

# ADAMAWA PAST AND PRESENT

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An Historical Approach to the Development  
of a Northern Cameroons Province

A. H. M. Kirk-Greene

AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF  
THE 20TH CENTURY



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a Northern Cameroons Province

A. H. M. KIRK-GREENE

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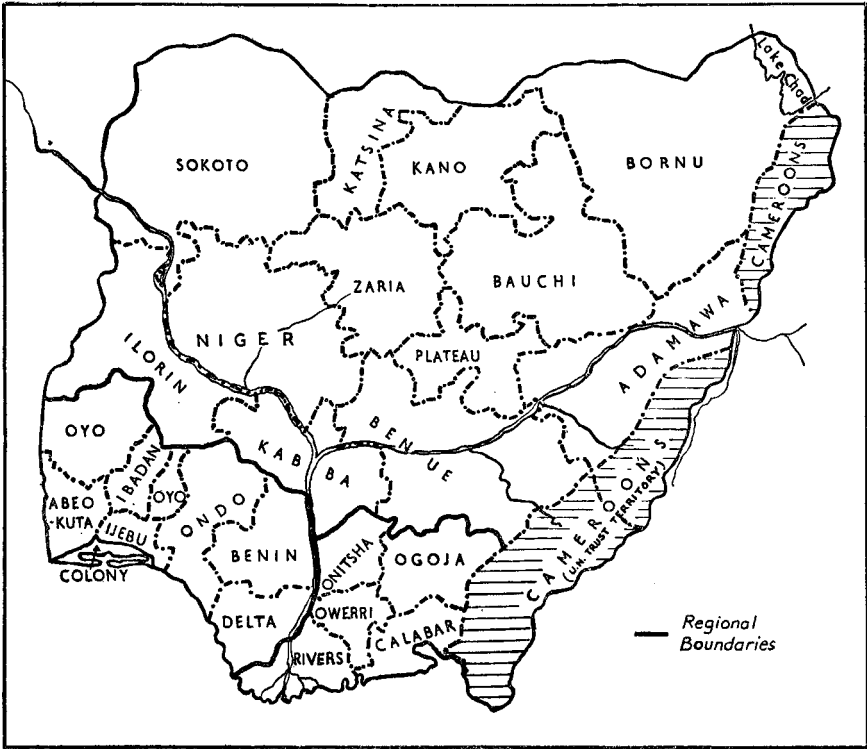
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ADAMAWA  
PAST AND PRESENT



NIGERIA: PROVINCES

ADAMAWA  
PAST AND PRESENT

AN  
HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF A  
NORTHERN CAMEROONS PROVINCE

*by*  
A. H. M. KIRK-GREENE

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## FOREWORD

MR. KIRK-GREENE's introduction to the history of Adamawa Province presents a straightforward and vivid picture of the Province as an officer in the Nigerian Administration has come to know it during several years of service and study devoted to its interests and problems. He describes its mountains and waterways, the character and occupations of its peoples, the political and economic conditions of the present day. He also sketches, in an equally lively manner, the history of the area over the past 150 years—a period in which it was the scene of the rise and warfare of the Fulani kingdoms, became of increasing interest to European trading firms, and was laid claim to by three different European powers within the short space of twenty-five years. For this part of his book the author draws on the works of French, German, and British travellers and explorers, on the reports and records of administrators and trading companies, and on Fulani texts and traditions, using verbatim quotations many of which are here translated for the first time.

While making no claim to exhaustive historical research or the presentation of new ethnographical material, this record of the varying fortunes of the territory, of the life of its peoples, the efforts and endurance of its explorers and the achievements of the early administrators, is of particular interest when the pattern of economic and political life in Nigeria is again being rapidly transformed.

London, 1957

DARYLL FORDE  
*Director, International African Institute*



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## PREFACE

ADAMAWA PROVINCE was created in 1926, largely from the original Yola and Muri Provinces. A Gazetteer of Yola Province was published by the Nigerian Government over thirty years ago and one of Muri Province nearly forty years ago; a more recent account of the new province of Adamawa was clearly desirable.

