

Rising from the rubble: towards safeguarding intangible cultural heritage of the Christian community of Mosul

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1. Introduction

Ancient Iraq holds a treasure trove of intangible cultural heritage, with its earliest traces found during different eras of its history. The Sumerian civilization, in particular, thrived with a rich legacy encompassing music, dance, and storytelling. Likewise, the Babylonians fostered a prosperous tradition of literature, art, and architecture. During the Islamic era, Iraq witnessed the emergence of novel forms of intangible cultural heritage.

Like many other regions of Iraq, Mosul stands as a renowned urban centre celebrated for its rich and diverse cultural heritage. Over the course of centuries, various distinctive civilizations sought solace within its borders, each leaving an indelible imprint on the intangible cultural heritage of the city.

However, decades of conflicts and socio-political turmoil in Iraq have rendered a great deal of its heritage either in ruins or under serious

existential threat. Many of its religious and ethnic communities, including Christians, have suffered significant impacts from the upheavals. Large swathes of these communities have been displaced and dispersed, leaving them in a difficult situation. Moreover, the intangible cultural heritage of Mosul's Christian community, once vibrant and thriving, has suffered a major blow. The city, which once had a diverse Christian population, benefited greatly from their contributions to its cultural heritage. The Christian population in Mosul has encountered immense challenges, especially during the period of ISIS occupation from 2014 to 2017.

Persecution forced many Christians to flee, resulting in severe disruptions to their cultural practices and heritage. The ISIS occupation resulted in the destruction of religious sites, cultural symbols, churches, monasteries, and other important places of worship and cultural significance. Consequently, traditional rituals, music, dance, and oral traditions—integral parts of the intangible cultural heritage—also faced threats and potential extinction.

After the liberation of Mosul from ISIS, there have been attempts to restore and revitalize the city's cultural and religious sites. Nonetheless, the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage poses a more intricate and gradual undertaking that requires active involvement from community members and preservation initiatives. Efforts aimed at conserving the cultural heritage of communities have historical antecedents. As stated by Pretelli (2023, p. 3), the emergence of the imperative to safeguard artistic heritage for the well-being of generations to come is a direct response to the adversities of war and devastation experienced in the past. Tracing its origins back to the aftermath of the French Revolution, the concept of cultural heritage has continuously evolved in order to safeguard historical continuity and prevent its obliteration. In the wake of recent upheavals in

heritage-rich areas such as Iraq, efforts have been accelerated to protect and help survive elements of heritage and culture in those affected areas. Jagielska-Burduk (2022, p. 11) highlights the significance of international cooperation, particularly in the context of areas like Mosul that have been greatly affected by turmoil. However, Arnal (2020, p. 539) brings forth an essential observation, regretfully noting that the prevailing discourse largely centres on the conspicuous aftermath of conflict. Regrettably, when attacks target a palpable facet of cultural heritage, the ripple effect similarly ravages its intangible dimension. Practices enmeshed with heritage and identity, spanning aptitudes, rituals, and customs, bear severe blows or even succumb to obliteration due to devastation, coerced upheaval, or deprivation wrought by conflict. In this context, Chainoglou, K. (2017) believes that this, in turn, acts as an impediment, thwarting the endeavours towards fostering peace, mending divisions, and rebuilding in the aftermath of conflict.

Hence, the sphere of protecting these communities should, therefore, broaden its scope even more and resonate with the public by acknowledging distinctive cultural assets that are susceptible to permanent loss. This initiative represents a modest contribution to the preservation of the cultural heritage of conflict-ridden Iraqi communities. It entails recording traditions, crafts, and festivities that characterize this historically important society. These are perceived to be diminishing and require immediate endeavours to ensure their survival. The project examines intangible cultural heritage traditions falling under the purview of the definition outlined in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, dated October 17, 2003. Accordingly, the project aims to go some way towards addressing the following:

- 1) What is the state of affairs of the intangible cultural heritage of Mosul's Christian community?
- 2) What are the practices of intangible cultural heritage used to define the pre-conflict society of Christians in Mosul?
- 3) To what extent are these still alive or under threat? What are the factors that contribute to their endangerment and/or vitality?

2. Mosul: city & community

2.1 The community of Mosul's Christians

Throughout its historical trajectory, the city of Mosul has perennially embodied a multicultural essence, discernible through its very name. Stemming from the Arabic term "wasel," which literally means "linking," Mosul operates as a focal point, cultivating connections amidst an array of communities. Within its confines, an array of discrete sects and ethnicities cohabitate, weaving a fabric of interesting diversity. Alongside the city's predominant Sunni populace, additional factions such as Shi'is, Yezidis, Christians, Turkmans, and Kurds contribute to its lively mosaic. Each community within Mosul possesses distinctive identities and cultural heritage, entwining to forge an intricate and dynamic shared legacy that has evolved over time. However, in recent times, the multicultural essence of Mosul has been cast into shadow by the detrimental reverberations of armed conflicts and political tumult.

