

REGISTER OF THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Inventorying 50 Lebanese Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements





Production :

Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth

Author and coordinator:

Prof. Annie Tabet, Département de Sociologie et Anthropologie (FLSH-USJ) and Member of UNESCO Global Network of Facilitators for UNESCO 2003 Convention

Interactive map:

Ms Rita Zaarour and Eng. Nada Saliba, Département de Géographie, Laboratoire SIG (FLSH-USJ)

Graphic Designer:

Ms. Ann Berberi

Photos and photography processing:

Mr. Joseph-Gerard Tohme, Institut d'Etudes Scéniques et Audio Visuelles et Cinématographiques (IESAV-USJ)

Documentation and field work:

Dr. Bernard Jabre, Ms Nabia Bejjani and Ms Elsa-Maria Messara, Département de Sociologie et Anthropologie (FLSH-USJ). Mr. Jean Hajjar, Member of UNESCO Global Network of Facilitators for UNESCO 2003 Convention. Ms. Katia Ibrahim, Dr. Khattab Ahmad, Ms Zella Kadouzian, Dr. Mohsen Moussawi, Ms Wardeh Serhal, Ms Fatima Tlaiss, Members of the Lebanese network for ICH safeguarding and Mr. Jean-Pierre Webbeh.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2014-2020 ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The Programme objective is to foster fair, equitable and sustainable economic, social and territorial development, which may advance cross-border integration and valorise participating countries' territories and values. The Managing Authority (MA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French. For more information, please visit: www.enicbcmmed.eu

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders

The Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Mediterranean is a part of the iHeritage project of ENI CBC "Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme", the largest Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative elaborated by the EU under the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI). The Programme brings together the coastal territories of 14 countries in view of fostering fair, equitable development on both sides of the Mediterranean

In Lebanon, the Register's works, implemented by Saint-Joseph University of Beirut (USJ) and directed by Prof. Annie Tohme Tabet, established an inventory of 50 Lebanese intangible cultural heritage elements (identification, documentation, description, photography, videography, community and photos consents, integration of the material into platform and publication preparation) under the supervision of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon (CCIABML)

Ambriss or jar labneh of the Bekaa valley

Traditional cuisine and aliment conservation

Ambriss is a traditional dairy product made in the Bekaa Valley in North Lebanon. Its preparation involves fermenting a blend of fresh goat and sheep milk with salt in dedicated “khabyeh” jars. The jars used to make ambriss are often protected against the evil eye, either by hiding them away or using eye-shaped beads. The fermentation process allows for its preservation, making it a muneh product meant to sustain the families that prepare it during the winter months. The product can also be sold in the local market, serving as a supplementary source of income for the domestic economy. This ancestral know-how is passed down through generations and typically carried out by women.



Anfeh salt marshes

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

Anfeh is known for its traditional coastal salt production, which has the oldest salt marshes in the Mediterranean dating back to Phoenician times. Salt was extracted from the salt pans that were laid out on the rocky expanses by the sea, channels dug in the rock allowed water to arrive there. From 1933, they changed their look with the use of concrete to, in small layers, cover the rocks and facilitate the harvesting of cleaner salt. Today, a few families continue this age-old practice, passing down techniques through generations. However, preserving this heritage is at risk due to government tax exemptions on salt production



Arabic calligraphy

Traditional craftsmanship

Al Khat al-'Arabi was introduced to Lebanon by the Ottomans in the 19th century. Arabic calligraphy can be found on various mediums, including holy books, places of worship and burial, memorial sites, jewelry, invitation cards, signs, and banners. More recently, it has gained prominence in public places through graffiti. This art form was historically practiced by men, but women have entered the field afterwards, mainly focusing on artistic and creative trades. Arabic calligraphy is a highly regulated and rigorous art form. In Lebanon, the transmission from master to pupil is more common among older generations, while young people acquire their expertise through formal education in universities and calligraphy training centers.



Arak, a grape brandy

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Arak is a grape brandy found in many Middle Eastern countries. In Lebanon, it is mostly prepared by men in wine-growing regions, notably within the Christian and Druze communities. The term “arak” in Arabic means “sweat”, alluding to the condensation process that takes place during the preparation of this beverage. Arak is made from fermented grape juice, usually from the Obeïdi variety, that is distilled 3 times. The aniseed is usually added during the 3rd distillation. The spirit then matures in terracotta jars for at least 6 months to release gas. Finally, the Arak is diluted to adjust the percentage of alcohol to 53%. Arak is often sipped with water: either one part water and one part arak, or two parts water and one part arak, served with ice.



Assia Pottery

Traditional craftsmanship

Assia is a village in the Batroun caza, where pottery skills have been passed down from mother to daughter, since time immemorial. The clay, prepared with raw material found in the surrounding mountains, is worked directly by hand, without turning on a potter's wheel. The resulting objects, characterized by their red color, are left to dry in the open air for one or two weeks. Once dry, the pieces are sanded with pebbles to acquire a glossy glazed finish. The objects are then fired in a wood firing kiln at 400 °C. Firing at high temperatures removes all the water from the clay, increases durability, hardening, and shape fixation.



