



Element Form

1. Defining the intangible cultural heritage element

- Name of the element as used:

Henna

- Other Name (if any)

Henna

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

- Social practices, rituals and festive events.
- Traditional craftsmanship

- Practitioners and groups concerned:

Women – girls – children – the elderly.

- Geographical location and range of the element:

All regions of the United Arab Emirates.

- Brief description of the element:

Henna is one of the ancient legacies of the United Arab Emirates, where no home would be without the smell of the henna bush because of its importance to women in the past. Before it was a decorative and aesthetic material, it was used in treating some diseases and aches. It is part of the rituals, ceremonies and adornment of women and girls.

Henna cultivation:

The types of henna differ according to the areas where it is cultivated, and therefore according to the environment in which the tree is grown. The best types of henna are those grown in the northern regions of the country, and the Al Batinah region in the Sultanate of Oman¹. The narrator, Sheikha Al Shamsi, recalls²: “In the past, henna was cultivated on the outskirts of palm farms, where it was grown in the form of sticks. After cutting it, it would grow again better”. Henna generally grows faster in warm weather than in winter and is harvested before seed formation. The narrator, Shamsa Rashid Al Shamsi, explains³: “In the past, henna was cultivated by the method of *amed* (meaning column) and it was grown at a length of approximately ten meters. It takes about two months to grow in the warm period, while growth is delayed by about 3 months in winter due to the cold weather”.

Preparing the henna mixture:

Regarding the preparation of the henna mixture, the narrator, Sheikha Al Nuaimi, indicates⁴ that after cutting the henna leaves, it takes 3 days for it to dry and is kept out of the sun. It is then pounded and sifted in a light piece of cloth, known as a *sheila* or *wegaya*. The amount to be used is then taken, kneaded with boiling water and dry lemon, and left for a period of time before use. The narrator, Shamsa Al Shamsi, adds⁵: “When it comes time to harvest it in the summer, it is dried in the yard for a day, goes through the process of

¹ Sheikha Mohamed Al Jabri, Accessories and Fashion for Women in the United Arab Emirates "Accessories of the Body" 2008, pp. 34,35.

² A field interview with the narrator, Sheikha Ali Al Shamsi, in the Shaab Al Ashkhar district, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, Sunday 21 January 2019.

³ A field interview with the narrator Shamsa Rashid Al Shamsi, in Falaj Hazza, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, Sunday 21 January 2019.

⁴ A field interview with the narrator, Sheikha Saif Al Nuaimi, in the Al Oasis area, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, Monday, 22 January 2019.

⁵ A field interview with the narrator Shamsa Rashid Al Shamsi, previous source.

“*asf*”⁶, gets filled in “*ywani*”⁷, and is preserved. Sometimes, it is distributed or given to people in need. If the henna is to be used by a girl or a woman, the henna leaves are pounded using a tool called the *menhaz*. It is then “sifted” using cloth and the desired amount is kneaded. The remainder is kept in boxes in and refrigerated to last for a longer period.

Decoration forms of henna:

Some of the traditional inscriptions are featured during national occasions and by grandmothers. Among the most famous inscriptions at that time were “*ghamsa*” in which the hand is dipped completely from the front and back with henna, “*gussa*” is done on the fingers and the half or the entire palm of the hand, “*shera’a*” is in the form of a triangle, “*rawayeb*” is done on the tips of the fingers, “*tila*” is a point in the form of a marble and “*kazoa henna*” is done the form of a *kazoa* bean⁸.

Narrator Shamsa Al Shamsi states⁹: The importance of henna can be observed in its many uses, including:

Headaches: A small amount of henna paste is placed on the head of the person (man) to cool off his head, especially in the summer, in addition to applying henna to the soles of the feet.

It is also used in the treatment of abdominal pain that afflicts women, especially pregnant women in the early months of pregnancy, as they would drink a medicine consisting of henna, *mahleb* and gum, left in a cup of water until the next morning. It would then be filtered, and the woman would drink it for a period of 4 days. This drink helps relieve colic and the pains that accompany

⁶ Asf: Moving the branches so that the henna leaves fall off, meaning that the leaves are filtered from the branches.

