

For Turcologists, the banks of this river are of supreme importance as the locus for the Old Turkish inscriptions, carved in the middle decades of the 8th century in a so-called "runic" script, in fact derived ultimately from the Aramaic one [see TURKS. Languages]. These inscriptions are the royal annals of the Kökürk empire, centred on this region till its fall in 744 and supersession by a Uyghur [q.v.] grouping based on Kara Balghasun on the Orkhon; these Uyghurs were in turn dispossessed by the Kirghiz [q.v.] in 840 and forced to migrate southwards to Kansu and Turfan [q.v.]. No Islamic geographers mention the Orkhon, but we know something of Kara Balghasun (whose ruins are still visible) from the visit to it by a Muslim traveller Tamīm b. Baḥr al-Muṭṭawwiʿ, which probably took place, in Minorsky's view, in 821 A.D.; this is the only first-hand Muslim account of the Uyghur kingdom in Mongolia.

*Bibliography:* See V. Minorsky, *Tamīm ibn Baḥr's journey to the Uyghurs*, in *BSOAS*, xii (1948), 275-305. (C.E. BOSWORTH)

**OROMO**, a people of eastern Africa, partly Islamised, present in Ethiopia but also, although in small numbers only, in Kenya, Somalia and even in the Sudan. Among its constituent groups are the Arssi (Arusi), Boran, Guji, Karayu, Leqa, Macha, Raya (Azebo), Tulama, Wello, etc. The Amharas, amongst whom they have become installed, have for a long time given them the name of "Galla", whose etymology is uncertain.

Numerically, the Oromo form one of the leading ethnic groups of Africa. In Ethiopia they represent 40% of the total population, i.e. between some ten and fourteen millions. Linguistically, they are the majority, ahead of the Amhara speakers. Their language is called by themselves *afaan oromo* and by the Amharas *orometāa* or *galleñña*, and belongs to the Cushitic group [see *kūsh*] at the side of Afar, Agaw, Bedja, Saho and Somali. The writing of Oromo in Latin characters seems now to be becoming generalised, even though the Ethiopian or Arabic alphabets have sometimes been used for it also.

Religious differences (they include Christians faithful to the national church, Catholics and Lutherans, also Muslims, and also followers of their traditional religions), as well as the cultural diversity of their groups and the denial of their existence as a people before 1975, have not prevented the gradual formation of a common identity among the Oromo. This is based on a substantial degree of linguistic intercommunication and on common values (such as the *gada* system). For some people it shows itself in a nationalism which the setting-up of a new, decentralised Ethiopian administrative system (1992), which endeavours to regroup the Oromo lands into an entity called "Oromia", would probably not satisfy completely.

The cradle of the Oromo, originally nomads, is believed to have been the region which stretches from Lake Abaya to the upper course of the Webi Shebele. The most important warrior raids and migrations which pushed them northwards began in the middle of the 16th century. They were favoured, if not provoked, by the disorder brought about by the wars which had set the Christian empire against the Muslims in the first half of that century, and especially against the sultanate of Harar [q.v.]. These migrations brought them to the Blue Nile, to Tigré and, in the northeast, to Harar, in the midst of peoples whose customs and beliefs, and even language, they often adopted. In this way, some of them early became Muslim.

From the 18th century onwards, Muslim political

entities took shape, often engaged in trading. In the north, the Tajju and Wello were capable of having an influence on the political evolution of the Christian states until 1853. In the south, petty kingdoms (Ennarya, Jimma, Gera, Gomma and Guma), originating from the middle of the 18th century, became Muslim under the influence of merchants, mainly Harari ones. Divided by internal rivalries, they were integrated into the empire by Menelik between 1881 and 1897, together with the Arssi region which had become Muslim in the second half of the century and the sultanate of Harar itself.

Oromo Islam is far from "orthodox", and its devotees are sometimes Muslim only in name. The famous pilgrimage to the *tubba* of Shaykh Nūr Husen takes place in the Arssi territory, and the rites practised there strongly resemble those of the traditional pilgrimages at Abba Mudda. The influential *ṭarīqas* have come from the Sudan (Tiḡjāniyya, Sammāniyya) or from Arabia (Aḥmadiyya, Kādiriyya).

*Bibliography:* Information on Oromo Islam is very scattered. In addition to the bibls. published on Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, one may consult J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London 1952; A. Trudnos, *Oromo documentation. Bibliography and maps*, Warsaw 1984; P.T.W. Baxter, *The present state of Oromo studies: a resumé*, in *Bull. des Études Africaines de l'Inalco*, vi, no. 11 (1986), 53-82.

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**ORONTE(s)** [see AL-ʿAṢĪ].

**ORTA** (r.), literally "centre", in Ottoman Turkish military terminology, the equivalent of a company of fighting men in the three divisions (the *Segmen*, the *Ḍemāʿat* and the *Bölük*) of which the Janissary corps was eventually composed [see ODJAĞ and YEŇİ ÇERİLER].

The number of *ortas* within the corps varied through the ages, but eventually approached 200; d'Ohsson reckoned the total at 229. The strength of each *orta* likewise varied; in the time of Meḥemmed II Fāṭih [q.v.], they are said to have been composed of 50 men, but in the low hundreds at subsequent periods. The commander of an *orta* was called the *Çorbacı* (literally, "soup purveyor" [q.v.]), and amongst the officers below him were, *inter alios*, the *Aşhacı* ("cook") and the *Baş Kara Kullukçiu* ("head scullion"), reflecting the origin of much Janissary nomenclature in culinary terms. The several officers in an *orta* seem to have reflected a variety of military functions rather than a hierarchy of ranks, as in modern armies. Also, each *orta* had its own clerk, *oda yazıcısı*, who kept the rolls of the soldiers on the company's strength.

*Bibliography:* İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı devleti teşkilâtından kapukulu ocakları*, Ankara 1943-4, index; M.Z. Pakalın, *Tarih deyimleri ve terimleri sözlüğü*, Istanbul 1946-54, ii, 730-1; H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic society in the West*, i/1, London 1950, index and esp. 60-3, 314-20. (ED.)

**ORTA OYUNU** (r.), "entertainment staged in the middle place", a form of popular Turkish entertainment so-called because it takes place in the open air, *palanka*, around which the spectators form a circle. One side is reserved for the men, the other for the women. Behind the spectators is found the place where the actors get ready to enter the stage by means of a passage which is left free. The décor consists solely of a chair—or a table—called *dükkan* "shop, booth" and a folding screen, *yeŇi dünya* "new world". An orchestra made up of a *zurna*, oboe, a *tiŇte nakkäre* "double drum" and a *dawul* "big drum" plays a tune for dancing, and the dancers (*köçek*) enter the stage, followed by the *diŇdiŇnadiŇis* "comic dancers". After this

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