Assyrian folk dances, Shora, Khigga Yaqoora, Dimdimma and Ghawerrah

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

The intangible cultural heritage of the Assyrian community in Lebanon, deeply rooted in their religious beliefs, is passed down through families and Assyrian parishes, clubs, and a school. Folk dances, are considered one of the markers of Assyrian identity, and are mainly performed during religious (e.g. Christmas) and, life events or secular (e.g. Akitu) holidays. During these events, individuals of all ages come together, join hands, and engage in rhythmic foot tapping and expressive hand and shoulder movements, accompanied by traditional or modern Assyrian music. The most common Assyrian dances performed are Shora, Khigga Yaqoora, Dimdimma, and Ghawerrah. These dances typically take the form of circle dances performed in a line with an open end. The head of the line, referred to as «Resha», usually dances with a handkerchief adorned with beads or bells so it jingles when shaken.



Basket weaving tradition

Traditional craftsmanship

Basket weaving is an ancient craft deeply rooted in Lebanon's rural villages. Different regions employ locally found materials such as reeds, palm leaves, and corn straw, to craft a variety of products, from multicolored mats in Al-Kouachra to prayer rugs in Hermel. Beyond the rural regions of Lebanon, traditional baskets also found their purpose in daily urban life. Techniques for processing materials and weaving vary, with a focus on preserving the integrity of the natural fibers. This centuries-old tradition is being revitalized with the help of modern designers and NGOs. These efforts seek to update traditional methods for contemporary tastes, benefiting tourism, commerce, and sustainable development, and empowering women. The craft of basket weaving continues to be practiced by both men and women across Lebanon, connecting communities to their living heritage while adapting to the demands of the modern world.



Al-Bawahir, traditional weather forecasting methods

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

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Blown glass, in Sarafand and Beddawi

Traditional craftsmanship

Lebanese blown glass has a rich historical significance, with its roots dating back to Phoenician craftsmanship around 50 BC. Today, artisans in Sarafand caza of Saida and Beddawi in Tripoli continue to practice this craft, passing down generations-old techniques. The process involves skillful manipulation of heat and temperature control. Molten glass is shaped using a metal rod, and artisans blow air into it to create various forms. In Sarafand, the know how has been handed down through the Khalife family for centuries, with children typically beginning their training around the age of 11. To this day, their ancient glassworks facility employs a furnace that dates back 2000 years to the Phoenician era. Across generations, the family has preserved techniques, secrets, tools, and artistic methods. In Beddawi, recycled glass fragments resulting from port of Beirut explosions (2020) are used to craft carafes and jars, showcasing traditional Lebanese craftsmanship.



Bell-making in Beit Chabeb

Traditional craftsmanship

The history of bell-making in Beit Chabeb in Metn Caza dates back to the early 18th century. This know how was passed down through generations in the Naffah family. Today, there is just one bell founder intending to pass on his skills to his young children.

The bell-making process involves creating molds from clay and goat's hair, then melting a copper-tin alloy to pour into the molds. After cooling, the molds are destroyed, revealing the bronze bell, which is engraved with the «Naffah et fils» trademark. In Beit Chabeb, the tradition of bell-making is deeply tied to the village's identity and Christian heritage, representing a legacy passed down through generations and uniting the community across time