This study has been compiled in the hope of giving the officer posted to Adamawa a background to the history of his Province and a guide to where he may be able to develop his interests and research. It also aims to provide a straightforward narrative, deliberately rejecting those ephemeral lists and statistics that so quickly grow out of date, and offering a chronicle of established facts and dates. On to this structure decennial supplements may be added; by virtue of the historical emphasis, revision and rewriting should not again be necessary, only extension.

A word on sources. Besides the valuable gazetteers quoted above and a useful typescript draft of the early 1930's, I have drawn extensively on two sources. One, the narratives and records of travellers to Adamawa during the past hundred years; the other, the local reports, files, district notebooks, and legends—even the accounts of eyewitnesses, for the history of modern Northern Nigeria has not yet reached the span of a man's days. The second source is available only to those who have had the privilege of serving in Adamawa. The first is open to all, and it is to encourage further acquaintance with such absorbingly interesting works that I have been so liberal in quotation and have listed these sources in a miniature bibliography of Adamawa literature, much of which has not been previously translated or catalogued.

I am particularly grateful to C. K. Wreford, Esq., C.M.G., Senior Resident, Adamawa Province, and to J. H. D. Stapleton, Esq., Senior District Officer (now Resident), without whose enthusiastic help and encouragement this book would have remained a might-have-been; to my *confrère*, R. W. H. du Boulay, Esq., District Officer, for allowing me to draw on his immense knowledge of

Adamawa; to those anonymous members of the library staffs in Kaduna, Cambridge, London, and Paris, who were so patient with me; and to the several editors for their kind permission to reproduce as appendixes, either *in toto* or in part, certain Adamawa articles of mine which have previously appeared in their journals and which seemed to be a suitable complement to this historical review. Finally, my thanks are due to the Government of Northern Nigeria for allowing me to publish this book, and to Professor Daryll Forde and Mrs. B. E. Wyatt of the International African Institute for the benefit of their wisdom and their unfailing support.

A. H. M. KIRK-GREENE

Yola, 1954-  
Tunbridge Wells, 1956

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# I

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

### BOUNDARIES

ADAMAWA PROVINCE, with an area of 31,786 square miles, is larger than Scotland. It ranks third in size among the Northern Provinces, following after Bornu (45,733 square miles) and Sokoto (36,477 square miles). Its pear-shaped land mass, with an extreme length of 350 miles and a maximum width of 165 miles, occupies the south-eastern corner of the Northern Region of Nigeria and lies between longitude  $10^{\circ}$  and  $14^{\circ}$  East. Its southern boundary lies at  $6^{\circ}30'$  North, the same latitude as Lagos; thence it marches north-eastwards, with the French Cameroons as its eastern boundary, until it reaches Bornu Province at  $11^{\circ}$ . Over a short sector between the two Adamawa areas of the Trusteeship Territory of the Northern Cameroons, comprising 10,970 square miles and administered as an integral part of the Province, the boundary is identical with the Anglo-German frontier delimited in 1909; elsewhere the international frontier of the Province is based on the Milner-Simon line of 1919. Within Nigeria, Adamawa marches on the north with the Provinces of Bornu and Bauchi and on the west with Plateau and Benue, while to the south lies the Bamenda Province of the Southern Cameroons.

### POPULATION

The administrative capital of the Province is Yola, which with its port and *sabon gari* offshoot of Jimeta carries a population of just under 20,000. The 1952 census recorded a total population of 1,181,164, of whom 417,200 were in the Trust Territory. Density of population ranges from 210 to the square mile in Cubunawa District to only 3 in Gashaka.

A further breakdown of population statistics is given in Table I. It must be stressed that there is a considerable margin of uncertainty in both the classification and the counting.

TABLE I

*Adamawa Division:* 162 tribes have been listed at one time or another.

*Muri Division:* 26 tribes have been listed at one time or another.

