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The Preservation of the Culinary Heritage through its Cinematographic Counterpart: Case Study of Illustrations of the Tunisian Culinary Rituals in Several Fiction Films





According to the...

...The intangible cultural heritage

Relies on:



the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith.



The Culinary Heritage of every nation, can be classified simultaneously, in more than one domain of the intangible cultural heritage. It can be illustrated in both:

- *oral traditions and expressions, including language.*
- *performing arts*
- *social practices, rituals and festive events*
- *knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe*

And:

- *traditional craftsmanship*





The Culinary Heritage of a nation may figure in:

➤ *oral traditions and expressions, including language.*

As many Cuisine behaviours, regardless of the related ethnicity and religion, are characterised with some vocal ritual messages.

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 Bahasa 언어

Which may distinguish a Culinary Heritage of a nation, through a linked expression to a rite



For example, the case of saying:

Besmelleh, Allahou Akbar
(In the name of Allah, Allah the greatest)

While practicing the Islamic slaughter, called *'dhabiha'*, in order to make eating the sheep meat: **HALAL (allowed)**





Or the Christian short grace prayer before lunch, in which they say:

*God is great, and God is good,
And we thank him for our food;
By his hand we all are fed;
Give us, Lord, our daily bread*





Or the Jewish prayer before eating fruits, in which they say:

***Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh ha'olam,
bo're p'ri ha'etz***

*Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the
universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree*





Culinary Heritage of a nation, is also manifested inter alia in the domain of

➤ *social practices, rituals and festive events*

As in addition to the specificity of a dish with its sweet taste and the mixture of various ingredients, its presentation way may be artistic, in order to highlight its aesthetic and festivity through a celebration.



Such is the case of the '*international party of the chilli pepper and the harissa*', which is organised every year as a collaboration between *the Tunisian Association of Culinary Arts* and *the Association of safeguarding Nabeul City* ([Laâbbassi Aïda. 2016](#)). This event takes place every year on October in Nabeul governorate, part of the **CAP-BON**.



➤ **The traditional craftsmanship** is another manifestation of the Culinary Heritage, which figures in craftsmen producing of traditional handmade kitchen tools, such as the *Mehres* that we use to grind spices





Foods like :

**The Tunisian famous Brik-Bel-Warka,
with the handmade dough,**



The French Port-Au-Feu, Cooked over low heat

and the Italian Pizza Margheritta



**Have intimate linking between the culinary
practices and the daily rhythm of life.**



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which made many societies, from different geographic sites, different cultures, or different religious beliefs, distinguished at the international scale, with culinary rites, that we can describe as being identitarian, typical, even specific to the gastronomy of the related society.





Culinary practices, with customary character, in close connection with religious occasions, follow the path of inheritance from one generation to its successor, either through the practice in family, during mystical celebrations,



The water pouring ritual for baptism



Rice Throwing (replacing cereal seeds)
- for prosperity and fertility -



Or from grandmother to grandson, by illustrating them verbally, or by practicing them together .