Ersal rugs weaving

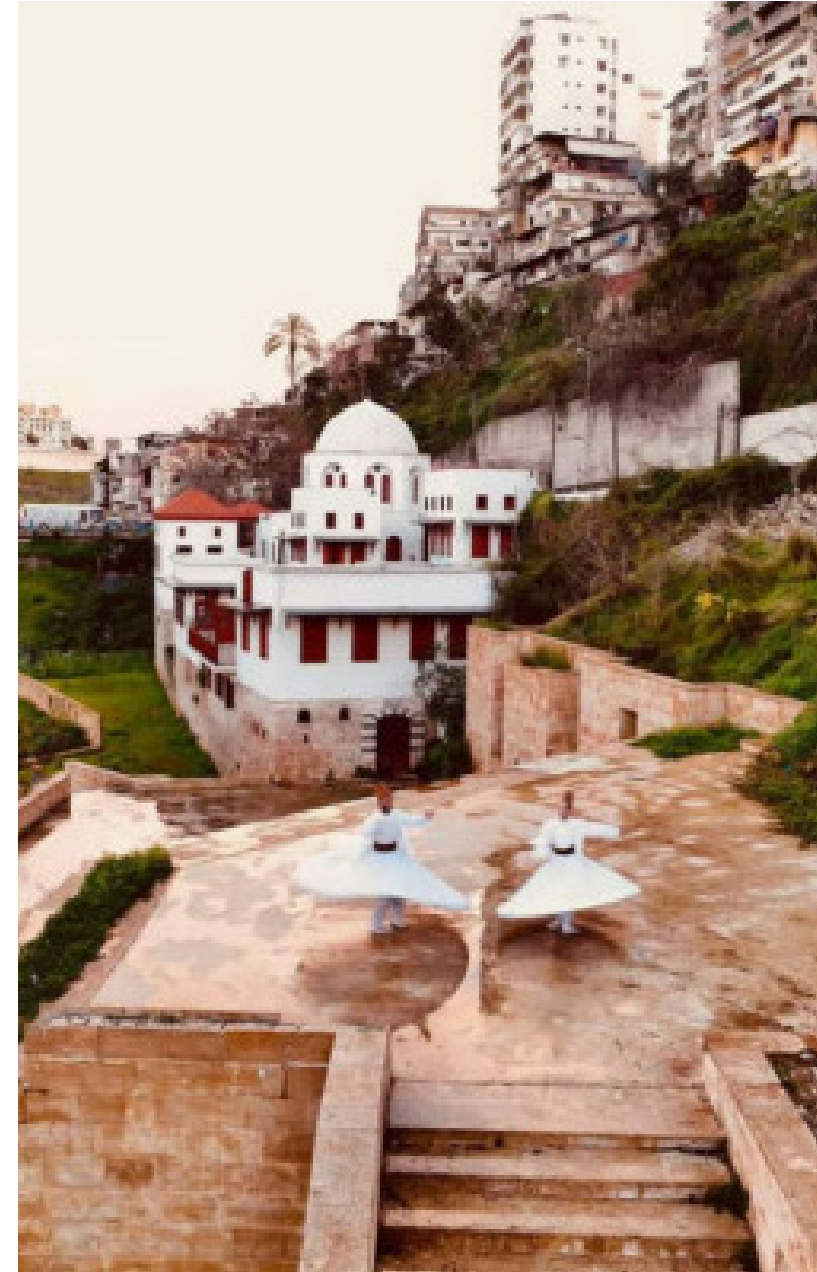
Traditional craftsmanship

Ersal's rug-making tradition has its origins in Aidamoun, a village in northern Lebanon, where Turkish-origin settlers introduced their weaving skills to the region. This expertise eventually reached Ersal, a village where most residents raised sheep, in the early 1960s. The knowledge was passed down from mother to daughter, and rug weaving had its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, the craft has significantly declined due to modernization. Revitalization efforts are now spearheaded by an association that operates a workshop and offers training for those interested in learning the trade. The craft entails washing, dyeing, spinning, and transforming wool into usable yarn, which is then woven to create rugs featuring various patterns and colors.



Al-Fatleh Al-Mawlawieh, a sufi dance

The Mawlawi order, a Sufi tradition attributed to Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, emphasizes circular dancing, singing, and specific musical instruments. Its beliefs align with Sufism, emphasizing unity of existence and worship that includes appeals to saints for assistance and healing. Sufi whirling, known as «fatleh mawlawieh,» is rooted in dhikr, involving Islamic prayer recitations alongside dancing and whirling, symbolizing communication with the Creator during ecstatic trances. The practitioners' attire, long white dresses, enhances the beauty of their dance. The Mawlawi order's presence in Tripoli dates back to the 14th century, centered around the Takia of the Dervishes. It gradually waned in the 20th century but found revival through a new troupe created in 1998 and the Takia rehabilitation in 2012.



Fishing boats construction

Traditional craftsmanship

Lebanon's coastal cities have a rich maritime heritage, where fishing has been a primary source of livelihood, although its importance has waned in recent years. Shipbuilding, which dates back to Phoenician times, flourished especially in Tyre and Byblos, and endures today in places like Saida, Tyre, and Tripoli. Typically, these workshops are family businesses, with men inheriting the craft from their fathers. In Tyre, for example, the Barbour family is renowned for shipbuilding. Despite modernization, the wooden fishing vessels, called feluccas, remain in use, with designs varying from port to port. This craft is in danger of disappearing due to declining demand caused by environmental factors such as pollution and overfishing, as well as the lure of more profitable trades among the younger generation, and modernization.



Al-Hkeyeh, the traditional Lebanese storytelling

Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage

Al-Haki (from the Arabic verb “hakā”, meaning “to narrate”) with its transmission conditions, communication rules, and rituals is regressing in Lebanon. The number of storytellers has significantly declined in rural areas. Non-professional storytellers became increasingly rare due to forced displacements, rural exodus, and other factors that sever the chain of transmission between generations.

Professional storytellers known as hakawātī (exclusively male) traditionally used to perform in Beirut, Tripoli and Saida cafés. They disappeared completely around 1975-1980, during the civil war. However, neo-storytelling is becoming a performing art, introducing the younger generation to new haki techniques. These emerging storytellers are professionalizing their craft and attempting to revive the tradition, drawing from collections of tales that span different geographical regions.



Hammana Cherry Festival

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Hammana, a charming village in the mountains of Mount Lebanon, offers breathtaking views and a temperate Mediterranean climate, making it a popular summer escape from coastal heat. This village is known for its annual Cherry Festival, celebrating the cherry harvest with various cherry-related activities, including tastings of jams and traditional dishes. The festival also features music, folk dances, and local crafts. Cherry picking during this event connects people with nature. The Cherry Festival dates back to the 1970s and predates the civil war. In recent years, the Hammana Municipality has actively supported and organized the festival to promote cherry production in the region.



Hand wood carving

Traditional craftsmanship

Wood carving is a craft that combines technical skill and creativity. Craftsmen use quality wood like walnut, poplar, olive, and more, which is carefully dried and processed during sawing. The engraving process involves drawing patterns on parchment paper or directly on the wood, securing it on a stand, and using specialized chisels to create intricate designs. Carving can take from a day to several weeks, depending on complexity. Some pieces incorporate mother-of-pearl, requiring precise carving and gluing. After smoothing by a specialist, the piece undergoes a painting stage. Crafting a single piece, such as benches, chairs, boxes, or musical instruments, can take several months. Historically, wood engraving was used for furniture decoration, but it faces challenges due to economic crises and rising wood prices. Some artisans have shifted to creating personalized items and representations of Lebanese heritage, opening opportunities for women in woodcarving.



