PART I: Name and geographic location

Name of the manifestation: Festive Cycle around the devotion and worship towards Saint John the Baptist / Saint John's Feast / Saint John’s Parade

Tradition-bearer communities: cofradías, parrandas, brotherhoods and societies

Geographic location of the manifestation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aragua</td>
<td>Ocumare de la Costa de Oro, Mario Briceño Iragorry, Girardot, Santiago Mariño.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carabobo</td>
<td>Puerto Cabello, Juan José Mora, Naguanagua, Bejuma, San Joaquín, Carlos Arvelo, Diego Ibarra, Valencia, Guacara.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital District</td>
<td>Libertador.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Acevedo, Andrés Bello, Brión, Buroz, Zamora, Plaza, Páez, Paz Castillo, Independencia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaracuy</td>
<td>Veroes, Independencia and San Felipe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas</td>
<td>Vargas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART II: Sub-categories of the intangible cultural heritage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artistic creation</th>
<th>Feasts, ceremonies and rituals</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Traditional medicine and healing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beliefs, myths and orality

| X

Culinary

| X

Manufacturing techniques and usage

| X

PART III: Characteristics

Origin: Saint John the Baptist is one of the most popular saints among Catholics, thanks to the interpretation of the Gospel, the ritual of baptism and the saint’s relation to Jesus Christ. According to the calendar of saints’ days, his birth is celebrated on June 24, and his passion or martyrdom, on August 29. The celebrations around Saint John the Baptist in Venezuela have their origin in Spain, where in the mid-sixteenth century they were quite popular. The feasts where characterized by the building of altars, the use of flags and fireworks, and magical rituals associated with fire, water and herbs. Processions and military parades also took place. This was all organized by brotherhoods, which used the images of the saint to show their devotion. It also coincided with the invasion of Abya Yala (Latin America) (Alemán, 1997). During the 16th century, the Caribbean was invaded by the Spanish, who brought with them human groups from Sub-Saharan Africa against their will. By establishing the trade of people of dark skin in the continent of Abya Ayala, European slavers had an impact on the native peoples and local communities of African descent, who are currently resisting on a cultural level, with their habits and customs, opening the path to the transformation and reinterpretation of cultural expressions, in what is known as the diaspora. The practices associated to the worship of Saint John...
the Baptist in Venezuela evolved during the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1789, the king of Spain, Charles IV, issued a royal decree to regulate slavery throughout his domains. The edict featured a combination of authority, regulation and paternalism. It was inspired by the Code Noir, which was promulgated by French monarch Louis XIV a century earlier, in 1685, at the request of his minister Colbert. The code would serve as template for the Spanish king, given the close ties held by both countries since 1733, and the issue of the Family Compact (Álvarez, 2016:1). Communities in Venezuela incorporated Saint John the Baptist to their celebrations, and gave him a double meaning. On the one hand, he was considered a supernatural miracle worker. On the other, he was a simple person who experienced anguish and joy like any other human being (Novo, 2001). The chants of the African slaves and their descendants were calls to their gods, imploring not to be forsaken. Then came the dance of fertility and the prayers of petition. These practices were held for a single day, set aside only for that purpose. Saint John’s day was the day that coincided with the rituals and celebrations of local slaves, whose gods were seen as pagans by their masters. In the town of Tarma, in the coastal state of Vargas, Saint John was dubbed “El dormilón” (the Sleepy One) (Benítez, 1993).

**Description of the manifestation**

**What is the manifestation about?** The celebration in honor of Saint John the Baptist is a ritualist, ceremonial, festive and collective manifestation, associated with the summer solstice, as well as the presence of water and fire. This makes the element a cultural expression that mixes feelings, chant, music, dance and instrumental performance with Catholic religion and popular beliefs, and draws a great number of worshipers in many villages across the Venezuelan territory.

