998).

Conflicts and civil wars resulted in partial or complete dismissal of many urban planning schemes proposed after the declaration of great Lebanon in 1920. (Verdeil,2001; Sarkis and Rowe, 1998).In 1943, Beirut had become the capital of the Republic of Lebanon and grew rapidly. The demand to modernize the city (Verdeil 2010, 2001; Nasr, 1999) due to its new status and role came from abroad, but it also met the needs of the Lebanese elites and served the project of the Lebanese nation building (Sarkis and Rowe, 1998; Makdisi, 1997, Al-Harithy, 2010). However, the absence of social housing programs, together with a general lack of control for the welfare and living conditions of the population, exasperated and increased the tensions that eventually led to the break of a civil war in 1975 (Johnson,1986).After the war, Beirut overgrew under the pressure of private investments that created the new modern structure and urban fabric of the capital. The development in Beirut remains today driven by the private sector with little monitoring by the State.

2.2 Kuwait city: building of a modern capital

Kuwait City, is located in the Persian Gulf and has old and rich history. The first traces of human settlements in Kuwait date back to the Ubaid periods (6500 BC) when the regional maritime traders established many interactions and trade connections between Mesopotamia and the Eastern Arabia (Carter, 2011; Lorimer, 1915). The old Kuwaiti walled cities established their livelihood by trading with many faraway regions such as eastern Africa and the Indian continent. Later, in the 4th century BC, the Kuwaiti territory was colonized by the ancient Greeks, who constructed many Hellenistic forts and Greek temples, which are still preserved and accessible today. The Kuwaiti bay was later included under Alexander the Great's Empire, and in 224 AD Kuwait was subjected to the rule of the Sassanid. The bay was an active trade port and a fertile area that was frequently used by the pilgrims and caravans as a resting place on the way from Mesopotamia to Arabian Peninsula (Casey, 2007). In the eighteenth

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century, commercial business flourished and Kuwait City grew rapidly to become one of the most important commercial centre in the maritime trade route with Aleppo, Baghdad and Constantinople. It then remained prosperous until the nineteenth century and became very famous for its trade port (Al-Hijji, 2010). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Kuwait had well-established elite: general trading merchants who acquired their wealth from long-distance commerce, pearling, and shipping. These wealthy Kuwaiti families educated their sons abroad more than other Gulf Arab elite. This started a tradition of international cultural exchanges between Eastern and Western regions that were later mimicked by other countries.

Between 1946 and 1982, the city rapidly flourished and became the most significant economic centre in the Middle East. It experienced a period of prosperity called the "golden era" characterized by the modern standard of living that attracted many foreign workers, mainly from Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and India. In 1961, Kuwait became independent with the end of the British protectorate and the establishment of a new constitution that held the first parliamentary elections in 1963. Since the 1950's and until the invasion by Iraq in 1990, Kuwait has witnessed an accelerated modernization mostly due to the Development Program (DP). This established new comprehensive modern guidelines for planning and organizing the living environment, and improved employment opportunities thereby generating economic growth. During this construction period, new planning ideas and architectural experiments imported from the west were adapted mostly by British experts. The Kuwaiti planning departments developed some large-scale urban renewal schemes. They also diffused the modernity ideas through the construction of many nation-building projects that represented the new middle class and the recent establishment of new modern socio-cultural ideas (Al-Saleh, 2016)

The Kuwaiti spectacular social and urban transformations were represented in the new architecture and urban planning processes at its peak when the country gained its independence. During the modern period many foreign and local architects worked together in creating relevant samples of modern architecture by expanding their professional horizons and collaborations. (Fabbri, et al. 2016)

2.3Modern architecture and national identity in Lebanon and Kuwait

Since the declaration of Greater Lebanon in 1920, the new state has been seeking a new identity that would represent a modern nation independent from the Ottoman Empire. Architectural and urban projects seemed to be a powerful tool to convey this identity and express the state's aspirations and development. Local architects and engineers who had pursued their studies in Europe and in the United States along with foreign architects delivered a significant body of modern buildings between 1930 and 1960 that mostly characterized the capital Beirut. Although many have argued that modern architecture represented the national identity of independent Lebanon, others considered it as symbolic of the French colonial period and symptomatic of Lebanon's dependency on and attachment to the West. Constructive discussions about local heritage, common history, traditions and social practices certainly shaped the development of modern architecture in the country and led to the "assimilation of modern ideas" and their adaptation to the local context.

Similarly to Lebanon, Kuwait has witnessed a construction boom that has peaked in the 50's as a consequence of the discovery of the oil and just before the declaration of the country's independence from the British rule in 1961. The search for a national identity reflecting the development of the

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country and the transformation of its community has certainly preoccupied the newly formed state. This was clearly reflected in the architectural projects that were commissioned at the time and that eventually completely erased the old city. A Development Program (DP) proposed by the British served as a guideline for the growth of the city in which large architectural projects were commissioned also to British and foreign architects. The quest for building a new national identity and the clear commercial benefits of the newly imported architecture overshadowed discourses about the preservation of the local architectural heritage and the attention to the real need of the community. Only later "nostalgic" discourses were triggered, lamenting the destruction of the old city (Al Ragam, 2015)

In the middle of this quest for building a national identity in Lebanon and Kuwait and of heated debates about constructions and deconstructions of cultural heritage, the journey of architect Sami Abdul Baki, operating between both countries stands out. His un-biased position towards the West was expressed through his nationalistic sentiments. They were rooted in his belief in the Arab state along with his eclectic body of work, ranging from a reinterpretation of classical architecture and nostalgic discourse about tradition to the experimentation with new materials and the introduction of a corporate language to the region. All of this makes him an interesting case study to look at in contrast to his other more orthodox colleagues at the time.