Horse Breeding in Lebanon

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

Horse breeding and racing have deep-rooted traditions in Lebanon, particularly in the Bekaa and Akkar plain, where historical families are associated with this practice. These families own huge farms and large numbers of horses, and their horse-related traditions govern various aspects of life, from social gatherings to riding.

Horse breeding thrived before the civil war (1975-1990) but suffered due to the conflict and never fully recovered, despite association efforts. Currently, due to the economic crisis, Arabian horse breeders are trying hard to preserve this heritage, to revive this tradition, and to attract more amateurs and those interested by holding annual festivals and organizing races, to breathe life into this lumbering body.



Hummus, a chick peas dish

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Along with tabbouleh, hummus is undoubtedly the best-known preparation in Lebanese cuisine. Indeed, hummus means «chickpea purée», but it's also the chickpea itself that the word indicates. Hummus name varies according to the topping added to the basic mixture : bel tahini hummus, bel awarma hummus, and hummus with beef.

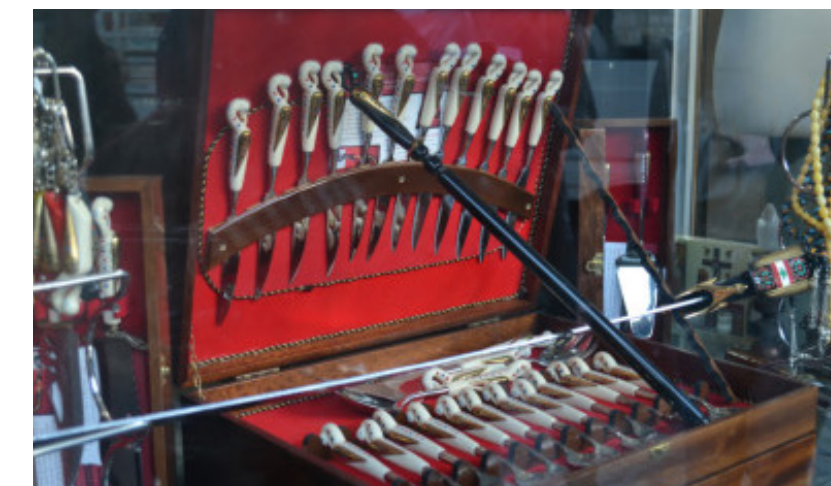
Hummus is served as an entrée and a mezze (a selection of small dishes shared between guests). Hummus is usually served with warm pita bread and can be accompanied by other mezze such as moutabbal (grilled eggplant purée), labneh (cottage cheese) or tabouleh (parsley and bulgur salad). Appreciated for its soft texture, slight lemony flavor, and delicate taste, this Lebanese dish has gained international recognition and is enjoyed in many countries around the world.



Jezzine's cutlery

Traditional craftsmanship

Jezzine's artisan tradition, which dates back to the 1770s, initially focused on making weapons from buffalo horn and bones and later specialized in cutlery in the 1930s. One of the distinctive features of Jezzine cutlery is the unique phoenix-shaped handles, a mythical bird from Phoenician mythology known as a firebird from paradise perishing in flames, only to rise anew from its ashes. It is the symbol of Lebanon, continually rebuilding itself after wars and crises. Once made of ivory and horn, these handles now incorporate bone powder and cellulose acetate, allowing for new colors and styles while maintaining the phoenix symbol. This craft has both historical and international significance, as Lebanese authorities often gave these handcrafted items as gifts on diplomatic occasions.



Kibbeh, a dish of Lebanese cuisine

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Kibbeh is a traditional dish in Lebanon and the Middle East made primarily from a mixture of bourghol and a second ingredient, which can be meat, fish, or vegetables. It can be prepared in various ways (raw, fried, grilled, or baked) and is shaped into stuffed balls or pancakes, often served with yogurt or a sauce. Traditionally, the meat was pounded in a stone mortar or tile, mixed with bourghol by hand, but this method has become rare due to modern machinery. There are several types of kibbeh which vary from one region to another Kibbeh nayyeh, Kibbeh bel saniyeh, kibbeh zgherteouieh, kebbet samak, Kibbeh Arnabiyeh, and many more. Also, Kibbeh balls are used in cooking and are an essential ingredient in local soups and stews.

Vegetarian versions, kibbeh batata, laktin or hilleh made from potato, pumpkin or flour mixed with bourghoul and stuffed with a variety of vegetable ingredients. Christians eat these types of kibbeh during fasting and especially on Good Friday.



Kochari, an Armenian dance performed in Lebanon

Performing arts

In Lebanon, the Armenian community is dedicated to preserving its intangible cultural heritage. Kochari dance is one of its essential elements. It is the most popular Armenian dance style, featuring regional variations and performed to various rhythms accompanied by instruments like zurna hornpipes and double-headed bass drums. It is performed on stages or as part of dance group during joyful events. During the performance, both male and female dancers join hands in a circle. Nowadays, young Armenians are interested in learning this dance through online resources like YouTube tutorials and community events in places like Bourj Hammoud, an Armenian town near Beirut.