⁷ Ywani: Plural for “Yuniya”, it refers to strings intended for making sacks of grain.

⁸ Turath Magazine, issued by the Emirates Heritage Club, Issue 2018, December 2017, p. 111.

⁹ A field interview with the narrator Shamsa Al Shamsi, the previous source.

pregnancy. The narrator, Sheikha Al Nuaimi, explains¹⁰: Henna has benefits for hair as it gives it shine and is a treatment for dandruff.

This is confirmed by the narrator, Al Hadh Al Kuwaiti¹¹: “The forefathers say, the henna of the day is adornment, the henna of the night is treasury (meaning remedy).”

The modern designs of henna have taken many forms and women have resorted to salons in order to obtain the latest designs that are mixed with local, Indian and Sudanese designs¹². However, the traditional designs still exist, and we see them on the palms of our mothers and at national events and heritage celebrations.

2. Features of the Element:

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

Women and girls of different ages, some men.

- Other participants whose work relates to the element:

- The vendors involved in marketing herbs.
- Expat workers.
- Persons involved in the cultivation and preparation of the henna plant.

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

The local language that is used during preparation of henna, whether when drying or kneading. The names given to henna in the local dialect.

¹⁰ A field interview with the narrator, Sheikha Al Nuaimi, the previous source.

¹¹ A field interview with the narrator Al Hadh Al Kuwaiti, researcher in the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi, on Sunday 24 March 2019.

¹² Sheikha Mohamed Al Jabri, previous reference, p. 44.

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

– Henna leaves/ lemon, whether dry or fresh/ the bowl/ *mi'sar*/ in addition to moisturizing oils and other herbs that are added to it.

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

– Songs, dance, and chants accompanying henna rituals at weddings and celebrations.
– Verbal conversations exchanged at the time of preparing henna.
– The instructions and rules that must be followed while preparing henna.

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

This element is practiced according to the norms, customs and traditions prevailing in society.

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

– Sitting with their elders to benefit from their discussions of the element.
– Observation while the element is being practiced.
– The experiences and information that mothers pass on to their daughters.

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

– Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi.
– Cultural and heritage events.
– Heritage associations.
– Other heritage clubs in the country

- Family Development Foundation
- Traditional crafts centres

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 element is still practiced according to the framework of customs and traditions without threats

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

- Group / community approval and involvement in data collection:

There is collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and other relevant parties regarding data collection.

- 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):

Interviews:

1. The narrator, Sheikha Ali Al Shamsi, in Shaab Al Ashkhar, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, Sunday 21 January 2019.
2. The narrator, Sheikha Saif Al Nuaimi, in the Al Oasis area, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, on Monday, 22 January 2019.
3. The narrator Shamsa Rashid Al Shamsi, in Falaj Hazza, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, Sunday 21 January 2019.

4. The narrator Al Hadh Al Kuwaiti, researcher at the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, on Sunday 24 March 2019.

• Dates and locations of data collection:

- In the Shaab Al Ashkhar area, Al Ain, on Sunday 21 January 2019.
- In the Al Oasis area, Al Ain, on Monday 22 January 2019.
- In Falaj Hazza, Al Ain, on Sunday 21 January 2019.
- The narrator Al Hadh Al Kuwaiti, researcher at the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, on Sunday 24 March 2019.

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

• Literature: books, articles, and others:

Books:

Sheikha Mohammed Al Jabri, Accessories and Fashion of Women in the United Arab Emirates, "Accessories of the Body" 2008.

Periodicals:

Turath Magazine, issued by the Emirates Heritage Club, Issue 2018, December 2017.

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

There is some audio–visual material preserved in the media about the element. A cassette recording of the interview that was conducted with the narrator.

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

There is documented information about the element in some heritage books, bulletins and archives.

6. Data about the inventory process

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

Hamda Mohammad Al Shamsi

- Evidence of the consent of communities and groups concerned to the (a) inclusion of the element in an inventory (b) the provision of information for the inventory

- Date the information was entered into the inventory:

30 May 2019.

- Pictures:





- References:

Date created: 01/05/2019

Date modified:

Username: Hamda Mohammad Al Shamsi

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