

Michel Ecochard

Until the nineteenth century, "culture" was dispensed by universities. Outside academia, the ability to contribute to culture was limited to private collections. Access to these was possible for only a few individuals; the majority of the population had no opportunity to contemplate monuments of culture.

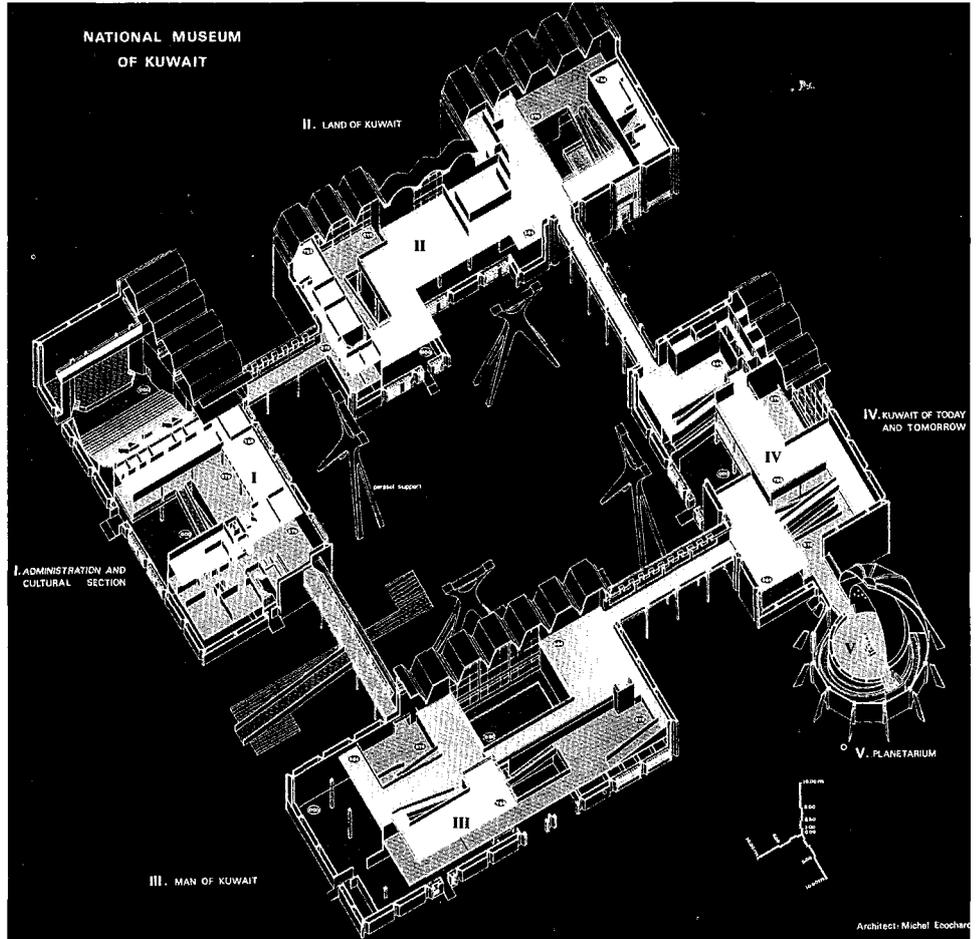
The creation of museums allowed the public access to works of art. Museums became specialized storehouses of archeological treasures, paintings, manuscripts and the like, or immortalized man's activities in war, in the sea or in space. A recent evolution has promoted "houses of culture," which afford a view of the theatrical, literary and pictorial arts of the modern age all under one roof. For Kuwait, it was important that this presentation of culture be even more general.

Established in 1960 by Mr. Sélin Abdulahk of UNESCO, the programme of the National Museum of Kuwait not only measured up to this evolution, but even surpassed it. Examination of the programme of buildings which comprise this museum makes one realize that the term "museum" itself is obsolete.

The Kuwait museum comprises five separate buildings constructed around a central garden, corresponding by their grouping to knowledge of the Arabian peninsula, its geography, its history and its civilization. The buildings are linked by galleries which allow easy passage from one to another. Those visitors who wish to visit only one section could have access to it through a garden, shielded from the intense heat of the sun by a three dimensional structure comprised of *brise-soleil* (sunbreakers).

The building divisions are as follows:

- 1) *Administration and Cultural Section*, a type of cultural house in our present conception, containing conference rooms, a library, discotheque, cafeteria and administrative offices
- 2) *Country of Kuwait*: geology, botany, zoology (numerous aquariums), ethnology, etc.
- 3) *Man of Kuwait*: archeology (on the island of Felaka there exists a Greek temple and excavations of a Sumerian



KEY:

- I Administration and Cultural Section*
- II Land of Kuwait*
- III Man of Kuwait*
- IV Kuwait of Today and Tomorrow*
- V Planetarium*

National Museum of Kuwait: plan showing the arrangement of the five buildings Extensions will be required to accommodate more specialized areas. Architect: Michel Ecochard

