

Nomad

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A **nomad** (Greek: νομάς, *nomas*, plural νομάδες, *nomades*; meaning one roaming about for pasture, pastoral tribe) is a member of a community of people who live in different locations, moving from one place to another. Among the various ways nomads relate to their environment, one can distinguish the hunter-gatherer, the pastoral nomad owning livestock, or the "modern" peripatetic nomad. As of 1995, there were an estimated 30–40 million nomads in the world.^[2]

Nomadic hunting and gathering, following seasonally available wild plants and game, is by far the oldest human subsistence method. Pastoralists raise herds, driving them, and/or moving with them, in patterns that normally avoid depleting pastures beyond their ability to recover.

Nomadism is also a lifestyle adapted to infertile regions such as steppe, tundra, or ice and sand, where mobility is the most efficient strategy for exploiting scarce resources. For example, many groups in the tundra are reindeer herders and are semi-nomadic, following forage for their animals. These nomads sometimes adapt the use of high technology such as solar photovoltaics to reduce their dependence on diesel fuel.^[3]

Sometimes also described as "nomadic" are the various itinerant populations who move about in densely populated areas living not on natural resources, but by offering services (craft or trade) to the resident population. These groups are known as "peripatetic nomads".^{[4][5]}



Pastoral nomads camping near Namtso in 2005. In Tibet, nomads constitute about 40% of the ethnic Tibetan population.^[1]

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Common characteristics

An nomad is a person with no settled home. Who moves from place to place as a way of obtaining food, finding pasture for livestock, or otherwise making a living. The word Nomad comes from a Greek word that means one who wanders for pasture. Most nomadic groups follow a fixed annual or seasonal pattern of movements and settlements. Nomadic peoples traditionally travel by animal or canoe or on foot. Today, some nomads travel by motor vehicle. Most nomads live in tents or other portable shelters.

Nomads keep moving for different reasons. Nomadic foragers move in search of game, edible plants, and water. The Australian Aborigines, Negritos of Southeast Asia, and San of Africa, for example, traditionally move from camp to camp to hunt and to gather wild plants. Some tribes of the Americas followed this way of life. Pastoral nomads make their living raising livestock, such as camels, cattle, goats, horses, sheep, or yaks. These nomads travel to find more camels, goats, and sheep through the deserts of Arabia and northern Africa. The Fulani and their cattle travel through the grasslands of Niger in western Africa. Some nomadic peoples, especially herders, may also move to



Gypsy mother and child



Nomads on the Changtang, Ladakh



Rider in Mongolia, 2012. While nomadic life is less common in modern times, the horse remains a national symbol in Mongolia.

raid settled communities or avoid enemies. Nomadic craftworkers and merchants travel to find and serve customers. They include the Lohar blacksmiths of India, the Romani (Gypsy) traders, and the Irish Travellers.

Most nomads travel in groups of families called bands or tribes.

These groups are based on

kinship and marriage ties

or on formal agreements of cooperation. A council of adult males makes most of the decisions, though some tribes have chiefs.



Beja nomads from Northeast Africa

In the case of Mongolian nomads, a family moves twice a year. These two movements would generally occur during the summer and winter. The winter location is usually located near mountains in a valley and most families already have their fixed winter locations. The winter locations have shelter for the animals and are not used by other families while they are out. In the summer they move to a more open area that the animals can graze. Most nomads usually move in the same region and don't travel very far to a totally different region. Because they usually circle around a large area, a community gets formed and the other families generally know where the other ones are. Most often, a family would not have the resources to move from one province to another unless

they are moving out of the area permanently. A family can move on its own or with others and if it moves alone, they are usually no more than a couple of kilometers from each other. In the modern day there are no tribes and the people make decisions among their family members, although they consult with the elders on usual matters. The geographical closeness of families are usually for mutual support. Pastoral nomad societies usually do not have large population. One such society, the Mongols, gave rise to the largest land empire in history. The Mongols originally consisted of loosely organized nomadic tribes in Mongolia, Manchuria, and Siberia. In the late 12th century, Genghis Khan united them and other nomadic tribes to found the Mongol Empire, which eventually stretched the length of Asia.