Kousan Chamber Choir and traditional Armenian singing and music preservation

Performing arts

The Kousan choir, founded in 1910, preserves traditional Armenian singing and music. «Kousan» signifies a storyteller who narrates tales of love, people, and nature through music. The choir has been active in various Middle Eastern cities and in Lebanon, it has a presence in Beirut, Bourj Hammoud, Byblos, Anjar, Zahle, and Saida. The choir comprises 60 members, from all ages, including Armenian musicians, music students, and experienced singers, with some being family members. Their repertoire includes religious music and folk songs performed with traditional instruments such as the flute, shvi, zurna, and dudug.



Lebanese Dabkeh, a popular dance

Performing arts

Dabkeh is a group line dance popular in Lebanon and neighboring countries. During this dance, the participants hold hands and rhythmically strike the floor, following the movements of a leader called ‘ras’ (head). The ras typically holds a necklace of beads or a handkerchief in their hand while dancing. The dance is usually accompanied by traditional instruments such as the mejwiz (double recorder), the derbouka, the daf (tambourine), and the nay (single-reed flute). The Dabkeh has several different regional variations that still exist today, despite folklorization efforts in the 1950s that aimed for the creation and popularization of a “unified” variant, the ‘dabkeh lubnanieh’ or Lebanese dabkeh.



Maamoul

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Maamoul is a shortbread pastry filled with date paste, walnuts, pistachios, almonds, or dried figs particularly popular in Lebanon. To make it, women rely on traditional skills, creating different shapes by hand and decorating them with tongs, or using wooden maamoul molds. Pastries that sell Arabic sweets produce maamoul mad which is easier to make.

Maamoul is a symbol of conviviality and sharing in Lebanon, and its preparation and its consumption are often a moment of family reunion, when generations come together to prepare or savor this delicious pastry.



Maasser El-Chouf Dabke Festival

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Maasser el-Chouf is a high mountain village renowned for its natural beauty, biodiversity and historical significance. In addition, the village is part of the Chouf cedars nature reserve.

In 2015, the National Dabke Day was created by Jabalna association, under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and in collaboration with the Chouf Cedar Reserve. It became a major celebration which attracts around 12,000 people. It includes professional dabke performances, competitions, dabke workshops, live shows, and stands selling local products. Additionally, visitors have the opportunity and time to visit the cedar forest. The National Dabke Day is part of a process of reconciliation and establishment of peace in Maasser el-Chouf. Its importance and notoriety at the national level provide the inhabitants of the village with a sense of identity transcending community affiliations.



Al-Man'oucheh

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Al Man'ouche is a traditional Lebanese flatbread, typically eaten for breakfast. The dough is made from sifted wheat flour, baker's yeast, sugar, salt, a small amount of oil, and water, and is indented so as to prevent the garnish – often a mixture of thyme and olive oil – from dripping off. The preparation of the Man'ouche is typically, but not exclusively, carried out by women for domestic consumption or in bakeries called forn (meaning oven), most of which are family owned. The man'oucheh, often enjoyed with tea or coffee, is a typical feature of the sobhiyé, morning gatherings that bring families, neighbors, and/or friends together.



Markouk or saj bread

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Markouk is a traditional Lebanese bread, very thin and almost translucent. It's made from dough, prepared in the Lebanese tradition on a saj, a heated metal dome. In villages, women often cook their bread on a saj over a wood fire, but electric or gas models are also common. The dough is made using yeast or sourdough, a combination of white and wheat flour, water, and sometimes salt. It is prepared the night before and divided into portions covered with corn flour to prevent sticking. The process of making bread involves stretching dough on a stool called «tabliyyé,» kâra (a round cushion), and saj. Cooking is quick, and bread is removed as it browns. It can be preserved for nearly fifteen days. Like Arab bread, the markouk serves as a spoon for eating or used as a base for sandwiches.



Marsaben

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Marsaben, a marzipan sweet, has a rich history in Zouk Mikhail, where it was introduced by a European traveler five generations ago. This delicacy is made from a mixture of sugar, orange blossom water, and rose water, which is then formed by hand into intricate flower shapes. Despite the dedication of its practitioners, typically women, to preserve and pass on this craft, it is in danger of disappearing due to a decline in local almond production, which increases production costs, and the mass production of lower quality Marsaben using molds.



Mawlid, spiritual religious song or praise of the Prophet

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Mawlid is a religious chanting crucial in conveying moderate and tolerant Islamic messages. It is based around traditional religious poems that encourage obedience, goodness and love for God. Singing inchâd and praise requires trained singers, choirs, and percussionists. Inchâd was traditionally passed down through generations of singers Munchidin by memorization, but modern communication methods and media have made it more accessible for all, men and women. Mawlid celebrations are held for various occasions, including the Prophet's birthday, migration, Isra and Mir'aj, Ramadan, and life events like births, marriages, and condolences.



Mûne

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

«Mûne» in Lebanon refers to provisions obtained through traditional preservation techniques. These provisions are prepared during the summer for consumption during the winter, when food is scarce, thus aligning with the traditional rural economy's reliance on seasonal food production. Mûne involves preservation techniques such as fermentation, sun drying, evaporation concentration, brining, distillation, and storage in olive oil and fruit sugar. The specific types of mûne vary by region and village, depending on the local availability of fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and meat. Women play a pivotal role in processing and storing preserved products, as well as managing reserves. In recent times, economic challenges have led to a resurgence in mûne production both in rural and urban communities.