**How is it organized and carried out?** The month of June is dedicated to a festivity that encompasses a series of rituals of diverse symbolism and whose most important days are the 1st of said month (first beating of drums), the 23rd (eve or vigil of Saint John), the 24th (baptism and feast), and the 25th or 29th, when the image is put away. However, the celebration around Saint John extends to the months of July, August and September, as the Sanjuaneros seek to pay their promises, either on a weekend or a national holiday (5th or 24th of July). At midday June 1, one can hear the sound of drums and church bells, depending on the location, as well as chants that allude to the opening of the cycle. The 23rd is the most significant day for the worshipers. The feast begins near the end of the afternoon and carries onto the night, when the vigil of the saint takes place, in the presence of the image. On June 24, the saint is baptized, an act that has several connotations, one of which is the biblical event where Saint John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The saint is not the only one in contact with the water, as the worshipers take the opportunity to bathe in a river, when they are near a body of water or if it rains by chance. The purpose is to receive the blessings as well as the attributes they confer to the image. The symbolism of the immersion is sacred in nature for the worshipers, who look forward to this moment. On the 24th, as the sun comes out and the chants begins, the festivity carries on with the parrandas, brotherhoods, societies and cofradías visiting one another as a way to strengthen the bonds of friendship and solidarity among their members. Other visits include religious temples, institutions, the house where the saint is being kept and the homes of promise keepers. In some communities, the festivities around Saint John merge into the celebration of other saints, such as Saint Peter and Saint Paul (June 29) as a way to close the summer festive cycle. Such is the case of the Sarria sector, in the Capital District, where the Sanjuaneros that have been celebrated and those that have not, because of quantity or date, gather during the “San Pedro de Sarria”, a parade that starts at the Santuario de María Auxiliadora, a church belonging to the Colegio San Francisco de Sales, a school known by locals as the Salesianos. Right after the 6:00 pm mass, worshipers and promise keepers take out the saints to parade them throughout the sector, accompanied by chants and the playing of instruments, until they reach the corners of San Pascual and San Pedro around 9:00 pm. The closing of the cycle, like in the case of the state of Yaracuy, is associated with another date from the catholic calendar, when locals bid farewell to their saint with a colorful display of flags and various rituals, every July 16, day of the Virgen del Carmen or Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The expressions feature chants that draw inspiration from that moment of devotion, and across the coastal states, like Aragua and Miranda, the Marian image is
usually taken out to sea. In some towns of Carabobo state, there is an exchange of secret words and signs with a handkerchief or cloth that is used to show reverence and symbolically seal the celebration. Saint John and his worshipers then return to the place where the image is kept, and the festivity closes until the next year. In the city of Caracas, it is also customary to bow to the Virgin Mary along the procession, regardless of her title or name. After these major dates, the calendar is still rich in short-distance processions, where small images are paraded to allude to Saint John in his infancy, a saint with different characteristics than as an adult, when the figure usually does not leave the church or the houses where he is meant to be guarded. There are parishes that celebrate the Feast of Saint John the Baptist on August 29 or the following weekend, by remembering the martyrdom or passion that comes with revealing or denouncing the truth.