The nomadic way of life has become increasingly rare. Many governments dislike nomads because it is difficult to control their movement and to obtain taxes from them. Many countries have converted pastures into cropland and forced nomadic peoples into permanent settlements.

Hunter-gatherers

'Nomadic' hunter-gatherers (also known as foragers) move from campsite to campsite, following game and wild fruits and vegetables. Hunting and gathering was the ancestral subsistence mode of Homo, and all modern humans were hunter-gatherers until around 10,000 years ago.

Following the development of agriculture, most hunter-gatherers were eventually either displaced or converted to farming or pastoralist groups. Only a few contemporary societies are classified as hunter-gatherers, and some supplement, sometimes extensively, their foraging activity with farming and/or keeping animals.



Starting fire by hand. San people in Botswana.

Pastoralism

Pastoral nomads are nomads moving between pastures. Nomadic pastoralism is thought to have developed in three stages that accompanied population growth and an increase in the complexity of social organization. Karim Sadr has proposed the following stages:

- **Pastoralism:** This is a mixed economy with a symbiosis within the family.
- **Agropastoralism:** This is when symbiosis is between segments or clans within an ethnic group.
- **True Nomadism:** This is when symbiosis is at the regional level, generally between specialised nomadic and agricultural populations.



Cuman nomads, Radziwiłł Chronicle, 13th century.

The pastoralists are sedentary to a certain area, as they move between the permanent spring, summer, autumn and winter (or dry and wet season) pastures for their livestock. The nomads moved depending on the availability of resources.^[7]

Origin

Nomadic pastoralism seems to have developed as a part of the secondary products revolution proposed by Andrew Sherratt, in which early pre-pottery Neolithic cultures that had used animals as live meat ("on the hoof") also began using animals for their secondary products, for example, milk and its associated dairy products, wool and other animal hair, hides and consequently leather, manure for fuel and fertilizer, and traction.

The first nomadic pastoral society developed in the period from 8,500–6,500 BC in the area of the southern Levant. There, during a period of increasing aridity, Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) cultures in the Sinai were replaced by a nomadic, pastoral pottery-using culture, which seems to have been a cultural fusion between a newly arrived Mesolithic people from Egypt (the Harifian culture), adopting their nomadic hunting lifestyle to the raising of stock.^[8]

This lifestyle quickly developed into what Jaris Yurins has called the circum-Arabian nomadic pastoral techno-complex and is possibly associated with the appearance of Semitic languages in the region of the Ancient Near East. The rapid spread of such nomadic pastoralism was typical of such later developments as of the Yamnaya culture of the horse and cattle nomads of the Eurasian steppe, or of the Mongol spread of the later Middle Ages.^[8]

Trekboer in southern Africa adopted nomadism from the 17th century.^[9]

Increase in post-Soviet Central Asia

One of the results of the break-up of the Soviet Union and the subsequent political independence and economic collapse of its Central Asian republics has been the resurgence of pastoral nomadism.^[10] Taking the Kyrgyz people as a representative example, nomadism was the centre of their economy before Russian colonization at the turn of the 20th century, when they were settled into agricultural villages. The population became increasingly urbanized after World War II, but some people still take their herds of horses and cows to high pastures (*jailoo*) every summer, continuing a pattern of transhumance.

Since the 1990s, as the cash economy shrank, unemployed relatives were reabsorbed into family farms, and the importance of this form of nomadism has increased. The symbols of nomadism, specifically the crown of the grey felt tent known as the yurt, appears on the national flag, emphasizing the central importance of nomadism in the genesis of the modern nation of Kyrgyzstan.

Sedentarization



An 1848 Lithograph showing nomads in Afghanistan.



A yurt in front of the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains. Approximately 30% of the Mongolia's 3 million people are nomadic or semi-nomadic.



