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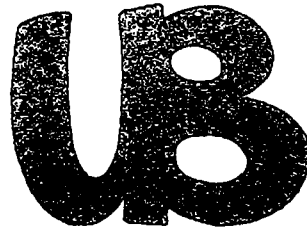
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Who are the Tana Orma?
The Problem of their Identification
in a Wider Oromo Framework

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WHO ARE THE TANA ORMA?
THE PROBLEM OF THEIR IDENTIFICATION
IN A WIDER OROMO FRAMEWORK.

by Günther Schlee

By using a question as a title, I by no means wish to evoke the expectation that I might endeavour to answer it. My sole ambition is to raise it¹. I have not done any field research among the Tana Orma or any other Oromo group² but I know people who have³. My own field research in Kenya altogether four years spread over a period of six, was among Somaloid groups whose history, however, is so intertwined with that of Oromo groups that one frequently comes across information about the latter. I have further read through most of the relevant literature, both published and archival. The problem laid out here might be solved by a few weeks of systematic oral interviewing by somebody familiar with the southern Oromo dialect and the oral traditions and clan structures of related and neighbouring peoples. As I never had the opportunity to conduct such interviews, however, I can only depict the dimensions of the question and leave the answer open.

Identification, i.e. proper naming, and localization of groups are problems of the very early stages of ethnography. To raise such questions in the case of Oromo groups who found their way into the Ethiopian and Portuguese literature already four centuries ago, may seem out of place. A look at the literature about Oromo or Galla, however, shows that the terminological confusion is quite formidable. A few of the terms we need to clarify before phrasing our title question more specifically are: Galla, Oromo, Orma, Wardai (Warra Daya, Warrdeh etc.),

¹This paper has been to a workshop on Peoples of the Lower Tana River in Bayreuth, Nov. 1981 and accepted for publication by the organisers. After waiting for a decade I now suspect that there may be further delays and therefore publish it as a working paper to make it available. Some references have been updated the rest of the paper reflects my earlier ago.

²The Gabbra and Sakuye of Marsabit and Isiolo district, among whom I have done research, are Oromo affiliation but not by origin.

³The few ideas I have about the subject are largely borrowed from Hilarie Kelly and Asmarom Legesse

Bareytuma (Barettuma, Bartuma) and Bararetta. We proceed from larger to smaller units of people.

Throughout most of the older literature the cluster of languages and peoples of Lowland Eastern Cushitic speech, today often referred to as Oromo, are called Galla. There have been many attempts to find an etymology for this term, most of them silly¹. According to the principle that the name a people use for themselves is to be taken for official and scientific use, the term "Galla", although well established in the literature in spite of its obscure origin, is in more recent writings largely replaced by "Oromo", of which there is no agreed-upon etymology either. The term has been alternatively described as meaning "the sons of men"², "free"³, or "free men"⁴. The latter translation is given by Huntingford for "Borana"⁵. We can safely assume that all these translations are wrong. "The sons of men" would be *ilm namá* in Boran and probably something similar in other Oromo dialects. It is difficult to find back-translations for the other expressions. "Free" in the legal sense would be rendered as *nam gudáa*, i.e. a big man, as opposed to *ijolle*, literally: children, a category that, however, includes women, dependents and other legal minors. The political concept of freedom would be rendered by words of ultimately Arabic extraction. As opposed to dependent peoples, these ethnonyms may however have acquired the connotation of freedom as a secondary meaning.

"Oromo" and "Orma" are evidently the same word. One cannot even say that "Orma" is a distinct dialectal form of the Tana area, since *nam Orma*, "Orma man", is also used by Boran as a

¹cf.e.g. d'Abbadie, A., 1880, pp. 168f.; Werner, A., 1914, p. 263; Philipson, J.H., 1916, p. 177; Jaenen, C.J., 1956, pp. 171f who quotes a whole bunch of proposals, Barton, J., 1924, p.7.

²Barton, J., 1924, p. 7.

³Philipson, J.H., 1916, p. 177.

⁴Werner, A., 1914, p. 121, Jaenen, C.J., 1956, p. 171.