Plan: M. Ecochard

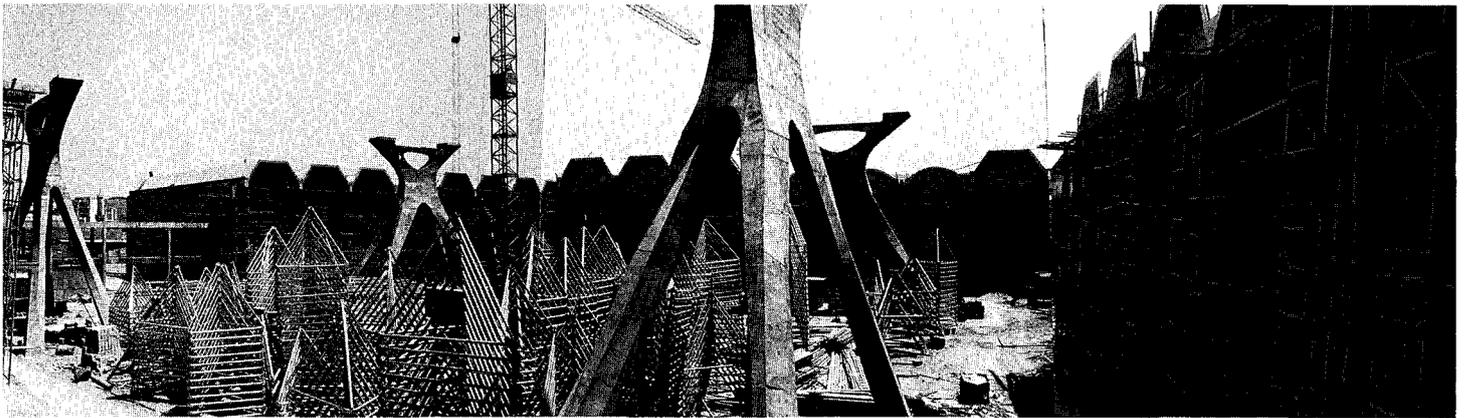
town), history, painting and graphic arts, folklore, and a display of the wooden boats which travel the Gulf and still use the construction techniques of the seventeenth century

4) *Kuwait of Today and Tomorrow*, a kind of palace of discovery with the history of oil, its extraction, its expedition and its

refining; the atomic era and use of the atomic pile; the development of the country and its urbanism, etc.

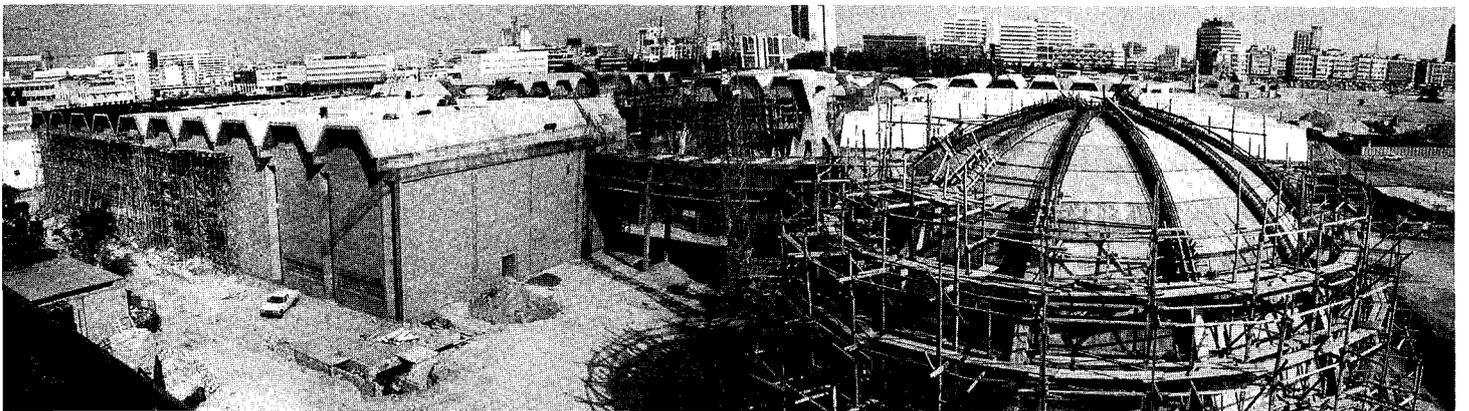
5) *Planetarium*, with an astronomical museum showing the ancient instruments of observation, a province of which the Arabs were the undisputed masters until the fifteenth century.

It is obvious that as the material development and culture of the Gulf progress, more specialized buildings will have to be constructed. Nonetheless, it was important from the outset to give the inhabitants of Kuwait and the Gulf an overview of both the present state of the arts and sciences, and their evolution in the Arab countries. The Kuwait National Museum should fulfill this important educational and cultural objective.



National Museum of Kuwait: view of construction of central courtyard from "Man of Kuwait" building. The four-legged concrete structures are parasol supports to provide shade. Architect: Michel Ecochard

Photo: M. Ecochard



National Museum of Kuwait: view of construction of Planetarium (right) and "Man of Kuwait" building, with remainder of Museum and Kuwait skyline in background. Architect: Michel Ecochard

Photo: M. Ecochard