Moore (2015, p. 17) notes that the historical origins of Christianity in Mosul can be traced back to the earliest days of the first century. During this time, the native Assyrian community, deeply embedded in the local fabric, experienced a profound spiritual transformation, embracing the principles of the Christian faith. In parallel, Huebner (2014, p. 522) contends that the ascendancy of the Sassanid dynasty in 224 CE marked a pivotal juncture in the northern expanse of Mesopotamia. Consequently, a substantial influx of Christians embarked upon their migration to Mosul, progressively solidifying the city's status as a prominent bastion of Christianity and nurturing its evolution into a noteworthy ecclesiastical community within the realm of Iraq.

Within the urban tapestry of Mosul, a city renowned for its cultural and ethnic diversity, distinct enclaves define the residential landscape. Arab Christians, a significant demographic, find residence at the heart of the city in the Sa'a neighborhood, adjacent to the Sarjkhana area. A salient feature of this community is its adherence to endogamy, fostering a sense of communal cohesion. This unity is further underscored by their conservative sartorial choices, particularly evident in the modest attire worn by women, often accompanied by traditional headscarves. The subsequent generation of this community disperses across the Al-Dhubbat and Al-Kafa'at neighbourhoods on the right coast of the city, which divided in two parts by the river Tigris, contributing to the intricate social mosaic of Mosul. In close proximity, the Al-Bakr neighbourhood hosts Armenians, who are notable for their proximity to a local church and a relatively less conservative way of life. Distinct from the aforementioned communities, the Al-Dawasa neighbourhood is home to the Assyrian Christians of Mosul.

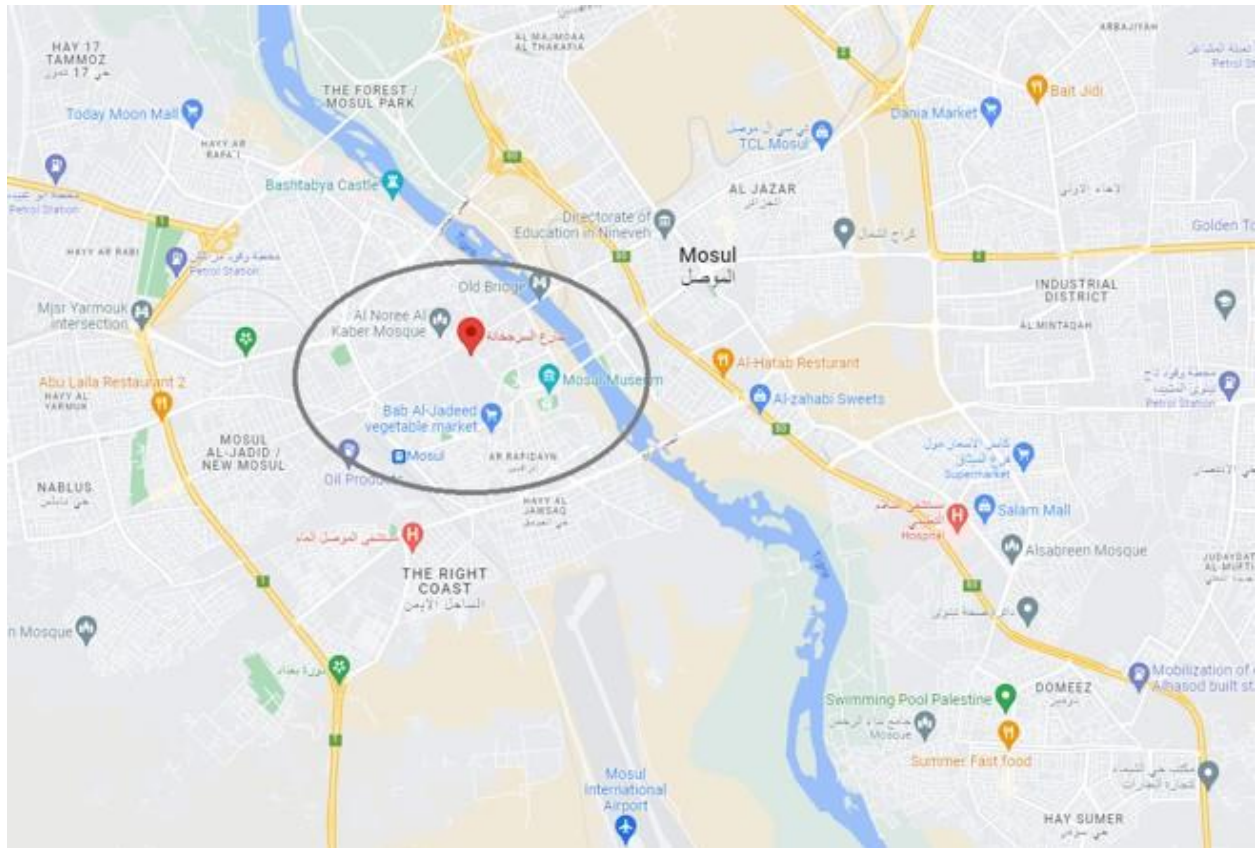


Figure 1: Areas in Mosul where Christian communities can be located.