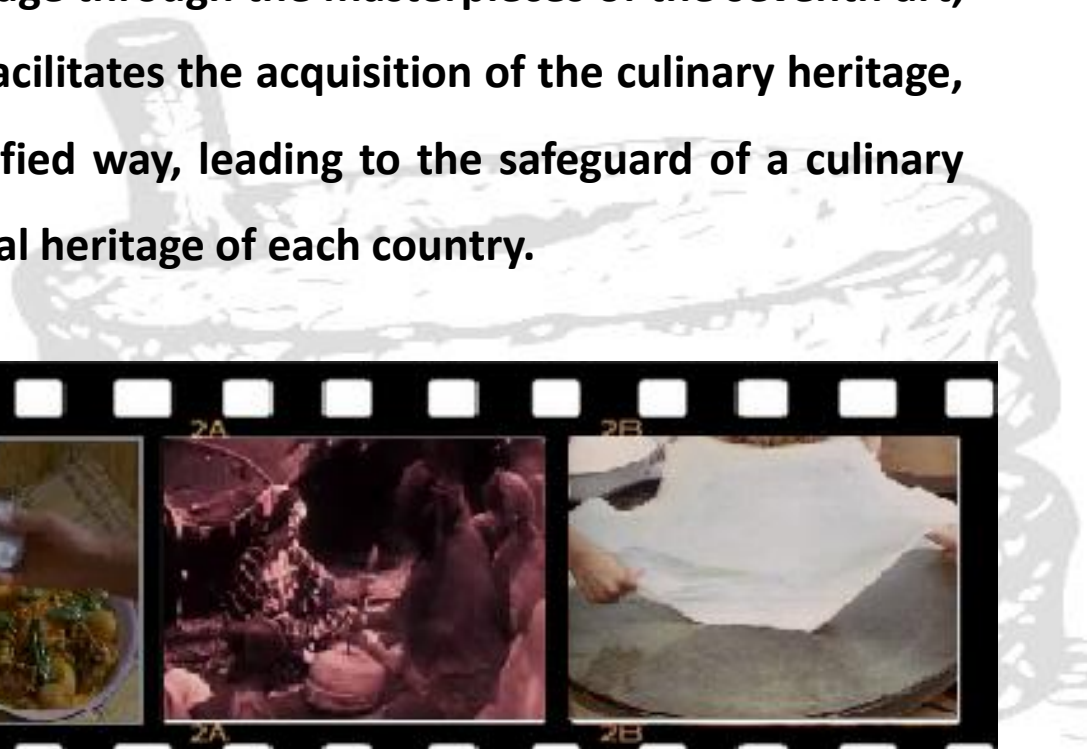
Such mean of communication, word-of-mouth, can submit, a culinary heritage, dating back to centuries and eras from the far past, to the risk of extinction.





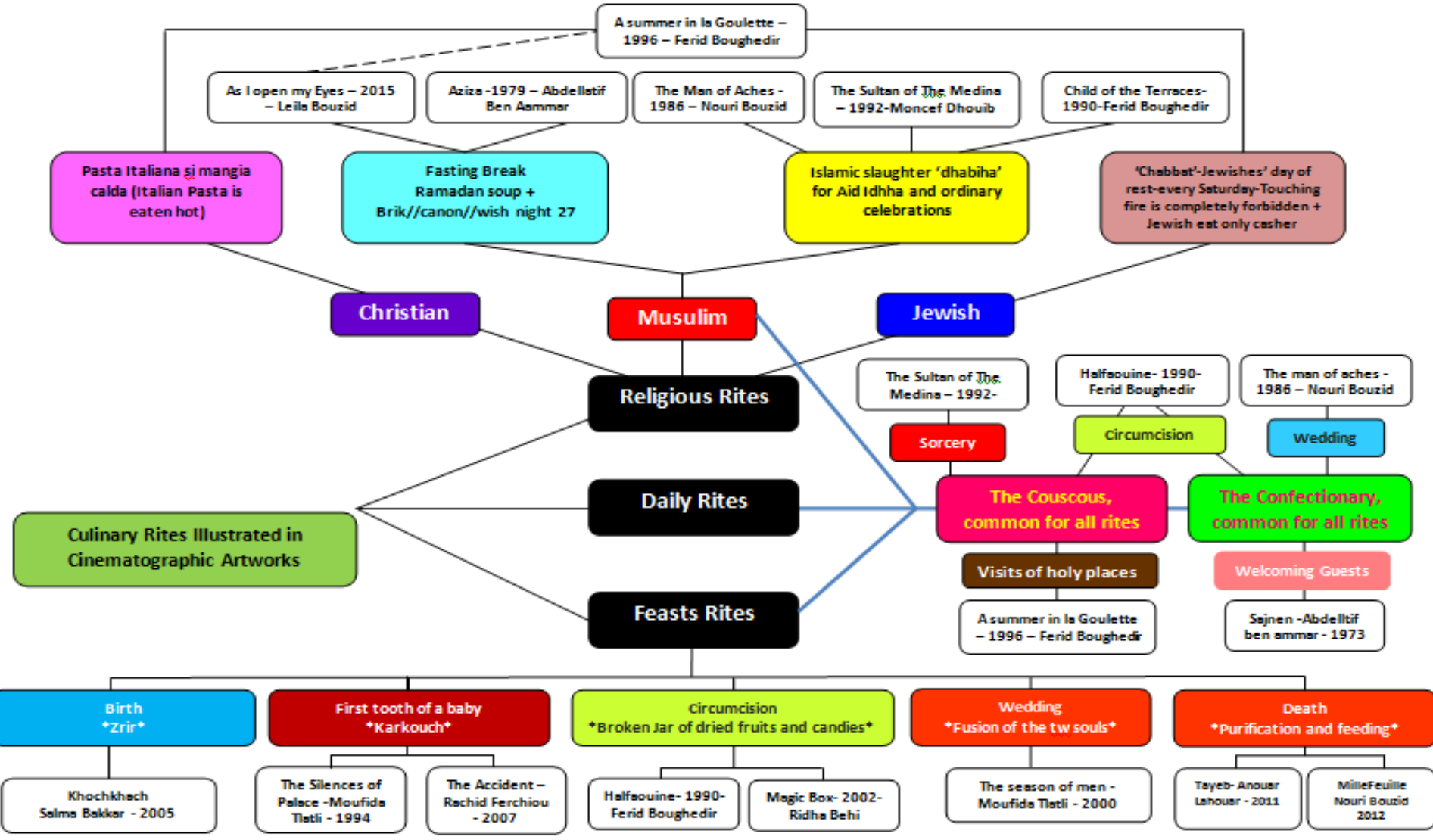
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The illustration of such heritage through the masterpieces of the seventh art, perfectly accomplishes this lack, and facilitates the acquisition of the culinary heritage, to a wider audience, in a more simplified way, leading to the safeguard of a culinary rite, being part of the intangible cultural heritage of each country.