3 METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

For this research, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect relevant historical data depicting the discourse on modern architectural production mostly in Lebanon and in Kuwait. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, English or French, and lasted for 30 minutes to one hour. Interviews were partially recorded and transcribed in a later phase in preparation for analysis. Biographical notes and previously conducted interviews with deceased architects, namely Sami Abdul Baki and Assem Salam were also considered as a primary material. Field observations of the visited projects were noted during site visits in Lebanon and served as a comparative device between relevant projects. Sets of photographs taken methodically on site, sketches and drawings analyses did not constitute the primary method of data collection but helped to contextualize the projects of Sami Abdul Baki and to interpret the findings.

As for the analysis of the data collected, schematic diagrams illustrating the complex network of connections, and multidisciplinary involvement in projects were produced. A selection of built and un-built works was then laid out in a matrix describing basic information about the projects coupled with brief descriptions of the relevant local and international events and comparative projects. The projects of Sami Abdu Baki have been mapped on a visual matrix in an attempt to detect recurrent themes and concepts and served as a base for the conclusions.

4 INTRODUCTION TO SAMI ABDUL BAKI

4.1Education and Academic Works

Sami Abdul Baki was born in September 1926 as part of a wealthy family from the Chouf in Lebanon. His father Mohammad Abdel Baki was an active member of the Nationalist League (Osbat al Amal al Qawmiyyah) and a firm believer in the independent and unified Arab states. His Nationalist beliefs

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strongly impacted his family, specifically Sami who later founded the League for the commemoration of the martyr's (Osbat Takrim al Shouhada'a) and remained active as its president until his death in 2017. Sami Abdul Baki grew up in Beirut, a city that saw an intensification of trade with both America and Europe and resulted in a great expansion between the two wars (Ghosn, 1970). Between 1943 and 1947, Sami Abdul Baki was enrolled at the program of civil engineering at AUB within a rising concern of the administration towards Arab Nationalism and the promotion of the Pan-Arab state.

In his Final Year Thesis Project entitled "The New Palace of Baal in Ain Baal", Sami Abdul Baki(Abdul Baki, 1947; 1997)expressed his concern about the dominance of new world architectural tendencies at the expense of continuing past construction techniques and architectural forms. His research was based on tracing the past evolution of residential palaces in Europe drawing from Violet Le Duc's "Histoire D'habitation Humaine"(1875) and Ernst Diez's "Art of the Islamic people"(Pellens, 2002) and his studies of residential complexes in the Middle East and the Levant area. Abdul Baki argued that new technologies and materials have "released the building from the limitations of thick masonry walls" reinforced the relation between indoor and outdoor spaces and "imparted a different quality to the shelter in which we work, play and rest" (Abdul Baki, 1947; 1997). In the concluding chapter of his thesis, Sami Abdul Baki describes the project he designed as both a manifestation of a world tendency and a "reluctance to abandon traditions of planning and architectural styles" (Abdul Baki, 1947). In fact, this academic work is strategically situated at the heart of a heated debate between two different architectural discourses. On one hand a purely rational and structuralist approach in architecture was promoted by Antoun Tabet and Farid Trad two of the most prominent modern architecture figures in Lebanon (Hourani, 1991). On the other hand, a new debate (Nassar, 1970; El Sheshtawy, 2008; Volks, 2010; Kaloustian, 2015) on how to develop a national or Arab identity and incorporate regional styles in architectural projects was initiated by a group of other architects such as Assem Salam, Raymond Ghosn, Rifaat al Chadirji, Jaafar Toukan, and Jacques Ligier Belair.

In an interview conducted by George Arbid in 1998, Sami Abdul Baki (Abdul Baki, 1998, Abdul Baki, 2002) claims that he has pursued studies in Germany in 1953 and graduated as an Engineer/Architect in 1956 from the University of Heidelberg. In another interview with Ricardo Camacho in 2016, Sami Abdul Baki mentions that he has graduated from the Technical University of Munich. In reference to his biographical notes, he earned a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of London in 1967.

4.2Biographical notes and Professional career

Reading into his biographical notes, Sami Abdul Baki mastered six languages. His communication skills had certainly facilitated his travel and enabled him to build business relationships with foreign clients, architects, and consultants. Abdul Baki's professional journey spans across several countries among which Lebanon, Germany and Kuwait where the city-state experienced an extraordinary social and civic transformation at the beginning of the oil boom. There, Abdul Baki was commissioned key development projects and iconic buildings for the nation. In addition to his professional work, Abdul Baki has undertaken several roles in committees, commissions, associations and boards based in many countries. Some of the most important and prestigious positions included his participation in many petroleum related negotiations between Kuwait and multi-national corporations before the establishment of the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) agreement. He was also appointed as an honorary council of Costa Rica in Lebanon for a period of 23 years. It is clearly noticeable that Abdul Baki

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demonstrated active patriotic and nationalistic beliefs and social engagement that were reflected in his ambitions to participate in the realm of the local politics in Lebanon especially after his return from Kuwait at the beginning of the '60s.

