

THE BANGWA OF WEST CAMEROON

A brief account of their history and culture



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1967

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The first European penetrated the Bangwa mountains in 1898; he was Gustav Conrau , a German trader and colonial agent who was seeking trading contacts and supplies of labour for the southern plantations. He recorded his impressions of the country with some enthusiasm and many of the features of the environment strike a visitor in the nineteen sixties as they struck him seventy-five years ago: the awe-inspiring mountain scenery, with its accompanying steep, sometimes perilous paths, crossed by rushing torrents even in the dry season; high tumbling waterfalls; isolated compounds behind plantain groves and hedges, the imposing lines of the tall Bangwa house; the wealth of material culture and the quiet dignity of the chiefs and the deceptive subservience of his wives. The situation is slowly changing: zinc roofs are steadily replacing the conical thatches, a few years ago there was opened a motor road linking Fontem with Dschang in East Cameroon and a dry season road is being built from Fontem to join the Mamfe-Tali road in the west. But in 1965 it was still an arduous two-day trek from the road terminus to Fontem, the capital of the largest of the nine chiefdoms, Lebang. The path traverses the Banyang forests, passing through their villages strung out on either side of a sandy street; crossing fast-flowing tributaries of the Cross River by means of woven swing-bridges or on the shoulder of a stalwart Banyang, accustomed to the rivers' treacherous currents and deep pools. Steep, boulder-strewn paths indicate one's arrival in Bangwa. Inside the country there is a complicated interlacing of paths and tracks which wind tortuously up and down precipitous slopes or along escarpments. These paths connect the separate chiefdoms, the numerous markets, and the savannah country of the east with the forest country of the west. The main road leads from Biagwa (Banyang) to Fontem, where the chief palace and market stands. But since each of the nine chiefdoms has a boundary with the forest and the savannah a series of parallel paths pass through each chiefdom. From the muggy heat and closed-in feeling of the forests one climbs five thousand feet to the cool, open country of the highlands. Most of the Bangwa inhabit the middle regions (at about three to four thousand feet), where the sparseness of oil palm groves indicates the beginning of a highland climate: but compounds are scattered all over the region, the highest inhabited point being about 7,000 feet, the lowest about 1,500 feet.

THE NAME 'BANGWA'

The name 'Bangwa' conveniently describes all the inhabitants of this cluster of nine chiefdoms although they do not, in any sense, constitute a tribe or a single political unit. The word derives from the stem nwe (or nwa in the northern dialects) which refers to both the country and the language. 'Bangwa' therefore correctly refers to the people who speak nwe and inhabit the narrow strip of country in West Cameroon which forms the foothills of the section of the East Cameroon plateau inhabited by the Bamileke. It is however, doubtful whether all in the inhabitants of the nine independent chiefdoms ever thought of themselves as 'we, the Bangwa', before they were grouped together as a unit of local government by the British administration. Each Bangwa chiefdom maintained much closer links with its neighbours, the Bamileke chiefdoms to the east, than with their Bangwa neighbours to the north and south. The term nwe is, moreover, used more specifically to describe the highland areas of the four chiefdoms, Fontem, Fotabong, Fonjumeter and Foto Dungatet .

Another term, Mok, describes the country of the two northernmost chiefdoms Fozimogndi and Fozimombin, which are linked geographically and historically with other Mok chiefdoms among the Bamileke. Nowadays the term Bangwa is convenient since it describes this cluster of centralised chiefdoms, speaking a language closely related to their Bamileke neighbours but cut off from them by the accident of European rule.

THE LANGUAGE

The Bangwa speak a Bantoid language which is closely related to languages spoken by the Western Bamileke, particularly around Dschang and Fondongela. Important dialectical differences, however, occur among the Bangwa and the Bamileke. On the whole the degree of mutual understanding depends on proximity: the inhabitants of Fontem, Fotabong and Fozimogndi have no difficulty in understanding dialects spoken by their immediate Bamileke neighbours (Fongundeng, Fongo Tongo and Foto: all in East Cameroon) with whom they have close economic and social links. Greater differences occur between the southern Bangwa chiefdoms and the northern Mok chiefdoms, which were cut off in the past by geographical and economic factors: most links were east-west, not north-south.

There are noun classes. The plural is formed by addition or change of prefix, but some make no distinction. There is concord with the possessive. There is no clear distinction of gender classes. A word may stand for several nouns depending on the change of tone. There is a considerable lexographic resemblance to Bantu¹. According to local speakers Bali (Mungaka) and Ngemba languages are akin to nwe. It appears that Bangwa is linked to other Bamileke languages even as far as Fumban through a chain of mutual intelligibility.

The languages of their western and southern neighbours are distinct although there is a considerable amount of word-borrowing, especially between the Bangwa and Banyang. Few people apart from those living on the boundaries, speak Mbo or Mundani but Banyang is spoken by male traders and members of the popular secret societies imported from the west. Nearly all Bangwa, both men and women, speak pidgin English, evidence of their keen trading propensities.

THE CHIEFDOMS - POPULATION FIGURES

The nine chiefdoms, the northernmost first, are: Fozimogndi, Fozimombin, Fonjumetor, Fotabong I, Foto Dungatet, Fontem, Foreke Cha Cha and Fotabeng III. The names given are the ones in current use and are in fact the chiefs' titles, Fontem, for example, is in fact the chief's title; his country is called Lebang; and the capital where the palace and market are situated is called Azi. Most commonly Fontem is used to cover all three cases. The population figures given below are the official figures of the 1953 census; they should, in my opinion, be almost doubled to give a more exact picture of the present population. It will be noted that females comprise sixty per cent of the figure since an important number of persons, mostly males, are working and living outside Bangwa.

¹ Dr. Elizabeth Dunstan is making a descriptive study of nwe at Ibadan University.

Fozimogndi and Fozimombin (together)	4, 047
Fonjumeter	2,432
Fotabeng	1,909
Foto	1,546
Fossungo	767
Fontem	7,400
Foreke Cha Cha and Fotabong III (together)	1,462

NEIGHBOURING PEOPLES

The Bangwa inhabit a somewhat inaccessible region but they have always maintained contacts with their neighbours on all sides: the Bamileke to the east, the Mundani to the north-west, the Banyang to the west and the Mbo and Nkingkwa to the south. Links have been economic, cultural and historical.

The Mundani, who claim to have migrated to their present position from the west are very different in language, social organisation, and material culture from the Bangwa although they have adopted elements of the latter's political organisation: titles, chiefship, secret societies. Bamumbu, the most important of the five independent Mundani chiefdoms, has one or two small Bamileke enclaves and the two languages (Mundani and Bamileke) are spoken along the watershed area. At the time of German penetration Fozimogndi and Fozimombin, the two northern most Bangwa chiefdoms, were at war with their Mundani neighbours over the ownership of extensive palm groves and there are still Mundani areas within the territory of these two chiefdoms. The Bangwa and Mundani today share a council and treasury, but the two peoples lack basic common interests and there is a good deal of mutual suspicion. To an average Bangwa the Mundani are people who marry young girls of tender years; to an average Mundani the Bangwa are the sort of people who marry their prettiest daughters to the most senile elders.

The Banyang. The Bangwa have always had vital trading links with the Banyang, in whose markets they bought, or exchanged for slaves, such necessities and luxuries as guns, cloth, currency beads, salt, and miscellaneous European goods. The Bangwa were the middlemen in the savannah slave trade. Consequently, for the sake of smooth economic relations, the Bangwa and Banyang had an uneasy alliance, with occasional disturbances. Legend recalls that the son and heir of Chief of Fontem was captured and enslaved by the Banyang; he was only released through the intervention of the wife of the Chief of Tali to whom a payment of seven slaves was made. This story is used to justify Fontem's annual tribute to the Tali chief, on the other hand it could hardly symbolise Fontem's political subordination to Tali. It may have been a tributary recognition of the importance of the Tali market in Bangwa economy. The Bangwa also remember with bitterness that it was the Banyang who aided the Germans in their punitive expedition against Fontem after Conrau's death.

It is interesting that a detailed study of the dynastic origins of Bangwa chiefs and subchiefs, both in the highlands and the lowlands, reveals much closer links with the Banyang. Of the paramount chiefs, Fonjumeter and Foto both claim Banyang origin, a claim attested in the

village of origin. In the present century Bangwa-Banyang relations have shifted. The Banyang no longer purvey European goods to the Bangwa since the latter are the better traders and have traded directly to the source of European goods. But the Banyang offer interesting bargains in the form of effective anti-witchcraft medicines (mfam etc.); witchcraft proving societies; and, in the past, powerful war magic (ajia). They also market the most colourful and prestige-ful recreational societies which originate in Calabar and Ekoi. Mortuary celebrations nowadays consist of rowdy exhibitions from members of these societies (nyangkpe, angbu, alungatshaba) which are slowly replacing the more restrained societies and dances of the highlands.

The Mbo. To the south of Foreke Cha Cha and Fotabong III live the Mbo sturdy warriors with whom the Bangwa have a long tradition of enmity and warfare, stemming from disputes over boundaries, oil palm groves and the kidnapping of each other nationals for cannibalistic or enslaving purposes. The Bangwa admire the Mbo (they have never admired their allies the Banyang) whom they drove from the lowland areas of Lebang (Fontem) under the generalship of Chief Asunganyi , towards the end of the last century. Since the turn of the century the Mbo have been restricted to the southern banks of the rivers Betse and Betenten, A fig tree in the large Mbo market, Elumbat, is supposed to symbolise the Bangwa victory. According to the Bangwa the Mbo also brought an annual tribute in smoked fish and game to Fontem.

The Mbo of West Cameroon originate from the Sandjou area in East Cameroon , and they played an important part in the early dynastic history of Bangwa, but especially Western Bamileke , chiefdoms. Foreke Cha Cha has historical connexions with Mbo; Fongo Tongo , Foto, Foreke Dschang , Fondongela, all Bamileke chiefdoms, claim origin from the Mbo. In other Bangwa chiefdoms minor subchiefs claim Mbo ancestors.

The Nkingkwa: A small, but interesting people inhabit the mountainous area to the south, between the Bamileke and the lowland Mbo. These are the Nkingkwa, divided into chiefdoms on the Bangwa pattern but with a very different culture and language. They are linguistically related to the Mbo; but they are inter-marrying with the Bangwa and adopting their institutions, They all speak nwe from an early age. Their present chiefs are of Bangwa or Bamileke origin but there is a kind of dual chiefship since their ritual leaders, the traditional 'owners of the land' are Nkingkwa lineage heads who relinquished political overlordship to invading northerners. I believe the Nkingkwa represent an important intermediary stage in a process of Bamileke-isation which has been going on for centuries throughout the area of my study. It eventually involves the loss of a people's original language, the adoption of savannah culture and political institutions, the individuation of compounds etc. They may provide a hint of explanation for much Bangwa history which is lost in the past. The Nkingkwa are therefore half-way along a developmental line which has been completed in the Western Bamileke chiefdoms and the highland Bangwa areas; but not yet completed in the lowlands. Thus Foreke Cha Cha , the southernmost Bangwa chiefdom, borders Mbo and has a dialect laced with Mbo words, and traces dynastic connexions with Mbo lineages.