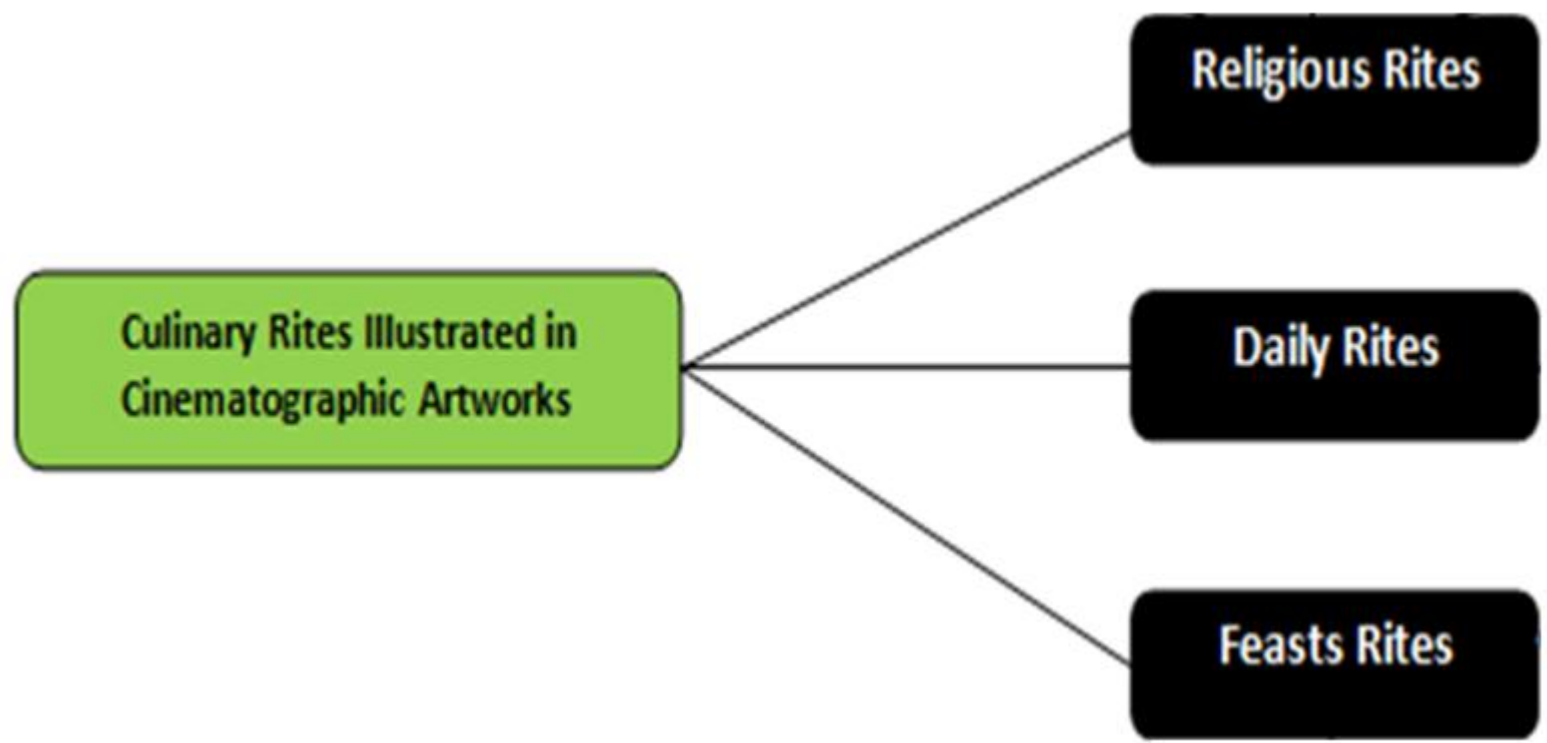


I would dissect some cinematographic representations, which illustrate some culinary practices, with a ritual dimension, in order to guarantee the acquisition of such rites, classified as cultural identity, by the general public, as well as ensuring the safeguarding of such a culinary heritage, by -inter alia- the cinematographic heritage of the related nation, ensuring also the worldwide propagation, once a movie is