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Harvesting the sea with the Kumzari people of Musandam Peninsula

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While much of the Arabian landscape is desolate, the surrounding waters are home to high levels of biodiversity. The Kumzari people of the Musandam Peninsula, located at the north-eastern tip of Arabia (van der Wal 2016), have been shaped by a deep relationship with the sea and with the sustenance that it provides.

Building on Moore and Anonby (2018), this paper opens with an inventory of marine species of the Musandam region. This leads into a study of how the Kumzari language conceptualizes the sea and organizes marine species into a biological taxonomy that contrasts with the western scientific taxonomy – more elaborate in some ways, but simpler in others. We then touch on the central role that fishing plays in the lives of Kumzari people, even in the context of current environmental fragility and decline, and resulting shifts in livelihood. The paper concludes with reflections on the prominence of the sea and of fishing in Kumzari oral literature, and underlines the ways in which the unique identity and cultural resilience of the Kumzari people remain inextricably tied to the sea.

References

- Moore, Alec and Erik Anonby. 2018. Cultural and linguistic connections with fauna in Southern and Eastern Arabia. 2018 Symposium on the Symbiotic Relationship Between Language and Nature in Arabia, University of Qatar, Doha, 19-21 February, 2018.
- Wal, Christina van der. 2014. *A grammar of Kumzari* (Ph.D. dissertation). Leiden: Leiden University.