*Numan Division:* 42 tribes have been listed at one time or another.

Recent returns show the leading tribes thus:

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Adamawa</i>	<i>Muri</i>	<i>Numan</i>
Fulani	72,442	26,346	5,682
Hausa	19,054	13,300	2,304
Higi	63,745	—	—
Chamba	55,990	2,240	—
Marghi	45,004	—	—
Kilba	32,001	—	—
Gude	28,077	—	—
Fali	23,598	—	—
Bata	22,740	—	3,749
Mambila	18,027	—	—
Yungur	19,600	—	—
Njai	14,069	—	—
Verre	12,281	—	—
Higi-Fali	9,956	—	—
Kanuri	8,941	1,830	587
Sukur	5,052	—	—
Wula	2,871	—	—
Tur	2,522	—	—
Wagga	2,347	—	—
Ga'anda	7,641	—	—
Mumuye	8,364	92,866	2,028
Bura	4,502	—	710
Yendam	4,919	3,234	—
Dakka	4,995	2,940	—
Wurkum	—	24,880	—
Jukun	—	24,387	—
Jen	—	4,946	1,185
Nupe	—	826	259
Bachama	—	2,010	9,273
Ibo	3,030	994	373
Yoruba	—	508	23
Bolewa	—	1,257	—
Laka	—	200	261
Longuda	—	—	13,661
Mbula	—	—	7,861
Kanakuru	—	—	2,790
Lala	—	—	3,220
Piri	—	—	2,071

## NATURAL DIVISIONS

Geographically, Adamawa Province may be divided into six principal areas:

- (i) The low-lying valley of the Benue river, traversing it from east to west for over 200 miles at only 600 feet above sea level and constituting its major physical feature.
- (ii) The northern highlands, rising to peaks of 4,000 feet and embracing the mountainous districts from Lala eastwards to Zummo and northwards to the Gwoza hills.
- (iii) The Gongola valley, separating the northern highlands of Adamawa from the Bauchi plateau.
- (iv) The southern highlands, including the 3,500-foot Alantika and Mumuye-Dakka ranges.
- (v) The high-forest belt of Gashaka.
- (vi) The Mambila plateau, boasting a mean altitude of 5,000 feet and summits up to 7,000 feet.

## ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

The Province is divided into three administrative Divisions:

(1) *Adamawa*: area, 18,558 square miles; population, 799,150. It extends the full length of the Province along its eastern boundary from the Bornu border to that of Bamenda Province. The Provincial Headquarters at Yola and all the Trust Territory of the Province lie within Adamawa Emirate, which is coincident with the Division and is divided into 28 districts, ranging in size from Gashaka (4,134 square miles) to Yebbi (57 square miles) and in population from Mubi (77,988) to Belel (5,030). It contains some 50 miles of the Benue valley, the whole of the northern highlands except for the Lala District of Numan Division, the eastern half of the southern highlands, and the entire Gashaka area and Mambila plateau.

(2) *Muri*: area, 11,014 square miles; population, 260,288. It contains over 100 miles of the Benue valley and the western half of the southern highlands. About a third of the Division lies on the north bank of the Benue and consists of the south-eastern

escarpment of the Bauchi plateau, known as the Wurkum hills which rise almost directly from the Benue swamps. There are 11 districts, the largest in area being Bakundi (2,478 square miles) and in population Wurkum (42,000).

(3) *Numan*: area, 2,214 square miles; population, 121,438. It is encircled by the Adamawa Emirate and Muri Division, save for a brief sector to the north and north-west where it marches with the Biu and Gombe Divisions of Bornu and Bauchi Provinces respectively. The Benue splits the Division from east to west for about 60 miles, while 40 miles of the Gongola valley divide it from north to south. The Division has five districts, of which the largest in both area and population is Bachama, 945 square miles carrying 37,000 inhabitants.