⁵Huntingford, G.W.B., 1955, p. 11.

designation for all Oromo and ritually associated peoples, the "vassals" of the earlier literature. This phrase is used with the same proud undertone as in *civis Romanus sum*. To distinguish between "Oromo" and "Orma" thus would not make sense to an Oromo speaker. For the group discussed here, their self chosen name¹ "Orma" would thus form a sufficient contrast to, say, Pokomo; if we want to distinguish them from other Oromo, however, we should specify them as "Tana Orma".

The term "Warra Daya" (Wardai, Warrdeh etc.) is of considerable age. It first appears in an Arabic source of the 15th century.² It has later been used as homonymous with "Tana Orma". Turnbull states "Wardeh or Warra-daiya is the name used by the Somali for the Orma or Southern Galla".³ Hilarie Kelly⁴ says that among the Tana Orma the application of this term is restricted to back-migrants who had lived in a dependent status among Somali, being descendents of captives.

Quite independently of how the term is used today in the Tana district, we can discuss the question to which degree the Tana Orma are identical with the Warra Daya of the traditions of Northern Kenyan peoples like Gabbra, Sakuye and Ajuran.

The Warra Daya are believed to have inhabited at one time or another almost all of Northern and Eastern Kenya and Western Somalia, i.e. the Jubaland. The Gabbra of Marsabit district attribute the graves marked by giant stone circles on the fringe of the lava fields bordering the Chalbi salt pan to the Warra Daya. Their own graves are of basically the same style but much smaller. Graves and wells all over Marsabit, Wajir and Mandera districts are likewise said to be testimony to Warra Daya occupation. There is a certain confusion in oral traditions

¹ "Their leaders appealed to both the Colonial and independent Kenya Governments to be officially recognized and designated as Orma". (Kelly, H. 1979, p.2)

² Paulitschke, P., 1896, Vol.II, p. 233 where the name appears in the form Wardhej (Al.Maqrizi, 1364-1442).

³ Turnbull, R.G., 1955, p. 3.

⁴ personal communication.

between Warra Daya and the mythical Madanleh, both being often used as interchangeable labels for the anterior population. Contrary to Pirone's speculation¹ the Madanleh, however, were not Oromo but a Somali or Somaloid people who had some relation or association with the Ajuran². From Lewis' account of 1955 it is not clear whether they still exist as a functioning unit. They are, however, placed on Paulitschke's map of 1893 under the name Maanthinle west of the lower Juba³.

The oral traditions of the Boran and Gabbra give the regions Dirre and Liban in Southern Ethiopia as the place of origin of the Warra Daya. "Liban" (Libin, Liwen etc.) also includes the northern part of the North Kenyan lowlands. These areas are the main stronghold of the Boran and are, and this applies particularly to Dirre, also said to be the ultimate place of origin of all or many other Oromo groups⁴. Thus, among traditionally minded Oromo (i.e. Non-Christian and Non-Muslim), the Boran have a prestigious position as those who remained in the homeland which is sprinkled with venerated sites.⁵ Other Oromo groups are actually said to derive from Boran, although it is not clear whether this is meant in a geographical or a genealogical sense.

Also in Dirre, wells are said to have been dug by Warra Daya, so the one of Tulla⁶. These very deep wells are often regarded as technical miracles by the present day population. There are traditions about fighting between Warra Daya and Boran in Liban. The relationship between the two peoples, however, as it appears in the oral traditions, is in general not marked by open hostilities but oscillates in time between alliance and competition that is carried out by ritual means. The Gabbra,

¹ Pirone, M., 1954, S. 119.

² Lewis, I.M., 1969 (1955), pp. 30, 43.

³ Paulitschke, P., 1893, I, back cover.

⁴ Haberland

⁵ Legesse

⁶ Interview Waako D'iriba, Boran, born ca. 1883, Marsabit, April 1980.

e.g., say that the Boran did not like the Warra Daya to live on and around the Hurri Hills of Marsabit District, i.e. in the area immediately bordering Boran country, because the wells dug by them would provide enemy parties with access to Boran country. So the Boran cursed the Warra Daya whereupon they had to move.

