

2016

A Living Human Heritage

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

Falconry

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Introduction

Falconry is a traditional activity involving hunting with trained falcons. It is believed that falconry emerged and originated in the spacious steppes of Asia and then spread through cultural and commercial relations to other parts of the world.

Falconry has evolved and spread through communities and societies as a form of intangible cultural heritage, a socially entertaining practice and a means of communication and interaction with nature. Although it was formerly a means of obtaining food, it has also borne many social denotations, values and meanings. Moreover, it has become emblem symbol of friendship, sharing, participation and an expression of freedom, as the falconers have a distinctive set of cultural traditions and morals, even though they come from different social backgrounds. They are also eager to transfer this heritage sport to their children, grandchildren and young social groups.

Falconry is considered one of the most ancient relationships between human beings and birds, dating back more than 4000 years. It is a traditional activity based on releasing the falcon to hunt its prey in its natural environment, enjoyed by amateur and professional participants of all ages. With the passage of time, these falconers have exerted strenuous efforts to strengthen their relationship with birds and the methods of their training, which has led to the emergence of a special language between falcon and falconer. Consequently, folk literature surrounding the practice has emerged, being represented in poetry, proverbs, songs, stories and tales. It has also led to the development of handmade falconry tools.



Falconers

The falconers regard themselves as a group joined together by this unique heritage sport, which enhances cultural values based on participation, sharing, cooperation and mutual support, characterised by the 'brothers' association' in the United Arab Emirates and the 'partner association' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In fact, these bonds are manifested through friendship and equality in the sharing of duties, mandates and responsibilities of the groups of 6 to 12 falconers, who spend a period ranging from one to three weeks practicing this traditional sport. This is interposed with evening gatherings around burning fireplaces in the camps set up in falconry regions.

It is customary to exchange discussion and amusing stories of their experiences during their daily journeys tracking their game and prey. The warm and intimate atmosphere that prevails among falconers and the noble values imbued in them by the sport of falconry are summarised in the words of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chairman of the Emirates Falconers' Club, who stated 'Falconry allows our children to enjoy the spell of the desert, imbuing them with the virtues of patience and fortitude, willpower and companionship, which are significant values in our present, as they have been for generations in the days of yore.' In addition, there is a Czech saying that states 'We do not hunt for game birds, but rather to gain all other delightful experiences during the falconry trip.

Falconers convey their knowledge, experiences and skills to the youth through several methods, including mentoring, in which an experienced falconer teaches young falconers hunting techniques by taking them to the steppes, and training them to build trust with the falcon.



The Inscription of Falconry on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

The authenticity of the sport of falconry in the UAE and the special care it was-and still is-given by the leaders and the people of the UAE was strengthened by the first great falconer, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may Allah endow him with his peace. All of this has been a factor behind the initiative adopted by the UAE to set up a portfolio to which the UAE, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, South Korea, Mongolia, Morocco, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Spain and Syria have all contributed. This resulted in the inscription of falconry on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. Other countries, such as Austria and

Hungary in 2012 as well as Portugal, Germany, Italy, Pakistan and Kazakhstan have joined UAE in this international report. The total number of participants who organised and drafted this file amounts to 18 countries.

The main achievements of this joint international project can be summarised as follows:

- The heritage sport of falconry and its associated practices have been granted legal capacity in their activities, thus obtaining the right to be preserved and passed down to future generations through its inscription on the Representative List



of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at UNESCO.

- The project emphasised the care and priority given to heritage by the UAE leadership, providing it with a great opportunity to underscore its efficacy in adopting future joint international projects through its positive international reputation, sincere humanitarian intentions and adequate human and material resources.
- The UAE has become a vital participant the law-making committees and the drafting of UNESCO resolutions on all intangible cultural heritage affairs.

- The project has provided individuals, governmental and societal entities, and institutions in the UAE with opportunities to connect and interact with their counterparts throughout the world, thus protecting and preserving their common national and humanitarian heritage.