projected in the framework of an international festival or distribution.



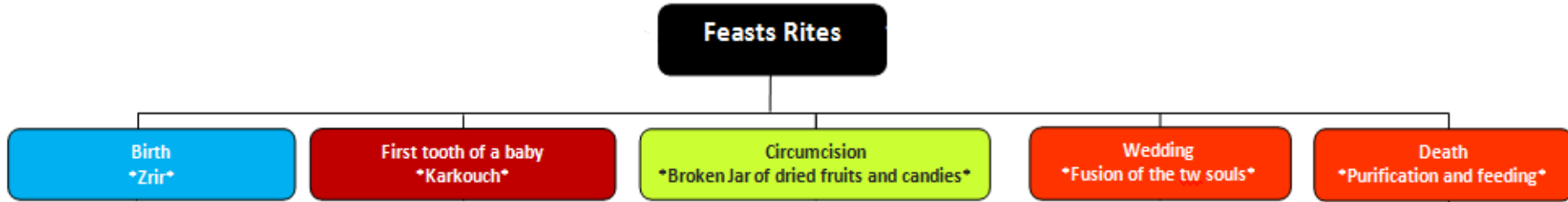


This is a graphic summary, through which I classify the different kitchen/food rituals, by subdividing them in three big themes:

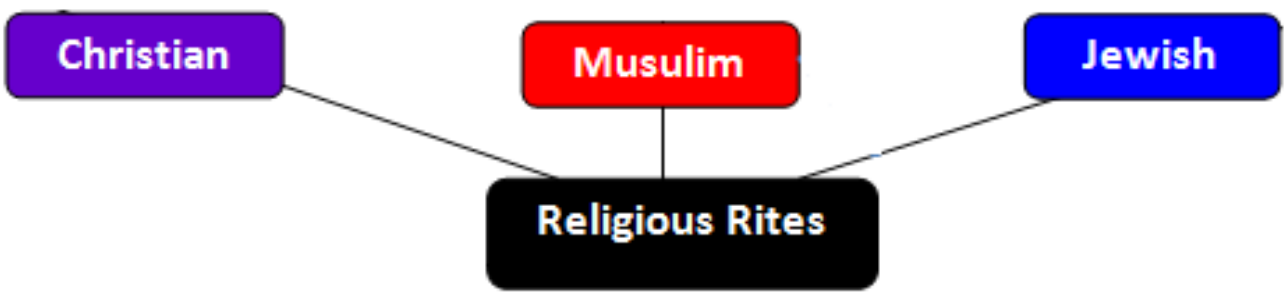




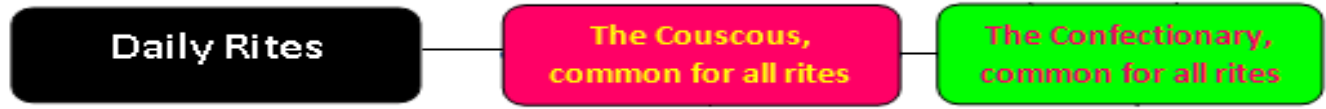
In addition to the subdivision of the rites, according to the celebration of the most important stations of the human life cycle:



