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Nota di contenuto	Frontmatter -- Contents -- 1. Introduction -- 2. The Myth of the Kinship. Society Evolutionism and the Anthropological Imagination -- 3. The Imaginary Tribe. Colonial and Imperial Orders and the Peripheral Polity -- 4. The State Construction of the Clan. The Unilineal Descent Group and the Ordering of State Subjects -- 5. The Essentialized Nomad. Neocolonial and Soviet Models -- 6. Creating Peoples. Nation-state History and the Notion of Identity -- 7. The Headless State. Aristocratic Orders and the Substrata of Power -- Notes -- References -- Acknowledgments -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	In this groundbreaking work, social anthropologist David Sneath aggressively dispels the myths surrounding the history of steppe societies and proposes a new understanding of the nature and formation of the state. Since the colonial era, representations of Inner Asia have been dominated by images of fierce nomads organized into clans and tribes-but as Sneath reveals, these representations have no sound basis in historical fact. Rather, they are the product of nineteenth-century evolutionist social theory, which saw kinship as the organizing principle in a nonstate society. Sneath argues that aristocratic power and statelike processes of administration were the

true organizers of life on the steppe. Rethinking the traditional dichotomy between state and nonstate societies, Sneath conceives of a "headless state" in which a configuration of statelike power was formed by the horizontal relations among power holders and was reproduced with or without an overarching ruler or central "head." In other words, almost all of the operations of state power existed at the local level, virtually independent of central bureaucratic authority. Sneath's research gives rise to an alternative picture of steppe life in which aristocrats determined the size, scale, and degree of centralization of political power. His history of the region shows no clear distinction between a highly centralized, stratified "state" society and an egalitarian, kin-based "tribal" society. Drawing on his extensive anthropological fieldwork in the region, Sneath persuasively challenges the legitimacy of the tribal model, which continues to distort scholarship on the history of Inner Asia.
