

Element Form

1. Defining the intangible cultural heritage element

- Name of the element as used:

Al Muhannya

- Other name:

Al Hannaya

- 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
- Traditional craftsmanship

- Practitioners and groups concerned:

Women who have experience in the field of henna.

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

The element can be found throughout the United Arab Emirates without exception. The people of the oases and the people of the coasts alike adorn themselves with henna. Many women are masters of this craft, and practice it in society.

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

Henna is one of the most essential adornments beautifying the women in the United Arab Emirates and the Gulf region since ancient times. Many women have mastered the craft of henna and were known to the community as the al muhannya or al hannaya. Henna rituals were accompanied by many traditional arts inherited in the various cities and towns of the Abu Dhabi emirate. Also, Emirati women have used henna dye since ancient times, following the example of the Messenger of God, peace be upon him. There are also many accounts about the sources of henna, some of which are local and while others are imported from some countries such as Oman, India and Iran.¹

Al muhannya: this is a woman who adorns the hands and feet of other women with intricate stylistic designs using henna. This is popular on many happy occasions such as weddings, and it is a well-known tradition in the United Arab Emirates and many Gulf countries and elsewhere. Henna is made from the leaves of the henna tree. The leaves may be bought from merchants. The leaves are washed and dried then ground in al menhaz to produce a powder. It is then run through al sheila, a fine black fabric used as a sieve.²

The al hannaya prepares the henna paste by mixing the fine henna powder with boiling water and dried or fresh lemon, then exposing it to the sun for a full hour, after which it is ready to be applied to the hands and feet for decoration – work for which the al muhannya receives a fee.³

Henna is used in weddings, feasts and other occasions. It also has other uses, the most important of which is the treatment of certain diseases. Men use henna as a remedy, specially those whose work exposes them to the sun and other

¹ Musa Salem Al Hawari, Henna in the Emirates, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi as a Model, 1st edition, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2008, p. 57.

² Interview with Shamma Al Neyadi from the book of Musa Salem Al Hawari, Henna in the Emirates, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi as a Model, Edition 1, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2008, p. 59.

³ Musa Salem Al Hawari, Henna in the Emirates, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi as a Model, 1st edition, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2008, p. 61.

harmful natural elements, such as seafarers, blacksmiths and farmers. Men also use henna helps to heal the cracks and callouses that develop on their hands and the soles of feet as a result of their work and walking on hot sand, especially in the summer.⁴

The narrator Al Yaziah says in this regard: The benefits of henna are many for men, women and children. As for men, they apply it to the soul of their feet to protect them when walking in the blazing heat. It is also known as a remedy is for the eyes. Henna is also placed on the head for its cooling effect. Some women traditionally apply henna when their husbands return from long trips. Some people adorn themselves with it at any time for decorative purposes. Henna is also applied to children to celebrate their fortieth day. Henna is usually mixed with turmeric, which is known for its many benefits. Sometimes herbs such as al wars are added to henna, as are pulses like mahlab, salt, and myrrh.⁵

2. Features of the Element:

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

Women of all ages: girls, young women, and old women.

- 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):

Merchants, seafarers, blacksmiths, farmers.

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

⁴ Saleh Ahmed Gharib, *Henna is the Adornment of Women in the Gulf*, 1st edition, Doha, 1998, p. 24.

⁵ Field interview with Al Yazia Ali Jaber Al Mansoori, Al Ain City, Al Ain Oasis, on January 21, 2019.

The local dialect is used in communication among people concerned with the element, and in traditional songs and tales during their practice of henna, especially on holidays and on the occasions of the henna night during wedding seasons.

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

The tools needed to practice this profession: henna leaves, fresh dry lomi (limes), water, menhaz for softening, black cloth (sheila) used as a sieve.

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

Traditional chants while practicing the element because of the association of henna with holidays and happy occasions.

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

The practice of the element is governed by customs and traditions, such as the henna night and the festive seasons.

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

The element is transmitted by the transfer of experiences and skills from mothers to their daughters. It is also transmitted through directed education and training at female artisan's houses, festivals, and heritage camps. The media also plays an important role in raising awareness of the element and its spread.

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

– Department of Culture and Tourism

- Ministry of Culture and Youth
- Heritage fairs and festivals
- Artisans' houses.

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:

There are no threats to the practice and spread of the element, as the Emirati family still practices henna within its inherited traditions.

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

- Group / community approval and involvement in data collection:

The group has a positive reaction towards collecting the material and they reinforce the role of the Department in preserving this heritage.

- Restrictions on data access and use:

There are no restrictions on information and expertise related to this craft, rather there is cooperation between official and private institutions concerned with heritage, and the bodies that list and document the elements of heritage.

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

Field interview with Al Yazia Ali Jaber Al Mansoori, Al Ain City, Al Ain Oasis.

- Dates and locations of data collection:

Al Ain City, Al Ain Oasis, 21/01/2019.

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

- Literature: books, articles, and others:

- Musa Salem Al Hawari, Henna in the Emirates, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi as a Model, 1st edition, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2008.
- Saleh Ahmed Gharib, Henna is the Adornment of Women in the Gulf, 1st edition, Doha, 1998.
- Al Bayan Newspaper, 19 July 2010.
- Al Bayan Newspaper, 9 March 2013.
- Al Bayan Newspaper, 8 September 2010.

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

There are some recordings of henna and its role in the media.

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

There are documentary materials about henna in heritage books, as well as pictures of henna and methods of preparing it.

6. Data about the inventory process

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

Ruqaya Subaih Khamis Saeed Al Kaabi.

- Date the information was entered into the inventory:

9/6/2015

- Pictures:



Al menhaz is used to grind henna into a fine powder.⁶

⁶ Al Bayan Newspaper, 19 July 2010.



A woman grinds the henna in the al menhaz until it becomes a powder, then uses a soft black sheila cloth as a sieve for the ground henna in preparation for kneading it with water.⁷



Pigment used in weddings and other happy occasions.⁸

Date created: 9/6/2015.

Date modified: 15/8/2020.

Username: Ruqaya Subaih Khamis Saeed Al Kaabi.

⁷ Al Bayan Newspaper, 9 March 2013.

⁸ Al Bayan Newspaper, 8 September 2010.