People by the name Warra Daya are said to have lived in the whole area from the Ethiopian Highlands in the North to Mombasa in the South and from Marsabit to East of the Juba, although neither continuously nor alone. As late as 1859 P. Léon des Avanchers gives a surprisingly detailed hear-say account of the Rendille-country (where at that time no European had gone anywhere near) and goes on to say "A l'est, est le pays de *Did-el-Salimat* et des *Wardai-Gallas*, qui s'étendent jusque près de Monbaça". We can easily identify the latter name as Mombasa, but where is *Did-el-Salimat*, which is on no modern map? *Diid* is the Oromo word for "plain, lowland", while *Salmate* is the Rendille name of a lava field south-east of Marsabit, at 1° 55' - 2° N and 38° 14' - 20' E, a position that agrees with that on Avanchers' sketch in relation to Marsabit (Avanchers: Sakou, Boran: *Saaku*, *Saakhu*) and Korolle (Koroulé) but not in terms of geographical co-ordinates, because Avanchers shifts the whole area west by over two degrees and south by one. The former divergence seems to be a standard mistake of Avanchers' sketch. (Did he possibly take Rome as 0° instead of Greenwich?)¹

The decline of the Warra Daya and their territorial losses in favour of mainly Darood Somali, in particular Ogaden, are amply described in Kenyan archival sources and summarized by Turnbull.² A decisive date seems to be 1865, when smallpox struck the Warra Daya around Afmadu, west of the lower Juba, and Northern Somali immigrants converged on the survivors, justifying territorial expansion by the idea of holy war.³ By

¹ Avanchers, Père Léon des, 1859, p. 163 and map.

² Turnbull, R. 6., 1955.

³ *ibidem*, p. 6.

the number of captives made in later years, the Warra Daya cannot, however, have been very decimated by the epidemic. Women captured from the Warra Daya enriched the Muhammad Zubeir Oga-den by a whole new mixed population. There are no statistics of Warra Daya slaves sold via Lamu and Zanzibar. Other Warra Daya have become herdboys of the Somali, and their descendants live among them to this very day. If we compare the mid-19th-century ethnic distribution with that of today we can in spite of all the population outlets quoted above only conclude that the bulk of the Warra Daya male population must have found death by the sword.

The severity of the fighting and the vulnerability of the Warra Daya is partly explained by the fact that the war started as an intestinal conflict with the Somali living as dependents among the Warra Daya. D. Mac Dougall quotes a Somali tradition about these 19th-century events: "When I was a little boy, I remember the profound respect and fear which our forefathers and elders for the Wardey [...]"

Our forefathers had worked as herdboys for them for centuries [?], until we grew strong ourselves [...]"

We grew tired of straight fighting, unsuccessful, so we invited the 'Wardey' elders to a great peace offering at which 150 oxen were slaughtered, which they had accepted, and it paid us well, for we assassinated 2000 chiefs [whatever these are] at the feast when they were well gorged with meat.

An extensive and successful raid was immediately organized against them and some 30.000 cattle and goats together with 8.000 women and children, were captured. We kept constantly slaughtering the "Wardey" and our policy was to kill any "Wardey" at sight, unless he submitted to become our slave and embrace Islam."¹

¹Kenya National Archives, Notes on the Decline and Extermination of the Gallas by K. Mac Dougall, 31. March 1914, DC/MAL/2/3, cf. Miller, David, 1981, p. 84.

Allowing for the approximate nature of the numbers and the undecidedness of what they refer to (how many of the 30.000 were cattle and how many goats, how many of the 8.000 were women or children respectively) and a general anti-Somali bias of the translation ("tired of straight fighting", "assassinated") this text may give us a rough idea of the style and extent of the conflict. We only have to add the time dimension: about five decades of intermittent raiding for this last phase of Warra Daya decline only, from 1865 to 1915.

In 1909 remainders of the Warra Daya were moved by the British "lock, stock and barrel to the right bank [of the Tana] (where they still are)"¹ to protect them from the Somali.

It is thus clear that the Tana Orma contain elements of "Warra Daya" who earlier settled further north and north-east. We should, however, remember that the term Warra Daya does not mean anything in terms of genealogical or clan affiliation but is a generalizing term applied to the non-Boran Oromo of the major area. It may be too late to ask for the clan structure the Warra Daya and how it links to other Oromo peoples because of the degree of decimation and desintegration of the Warra Daya. We can, however, ask this question with reference to the present-day Tana Orma.