Olive Oil Soap

Traditional craftsmanship

Olive oil soap, known as Saboun Baladi, is a traditional product made from natural ingredients, mainly virgin olive oil caustic soda and water, with the option to add scents like bay leaf oil or rose water. This artisanal soap-making process follows methods passed down from generation to generation. Saboun Baladi is known for its skin-friendly, medicinal and therapeutic benefits.

Although many Lebanese had switched to industrial soap in the past, the demand for Saboun Baladi has increased due to the current crisis, providing income opportunities, particularly in rural areas. In larger cities like Tripoli and Saida, soap is produced in factories.



Olive tree culture

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

Lebanon's olive trees are primarily located in the hilly areas near the coast, ranging from a few meters to 850 meters above sea level. Remarkably, some ancient olive trees, thousands of years old can be found in Bchaaleh and Deir Mimas. Olive trees are planted most often in deep, alkaline soils in the North and in pebbly brown soils in the South. They are hardy and often planted in marginal lands, making them ecologically valuable. Lebanese olive cultivation relies on various local varieties collectively known as «Baladi». Lebanon experiences a three-month olive harvest season from mid-September to the end of November every year. Harvesting begins about a week after the first rains. The harvest is a communal event, involving family members of all ages and often local institutions, resembling a festive occasion. Olive oil, natural and virtuous, serves multiple purposes: food, lighting, care, religious practices, hygiene (soap).



Pine trees culture and harvest

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

Pine trees play a crucial role in the country's economy. While various regions in Lebanon produce pine, Mount Lebanon remains the primary contributor.

Pine cone harvest and drying season begins in June. The cones are collected, dried on roads or rooftops, and the pine nuts are eventually separated from the cones using modern machinery. Lebanese pine nuts are prized for their high quality and unique flavor. They are used in cooking and healing. Pine tree wood is used for heating, furniture making, and its dust serves as a soil fertilizer.

Despite their economic importance, Lebanese pine trees face threats of extinction. Urbanization and diseases have led to their decline, jeopardizing the livelihoods of rural families who rely on them.



Proverbs on weather and seasons

Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage

Proverbs are an essential component of Lebanese culture, emerging naturally in various situations to impart moral lessons, popular wisdom, and experiential knowledge. They have diverse origins, drawing from religious texts like the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'an, and others, as well as ancient Arab poetry and everyday observations. Spoken in literal or dialectal Arabic, they are not attributed to specific authors and have been passed down orally. In situations, proverbs are introduced with the phrase «there is a proverb that says» (في مثل بقول), followed by the recitation of the proverb itself. In rural Lebanese society, proverbs are influenced by nature, climate, and the sky, guiding the actions of peasants and villagers. Several proverbs are related to the weather and the seasons:

If the moon is surrounded by a halo, the coming night will be rainy

إذا القمر عليه طارة بتكون ليلة غدي مطّارة

Cold of summer is more piercing than a sword

برد الصيف احد من السيف

In summer conflagration, in winter flood

بالصيف حريق وبالشتي غريق

Heat is health, even in the middle of summer

دفا عفا ولو بعز الصيف

If summer had a mother, she would have mourned him

لو كان للصيف ام لكانت بكيت عليه

(Samadi Naaman Hana, *Les proverbes de ma mère : Proverbes du Liban & leurs équivalents dans les langues du monde*, Paris : Geuthner, 2013.)



Proverbs on months and weather forecast

Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage

In rural Lebanese society, proverbs reflect the careful observation of nature and its evolution, the climate, and the sky. These proverbs guide the behavior of peasants and villagers. Numerous proverbs describe weather variations and offer agricultural advice specific to each month of the year. Here are a few examples of proverbs depicting weather conditions during the different months of the year.

February	شباط
February, whether it's punching or kicking, carries the smell of summer	شباط ان شبط وان لبط ريحة الصيف فيه
March	آذار
In March, the traitor, [there are] seven major snowfalls, not to mention a few lighter ones	آذار الغدار فيه سبع ثلجات كبار ما عدا الصغار
July	تموز
July heat boils the water in the jug	تموز بيغلي المي بالكوز
September	ايلول
The end of September is damp with rain	ايلول طرفو بالشتي مبلول
October	تشرين الاول
Between October and November, a second summer	بين تشرين وتشرين صيف ثاني

(Samadi Naaman Hana, Les proverbes de ma mère : Proverbes du Liban & leurs équivalents dans les langues du monde, Paris : Geuthner, 2013.)



Proverbs about the sky

Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage

Proverbs are often very old and of folk origin, and therefore transmitted orally. In situations that are conducive to them, each proverb is prefaced by the phrase «there is a proverb that says» (في مثل بقول), followed by the recitation of the proverb itself. Proverbs relating to heaven exhort humility, modesty, poverty, evoke luck or destiny commanded by God.

No matter how much the tree grows, it will not reach the sky

Who loves his mother-in-law has heavenly luck

Who doesn't have a mother-in-law has divine luck

(Samadi Naaman Hana, *Les proverbes de ma mère : Proverbes du Liban & leurs équivalents dans les langues du monde*, Paris : Geuthner, 2013.)

