

Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Duala and their Hinterland, c.1600-c.1960 (African Studies)

Ralph A. Austen, Jonathan Derrick



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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 1999 book also examines the growing consciousness of the Duala as an ethnic group and uses their history to shed 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 conflicting with their own findings but illuminate local conceptions of social hierarchy and their relationship to spiritual beliefs.

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