The Bamileke: There is no doubt that the Bangwa have closest linguistic, cultural and social affiliations with their eastern neighbours the Bamileke. The name Bamileke, is an administrative term (derived, perhaps, from the Bangwa words mbe m'leku 'people of the Savannah') used by the Germans to describe a very mixed grouping of independent chiefdoms, well-nigh a hundred of them, scattered over a vast fertile plateau and centering on Bafang, Bangangte, Bandjoun, Bafoussam and Dschang. A common language (but with important dialectical variations) and some wide-spread shared cultural elements give them a degree of unity in which the Bangwa share.

Trading contacts with the Bangwa's immediate Bamileke neighbours have always been important. In the olden days chiefs had trading alliances involving the exchange of guns, slaves and European goods. Today the Bangwa provide the eastern markets with oil, foodstuffs (cocoyams mostly) and livestock in return for raffia wine, groundnuts and maize. Even the international boundary between the former British and French trusteeship territories, involving different currencies, customs duties, laissez-passers etc., did not prevent a continuance of close commercial and social links. Many Bangwa families originated in the east and close links are still maintained. Fotabong I is connected with the important chiefdom of Foto near Dschang. Inter-marriages are common - the Bangwa and Bamileke of the west share a similar pattern of marriage payments.

Like the Bangwa the Bamileke are great traders; many of them have become very prosperous and scattered throughout the Cameroon in positions of economic influence. Their political ambitions, however, have never been satisfied; this, plus a general anti-colonialist sentiment, may account for the general outburst of terrorism which involved attacks on traditional chiefs and expatriate administrators with harsh reprisals by the gendarmerie. The Bangwa felt only slight repercussions of these troubles between the Bamileke and the East Cameroon administration in the late fifties and early sixties. The British colonial administration, often through necessity, interfered far less in the internal affairs of the Bangwa chiefdoms which were cut off from the administrative centre, at Mamfe; the British relied heavily on indirect rule, and local government has remained firmly in the hands of the traditional rulers. In the east things were different: there were no customary courts, chiefs were often dismissed or appointed by the administration. Certain customs which were considered heathen or inefficient were prohibited. Forced labour was the rule until recent years; and the chiefs who had been deprived of their traditional source of power (the respect and tribute of their people) were obliged to round up labourers for the coffee and cocoa plantations belonging to Europeans. In Bangwa, after the first unfortunate experience of German attempts to recruit labour for the plantations, the Bangwa were never asked to organise labour gangs. Thus although the Bangwa lagged behind their brothers the Bamileke in acquiring European technological benefits their social transition from the pre-colonial world to the modern one has been less violent and characterised by slower change.

BANGWA HISTORY : A SKETCH FROM MYTHS, TRADITIONS AND RECORDS

A heterogeneous people necessarily have a complex history and I shall only attempt a summary here. More detailed accounts of individual chiefdoms will be given in a later publication.

All evidence points to the fact that the Bangwa as we now know them are not an ancient people, whose origins are lost in the dim past. Even paramount chiefs, who have the longest pedigrees, only trace their dynasties back seven or eight generations; and from the material evidence of their ancestors' skulls and the strict rule of father-to-son succession it may be surmised that the Bangwa have inhabited the mountain regions for less than two hundred years. Legend tells of the founding of the chiefdoms; both Bangwa and Bamileke accounts have many common elements. Briefly it tells of a hunter who came from the Mbo or Banyang forests with his following (his family and the classic nine servants) where he met the Beketshe, a loosely-grouped hunting and gathering people who lived a naked, nomadic existence in the wooded mountains without the advantages of huts or agriculture. The forest hunter, with his guns and through guile, deprived these people of their proprietary rights to the land. These Beketshe, from whom some contemporary Bangwa still claim descent, are described in innumerable stories as brainless, fickle and incredibly gullible, and are a constant source of amusement to sophisticated Bangwa. According to the myth they were taught farming, fire-making, and some elementary facts of life including copulation. The Beketshe ceased to rely on wild plants and game. And the union of these nomads and forest hunters formed the nucleus of the Bangwa people who were now confronted by the Bamileke peoples of the grasslands: agriculturalists who fought with spears and had a very elegant and highly structured political system. The forest hunter and his followers acquired dominance over these scattered political groups through his bravery and his ability to husband the country's resources. A common myth tells how he hoarded leopard skins, ivory tusks, lengths of stencilled blue and white cloth; the possession of these symbols of royalty ranked him immediately and indisputably as chief.

These legends clearly recount in mythical form the arrival in the mountains and savannah of individuals from the forest who had access to European goods, especially guns, and through superior hunting and warlike prowess and commerce acquired superiority over the original inhabitants of the mountains and migrants from the eastern savannah. He did not, however, impose his cultural background: to a man the newcomers adopted the language and customs of an eastern culture we now know as Bamileke.

Each chiefdom, of course, has its own specific traditions of origin. The Foto and Fonjumetor dynasties derive from the small Banyang hamlet of Fumbe situated on an important market site within easy reach of the Bamenda Grassfields. Foreke Cha Cha has a complicated tradition of origin involving both Mbo and Banyang connexions. Fotabong III branched off from Foreke Cha Cha in recent post-colonial times. Fossungo claims to have come from Fossung Wentchen in the east. Fotabeng I is an offshoot of Foto in the east. Fozimogndi and Fozimombin are brother chiefdoms descended from a border chieftain now

a subchief of Bafou-Fondong in the east. Other chiefs, especially across the border have even more varied origins, natural in an area which saw so much turmoil in the not too distant past, mainly resulting from the slave trade. One chief claims to have come from Bali; another from Fumban; another from West Cameroon ; another was an affluent servant of Fongo Tongo . But among the Western Bamileke the most common picture is the same: the founding ancestor came from the Mbo plain.

Fontem, the most influential chiefdom, presents a problem since there is not a single commonly accepted tradition. Some accounts declare the first chief was of Banyang or even Keaka (Ejagham) origin. The royal family does not accept this, explaining that it was the kidnapping of the heir to the throne by the Banyang which gave rise to this story. The official account, told by the chief himself,² gives Nketshe, a small district not more than a mile or two from the present palace, as the point of origin. This is the reputed home of the original Beketshe, so Chief Fontem is in fact claiming Beketshe origin for his family. This runs counter to other myths recounting the meeting of the first Fontem chief and the Beketshe and other traditions told to me by descendants of the Beketshe record that the first chief came from the east. Certainly, in the installation ritual of the chief representatives from eastern chiefdoms play an important role which is justified by their supposed common origin. However since the Beketshe are known as the 'original people' and the 'owners of the land' it would perhaps be politic to claim descent from them.

Within each chiefdom component subchiefs, nobles and even commoner families tell varied traditions of their original home. Thus in Fontem we have subchiefs from Mbo, Banyang, Keaka (Ejagham), Mundani, Fotabong I, Foreke Cha Cha, Foto and Bamileke chiefdoms. Yet despite the varied origins, only unearthed through ceaseless enquiry, the chiefdom of Lebang has achieved a high degree of cultural and political homogeneity.

THE GERMANS

The Bangwa saw their first German in February 1898 when Gustav Conrau, always known by his Bali nickname, Manjikwara, arrived to make the acquaintance of Chief Fontem Asunganyi of whose influence and wealth he had heard while looking for ivory and plantation labour in the Banyang village of Tali. Conrau and Asunganyi, then a young man of about twenty-eight, took a liking to each other. Conrau, for his part, admired the dignified bearing of the young chief, his vast palace with its elaborate meeting houses and other evidence of an advanced material culture. The chief and his people were taken aback by their first glimpse of the Europeans of whom they had heard so much: 'there's a huge baby in the market' was the shout. Gifts were exchanged between the two men and Chief Asunganyi , proud of his flourishing market, was eager that a German trading 'factory' should be established at Azi his capital. He consequently acceded to Conrau's wishes that he should be allowed to take away seventy-odd men to work on the plantations in the south. When Conrau returned a year later, without the men whom the Bangwa thought had only

² Chief Fontem's account of his country's history is given in full by Miss Elizabeth Dunstan. "A Bangwa Account of early Encounters with the German Colonial Administration", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. III . No. 2 1965.

gone temporarily, the people feared they were dead. Asunganyi and his councillors decided to detain Conrau in Fontem until he had arranged for their return. Conrau agreed and sent off messages to this effect. One night, however, according to Bangwa traditions, Conrau attempted to flee. Pursued by his captors Conrau panicked, shot wildly at the Bangwa and when he found himself down to his last bullet shot himself to avoid the torture he could expect at the hands of the infuriated natives. The Germans appear to have accepted this version of Conrau's suicide which was re-inforced by the account given by his Bali servants. Some people in Bangwa suggest that he may have been shot by his adversaries. At all events his head was removed and carried to Fontem's palace as a war trophy: the prepared scalp was even worn at a celebration at nearby Fotabong by the queen mother. The Germans, as a consequence of his death, sent two military expeditions against Fontem; the natives put up a courageous resistance, building barricades, attempting to snare the German-led soldiers into ambushes and polluting the drinking water. But their antique Dane guns and spears could have little effect against the German efficiency and machine guns which they used in this futile campaign. Many Bangwa were killed and the chief's compound destroyed. Foto Dungatet had supported Fontem in the fight; Fotabong I on the other hand had befriended the Germans from the beginning. Subsequently the Germans established a trading post and garrison at Fontem, or Fontendorf, as they called it.

As soon as the Bangwa realised they would be defeated by the Germans' superior arms Fontem Asunganyi and some loyal councillors and servants went to hide in the hills behind the palace; the German captain was told he was dead. His adjutant brother, Nkweta, presented Asunganyi's young son, Ajongake, as the new chief. For several years Nkweta and Ajongake administered the chiefdom between them; their main task was to satisfy the German's seemingly insatiable demands for labourers and food supplies. These activities made Ajongake unpopular with the people and Fontem subchiefs. Other Bangwa chiefdoms also felt the effects of German rule to a greater and lesser extent. Some individuals in Bangwa remember the Germans today: the 'factory', the cloths, pans and goods they could buy in exchange for oil, wild rubber, ivory etc. Others remember the harsh treatment they received at the hands of the German-trained soldiers - as porters, and labour recruits in the plantations. Fotabong I, the chief who had befriended the Germans, made some territorial gains, acquiring control over some Foto subchiefs of the forest areas; and one independent chiefdom, now under Fontem-Mbo - was handed over to Fotabong.

In Fontem a dispute over a woman between the chiefs of Foreke Cha Cha and Lebang (Fontem) led to the betrayal of Asunganyi's whereabouts in about 1911. The former chief surrendered voluntarily and he was expatriated with two wives and some servants where he remained till after 1914. Convinced that exile meant death Asunganyi handed over the chiefship to his son Ajongake, bidding him to worship a lock of his hair as his skull. Ajongake became to all intents and purposes chief of Fontem. With the German defeat by the British and French in 1915 Asunganyi returned but remained for some time quietly in the background. But father and son began to quarrel; Ajongake had fulfilled a thankless task as chief intermediary between the Germans and the Fontem people and he was unpopular. Asunganyi was persuaded to take over the throne; his son was driven from the country, accompanied by a few wives and some loyal followers. He lived for some time in

Fotsa Toula in East Cameroon ; but later he went to Mamfe where he died destitute in 1931. There is a curious lack of interest in Ajongake among contemporary Bangwa: his character has been so blackened that few people can mention him in a favourable light, fearing perhaps that a kind word said of this unfortunate chief would detract from his father, Asunganyi.