5THE PRODUCTION OF ICONIC PROJECTS IN LEBANON

5.1 Villa ChaficQassem 1952

Prior to founding an office for engineering and construction with his brother Sami Abdul Baki, Fuad Abdul Baki worked for one year at the Tapline Company in Zahrani where he met ChafficQassem and later convinced him to build a small vacation house on a beautiful plot by the sea in Zahrani. The house was designed by Sami Abdul Baki and completed in 1953 (Figure 1). It consists of a pure circular shape including the functions of the house on two floors and topped by a shallow conical roof. It also had another separate and elongated conical volume housing a staircase and connected to the first volume through an elevated bridge. The bridge extends to a circular balcony wrapping around the first floor and overlooking the banana fields around the house and the sea further away to the west. The project stood out as a playful geometric composition and was characterized by its use of colored concrete.

Figure 1: Villa ChafficQassem, S., F. Abdul Baki, Zahrani, Lebanon, 1952.(Source: Authors).

ChafficQassem's villa became a landmark on the old Saida-Tyr road and was referred to as the Umbrella by the residents of the area. During an Interview with Jassem Osman, a remote relative of the client, he mentions that “the house was never meant to look like an Umbrella, but that it was inspired by a

modern house in Italy that the client has captured in a photo and showed it to the architect". Osman added "Chaffic Qassem's Villa was a symbol of the lifestyle of the Lebanese modern society and witnessed some of the most lavish parties of the country at the time!" (Osman, 2018).It is important to mention that one year earlier, Lebanese architect Ferdinand Dagher had completed a unique circular shaped chalet for Raja Saab on the shore of Ouzai. The project was elevated on four massive pillars liberating the ground and exposing in the middle of the project a circular staircase trapped within a cage and leading to the upper floor. A circular balcony wrapped around the building and provided an outdoor extension of the interior space and a magnificent and uninterrupted view to the sea and the surrounding landscape. The chalet in Ouzai became an icon of the architecture of that time and an excellent manifestation of the international style in Lebanon. While both projects are very similar in terms of program, location, forms, and materials, it is evident that Dagher appreciated the color and texture of the concrete very much and used it frankly as a finished product. It is also worth mentioning that both projects originally intended as a luxurious vacation destination by the sea are used today as a utility storage space in Zahrani or have been illegally occupied by migrants fleeing the war zones. Another circular shaped project raised on pilotis was designed a few years later by Lebanese Architect Albert Manasseh for Shaikha Badria, Sheikh Fahed-al-Salem's wife in Al Salimiyya in Kuwait. Sabah Al Rayes interpreted the project's circular form as a manifestation of the Space Race between the Soviet Union and the US at the time (Al Rayes, 2017).

5.2 Druze Community Centre 1952

The period between the declaration of the independence of Lebanon (1943) and the beginning of the civil war (1975) witnessed a serious effort to build the Nation and its institutions. This period coincided with an economic boom and was characterized by a cultural openness to the west fuelled by bitterness towards the previous Ottoman rule. Looking at the future, engineers and architects in Lebanon naturally embraced modern architecture as a representation of the country's independent identity and their ambition to modernize the discipline. Similarly to other practices, "Architecture is strongly connected with influent networks, that are neither totally private nor overtly public, i.e., community and confessional networks" (Arbid, 2002). When Sheikh Mohammad Abou Shakra decided to build the Druze Community Center in 1952, it is highly probable that along with his professional reputation and the contribution of his family in the fundraising for the project, Sami Abdul Baki represented the appropriate confessional affiliation to be commissioned the project. In the absence of any Druze liturgy or typical place of worship except for the "Khalwah" (an isolation place) which is a modest and non-characteristic place for prayer, the Druze community or religion could not be represented by any architectural style or building typology(Abdul Baki, 2006). Sami Abdul Baki was thus given a "Carte blanche" when it came to the design of the Druze Community Centre that is considered the official residence of the highest spiritual authority of the community (Figure 2). It is hence important to go back the architectural trends and influences that shaped governmental and institutional buildings as well as the architect's academic, professional, and cultural exposure at the time to reveal possible inspirations for the project.

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Figure 2: Druze Community Centre, S., F. Abdul Baki, Beirut-Lebanon, 1952.(Source: Authors).

As of the 1920s, the revival of classical order and modern interpretation of classical architecture gained widespread popularity in Europe, especially in the design of governmental buildings and public institutions. This new style was also symptomatic of a nationalist culture seeking to exhibit the unity between citizens and their nation, the hegemony of the state and its absolute rule which could have been the aspiration of Sami Abdul Baki in his design of the Druze Community Centre. In Lebanon, architects having pursued their education abroad or collaborated with foreign architects as well as international design firms introduced this tendency in several public projects. During one of his early jobs commissioned by the ministry of foreign affairs, Sami Abdul Baki was tasked to follow up on the construction of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) palace designed in 1948 by Lebanese Architect Farid Trad. The project manifested clearly this revival of classical order through architectural elements, symmetry, planning, and organization. A year later, Prof. K. Yeramian his thesis advisor was commissioned the construction of the Nami Jaffet Library designed by the American firm McKim, Mead and White, on AUB campus. The building was inaugurated in 1951 and is well recognized by its frontal double height roofed colonnade and the hand-hewn white stone cladding of its facades. The similarity of the Druze community centre with the Palais of Tokyo and the Palais de Chaillot both designed for the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937 is also undeniable! Both

projects are characterized by their sober and yet monumental facades highly symmetrical with repetitive use of modernized classical elements and details.