2.2 Intangible cultural heritage in Mosul

Alaubaidi (2018, p. 86) notes that the city of Mosul boasts a multitude of aspects within its intangible cultural heritage, conveyed through oral transmission from one generation to the next. This intangible heritage holds profound importance in the collective memory of Mosul's inhabitants, spanning both a national and human scope. Consequently, it becomes imperative for those invested in Mosul's welfare to accord due precedence to its preservation, documentation, and safeguarding, thereby averting its potential loss or lapse into obscurity. Heritage stands as a testament to the identity of communities, serving as the bedrock of their standing in the global panorama. It unveils culture to the world through

auditory, visual, and verbal mediums, spotlighting our heritage on the international stage. In this light, Afifi (2016) underscores the necessity for earnest efforts to rejuvenate and adapt this heritage, ensuring its accessibility to the emerging generation and transforming it into a valuable repository that contributes significantly to the enhancement of cultural comprehension.

Mosul encapsulated not merely physical assets in the form of edifices and landmarks, but also functioned as a dynamic nucleus of cultural heritage traditions seamlessly interwoven into the communal fabric. These traditions encompassed an array of activities, spanning festive commemorations, the nurturing of artisanal skills and craftsmanship, and customs intertwined with gastronomy. The evolution and perpetuation of intangible heritage practices within Mosul were intricately tied to particular urban and environs. These interlinked and mutually reinforcing practices encompassed the observance of religious festivities, entailing the creation of distinct culinary offerings. Despite the influences of globalization and the disruptive ramifications of warfare, the intangible cultural heritage traditions endure in Mosul, albeit with adaptations and adjustments to the evolving circumstances. Subsequently, I will expound upon the heritage aspects addressed in this project, categorizing them in accordance with the five domains referenced earlier.

3. Materials and Methods

This study draws upon an assemblage of meticulous semi-structured interviews conducted with native Christians from Mosul. This sampling

technique finds application across a diverse spectrum of disciplines. As noted by Britain (1997) and Tagliamonte (2006), it has demonstrated considerable currency in sociolinguistic research, with numerous studies adopting its methodological framework. The approach entails the fieldworker engaging with individuals who possess an insider's knowledge and familiarity with the community. This practical and expedient method assists in identifying and suggesting suitable informants who meet the criteria of the sample design. These informants, subsequently, can tap into their networks, and this process ripples further, gradually snowballing the sample size to encompass the desired number of speakers.

Moreover, this methodology has found application in the realm of heritage literature, leveraging its inherent benefits. It presents a suitable option for engaging with communities whose voices often go unheard and for negotiating the bureaucratic intricacies of top-down governance, a context in which particular groups might be marginalized (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The choice of interviewees was made with meticulous care, considering diverse factors including their social standing, background, and proficiency. The study encompassed a total of ten interviewees, comprising seven males and three females. It is noteworthy that specific individuals participated in multiple interview sessions. Due to the dispersed geographical locations of the interviewees across various regions of Iraq, the interviews were carried out remotely using telephone communication. To guarantee a thorough comprehension of the Christian community in Mosul spanning various age groups, the individuals interviewed were deliberately chosen from separate generational categories: the youth (below 30), the middle-aged (30-59), and the elderly (above 60). This selection of interviewees collectively presents a diverse range of social and economic positions, encompassing

professionals, religious authorities, and retired individuals. In the pursuit of this study, an online survey was meticulously devised through Google Forms. The selected questions were precisely structured to encompass the five core elements mentioned earlier. Together, these facets encapsulate diverse dimensions of the intangible cultural heritage of Mosul's Christian community. By employing a questionnaire, the potential impact of the interviewer on participants' responses can be minimised. Considering that the questionnaire remains accessible to respondents as of the time of drafting this report, only insights will be gleaned from the findings of the questionnaire, given its status as a work in progress. The primary body of information presented here will be drawn from the conducted interviews.