After defeating the Germans in 1915 the British remained in effective control of the Bangwa area until independence in 1961. At first Bangwa was administered from Dschang, but after a few years the watershed between the eastern highlands and the western forests was chosen as the boundary between the two trusteeship territories.

Bangwa was cut off from her more natural neighbours, the Bamileke, and aligned with the Banyang, Mundani and Mbo. British rule was much less effective than the German. Apart from occasional tours by district officers and medical officers the Bangwa were left to govern and develop themselves. Customary courts were established to hear local civil cases: the administrators interfered only to settle acrimonious land and boundary disputes, and criminal cases, including murder and witchcraft. The traditional chiefs of the nine chiefdoms were made members and Fontem Asunganyi became permanent president. His inimitable personality dominated the court's decisions often in a somewhat quixotic fashion until his death in 1951.

Schools were established eventually; in Fontem there was a native authority primary school by the 1930s. Roman Catholic missionaries established others throughout the country. Some cocoa and coffee plantations were started, mainly due to the enthusiasm of local Bangwa like Ekokobe, the chief's sister's son and loyal retainer.

Asunganyi died after ruling Lebang (Fontem) for over sixty years. When he received Conrau in 1898 he was in his late twenties or early thirties. According to Bangwa accounts he had succeeded his father Atshemabo as an adolescent. During his minority the country was governed by his elder sister, Meka, later made queen mother, and his Great Retainer, Mbe Tanye , who had successfully fought off attempts by Asunganyi's uncle (now sub-chief Fossung Wentchen) to usurp the throne. In the early years of Asunganyi's reign he was involved in intermittent guerrilla warfare with the Mbo who inhabited the edges of his territory. He succeeded in pushing them back across the River Betse before the Germans arrived. Fontem Asunganyi never claimed suzerainty over the other eight Bangwa chiefdoms although he was recognised by both Germans and British as supreme in the area. His influence, on the other hand, was extensive both in Bangwa and among the Nkingwa and Western Bamileke . He frequently looked after the interests of heirs of his fellow chiefs who succeeded as young boys, ensuring their legitimate succession when they reached their majority. Asunganyi had particular alliances with the chiefdoms of Foto Dungatet , Fonjumetor and Bafou Fondong in the east.

Asunganyi's influence was an important one in Bangwa during European rule. He was a stickler for the old customs and traditions. Few people, even Europeans dared run counter to his wishes. He ruled his country, his large harem and his children with a generous, if

somewhat iron, hand. His prodigality and kindness is proverbial: no feast can be held today without unfavourable comparison with the orgies of meat, yams and wine which Fontem Asunganyi provided for his people. He became a legend while he was alive: and tales are told today of his feats of strength, his cunning, his hunting fighting and dancing prowess. And on every possible occasion he made a great show - to impress European visitors or neighbouring chiefs - his German brass band playing, his horses parading, his wives dancing, gun-powder exploding. When most Bangwa become nostalgic and recall the 'good old days' they refer to the time when the old chief was alive, when Bangwa was prosperous, the women stable and obedient, the young men respectful and the crops plentiful: an exaggeration perhaps but a token of Asunganyi's place in the minds of his people.

He was succeeded in 1951 by his son, Defang, a progressive chief, ruling in a difficult period of swift change. Missionaries have been active in Bangwa for over thirty years but up till 1966 there was no permanent mission station: the nearest was at Mbetta, in the Nkingwa-Mbo area. Converts are few. Very little proselytisation has been undertaken by the protestants but some churches and a school have recently been opened. There is, incidentally, no Islamic influence. Apart from one Government school at Fontem the schools have been administered by the Catholic mission. School attendance is very high: few children fail to receive at least a few years elementary training. A Roman Catholic organisation is planning to open a secondary school in Fontem in 1966.

Until 1966 there was no permanent dispensary, maternity clinic or hospital facilities of any kind in Bangwa. Long journeys by foot were made to West Cameroon hospitals or the Government hospital in Dschang. Plans for a hospital, dispensary, and maternity unit are part of a comprehensive project to be undertaken by a Catholic lay missionary society in the near future: this project also includes the secondary school, a domestic science centre and a soap factory.

The present development of Bangwa may, it is hoped, put an end to the constant flow of young people, mostly men, to the towns and plantations of the south, sometimes permanently. Although the young men declare that they are working in the south to collect the large marriage payments necessary to marry in Bangwa, few return once they have a wife. Many marry women from other tribes. Migration into Bangwa, on the other hand, is almost negligible. Land-hungry Bamileke sometimes cross the border to farm but they are not encouraged to settle. In the developing semi-urban centre of Fontem there were only three non-Bangwa - one was a resident Ibo carpenter.

The face of the country is also changing. Villages are springing up around the important markets at Fontem, Fotabeng, Foto and Lekeng (Fossunge). In the past close villages were unknown in Bangwa, the people living scattered over the landscape. The country's centre was merely the chief's palace with the market and a few servant's houses. Trader's shops are springing up. And the ordinary people are leaving their former isolation to build European-styled compounds near the roads which will link the Bangwa with the towns, hospitals and markets of east and west Cameroon .

In 1966 Bangwa Mundani became a District within Mamfe division with a resident District Officer.

THE COUNTRY - A DUAL DIVISION

Having boundaries with the high savannah and the low forest lands means that each chiefdom is able to participate in the advantages and disadvantages of two distinct ecological and cultural environments, which have played an important part in the development of a unique Bangwa culture. Each of the nine chiefdoms may be roughly divided into highland and lowland areas; each has its own market or markets which channel forest goods (particularly oil, dried fish and meat) to the highlands and savannah goods (groundnuts, maize, tobacco, raffia, palm wine) to the lowlands. Dual cultural influences are also discernible: although some Bangwa dynasties trace their origins to the forest the general flow of population and culture traits connected with social and political organisation has been from east to west. From the forest come notions concerning witchcraft, secret societies and magic. On the whole there has been a continuous and subtle amalgam of forest and savannah cultures.

The Bangwa are conscious of this dual division between the highlands and lowlands. Many highlanders maintain that the real nwe is restricted to the open country of Fontem, Fotabong, Fonjumeter and Foto. The inhabitants of the forest are the 'down' people (mba tshen) who produce the valuable oil. The highlanders put a premium on hierarchical political organisation and rank; it is they who traditionally owned the palm groves in the forests, sending their slaves and servants to supervise oil production. Nowadays such master-servant links are becoming more and more tenuous: and the highland chiefs are losing an important source of tribute.

Highlanders are proud and independent; they despise farm work but are consummate politicians, dancers and carvers. Their religious scruples are connected with the worship of ancestral skulls. They consider their lowland countrymen to be steeped in the magic and witchcraft of their Banyang and Mbo neighbours. 'Up and down' notions are mostly stereotypes; but as with stereotypes all over the world there is a grain of truth in them.

THE ECONOMY

Two seasons determine the Bangwa farming seasons the wet season from April to November-December, with maximum falls in September-October; and a short dry season from December to April which is never completely without rain. The average rainfall for the country as a whole is approximately 110 inches per annum. In general the soil is volcanic, a tenacious red clay of limited fertility. In the highlands the less dense forests have been cleared for intensive agriculture and some areas of grassland provide grazing land for cattle and horses. Climatic variations within each chiefdom are due mostly to sudden altitude changes: a few hours climb and the topography, climate, flora and fauna have undergone a complete change.

The Bangwa cultivate crops associated with both forest and savannah climates but everywhere the staple is cocoyam and for most people it is the most satisfying, if not the most delicious food. They are of two kinds: the hairy, fluffy white 'native' cocoyam and the bigger, waxier 'European' cocoyam. They are planted in January or February and intercropped with pumpkins and gourds. After the first rains in March and April maize, groundnuts and beans are sown. Yams are only occasionally grown and do not appear to do well. Potatoes were introduced by the Germans but only flourish in the very high areas of Fozimogndi and Fozimombin. Sweet potatoes are a valued subsidiary crop. Plantains are less important than they were: once a staple crop, especially in the forest, they have been reduced by disease. Bananas are important as fodder for pigs and delicacies for children. Several kinds of local spinach are grown. Farms are cultivated from three to four years and left to revert to bush for up to ten years.

Subsistence farming is undertaken by women. Each will have half a dozen or more farms given over principally to cocoyams but with beans, maize, cassava, sweet potatoes and groundnuts as subsidiary crops. Clearing is done by the women themselves, usually in groups. Sometimes very heavy bush is cleared with the help of an adolescent son or an obliging son-in-law, in return for a meal. Co-wives usually farm their major farms together, but subsidiary farms on land begged from divers kin will be widely separated. Only farms near the compounds are fenced: further afield there are vast unfenced stretches of farms with only vague boundaries between the farms of individual women. An important hazard is that from roaming livestock (goats, sheep, cattle). During the vital growing periods small boys of pre-school age spend long days in small grass huts shouting off marauding monkeys.

Farming in Bangwa is an arduous if not continuous task. Women have other important activities: such as the making of household articles like pots, mats, rope and bags. In quiet times they collect firewood which is scarce in the highlands. Towards the beginning of the dry season the women form parties to hunt for tadpoles and frogs: there are no fish in most Bangwa rivers. In the past large-scale diversion of rivers was organised by the queen-mother (mafwa) to snare tadpoles in dams. Apart from plantains Bangwa men showed little interest in farming. Recently, however, they have been encouraged to grow cashcrops: cocoa in the lowlands and coffee in the highlands. The production of oil has always been important and forms one of Bangwa's biggest exports. Other permanent crops, none of which is of special commercial interest, are kola, avocado pears, 'plums', Indian bamboo, the 'date' palm and two kinds of raffia. The four different types of palm all produce wine but only the raffias and date palm are exploited to any degree. Oil palm wine, although coveted, involves cutting down the trees which is prohibited. Raffia and Indian bamboo provide important building materials and the 'date' palm provides fibres for mat- and basket-making.

Land, as such, was not a scarce commodity in Bangwa although fertile land, or flat land was specially valued. On the whole it was people who were lacking: chiefs welcomed immigrants whatever their status or past history, arranging for houses to be built for them and allowing them and their wives equal access to available farm land. Who owns the land

in Bangwa? Is it privately owned like most other property: houses, palm groves, etc.? In the first place all the land within the boundary of a chiefdom belongs to the chief: the mountains, the rivers, the virgin forests, the farms. The chief 'cares for the land' only. He calls together the ku'ngang society to ensure the fertility of the soil through annual sacrifices. He settles disputes. He allocates land for community purposes. And, as far as the unoccupied forest lands are concerned, any subject of the chief may claim usufruct by clearing it. However, within a chiefdom subchiefs also claim to 'own the land', subject to the paramount chief's overriding claims. Within the land of a chiefdom or a subchiefdom a chief has completely private rights only to those gardens immediately attached to the palace. Other farming tracts are controlled by the chief and shared out to his wives and the wives of his subjects. Within a chiefdom a noble or compound head will only own a fenced area attached to his compound: this will be used for garden crops (spinach, garden eggs, etc.), plantains and, today, coffee. Most men's wives depend on a share of the farming tract divided annually by the chiefs. This will be a woman's primary plot for two or three years; it reverts to fallow after the cocoyams and subsidiary crops of maize and groundnuts have been harvested. A woman will also have farms in neighbouring quarters or chiefdoms since certain areas are valued for certain crops; and six or seven farms will prevent the calamity of a crop failure in one area. A woman's rights to her farms are essentially temporary: when they are fallow she loses any rights unless she has planted permanent crops (pear trees or coffee) or has cleared untouched virgin bush herself. In general one can say that land is a 'free good': there are no permanent rights to farm land; no payments are made, even in kind, to the 'owner' of the land. In some places however conditions are changing. Land beside the new motor roads, around important markets, especially if it is flat, is coveted by traders, who may not traditionally have any rights to land in that area. There is a tendency for commoners to sell land surrounding their compounds, which was traditionally for their individual use. On the other hand there is a fear that chiefs may take advantage of their position as traditional overlord to transfer land at will and for their personal profit. The development of cash crops and new village settlements will exacerbate this problem: up to the moment the administration, while supporting the chief's rights in principle, has made no general ruling.