When does it take place and what are the stages?: After the May Cross festival, which takes place on the 2nd or 3rd of May, celebrations around Saint John the Baptist kick off in many small towns every 31st, the day of the coronation of the Virgin Mary. At the beginning of the month, also known as the awakening of Saint John, worshipers start building an altar to celebrate the first wake of the saint, accompanied by the beating of drums and chants known as cantos de sirena, fulías, décimas and sangueos. The small village of Ocumare de la Costa, in the state of Aragua, in the morning hours of June 23 (eve of Saint John), locals sing their cantos de sirena as a ritual expression to salute the saint. That same morning, devotees leave their homes and take to their boats to navigate along the shore to a beach called La Boca (The mouth). During this practice, every cofradía or brotherhood disembarks with their own image of Saint John, and they are received with flags and sangueos sung by local practitioners and officiants of the feast, as a tribute to each visiting community. On their way to the altar, they make several stops and beat their drums. They end by placing the image on a sacred spot and sing some cantos de sirena. In the afternoon, they return to their boats carrying their images with them. The vessels, decorated with multicolored flags, gather out at sea, to the sound of sangueos and fireworks, and eventually head back to their villages, where the celebrations around the saint go on. The most significant day is June 24, but in some regions of the country, tradition calls for the celebration of mass the day before, at midnight, and then at sunrise. That day the image is dressed up, and taken out of the house where it has been kept safe, known colloquially as “The house of Saint John”. The procession takes place at the sound of drums and chants (sangueos, malembes, lejíos, camineros). The image is paraded on the shoulders of its guardian, who is followed by the rest of the worshipers to the local church, where mass is celebrated in his honor. At the end of the religious ceremony, the beating of drums resume, and the procession makes its way across the village, while devotees and promise keepers greet the saint with handkerchiefs and multicolored flags, like butterflies “clearing the way” until they arrive at the main altar. On June 25, some villages engage in what is known as the “locking up of Saint John” to bid him farewell. That day, the image is paraded along the main streets of the village, visiting the families that worship him. Other towns extend the celebration cycle until June 29, the day of Saints Peter and Paul, or July 16, day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, or even August 29, when the martyrdom of Saint John is celebrated.

Where does it take place? The festive cycle around Saint John the Baptist in Venezuela is celebrated in the Capital District, and in the states of Aragua, Miranda, Carabobo, Yaracuy and Vargas, where the cultural expression has developed uninterruptedly, with unique elements according to the location, but always sharing common features.

Who participates? The festive cycle of Saint John the Baptist engages tradition bearers, devotees, practitioners, and promise keepers, all organized around various social institutions, known as cofradias, parrandas, brotherhoods, and societies (the oldest of these entities), and the community as a whole. Members of the cofradias and the societies have access to and agency over the image of the saint. Their roles, however, are always linked to the Catholic Church. In the case of the parrandas and the brotherhoods, their activities and rituals do not strictly follow Catholic statutes, so the saint in those communities is guarded by someone in a local “house of the saint”. Traditional hierarchies and the role
of women hold a significant place among the Sanjuaneros and their organizations. Other significant positions are those of the cooks in charge of preparing the traditional sancocho or stew for everyone, as well as the ritual beverages that are offered by some to pay for a promise. Other participants include the painters, the carvers and the sculptors who make the religious figures. As representatives of the Catholic Church, the priests are responsible for their parish. They celebrate mass and administer the sacraments to the community, and on some occasions, participate in the processions and the feasts. In the case of the coastal villages, fishermen lend their boats to allow the images to be transported to the places where they fish, to receive the blessings of the saint.

Why do they do it? Besides Baby Jesus, John the Baptist is the only in the only saint whose birthday is celebrated by worshipers. In Venezuela, devotion to Saint John is expressed through beliefs and practices associated to the popular religiosity found in some regions of the country. Ways to predict the future and solve issues about love, ritual baths to bring good luck, health, fortune, and even new lovers are among the most common requests or petitions. There is also the belief that by cutting one’s hair, it will grow more abundantly and bring good luck, and that by cracking an egg into a glass of water, a person will be able to know the future. These are a few of the elements that showcase the spiritual and emotional state of mind of the community around the saint and his festivity.

What material elements are associated with the manifestation? The image of Saint John is of much significance to his worshipers and their festivity. There is a symbolism that expresses codes of faith around the hands and fingers of the saint. For example, when they are open, Saint John is greeting everyone. When he is pointing to the sky or the ground it means: “Behold the Lamb of God”. The clothes worn by the saint are also very important, as many Sanjuaneros give away items of clothing and beautiful hats, out of devotion or to pay for a promise. In some villages, expert hands are in charge of tailoring the garments, and only a few people can keep the items that have been offered to the image. In the urban festivals, promise keepers are responsible for clothing the saints, whether the garments are theirs or not. In the festivities dedicated to Saint John, the colors play an important role and have different cultural meanings. Musical instruments vary from one place to the next. In the villages across the state of Miranda, several types of drums are used, such as the mina, the curbata, the culo e’ puya, the quitiplás, the tuyero drum, the side drum, the caja and the culatas. In the states of Aragua, Vargas, Yaracuy and Carabobo, the cumacos, the pipas, the clarines and the campanas are among the most common drums. In the case of the Capitol District, the aforementioned instruments are all present in the celebrations around Saint John the Baptist, being the cumacos, the pipas, the side drums, the caja, the clarines and the campanas the most common types of drums. One can also find the maraca and the guarura among the instruments used to accompany the chants. These expressions highlighting the nexus between the human and the divine are what make this festivity one of the most significant displays of devotion, faith, rituality, organization and pride regarding the ethnic, cultural and patron saint-related elements of Venezuela.