4. Findings

1) Oral traditions and expressions

A key component of examining the usage of the oral traditions of the Christian community of Mosul is their dialect. The present study investigates the specific contexts where Christian Maslawis use it. The Maslawi dialect, spoken by Masalawis, with minor differences, regardless of their faith (Blanc, 1964, p. 10). To exemplify these differences, Christian Maslawis employ the verb modifier "ka-" to express habitual aspect forms or the present continuous tense of verbs. Conversely, Muslims and Jews frequently opt for the equivalents "qa-" and "ʕa-." A comparative instance demonstrating these disparities is as follows:

Christian Maslawis

Muslim and Jewish Maslawis

/ka jəftəʃəl/

/qa jəftəʃəl / OR /ʃa jəftəʃəl /

It is burning

It is burning

It is burning

The current status of their Christian dialect is rather precarious. Previous research has demonstrated (Yaseen, 2015s, 2015b, 2015c, 2018) that the dialect of Mosul is receding due to various factors. Muslim residents of Mosul seem to be relinquishing their hold on the dialect due to the blending of Mosul's society with individuals from outside the region. Consequently, it is highly likely that Christian residents of Mosul who speak in a similar manner have experienced varying degrees of the impact of dialect dilution, especially in light of recent developments witnessed during the past decade. Interviewees reported the recessiveness of the dialect can be attributed to a number of reasons chief among them is mixing with non-locals where they daily contact with non-Maslwi speaking people has had its effect on their use of their traditional way of speech. Oral traditions, like other intangible cultural heritages, are under severe threat due to the rapid pace of urbanization, massive migration waves, industrialization, and significant environmental transformations. The advent of modern media, including books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet, poses an exceptionally detrimental impact on these cherished oral practices and expressions, as noted by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2003).

The consequences of urbanization are extreme, causing widespread population movements and intermarriage among various indigenous

groups, leading to a stark reduction in cultural populations. Consequently, this contact with national languages adds to the risk of decay and impending extinction of these precious oral traditions (Lewis, 2009). This indeed has long been cited as lying behind the dilution, and sometimes complete erasure, of minority dialects (e.g. Watt, 2002; Watt and Milroy, 1999; Williams and Kerswill, 1999). The principal consequence is predominantly a result of reciprocal accommodation that transpires among individuals in contact within specific speech communities or localized areas, including recently formed urban settlements. The theory of accommodation, originally advanced by Giles et al. (1973) and subsequently elaborated on by Coupland and Giles (1988), asserts that when individuals speaking different but intelligible dialects interact, they exhibit a tendency to linguistically adjust to one another by converging towards shared linguistic features. Trudgill (1986, pp. 1-8) highlights the phenomenon wherein momentary acts of accommodation tend to manifest as enduring patterns over time. The ultimate consequence of such linguistic behaviour often involves the replacement of indigenous linguistic traits.

Respondents have also reported coercive reasons such as displacement, immigration or travel outside Mosul as reasons that contributed to the decline in the use of Mosul dialect by the Christian community. The Mosul way of speech is radically different from the rest of Iraq and thus respondents reported that avoiding the dialect sometimes is to enhance understanding by others.

To account for the reasons that lie behind this shift, interviewees reported that in light of various events that have unfolded in recent decades, the influx of non-locals into the city has been extensively examined in this

study. These circumstances have led to the city's transformation into a central hub where both Maslawi and non-Maslawi-speaking communities coexist. Such conditions provide a fertile ground for contact-induced changes to take place, particularly spearheaded by the younger and middle-aged generations. Contact conditions are widely recognized as catalysts for linguistic adaptation, as speakers strive to achieve optimal communication among themselves. The observed linguistic shift in the speech of Maslawis has been attributed to the movements of individuals, predominantly from Bedouin and rural backgrounds, which have altered the social equilibrium of Maslawi society.

The dialect appears to be mostly used by older generations (+60) a finding that is widely reported in the literature of decline in language use. In his study of the traditional dialect of Hit, Ahmed (2012) also explores the transformations occurring in the qeltu-speaking town of Hit. The catalyst for these changes, as identified by Ahmed, is the contrast in contact experienced by older Hiti generations in comparison to non-Hitis, which pales in comparison to the extensive interactions observed among the young and highly educated cohorts. Albirini (2016, p. 209) acknowledges the imbalanced opportunities for contact between older and younger generations in Arabic-speaking regions when it comes to interacting with speakers of different dialects.

The project also examined the current application of other oral practices, specifically songs and hymns, within the community. In the course of interviews, respondents conveyed that while the practice of these practices might be experiencing a decline, there still remains an ongoing engagement with certain hymns within the community. Notably, the hymn:

شعب المسيح في هذا اليوم مسرور . جئنا نبشركم بالفصح والنور

"Christ's people rejoice on this day, We come to proclaim to you Easter and light."

This continues to hold significance and is actively practiced. However, the fervent preservation of these traditional oral practices does not appear to be vigorously pursued, based on insights gleaned from the interviews and the current dataset derived from the questionnaire. The informants indicated that there may be varying degrees of commitment to the maintenance of these practices among community members. The responses provide intriguing insights into the status of these cultural practices. Notably, one third of respondents conveyed that the utilization of these traditional elements is rare. This minority perspective suggests a diminishing presence of these practices within the community's cultural landscape, possibly influenced by evolving societal dynamics or changing preferences. Most notably, a significant majority of respondents surveyed so far expressed that these special traditional dances and songs are no longer used. This noteworthy percentage suggests a considerable shift in cultural practices within the Mosul Christian community.