Although land could never be sold in the past this was not the case of permanent crops which were sold, leased or pawned at will since they are owned individually and quite separately from the soil on which they are grown. Palm trees, especially, change hands frequently: they may be inherited, sold for cash or pawned and pledged. In the latter cases a palm grove is handed over for a certain period in exchange for an amount of money - usually the owner also claims an annual tribute in oil. The position concerning cash crops is ambivalent but in general they have been treated as permanent crops. Rights to land and crops are thus multiple; sharing rights in one plot will be the chief as general overlord, the sub-chief in whose country the land is located, the owner of the palm trees, the owner of the coffee bushes under the palm trees, and the woman who is intercropping maize and cocoyams among the coffee.

MEN'S ACTIVITIES

The Bangwa men despise farming but they are far from being laggards. They were, in the past, pre-eminently traders and warriors but they were also producers of oil, capable hunters, rearers of livestock and specialised craftsmen. Livestock rearing has taken on an increased importance within recent years. Whereas in the past (vide Cadman Assessment Report) the Bangwa depended on buying their livestock from eastern markets they are now supplying the populous Bamileke areas with pigs and goats. Nowadays each household head has a pig or two the meat of which fetches high prices in the local markets: women and children are kept busy providing them with food. Goats roam the paths, often wreaking havoc in the women's farms: they are mostly used for gift-exchange or sacrifice. Hens are numerous. Sheep are owned by the more well-to-do mainly as a store of wealth. Cattle are kept only in the eastern highlands: the chief of Fontem has a herd of dwarf cattle which is, unfortunately, fast diminishing.

Specialised activities include those of the smith, carver, diviner, priest and healer; nowadays there are also carpenters and tailors. The Fontem blacksmiths are well-known in the Cameroon grassfields. The craft traditionally came to Fontem during the slaving period; one of the chief's slaves was a smith and he and his family were set up in the palace to make the double gongs for the lefem societies of Bangwa and the Bamileke kwifo societies, and more esoteric instruments for the tro secret society. The Fontem blacksmiths are still nominally servants of the chief. The Bangwa also excel at carving and featherwork which are considered fit occupations for aristocrats. The present chief of Fontem is an excellent carver in wood and ivory. Many masks, stools and drums are sold in the east the standard of Bamileke sculpture having declined in recent years. Stylised, skin-covered masks typical of the Cross River area are also made. Carvings of former chiefs and queen mothers are considered sacred and are associated with the important tro and lefem societies. Unfortunately the drastic German punitive expedition which occurred at the turn of the century resulted in the burning of many chief's compound and his treasures.

The flourishing Bangwa economy has always depended primarily on trade. A geographically advantageous position between the densely populated savannah regions and the forest zones in contact with the Cross River and Calabar has stimulated the Bangwa's role as middlemen. Apart from the always important trade in salt, oil and other local commodities the Bangwa traded slaves, guns, European articles, and prestige objects such as flywhisks, carvings, beadwork and the blue and white stencilled cloth which was valued by chiefs and nobles. Various currencies were in circulation in the past: small multi-coloured trade beads, of which the red variety (kpeng) were the most valuable, iron rods, a type of reddish cloth, and to a lesser extent cowries (mbi).

Slaves were bought in the east and sold to Banyang or Keaka traders for sale in the Cross River markets; or towards the south where they were sold in Wouri and Mungo markets. The exact slave routes from the east are unknown: some slaves in Bangwa came from as far afield as Fumban. They were captives in war, criminals; some were kidnapped as babies, as

people still alive in Bangwa can testify. Within Bangwa itself persons convicted of witchcraft, murder, or adultery with the wives of titled men were also sold. Chiefs were the principal traders although individual fortunes were made by commoners. Chiefs' servants traded for them: they maintained special contacts both in the east and the west. On the whole this kind of trading was conducted outside the markets. Most male slaves were sold; a few were retained as palace servants, or to climb the oil palms in the lowlands. The whole structure of Bangwa society depended on the slave trade: to some extent its present day structure is a result of it. Many female slaves were married. Slaves were on the whole well-treated and frequently rose to positions of wealth and political importance. Descendants of slave-retainers are now important subchiefs. Unlike their neighbours, the Banyang, the Bangwa attach little stigma to slave parentage: in fact no Bangwa can say with certainty that there is no slave blood in his family. Children of slaves were technically free, although their children might continue their father's work in the palace. Some people say that the position of a slave (*efwet*) or the child of a slave (*mwombembe*) was more advantageous than that of a man's free born son: a chief or wealthy man feared his sons, but trusted his loyal slave or servant, rewarding them with political office and women. A childless man could appoint his slave as his successor. Since German times trafficking in slaves has been forbidden but trading in European goods remained important and could be exchanged in the east, against cash now instead of human beings. Young men, singly or in pairs, travelled to Calabar and Onitsha to buy goods to sell in the Bangwa, Bamileke and Mbo markets. Many owners of fine, European-styled compounds and a plurality of wives owe their position to this lucrative trade. But with independence and re-unification Calabar and Onitsha were cut off and quick profits are no longer to be made. Trade goods are brought into Bangwa from Kumba now, either head-loaded or by road through Dschang. Costs have risen and profits fallen. Bangwa traders also fear the removal of tariff restrictions between East and West Cameroon and the serious competition of highly-organised Bamileke traders.

INTERNAL TRADE AND MARKETS

Most of the internal trade is in the hands of women although young men earn money by trading livestock and oil in the Bamileke markets, and wine in the Banyang markets. Women carry smoked meat and fish from the forest areas to the highland markets; palm wine to the lowlands; and cocoyams, oil and oil kernels to the east returning with groundnuts and maize. There is a general trading pattern from Banyang forest market, to Bangwa lowland market, Bangwa central highland market and Bamileke Grassfield market - all of which a Bangwa trader, male or female, may attend in one eight-day week. Wives of chiefs and nobles, on the other hand, are usually forbidden to carry out these long-distance and strenuous trading expeditions: they earn pin money by trading foodstuffs in their local markets: cocoyams, cassava flour, maize beans, roasted groundnuts, kola nuts and garden eggs. With these small profits they are able to buy small quantities of salt, meat and oil to supplement their husband's contributions. The women who trade more extensively can afford to buy household articles, cloth and make important contributions to their children's schooling.

Bangwa is dotted all over with markets, large and small. No chief worth his salt is without one. They are usually on the forest-savannah trading routes within each chiefdom: trade was never north-south. For this reason it was no anomaly that each of the major markets occurred on the same day of the eight-day week (amina): this was altered by the British administration. In Fontem (population 7,400 in 1953) there are four important markets, and half a dozen others are attended regularly by the inhabitants. A market was established in the past by a chief planting a 'fig' tree (nda) in front of his palace and sacrificing a goat which was buried below it. It was his duty to protect the people attending his market. He himself, however, by custom, is forbidden to enter the market on market days: he sits with his retinue outside the palace and is available to his subjects to receive their compliments or settle their disputes. Nowadays he may collect taxes or carry out local government business. Announcements are made by a royal servant who walks through the market carrying the nkeng leaf, which symbolises peace, or the royal double gong. In one corner of the large and colourful market at Fontem some of the chief's councillors are available for settling disputes between traders. Ibo traders attend with their fancy-goods and patent medicines. Palm wine is sold in prodigious quantities in many tiny stalls. Cattle and pigs are slaughtered and sold in a special section; livestock is sold in another; smoked fish and game in another etc. Solidly built shops owned by Bangwa traders are slowly springing up around the market squares but sites for such enterprises are difficult to acquire, especially for strangers. Many regulations surround market trading a form of protection exists by which non-Bangwa are forbidden to sell certain kinds of goods such as pork; and all traders are strictly enjoined to abstain from encouraging adultery etc.

TRADITIONAL BANGWA SOCIETY

Both the Bangwa country and its inhabitants have attracted the sympathetic attention of outside visitors. Administrators wrote of the precipitous terrain, narrow cliff paths, wild, dropping waterfalls and the proud, colourful people in their lonely fastnesses: the men with their hair long, dressed in elaborate styles; the women shaven and naked. On ceremonial occasions both men and women brought out splendid clothes and fantastic masks. The Europeans admired the clean well-kept compounds, the elegant houses, the trim hedges. Each adult Bangwa has his own compound, built away from the main paths; unless it is a modern style house with its shining zinc roof, it is invisible to the passing stranger. When a young man wished to start an independent adult life he was given a length of bamboo from his father, symbolising his consent and limiting the size of the walls of his square house. People did not live in villages, nor even in compounds of extended families. It has been suggested that witchcraft fears sent them off to build their houses in the bush alone. Others say: 'Should we fear our friends and relations to such an extent that we should live on top of them in case they do us harm?' Separate compounds tie in with Bangwa individualism and their system of inheritance whereby most of a man's inheritance goes to his heir: other sons had to seek their fortunes independently.

A private path leads off the main track, winding in what often seems a haphazard fashion before reaching a suitably dignified height to descend down elaborate steps to the open dancing place before the Great House (ndia ndi) which most compounds boast. Visitors,

friends and subjects meet in this house which, in the compounds of chiefs and nobles, is often an imposing building. The right to a number of poles, granted by the chief, indicates the rank of the owner. In the compound each wife has her own house where she cooks and works and where she and her children sleep. The compound head has his private quarters (if he is a polygynist) usually hidden from view behind a tall fence made of fern poles. Here he keeps his heirlooms, his ancestors skulls etc., and receives his closest friends. He takes his meals and entertains visitors in the Great House.

The tall solid Bangwa house attracts admiration after the squat oblong houses of the forest peoples. Flat sites are difficult to find for building purposes and areas are laboriously levelled by hand: enormous boulders which can not be shifted are left surrounding the houses. The traditional shape of a Bangwa house is a cube on a shallow circular foundation of stones, surmounted by a conical thatched roof. The size and proportions vary according to the importance of the building but the basic shape of a woman's hut and a large chief's meeting house is the same.

