

2015

A Symbol of Generosity

Inscribed on UNESCO's
Representative List
of the Intangible Cultural
Heritage of Humanity

Arabic Coffee

قهوة
GAHWA

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Introduction

Arabic coffee in the United Arab Emirates is, as in other Gulf and Arab countries, considered a symbol of the generosity attributed to the citizens of the UAE, representing an important aspect of cordial hospitality to the extent that it has become an authentic national tradition, and one of the characters of the esteemed Emirati personality around the world. The great significance of Arabic coffee as an eternal emblem in authentic Emirati and Gulf heritage is proven as a fixed and unique element on Arab tables in all of their states and on all occasions, with its aroma capable of inundating one's self with delight, comfort and satisfaction, attracting members of every segment of society around the clock. This lure and attraction is increased to the extent that it is said that the welcoming and honouring of guests remains incomplete without serving coffee, even if they are given a banquet in their honour. This is in addition to the other signs of hospitality to which they are entitled; notably a welcoming and warm reception, with all appropriate gestures of honour, which is summed up by the following Bedouin saying: 'When a guest comes he's a prince. When he sits, he's a prisoner. When he leaves he's a poet.'

A guest who is not offered coffee may feel disrespected, imagining that their host has not observed their due duty towards them and has not paid them the full respect they deserve. Tradition have gone far in giving coffee a distinguished social status, as they have made drinking a cup of coffee a sign of tolerance and reconciliation between disputants, and recognition of acceptance of all agreed-upon demands. Letting a guest leave without serving them a cup of coffee is evidence of the continuation of the dispute, and an indicator of the disgrace of the host, who should have been more cordial to their guests. This is soon spread among members of the tribe or community, as this contradicts the host's social standing and sense of belonging.

As part of the desire of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman and Qatar to introduce and raise awareness of their authentic heritage, Arabic coffee was inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2015, through a joint international portfolio submitted by the aforementioned countries. Hence, Arabic coffee has been included in the list of human heritage of humanity.



The history and origin of coffee

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that the word "coffee" is derived from the Arabic word qahwah, which stems from iqhaa, meaning to reduce or stifle the drinker's appetite for food. Another story has attributed the root of the word to the province of Kaffa (Kefa) in south-western Ethiopia (Abyssinia), the original home of the coffee tree, from which it spread to Ceylon, Suriname, Java, Brazil and other parts of the world. In addition, some references state that the original home of the coffee tree is Yemen, as it was one of the first countries to plant it, and then exported its fruit. Evidence for the latter theory is that coffee beans are called Arbika, that is to say, Arabic coffee, and the most famous type is mocha, the name of which is derived from the Yemeni port of Al-Muka on the Red Sea, which was once known as a major marketplace for coffee and a port for its export.

In general, these stories present clear evidence that the cultivation of coffee has very old origins, as ancient as the

drawings in some nineteenth-century monasteries in Yemen demonstrate. In fact, Yemen monopolised its cultivation until 1690, when the advent of Dutch occupation transferred its cultivation to Europe, Brazil and other parts of the world.

As for the discovery of the coffee tree, it is said that it came about by coincidence when a goat herder observed that his goats became more active and energetic after eating from a certain tree in the pastures, so that they did not want to sleep at night.

The name of the coffee tree is the coffee shrub of Arabia, with a height ranging from 4.3 to 6.1 metres. However, farmers trim it, so that its length becomes no longer than 3.7 metres. The coffee tree has self-pollinating white flowers, and the average tree produces enough fruits in one year to make 0.7 kilograms of roasted coffee.

Coffee preparation methods

The preparation of coffee frequently starts in the morning, and can be completed at any time using the necessary tools: a special coffee pot called a dallah, jars and cups, or a small, delicate cup without handles called a finjan, and mihmas (a coffee roaster; a special pan or apparatus suitable for heating up and roasting green coffee beans), as well as other tools known as the brew basket.

In the past, the Bedouin used to dig a shallow, circular hole surrounded by three stones on which they would place the coffee pot, igniting the firewood in the hole, in order to keep the coffee hot enough to be served at all times. This was later known as Kuwar, and built from clay in one of the nooks of the Majlis (or guesthouse), and then covered with pebbles, lined with plates of soft stone to become a stove for preparing coffee. There is always a place set beside it for the individual preparing the coffee-, and a small firewood container to store the firewood.

In order to prepare the coffee, the women of the house sort the beans, discarding any bad ones, before washing and drying them. The beans are then roasted by a man or woman, who puts the coffee beans in a special pan (al-tawa), which



is then placed over the fire and stirred with what is called the mihmas until the coffee beans become red or brown, as an indicator that they are roasted.

The contents are then transferred to a mortar to be ground with a pestle, so that the coffee can be pulverised finely enough. In old times, coffee beans were ground on a rock with a large square surface and a small base that was placed next to the Kuwar. The coffee grinding in the mortar is accompanied by a delightful sound matched by a special aromatic smell that spreads through the place.

After grinding the coffee, it is transferred to a large pot. In days of yore, it was put in a zamzamiya, a ceramic pot that preserves its temperature, taste and colour, but nowadays it is common to use a heater or a pot made for this purpose. Water is then added to the ground coffee beans, which must be clean and fresh. This is why the Bedouin are inclined to keep the coffee in a special bottle.

Coffee equipment and tools

The tools used in coffee making are called the ma`ameel (or brew basket), and include a stove or fireplace, various types of pots, the mihmas (coffee roaster), small delicate cups without handles called, the mortar, milqat, mabkhara, beza, murka, minfakh, tawa, and other tools. Chief among these tools are

- Al-Mihmas: A special iron pan of 40 centimetres, which ends in a round and delicate piece 5 to 7 centimetres in diameter, it is used to stir the coffee beans placed in a special pan (called al-tawa) in the fire on the fire to melt.
- Al-Tawa: A circular dish made of iron used to roast the coffee beans. It has various sizes according to the quantity of coffee to be made, ranging from 15 to 75 centimetres, and its handle is approximately 45 centimetres long to hold it away from the fire.
- Clamp: An iron tool in the form of a rod used to hold embers and remove them from inside the burner, and to move the embers inside the burner and distribute them appropriately using a stick.



- Mortar: A cylindrical bowl made of iron, used to grind and pulverise the roasted coffee beans with a piece of iron called a pestle, which is spindle shaped and 80 centimetres long. It is held from the middle with one hand during grinding or pulverising process, while the mortar is gripped with the other hand.
- Dallah: One of the most important tools used in preparing and serving coffee, thus it is designed, refined and decorated with special effort, a process which has become a special art in itself. The dallah is made of the finest types of brass and white copper, and consists of three types:
 - 1-Coffee Dallah: The largest size, usually placed over the embers, and where coffee and cardamom are boiled, after which the boiling coffee water is taken and poured into another pot.
 - 2-Dallat al Talgeemah: A medium-sized pot compared to the other two, it is placed beside the fire and the coffee is filtered inside, before being poured into the third dallah, the Al-Mzlah.
 - 3-Dallat al Mazallah: The smallest of the pots used in coffee making, from which the coffee is poured and served.