2) Performing arts

UNESCO recognises this field encompassing an array of various forms and manifestations found within social activities, rituals, and celebrations. These include ceremonies, games, and seasonal traditions. These practices involve gestures, songs, dances, and the wearing of unique clothing,

sometimes accompanied by animal sacrifices. This project aimed to investigate the current practice of special traditional dances or songs within the Mosul Christian community.

The songs performed during wedding and celebration ceremonies embody a rich artistic heritage and a treasure trove of diverse melodies, colours, and rituals. Due to their social and entertainment roles, as well as their connection to significant moments in human life, these songs hold immense importance among various forms of folk expression.

Interviewees were asked to indicate whether the community still engages in the practice of special traditional dances or songs peculiar to their community. They reported that despite the negative factors, influences, and pressures that have caused the disappearance and fading of other folk expressions, these songs have not been significantly neglected, forgotten, or lost over time. They are frequently performed during engagement and wedding celebrations, with their distinctive rituals and various steps being observed collectively.

One of the interesting aspects that informants reported is that during celebratory occasions, the mothers of grooms, referred to as "ام الختن," partake in a customary dance ritual wherein they dance while holding a traditional ladle called 'chamcha' or 'kafkeer'. This cultural practice holds significant symbolism, as it signifies the generous nature of their family and serves as an indication of the mother's culinary prowess. Specifically, it highlights her expertise in preparing kibbi, a traditional dish, and her overall skilfulness in the realm of cooking.

3) Social practices, rituals and festive events

The social practices inherited by the Christians of Mosul on various occasions have also produced similar results. Interviewees indicated that the Christian community in Mosul still engages in practices such as colouring eggs during Easter as well as practicing certain wedding ceremonies. These practices appear to have been hard hit by the chaotic disruptions in the communities affected by ISIS. According to a study conducted by Almohamad et al. (2023), the Islamic State (ISIS) abolished several non-material aspects of marriage customs in the Manbij area of Syria, including the use of *henna* at night and other festive activities. They claimed that these elements were forbidden under Islamic law.

Mosul's Christians have the practice of refraining from conducting wedding ceremonies during the period of Great Lent (Fifty-Day Fast). Interviewees indicated that while the Christian community in Mosul still adheres to the practice of avoiding wedding ceremonies during the Great Lent period, the practice is gradually in retreat. Moreover, interviewees also indicated that the tradition of holding wedding receptions and engagement ceremonies on Saturday and Sunday nights within the Christian community in Mosul is not followed as it used to be in the past.

A key aim of this project is to investigate the current celebration of specific occasions within Mosul's Christian community. In what follows, a description of the occasions still celebrated by this community.

Christmas & New Year

Christians diligently prepared for the arrival of Christmas, with each individual playing their part. The women, in particular, busied themselves with household arrangements and tailored festive attire for themselves and their children. Moreover, they engaged in the preparation of "kleja," a traditional delicacy, along with the essential ingredients such as nuts, sugar, flour, and ghee. These ingredients were known to come in various types: some containing a mix of walnuts and sugar, while others solely comprising "shakar" (sugar) without any filling along the basket's edges. Moreover, dates also held a significant place in these preparations. The daughters of the house exhibited their remarkable skills in classifying the diverse forms of "kleja," arranging them neatly on trays. To differentiate the various kinds, some families use wooden seals inscribed with distinctive marks to seal the "kleja" before they were painted with eggs. Afterward, one of the men would transport them to the market's oven for baking, while others preferred to summon a baker to bake the delicacies in the household furnace (oven).

On Christmas Eve, women engage in sewing activities, crafting their garments, while preparing delicious treats like kleicha and yakhni. In contrast, men take on the task of purchasing clothing, candies, mlabbas, and fresh fruits in anticipation of the evening. They also light their manqal (griller) and sobba (heater), creating a warm and inviting atmosphere, and exchange captivating stories. As the morning of Christmas arrives, families gather and proceed to the church, exchanging heartfelt congratulations among themselves. A distinctive Christmas breakfast awaits, featuring

special delicacies such as qaimar¹, honey, and basturma². Dads graciously distribute eidiya (eidaniyaat³) to their loved ones. During the lunch of the first day, an exceptional dish called yakhni kibbi⁴ is meticulously prepared. The family gathers at Sida's (grandad's) house. The father, accompanied by his sons, embarks on a customary visit to other households, where they graciously bestow *eidaniyaat*. This tradition typically continues until sunset. On the second day of Christmas, which falls on the 26th of December, individuals again attend church services. Uncles gather their nephews and treat them to an outing at the cinema, fostering a sense of familial camaraderie.