In the following we compare the clan lists of the Tana Galla² with that of the Boran³ and that of the "Galla" of the sixteenth century as it appears in the account of the Ethiopian monk Bahrey⁴. In compiling the Tana Orma clan list we proceed in an additive way and drop only one clan where the authors, Werner and Kelly, disagree as to its affiliation to larger units, namely *Digalu*. By combining different lists in this way, any intentional sequence in terms of seniority necessarily gets

¹Turnbull, R.6., 1955, p. 11.

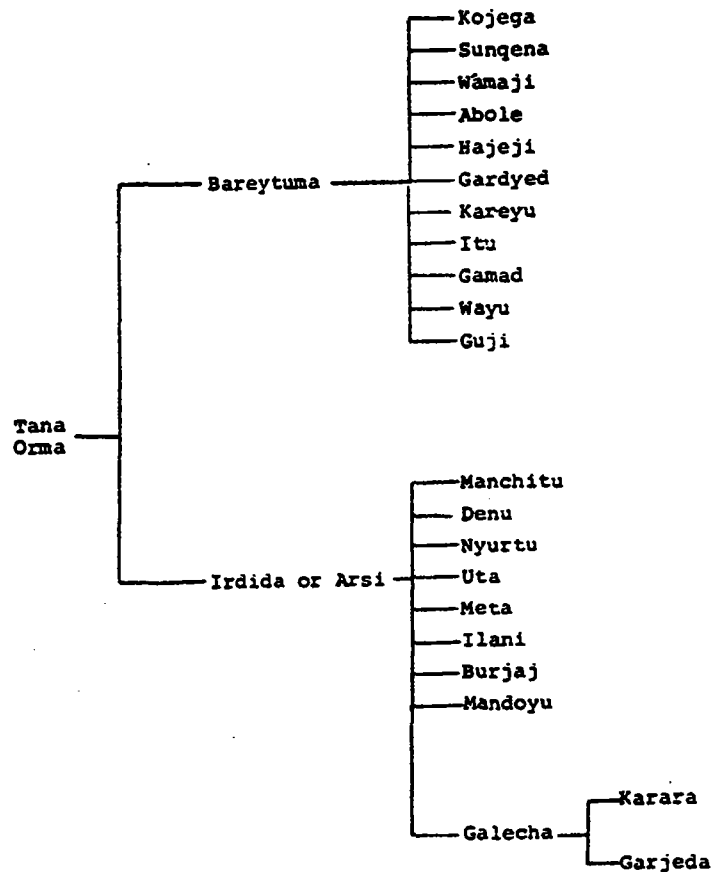
²after Alice Werner, 1914, p. 137, and Hilarie Kelly, 1979, appendix.