The above exercise in precedent finding is particularly provocative as it relates a collection of disparate projects together using their formal language as the only common denominator. This formal display on the facade does not clearly translate into the internal organization of the Druze Community center that remains unclear in terms of connecting different spaces together. In his interview with G. Arbid in 1997, Sami Abdul Baki stated that “the real art is simplicity” (Abdul Baki, 1998) but he confessed that his real obsession is to design “greatness and monumentality” (Abdul Baki, 1998). This is clearly expressed through the work on the façade of the Druze community Centre but less reflected in plan in terms of the internal organization and circulation. Furthermore, in an interview with the counsellor of Sheikhdom of Al Akl, Sheikh Ghassan Halabi revealed that Sami Abdul Baki has proposed a project for the extension of the Druze Community Center in 1990 that consisted of building a “perfectly symmetrical addition” to the building on the East. He had stated that this would “enhance its hegemony over the hill while completely blending in with the existing structure”.

5.3 Martyrs square memorial 1953

As part of an international competition to commemorate the Martyrs of the independence, Sami Abdul Baki, then president of the League for the Commemoration of Martyrs, submitted a counter-proposal to the existing work of Art designed by Youssef Al Hoayek and won the first prize of the competition. The proposal that was publicized in Al Hayat Newspaper in 1953 consisted of a gigantic concrete arch, fourteen pillars connected at the top by a beam in a semi-circle, and an obelisk built onto a square marble platform. This monumental art is clearly drawn from a modern reinterpretation of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman victory memorials while possibly dwelling on the idea of "Lebanon as a crossroad of civilizations" as Lucia Volks argues in her book on memorials and martyrs in Lebanon. The thin concrete structure spanning above the fourteen pillars and the obelisk cannot be dissociated from the Arch of the Empire designed by Ludovico Quaroni for the Roma 1942 Esposizione Universale in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Fascism. Although the World fair never took place, the design of the Arch of the empire was featured in 1937 on a poster that was widely disseminated. The perspective representing Sami Abdul Baki’s proposal for the martyr’s square memorial could be highly influenced by it. As per the quoted words of Mr. Ibrahim Khoury, the director of the office of information and Public Relations at AUB and a very close friend of the Abdel Baki family, the proposal for the martyr’s square memorial was “very dear to the heart of Sami Abdul Baki” for the symbolism it represented. It clearly reflected his enthusiasm through “an exuberant proposal” (Khoury, 2018). Although Abdel Baki's proposal represented the grandeur, victory, and masculinity that were missing in Hoayek's representation of the two mourning mothers, the proposal was rejected by a vast majority of the public because it dismissed "both ethno-religious difference and national unity"(Volks, 2010). In 1956, Abdul Baki submitted a more acceptable (neoclassical) and feasible design that was finally approved and executed by the Italian sculptor Renato Marino Mazzacurati (Figure 3). This search into the different designs and proposals for martyr’s square uncovers the little tolerance of the general public for experimental forms and modern architecture in the representation of their nation.

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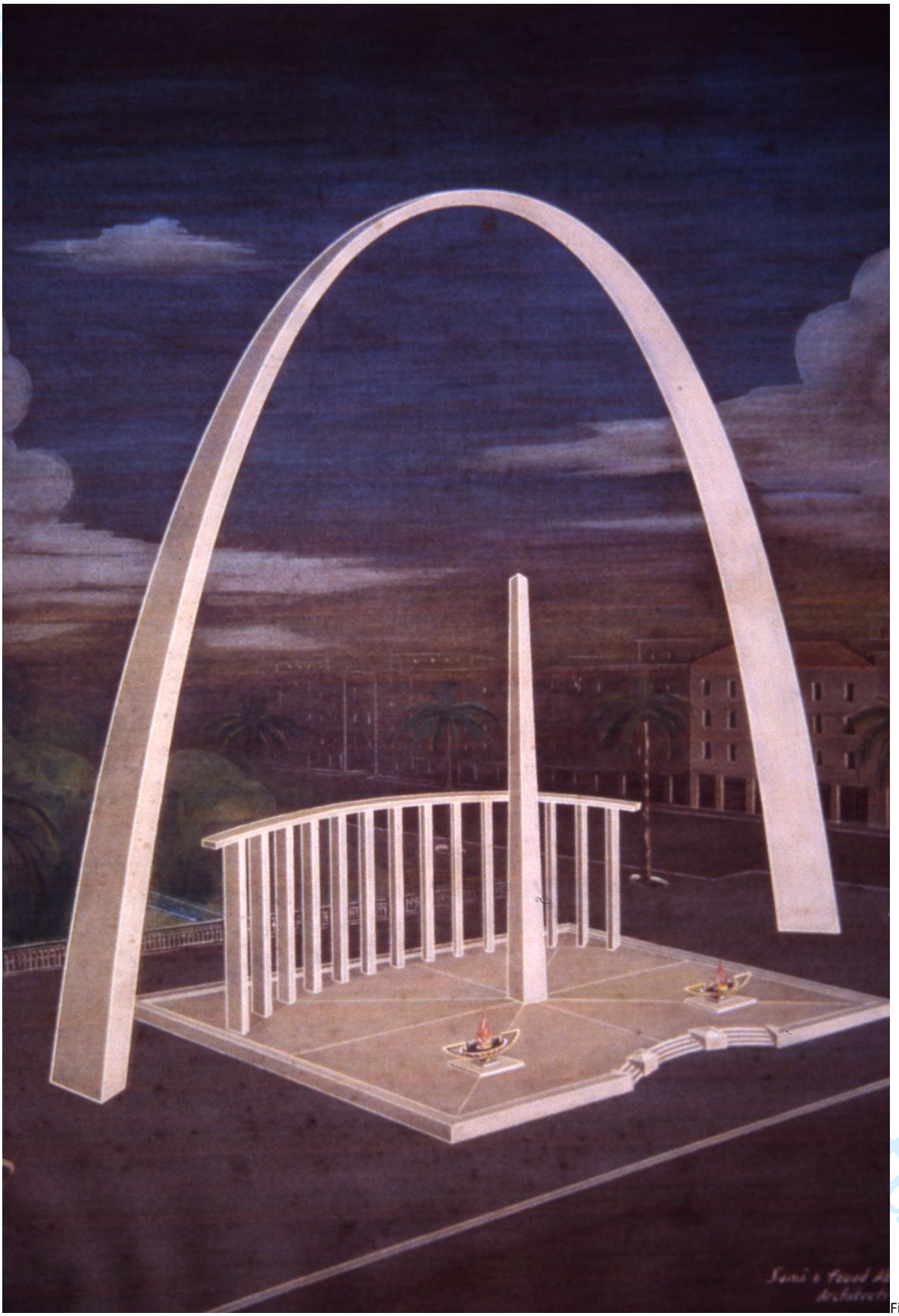

Fig. 3

Figure 3: 1st Proposal for the martyr's memorial, S., F. Abdul Baki, Beirut, Lebanon, 1953.(Source: ACA Arab Center for Architecture).

6THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CORPORATE ARCHITECTURE AS PART OF THE MODERNIZATION OF THE CITY OF KUWAIT

In 1949, during his studies in the states, Fuad the older brother of Sami Abdul Baki met with Sheikh Fahad Al Salem who later offered him a job as the inspector General at the Public Works department in Kuwait in 1953. Around that time, Sami Abdul Baki pursued his architectural studies in Germany where he also worked with German architect Ernst Van Dorp on several small to large-scale projects in Bonn, Cologne and Rio de Janeiro. In 1956, just as Sami completed his studies in Heidelberg (Abdul Baki, 1998), Fuad Abdel Baki requested a leave from his position at the Public Works Department and Sami was asked to replace his brother (Al Salem, 1956). Sami Abdul Baki occupied this position for two years during which he established several partnerships with Lebanese, Kuwaiti and German peers and founded the Arab Consulting Engineers (ACE) company who was commissioned several key projects in Kuwait.

The 1950s represented a period of Nation Building in Kuwait driven mostly by the revenues from the discovered oil and coincided with the Nakba in Palestine and the subsequent rise of Arab Nationalism. During these years, Kuwait witnessed an unprecedented building and expansion of its infrastructure and governmental institutions guided by a Development Programrelying initially on the British experts to manage it. In 1954, an important shift in the politics of the development enabled the start of a new phase during which preference was given to Kuwaiti contractors who took in charge the development scheme with the help of Arab experts (Alnajdi, 2014). This new development paradigm was very much favorable for Sami Abdul Baki to get two important governmental building commissions in Kuwait.

6.1 The Municipality Complex

As of 1956, many state buildings and infrastructural projects have been commissioned to ACE consultants including the municipality complex (Figure4). This project consisted of threeblocks, one of which housed the seat of the National Assembly which became after the independence of Kuwait in 1962 a National symbol. The project is characterized by its use of the latest construction technologies such as its reinforced concrete structure, underground parking, curtain wall façade, integrated Air Conditioning, and elevators system. In 1967, the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram depicted an angry Arab crowd after the six-day war with Israel calling for a United Arab state in front of the seat of the National Assembly. Although these governmental centres demonstrate the Arab pride and development, they mostly reflected modern ideas, an international approach to architecture, as well as a corporate identity arguably addressed for the first time in the region.

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Figure 4: Municipality Complex, S. Abdul Baki, ACE, Kuwait, 1959(Source: ACA Arab Center for Architecture).

It is important to note that the development of such architecture in Kuwait did not arise from any older construction practice nor so much from the climate. Determining factors were often the availability of funding, materials, and Arabs or foreign consultants. The lack of any local aspect resulted in the adoption of almost wholly transhipped buildings or copied designs "caring more for impressiveness than for the soundness of design"(Ghosn, 1970). It is worth mentioning that first use of curtain wall technology in Beirut is recorded in 1957 in Ilays Murr building designed by Bahij Makdissi and Karol Schayer on Hamra street (Arbid, 2002). The building was praised for its "use of glass that is well adapted to the northern elevation on a narrow and relatively dark street" (Ghosn, 1970).The application of a similar glass façade on the municipality building in a hot country such as Kuwait required the extensive use of Air-conditioning which on certain days was still inadequate. The concept of the sun breaker or the brise- soleil, whose application was a characteristic feature of modern architecture in hot climate countries, was not very much pronounced in the municipality complex. However, the pattern on the large facades of the municipality buildings could be inspired by one of the earliest large scale residential projects designed in 1956 by Lebanese architect Joseph Philippe Karam in Beirut. Its façade was "aggressively articulated" with vertical and horizontal protruding elements. When asked about his inspirations in the design of the municipality complex, Sami Abdul Baki did not refer to any specific project. He rather stated that during that period in Kuwait "all projects had similar structures and were only differentiated by the materials and finishes covering it!" (Abdul Baki, 1998).A simple yet provocative answer, that reveals the importance of the projected image of the building.