As the new year dawns, families come together to make elaborate arrangements for the occasion, including preparations for a special meal, the recitation of hymns, and culminating in a grand celebration at midnight. Christians observe a distinctive lunch on the 1st of January, featuring kibbi al qaisi⁵. This particular dish holds significance due to its pleasant sweetness, symbolizing a positive omen for the forthcoming year.

The Feast of the Epiphany

The Feast of the Epiphany, known as Beth Denkha (عيد عماد المسيح) (عيد الدنج) in the Church of the East, is observed with great reverence on January 6th. This ancient religious occasion, which has its roots in the 3rd century AD, carries profound significance not only for the Church of the East but also

¹ Also known as Kaïmaki, typically produced using the creamy, high-fat milk sourced from cows or buffaloes.

² a type of beef that undergoes salt and spice curing, akin to the Italian bresaola.

³ The tradition of offering monetary gifts to children and family members, which is commonly done by older relatives or family friends.

⁴ stuffed rice dumplings.

⁵ A small-sized kibbeh that holds a delightful mixture of lamb and aromatic spices.

for numerous other Christian denominations. Devoted followers partake in a series of sacred ceremonies held within the sacred confines of their respective places of worship. Subsequently, a unique and enticing meal is savoured, captivating the hearts and palates of Christian adherents—a culinary masterpiece named kishik⁶. This exquisite gastronomic dish, crafted with utmost precision, occupies a cherished position within the rich culinary heritage cherished by the faithful.

Easter (Holy Fire)

Interviewees also state that in the past, during the historical commemoration of the Feast of the Cross, an impressive bonfire would be carefully lit, creating a stunning display of fire. However, as time passed and traditions changed, a notable transformation occurred. Nowadays, the sacred observance of this important event has undergone a significant change, with the main focus moving towards a more subtle yet captivating presentation—a display of fireworks. Consequently, the once towering fire, emanating both warmth and profound symbolism, has relinquished its pre-eminence to the enchanting spectacle of vibrant pyrotechnics that illuminate the nocturnal heavens.

Before this Eid, people perform what is called the fasting of the fifty, which is a period of fasting that Christians observe in the forty days leading up to Easter. During the Easter period, after attending church services, Mosul's Christians partake in the customary consumption of *yakhni kibbi*. This savoury delicacy is crafted from minced lamb, bulgur wheat, and an

⁶ Kishik is a finely textured cereal usually made from cracked wheat that undergoes fermentation using milk and yogurt.

assortment of spices. Traditionally, the mixture is moulded into either patties or balls and can be prepared through frying or baking methods. Complementing the dish, a yogurt sauce is commonly served. *Yakhni kibbi*, a gastronomic treasure believed to have originated in the Middle East, has been relished for countless generations. Notably flavoursome and nutritionally rich, this dish provides a delightful means of commemorating Easter and serves as a splendid conduit for sharing one's cultural heritage and time-honoured customs with others.

Mary the Virgin Feast

The Feast of Mary the Virgin, known as عيد العذراء (Eid al-'Udhra') in Arabic, is commemorated by the Christian faith on the 15th of August. Among the Chaldean and Syriac communities, this significant occasion holds deep religious meaning. The Church of the Immaculate Conception, affiliated with these denominations, holds this feast day in high regard⁷. It pays homage to the Virgin Mary, honouring her esteemed role as the mother of Jesus Christ, and emphasizing her unwavering purity and moral excellence. During this period, believers come together to pray, express their devotion to Mary, and contemplate her extraordinary life and the profound teachings she embodies. An integral part of the celebration is the practice of بيعة الطهرا (Bay'at al-Tahra), where individuals partake in a unique tradition of falling asleep to the calming melodies of hymns and prayers. This custom involves the recitation of sacred verses and invocations, with specific requests made, such as blessings for children. By surrendering to sleep, interviewees seek

⁷ The Upper Virginitiy Church, locally known as "foqaniyi," is affiliated with the Chaldean denomination, while the Lower Virginitiy Church, known as "jaweaniyyi," is associated with the Syriac Jacobite denomination.

spiritual connection and divine intervention through this meditative encounter. The rhythmic recitation of hymns and prayers serves as an act of devotion and supplication, fostering an atmosphere of serenity and spiritual contemplation.

Feast of the Cross

In Mosul, the city observes a momentous occasion known as the Feast of the Cross, also referred to as Christ Eid عيد الصليب. This celebration holds great significance, especially for the residents. During this festive period, households in Mosul engage in a commemorative practice to mark Christmas. They place a wooden cross within their homes as a symbol of Christ's birth and the profound illumination he brings to their lives. Furthermore, they enhance the candles by adorning them with a special covering called *kabbobi* (كبوبي), meticulously crafted by *khayyateen* (tailors). This embellishment ensures the candles remain aglow, serving as a representation of the guiding light bestowed upon them by Christ. By observing the Feast of the Cross, the people of Mosul manifest their unwavering faith and profound reverence for the Christmas season.