What creative process is associated with the manifestation? Finding different ways to beat the drums, doing one’s hair, getting dressed, dancing, composing a prayer and executing a spiritual practice has significantly enriched the cultural diversity of the country. And by defending and legitimizing the manifestation, bridges have been built on equality and mutual respect, and dialog is taking place between different groups and individuals, in what can be considered as an exercise in true interculturality.

Traditions ruling over access to the element and other aspects: The celebration of Saint John the Baptist is an expression of collective participation that has remained over time, generating a set of practices, uses and codes that Afro-Venezuelan communities, for the most part, have passed on via oral tradition, and where sacred, popular elements expressed in rituals, myths, and musical, choreographic and symbolic performances passed on throughout 400 years have turned this festive, devotional manifestation into a cultural identity marker, something to establish our sense of belonging
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across the national territory, something that draws on cultural resistance against the enslavement of our ancestors for its vitality and currently puts the call for freedom amongst our communities under a new semantic framework.

Bearer testimonials on the manifestation: Following are a couple of testimonials underlining the influence and significance of the element:

Dioger Berroterán, Naiguatá, Vargas state (2019): “My devotion to and respect for the manifestation around Saint John began when I was a child, because the house where I was raised and still live in, my parents’ house, is one street away from the house where Saint John is kept, and where drums beat every 23rd and 24th of June. Today I feel the same emotions I did 45 years ago.”

Francisco Pacheco, Cata, municipality of Ocumare de la Costa de Oro, Aragua state, (2019): “Saint John the Baptist is a manifestation that consolidates the values you were taught by your family. I became familiar with Saint John through my mother, Paula Croquer, who in turn learned it from her mother, my grandmother Santía Fiol. To me, Saint John equals family, it is my village of Cata, the most beautiful memories and the faith you learn at home.”

Symbolic geography of the manifestation: The link between the festive cycle and the territory can be noticed in the formation of symbolic geographies, where the environmental elements are internally recognized and protected for their intrinsic, natural value, but also for being markers of the intangible cultural heritage. In most bearer communities, economic activities, especially fishing and agriculture, are managed through self-sustainable projects, where Saint John the Baptist and its symbolic, festival markers are taken not only as an added value, but also as an element built in the value of the territory and traditional socially-minded production practices.

(*) Symbolic geography of the festive cycle in honor of Saint John the Baptist.

General location of the manifestation regarding Saint John the Baptist within the Venezuelan territory. Source: Cultural Heritage Institute, 2019.
Photos

Félix Corro, guardian of the image of Saint John of Naiguatá, Vargas state. Photo Archive, Cultural Heritage Institute, 2014

Fastening of leather drumhead for drums called *pipa* in preparation for the feast of Saint John of Naiguatá Vargas state. Photo Archive, Cultural Heritage Institute, 2014.

Garments for the image of Saint John the Baptist, Cata, Ocumare de la Costa de Oro, Aragua state. Photo Archive, Cultural Heritage Institute, 2013.
Community recognition

Identity-reinforcing elements: Understanding the manifestation as the product of a historic legacy, each region or town has their own unique characteristics regarding the celebration, but they all share a common markers, such as faith, identity, popular religiosity, memory, collective imagination, physical and spiritual space, and territory involved in the ritual.