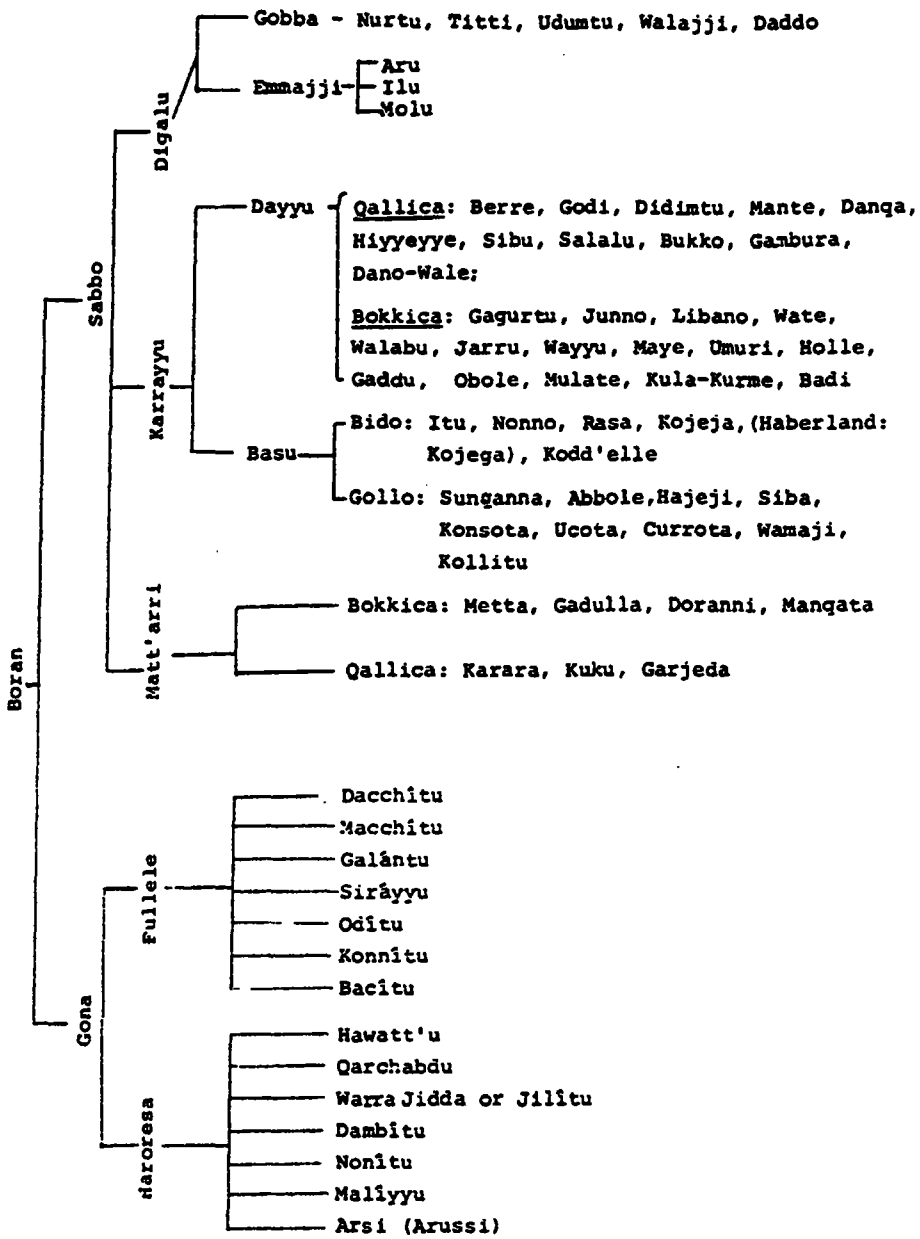
³after Haberland, E., 1963, pp. 123ff and Legesse, Asmorom, 1973, p.40.

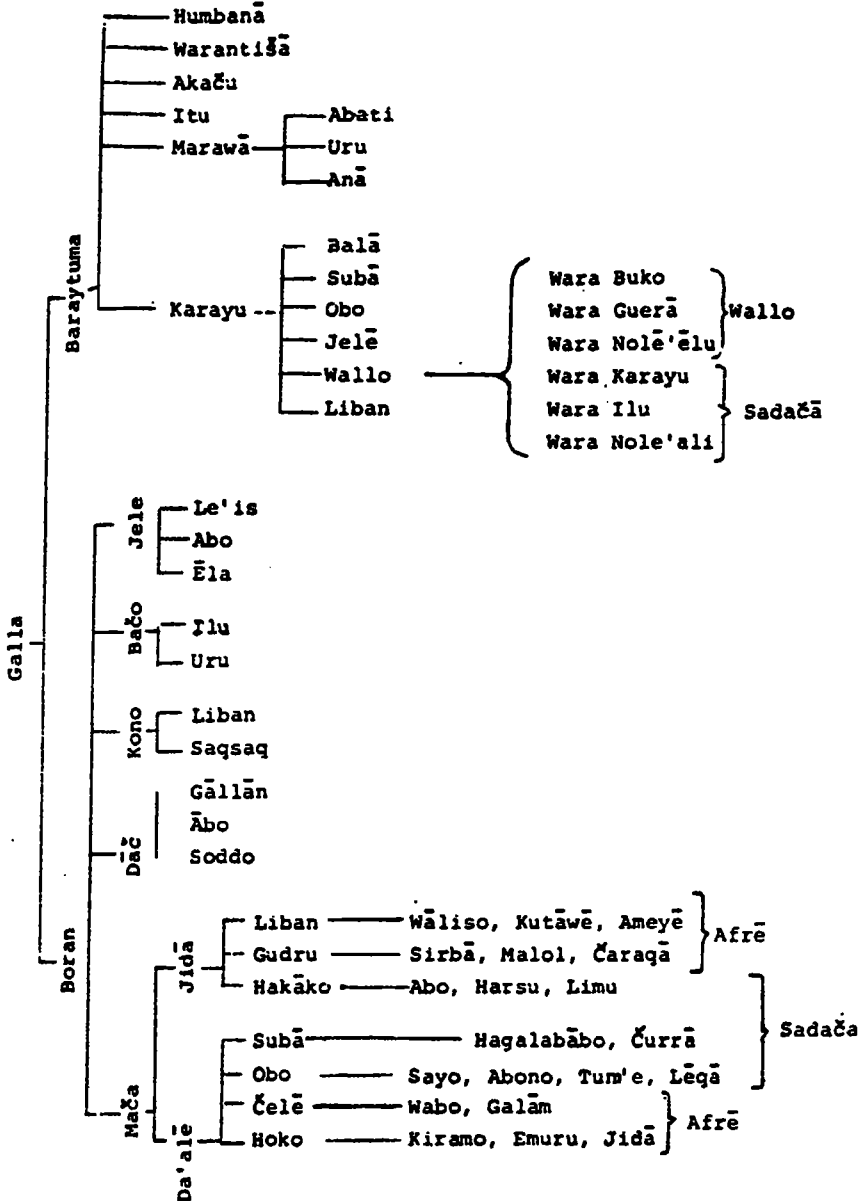
⁴after Schleicher, A.W., 1893, Guidi, J., 1907, Huntingford, G.W.B., 1955.

