

Somali

also known as “Samaale”, “Soomaali”

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

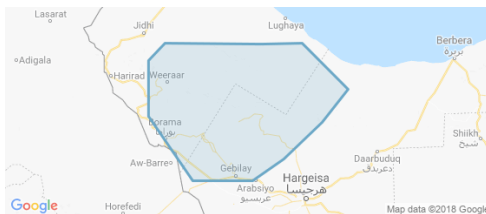
Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

** Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

** Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Religion, Islamic Traditions, Sunni, Shafi'i

The Somalis are a group of people living in Somalia, southern Djibouti, eastern Ethiopia, and northeastern Kenya. This entry focuses specifically on the Dolbahanta sub-tribe in Somalia, ca. 1900. At this time, the focal region was a part of British Somaliland, a British Protectorate. There are no formal political offices among the Somali; the political units are lineages and clans. The Somalis are Sunni Muslims, primarily of the Shafi sect. Religious beliefs and practices permeate almost every aspect of the society itself. Consequently, in this entry, the Somali religious group is considered to be coterminous with the Somali society itself.



Date Range: 1900 CE - 1960 CE

Region: Northern Somalia

Region tags: Africa, Eastern Africa, Somalia

Somalis live in Somalia, southern Djibouti, eastern Ethiopia, and northeastern Kenya. This entry focuses specifically on the Dolbananta subtribe (ca. 1900), who live in northern Somalia.

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.
- Source 2: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mo04-001>
- Source 1 Description: Lewis, I. M. (1955). *Peoples Of The Horn Of Africa: Somali, Afar, And Saho. Ethnographic Survey Of Africa : Northeastern Africa*. London: International African Institute.
- Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mo04-018>
- Source 2 Description: Lewis, I. M. (1961). *Pastoral Democracy: A Study Of Pastoralism And Politics Among*

The Northern Somali Of The Horn Of Africa. London: Published for the International African Institute by Oxford University Press

— Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mo04-000>

— Source 3 Description: Helander, B., & Beierle, J. (1997). Culture Summary: Somali. New Haven, Conn.: HRAF.

— Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mo04-006>

— Source 1 Description: Drake-Brockman, R. E. (1912). British Somaliland. London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd.

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

— Yes

Notes: "The activities of Catholic and Protestant missionaries have never been successful" (Helander & Beierle, 1997).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

— Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649 (Frequency of Internal Warfare, resolved rating) indicates that "internal warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year". Additionally, SCCS Variable 1654 (Pacification) indicates that the society is "not pacified for all or parts of the twenty-five-year time period". Source of information: Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004.



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

— Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650 (Frequency of External Warfare, resolved rating) indicates that "external warfare seems to occur every year, but usually only during a particular season". Additionally, SCCS Variable 1654 (Pacification) indicates that the society is "not pacified for all or parts of the twenty-five-year time period". Source of information: Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004.

Does the religion have official political support

Answer 'yes' also in cases where the religious and political spheres are not distinguished from one another, but the religious group's activities are tied up with, and supported by, the functioning of the society at large.

— No

Notes: There are no formal political offices among the Somali (Lewis, 1961:198). Religious leaders may participate in council meetings, but religious leadership is not coterminous with political leadership (Lewis, 1961:213).

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

— Estimated population, numeric: 100000

Notes: This entry focuses on the Somali sub-tribe Dolbahanta, which has a population of about 100,000 (Lewis, 1961:5).

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

— Estimated population, percentage of sample region: 100

Notes: Of the Somali, 100% are Muslims. "Somali are in fact devout and even fervid Muslims, and, as Sunnis, follow almost exclusively the Shafi'ite school of Muslim Law" (Lewis, 1961:26).

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: "The duties of sheikhs and wadaads are closely circumscribed; they attend to the religious life of their lineage-group" (Lewis, 1961:214).



Are leaders believed to possess supernatural powers or qualities:

— No

Notes: "The position of wadaad...is acquired through devotion to religion and training in the Shariah, the Quran, and in the traditions of the Prophet. The title 'sheikh' is reserved for men who are usually literate in Arabic, and who have a more thorough knowledge of the Shariah and religious works" (Lewis, 1961:214).

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

— Yes

Notes: The Somali are Muslim, and follow the Koran, which is a written text.



Are they written:

— Yes



Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

— I don't know

Notes: The Koran is believed to be the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. This story, however, is not detailed in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 66 (Large or Impressive Structures) indicates that no large or impressive structures are present (Murdock and Wilson, 1972; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

— Yes



Tombs:

— Yes

Notes: "The local founders of congregations and tariqa farms often receive at death the title of saint, and the veneration accorded to them develops into a cult which eclipses the devotion due to the true founder of the Order and the Prophet. Their tombs become shrines maintained by a small body of adherents, usually of the saint's family, to whom his baraka has passed. Followers of the Order and neighbouring tribesmen make a pilgrimage to the tomb each year on the anniversary of the saint's death and also to offer sacrifice as occasion demands" (Lewis, 1955:145).

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body.

Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

— I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic evidence

Belief in afterlife:

— Yes

Notes: Ethnographic information suggests that a belief in afterlife is present, but this belief is not described in detail. "It is believed to be meritorious to show kindness to a poor sheikh or wadaad (as indeed to any poor person). Such offerings please God and bring an automatic reward, if not in this life, certainly in heaven, and Somali are very generous in this respect" (Lewis, 1961:216).

- ↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:
 - I don't know
- Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information

Reincarnation in this world:

- No
- Notes: No ethnographic evidence for a belief in reincarnation among the Somali.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

- Yes
- Notes: See questions below for more details.

- ↳ Mummification:
 - No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mummification.

- ↳ Interment:
 - Yes

Notes: "The grave consists of a trench dug in an east-west direction to fit the dimensions of the corpse. In the north side of the trench a small niche or crypt is cut to the height of the corpse's shoulder-span. When the cortège has arrived at the grave, prayers are recited, and on their completion, the corpse is gently lowered into the grave by two men. The body is laid on its right side, the head to the east and the face turned to the north towards Mecca. It is covered with a cloak, and the bindings of the shroud are cut by the two grave-diggers, who also place earth and lumps of clay under the body to keep it in position in the grave. The crypt in which the body rests is then closed with pieces of wood or stone in such a way that no earth touches the body" (Lewis, 1955:139).

- ↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):
 - No

Notes: Corpse is interred extended and on the right side (Lewis, 1955:139).

- ↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):
 - No

Notes: Corpse is interred extended and on the right side (Lewis, 1955:139).

- ↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):
 - No

Notes: Corpse is interred extended and on the right side (Lewis, 1955:139).

↳ Corpse is interred some other way:

— Yes [specify]: On right side

Notes: "The body is laid on its right side, the head to the east and the face turned to the north towards Mecca" (Lewis, 1955:139).

↳ Cannibalism:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for exposing corpses to the elements.

↳ Feeding to animals:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for feeding corpses to animals. In fact, measures are taken to deter hyenas from graves.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

— I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information

Are grave goods present:

— I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information

Are formal burials present:

— Yes

Notes: See Lewis, 1955:139 for a description of formal burials.

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

— Yes

Notes: Among the ethnographic evidence, God (otherwise known as Allaah or Allah) and Saints are described as being present. Details regarding specific aspects of these supernatural beings are not discussed in length. Answers to the following questions are given based off available information.

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 (Religion: High gods) indicates that a high god is "present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):

– No

Notes: There is no monarch among the Somali.

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:

– No

Notes: There is no monarch among the Somali.

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "It is believed to be meritorious to show kindness to a poor sheikh or wadaad (as indeed to any poor person). Such offerings please God and bring an automatic reward, if not in this life, certainly in heaven, and Somali are very generous in this respect" (Lewis, 1961:216).

↳ The supreme high god can reward:

– Yes

Notes: "It is believed to be meritorious to show kindness to a poor sheikh or wadaad (as indeed to any poor person). Such offerings please God and bring an automatic reward, if not in this life, certainly in heaven, and Somali are very generous in this respect" (Lewis, 1961:216).

↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:

"Indirect causal efficacy" refers to not being seen as consciously, directly and actively intervening in the human world, but their overall well being or general attitude has effects on, e.g., quality of harvest, success in war, health, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "The ultimate focus of causation is God (Allaah), conceived of as a largely impersonal power before whom man is impotent and helpless. Sickness and ill-health, good and ill-fortune, all exist with His consent and are ultimately in His control to withhold or bestow" (Lewis, 1961:258).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

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↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: Ethnographic evidence describes the presence of Saints, but neither specific attributes nor characteristics. Questions are answered where information is available.

↳ These mixed human-divine beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

"Indirect causal efficacy" refers to not being seen as consciously, directly and actively intervening in the human world, but their overall well being or general attitude has effects on, e.g., quality of harvest, success in war, health, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "There are no harvest festivals and no rites or religious services specifically connected with cultivation. Local saints, however, are petitioned to bless the fields and, particularly when birds molest the crops are solicited through gifts made to the custodians of their tombs to safeguard the growing sorghum" (Lewis, 1961:106).

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– I don't know

Notes: Presumably, God participates in supernatural monitoring because SCCS Variable 238 (Religion: High gods) indicates that a high god is "present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). However, there is not enough ethnographic information concerning further details of supernatural monitoring.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: Supernatural punishment from God occurs in a general form. "Man is in any case held to be by nature sinful so that God's disfavour is regarded rather as a constant condition than as an immediate punishment for some transgression" (Lewis, 1961:258).

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: God (or Allaah/Allah) is the agent of supernatural punishment. This punishment is only described generally, and not in much detail. See questions below for relevant information.

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

Notes: See Lewis, 1961, pages 258-259.

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– No

Notes: Done only by high god.

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: God punishes because humans are generally sinful (Lewis, 1961:258). "Only rarely is a particular disaster or misfortune taken as a specific indication of God's displeasure and then usually not by those most concerned" (Lewis, 1961:259).

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Other [specify]

– Yes

Notes: God punishes because humans are generally sinful (Lewis, 1961:258).

