Pastoral resources and strategies: similarities and differences between the Rendille and Gabra of northern Kenya

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The Rendille and Gabra occupy arid rangelands in Marsabit District, northern Kenya and are primarily nomadic pastoralists, who keep camels, sheep, goats, cattle and donkeys. This paper analyses differences and commonalities in certain aspects of the pastoral economies of these two neighbouring groups. It focuses on household herd composition and herding strategies. The mix of animal species and herding strategies among the Gabra and the Rendille are not quite the same, a fact not unrelated to differences in culture and history. The Kenya Gabra originated from the highlands of southern Ethiopia, where the rangelands are suitable for cattle keeping, and only pushed southward into Kenya at the end of the last century. The Rendille have always lived in more arid regions where camels are more appropriate. Furthermore, Rendille culture promotes large-scale cooperation between households, which has a major impact on the size and mobility of their pastoral camps (Rendille camps are four times larger than Gabra camps), and this in turn has shaped their herding strategies. Gabra culture shows greater acceptance of independent action by households. Bibliogr., notes.