The dry season is the time for house building, and involves friends, neighbours and relations. The women work the mud and the men make the timber supports. The method of making the walls recalls European half-timbering: there is a wooden framework (here of ant-resisting fern poles) with a lattice between which is plastered to leave the framework revealed. The fern poles are driven into the ground to form a square, about a foot apart. Cross-posts (palm ribs) are lashed to the uprights with flexible vines as ropes. Mud is thrown on to this surface by women. The roof is constructed of four triangular frames which are bound on to a round tray: resting on the building the triangles join in the middle forming the curve of the roof. Thatch is of raffia, not grass as in the Bamileke districts. The interior of the house is plastered with mud although superior ones are lined with bamboos tied together with vines making decorative patterns. There are no windows, light entering through the small rectangular door, its threshold a couple of feet above the floor. Storage space is inside the roof. Beds and shelves are built into the walls with bamboos. Traditional houses were rebuilt every ten or fifteen years, although some large ceremonial houses have been standing for nearly fifty years.

The large cluster of houses comprising a chief's palace gives the impression of a village. The palace at Fontem is no longer built entirely in the traditional style: most of the Fon's wives (he has over forty) live in two long rows of zinc-roofed huts. Previously the palace was a maze of wives' huts centering on courtyards fenced off with fern poles and entered through porches. There were also the houses of the chief's servants and for the important associations, tro and lefem. The chief's sleeping quarters - the nti ma, or heart of the palace - was situated amidst these clusters of wives' houses. Access to this area was difficult; nobody but a trusted wife or retainer even knew in which room Fontem Asunganyi was sleeping. At Fontem there were two meeting houses: the lemoo where cases were heard and where the chief sat on ordinary occasions, and the ndia ala, or house of the country, where important meetings involving the whole of Lebang were held. At the present time Fontem has a large concrete meeting house outside the main palace gate; inside the palace is a large three-storied - 'rest house' built by Asunganyi in the thirties. It is used for visitors and the

Fon's adolescent sons. Behind another cluster of wives' houses is the large thatched lemoo, a huge traditional structure on a circular stone foundation, supported by weighty poles. Inside the walls are intricately panelled with bamboos. There are special alcoves for subchiefs, noble and commoners: the chief sits with his wives and servants at one end. Outside the palace there is a large dancing green and beyond is the lefem: a copse where royal children are buried and where the cult association with its harmonious gongs meet on a certain day each week. It had its own servant, Mwo Bu Lefem, a weird unkempt creature who lived in the bush and cared for the valuable gongs. Protecting the palace against witchcraft was a line of stones (ledzü) and as one of the most vital symbols of chiefship a monolith called mwo ala.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

An elaborate etiquette gives outward cognisance to a ranking system which includes chiefs, subchiefs, nobles, commoners, royals, slave servants, titled servants; also the old and young, men and women, wife-givers and wife-takers. Even within a single class - subchiefs for example - there is a hierarchy determined by the age of the title, whether it was 'bought' or 'came from God', the incumbent's relationship to the paramount chief, etc. A subchief's rank determined his seating in the national assembly, whether his wives wore brass anklets, the number of supporting poles and doors of his ndia ndi ('great house'), the amount his successor paid to the chief as death dues etc.

The most obvious difference, perhaps, is between the sexes. Men and women co-operate rarely in daily life. A man has his own interests, his own friends; contact between husband and wife is minimal - even travelling together to a funeral ceremony a man walks ahead, his wives behind with their paraphernalia. Women are expected to adopt a subservient mien in the presence of men: they sit only when bidden, rarely eat in a man's presence, and when a woman meets a man on the farm paths she will slightly bow and stamp her foot in greeting. Even today when an important man visits a compound the old ladies come out, bow down and with a swaying motion sweep the ground with their hands. Nevertheless some women achieve positions of importance; and the 'hen-pecked' husband is as common in Bangwa as Europe. Queen mothers and a chief's ranking wives take precedence over men. Old women, especially the mothers of large families receive tremendous respect. Old age, in general, takes precedence over political or social rank. General courtesy, however, between all ranks and sexes is a marked characteristic of Bangwa social life. The poorest woman, the meanest servant, the tiniest child is shown a serious and respectful attention due to any individual.

THE CHIEF

The Bangwa chief (efwa) is the focal point and strength of the traditional system. It was to his chief that a man owed his primary loyalties in the past - not to his lineage or his age grade. The chief is not divine: neither he nor his ancestors form the basis for a national cult: but he has sacred attributes and performs important rites for the well-being and fertility of his subjects. A subject speaks to him with his hands before his mouth, after attracting his attention by clapping his hands twice three times and standing in a stooped position; he

leaves his presence bent low and walking backwards. If a chief sneezes one of his retinue calls one of his many praise names: 'great snake', 'leopard', 'God on earth'. In the past, and in some respects still today, the Bangwa chief was feared by everyone, and with reason, since his power over his subjects was considerable.

The duties of the chief towards his subjects are arduous and rarely neglected. He settles their family quarrels, their land disputes, accusations of witchcraft; he attends their funeral ceremonies; he directs community projects. The present chief of Fontem is available to his people day and night; he cures their aches and pains, gives advice, settles disputes over succession, conducts witch-proving rituals, attends to matters of local and national politics (he is a member of the House of Chiefs), and deals with his own huge compound and farming interests.

The paramount chief's wealth can be considerable. Certain articles come to him as his due: ivory tusks, leopard skins etc., which are the traditional symbols of chieftaincy. His harem may be extensive and he has important rights in the marriage payments of a large percentage of his female subjects (his wards or azem'ndkap) At the death of his subchiefs and nobles he receives death dues which might be the transfer of a marriage ward, an oil grove, or simply cash. He owns extensive palm tree forests which were cared for by his slaves and servants in the past; nowadays the groves are pawned to men who provide him with an annual tribute in kind. Palm wine is also brought to him by tappers with raffia palm concessions. Otherwise there is no formal tribute or taxation system although subchiefdoms and quarters were expected to bring gifts during annual celebrations at the capital.

Conquered areas, such as Mbo, formerly brought smoked fish and game. The services of his servants (tshöfwa) are also an important source of income. The Fontem blacksmith family were originally his slaves: most of the profits from the sale or exchange of their valuable gongs and tro instruments went to the palace. The chief also expects his immediate subjects, the inhabitants of the palace quarters, to provide labour for the building and repair of his palace. The great meeting house (lemoo) is the responsibility of the whole country. Perhaps the greatest source of wealth in the past was from trading, mainly in slaves. His sons and servants traded for him and he had permanent trading alliances with eastern chiefs and Banyang traders. His special servant in the lefem traded slaves in the west, insisting as the chief's trader, on prior entry into the market. An attempt, not particularly successful, was made by the chiefs to monopolise the trading of guns.

There is no doubt that Bangwa chiefs frequently showed unpraiseworthy cupidity in the past. The property of childless, wealthy men was confiscated; the property of witches or adulterers sold or hanged was sent to the palace. Fontem Asunganyi had an important source of profit as a marriage broker, arranging the marriage to the highest bidder of widows or disputed wives. More reputable gains were made from fines, 'thank-you' fees for settling disputes, and the administration of a nobleman's property during the minority of his heir.

Nowadays the resources of a chief are more limited; and this decline in wealth is paralleled by a decline in political power. The chief still has marriage rights in his wards; he still owns palm groves. But his subjects are questioning his rights to a share of the bridewealth of the descendants of slaves; and his resident palm oil producers are no longer willing to hand over the chief's traditional share. The present Chief of Fontem receives payment as local tax collector, member of the Customary Court, and the West Cameroon House of Chiefs. He also attempts to make ends meet by growing coffee and hiring out his Landrover to local traders. One heavy financial obligation is the education of his many children all of them, girls and boys, attend the local primary schools and some are in the south for further education.

ADMINISTRATION

In Lebang (Fontem) the political pattern does not differ greatly from that found in other Bangwa chiefdoms and across the border among the Western Bamileke. The chief is supreme ruler, owner of the land, father of his people etc., etc.: but important powers are delegated to subchiefs (efwantö) who ruled their own countries with an almost free hand. The paramount chief has direct administrative dealings only with his own hamlets (lepfö) inhabited by his personal subjects (his fumbe) A hamlet is in charge of an Nkem nominally appointed by the chief but the post may inevitably become hereditary. These hamlets surrounded the palace but were also scattered throughout the chiefdom between the territory of the sub-chiefs. The immediate palace hamlets are administered by bakem (pl. of nkem) usually important retainers or ex-retainers of the chief. Other hamlet heads are independent nobles, commoners and royal sons, who do not aspire to the rank of sub-chief: some hamlets are tiny, perhaps a man, his wives and children and a single servant. In these cases the title has been bought by the Nkem and he plays little administrative role. Other hamlets contain a motley collection of people; in the forests they are possibly descendants of people sent to climb the Fon's palm trees and produce oil for trading. The inhabitants of a hamlet are mostly a mixed bunch since mobility throughout the country is high but there is a core consisting of the family of the hamlet head or nkem.

Chiefs depended very much on a body of servants or retainers who inhabited the palace precincts. They were of varied origins: some were descendants of slaves; others were the sons of female marriage wards (azemnkap) even a free man could become a chief's servant since palace service often entailed advantages (a wife perhaps) which a man's father could not provide. Immigrants to the country, exiled from their homes because of accusations of witchcraft or adultery, had no choice but accept the chief's bounty and become his servant. A slave (efwet) was quite a different status from that of servant (tshöfwa) Even among the body of palace retainers there were ranks.

A retainer's duties were varied. Some looked after the running of the palace and watched over the Fons wives. Others supervised community work-parties; collected the chief's oil dues or traditional payments such as death dues and bride wealth; arranged the marriages of royal daughters. One or two trusty retainers lived in the chief's private apartments; sometimes they acquired power both inside and outside the palace. Loyal service was

rewarded by gifts (palm groves, wives) or promotion to the status of Great Servant (tshö fwa ndi). A powerful Bangwa chief trusted his servants more than his councillors (bakem) or royal sons (ebwo fwa): a servant would be unlikely to wish him harm for political or personal reasons.

Favourite retainers were frequently married to royal daughters: the Fontem queen mothers married, as a rule, their fathers retainers. This enabled them to remain living in the palace, and gave them the required independence not available to the wife of a noble Bangwa. It also meant that the property acquired by a servant and by a queen mother would not leave the royal family: the successor would be a royal.

The Fon's executive council, tro ndi called 'the Nine', consisted of the nine great retainers of the chief. These were palace intimates; their titles were inherited by their sons but the chief had the power to change the succession. The Nine were always associated with the chief, both inside and outside the palace. They alone were allowed to sit with the chief's wives. They shared the chief's spiritual activities: together they were transformed into leopards or pythons, joining other paramount chiefs and their retainers in the other world where they performed feats of agility and competed in splendour. For this reason the Nine were feared, particularly by the chief who depended on them while travelling on these spiritual ventures. The explanation of the recent death of a Western Bamileke chief was that his Nine trapped him into falling into a huge hunting pit while exploring the pleasures of the witch world. The political position of individual members of the Nine was not secure because of this: several of them have been accused of witchcraft or plotting against the chief in the past and were hanged or sold into slavery. To the Nine were also confided many unsavoury aspects of government, arranging the hanging of witches and adulterers and carrying out sassafras poison ordeals.