الشجرة مهما كبرت ما بتوصل للسما

حظه من السما يلي بحب الحما

حظه من السما هلي ما عنده حما



Al-Qaidah Al-Qamariah, moon phases rule

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

The lunar year is based on 12 lunar cycles, with each cycle equaling a lunar month of approximately 29 or 30 days. This results in a lunar year of about 354 days, which is shorter than the solar year by about 11 to 12 days. While the Gregorian calendar is used as the official calendar in Lebanon, traditional lunar and lunisolar calendars are still used for determining religious worship, observances, and national holidays. It is also used by farmers to schedule their agricultural activities, and determine the best time for planting and harvesting certain crops.



Rachaya Al-Wadi Dibs Al-Anab, Grape Molasse Festival

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Every October, the Rachaya and Beyond Association organizes Molasses Day in Rachaya al-Wadi. This village environmental festival attracts people from across the country and features activities such as visiting grape molasses presses, grape picking, and selling regional products and village food. The festival also includes competitions, prizes, music, and singing.

Rachaya Al-Wadi's successful grape cultivation history produces Dibs al-anab or grape molasses, an ancient Mediterranean sweetener, predating cane sugar and honey. Dibs al-anab, a delicious and nutritious food, offers several health benefits.

The production process of Dibs al-anab involves pressing fully ripened grapes, allowing the juice to settle and purify with the help of limestone soil. Afterward, the juice is boiled and matured before being stored in special refrigerators. .



Sea mass in Batroun

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Saint-Stephan parish in Batroun, hosts an annual maritime mass to honor deceased sailors and pray for the safety of those at sea. This tradition has ancient origins deeply rooted in the town's history. As traditional fishing practices were perilous in the past, the residents and clergy of Batroun would gather at the old port quays to retrieve the bodies of shipwrecked sailors and organize their funerals. The formalization of this ceremony occurred in the early 1970s through the efforts of the Jeunesse Mariale and the city's bishopric. The goal was to actively engage the community of fishermen and divers in religious life. Nowadays, fishermen play a central role in organizing the event, arranging chairs, decorating boats, and preparing for the ceremony. The mass takes place on a boat, with attendees on the church esplanade. Following the mass, a procession of boats, including one with clergy and bereaved families, heads out to sea to cast a wreath of flowers as a gesture of gratitude to marine life for sustaining the livelihoods of the fishermen.



Shanklish or arisheh cheese

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

Shanklish or arisheh is a Syrian and Northern Lebanon cheese. It can be produced by villagers for domestic consumption and to generate some additional income, or industrially to be sold on the market. The recipe comes from ancient knowledge of food preservation for the winter called muneh. Shanklish was originally made from fermented goat cheese but the last two generations have been making it with cow's milk. It is a salty and pungent cheese shaped into balls and covered with various ground spice mixtures. In the Akkar governorate, it is typically eaten with olive oil. In other parts of the country, Shanklish is commonly served as part of the Lebanese mezze, crumbled in the middle of a plate and surrounded with chopped onion, diced tomato, and minced parsley.



Slik, edible plants collecting

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

In Lebanon, edible wild plants, known as sliq or sliqa in Arabic, are highly valued within rural communities. This knowledge is typically passed down orally through generations, with women often being the keepers of this information. These wild plants are a vital part of local cuisine, used both raw and cooked, and they also have medicinal benefits. They are also collected for healthy drinks and winter supplies and are particularly important during Lent among Christians, as the period of fasting encourages the use of these nutritious plants. However, the tradition is under threat due to a loss of traditional knowledge transmission, changes in land use that restrict access to natural areas, pollution, and excessive commercial harvesting of wild edible plants.



Tabbouleh, an emblematic Lebanese dish

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

In Lebanon, tabbouleh, a very popular traditional salad, is considered one of the typical dishes of Lebanese cuisine. It is prepared with fresh ingredients such as parsley, mint, tomatoes, onions, bulgur, lemon juice and olive oil. Women often get together to sort and bundle the parsley, it's a great moment of sociability, during which family news and events are exchanged and commented on. From an early age, girls are involved in the preparation of tabbouleh, especially in sorting the parsley. Tabbouleh is commonly enjoyed at holiday meals, celebrations, family gatherings, and especially on Sundays.



Tarq a Baalbaki embroidery

Traditional craftsmanship

Tarq is a special embroidery technique used on delicate fabrics like silk, tulle, linen, and Najaf fabrics. It involves using fine silk veils stretched over a wooden frame, pure gold or silver wire, and a unique silver-plated, double-holed needle. The patterns are created directly on the fabric without prior drawing and typically feature small geometric shapes resembling mosaics. Tarq is considered expensive due to the high-quality materials and time required for crafting veils and abayas.

Its introduction to Baalbek dates back to Ottoman rule when a Turkish woman shared the technique, eventually passing it down through generations in the Rifai family. Today, local associations organize training sessions to preserve this tradition.