At one time a considerable area of Adamawa Province was 'closed' under the provisions of the Unsettled Districts' Ordinance. For instance, in 1925 the Chamba, Mumuye, Piri, Longuda, Kanakuru, Yungur, Lala, Bura, Hona, Marghi and Kilba tribes were all defined as 'unsettled' with the exception of a very few areas, and the Mambila, Alantika and northern touring districts were 'closed' *en bloc*. Numan Division was completely 'opened' in 1927. In Muri Division the Mumuye area west of the Jalingo-Lau road was 'opened' in 1928, followed by part of Zinna District in 1931; the last part of Zinna District, the hills of Dong, was opened in 1954. In Adamawa Division, Ga'anda District was opened in 1927, Mambila District in 1936 and most of the northern districts in 1950. Today in the Province there remain only 150 square miles of unsettled districts in the Alantika area and some 400 square miles in certain villages of Madagali, Cubunawa and Mubi Districts lying to the east of the Uba-Bama road.

#### CLIMATE

In the northern districts of the Province, where the country rises to about 2,000 feet and the annual rainfall averages 42 inches, the climate is pleasantly free from the excessive heat and humidity caused by evaporation in the Benue valley. Along the Benue river evaporation produces a trying humid atmosphere throughout most of the year; shade temperatures of 110° are not unknown, and

in Yola itself the heat is retained for long hours of the night by the abundant rock.

For most of the Province the seasonal cycle is that of the Northern Region generally: tornadoes and a few showers in the marginal months of April and October; the rains spreading from May to September, with perhaps a brief dry spell in August before the heavy rainfall of the succeeding month; lower temperatures during the harmattan months of November to January; and the hot and airless weeks from mid-February to the onset of the rains. This colourful description of the seasons is taken from a recent touring officer's report:

For five months of the year 50 inches of rain render travel by car virtually impossible; even by horse it is plodding and wearisome in the western spongelike swamps, wet and dangerous among the eastern hill torrents that are born in a night and live but for a season. May brings the first tornadoes, full of sound and fury, signifying little; June and July are a veritable spring, a time of rising sap and new birth and joy, when the country is swiftly and strangely changed to a green luxuriance. Then come three months of heavy storms and washouts, until one day quite suddenly there are no more dark clouds gathering over the Mandara hilltops: the corn turns brown and brittle, bush fires burn merrily along the hillsides at night like twinkling lights, and dead leaves litter the ground, for the dry season has come. November to February bring the invigorating climate of hot suns and chilly evenings, when the temperature can drop from 100 to 50 degrees within a space of hours. The harmattan veils the countryside with its mantle of Sahara-borne sand particles which infiltrate everywhere; shaving brushes stiffen while leather and paper curl at the edges, crumple and crackle. Thus into March and April, months when a cruel sun overwhelms all living things save the sturdy *Adenium Honghel* shrub; the burnt, parched earth bears no resemblance to the viridacious richness of earlier months; stifling nights bring little relief to a tense and nerve-taut community anxiously awaiting the onset of the first rains, which surely cannot be far behind.

There is another climatic zone in Adamawa, that of the Gashaka-Mambila region, where the prolonged rainy season approximates to the weather cycle of Southern Nigeria but with the plateau advantages of a low temperature.

Further climatic data are given in Tables II and III.

TABLE II<sup>1</sup>

Yola lies approximately 575 feet above sea-level, at 9° 10' N. and 12° 29' E.

Mean monthly rainfall, in inches, averaged over 35 years: line (a).  
 Mean daily maximum temperature, in degrees Fahrenheit: line (b)  
 Mean daily minimum temperature, in degrees Fahrenheit: line (c).  
 Mean relative humidity, per cent at 0600 hrs., G.M.T.: line (d).  
 Mean relative humidity, per cent at 1200 hrs, G.M.T.: line (e).