into disorder, which, however, does not need to concern us here, because we are not going to base any argument on seniority. The Boran clan names have been transliterated to the newer orthography, which provided no difficulties because both Haberland's and Legesse's transcriptions are largely correct and phonemic, so that no ambiguities arise in the process of transliteration, except that Haberland seems to economize on geminated consonants. The clan names of the other groups are rendered in the original versions. In case of divergence, preference is given to Kelly over Werner, because the former distinguished k and q (non-emphatic vs. emphatic)

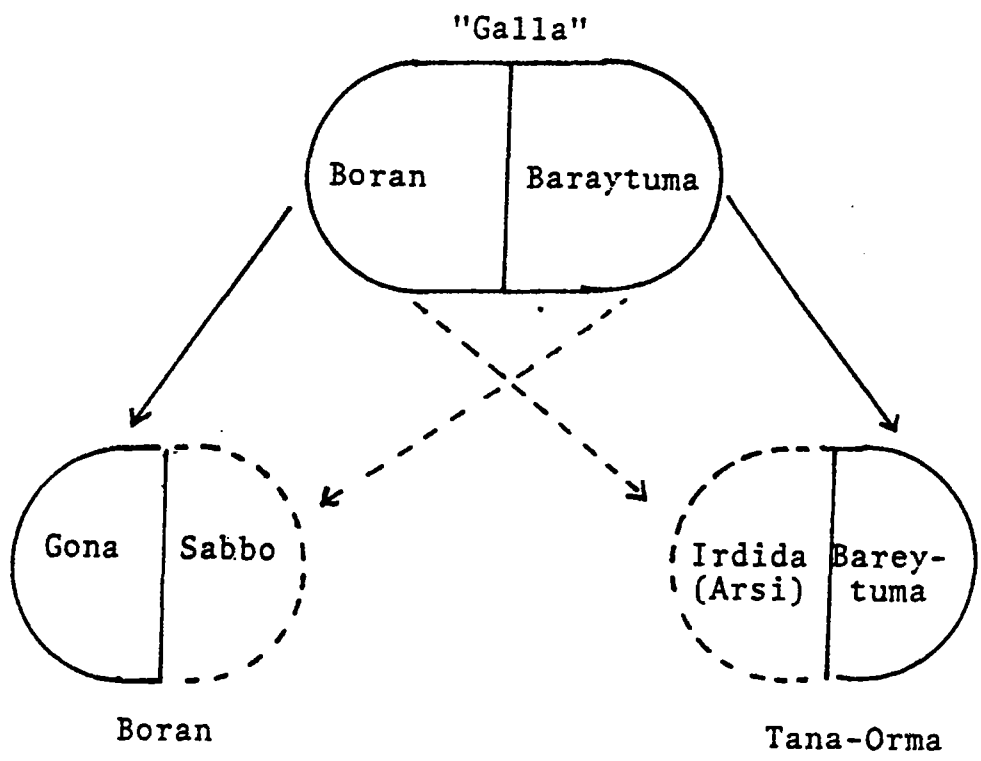
All three diagrams show a primary division in two moieties.