The feast of Mor Mattai (Saint Matthew the Hermit)

The Christian community also celebrates the feast of Mor Mattai⁸ (Saint Matthew the Hermit) on September 18th. On the feast day of Mor Mattai, people come to the Monastery of Mor Mattai, which is located in the

⁸ Mor Mattai was a 4th-century Christian monk who lived in the Nineveh region. He is venerated as a saint in the Syriac Orthodox Church and his feast day is a major religious holiday for Chaldeans, Syrians, and Assyrians.

Nineveh Plains. The monastery is one of the oldest and most important monasteries in the Syriac Orthodox Church. It is believed that Mor Mattai founded the monastery in the 4th century.

Christians also celebrate the following feasts : Feast of Saint Qorqis, Feast of Saint Behnam, Feast of the Lady, Feast of the Ascension, Feast of Lord Hermuz, Ascension Friday, New Sunday.

4) Clothing traditions

This project aimed to investigate the current usage of specific clothing items within the Mosul Christian community. Interviewees described some clothing items that are still being, albeit some reported that they never heard of them, worn by the community. A woman's attire comprises various components such as an intricately designed head covering known as "al-Qanja". Underneath this head covering, there is a cap or "Araqjeen" that serves the purpose of securing the hair. Following the cap, there is a black piece of fabric, succeeded by the "Qanja". Subsequently, a rectangular fabric piece called "Mistorta" is worn. After the Mistorta, a sizeable colourful scarf named "Khammouk" is wrapped around the head. It is fastened on one side with a curved loop made of gold or silver, referred to as "Kkalbi". There is also a large silk piece elaborately embroidered, known as "Habriyya", available in multiple colours. Furthermore, there is a scarf in the hue of pomegranate called "Turkiya" (Diyarbakır), commonly known as "Kufiya" or "Koofiya". It is worth noting that a silk scarf, known as "Kashmiriyya", once existed, characterized by its vibrant and attractive colours. It was worn around the head and removed by the bride after the

wedding period. Additionally, there is a colourful ribbon reminiscent of the rainbow's colours, called "Dobara". It is horizontally tightened around the head and is commonly used during weddings and special occasions.



Figure 2: Traditional clothing of Christians

5) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

This project also looked into the present-day observance of certain religious practices within the Christian community in Mosul. Of specific reference in this realm is the tradition of visiting the Church of Al-Tahirah (Virgin) for prayer, performing ablutions at the statue of Our Lady Mary, and seeking blessings, including those related to fertility and other provisions. The interviewees were requested to provide insights into whether these religious rituals are still practiced within the Christian community in Mosul. Respondents reported that the Christian community in Mosul is still engaged in practices in relation to seeking blessings for fertility and naming newborn children after the respective monasteries or churches.

Furthermore, respondents also reported the custom of visiting Mar Mattai Monastery within the Christian community in Mosul and the wearing of necklaces or rings around the neck as a means to fulfill desires and aspirations, rooted in the belief in the miraculous blessings of Father Mar Mattai.

5) Traditional craftsmanship

This project aimed to investigate the practice of specific crafts within the Christian community in Mosul in order to provide insights into the traditional crafts and the reasons for their reported decline. The craft of carpentry, along with building and marble engraving, are prominent trades practiced by the Christian community in Mosul. These crafts represented

not only a means of livelihood but also a cultural heritage passed down through generations. Among these crafts, carpentry held a special place as it showcased the remarkable skills and craftsmanship of the Christian artisans in Mosul. However, in recent years, the carpentry industry in Mosul has faced a decline. One of the primary reasons for this decline is the surge in imports of wooden products from other regions or countries. With the globalization of trade and the availability of cheaper, mass-produced goods, locally crafted carpentry items have faced stiff competition in the market. The influx of imported goods has led to a shift in consumer preferences and reduced demand for locally produced carpentry products. Imported furniture and decorative items often come at lower prices, making them more accessible to a wider consumer base. As a result, the once-thriving carpentry industry in Mosul has struggled to compete with these mass-produced alternatives. The decline of the carpentry industry not only has economic implications but also impacts the cultural fabric of the community. The loss of skilled carpenters and the diminishing demand for their craftsmanship threaten to erode the cultural identity and heritage associated with this craft in Mosul.

5. Reasons of decline of Mosul's Christian heritage

Navigating the intricate tapestry of cultural heritage preservation often reveals a multifaceted landscape shaped by a variety of influences. Against this backdrop, this section delves into specific aspects that have contributed to the erosion and disruption of Mosul's intangible heritage.