6.2 The Ministry of Guidance and Information

The second project, The Ministry of Guidance and Information, was originally designed by Egyptian architect Sayyed Kareem (Fabbri et. al., 2016, 2018)as the Kuwait Printing Press in 1956 and then reassigned to Sami Abdul-Baki who delivered the project in collaboration with German Architect Ernest Von Dorp in 1959. The project is characterized by a large mass raised on pillars, and a free-flowing ground floor which extends to the back of the building into an atrium and hosted the first printing press of the country. On top of the building is a roofscape which departs from the vocabulary of the main mass below. The extensive use of brise-solaire reminds us of the Thunayan al-Ghanim building and the Mubarakkiya school. Both are the works of Sayyed Kareem whose facades are clearly articulated with "these thin horizontal shading devices and vertical panels animating the project with shadows and light"(Fabbri et. al., 2016, 2018). the Ministry of Guidance and Information along with the Municipality complex, were both featured in many local and Arab newspaper and magazines as a symbol of “Al-Nahda” (The Arab renaissance) in Kuwait and as a propaganda for the endeavours of Arab consultants and contractors and their contributions in the development of the city. Both projects were symbolic of “Al-Imara Al Haditha” (the modern kingdom) and until now stands as an urban reference (Fabbri et. al., 2016; 2018).

7 RESULTS

For a decade and a half, Sami Abdul Baki was involved in several projects in Kuwait and in Lebanon, amid local and international circumstances. These projects are not comparable in terms of construction techniques, craftsmanship or character and, in many instances, are symptomatic of other architects’ work as demonstrated in the visual comparison diagram below (Figure 5,6).

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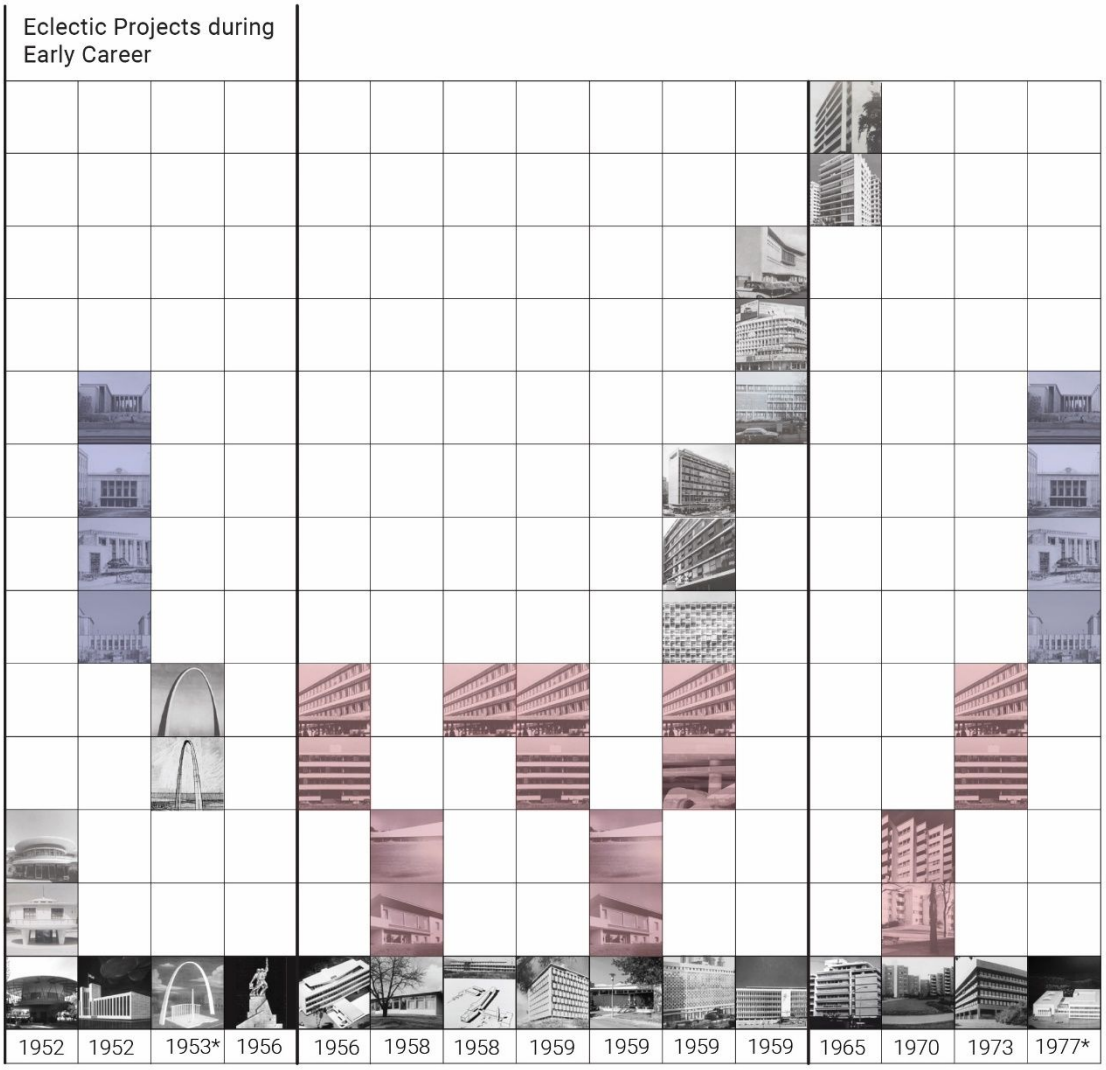

Figure 5: Visual comparison diagram of Sami Abdul Baki's projects and other comparable projects including Ernst Von Dorp. (Source: Authors).