In a sense the Nine were also the Bangwa kingmakers. It was to them the chief confided the name of his successor on his death bed. They protected the palace during the often turbulent interregnum and saved the young chief from possible usurpation. The Nine announce the chief's death, supervise the ritual preparation of the corpse and announce his successor to the populace. They have other important activities: they make a sacrifice involving the mystic stone of the country which stands outside every Bangwa palace (mwo ala); they play a vital role in the ceremony which follows the killing of a leopard; one of them accompanies the chief when he makes a regular sacrifice to the royal skulls. In Fontem the Nine were originally slaves or retainers; however they frequently married royal daughters so that their successors become relatives, 'sister's sons', of the chief.

THE SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

The chief was primarily concerned with settling disputes among his immediate subjects (his fumbe); his subchiefs were allowed to deal with their own cases locally. He was aided in this by bakem and his trusted servants, of whom only a selected few attended his council or court (atshem). The chief sits in his meeting house (lemoo) everyday to discuss political questions with his councillors and subjects or to settle disputes, although special days were

set aside for the hearing of important cases. Some decisions were taken in the secrecy of the tro house with members of the Nine; but on the whole proceedings were informal and open to the general public. Rich and poor brought cases; payment rarely exceeded a gift of wine to be drunk by the deliberating elders. Punishments included forced labour in the palace, restitutive payments and fines. A section of the tro society was used to place injunctions on disputed property and carry out punishments.

If cases appeared to have no obvious solution there was recourse to various methods of divination or ordeal: ngu. A pepper seed placed in the eye of an accused man proved his guilt if it did not come out immediately; a chief's servant might be sent to the forest to shoot the first squirrel or antelope he saw: its sex determined the innocence or guilt of the parties; a sheaf of leaves held in the hand of the diviner was manipulated in a certain way to answer questions put to it by the judges. Many of these practices were open to fraud and bribery, a fact recognised by most Bangwa, as most people preferred to make a simple oath at an oathing site found in the chief's lemoo or in the sacred lefem copse. For serious cases such as witchcraft and adultery the fearful sasswood ordeal was conducted by the tro society. If the accused man or woman failed to vomit the poison their guilt was proven and the masked men beheaded the victim by the river's edge.

These procedures for settling disputes were conducted at all levels of the political organisation. Even within a tiny quarter, atshem were held under the guidance of respected elders. This is the common way of settling cases arising from divorce and the repayment of bride price. But nowadays the general system of atshem has broken down as far as civil and criminal disputes are concerned. A system of local councils was introduced in the late 'fifties mainly as a result of agitation on the part of commoners who formed the Bangwa Improvement Union; they considered that traditional methods were not in line with modern changes. In Fontem there are twelve electoral units who provide a member each for the elected council. It meets on Sundays and hears cases brought before it by individuals not prepared to go to the Customary Court. The chief is its president still but members are 'young men', not his personal cronies and titled brothers as before. Another twelve elected men form a community development council whose special concern is providing materials and roads for such projects as road-building, schools etc. Twelve other persons have been elected to attend the periodic meetings of the joint Bangwa-Mundani council where matters of wider concern are debated: at the moment members are discussing the important road-link between Tali and the east; the alarming increases in marriage payments; the position of marriage wards; and the setting up of an independent Bangwa council and treasury.

THE SUBCHIEFS

Apart from the palace hamlets a Bangwa chiefdom is divided into subchiefdoms which have an important degree of political independence. The subchiefs (efwantö) are of varied origin: some are conquered, formerly independent chiefs; others are royal cadets raised to subchief status; others are descendants of queen mothers, wealthy commoners, or great servants. In Fontem conquered subchiefs include Foreke Belua, Fombindia, Fombö, Fawchap; former royals are Fobella Nga, Fonge, Fossung; Fonka and Fobella Ngang Nga

are descendants of queen mothers. In the past an important subchief ruled a miniature state with its own quarters and quarterheads, atshem etc. The subchief received the respect due to a chief, and services and gifts from his subjects. He had his own lemoo sacred lefem copse, sacred stone (mwo ala), his own tro society; the chiefdom had its own spiritual guardian residing in a huge rock or spectacular waterfall; and fertility ritual for the benefit of the subchiefdom was conducted by the subchief. Nevertheless the paramount chief imposed important restrictions on his independence. Political affairs concerning the whole country were settled by the chief in concert with his subchiefs and bakem. Subchiefs were forbidden to undertake private wars. No subchief could inflict the death penalty, even on a slave and cases of witchcraft, murder and adultery with a royal wife were judged by the chief. A subchief was only installed with the consent of his chief and after paying a stiff inheritance fee. Not infrequently in the past a paramount chief installed the heir of his choice against the wishes of the dead subchief.

The Bangwa political system is clearly segmented. Governmental powers were delegated to several levels. Even the bakem or quarter heads had important governing and administrative rights.

SUCCESSION

Succession disputes at subchiefdom and chiefdom level appear to be the rule rather than the exception although strenuous attempts are made to restrict the effects of the quarrels to the palace. Until a chief makes his will (orally in the past, but now sometimes written), which only happens on his death bed, nobody but perhaps his closest advisors are aware of his choice. It is rarely his eldest son. At Fontem Asunganyi 's accession in the eighties of last century, the heir was supported by his father's retainers and they with the help of his elder sister thwarted an attempt by his uncle to usurp the throne. When the present Chief Fontem succeeded a virulent but brief dispute as to the proper succession was quashed by the discovery of a photograph taken by a District Officer which showed the old chief with his chosen heir. Frequently a chief dies with his successor still a minor. The appointed regent may be a queen mother, a servant, or, in rarer cases, the dead chief's brother. Some times (as in Fotabong I and Fossungo earlier this century) it is difficult to remove the regent from his position of power. During my stay in Bangwa in 1965 one paramount chiefdom (Foreke Cha Cha) was administered by a queen mother regent; while several subchiefdoms (Fonjenawung and Fombö are two examples) were under the care of servants. In the latter cases the ex-servant assumes all the trappings and prerogatives of chiefship, including the royal wives, until the coming-of-age of the young chief.

The ceremonies surrounding the burial of a chief and the succession of his heir are elaborate. I witnessed the mortuary ceremonies of one important subchief and the succession ceremony of the chief of Foreke Cha Cha ; the latter was somewhat abridged due to the fact that the young chief is a Christian. Upon the death of a chief the news is circulated amongst his closest friends and special relatives and sent to neighbouring chiefs. His burial is usually carried out under a cloak of secrecy. A post mortem examination for divining witchcraft is not usually made for a paramount chief. The important feature of the

burial is the ritual rubbing of the corpse by his successor and the new queen mother, the tying of a white cock in his right hand (to counteract atmospheric disturbances caused by the death of a chief), and the actual inhumation by members of his tro society. The tro members dress in their masked costume, one of them hiding beneath its folds the tro ndi itself, the supreme object associated with tro and chiefship. The body is lowered into the grave, facing east; in the past a paramount chief was supposed to have been buried with one or two slaves, now he is wrapped in valuable cloths with a precious bead (placed in his nose. When the grave is filled in the tro leader thumps the mound with a plantain stem, and the others give out weird shouts and shake the jangling tro ndi instrument over the grave. The unearthly cries and rattling indicate to the assembly populace that their chief is dead and buried; from this moment only they and his widows are allowed to show signs of grief. In Fonjumetor there is a variation in that a dog or sheep is beaten and beaten until it cries, whereupon the assembled mourners begin to wail. Among the Bamileke a poor slave or servant was beaten and hounded, crying, from the chiefdom at this stage.

The widows mourn for nine weeks. During this time they neither wash nor cook food and sleep on dried plantains leaves in the lemoo. At the end of the mourning period they are shaven, washed and ritually oiled by an old woman specially deputed for the role. The succession rites for the new chief follow immediately after the burial ritual unless he is a child when the ceremony is delayed. The children of the dead chief are assembled in one corner of the dancing area where the mourners are gathered. Suddenly the tro members in their terrifying costumes skip out of the palace precincts over towards the children snatching one by one the successor and his titled brothers and sisters: first the chief, then the mafwa (the queen mother), the nkweta (the senior brother title), the asa'a, morfwa and angkweta (another female title). Not all the titles may be given at this time but the chief, Nkweta and Mafwa are essential. They are conducted to houses erected for the use of the tro society where they are decked out in special hoods made from the royal stencilled cloth. They are presented thus to the people and then returned to the palace where they are secluded for seven or nine weeks. During this time they are rubbed with oil, medicine and camwood, and fed with the choicest foods. The chief cohabits with wives specially married at this time and some selected widows; until one of them conceives he can not be called chief: he is known as tanyi nkö (the 'child father of twins' litt.). The woman who bears the first child becomes ngwi nkem, chief wife. His first wife, if he has been married before succeeding to the throne receives the title of ngwi konge (favourite wife). During the new chief 's seclusion he is visited by subchiefs, nobles and neighbouring chiefs. His titled retainers, the Nine, tell him stories of his country. After the seclusion period he may not necessarily take up the reins of government immediately; frequently there is a long interregnum. Fontem Asunganyi decreed, on his death bed, that his son should not rule until three years were passed; during this time the country was put under the care of his capable queen mother and his sister's son, Fonka Ekokobe .

A chief's property goes primarily to his heir but an important part is divided amongst his children; in theory each son who did not marry during his father's lifetime should receive one of his widows now. Unscrupulous sons often claimed more; stories are told of pitched battles between sons (supported by their mothers and kin) and the servants and loyal

relatives of the new chief who tried to keep the royal property intact. The bulk of the property goes to the successor (widows, marriage wards, oil palm groves, rights in the marriage payments of royal daughters and their matrilineal descendants); Nkweta also took wives and a portion of the property, often as much as he could; lesser title-holders took proportionate shares.

Royal brother and sister titles are a feature of the Bangwa political system. Nkweta is the chief's second-in-command: Asunganyi half-brother, Nkweta Fondu, supported him throughout the sixty-odd years of his reign and was rewarded with the title of subchief. Another title, Asa'a goes to a half-brother and may be translated as 'spokesman'. Asaba is a title given to the chief's first born son. Mwofwa is a title reserved to the chief's full brother or a close member of his immediate family: Asunganyi gave it to his sister's son, now Fobella Ngang Nga . The roles played by these titled brothers depend on the strength of their personalities. At the present time Nkweta Fontem is a retiring personality who has no wish to make his mark on politics; the opposite may be said for his half-brother Asa'a . There are also two female titles, Angkweta and Mafwa. The word 'mafwa' means 'female chief' and in some respects she is considered as such. She is given the respect of a chief and may represent him at almost all royal functions; in Fontem she enters the tro society house with him and sacrifices to the royal skulls. The mafwa and the new chief together rub the corpse of their father. Her duties mainly concern women; she is the 'mother' of the palace, the Fon's wives bringing their complaints and quarrels to her. Domestic disputes throughout the country may be brought to her. She organises women's activities, either farming, recreational and (today) political. In Foreke Cha Cha the mafwa acted for many years as the country's regent and was treated in all respects as a chief. The mafwa of Fontem, Mafwankeng is a powerful and much admired personality. Named after her father's sister she was the support and solace of Chief Asunganyi through the last years of his reign. Towards the end she supported him in state matters, dealing with European administrators and representing her father in the customary court. She is now a court member in her own right. She leads the women's association ake and organises meetings for the local KNDP party. Married to one of her father's servants, she divorced and now has her own compound, her own wife, and a standing in Fontem and Bangwa generally which is undisputed.