- **Conflict and War:** Mosul experienced intense conflict, particularly during the ISIS occupation between 2014 and 2017. During this period, much of the city's cultural heritage was targeted and destroyed by the extremist group, including ancient monuments, religious sites, and cultural practices. Factors such as displacement, immigration or travel outside Mosul. The prolonged conflict led to a massive displacement of the population. Many people were forced to flee their homes, resulting in the disruption and scattering of local communities and their traditional practices. This displacement can lead to the loss of cultural knowledge and the erosion of intangible heritage.
- **Globalization and Modernization:** Even before the conflict, the process of globalization and modernization was already affecting traditional cultural practices in Mosul. Younger generations were becoming less interested in traditional customs and more exposed to external influences, leading to a decline in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. This was also apparent in the decline of traditional crafts, which have been impacted by the easy availability of imported alternatives, leading to these crafts fading into obscurity.
- **Loss of Knowledge Bearers:** The conflict not only disrupted communities but also led to the loss of knowledge bearers – the individuals who carry and pass on the intangible cultural heritage from one generation to the next. With the death or displacement of these key figures, many traditional practices and knowledge have been lost. The loss of gold generations which tended to embrace these heritage practices.

- **Decreasing Interest:** Less interest on the part of local and federal government in popularising these cultural assets.
- **Cultural Suppression:** During the period of ISIS rule, the extremist group actively sought to suppress local cultural practices and impose its own strict interpretation of Islamic law, which led to the abandonment or suppression of many traditional cultural activities.
- **Infrastructure Damage:** The conflict and military operations caused significant damage to infrastructure and public spaces in the city. Cultural venues, performance spaces, and other sites of intangible cultural heritage were affected, making it challenging for traditional events and activities to take place.

6. Safeguarding

A key element of this project aimed to investigate potential strategies for preserving the Christian heritage in Mosul. These can be formulated as follows:

Increasing Awareness and Education:

One of the suggested options for preserving Christian heritage is to increase awareness among people and inform them about its importance for future generations. This can be achieved through educational programs, cultural initiatives, and community outreach efforts. By raising awareness, individuals can develop a deeper appreciation for their heritage and actively engage in its preservation.

Sharing Traditions and Heritage:

Interviewees also emphasised the significance of sharing their traditions and heritage with others in local and international forums. Festivals, seminars, and similar activities serve as platforms to introduce the broader public to the unique aspects of Christian heritage in Mosul. By promoting dialogue and exchange, the community can foster a greater understanding and appreciation of its cultural richness.

Passing Down Heritage:

Preserving Christian heritage for future generations is crucial. Interviewees recognized the importance of passing down their heritage to children by embracing its various forms and encouraging their active participation. This includes practicing traditions, celebrating festivals, and transmitting stories, folklore, and tales. Documenting and archiving these cultural treasures through research initiatives ensures their longevity.

Media and Cultural Industries:

The role of media, institutions, and cultural industries is essential in disseminating heritage and raising awareness among the general public. By utilizing various media platforms, such as television, radio, and online platforms, the community can reach a wider audience and share the significance of Christian heritage in Mosul. Supporting cultural industries and institutions can also contribute to the promotion and preservation of this heritage.

Training and Infrastructure:

To effectively preserve diverse forms of heritage, interviewees emphasized the need for improvements in training and infrastructure. Equipping staff and institutions with the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills is crucial for their active engagement in heritage preservation. This includes providing training programs, funding for research, and enhancing infrastructure for proper archival and documentation practices.

Maintaining Language and Dialect:

Maintaining the practice of the Christian dialect within and outside the home emerged as an important factor for heritage preservation.

Interviewees highlighted the significance of embracing and adhering to the dialect to ensure its continuity and permanence. By valuing and using the dialect, the community can preserve an essential aspect of its cultural identity.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this project sought to provide an overview of the intangible cultural heritage of Mosul's Christian community and the challenges it faces. The findings reveal that the community's oral traditions and expressions, including dialect, are crucial components of their cultural heritage. The project also highlighted the impact of conflicts and socio-political turmoil on the preservation of Mosul's cultural heritage. The

deliberate acts of aggression witnessed in Mosul have resulted in the destruction of many cultural sites and artifacts, leading to the loss of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

However, the project offers hope by outlining steps that can be taken to safeguard and promote the intangible cultural heritage of Mosul's Christian community. The multi-faceted approach suggested in the project includes increasing awareness, sharing traditions, passing down heritage, utilizing media and cultural industries, investing in training and infrastructure, and valuing language and dialect. These strategies can help the community actively contribute to the protection, promotion, and celebration of its rich Christian heritage for current and future generations.

Moreover, the project draws attention to the criticality of international cooperation in preserving cultural heritage. The turmoil witnessed in Mosul and other heritage-rich areas such as Iraq highlights the need for a global effort to safeguard cultural heritage. Also emphasised in this project is the importance of recognizing and addressing the intangible dimension of cultural heritage and taking steps to preserve it for current and future generations.

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