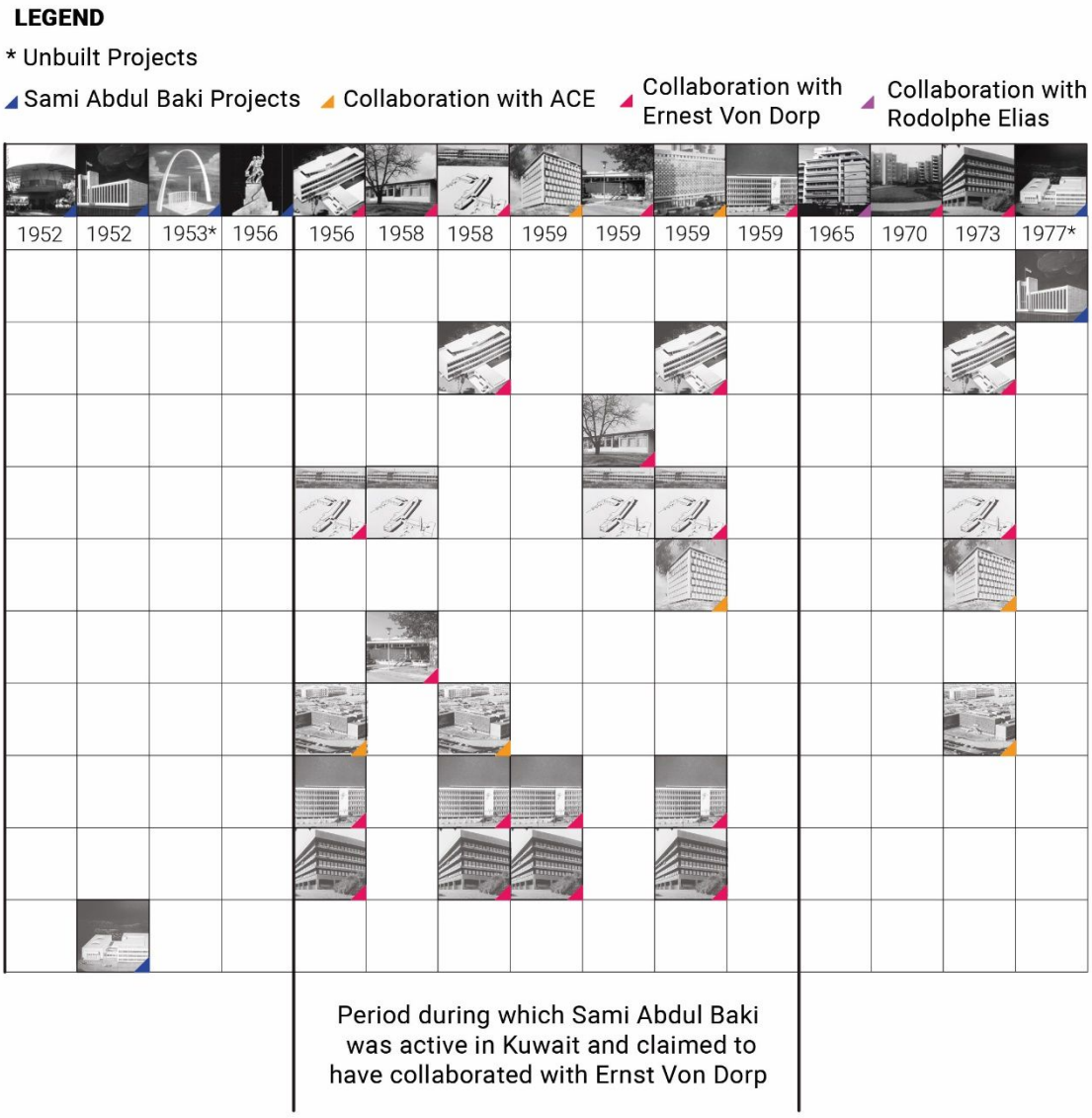

Figure 6: Visual comparison diagram of Sami Abdul Baki's projects and Ernst Von Dorp projects. (Source: Authors).

