

# The Maritime Traditions of the Fishermen of Socotra, Yemen

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## **Abstract**

The Socotra archipelago lies approximately 135 nautical miles northeast of Cape Guardafui, Somalia and 205 nautical miles south of Rās Fartaq, Yemen. The archipelago is made up of four main islands, Socotra, °Abd al-Kūri, Samḥa and Darsa, of which Socotra is the largest and most densely populated. The population of Socotra is divided between the interior pastoralists and the coastal fishermen and traders. While scholarly studies concerning the interior population abound, the fishermen of Socotra have received very little attention and little about them or their traditions is known. This thesis seeks to address this balance by studying their maritime traditions and asking the question, how have social, environmental and technological influences shaped the maritime traditions of the fishermen of Socotra?

The primary data forming the basis of this study is my ethnographic fieldwork carried out on the islands of Socotra and Samḥa between 2009 and 2010. This data is incorporated within a transdisciplinary framework that looks at some of the essential factors of historical, archaeological and environmental evidence to gain a holistic insight into the spatial and temporal factors affecting the maritime traditions of the fishermen.

This study argues several important points. The first is that the fishermen's maritime traditions on Socotra are governed by their length of involvement in fishing and understanding of the environment they are operating within. Secondly, their fishing practices are influenced by social and economic demands, which have a direct impact on the vessels and equipment they use. Thirdly, the environment and landscape plays a major role in the fishermen's techniques and practices. Finally, it also argues that there is not a singular, uniform maritime tradition for the entire island of Socotra, but that there are numerous regional variations.

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