And according to the religion of the characters



Without forgetting the daily culinary rites, which encompass common dishes and suites



COOKING AS A RITUAL



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TUNISIA


 Tunisian Feasts
 Rites

Birth

First Tooth

Circumcision

Wedding

Death

 Tunisian
 Religious Rites

Christian

Jewish

Muslim

Daily Life Rites

Couscous

Brik

sweets

In the movie *Khochkhach*-FLOWER OF OBLIVION made of by *Selma Baccar*, in 2005; we find *Zakia*, the heroine, settled in an insane asylum , seeking for recovery from her addiction to the calming plant *Khochkhach*, that she has used during her childbirth to decrease her pain.

While talking to her friend in the courtyard, a flashback takes the audience to her past, while she was pregnant:

a woman, from the bourgeoisie of Tunis, preparing with her housekeeper and her mother in law, the [Zrir for her child's birth](#).



Tunisian Feasts Rites

- Birth
- First Tooth
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- Death

Tunisian Religious Rites

- Christian
- Jewish
- Muslim

Daily Life Rites

- Couscous
- Brik
- sweets



Here is the best plan which illustrates the *Zrir* preparation ritual, as we find the future mum refining the sesame grains with a *Ghorbal* which is a traditional sieve, a copper cooker and a wooden bowl; in addition to the housekeeper touching the pregnant belly and guessing the gender of the baby.



Through the use of kanoun: a pottery full of firebrands, to which we add incense to make good smell, the grandma tries to expel the evil spirits, while welcoming the mum and the baby.





Tunisian Feasts Rites

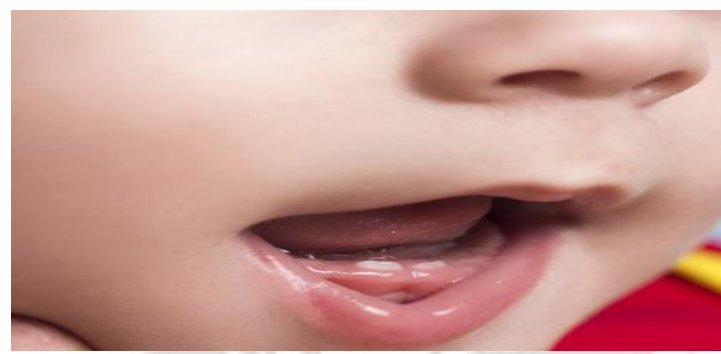
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Daily Life Rites

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Later after a birth, and with the appearance of the first tooth of a baby, the Tunisian families celebrate an event called *KARKOUCH*.

The *KARKOUCH* celebration was illustrated in the Tunisian movie : [SAMT AL KOUSOUR](#)- The Silence of the Palaces, made by *Moufida Tlatli* in 1994.

When she visited the palace where she was born, and while touching the necklace that was her aunt's gift, the heroine travels in a flashback which illustrates the occasion of having got this gift: the *KARKOUCH* celebration of her first tooth.



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It is a flat bowl, made of Esparto, containing a cocktail of dried fruits, sweets and dragées, which should be poured over the head of the baby, then taken and eaten by kids around him/her as a hope that she/he will get a healthy mouth with a virtuous tongue in future.

Karkouch is no more frequently celebrated nowadays, *just some regions still do*. Then, such a movie safeguards this culinary ritual.



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Circumcision is one of the world's most widely performed procedure, Aapproximately 37% to 39% of males worldwide are circumcised, about half for religious or cultural reasons.

Such a ritual, and how celebrated by Tunisian Muslims, was perfectly represented through the movie [Halfaouine](#) - Child of Terraces; made by Ferid Boughedir in 1990.



The shot starts by calming the mum and reducing her hurt by the housekeeper, who puts her feet on fresh water: it's a behavioural rite which is practiced only by the 'tunisoises' women.