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Year
(a)	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.9	4.9	6.2	6.8	7.7	7.8	3.2	0.2	0.0	39.0
(b)	95.1	98.4	102.0	103.0	96.9	90.5	87.4	87.2	86.2	91.1	96.9	96.0	94.2
(c)	65.2	69.4	75.5	78.8	76.1	73.4	72.4	73.4	71.5	71.9	67.5	65.1	71.6
(d)	35	33	34	55	76	87	90	92	93	91	71	47	67
(e)	16	15	17	26	39	61	66	68	69	60	29	19	40

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Appendix I to *Land and People of Nigeria, 1955*, which gives comparative figures for many large stations in the country.

TABLE III

*Average rainfall: other stations in Adamawa Province*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Numan</i>	<i>Jalingo</i>	<i>Mubi</i>	<i>Gembu (1955)</i>
January	—	—	—	—
February	0·22	0·29	—	9·04
March	0·52	0·64	0·05	—
April	1·35	2·68	0·30	4·35
May	4·66	6·14	3·60	7·82
June	5·36	7·79	5·47	14·98
July	5·60	7·99	7·30	8·21
August	5·65	7·24	10·24	5·46
September	6·71	10·57	10·56	6·83
October	2·87	4·98	3·40	8·68
November	0·07	0·19	1·31	1·13
December	—	—	—	—

## VEGETATION

The general pattern is that of stretches of undulating country covered with thin, low-growing bush, intermittently broken by fertile valleys and abrupt massifs. These low ridges of well-drained laterite soil, which provide excellent grazing and arable land, may be regarded as an apron to the great granite hill systems of the Province.

The northern part of Adamawa is mainly Sudan savannah, with a patch of Guinea savannah in the Mubi-Biu area, while to the south lies Guinea savannah broken by islands of high forest in the Toungo-Gashaka region. This savannah, though profoundly affected in its physical appearance by farming and seasonal firing, is characterized by a continuous grass cover, in which stand abundant trees, generally of small size and of branched and twisted habit, and rarely providing an uninterrupted canopy. In the far south the grassland montane outriders of Bamenda merge into the Mbum plain and the Mambila plateaux.

Much of the Province is covered with secondary timber, a feature of the orchard bush of Northern Nigeria. The principal trees are acacia, shea-nut and locust-bean, with sporadic concentrations of deleb-palms and isolated baobabs. Remnants of true

forest, in which mahogany and other hardwoods persist, are found in Gashaka and along the banks of streams.

On either side of the Benue stretch great marshlands, and the alluvial plain of the Gongola valley carries a rich layer of black cotton soil. Of the rice potentialities of Adamawa Dr. Dalziel wrote in 1910:

The extensive marsh between the Benue and the long ridge on which Yola town is situated, some two miles in width and many miles in length, is alone capable of supplying the province with this grain, a fact which was pointed out to the late Emir by a party of Turkish exiles last year. From the deck of a river steamer one cannot fail to see extending from the edge of the natural channel almost endless areas of grassy swamps, little cumbered by trees, and limited only by the range of hills some 10 to 15 miles distant, areas which would appear to offer illimitable possibilities for the growth of this cereal.

Adamawa is blessed with valuable pastures, especially those of the Mambila plateau which support over 150,000 head of cattle. The fertile areas of the Gongola and Yedseram valleys have earned the name of Adamawa's granary; yam mounds are characteristic of the Mumuye country; and maize, tobacco and onions mark the riverain vegetation. There are, however, still large tracts of uncultivated bush, and in Gashaka and parts of Muri Division it is possible to do a day's trek without coming across more than a handful of huts.