How does it foster participation and community integration? The celebration of the festive cycle of Saint John the Baptist across the national territory is known for encouraging social integration among its practitioners and devotees, by incorporating people who come to learn about it and enjoy the air of festivity and religiosity that distinguishes the element. One must also acknowledge the vital role the cofradías, the parrandas, the brotherhoods and the societies have had in bearing the tradition and strengthening devotion to the saint in their communities over generations. This has been possible thanks to the power of oral transmission within the family unit, and the various social organizations bearing the manifestation, developing a significant sense of belonging among its members. Furthermore, the feeling of devotion is not confined to the major days of the celebration, as it can manifest in the everyday life of the local social organizations mentioned in the present record, who are driven by respect, solidarity and faith to instill a sense of participation, organization and collaboration among community members that feel drawn to see the manifestation in person every year.

Transmission:

How is it passed on and kept alive over time? Every community has a family that is closely connected to the image of Saint John, perhaps because of legacy or because they earned such a privilege after years of favorably contributing to the celebration. Thanks to oral tradition, the family setting is the best means to pass on knowledge and knowhow from one generation to the next. The younger ones learn by watching and imitating their elders (parents and brothers) while they conduct an activity or ritual, especially when there is singing, dancing or playing an instrument involved. In many villages, there are non-profit initiatives driven by tradition bearers, which are meant to teach local children and teenagers about every aspect of the element. These initiatives serve as nurseries in the sense that children and teenagers learn about the importance and sacred nature of the element, and how to take care of the image of the saint. At the same time, they hone their performance skills so they can eventually sing or play a percussion instrument. Also worth mentioning, is the positive experience of volunteer instructors and tradition bearers who visit the local schools to narrate and help children become familiar with the celebration.

What values can be found in the manifestation? A common saying among Sanjuaneros is: “You can find your true feelings about Saint John in your heart, not in your mind”. It is a proclamation of faith and love that underscores the vitality and protection that devotees bring to the element. For these premises to be recreated on an annual basis, it is critical that social cohesion, brotherhood, solidarity, respect and commitment be present in every single component of the manifestation. The image of Saint John is ascribed with the power to work miracles and fulfill requests regarding health issues, prosperity and love. In this sense, the saint and the beating of the drums bring out the hopes and struggles present in the collective imagination, including in those who, for whatever the reason, are not capable of partaking in the celebration. The festive cycle therefore features rogations that transcend the individual in order to search for the well-being of the community as a whole.

How does it contribute to the material and spiritual wellbeing of the community? The festive cycle is an example of how creative and lively are some of the alternative forms of faith and ritual that exist around Saint John the Baptist, in different social spaces, such as villages,
small towns, parishes, and cities, where the bearers have shown the ability and willingness to share space with other religious, cultural and ethnic factions. There are numerous examples of dialog between communities nationwide, regarding the element. Many positive exchanges have also taken place on an international scale, such as the one between Sanjuaneros from the state of Yaracuy with groups from Spain. Another example is the Encuentros Internacionales de Sanjuaneros, an international meeting that has been celebrated for the past 20 years between the Tambores de San Juan de Naguanagua, from the state of Carabobo, and groups of Sanjuaneros from the Dominican Republic.

How does creativity and respect for cultural diversity manifest? The values that identify the element are compatible with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various UNESCO conventions. Respect is much more than an aspiration among the organizations. It is a requirement to participate in any activity or task associated with the festive cycle. With the exception of a few roles that are assigned according to one's gender, being a man or a woman does not preclude anyone from assuming any responsibility during the celebration.

PART IV: Manifestation sustainability:
What conditions are necessary to preserve the manifestation and its vitality? This festive cycle is deeply rooted in many communities around the country, and can be found throughout a large geographic extension and spatial-spiritual arrangement. Thanks to the creativity of the bearers, the element adopts unique characteristics depending on the location. A variety in the popular liturgy around the festivity adds complexity and diversity to the manifestation. Another factor contributing to the sustainability of the feast is the spontaneous diligence displayed by devotees and their communities before and during the manifestation.