Tunisian Feasts Rites

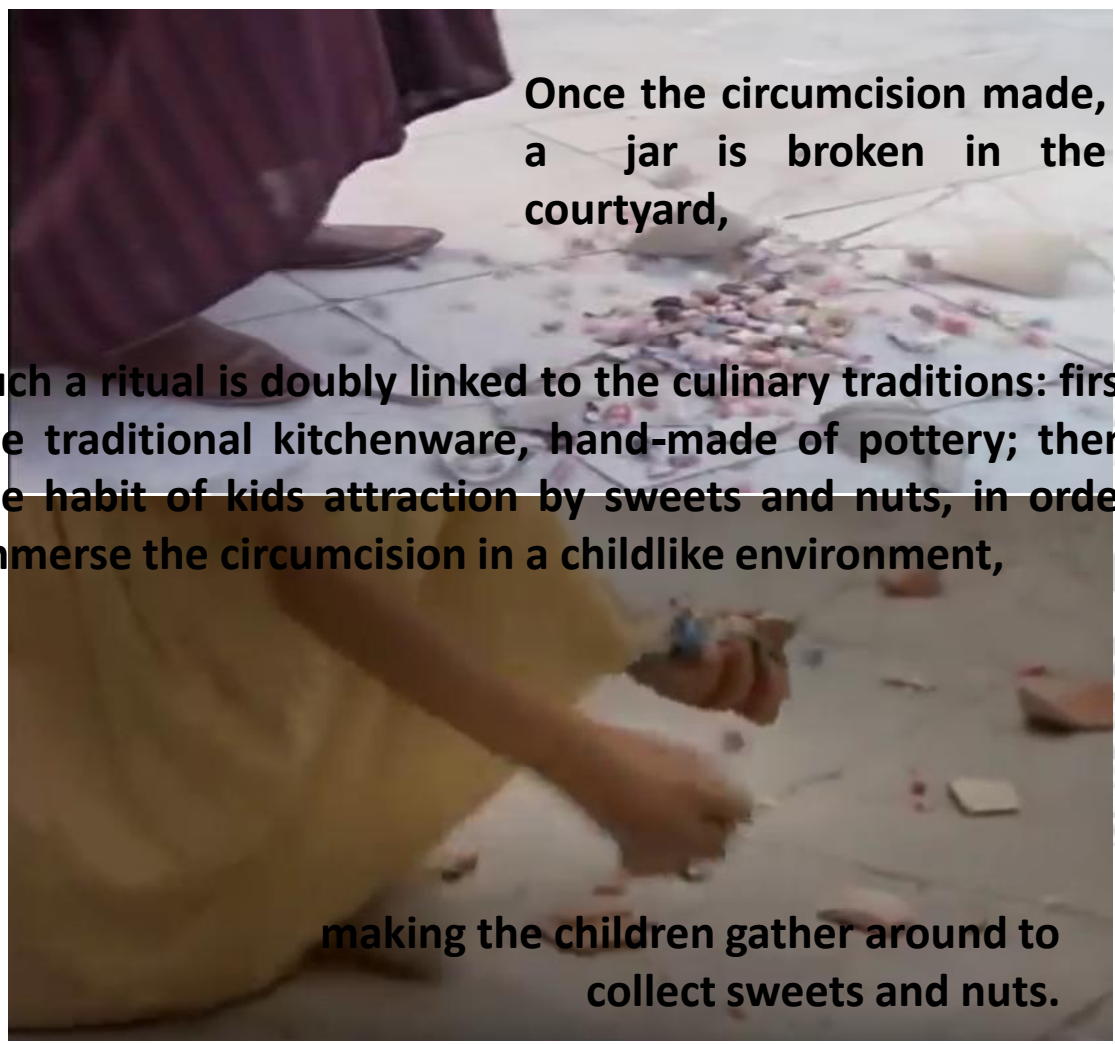
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Once the circumcision made, a jar is broken in the courtyard,

Such a ritual is doubly linked to the culinary traditions: first by the traditional kitchenware, hand-made of pottery; then by the habit of kids attraction by sweets and nuts, in order to immerse the circumcision in a childlike environment,

making the children gather around to collect sweets and nuts.



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Wedding is a magic station of the human life trip, which creates a balance in a couple's life.

Even for the same nation, rites of wedding celebration may vary from one region to another.