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "Awards and punishments do not automatically fall due in this life but may be received after death" (Lewis, 1961:258).

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of a belief in reincarnation.

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of a belief in reincarnation.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for available information. (note that information regarding supernatural rewards is limited)

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

Notes: God is the only cause of supernatural reward as described by ethnographic evidence.

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

Notes: God is the only cause of supernatural reward as described by ethnographic evidence.

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– No

Notes: God is the only cause of supernatural reward as described by ethnographic evidence.

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "It is believed to be meritorious to show kindness to a poor sheikh or wadaad (as indeed to any poor person). Such offerings please God and bring an automatic reward, if not in this life, certainly in heaven, and Somali are very generous in this respect" (Lewis, 1961:216).

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as a superior life form:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for a belief in reincarnation.

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for a belief in reincarnation.

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:

– Yes

Notes: "It is believed to be meritorious to show kindness to a poor sheikh or wadaad (as indeed to any poor person). Such offerings please God and bring an automatic reward, if not in this life, certainly in heaven, and Somali are very generous in this respect" (Lewis, 1961:216).

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more details.

↳ Monogamy (males):

– No

Notes: "As a Muslim, each Somali man has the right to be married to four women" (Helander and Beierle, 1997).

↳ Other sexual constraints (males):

– I don't know

↳ Other sexual constraints (females):

– Yes

Notes: "An exceedingly high value is placed on virginity in women at marriage which the Somali practice of infibulation is designed to ensure. [footnote] Girls are infibulated usually when they are between eight and ten years' old (and sometimes earlier), the vulva being sewn together, usually by a Midgaan woman. A portion of the clitoris is excised to make the girl clean (halaal) in a Muslim sense. This is conducted usually individually and without much ceremonial. The aim is to prepare a girl for marriage and to safeguard her virginity until that time. The excision of part of the clitoris may be made separately at an earlier age" (Lewis, 1961:43).

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the requirement of castration.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Notes: "As a rule, the three times of prayer most commonly recognized are the Fajr or early morning, the Maghrib or sunset prayer, and the Zuhr, which is said as soon as the sun has begun to decline;

some Somalis will rigidly observe all five times, including the Asr between two and four, and the Isha about eight o'clock, but these are the exceptions" (Drake-Brockman, 1912:110).

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

This question refers to the wider society in which the religious group is located.

— A chiefdom

Notes: The Somali have two level of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is indicative of a larger chiefdom (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004). The Somali political unit is the lineage, and several lineages may occasionally come together to form a clan (Lewis, 1961:4). Beyond the clan, there is no higher political organization.

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

— Yes

Notes: "Most local centres have at least one Quranic school, often attached to a mosque or tomb of a saint, where boys gather for religious instruction. Many a sheikh or wadaad devotes almost all his time to teaching children, and living chiefly upon the fees which he charges" (Lewis, 1961:215).



Is formal education restricted to religious professionals:

— No

Notes: "Children who wish to learn the Quran, the Shariah, and the works of the saints, even if they do not wish to devote their lives wholly to religion, come under their [sheikhs and wadaads] instruction" (Lewis, 1961:214).



Is such education open to both males and females:

— No

Notes: Although not directly stated in ethnographic records, it can be assumed that education is only open to males. All examples and discussion around religious education only includes male children as students (see Lewis, 1961:215).

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— No

Notes: SCCS 20 (food storage) indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Notes: SCCS 20 (food storage) indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: "To counter its deficiencies in water resources in some parts of the Haud artificial basins have been excavated by individuals using hired labour, by lineage-groups, and by the Government" (Lewis, 1961:35).

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

— No

Notes: It can be assumed that transportation infrastructure is not present, as routes of land transport are "unimproved trails", according to Murdock and Morrow (1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004; SCCS Variable 14).

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

— No

Notes: "Police functions are not specialized or institutionalized at any level of political integration, the maintenance of law and order being left exclusively to informal mechanisms of social control, to private retaliation, or to sorcery" (Tuden and Marshall, 1972, column 10: police).

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

— No

Notes: "Many sheikhs and wadaads take their duties as peace-makers seriously. But they do not themselves settle disputes, or judge between disputants, for this is the work of elders in council, and of informal courts of arbitration" (Lewis, 1961:217).

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

— No

Notes: "Arabic is used throughout the Somali area in much the same way as was Latin in Medieval Europe (i.e., for all official and religious documents, etc.). Somali is unwritten..." (Lewis, 1955:12).

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an

institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: "Arabic is used throughout the Somali area in much the same way as was Latin in Medieval Europe (i.e., for all official and religious documents, etc.). Somali is unwritten..." (Lewis, 1955:12).

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: "Arabic is used throughout the Somali area in much the same way as was Latin in Medieval Europe (i.e., for all official and religious documents, etc.). Somali is unwritten..." (Lewis, 1955:12).

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

— Yes

Notes: The Somali rely primarily on animal husbandry for subsistence, as well as intensive agriculture to supplement the diet. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

— Pastoralism

— Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: The Somali rely primarily on animal husbandry for subsistence, as well as intensive agriculture to supplement the diet. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.