#### RIVERS

The River Benue,<sup>1</sup> which with its tributaries waters nearly all the Province, rises in the 3,000-foot Ngaundere massif in the French Cameroons. Its name, Binuwe, means the 'Mother of Waters', though some scholars have sought to find its origin in a distortion of a Bachama word meaning 'The Big Death'. Its flow is rapid over the first 150 miles, with a fall of about 2,000 feet, but from its confluence with the Kebi the Benue proceeds more slowly. Shortly after passing the French town of Garua it enters Adamawa at a point some 30 miles above Yola and is joined from the south by the Faro which here marks the international boundary. This frontier follows the course of the Benue for a few miles

<sup>1</sup> See also Chapter VIII.

downstream, as far as the mouth of the Tiel, which constitutes the boundary northwards from the Benue for about 30 miles. Thence the Benue winds slowly westwards, amongst ever-changing sandbanks and with many a sweeping bend, until it meets the Niger opposite Lokoja and enters on the final stretch of its 800-mile journey to the sea. In the dry season, when the banks tower above as reminders of the earlier level, the river is shallow and can even be forded on foot by Yola; but in the rains, when a difference of over 20 feet has been measured, it swells to half a mile wide and is navigable by large river-steamers of 6- or 7-foot draught as far upstream as Garua.

In scenery the Benue presents a striking contrast to the Niger. Its waters untroubled by rapids or exposed rocks, its hills cut far back to reveal tongues of marshland running up the tributary valleys, its course undistinguished by the picturesque sequence of narrow gorge and expansive plain, the Benue bears signs of deep erosion and changing river beds. One traveller<sup>1</sup> has even hazarded that the break in the Bagale hills opposite Yola was once the bed of the Benue before the general physical upheaval.

The most important tributary of the Benue is the Gongola, which joins it at right angles opposite Numan and is navigable to light-draught steamers during the rains once they have overcome the considerable strength of the current at the confluence; in the dry season the Gongola contracts to a trickle.

Besides the rivers already mentioned, other important tributaries of the Benue include the Beti, Mayo Ine, Mayo Belwa, Kunini, Kilengi, Lamorde and Fan Manga. The Taraba and Donga rivers are navigable to river steamers at high-water, while the Pai used to serve as an evacuation route by launch for the galena mines at Zurak. It is noticeable that the southern tributaries are greater in number and size, since the river basin extends through broken and relatively well-timbered country as far as the verge of the Southern Provinces' rain-forest zone, whereas to the north it is brought up sharply against the stony central plateau of the Bauchi highlands. Incidentally, there is, just off the Mambila plateau and marking the boundary between Adamawa and Benue Provinces,

<sup>1</sup> Migeod.

a hidden and almost unknown waterfall, as spectacular as that of Assab on the Jos plateau, and estimated to be even larger in both fall and volume.

The north-east corner of the Province lies within the Chad basin and contains the headwaters of the Yedseram. This rises in the hills near Gella and within a few miles has broadened into a strong-flowing river, fed by numerous small tributaries from the Mandara range to the east of its fertile valley. Farther on, it meanders across the wide plain, here and there losing its identity in chains of pools and marshes, and eventually drains into Lake Chad. In general terms the boundary between the British and French Cameroons from the source of the Yedseram as far as the Bornu border is the watershed which separates the basin of this river from that of the Kebi river.

#### MOUNTAINS

The glory of Adamawa is in its mountain ranges.

Geologically, the prevalent formation is an exposure of the basal crystalline rocks common to Northern Nigeria, which in the northern and southern highlands emerge as granites and gneisses. In the elevated plains and the wider valleys that run between these ranges the basal rock is covered by a thick layer of laterite or by granite sandstone; shale and fossiliferous limestone of marine origin appear, associated with a more recent series of sandstone and ironstone, with here and there saline deposits. Much of Adamawa displays to perfection the geographical *Inselberglandschaft*, a series of isolated domes and kopjes set in a well-wooded plain.

Eastward from where the extensive Benue plain of Muri Division narrows near Lau there rise sudden and steep hills on both banks at a distance of 15 miles, developing on the right bank into the great barrier of the precipitous Muri range, whose peaks one explorer<sup>1</sup> has compared to the teeth of a gigantic saw. Farther upstream the eye is attracted by the curious and characteristic volcanic mounds of Gamadio and Giwana, and by the flat-topped, sugar-loaf sandstone outliers of Yendam Waka which, typical of the Niger country, are less common in the Benue valley.

<sup>1</sup> Lenfant.