ASSOCIATIONS

In Bangwa societies or associations ('jujus') organised for political, economic and social activities are still of great importance. Many of them, particularly the recreational societies, come and go according to fashion, but the two traditional societies tro and lefem will always have a vital part to play. Tro is a society linked with chiefship. It is divided into ranked sections: the great tro (tro ndi) consists of the chief and his mafwa (and sometimes the chief's Great Wife, the ngwi kem) and the Nine. This section rarely meets nowadays except to play a ritual role at the death and succession of chiefs. In the minds of the Bangwa, tro, with its masked members and mysterious dances, is associated with fearful punishments, hangings and witchcraft ordeals. And its members indulged in spiritual exercises associated by their subjects with witchcraft. Another section of tro includes

subchiefs and nkem who have bought from the chief their own section of this society. This section is nowadays nothing but an 'eating and drinking' society; they are entitled to important prestations of meat and drink at the funeral celebrations of one of their members. Eating and drinking at the funeral of a fellow member is a common factor of all Bangwa societies, new or old; his successor is honour bound to provide these dues if he wishes to inherit his father's status in the society.

Membership of the lefem society was also linked to status and rank but all citizens could belong, if they could afford the initial payments; the only taboo was that no one could join the lefem society while his father was alive. The lefem of Chief Fontem met in the sacred copse outside his palace; his subchiefs also had lefem copses, but lesser ranks played the gongs associated with the society inside their compounds. A man's rank, or wealth, also determined the number of gongs played in his lefem. Only Fontem was allowed the great fombi a huge seven-foot-high double gong which was brought out only on the greatest occasions and then with strict magical precautions. The music from the gongs is very beautiful both to the African and European ear; lefem is the most popular of the Bangwa societies.

Aka is another society; it no longer meets in Fontem but it is still popular in neighbouring chiefdoms. It was a society for the rich; in the past a slave was paid to the chief by an aspiring member. It is associated with the beautiful embroidered bead masks made to resemble elephants with wide flapping ears and hanging trunk. The day aka met all a chief's subjects who were not members were banned to their compounds and forbidden to utter a sound; even cocks were kept under baskets in case they crowed and incurred the owner a stiff fine.

All of these societies had governmental and judicial functions; in all of them for example disputes between members were discussed and settled. Both lefem and aka had oathing sites associated with their meeting houses.

Before colonial times Bangwa warriors were organised into an association called afu'ka (or manjong) with a central group of skilled fighters called alaling. These societies were not, in Fontem, organised into age grades as in Bamileke and parts of Bamenda. Instead each subchiefdom and quarter sent their own recruits to be trained at the capital. They fought usually in one body although different sections might be sent out on special raids. The vigour of Fontem's defence against the superior German forces was even appreciated by their adversaries. Associated with these warrior organisations were medicines they acquired from their Banyang neighbours. This was ajia, a medicine which required a complicated seven-day ritual known only to a few initiates. The end effect, it is said, was to deflect the enemy's bullets from the owner's body. Afu'ka and manjong are dancing societies only today; in Western Bamileke its members meet for community purposes, road building, palace repair etc. Recreational societies have been introduced from Keaka (Ekoi) and Calabar by visiting Banyang and they are most popular at funeral celebrations ('cry-dies') and public occasions. They include Angbu, Niyangkpe, and Alungatshaba and are associated with elaborate costumes and masks and joyous dancing and singing. In these

societies, in contrast to tro and lefem all men are free to join for a nominal fee, at least in the lower sections and even the women are allowed to join the dancing. In some western Bangwa districts Nyangkpe has an important political role, the elders of the society settling most disputes. Fontem Asunganyi bought most of these dance societies from the Banyang for reasons of prestige. He also bought, but for different reasons, anti-witchcraft medicines. The most widespread of these is mfam a powerful medicine bought in the 1920s and which has spread well into East Cameroon . According to reports its power to punish alleged witches and their families is extraordinary. Leaves from the 'mfam' tree are used for divining. And in the customary courts set up by the British natives swore on this medicine: "If I lie let mfam kill me; if I tell the truth let mfam leave me alone." The death of a confessed witch is usually attributed to mfam or allied medicines and considerable fees are paid to its owner in order to have their powers revoked.

The traditional Bangwa anti-witchcraft society was ku'n gang. Its members possessed powerful medicine for preventing famine, and individual sterility and barrenness. Recently ku'ngang has suffered something of an eclipse but the images associated with the society are still considered powerful (they are supposed to walk and dance and go out at night hunting out witches).

FAMILY ORGANISATION

The Bangwa trace relationships through both parents. Inheritance of most property and succession to titles is derived through your father. Residence is to a large extent patrilocal. A chief's successor worships a line of male skulls inherited from father to son. To this extent then the Bangwa are a "patrilineal people". Nevertheless there are no wide patrilineal groupings, no clans or lineages with common name and marriage taboos, no regular meeting of patrikin for ritual, economic or social purposes. A patriline is primarily important to a man who succeeds his father the chief. Half-brothers, children of one father, have little in common after their father's death. They co-operate in the mourning ceremonies, quarrel over the inheritance and then go their separate ways. Half-brothers own no property in common.

Female links are important in the Bangwa kinship system. Ideally a woman's property is inherited by her favourite daughter and her skull becomes the focus of an ancestral cult of which the daughter is priestess. A female line is sometimes traced back several generations to a founding ancestress or manengo to whom sacrifices are made. However a woman's skull may also be inherited by her son and passed on to his daughter. It is rarely inherited by her sister's daughter or a distant matrilineal relative. A woman's property which accompanies the inheritance to her skull includes her personal effects and marriage payments due on her daughters and granddaughters.

Thus the Bangwa may be said to trace descent through male and female lines. The most important family relationships, however, are those of a person's own kindred, his atsen ndia. This is an elastic grouping focussed on one's mother, although if her relatives are few (or non-existent since she may be a slave) it may be one's father's mother. This grouping

emphasises the solidarity of the children of one womb and their children; it runs counter to the half-sibling relationship within the polygynous family. It is this effective grouping on which a Bangwa man relies throughout his life. Its members form a core group at all sacrifices and rituals; they support a member in accusations of witchcraft; they contribute to marriage payments and receive a share on marriageable women; they help with school and medical fees. Once mother's brother (i.e. the full sibling of your mother as opposed to the successor of the mother's father, your mbe tetse, who in most cases is her half brother) may take you into his compound, teach you his craft, give you a wife. A sister's son and lesser members of a man's atsen ndia will receive some of the property left by a wealthy mother's brother: a marriage ward, a widow or an oil palm grove. In the political sphere the title given to the chief's full brother or sister's son, mwofwa symbolises the importance of the atsen ndia.

PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

The Bangwa are a property-conscious people and very acquisitive. Each individual who is not heir to his father's title and property attempts to accumulate his own wealth which he leaves with his skull to his heir. It is this strong notion of private property, as opposed to the merged property of a typical corporate lineage, which colours the Bangwa kinship and descent system. All property descends to a man's son; it should not 'go up'. Wills, involving an almost complete freedom of bequest are made to ensure this. Failing a son a man will bequeath his property to a daughter's son, a servant or slave, in preference to a patrilineal collateral. A childless man may instruct his widows to cohabit with a lover in order to produce an heir to the property and a successor to his skull.

The skull cult reflects this division among patrikin. The possession of a long line of skulls does not justify your authority over the patrilineal descendants of the first ancestor. Groups which sacrifice to two or twenty skulls are essentially the same: the chief who has twenty only has ritual authority over his father's children and his own children and grandchildren. In Bangwa non-kinship relations are valued. A man's friends, for example, are important to him as kin. Anyone born at the same time as another becomes his 'friend by birth' (the closest friends, of course, are twins) and a close relationship is forged which in later life serves social, ritual and economic functions. 'A friend of the road' is an acquired friend; this type, was, in the past, sealed by eating a minute portion of each other's blood dipped in kola nut. Blood friendship rites brought a friend as close as your full brother.

LIFE CYCLE

Children are delivered by an experienced midwife. They are named ten days or so after birth, usually after an important relative of their father or mother or in memory of the circumstances of their birth. No distinction is made between girls and boys names. Girls' ears are pierced and a boy circumcised soon afterwards.

Twins are welcomed with a mixture of pleasure and consternation. They are other-worldly creatures and a series of rituals must be undertaken to persuade them to remain with their parents on earth. 'Single' twins are those children born feet first or with a cawl. A special

shrine is made by the priest (tanyi: literally 'father of twins', as honorary title) inside their mother's house. The children are medicated and fed with a special chicken while other mothers of twins (anyi) dance outside in the compound. The chief sends precious beads to place around their necks and two mugs to hang above their bed. Some time before puberty twins undergo a further ritual whereby they are secluded in a house for some weeks, rubbed with camwood (a red cosmetic) and given quantities of food in order to 'fatten' them. At the end of this seclusion they leave the house; tanyi sacrifices a cock and goat; and the anyi dance. This final ceremony cuts the twins off from the spirit world definitively.

Children grow to adulthood without any rituals associated with puberty. They receive a general training from their mothers and fathers. A girl receives her first hoe when quite young, eight or nine, and a boy his first matchet when he is eleven or twelve. Nowadays almost all Bangwa children between the ages of eight and fourteen are attending school so that traditional patterns of socialisation are being affected. And mothers no longer have small nursemaids to look after younger brothers and sisters while they are away at the farm; in some cases this task has been taken over by their husbands, so keen are both parents that their children should attend school.

MARRIAGE

In the past girls were betrothed soon after birth. The ceremony was a simple one, the suitor or his father placing a large log of wood on the fire of the mother of the newly born girl. If the mother and father agreed the log was left on the fire and the baby was betrothed to her suitor. As a son-in-law he now began a long period of service to his parents-in-law: he helped his mother-in-law in the heavy work of farm-clearing; he brought working-parties when his father was building a house in the compound. He was personally responsible for re-building his mother-in-law's house. He could be sent on errands by them. When his father-in-law needed money he borrowed at will from him. Nowadays, since most of the young men are working in the south, accumulating heavy marriage payments, these personal services are no longer carried out: most of them are incorporated into the final marriage payments.

The Bangwa girl goes to her husband as soon as she is physically mature, although before puberty she has been visiting his compound under the supervision of a senior wife. She brings food to her future husband, receives gifts in return and begins to cultivate farms near his compound. Some girls undergo a ritual seclusion period of seven or nine weeks before they marry. In pidgin English this is called 'fattening'; girls are put in the 'fattening house' who are ailing or who do not become nubile at the same time as their age-mates. The ceremony is essentially an elaboration of the twin seclusion ritual. The girl's illness is attributed (by a diviner) to the torments of spirits. She is placed in a walled off apartment inside her mother's house where she is rubbed with camwood and fed with nutritious food. The final ceremony involves much dancing and feasting, and the sacrifice of a goat whose blood is rubbed into the girl's eyes to prevent her finding her way back to the spirit world. The same treatment is given to her full siblings since the 'disease' is supposed to be catching. In some cases a startling difference is remarked in the physique of the 'fattened'

girl. The ceremony finishes with the girl going to market, rubbed in camwood and oil, where she 'shows herself' to the people.