Tarboush-making

Traditional craftsmanship

Tarboush, a flat-topped men's hat made of red felt with a silk tassel, is a distinctive headwear found in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. In Lebanon, tarboush-making is a traditional profession passed down through generations, though few continue the trade today. Crafting a tarboush is intricate, involving multiple stages. Only three artisan families in Tripoli, Beirut, and Saida still produce it. The process includes importing fabric from the Czech Republic, shaping it over a mold, adding wooden supports from Morocco, and sewing a leather strip inside. Historically, the tarboush was associated with influential Lebanese families and was popular across social classes. However, sociopolitical changes led to its decline, and it disappeared during the civil war. Today, it's worn by select groups, such as religious clerics and those in tourism or hospitality, as efforts are made to preserve it as part of Lebanon's heritage.



Three hoods a weather forecasting method

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.

Farmers and fishermen in Lebanon traditionally relied on nature for weather forecasting, observing the sky, clouds, stars, the moon, and even animal behavior. Despite its lack of accuracy, elders in rural and coastal areas retain this knowledge. The calendar also guides weather predictions, with January and February being particularly notorious for harsh weather, especially in mountainous villages. The «Tradition of the Three Hoods» (Tlet Allousset) stems from Christian monastic customs, forecasting three major snowfalls between January and February, coinciding with the feasts of significant saints: Saint Anthony the Great, Saint Ephrem the Syrian, and Saint Maron. Comparing the snowfall on these saints' feast days determines which one brought the most snow, which is a sign of divine grace.



Traditional fishing knowledge and techniques

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

Fishing is one of the oldest professions along the Lebanese coastal ports, serving as the primary source of livelihood for families. Despite its arduous nature and inherent dangers, it sustained communities for generations. The Lebanese coast is home to various fish species, each species has its own season and fishing methods, and traditional knowledge is crucial for successful fishing, encompassing factors like sea currents, storms, and fish behavior.

Traditional fishing techniques like the shovel, nets, a rod and cage are still used in fishing ports along the coast. Good fishermen know the right places to fish, the depths and the sea currents. In the past, they relied on celestial observations, including moon, stars, winds, and celestial events, to predict weather and fishing conditions. Today, meteorology and GPS aid them in their work.



Traditional games

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Traditional games are known as simple games that entertain young boys and girls, as well as adults in families, alleys and neighborhoods of towns and villages. These games fill with joy and happiness instill in young generations kindness, rules and beautiful values. They differ in form, content, and execution method, playing a vital role in children's social education. Some of the most renowned traditional Lebanese games include al-laqitah, al-sabeh ahjar, ya Salwa leich 'am tebki, al-tankeh, and many more.

There was a decline in passing on traditional games to new generations but the deteriorating economic situation in some neighborhoods, especially in popular areas, has led to a resurgence of interest in those games among children.



Traditional weaving

Traditional craftsmanship

Weaving in Lebanon was a vital part of Lebanese social life since the late sixteenth century. The traditional woven abaya, originated from this craft, has evolved with changing fashion trends while maintaining its cultural significance in Lebanon.

Weaving in Lebanon covers diverse techniques and patterns that reflects the country's cultural richness. It has been passed down through generations and is notably practiced in Zouk Mikael and Baadarane. In Zouk Mikael, the only weaver left crafts a variety of items, including abaya, decorated with luminous patterns and gold and silver threads. Baadarane has a cultural heritage of weaving ceremonial silk abaya known for its dark color and golden embroidery. This ancient technique persists through the Al-Baz family.



Zaatar, thyme a local condiment

Traditional cuisine and aliments conservation

«Zaatar» refers to wild thyme herbs that grow in wilderness. The term also refers to an herbal mix commonly used in kitchens. In June -July, Zaatar is collected and dried. It is mixed with sumac, roasted sesame seeds and salt. mix is conserved for mune (winter provision) or sold to friends and family members. Zaatar serves multiple culinary purposes. It is mainly used to make Manouche, the Lebanese pizza eaten for breakfast.

Zaatar holds deep cultural significance in Lebanon, representing culinary heritage passed down through generations and symbolizing national identity, friendliness, and hospitality.



Al-Zajal, recited or sung poetry

Performing arts

Al-Zajal is a form of folk poetry performed daily, during life events such as weddings and funerals, and during large gatherings. The poets, known as qûâl or zajjâl, express themselves individually or collectively on various themes, including life, love, nostalgia, politics, and more, depicting everyday occurrences and significant moments. Al-Zajal often takes the form of poetic jousts performed to the beat of instruments like the tambourine and derbouka, with poets challenging each other and the audience joining in with applause and rhythmic repetition. Because it brings together people of all ages and religious communities, Al-Zajal plays a vital role in preserving Lebanon's cultural heritage, fostering inclusivity and intercommunity dialogue, and promoting national identity.



Zambo Carnival

Social practices, rituals and festive events

Zambo Carnival, celebrated in Tripoli's old town of Al Mina on the last Sunday before Orthodox Christian Lent, is a tradition spanning over a century, passed down through generations. Its origins are diverse and debated. Some attribute it to Brazilian immigrants, others to Greek influences from the city's past, and some to Senegalese soldiers during the French Mandate. Regardless of its beginnings, the town's inhabitants enthusiastically continue the tradition, with volunteers of all ages participating. During the carnival, people from various communities joyfully roam the streets, donning vibrant costumes, colorful wigs, and masks. The parade, accompanied by drums and shouts, builds an atmosphere of great joy, culminating with some participants bravely jumping into the Mediterranean Sea. This unique cultural event unites Christians and Muslims and serves as an outlet for celebration and camaraderie.





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