A Sami (Lapp) family in Norway around 1900. Reindeer have been herded for centuries by several Arctic and Subarctic people including the Sami and the Nenets.^[6]

In 1920, nomadic pastoral tribes represented over a quarter of Iran's population.^[11] Tribal pastures were nationalized during the 1960s. The National Commission of UNESCO registered the population of Iran at 21 million in 1963, of whom two million (9.5%) were nomads.^[12] Although the nomadic population of Iran has dramatically decreased in the 20th century, Iran still has one of the largest nomadic populations in the world, an estimated 1.5 million in a country of about 70 million.^[13]

In Kazakhstan where the major agricultural activity was nomadic herding,^[14] forced collectivization under Joseph Stalin's rule met with massive resistance and major losses and confiscation of livestock.^[15] Livestock in Kazakhstan fell from 7 million cattle to 1.6 million and from 22 million sheep to 1.7 million. The resulting famine of 1931–1934 caused some 1.5 million deaths: this represents more than 40% of the total Kazakh population at that time.^[16]

In the 1950s as well as the 1960s, large numbers of Bedouin throughout the Middle East started to leave the traditional, nomadic life to settle in the cities of the Middle East, especially as home ranges have shrunk and population levels have grown. Government policies in Egypt and Israel, oil production in Libya and the Persian Gulf, as well as a desire for improved standards of living, effectively led most Bedouin to become settled citizens of various nations, rather than stateless nomadic herders. A century ago nomadic Bedouin still made up some 10% of the total Arab population. Today they account for some 1% of the total.^[17]

At independence in 1960, Mauritania was essentially a nomadic society. The great Sahel droughts of the early 1970s caused massive problems in a country where 85% of its inhabitants were nomadic herders. Today only 15% remain nomads.^[18]

As many as 2 million nomadic Kuchis wandered over Afghanistan in the years before the Soviet invasion, and most experts agreed that by 2000 the number had fallen dramatically, perhaps by half. The severe drought had destroyed 80% of the livestock in some areas.^[19]

Niger experienced a serious food crisis in 2005 following erratic rainfall and desert locust invasions. Nomads such as the Tuareg and Fulani, who make up about 20% of Niger's 12.9 million population, had been so badly hit by the Niger food crisis that their already fragile way of life is at risk.^[20] Nomads in Mali were also affected.^[21]

Contemporary peripatetic minorities in Europe and Asia

"Peripatetic minorities" are mobile populations moving among settled populations offering a craft or trade.

Each existing community is primarily endogamous, and subsists traditionally on a variety of commercial and/or service activities. Formerly, all or a majority of their members were itinerant, and this largely holds true today. Migration generally takes place within the political boundaries of a single state these days.

Each of the peripatetic communities is multilingual; it speaks one or more of the languages spoken by the local sedentary populations, and, additionally, within each group, a separate dialect or language is spoken. The latter are either of Indic or Iranian origin, and many are structured somewhat like an argot or secret



A tent of Romani nomads in Hungary, 19th century.

language, with vocabularies drawn from various languages. There are indications that in northern Iran at least one community speaks Romani language, and some groups in Turkey also speak Romani.

Romani people

Dom people

In Afghanistan, the Nausar worked as tinkers and animal dealers. Ghorbat men mainly made sieves, drums, and bird cages, and the women peddled these as well as other items of household and personal use; they also worked as moneylenders to rural women. Peddling and the sale of various goods was also practiced by men and women of various groups, such as the Jalali, the Pikraj, the Shadibaz, the Noristani, and the Vangawala. The latter and the Pikraj also worked as animal dealers. Some men among the Shadibaz and the Vangawala entertained as monkey or bear handlers and snake charmers; men and women among the Baluch were musicians and dancers, and Baluch women also practiced prostitution. Jogi men and women had diverse subsistence activities, such as dealing in horses, harvesting, fortune-telling, bloodletting, and begging.

In Iran the Asheq of Azerbaijan, the Challi of Baluchistan, the Luti of Kurdistan, Kermānshāh, Īlām, and Lorestān, the Mehtar in the Mamasani district, the Sazandeh of Band-i Amir and Marv-dasht, and the Toshmal among the Bakhtyari pastoral groups worked as professional musicians. The men among the Kowli worked as tinkers, smiths, musicians, and monkey and bear handlers; they also made baskets, sieves, and brooms and dealt in donkeys. Their women made a living from peddling, begging, and fortune-telling.

The Ghorbat among the Basseri were smiths and tinkers, traded in pack animals, and made sieves, reed mats, and small wooden implements. In the Fārs region, the Qarbalband, the Kuli, and Luli were reported to work as smiths and to make baskets and sieves; they also dealt in pack animals, and their women peddled various goods among pastoral nomads. In the same region, the Changi and Luti were musicians and balladeers, and their children learned these professions from the age of 7 or 8 years.

