Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers

*The Duala and their Hinterland, c. 1600–c. 1960*

The Duala people entered the international scene as merchant-brokers for precolonial trade in ivory, slaves and palm products. Under colonial rule they used the advantages gained from earlier riverain trade to develop cocoa plantations and provide their children with exceptional levels of European education. At the same time they came into early conflict with both German and French regimes and played a leading – if ultimately unsuccessful – role in anti-colonial politics. In tracing these changing economic and political roles, this book also examines the growing consciousness of the Duala as an ethnic group and uses their history to shed new light on the history of “middleman” communities in surrounding regions of West and Central Africa. The authors draw upon a wide range of written and oral sources, including indigenous accounts of the past which conflict with their own findings but illuminate local conceptions of social hierarchy and their relationship to spiritual beliefs.

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Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers

The Duala and their Hinterland,
c. 1600–c. 1960

Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derrick
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Preface

The writing of this book has occupied well over twenty years, although both authors have simultaneously been involved in numerous other projects. The research and writing of chapters 2–4 is entirely the work of Ralph Austen. Chapters 5 and 6 are based on research and drafts by Jonathan Derrick, with additional research and the final writing undertaken by Ralph Austen.

In the course of our efforts we have both become heavily indebted to a great number of oral informants, research assistants and colleagues. Help on specific matters is acknowledged in our many footnotes but recognition beyond these formal courtesies must be extended to at least some institutions and individuals. These include the staffs of the many Cameroonian, British, Dutch, French, German and Swiss archives (governmental, missionary and private) in which we worked (the archives are specified in the bibliography).

In Cameroon we both benefited from the help of various members of the History and Geography Departments of the University of Yaoundé as well as the staffs of the American Cultural Center and the Goethe Institute. In Douala, we both owe special thanks to Father Eric de Rosny, SJ for personal support of various kinds and, in Ralph Austen’s case, to the Collège Alfred Saker, the Procure Catholique, Louis Bissek and Martin Njeuma for lodging and other help. Jonathan Derrick is similarly obligated to Jean-Emile Mba and the late Achidi Ndifang in Douala and Dierk Lange in Paris and especially to Xavérie Kobla (now Mrs. Derrick).

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Abbreviations

AA Auswärtiges Amt [German Foreign Office]
ALME Archive of Léopold Moumé Etia, Douala
ANC/FA Archives Nationales du Cameroun, Fonds Allemands, Yaoundé
ANC/FF Archives Nationales du Cameroun, Fonds Français, Yaoundé
ANSOM Archives Nationales, Section d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France
BFA Bell Family Archives, Douala
BGF Buea German Files, Cameroon National Archives, Buea
BMG Basler Missionsgesellschaft archives, Basel, Switzerland
BMH Baptist Missionary Herald
BMS Baptist Missionary Society, London
Calprof Calabar Provincial Files, Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan
CEA Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines
CO Colonial Office files, Public Records Office, Great Britain
CSO Central Secretariat Office Files, Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan
FO Foreign Office files, Public Records Office, Great Britain
ISH Institut des Sciences Humaines, Yaoundé
JAH Journal of African History
JME Journal des Missions Évangéliques
JOCA Journal Officiel du Cameroun
NBC Native Baptist Church
PMC League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission
PP Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers
RFHOM Revue Française d’Histoire d’Outre Mer
RKA Reichskolonialamt files, Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Potsdam
RT Germany, Verhandlungen des Reichstags [Reichstag debates and papers]
SMEP Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris
UPC Union des Populations du Cameroun
Map 1  The Cameroon Littoral, c. 1977. Reprinted by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press. Words in full capitals indicate ethnic groups.