As a matter of fact, Sami Abdul Baki has a remarkable track record of collaborations, partnerships and cooperation with Lebanese architects such as Georges AbouChaar and Afif Salman both founding members of the order of Engineers and Architects in Beirut in 1951 and founding members of ACE that Sami Abdul Baki founded in 1956 to undertake projects in Kuwait. He also collaborated with the renowned Lebanese architect Rodolphe Elias whose office was based in Beirut and with whom he designed the Amatouri Building at the intersection between Hamra and Abdel Baki Streets as well as a castle for Kuwaiti prince Salem al Sabbah in Alley. During his stay in Germany, he also fostered a solid relation with architect Ernst Von Dorp whose works "shaped in particular the cityscape of Bonn"(Pellens, 2002) and with whom he worked on several projects including the embassy of the German Federal Republic in Rio de Janeiro in 1956. (Table 1)This research also demonstrates that Abdul Baki's

educational *parcours* and the countries where he has studied certainly reflected on his professional career and were strongly connoted to his workplace and collaborations. The timeline below illustrates a natural distribution of projects at the beginning and the end of his career in Lebanon. On the other handsome of the most significant and claimed contributions are located in Germany, where he studied and built a strong work relation, and Kuwait, where he expedited this relation and capitalized on the German expertise. Although no work has been recorded in England where he finally pursued his Ph.D. in Economics, it is believed that this degree was a step forward towards his involvement in the political life in Lebanon after his return from Kuwait. (Table 1)

Profesional Projects

	Year	Name of Project	Location	Collaborators	
BSc Civil Engineering, AUB	1947	Abdel Baki Building	Lebanon	Fuad Abdul Baki	
	1952	Villa Chaffic Qassem	Lebanon	Fuad Abdul Baki	
	1952	Druze Community Center	Lebanon	Fuad Abdul Baki	*Fuad Abdul Baki assigned as Inspector General in Kuwait by Sheikh Fahd Al Salem Al Sabbah
	1953	1st Proposal for Martyrs memorial	Lebanon	Fuad Abdul Baki	
Dip. Eng/Arch., Heidelberg	1956	2nd Proposal for Martyrs memorial	Lebanon	N/A	*Sami Abdul Baki assigned as Inspector General in Kuwait In replacement of his brother Fuad
*Sami Abdul Baki starts a collaboration with German architect Ernest Von Dorp	1956	Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany	Brazil	Ernst Von Drop + Dorsch Consultants	
	1956	Expansion of Kuwait Airport	Kuwait	Sir Fredrick Snow	
	1956	Port of Kuwait	Kuwait	ACE (Afif Salman + George Abou Chaar)	
	1956	4th Ring Road	Kuwait	ACE (Afif Salman + George Abou Chaar)	
	1957	Boys School	Germany	Ernst Von Dorp	
	1958	Elli Heuss Knapp gymnasium	Germany	Ernst Von Dorp	
	1959	Municipalty Complex	Kuwait	ACE (Afif Salman + George Abou Chaar)	
	1959	Ministry of Information and Guidance	Kuwait	Ernst Von Drop + Dorsch Consultants	
	1959	Ministry of Finance	Kuwait	ACE (Afif Salman + George Abou Chaar)	
	1959	Health Department	Kuwait	ACE (Afif Salman + George Abou Chaar)	
	1959	Villa Raderschall	Germany	Ernst Von Dorp	*Sudden death of Sheikh Fahd Al Salem Al Sabbah known to be the sponsor of the Abdul Baki brothers in Kuwait
Phd Economics, UL	1968	Federal Ministry of Defense	Germany	Ernst Von Dorp	
*It is believed that his diploma in economics was a step forward towards his involvement in the political life in Lebanon	1970	Residential complex	Germany	Ernst Von Dorp	
	1973	Federal Police Headquarter	Germany	Ernst Von Dorp	
	1977	Ain w Zein Hospital	Lebanon	N/A	
	1995	Association of Abdel Baki Family	Lebanon	N/A	

Table 1: Academic achievements and workplace matrix. (Source: Authors).

Finally, when we include the chronological notes about the local and general context of the projects, we can read logical and consistent themes that are recurrent, and that could be attributed to certain ideological affiliations familiar to Abdul Baki's and his family. It is interesting to note that despite the natural development of his relations and the maturity of his thoughts and commitment to specific ideas, no recurrent architectural discourse or theme can be attributed to projects he was commissioned.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This paper argues that each of the commissions of Sami Abdul Baki was unique in terms of the opportunity it has offered for the architect to produce an iconic or an ideal project. However, the entire body of work did not really constitute a consistent architectural language reflecting a specific ideology or school of thoughts. Although Abdul Baki did not produce works that could be characterized by a precise character or architectural language, or that even influenced generations of architects; he was nonetheless one of the first to introduce the notion of corporate architecture in the region. He did that specifically through his projects in Kuwait where the building solution responded more to the client's motivations, ambitions, and financial means rather than to the architect as an author or creator.

Furthermore, this paper argues that Abdul Baki's involvement in the projects varied from design to supervision, to client representation and in many ways, his position could be suspicious of being not fully aligned or compatible with the benefit of all parties involved. His strong political dimension and quality as a mediator or facilitator in addition to his strong network of contacts certainly played a big role in the project commissions that he has won as an Architect/Engineer. Through the work of one Engineer/Architect, this essay reconstructs one portion of the narrative of cultural exchanges between Beirut and Kuwait City, particularly during the heydays of construction in the 1950s. In doing so, this essay also aims at positioning Sami Abdul Baki as being "in the right place and at the right time," capturing opportunities to develop key institutional and national projects without necessarily succeeding in translating this opportunity into iconic projects with long-lasting values. Similar narratives about foreign and Arab architects active during the same period could further contribute to this history of urban opportunities and transformations that both cities and their inhabitants have been subjected to during more than a decade of "modernization" and development.

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