Comparing the Tana Orma with the Boran list, we discover that all correspondances are between the Bareytuma moiety of the Tana Orma and the Sabbo moiety of Boran on one hand and between Irdida/Arsi and Gona on the other. In examining the first pair a bit more closely, we see that all equivalences involve the Boran clan Karrayyu, which in Tana-Bareytuma appears as Kareyu and is also represented by three of its subclans which in the Tana list appear as independent units: Sunqanna/Sunqena, Hajeji and Itu. The overlap between the Boran moiety Gona with Irdida (Arsi) includes Macchitu/Manchitu, Meta, Karara and Garjeda, as well as the Boran clan Arsi or Arussi, which appears in Tana Orma as one of the names of the whole moiety, and incidentally is, as generally known, also the name of a major Oromo people to the north-east of the Boran, which shows that similar processes to those underlying the naming of Boran and Tana Orma groups have also occurred in other parts of the Oromo nation.



More striking than this partial identity of elements of Boran and Tana Orma moieties is the comparison of the Boran moiety of Bahrey's Galla with the Gona moiety of the present day Boran, over a gap of four centuries. If we assume that the endings -itu and -tu are mere suffixes to mark names as group-names or with a similar function, we find the following correspondances:

Dacchitu ≅ Dac
Macchitu ≅ Maca
Galantu ≅ Gallan
Konnitu ≅ Kono
Bachitu ≅ Baco

Worre (people of)

Jidda ≅ Jida

Slightly less impressive is the agreement between the clan lists for the moiety Baraytuma of the 16th century Galla with that of the moiety by the same name of the Tana Orma, which includes, apart from the moiety name, the clans Karayu / Kareyu and Itu.

The agreement between "Galla"-Baraytuma and the Sabbo moiety of Boran comprises Karrayyu/Karayu and Itu. We have to exclude Liban because this name occurs twice in Bahrey's list, which would make the identification ambiguous, and dropped Digalu, because there was disagreement as to its moiety affiliation among the Tana Orma (I would guess that Digalu belongs here).

Finally, the agreement between "Galla"-Boran and the Irdida of the Tana Orma is limited to Maca/Manchitu.

We may thus assume the following equivalences between the moieties:

	"Galla"	Boran	Tana Orma
moiety:	Baraytuma	Sabbo	Bareytuma
moiety:	Boran	Gona	Irdida/Arsi

This view is considerably strengthened by the total absence of inverse examples; there is no overlap of clan names between Baraytuma and Gona or Sabbo and Arsi etc.

Taking into account the degree of the overlap, which is higher between the "Galla"-moiety Boran and Gona than between Baraytuma of "Galla" and Sabbo, and is also higher between "Galla"-Baraytuma and Tana Orma Bareytuma than between "Galla" Boran and Irdida, we might hypothesize the following process of fission and re-constitution: Bahrey's Galla split largely along the moiety line, the moiety Boran forming the nucleus of the Boran and the Baraytuma the nucleus of the present day Tana Orma (and possibly other branches that have since disappeared). The Boran moiety Sabbo was constituted of the minority of "Galla"-Baraytuma and possibly filled up with migrants from elsewhere, to re-establish the numerical balance of the moieties, which is important because of the moiety exogamy which is still practiced by the Boran and was practiced universally by the Oromo. In the same way the Irdida/Arsi moiety of the Tana Orma may be a compositum of "Galla"-Boran remnants and other elements.

It is clear from oral traditions¹ that there was inter-migration and mutual refuge between Warra Daya/Tana Orma and Boran, and this may obscure the basic pattern. In fact there is a local, or co-migrant, fraction of the Tana Orma called Boran,

¹ personal communication Hilarie Kelly and J.C. Winter as well as own information about Waso Boran, further Philipson, J.H., 1916, p. 178.

just as there are other such localized fractions called Kofira and Barareta. As can be expected according to the general pattern, these fractions are independent from the clan boundaries, i.e. they are not genealogical, but secondary and associative groups¹. Of these, Bararetta (Barareta) may have the longest history of residence on the right bank of the Tana². This interpretation of Boran and Tana Orma ethnogenesis as the splitting of one original people and subsequent re-construction of the moiety organization seems to find some backing in the literature, and may, after all that has been published about Oromo, not come as a surprise.

