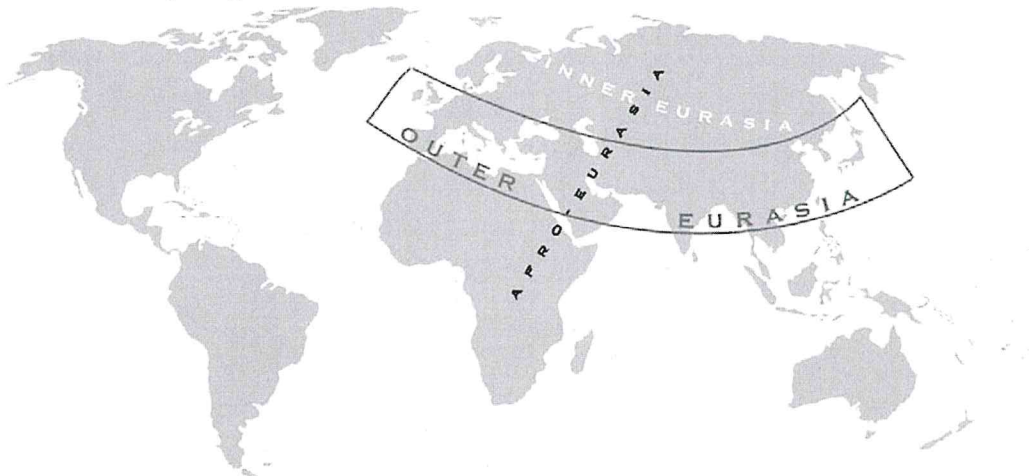


Student Handout 5: Pastoral Nomads: Adaptations and Interactions

Pastoral nomads are animal-herding people who migrate seasonally in search of grazing land for their livestock. Pastoral nomadic groups became significant on the stage of Afroeurasian history in the second millennium BCE.

Adaptations: Like hunting, pastoralism offered a technological solution to the ecological problems that the harsh environment of Inner Eurasia posed. Its success encouraged population growth, and as populations grew, Inner Eurasian communities faced new challenges. They had to find ways to mobilize scarce resources both to sustain themselves and to defend themselves against rival groups. The relatively flat landscape of Inner Eurasia offered a few natural resistances. Where geography offered no shield, societies had to rely on tactical and fighting skills.



Map 1.1 The 'cold Eurasian core' (below 0 degrees in January).

Stop and Jot after reading the paragraph and studying both maps:

*Why was farming not an option for people living in Inner Eurasia?
Why was pastoral nomadism more practical?*

Why were pastoralist societies so warlike? The pastoral way of life favored warrior cultures. Livestock was a less secure resource than agricultural crops. Disease could swiftly destroy a large herd, and rival nomad rustlers might steal an entire herd. Herders had to be able to react quickly in a crisis. Controlling large animals also required the physical skills of a rodeo rider and the logistical skill of a cattle driver. This means that they had to have a system of military readiness both to protect their animals and to raid their neighbors. It requires physical strength, endurance, and a great tolerance for hardship.

Turn and Talk: What was difficult about living as a pastoralist and taking care of herds of animals? How did people adapt to these difficulties?

Pastoral societies had to be able to transform themselves easily into armies capable of fighting with skill, spirit, and ferocity. Military resources had to be concentrated in relatively sparse populations. Therefore, training in how to ride and shoot had to begin at an early age. The pastoral nomadic way of life also encouraged aggression and a willingness to resort to violence, a limited empathy for other peoples' suffering, restrained affections in personal relationships, and great concern for personal courage and status. Pastoral societies instilled these martial values in both women and men.

Stop and Jot: How did people adapt to the specific challenges of being a nomadic pastoralist? What values, attitudes, and skills did they have to develop to survive and succeed?

Interactions: Contacts with farming societies of Outer Eurasia may have created new opportunities for trade and raiding. With the rise of chariot warfare in the second millennium BCE, empires such as those of China and Assyria needed horses for their armies. Since they didn't have the land needed to support large herds, they had to import horses from the steppes. Pastoralists of Inner Eurasia could maintain large herds only if they took up a nomadic lifestyle. If this argument is correct, it suggests the beginning of an interdependent relationship between Inner and Outer Eurasia.

Pastoral nomads frequently moved with their livestock herds through regular yearly circuits to find fresh water and pastures. Nomads depended for survival on the meat and milk of their flocks, as well as other resources like hides (skin) and bone, but they still needed some agricultural products, such as grain. As a result, pastoral nomadic societies relied on farming societies for certain products. Pastoral nomads usually needed the grains and luxury products of agricultural societies more than farmers needed surplus livestock. This unbalanced relationship helps explain why relations between nomads and settled peoples sometimes became violent, especially along the borderlands between Inner and Outer Eurasia.

Turn and Talk: What did farmers and pastoralists need from each other? Why did this matter? What was the impact of their dependence on each other and their interactions?

This text adapted from World History for Us All, Era 3, Migrations and militarism across AfroEurasia, <http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu/eras/era3.php>.