Elements that put the manifestation at risk:
What are the risks to its transmission, promotion, sustainability, and access to its tangible and intangible elements? Inappropriate methods of promoting and disseminating the festive element based on a commercial approach, distorting the essence of the traditions that define the manifestation. Erratic implementation of cultural policies and/or neglect when it comes to the safeguarding of cultural heritage.

Safeguarding measures:
Previous efforts: Studies on the festive cycle around the devotion to Saint John the Baptist have been taken on by academia. Institutions have facilitated methods to register and document it. It is present in formal and non-formal education curricula, as well as long distance and online studies. Local social institutions have been recognized as “Cultural Interest Assets” on a municipal and state level. Confederations and civil associations have been created to bring said social institutions together, and independent research has contributed to make out the influence and significance of the element when it comes to the identity and the idiosyncrasy of the Venezuelan people.

Support from institutions to maintain the viability of the manifestation:
Public: X Private: X Communitarian: X

What measures have been implemented to help preserve the manifestation? The Festive Cycle around the devotion and worship towards Saint John the Baptist has been declared a “Cultural Interest Asset” by the Cultural Heritage Institute, an agency under Venezuela’s Ministry of Culture, through an administrative ruling made on February 20, 2005 (No. 003 / 2005), and published on July 22, 2005 in Venezuela’s official gazette No. 38.234.
Bibliography:

PART V: Observations
Forms of community participation in the collection of data: During the First Census on Venezuelan Cultural Heritage (2004-2010), the Cultural Heritage Institute conducted its collection of data in the state of Carabobo, between 2006 and 2010, and in the state of Miranda, between 2005 and 2010. In the state of Vargas, collection procedures were conducted twice: first, in 2005, during the First Census on Venezuelan Cultural Heritage, and years later, in the parish of Naiguatá, from June 22 to June 25, 2014, as part of an *in situ* collection process. Collection of data regarding the manifestation also took place during the celebration of Saint John the Baptist of Cata, in the municipality of Ocumare de la Costa de Oro, Aragua state, from June 22 to June 25, 2013, and during the celebration of Saint John the Baptist of Naiguatá, in the municipality of Vargas, Vargas state, from June 22 to June 25, 2014. The Cultural Heritage Institute also held several round tables to develop a methodology for the collection of data regarding the intangible cultural heritage during the celebration of Saint John the Baptist in the Libertador Municipality of Capital District, on the following dates: July 7, 2013; September 10, 2015; October 10, 2015, and July 9, 2016.
Possible restrictions to the use of collected data:
The conversation between the Madrina or godmother of a parranda and Saint John is sacred in nature. It is one of the elements of the ritual that devotees and Sanjuaneros in general consider that should be kept secret. The practice is guarded by the bearers, who refuse to let people outside the manifestation see such a solemn, intimate moment. The community of Sanjuaneros is against the dissemination of this part of the ritual through audiovisual media.

PART VI: Registration data

Photographic documentation
Place: Cata, municipality of Costa de Oro, Aragua state / Naiguatá, municipality of Vargas, Vargas state.
Date: 2013 / 2014
Photographer: Photo archive of the Cultural Heritage Institute.

Data collection
Community spokespeople: It is worth noticing the support provided to the Cultural Heritage Institute by the Cofradía de San Juan de Naiguatá, in the state of Vargas; the Cofradía de San Juan de Cata, in the state of Aragua; and the Asociación de Parranderos y Parranderas de San Juan de Caracas, represented by professors Arnoldo Barroso, Wilfredo Mendoza and María Sivira.
Representatives from other institutions: State-level cabinets operating under the Ministry of Culture.
Advisory team from the Cultural Heritage Institute: General Registry Office of Venezuelan Cultural Heritage: Alesia Martínez, Glenny Sangil, Mirla Pacheco, Nélida Réquiz, Gabriel Gómez Cerezo.
Place: Caracas, Cultural Heritage Institute.
Date of registration: 2013/2014.