Legesse stresses:

"There is a direct and thoroughly instructive parallelism between the contemporary social organization of the Borana and the organization of the Oromo as a whole in the sixteenth century."

Contrary to Legesse's view, the original moieties Boran and Baraytuma may very well have been localized to a certain degree, because the subsequent fission seems to have run largely along the moiety line.³ A decade before Legesse, Haberland extends the principle of fission along moiety lines and subsequent re-construction of the dual system to Oromo ethnogenesis in general, without having the Tana Orma in view particularly:

"Die ursprünglich exogame Dual-Ordnung teilte das Galla-Volk der Mythe nach in die Borana und die Barentu. Nach der Trennung dieser beiden Gruppen wurden die Heiratsklassen bei jedem seitdem entstehenden 'echten' Stamm aufs neue konstituiert, so daß es keinen größeren Stamm gibt, bei dem heute diese Zweiteilung nicht wenigstens noch in Relikten erkennbar

¹Werner, A., 1914, p. 135.

²on the *Esquisse d'une carte ...* by Avanchers, 1859, they are referred to as Bararatra Galla.

³Legesse, A., 1973, p. 11.

wäre. Die damit verbundene Heiratsordnung wird jedoch sehr häufig nicht mehr eingehalten."¹

Philipson quotes a Tana Orma tradition about their origin in "Boranaland", without, however, discussing the process of fission in terms of clanship or moiety structure².

As to the question whether the original fission actually occurred along moiety lines, which supposes that the moieties have been localized or gradually become more and more so, it is interesting to note, that a Portuguese source states there were Galla called "Britamos" (Baraytuma?) in 1620 in the Shebeli/Juba area³. This confirms Huntingford, who locates "Boran" in the west and "Baraytuma" in the east.⁴

I want to finish my speculations about the role of moieties in Tana Galla origin with one observation about spatial arrangement. All nomad peoples of the northern Kenyan lowlands I know have the doors of their houses to the west, either preferentially or as a matter of principle, including the Boran, Gabbra, Sakuye of Oromo (Boran) speech as well as Rendille and Somali. Although there are many ritual elaborations involving spatial orientation, the main reason seems to be a practical one: the constant wind blowing from the east. In concordance with this, north is called the "right" and south the "left" side. Among the Tana Orma, all this is inverted: their houses face east, north is "left" and south is "right".⁵ As this orientation of

¹Haberland, E., 1963, p. 120 in English: The original moiety structure divided the Galla, according to the myth, into the Boran and the Barentu. After the separation of these two groups, the exogamous moieties were re-established in the case of every single "real" tribe which has come into being since, so that today there is no major tribe which does not show at least traces of such a dual division. Exogamy rules linked to this moiety structure, however, very often are not kept any more. (MY translation)

² Philipson, J.H., 1916, p. 178.

³ Lewis, H.S., 1966, p. 33.

⁴ Huntingford, 1955, p. 11.

⁵ Vgl. Werner, A., 1914, p. 129 and 132, Jaenen, C.J., 1956, p. 176.

the huts does not seem very functional because of the dust, the most likely explanation for me seems that it once marked a ritual oppositon to the Boran, the other moiety - an explanation which may have some plausibility since the identification of binary social divisions with cardinal points is a phenomenon not unfamiliar to anthropologists and is also a recurrent pattern among Eastern Cushites. The mirror-symmetry of their spatial orientation might stem from the time of the common residence of the ancestors of the Boran and Tana Orma in the Ethiopian Highlands, where the strong relief produces more irregular wind patterns.

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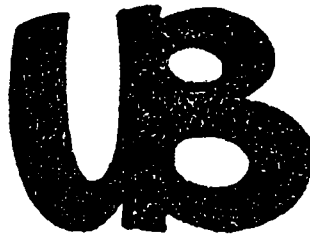
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