The marriage ceremonies (apoo) were elaborate festive affairs; today they have been drastically curtailed to a simple blessing of the married pair by an elder. Most husbands are unwilling to sponsor this ceremony since the expense is high and the chances of recovering the outlay, if the girl divorces him, slim.

The polygyny rate is fairly high and is the reason why men marry their first wives late in life. About half the households consist of a man with two or more wives. A paramount chief may have up to fifty at the present time, a subchief up to twenty. A man's widows are inherited by his successor although some are handed out to unmarried sons. Older widows leave their husband's compound to settle down with married daughters or sons.

Marriages in Bangwa are legalised by the finalising of the marriage payments and the transfer of a certain goat (the 'marriage goat') to the bride's kin. These payments (called dowry throughout West Cameroon) are very high and going up all the time. In 1966 an average payment appeared to be in the region of £200 but the amount varies according to circumstances and the bride's status. And if the bride has been divorced from her former husband the amount may reach £300 since all gifts, loans etc., which were made to the bride and her kin are tallied by her ex-husband and refunded. The marriage payments are diverse: they are grouped into classes ('goats', 'salt', 'hoes') but are, apart from ritual exchanges, paid in Cameroon francs, after being calculated in sterling. A large selection of relatives receive a share: full brothers and members of her atsen ndia half-brothers of importance, her mother, her mother's mother, her father's mother, etc., etc. But the bulk of the money is shared between four persons, her 'marriage fathers': the bride's father, her mother's father, mother's mother's father and mother's mother's mother's father, or their successors through the male line. Each of these persons has a title: her father, mbegi; her mbe tetse or middle father; her mbe nkembetü or 'stump' father; and her tangkap her 'money father'. The mother's mother's mother's father or tangkap is a special case and needs explanation.

In Bangwa thinking everybody, male and female, is descended from a female slave. The successor of the man who bought her is your tangkap and he receives multiple services and dues from his wards (azem nkap) the most important of which are marriage payments on females. Since the bride's real mother may have been bought, the tangkap, even at the present times may claim the shares due to the mbe tetse, the mbe nkembetü and tangkap. The tangkap institution is being hotly discussed in Bangwa at the present time; many people declare that it is a depressing relic of slavery. More and more cases of unpaid dues are appearing in the courts. Up to the present time the tangkap's rights have been successfully defended by the interested parties, mostly chiefs, but slowly the Bangwa are beginning to realise that it is only in their local customary courts that rights in azem nkap will be upheld. Its sudden abolition might have deleterious effects; perhaps it is better to let nkap marriage die of its own accord. The Bangwa are a business-like people. As the tangkap fails to carry

out his reciprocal role as the 'father' of his wards, so his claims for exorbitant shares of the bridewealth will be opposed.

ILLNESS AND DEATH

The Bangwa ascribe natural and unnatural causes to death. They can recite lists of symptoms for various fatal as well as non-fatal illnesses which are diagnosed with skill. Witchcraft is a common cause, but once a confession is induced the cure must be aided by medicinal means. Thus madness results from a man transforming himself into a bush-cow and falling into a hunting pit; but its cure includes psycho-therapy, cupping and shock treatment. There are many specialists: bone-menders, experts in the treatment of rheumatics, children's and women's complaints, barrenness and impotence. The general term ngang afu (leaf man) is given to these practicians. Other experts specialise in the exorcisation of spirits, particularly those bedevilling children. Others perform complicated purification rituals after evil deaths (suicide, murder, an accident, death in pregnancy, death from dropsy and elephantiasis.) Others hunt the invisible witch who is haunting a compound bringing bad luck and illness. Ngang ntshep has the secret of the medicine which punishes the children of a man who is backward in his bridewealth payments. In all these activities the medical expert or priest is on close contact with the diviner (Mbo, Banyang, Bamileke, as well as local diviners, are used by the Bangwa). Their roles are all socially approved, directed towards curing illness or punish evil-doers. Morally unjustified 'black magic' is not common in Bangwa, nor even socially recognised.

Witchcraft (lekang) has an ambivalent position since it may be used for good or evil purposes. It pervades Bangwa beliefs and has many manifestations; basically it is a belief that all men and women have the capacity of changing themselves into animals or natural forces, for the purposes of bewitching their relations, or for the less anti-social activities of chiefship and medical healing. Of course only some people take advantage of the propensity; ability varies and may be inherited or learned. Men, women, tiny children may be witches: elephants, swarms of bees, lightning, aeroplanes: a witch preys on the flesh of living people causing their illness and eventual death. Witchcraft also causes crop failure, sterility and barrenness, poor trading-success, failure at examinations. It explains the miracles associated with healing, a chief's power or a young man's brilliance on the football field or the xylophone.

Since most deaths are ascribed to witchcraft post mortem examinations are regularly carried out on all corpses, including those of tiny babies and senile men. The stomach is operated by an expert. The vital organs are removed and any marks, protuberances or colouring noted to ascertain whether the dead person has been a witch. Each organ examined - in the stomach, the chest and throat - is associated with a particular transformation. The operator declares, for example, that the man has been 'using' his elephant in the forests near the Mbo Plain where he had been trapped in a swamp, caught pneumonia and died. If none of these signs are discovered it is presumed that the person has been bewitched by a family member and all present took an oath over the dead body, sometimes dipping a kola nut into the bloody water which has been used to wash the dead man's stomach. If the father,

husband or successor of the dead person is not satisfied he seeks further advice from a diviner as a result of which medicine (nchep) is prepared to hunt down the witch and cause him to become ill. Such an illness is only cured through confession: such confessions even among children, are not uncommon in Bangwa today.

The dead are buried in oblong graves behind their houses. Special ceremonies accompany the burial of a chief or noble but for a child or commoner it was a simple affair. Children of chiefs are buried in the lefem copse, outside the palace.

Beliefs in the afterworld are complex. Dead men's souls go to the Bangwa heaven or hell - the 'good country' and the 'bad country' both of which were below ground. The sky is the abode of witches, not angels, a fact which determined many old Bangwa from accepting Christian doctrines. Ghosts are the dead returned from their graves to haunt members of their family: they are exorcised by a simple lustration ritual.

ANCESTORS AND SKULLS

A Bangwa man's ancestors (male and female) are worshipped through their skulls; they provide succour in times of need, explanation of misfortune and justify succession to title and inheritance of property. There is no regular skull cult. Individuals worship their ancestors through the mediacy of their successors; sacrifices are made, on the whole, to close ancestors - father, father's father, mother, mother's mother. There are one or two exceptions; wards (azemnkap) may be directed by diviners to sacrifice at the skull of their tankap even if there is no blood relationship between them. Similarly the skulls inherited by a chief may affect his personal slaves; a childless man could bequeath his skull to a slave who would begin a cult in his name.

A year or two after a man's death his successor makes preparations to exhume the skull. Before the earth is removed, a sapling, planted above the dead man's head, is shaken by the priest concerned and food and wine poured into the grave.

It is believed that the skull has been wandering around inside the earth and this sacrifice persuades it to return to the grave in readiness for exhumation. The priest removes the skull, rubs it in oil and special leaves and places it in a clay pot in the ancestral shrine or merely behind the successor's house. A further sacrifice is made by the man's heir with all his atsen ndia present: and if, the next day, the white ants have eaten the oil and melon seeds it is known that the departed ancestor is content.

Although the royal ancestors have no ritual significance for the country as a whole the skulls of dead chiefs are worshipped with more ceremony than those of commoners. On a special day of the week the chief (or one of his deputies: the queen mother or his Great Servant) sacrifices to the skulls to the accompaniment of the trumpeting of a carved ivory elephant blown by one of the palace retainers. For most Bangwa the ancestors are only appeased when they show evidence of annoyance: when a child is sick, or a trader is having

a run of bad luck. Nevertheless the ancestors are always invoked in the course of other rituals not directly concerned with them.

While the Bangwa consider their ancestors to be their most vital spirits or 'gods' (belem) each adult also worships at a shrine dedicated to a personal spirit guardian, his ndem bo. A man's ndem bo which literally means 'spirit, or god, builder' is the creator of a man's personality. On the diviner's advice the shrine is erected outside the compound by a priest (tanyi). Sacrifices are made there on the same kind of occasions as sacrifices are made to the skulls. Women sacrifice at the ndem bo of their fathers; only a queen mother who was also a compound head has her own. Most Christians translate ndem bo as God the Creator which is certainly right up to a point. This ndem bo however, creates an individual; he did not create the world and all things on it. Nor is he indivisible.

Each chiefdom, and some important subchiefdoms too, have their own sacred spot - usually a lake or waterfall, a cave or strangely shaped boulder - where sacrifices are made by the chief and his close associates. The tanyi priests conduct the rituals which assure fertility to the women of the country who are blessed with the sacred water associated with the place. The fertility of farms is assured by an annual ceremony performed by a society of priests called ku'ngang; for several days the ku'ngang people retire to a hut in the palace preparing a ritual centred on their sacred images (lekat). On the final day all the people bring their seed, hoes and matchets to be blessed. Some of the seeds are planted by the women in their farms; others are planted on the boundaries of the country to ward off evil spirits which may destroy the crops. (Apart from this ritual farming itself is a pragmatic affair, free from magic; certain taboos, however, come into force, especially at planting time).

CONCLUSION

In this account of the Bangwa I have been primarily concerned to sketch traditional social organisation, and to stress its functioning in the past. A study of present-day Bangwa would be considerably different. The 1960s, particularly, are seeing important changes. Before independence, relations with the outside world were intermittent and superficial. At irregular sessions of the Bangwa Mundani Council the chiefs and some of their educated subjects discussed the possibility building roads and introducing medical services and secondary schools; they also touched on vital social problems. But Bangwa's remoteness from the administrative centres and major networks of communication meant that they received few of the amenities of European civilisation. For example the first motor road from Dschang to Bangwa was completed only in 1963 although plans had been afoot for thirty-five years. This road was put through by the hard work of the Roman Catholic Mission, community labour and financial grants from the East Cameroon government, fearful that terrorists might use the Bangwa mountains as hideouts. Bangwa is now open to the markets of East Cameroon : traders with their trucks are visiting the major markets for palm nuts and oil for factories in Dschang and Nkongsamba. A dry season road from Tall to Fontem has become the Bangwa passion and each chief is attempting to construct an east-west road linking his chiefdom with Dschang in the east and Mamfe and Kumba in the west.

The Bangwa are a virile, hardworking people, adaptable to new and profitable situations. Their culture will change beyond recognition within the next generation. It is hoped that some elements of their distinctive and highly developed culture will remain. Weird, brilliant pieces of sculpture, terror masks and figures of mothers of twins and chiefs, have won a place in private collections and museums all over the world; today they lurk in corners of old compounds, highly valued as symbols of chiefship or relics of the past. A chief's Great House is a splendid example of Cameroon house-building with its intricate panelling, tall conical roof, its collections of drums, musical instruments and sculptures; today they are crumbling, replaced by the ubiquitous concrete and tin-roofed buildings of contemporary Bamileke towns. I hope a knowledge of their past, a slice of which is contained in this booklet, will enable a Bangwa to feel proud of his history and his own individual culture.