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Ritual and ceremonies of Sebeiba in the oasis of Djanet

The ritual of Sebeiba is practiced exclusively in the oasis of Djanet located in the south east of the Algerian Sahara in the « Tassili n Ajjer » mountains. This area is inhabited since prehistory by nomad and sedentary populations belonging to the touareg group.



In Djanet, Sebeiba is practiced by two sedentary groups, namely the inhabitants of the villages of Azelouaz north of the oasis and El Mihan in the south.





The ritual itself is made up of two phases :



A- a preparatory one called «Timoulawine», it extends from the second to the ninth day of Mouharram (the first month of the islamic lunar month) ; “Timoulawine” consists in exercising the ganga game (tambourin) and singing for women and dancing for men.

B- That of the Sebeiba which takes place on the tenth day of Mouharem and is made up of three phases :

a/- the first one is called «Tenfar». The participants of the two villages go to place called Loghya (between the two villages), preceded by dancers in war costumes called « Takambout » and followed by groups of women who play tambourines and dance.



c/- The third one is called «Aghalay n awatay» (the renewal of the year). Participants to the ritual go around the place dedicated to this purpose located on the edge of the garden of the two communities , while jingling their swords and accompanied by the sound of the gangas and the womens'songs.



b/- The second one is called «Tikemsine». Male participant parade while showing their dresses and various weapons.



The transmission is done by some elders called («Imgharen») who grant a particular attention to both the teaching and the organization of the ritual.

The oldest among women called «Timgharine n agay» are very keen on transmitting the poetic repertory and the various songs by gradually incorporating new choir members.

The «Timgharine n agay» teach women how to prepare themselves and how to take care of their body and their looks (hair style, dresses...).

The seniors among men called (Imgharen) are keen on transmitting through teaching specific rules for Sebeiba choreography.

These dances include elements which are specific to the ritual such as the various costumes, particularly the «Takembout» ones which are considered as sacred and the various weapons such as swords, spears and javelots.

The celebration of the Sebeïba ritual is an important event proper Djanet. It is an important indicator of its cultural identity.

The cultural function of the ritual stems from its entrenchment in the society, particularly among the elders who are keen on its transmission to future generations. This transmission is a vector of the feeling of continuity and reinforces the realization of appertaining , beyond the tribal bond to the city its history and its culture.

The songs, the poetry, the dances, the costumes, the know how linked to handicraft, cosmetics, metal works and the survival of the palm grove and gardens are a testimony of a living patrimonial culture.





The Tassili n Ajjer was registered, since 1982 on the list of the World Cultural Heritage as a mixed site for its pre historical heritage and the diversity of its natural landscapes. The registration of the Sebeiba would be a testimony of the vitality of the communities of Djanet for the preservation of their immaterial cultural heritage and would reveal to the world a cultural expression in favor of dialogue, mutual respect, the culture of peace and the humanity's cultural diversity.



As part of the work on the Sebeiba, the Tassili n Ajjer Cultural Park of Djanet has created since 2009 a service in charge of collecting information and data on all the existing ICH over the Park area, this service is led by three conservation attachés from the Djanet community who are related to the keepers of the knowledge on Sebeiba. One of the three attachés who was promoted to the rank of officer was appointed as Director of the Tassili n Ajjer Cultural Park, being herself a keeper and a member of the group of Ksar d'Azzelouaz women involed in the Sebeiba.

The preparation of the dossier on the proposal of the folkloric ritual of the Sebeiba for registration in the representative list of the immaterial heritage of UNESCO had been the subject of large debates and discussions at different levels of representativity. With the populations of the ksours (El Mihan and Azelouaz) of Djanet, being the main actors of the ritual.

Several Fora were held with various Stakeholders, particularly women and youth who are responsible for perpetuating a secular tradition.



The Councilors of the People's Communal Assembly (the Town Council) of Djanet and of the County Assembly expressed their support to the candidature in favor of the registration of the Sebeiba in the representative list of the immaterial heritage of UNESCO through official deliberations. The Councilors stressed the importance of registering Sebeiba on the representative list of the immaterial heritage of humanity while expressing their moral and material support to the project for the identification and the promotion of the immaterial cultural heritage in general.



Civil Society Organizations played an important role in the preservation and the perpetuation of this part of the collective memory of the town of Djanet. They also made a significant contribution in the identification and the supply of the national ICH data bank initiated by the Tassili n Ajjer Cultural Park through its ICH service and the Organizing Committee of the Sebeiba Annual Festival, created in 2009 which has reached its 6th edition and which includes among its members the President of the Sebeiba Association and the Mayor of Djanet. The video tape which is provided as a back up to the dossier shows the involvement of the Djanet community through the Sbeiba Association in all the stages of identification and supply of the dossier of the element

The «Sebeïba» association is the emanation of the keepers of knowledge of this heritage. The contribution of other associations is worth underlining, mainly those involved in the safeguarding and the rehabilitation of the ksours of Djanet.

The documentation of the dossier was entrusted to the Tassili n Ajjer Cultural Park whose headquarters are in Djanet in cooperation with the National Centre of Pre historical, Anthropological and Historical Research of Algiers. Finally the Sebeiba Annual Festival represents an important actor in favor of local, national and international promotion of this element.



Photos : Amokrane Salah