Djerba is an island in the south east of Tunisia, which inhabitants are characterized, among other Tunisian citizens, by their specific clothes and life style.

[Mawsem Arrijel](#) - The season of men deserves to be considered as the best illustration and safeguarding of the Djerbian rituals, style of life, habits, clothes, behaviour, social contact...



Tunisian Feasts Rites

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- Wedding**
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The Djerbian wedding ceremony, has its own specificity, if compared with other regions of Tunisia. Once the wedding ceremony is finished, the couple starts its intimate life with a ritual that allows bringing to each other: chance, love and fertility, through exchanging some honey: the real sense of honey moon.



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Death is the last step of a human life path which celebration in any religion is commonly distinguished with respect, sadness and the lose of a close important person.

By subtracting the bodies of the martyrs who should be buried as they are, garnished with their blood, as a sign of their sacrifice, every body of dead person should follow the ritual of purification: each religion has its funeral rites symbolizing the passage from life to death: a set of acts, gestures and words which is codified.

The Muslim funeral rite was illustrated with details through the short fiction film [TAYEB](#) – The Masseur, made by Anouar Lahouar in 2011.



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Dieu Tout-Puissant, nous implorons votre pitié... Pardonnez nos péchés et évitez-nous l'impureté... Epargnez-nous votre rigueur.

This shot from a fiction short movie, documents the funeral ritual, during which, the family of the lost parent, should put in the room where the purification ritual takes place, a cup of milk, a candle on a plate and a portion of bread, thinking possible his getting up while waiting all the night for the funeral in the next day, or thinking that he may have another life.


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Tunisian citizens, either they were Muslim, Christian or Jewish, are distinguished with many religious rituals of kitchen, related to the the religion of each other. Their behaviour was well represented through the movie: *SIF HALKELWED – A Summer in La Goulette*; made by Ferid Boughedir in 1996.

SIF HALKELWED is a splendid masterpiece which illustrates an heterogeneous peaceful mixture between three neighbours, Living in the same building.

The agreement of the three families, figures many times in their behaviour, as although the difference of their religions, they peacefully exchange their dishes, making each other taste his neighbour's one.



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The Christian Tunisian neighbours-from Italian origin- have a distinction in their habit while eating: they systematically eat the '[pasta calda](#)' (Italians are internationally distinguished with their multiple types of pasta) which means that the eating should take place as long as the dish is still warm, that's why she brings her daughter back to the table, while she was about to get out.





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The Jewish neighbor asked his Muslim one to light up the cooker instead of him , in order to cook eggs, as the engaged Jewish are forbidden to light the fire every Saturday.

This culinary ritual was perfectly represented in a discussion between Jojo and Youssef: a shot from the movie : [A Summer in La Goulette.](#)





Fasting cutting is mostly accompanied by supplications broadcasted on TV, such as the names of Allah, which submerges the dinner, with an aura of holiness.

COOKING AS A RITUAL



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The Brik dish was represented in Eté à La Goulette movie, showing how GioGio was making the [brik belwarka](#)



Brik is assaulted varied entrance, which is first of all related to Ramadan holy month, in addition to be appreciated also during Tunisian daily life.



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Traditional Tunisian Sweets such as *Baklawa*, *Kaak Warka*, *Chbebek El Janna* ([illustrated in a movie, also named *Chbebek El Janna*](#)) and more others, represent almost a mixture of heritage from different civilisations which has passed through Tunisia in past, like the Ottoman dynasty, the Hafside or the Aghlabide ones... But most of all, we find in each sweet, a Tunisian specificity, which distinguish them from other nations' sweets.



Sweets are always distributed to the guests that we invite to different celebrations, but may also be saved during daily life, in order to find how to welcome a coming guest unexpectedly.



All the mentioned examples of illustration, and many others, may lead us to confirm the vision of the cinematographic masterpieces as a safeguarding mean to the heritage of every nation.

**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
ATTENTION**



And not only the kitchen is full of heritage, any section of our life, is distinguished with inherited specificities from previous civilisations, making possible their safeguarding against extinction through cinematographic masterpieces, such as the inheritances of architecture, figuring in contemporary constructions, traditional habits which can be worn by comedians... Leading us to confirm that the seventh art is a spoiled, priceless mine, which may insure all the heritage preservation.

