

Kuwait by the First Photographers documents the period between 1900 and 1950, which saw Kuwait's emergence from a vulnerable sheikhdom negotiating a precarious independence among neighboring powers--the British in India and the Gulf, the Ottoman Turks in Mesopotamia, and the central Arabian chieftaincies of Hail and Riyadh--to a nation-state with the highest per capita income in the world. It is an outstanding visual record of a crucial time before the centuries-old way of life, centred on pearling, fishing, boat-building and trade by land and sea, was swept away. Kuwait's people, with no natural resources of their own, not even fresh water, managed by skillful use of their geopolitical position and traditional skills to make Kuwait not only the foremost Arabian port in the Gulf, but also a force to be reckoned with in north-east Arabia. European fascination with the Arab way of life is reflected in the photographs of many renowned travellers including Freya Stark, Alan Villiers and Wilfred Thesiger.

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