The nomadic groups in Turkey make and sell cradles, deal in animals, and play music. The men of the sedentary groups work in towns as scavengers and hangmen; elsewhere they are fishermen, smiths, basket makers, and singers; their women dance at feasts and tell fortunes. Abdal men played music and made sieves, brooms, and wooden spoons for a living. The Tahtacı traditionally worked as lumberers; with increased sedentarization, however, they have taken to agriculture and horticulture.

Little is known for certain about the past of these communities; the history of each is almost entirely contained in their oral traditions. Although some groups—such as the Vangawala—are of Indian origin, some—like the Noristani—are most probably of local origin; still others probably migrated from adjoining areas. The Ghorbat and the Shadibaz claim to have originally come from Iran and Multan, respectively, and Tahtacı traditional accounts mention either Baghdad or Khorāsān as their original home. The Baluch say they were attached as a service community to the Jamshedi, after they fled Baluchistan because of feuds.^{[22][23]}

Yörüks

Yörüks are the nomadic people who live in Turkey. Still some groups such as Sarıkeçililer continues nomadic lifestyle between coastal towns Mediterranean and Taurus Mountains even though most of them were settled by both late Ottoman and Turkish republic gets

Image gallery



Snake charmer from Telungu community of Sri Lanka.



A Scythian horseman from the general area of the Ili river, Pazyryk, c.300 BCE.



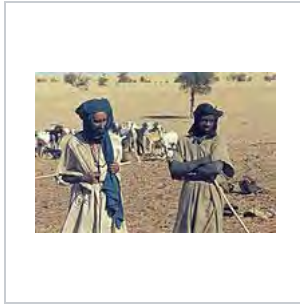
Yeniche people in the 15th century



A young Bedouin lighting a camp fire in Wadi Rum, Jordan.



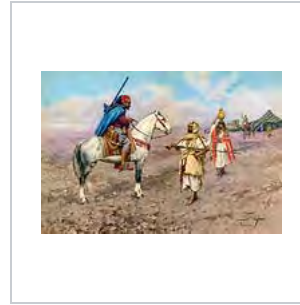
Kyrgyz nomads in the steppes of the Russian Empire, Uzbekistan, by pioneer color photographer Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky, c. 1910.



Tuareg in Mali, 1974.



Kyrgyz nomads, 1869-1870.



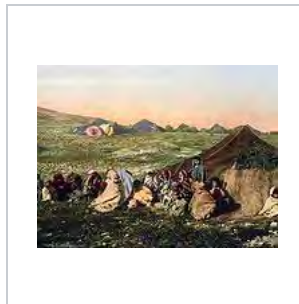
Nomads in the Desert (Giulio Rosati).



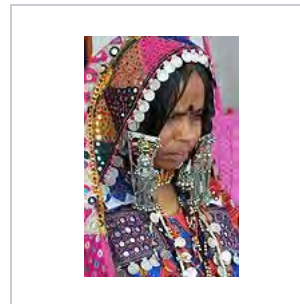
Gros Ventre (Atsina) American Indians moving camps with travois for transporting skin lodges and belongings.



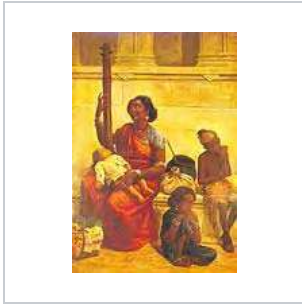
House barge of the Sea Gypsies, Indonesia. 1914-1921



Photograph of Bedouins (wandering Arabs) of Tunisia, 1899



A Lambadi Woman of India.



Indian Gypsies painting
by well-known artiste
Raja Ravi Varma

See also

- List of nomadic peoples
- Eurasian nomads
- Nomadic peoples of Europe
- Seasonal human migration
- Nomadic empires
- Nomadic tents
- Nomads of India
- Sea Gypsies
- Antlers Gallery: The 'nomadic' gallery, Bristol

Figurative use of the term:

- Global nomad
- Snowbird (people)
- Military brat
- Perpetual traveler
- RV lifestyle
- Third culture kid

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