

Element Form

1. Defining the intangible cultural heritage element

- Name of the element as used:

Qassab (butchers).

- Other name(s):

Dhabbah (slaughterer).

- Short and useful title of the intangible cultural heritage element (Including domain(s) of cultural heritage manifested by the element):

Social practices, rituals and festive events – skills associated with traditional craftsmanship

- Practitioners and groups concerned:

Men

- Geographical location and range of the intangible cultural heritage element:

All regions of the United Arab Emirates.

- Brief description of the intangible cultural heritage element (Not to exceed 200 characters):

In the past, the man or the head of the family practised this profession whenever needed in the house or neighbourhood. A sheep or camel would be slaughtered using a knife with the animal facing the qibla. The head would be chopped off and the animal would be hung from its limbs on the family trunk¹, or a place designated for slaughter. The animal would then be skinned

¹ Family trunk: a metaphor for the trunk of the family tree or a strong branch of that tree.

and cut into small pieces, which would be prepared for cooking by the family.²

At a later stage, *qassab*-s (butchers) emerged, who started practising the trade and selling meat. Meat would only be sold on Friday; however, it was available on a daily basis in the month of Ramadan.³

Qassab-s still exist to this day. In the past, *qassab*-s practised their profession (slaughtering animals) at the outskirts of creeks. The *maqssab* (site of slaughter) was a sandy area in the open air, in which the *qassab*-s fixed pieces of wood to the ground to hang and skin the animals after slaughter. *Qassab*-s practise their profession during holiday seasons and festive occasions in *sakeek*-s (narrow alleyways between homes), courtyards or front yards. Some people prefer to witness the slaughtering process in person. *Qassab*-s would wander the alleys and offer their services. They carried a sharp knife with a wooden blade and a cleaver that was placed in a piece of canvas "*khaish*"⁴ with a rope attached to it that would be used to hang the carcass after skinning.

Slaughtered animals were very cheap and affordable for everyone. Each slaughtered animal was worth between 2.5–3 rupees. The *qassab* would receive two rupees as compensation for each slaughter. The owner of the animal would sometimes reward the *qassab* by giving them a piece of the animal, such as the head, internal organs, or the neck. There are men who have the necessary knowledge about the slaughter process, yet they do not practise the profession. They only slaughter animals for their families or provide assistance to their neighbours. *Qassab*-s are known for their good qualities. They are always kind to the slaughtered animals, they provide them with rest and water prior to the slaughter and they do not sharpen their knives in front of the animals. In addition, they mention the name of Allah while

² Abdullah Ali Zaid: *Dibba: Crafts, Professions and Industries*, Ministry of Culture and Youth, Abu Dhabi, 2010, p. 221, adapted.

³ Juma Bin Humaid: *A Living Memory of Land and Sea*, Department of Culture, Sharjah, p. 40.

⁴ *Khaish* is a textile fabric with a rough texture and a light yellowish-brown colour. It is mainly used in making sacs for agricultural products.

slaughtering the animal, as Allah states, “And do not eat of that upon which the name of Allah has not been mentioned”.⁵

2. Features of the Element:

- Concerned practitioners and performers of the intangible cultural heritage element (including name, gender, occupational category, etc.):

Men who have the proper experience and knowledge about the correct method of slaughter.

Women who have experience with skinning and chopping.

- Other participants whose work relates to the element and contributes to sustaining its practice or facilitates the performance and transmission of the element (including those who attend a performance or those who are responsible for training, supervision or sponsorships):

Expat workers, commoners (men and women), vendors (who sell meat or the instruments used in the trade)

- The language (s) used (in the element):

The local dialect used in the nomenclature associated with the element, as well as the proverbs and anecdotes told by the practitioners of the trade.

- Tangible elements associated with the practice of the element and its transmission, such as: instruments, equipment, costumes, spaces, and ritual tools (if any):

Knives of different sizes, canvas “*khaish*”, slaughter site (butcher shop/ slaughterhouse).

- Other intangible elements related to the practice and transmission of the element in question (if any):

⁵ Sheikha Mohammad Al Hay: Tales from the Ancestral Heritage, National Media Council, Ras Al Khaimah National Printing Press, 2016, p. 49-51.

Oral forms of speech, including the conversations and stories exchanged while practising the element.

The instructions and guidelines that are followed while working.

- Customary practices governing access to the element or any of its specific aspects

There are no restrictions preventing access to the element.

It is practised by members of the household as well as owners of butcher shops.

- Modes of transmitting the element to others within the group:

- Transferring the experiences of craftsmen to their children and grandchildren.
- Referencing the element in the media, local periodicals and councils.
- This element is practiced in accordance with societal norms, customs and traditions.

- Concerned organizations if any (associations/civil society organizations, etc.):

- Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi.
- Department of Health
- Ministry of Climate Change and Environment
- Ministry of Culture and Youth.
- Emirates Heritage Club

3. Status of the element: its viability and sustainability

- Threats to the practicing of the element in the context of the relevant community / groups concerned:

- The availability of modern slaughterhouses has reduced the need for traditional butchers.

- The spread of awareness about the importance of modern slaughterhouses and their health benefits, and dangers of roaming home butchers.

4. Data: restrictions, and private permissions (collectively and access)

- Group / community approval and involvement in data collection:

The narrators have expressed their approval for data collection and documentation.

- Restrictions on data access and use:

There are no restrictions on accessing data related to the element.

- Experts and narrators (their names, position, and affiliation):

Narrator Shamsa Rashid Al Shamsi, Falaj Hazza, 3 July 2018.

- Dates and locations of data collection:

8 July 2018.

5. Sources of information about the element (if any)

- Literature: books, articles, and others:

- Books:
 1. Juma Bin Humaid: A Living Memory of Land and Sea, Department of Culture, Sharjah.
 2. Sheikha Mohammad Al Hay: Tales from the Ancestral Heritage, National Media Council, Ras Al Khaimah National Printing Press, 2016.
 3. Abdullah Ali Zaid: Dibba: Crafts, Professions and Industries, Ministry of Culture and Youth, Abu Dhabi, 2010.

- Audio-visual materials, records etc. in archives, museums, and private collections (if any):

There are various media recordings that have referenced the element.

- Documentary materials and tools in archives, museums and private collections (if any):

There is documentary information about the element in a number of heritage books and bulletins.

6. Data about the inventory process

- The person(s) who performed the classification and collection:

Hamda Mohammed Al Shamsi

- Date the information was entered into the inventory:

- Pictures:





Date created:

Date modified: Updated on 17/08/2020

Username: