

The Art of the Bambui Kingdom (Western Grassfields, Cameroon)

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By

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5669-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5669-0

To the memory of Tabah Premus FUBAH

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FOREWORD

The Art of the Bambui Kingdom is part of the ongoing Bambui Museum and Ecotourism Project (BMEP). The project started in 2001, following the call to establish museums in some palaces of the Western Grassfields by an Italian NGO, Centro Orientamento Educativo (COE). Although Bambui applied and was not selected by the COE, the idea of a museum in the palace did not diminish—it continued to gain support from across the village, and specifically from the Bambui Cultural and Development Association (BACUDA) and the Bambui Traditional Council (BTC). As a native of Bambui with a background in museum studies, I was assigned from the outset to work on a catalogue of the objects in the Royal Palace that will eventually be displayed in the museum when it is completed.

Accordingly, fieldwork for this book started in 2004. It involved yearly visits and participation in traditional religious activities such as the protection of space, marriages, births, burials or first and second funeral celebrations, enthronement, and ancestral propitiation. In 2006, I was initiated into some of the societies and rituals that are considered secret, such as *Kwifor*, for example, allowing me to have an in-depth knowledge of their internal affairs. I was also privileged to be given access to the Royal Treasure Chamber, allowing me to see the richness and diverse nature of the treasures held.

Having participated in most of the traditional religious rituals associated with art and material culture, and seen the deplorable conditions under which the treasures are preserved, I am interested in opening up and strengthening the possibilities for a more critical debate on what can be done in order to promote and preserve these treasures for the benefit of the entire fondom. In fact, I am interested in raising public awareness of the need to preserve these rather than to continue to use and discard them when they are no longer useful, as is often the case. In other words, I am reiterating the case for the creation of a modern museum in the Bambui Fondom where these treasures can be preserved.

Having a museum where these treasures can be preserved is particularly significant because it will help address some of the issues associated with antiques and other cultural assets across the region, such as theft and illegal traffic of objects, exploitation of poor fondoms and kingdoms by African art dealers and researchers from the West, and lack of education about the different ways and means the fondoms could

employ to transform these resources to the benefit of all. As noted by Notue, problems associated with antiques and other cultural assets such as the ones I have mentioned, have brought “renewed interest both in developing and developed countries on study, training and research relative to different aspects of national heritage” (2005, 13). But in spite of the efforts being made in training Africans to be able to curate their artistic and cultural heritage, some regions, such as the Bambui Fondom for example, are still disadvantaged because there is no one to conduct an effective campaign to raise awareness about what can be done to protect and preserve the treasures. Hence, the treasures in the Bambui Royal Collection seem to have been abandoned precisely because people do not know the best way to promote them. This book is a pilot attempt toward addressing this issue.

In terms of previous research, there is very little literature on the art and material culture of the Bambui Fondom. A few dissertations were written by students of Bambui ancestry at the Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary (STAMS), Bambui, but the focus was on particular aspects of Bambui organisation and folklore. By contrast, there is a vast amount of literature on the Cameroon Grassfields as a whole and the western Grassfields (where Bambui is located) in particular (cf. Gebeaur 1979; Geary 1981, 1987, 1996; Engard 1986, 1989; Diduk 1987, 1989, 1992; Rowlands 1993, 1995; Knöpfli 1997, 1998; Argenti 1998). As noted by Warnier (1975, 15), the vast amount of literature on the Western Grassfields can be divided into three main types: first, travel accounts and published reports of the German period (1884-1916); second, publications by Christian missionaries in connection with missionary work; third, scholarly work by Western anthropologists, historians and art historians, for example.

Yet, in spite of the vast amount of literature on the Western Grassfields, there is little, if anything, specifically on the art and material culture of the Bambui Fondom. In most cases, Bambui is merely mentioned as a missionary centre, perhaps because of the numerous missionary institutions across the village, or simply highlighted precisely because of its location at a cross-road on the Bamenda Ring Road rather than a fondom with a rich and diverse heritage that is worthy of study. For comparison, while the art and material culture of other fondoms in the western Grassfields, such as Bafut, Mankon, Nsei, Kedjom Keku, Kedjom Ketingo, Oku, Bali, Nso, Babungo and Kom, for example, continue to gain prominence in Western art discourse, little is known about the art of the Bambui Fondom. Yet, the Bambui Fondom, like most fondoms in the Grassfields and particularly the western Grassfields, has a rich and diverse

tradition of art and material culture that can be studied. This book sets out to fill the gap created by the absence of Bambui art and material culture from the literature on Grassfields art.

Unlike previous studies that have been undertaken on the art and material culture of the western Grassfields, this book is particularly significant because it is the first of its kind in terms of the artistic and cultural heritage of the Bambui Fondom. Of course, there are features common to all the fondoms of the Cameroon Grassfields that allow us to describe the entire region as a distinct cultural and art-producing area, with the possibility that Bambui has nothing new to offer. But there are also reasons to believe that Bambui has a lot to offer, especially considering the level of misinformation sometimes encountered in the literature. As Geary (1987, 43) has pointed out, catchwords such as kingship, palace, secret societies, retainers, and hierarchy that are normally taken for granted and applied as meaning the same thing across the Grassfields, can only be fully understood if the particular context is elucidated. This book addresses the problem of misinformation and the generalising approach in Grassfields artistic studies by presenting a detailed study of the artistic and cultural heritage of one ethnic group, the Bambui Fondom. It is intended especially for young scholars and museum staff as well as for African art lovers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I decided to write this book because I believe that Bambui has a lot to offer in terms of art and material culture, and that in narrating what is unique about Bambui, the reader will gain insight into what is distinctive about Bambui's artistic and cultural heritage. For anyone aspiring to learn about the rich and diverse art of Bambui, this book will prove useful, especially since it is written by someone who has lived, and still is living, the Bambui experience.

I have approached my writing journey in the same way that books of this nature are written, especially those focusing on the kingdoms of the Western Grassfields. I had very little idea how to order my work in a way that would be appealing to understand. I just knew what I wanted to achieve. The rest I thought I would figure out along the way.

In the process of bringing this book together, I benefited from the help and support of many people and institutions. My sincere thanks are due to: Dr Sue Malvern and Dr Paul Davies of the University of Reading and Professor Dunja Hersak of Universite Libre de Brussels for assisting with my PhD dissertation from which this book emerged; Professor Anitra Nettleton of the University of the Witwatersrand for reading through the book proposal and providing me with useful insight, as well as for recommending me for the Cambridge/Africa Collaborative Research Programme on Arts and Museums in Africa 2012/2013; and Professor Cynthia Kros of the Wits School of Art for recommending me for the same fellowship. My participation in the Cambridge/Africa Collaborative Research fellowship gave me additional strength and inspiration, the outcome of which is this book. I would also like to thank the Centre for the Creative Arts of Africa (CCAA), University of the Witwatersrand, where I was a Research Associate during the research for this book, the Leverhulme and Sir Isaac Newton Trusts for sponsoring my research at the Centre of African Studies, Cambridge; the coordinators of the 2012/2013 Cambridge/Africa Collaborative Research Programme on Art and Museums in Africa, Professor Nicolas Thomas, Professor Harri Englund and Dr Sally Ashton for providing the necessary assistance throughout my stay in Cambridge; and Rachel Hand for providing biscuits and tea each time I walked into her office as well as support in the Museum of

Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) collection store. I am grateful to the staff of the Centre of African Studies for their generosity.

I am especially grateful to the *fon* of Bambui, Angafor Momboo III, his notable, Pa Mokezang and the lone palace retainer, Pa Amungwa Peter Nkoh for granting me access to the royal treasury or traditional palace museum. Dr Amy Niang of Wits University and Dr Ngambouk Vitalis provided me with much needed advice and encouragement in difficult moments of the study. Angafor Julius provided me with relevant information about traditional days and activities in Bambui while Elisabeth Salverda and Jeni Harris assisted in proofreading the manuscript. Angafor Gideon sold his copy of *A Short History and Traditions of Bambui 1700-2012* to me at a time when the book was scarce. My parents Pa Joseph Fubah and Mama Mariana Mbuh Fubah provided the foundation by sending me to school and I will forever be grateful to them.

Finally, special thanks go to my wife Alubafi Miranda, and children Alubafi Agnella and Tabah Agnel for their support and encouragement during my six-and ten-month residence in Cambridge and Berlin in particular, as well as numerous visits to Cameroon. Without their understanding this book would never have been completed.

INTRODUCTION

Bambui or *Abe-eh Mbeuh* as it is popularly known is one of the many autonomous fondoms/kingdoms in the Western Grassfields, which came into existence some five and a half centuries ago. It has a population of about thirty thousand inhabitants, who are in turn divided into thirty-seven *Nte-eh* (s) or quarters. Archaeological and linguistic sources of the Western Grassfields, including Bambui, suggest that the Bambui Fondom has been occupied successively for about five and a half thousand years. The language of the fondom known as *Agho-oh Mbeuh* belongs to the *Ngemba* group of languages, and is considered by most Grassfields scholars as a subdivision of East Grassfields (which also include Central Bamileke), one group of the Bantu languages of the former West Cameroon. This group of different but interrelated languages dates back to at least five thousand years and is therefore considered a result of a long diversification of a single basic language called proto-Bantu.

Like most of its neighbours, Bambui has a well demarcated territory, a population of diverse origins, well defined institutions and military power, all answerable to a sacred male sovereign, *efor-mbeuh* or the Bambui *fon* or king. The Bambui *fon*, then, is the spiritual and secular leader of his people. Like most Grassfields *fons*, he plays the role of an overseer in issues relating to social organisation, traditional religious rituals and performances, judicial matters and the promotion and preservation of relationship with neighbouring villages. He heads and is responsible for the creation and functioning of all traditional societies and *juju* or masks lodges across the fondom. His powers are closely monitored and regulated by his numerous sub-chiefs or notables, heads of clans or quarters and *Kwifor* or regulatory society. The capital, *nto-oh*, is located in the royal palace and it is considered the overall cultural, administrative and religious centre of the fondom. It is at *nto-oh* where the *fon*, his mother, his numerous wives, children and servants live. Additionally, *nto-oh* is the meeting place for most of the traditional societies in the fondom. It is home to the Royal Treasure Chamber that houses and supplies a wide variety of cultural objects used in ceremonies and other royal manifestations such as *mendele* or annual dance. Like most villages or fondoms across the Western Grassfields, Bambui has a long history of

producing and using art objects in socio-cultural, religious, political and even economic activities.

The art presented in this book serves as a window into the Bambui Royal Treasure Chamber. It is by no means restricted to Bambui because the artefacts were collected from across the Grassfields either as gifts, war trophies or objects of commercial exchanges. Such treasures, made up for the most part of objects of foreign provenance given by allied kingdoms, reflect Grassfields *fons*' preoccupation with the appropriation of the world or foreign other (Warnier 1975; Geary 1996; Argenti 1998, 1999; Rowlands 1996, 2007). Acquiring such objects from another kingdom marked the giver's subjection to the receiver in a complex diplomacy of gift exchange (Warnier 1985, 70; Rowlands 1987, 60-1). Objects of foreign provenance were thus "inextricably tied up with histories of war and conquest. In some cases prestigious objects of European origin were not only locked away in storehouses but also displayed on the battlefield" (Argenti 1998, 767).

Similarity in the forms of objects is indicative of the fact that both art and artists circulated throughout the region in different forms of exchange—ending up in different fondoms where styles and aesthetics were also copied and replicated—and is now seen as part of the history of these kingdoms. The richness and diverse nature of the treasures is very much in line with local features of art and craft production across the Western Grassfields and their stylistic homogeneity can also be observed across the African continent and beyond.

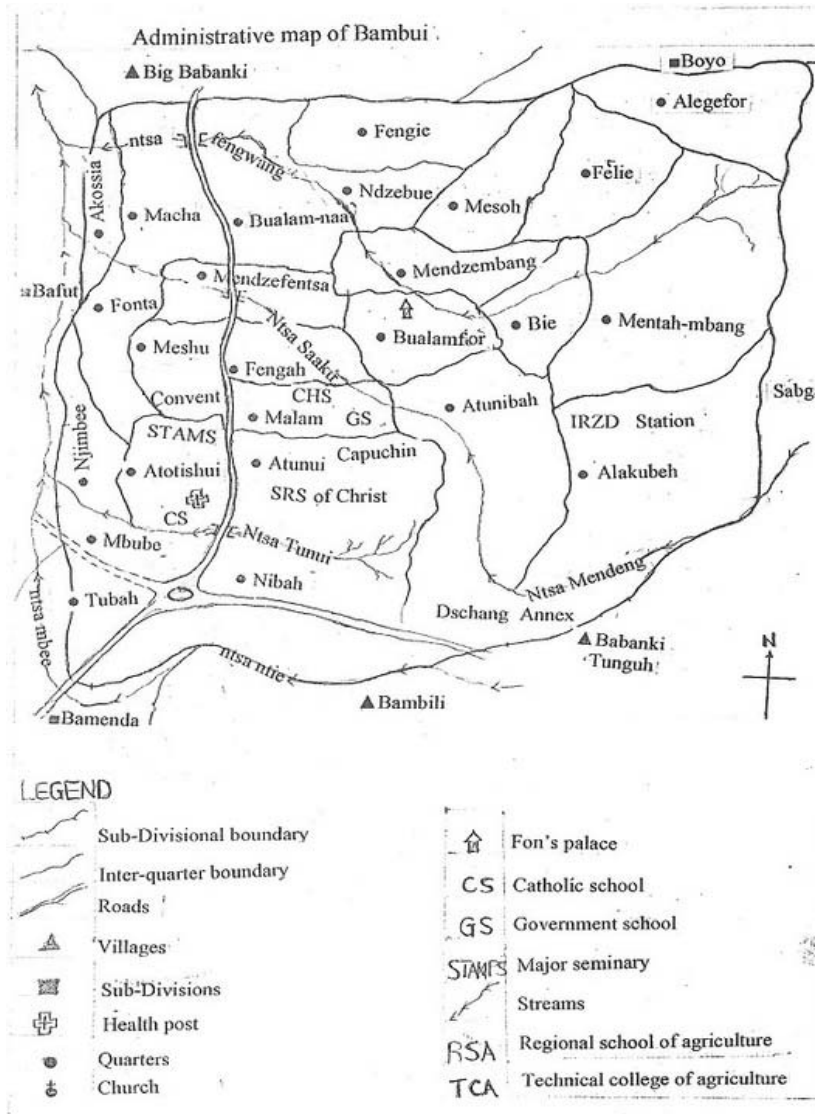
Although the art of the region is increasingly adapting to the forces of innovation and change, Bambui has remained faithful to its ancestral values and traditions, embracing modernity but still promoting and preserving what was handed down by its ancestors. This is noticeable particularly in the domain of artistic creation in which artists present both the individual and collective traditions of the regions. The contradictory nature of ancestral values and traditions across the Grassfields has been well highlighted by Grassfields scholars as "a certain continuity and dynamism with changes and innovations based on external influences and internal contradictions in the course of a long past" (Notue 2000, 16). In spite of the turbulence resulting from colonisation, Bambui arts not only survived but is thriving.

Like most of its neighbours, Bambui was a major centre of commercial activities in the pre-colonial era, allowing its rulers the opportunity to amass a huge collection of treasures made up of diverse objects from neighbouring and distant kingdoms. Following wars with the Germans (such as the 1898 punitive expedition against Bambui for providing refuge

to the *fon* of Bafut, Abumbi I), as well as fires over the years, most of these treasures were destroyed. Some were however smuggled out of the fondom and these surviving treasures now form the basis of the objects in the Royal Treasure Chamber, comprising drinking horns, religious architecture, statues, royal furniture, royal head-dresses and costumes, masks, musical instruments and spears. The objects are meant to promote and preserve the power and integrity of the Bambui *fon* and his numerous sacred societies and notables.

Although the objects presented in this book have been selected from those found in the palace, other important pieces are dispersed throughout the fondom, especially in the homes of sub-chiefs, quarter heads, and other traditional and modern urban elites (see for example plate 10). Some royal objects however, especially those belonging to sacred societies, are still locked away in secret storerooms of the palace and only brought out during traditional religious ceremonies involving the societies' initiated members. A review of the objects discussed in this book shows a picture of the rich visual and intellectual history of the Bambui Fondom. Bambui art, which like that of its neighbours swings between tradition and creativity, is not motionless. It is functional, exhibitionist, expressionist and decorative: most of these traits are illustrated by this catalogue.

This pioneer book on the art of the Bambui Fondom is divided into four main parts. Part One focuses on the geographical location and history of Bambui. Part Two discusses the social, political, religious and cultural meanings of the different categories of artefacts and art in the fondom. Understanding the historical context within which artefacts and art are produced and used is particularly important, as numerous studies have already highlighted, because it corresponds to current art-historical research which aims at "integrating the works in their specific ecological, social and cultural environments" (Notue and Triaca 2000, 16). It is also important because it will serve as a stepping stone towards the reconstruction of the history of the artistic and cultural heritage of the Bambui Fondom in particular and the western Grassfields as a whole. Part Three is an examination of the forms, functions and meaning of the objects, while part Four catalogues some of the pre-eminent pieces found in the Bambui Royal Treasure Chamber.



Map. Bambui in the region of Bamenda with its quarters and roads linking the fondom to other fondoms and regions of the western Grassfields. Royal Archives, Bambui, 2008.

CHAPTER ONE

ABE-EH MBEUH OR THE BAMBUI FONDOM

Geographical Location

Bambui is one of the four fondoms found in Tubah Sub-Division, North West Region, Cameroon. It is located some 12 kilometres north-east of Bamenda town in Mezam Division. It lies between latitudes 5°59' and 6°01' N and between longitudes 10°13'E and 10°15' E within the sub-equatorial climatic region characterised by two distinct seasons: the wet and dry. The fondom is situated on the flanks of the Bamenda volcanic highlands, along the very range that consists of the Oku and Bamboutos Mountains on the main Cameroon fracture line oriented south-west to north-east. The region is an important frontier rich in water resources; its crest-line corresponds to part of the geographical boundary between West and Central Africa and is the actual division of the large basins of the River Niger and Congo.¹

Bambui shares boundaries with Bafut to the west, Kedjom keku (Big Babanki) to the north, Kom (Boyo Division) to the north-east, Kedjom Ketingo or Small Babanki (with Sabga settlement) to the east and south-east, Bambili to the south, and Nkwen to the south-west (see map). It stretches 3.8 kilometres of the Bamenda Ring Road, which is the principal highway of the region, and 8.1 kilometres of the Bambui-Fundong road.

Morphologically, Bambui is divided into three main regions, namely the Bambui plains in the west, the low plateau in the centre and the high lava plateau in the east and north-east. The lowest altitude in Bambui is about 1050m on the plains and corresponds to the valley of the Fengwang River (a tributary of the Menchum River). The highest point is 2400m on the north-eastern extreme of the high plateau. The high lava plateau is separated from the low plateau by a west-facing escarpment. The high plateau has dense patches of indigenous forest interspersed with Savannah vegetation. Bambui legend informs us that the forest used to harbour plenty of wild life, including elephants, monkeys, buffaloes, lions, chimpanzees, and antelopes—right up to the 1920s. However, because of

indiscriminate or uncontrolled hunting, destruction of the forest as well as cattle grazing, most of the wild animals are now extinct.

Bambui has a dense network of streams. The main streams that drain the village are *Ntsa Fengwang*, *Ntsa Saakeu*, *Ntsa Tunui*, and *Ntsa Ntie*—running along the Bambili frontier, and *Ntsa Mbeuh* and *Ntsa Mbee*—running along the Bafut frontier in the west. The principal watershed is Alegefor and mending hills, in the east and north-east of the fendom. Specifically, there are three sub-watersheds: the *Mbeuh*, *Alegefor* and *Ntahmbang*. All the streams except for the *Tunui* and *Mbee* take source from these watersheds and flow towards the lowland in the west and north-west. It is hypothesised that the *Ntsa Tunui* originates from a spring which is believed to be an outlet of Lake Bambili. It has an unusual regime with high discharge recorded during the dry season. Interestingly, all the streams eventually flow north-westward to merge with the *Fengwang* that feeds the River Menchum. From the highlands, most of the streams cascading as waterfalls with the *Meya-ah* waterfall being the most notable. There are also dozens of springs all over the area, with one hot spring at *Atuoh* (Folie Quarter) that flows into the *Mbeuh* Stream evidence that the area is of volcanic origin. These diverse physical attributes offer many opportunities for economic and social development, especially in the area of tourism, but most of them are yet to be fully exploited.

History

Bambui legend holds that the people of *Mbeh* (as they were previously referred to) came from the upper Mbam River, the region of the sacred lake usually referred to as Kimi or Rifum, home to the present day Tikar.² Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they emigrated from present day Adamawa region passing through the Mbam Valley, and eventually took up temporary settlement in Ndop.³ Because of conflicts and the struggle for leadership by various group leaders as well as the search for fertile land, they later moved out of the Ndop plain. They were led out of Ndop by a brave warlord called Zehtingong who subsequently became the first *fon* or king of Bambui (date not known). From Ndop, they settled on a hill in present day Bambui called *Phedieuh* before moving on to *Nka'ah* (the former Wum Area Development Association, WADA) and later to *Atuala-ah*, another prominent hill site. Settling on hill sites in those days was considered safe and an advantage because it allowed them the opportunity to see in all directions, and therefore prepare against attack if they saw their enemies approaching.

Conflicts at their temporary settlements resulted in the creation of a hierarchical structure aimed at compensating the various factions (i.e. group leaders, family heads and princes). Following the new leadership structure, traditional titles such as *fo(s)* or sub-chiefs were created and assigned various functions to assist the *fon*. Some of the notable names that emerged at the time and have survived until the present day include: *Fo-manjuh* who later became the sub-chief of *Manju* quarter; *Fo-mallam* who later became the sub-chief of *Mallam* quarter; *Fo-ngueh* who later became the sub-chief of *Manduba* quarter; *Fo-matula-a* who later became the sub-chief of *Atula-a* quarter; and *Fo-magho* who later became the sub-chief of *Magho-o* quarter.

Although the sub-chiefs were seen as subordinates to the *fon*, most of the people under their leadership continued to address them as *fon*; thereby creating confusion as to who the real *fon* or overall traditional ruler was. The sub-chiefs also added to this confusion by carrying their palm wine calabashes with *Nka-azang* or royal palm leaves—a symbol of power reserved for the *fon*. To ensure that only one *fon* reigned, two of the *fon*'s closest aides, *Tarh Anembe* and *Tarh Asogho Fameunghie* protested against the use of the *Nka-azang* by sub-chiefs. Following the protest, which happened at a traditional gathering of the *fon* and his sub-chiefs (no date given), it was unanimously agreed that the use of *Nka-azang* on palm wine calabashes by sub-chiefs be terminated. Henceforth, all sub-chiefs were given the title of *Tarh* (subordinates to the *fon*), rather than *fo* as they were previously addressed by their people. However, one of the sub-chiefs, *Tarh Moteh* was given preferential treatment because of his prominent position in the Bambui Fondom. He was allowed to continue to use his palm wine calabash with *Nka-azang* but only within his compound rather than carrying it around elsewhere as was previously the case.

With the leadership squabbles addressed and a traditional structure in place, Bambui territory was formally demarcated into quarters and placed under the care of the different *Tarh(s)*, allowing them to move out of the temporary settlements to permanent sites, some of which were named after them—such as *Mallam* named after *Tarh Fo-mallam* and *Manju* named after *Tarh Fo-manjuh*. Henceforth, Bambui became something like a confederation ruled by the Bambui *fon* whose premises was also relocated from the temporary settlement to the various sites, before finally relocating to the present site, *Nto-oh-fi* or new palace, at *Bielaamfo-oh*. Within the confederation, the clans or sub-clans were allowed a degree of independence and the privilege of managing their own affairs. Additionally, the *Tarh(s)* participated in the central administration of the fondom, assisting their overlord the Bambui *fon* as requested. They were allowed the privilege of

organising hunting expeditions, but were required to pay tribute to the Bambui *fon* by offering him all royal animals (such as elephant, buffalo and leopard) that were captured.

Bambui legend also holds that a commercial centre existed around the palace where non-royal animals captured in the hunting were exchanged for other valuables. Until about 1895 when the German explorers constructed bigger roads linking the different chiefdoms across the Western Grassfields, the Bambui commercial centre was connected to other chiefdoms by foot-paths. Following an imperial German punitive expedition on the Bambui palace in 1898, the palace and neighbouring commercial centre were destroyed, and seventy-eight Bambui people lost their lives, thus forcing the traditional ruler to suspend trading activities at the centre for some time. The punitive expedition was meant to force the Bambui traditional authorities to hand over the *fon* of Bafut, *fon* Abumbi I, who had taken refuge in Bambui following an earlier attack on his palace by the German colonists. Dr Eugen Zingraff, the German researcher and explorer who was dispatched to open up the interior of Cameroon in 1886, had attacked Bafut because *fon* Abumbi I refused to succumb to German requests for cheap manual labour and primary materials for German industry and commercial endeavours in the then Kamerun.

In 1898, *fon* Abumbi I returned to Bafut and voluntarily surrendered himself to the Germans. Zingraff welcomed his decision but decided to send him to Victoria (a coastal city) in order to avoid another uprising from Abumbi and his people. Abumbi thus spent some time in Victoria before returning to Bafut to resume his position as the *fon*. Shortly after his return, Abumbi visited the Bambui *fon* to express his gratitude for the support he received when the Germans attacked and burnt down his palace. Together with his Bambui counterpart and various notables, the two *fons* signed a traditional “brotherhood pact” suspending all boundaries that existed between Bafut and Bambui. Henceforth, the two chiefdoms existed as brotherly villages and the boundaries separating them were not enforced until fairly recently, when skirmishes started erupting between them—with the *fon* of Bafut, Abumbi II accusing the *fon* of Bambui, Angafor Momboo II of encroaching onto his territory and vice versa. This, in fact, is one of the main reasons for the contemporary boundary crisis between Bambui and Bafut. While understanding this is beyond the scope of this particular study, it presents a potential research area for those interested in boundary issues because of the complex nature of the causes of the crisis.

When all former German colonies were seized and placed under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations in 1919, the British and French

partitioned Cameroon into two regions: East and West. Following the partition, the French took East Cameroon (about three quarters of the territory) while the British took West Cameroon (about one quarter of the territory). West Cameroon, the region where Bambui is located, was administered as part of British Eastern Nigeria. When the British instituted the system of Indirect Rule in 1922, West Cameroon became known as British Southern Cameroon but was still administered as part of Eastern Nigeria. However, traditional administration was in the hands of local chiefs because the British admired the manner in which the chieftaincy system was organised and managed. The British colonial officials in Eastern Nigeria established relationships of cooperation with the chiefs in British Southern Cameroon, most of whom acted as intermediaries between their communities and the British officials. This practice continued until 1961 when British Southern Cameroonians voted in a United Nation organised plebiscite to join La République du Cameroun that had earlier achieved independence from France in 1960.

Foreign or Other Ethnic Groups

Foreign ethnic groups, here, refer to those groups that settled in Bambui shortly after the establishment of the kingdom, as well as those that came during the colonial and postcolonial era. Notable amongst these groups are the Nsongwa, Bambili, Baforkum, Finge, Bamoum, Wimbun and the Cattle Fulani (Bonu 2012). Ethnographic sources and recent literature suggest most of these groups were attracted to Bambui by the hospitality of the people as well as by the availability of abundant fertile land. Some groups settled elsewhere as a result of disputes over succession between some of the princes of the different groups in their original settlements or kingdoms. While some settled only temporarily and left, others persisted and were either integrated or assimilated into the Bambui traditional system. Yet, in spite of their assimilation, most groups, especially the Finge and Baforkum, still practise some of the customs and beliefs they brought from outside, alongside those of the Bambui. Analysing their history, however, is not to suggest that the founding dynastic clans of the Bambui kingdom were not foreign. Rather, it is meant to give an in-depth account of the historical biography of the kingdom. The activities of these foreign ethnic groups, no matter how small, contributed to the story of what is now known as the Bambui kingdom, and by extension, its treasures.

Nsongwa Ethnic Group

Bambui's legend tells us that the Nsongwa were the first foreign ethnic group to request and be granted settlement in Bambui (year unknown). Their settlement was at present day Masoh quarter, about half a kilometre from the Bambui palace. As noted by Bonu (2012, 105), the Nsongwa only settled in Bambui for a short time, before leaving for their present site close to Bali Chomba (date unknown).

Bambili or Mbeligih

The Bambili, also known as *Mbeli*, were the second foreign ethnic group to be granted settlement in Bambui. As was the case with most of the kingdoms in the Western Grassfields, this group migrated from Tikar, settling temporarily at Ndop before moving to Bambui. Arriving in Bambui shortly after the Nsongwa had left, the *fon* (name unknown) of Bambui at the time allocated to them the same piece of land at Masoh. While at Masoh, their activities were coordinated by their leader or *fon* (name unknown). But as time went by, they realised that they were not comfortable in Bambui because of their second-class status. As a result, they started searching for an alternative place that would allow them independence. Through their search, they discovered a virgin kola nut forest to the south of Bambui. The forest attracted them to the extent that they harvested some kola nut and brought it to the *fon* of Bambui, their host, as a symbol of gratitude. Over the years, they continued to explore the kola nut forest in an attempt to make it more habitable for when they would eventually relocate. However, their effort to relocate was disrupted by the death of their *fon*. Accordingly, they buried their leader and spent some time at Masoh before finally relocating to their present site (date unknown). Prior to their departure from Masoh and Bambui, they constructed a memorial stone called *Azahmengong* ("Only the Gods Know") on the grave of their leader. Over the years, Bambili traditional elites continued to make a libation to their leader on the spot but it is not clear if this practice still continues or its potency has been transferred to Bambili palace.

Unlike the Nsongwa, the Bambili people settled in Bambui for many years and this resulted in the acculturation or assimilation of Bambui culture by the Bambili and Bambili culture by the Bambui in turn. Hence, there is a sense of "oneness" in the culture of the two kingdoms that has survived to the present day. Bonu (2012, 106) has noted that this is manifested in the similarities in the days of the traditional eight-day week,

as well as in the names of men and women in Bambui and Bambili. The language of the two kingdoms is another area of similarity. A Bambui person for example does not need to learn the Bambili language just as a Bambili person does not need to learn that of Bambui.

Below are tables showing the days of the eight-day week in Bambui and Bambili as well as those of men and women in the two kingdoms.

Bambui Week Days	Bambili Week Days
Yientie	Yentigi
Yienkue	Yekha
Yielie	Yeligi
Yiendue	Yenghiwhi
Yieko-o	Yekho
Yiejung	Yejung
Yiemphie	Yemphigi
Yieleng	Yeshimbang

Table 1.1 Days of the traditional eight-day week in Bambui and Bambili (adopted from Bonu 2012, 106)

Bambui Names	Bambili Names
Amungwa	Amuhngwa
Tanjong	Tanjong
Fombalang	Fombalang
Fobejung	Fobejung
Azanui	Azanui
Ngweni	Ngweni
Saanui	Saanui
Azunishie	Azunishie

Table 1.2 Common names used for men and women in Bambui and Bambili (adopted from Bonu 2012, 106)

Baforkum

The Baforkum, literally translated as people of “forkum” or people of chief Akum, arrived in Bambui around 1910. Originally from Santa-Mbei, and were led by one of their princes, called Akum. Prince Akum and his brother Prince Ndifor were both sons to the *fon* of Santa-Mbei, *fon* Ngufor (Bonu 2012). When their father *fon* Ngufor “went missing” or died (date unknown), the two brothers quarrelled over the throne, thereby dividing

the kingdom into two factions. As the dispute continued, Prince Ndifor became more popular and was eventually enthroned. Dissatisfied with the outcome of the dispute, Prince Akum took his followers out of Santa-Mbei and they wandered across the region for some time before finally settling on a piece of land allocated to them by *fon* Asoghogo II, the *fon* of Bambui at that time. The area was then known as Mendeng, and later as Alaakuba before the Germans changed its name to Baforkum. Prince Akum was crowned sub-chief, answerable to the *fon* of Bambui.

Prior to the arrival of Prince Akum and his followers, Mendeng was a farming site punctuated by raffia palms (mostly in the valleys) that were owned by Bambui notables such as *Tarh Fo-manju*, *Taform*, *Fornimoh*, *Azubuh* and others (Bonu 2012). The allocation of the area to Prince Akum and his people, however, did not affect the Bambui citizens who owned land in the area. However, when the British Southern Cameroon government created what is today the Regional College of Agriculture (RCA Bambui) in the early 1940s, most of the people were displaced while the marshy area in the region was developed into fish ponds, and thus its affiliate name “fish pond - Baforkum.” The other sections were developed for irrigation purposes and one of them is until the present day, used by one of the government farms, Multiplication Farm, Bambui.

Over the years, Baforkum has had successive leaders, all from the group that came from Santa-Mbei. They too have also been assimilated into the Bambui traditional system—through intermarriages, for example. One notable example is Chief Akum who married a Bambui woman; they produced many children, naming one of them Ngufor, after his paternal grandfather, *fon* Ngufor of Santa-Mbei. Interestingly, the young Ngufor also had a son and named him Akum, after his father in-law, Chief Akum of Baforkum.

The population of present day Baforkum has grown exponentially, allowing the sub-chief, in consultation with the *fon* of Bambui, to allocate a quarter head or heads to assist the ailing Chief James Boma with the administration of the region. Like the *fon* of Bambui and most of his sub-chiefs and quarter heads, the members of authority in the traditional hierarchy in Baforkum have also assembled a huge collection of treasures in their homes. I was privileged to be given access to some of these treasures during field work (plates 3-10).

Finge

The name Finge originates from Kom, and is one of the regions in the present day Belo sub-division, precisely above the Mbingo Baptist

Hospital. At the turn of the twentieth century, some of its indigenes left Belo because they sought autonomy from the main Kom kingdom. In fact, they wanted to have their own *Kwifor*, the regulatory society in most or all Grassfields kingdoms, but this privilege was never granted. After Kom, they settled at Kifem, a region in Kedjom Keku or Big Babanki, but this did not last either as their host Big Babanki also refused them the right to the autonomy they desired. Accordingly, they started searching for a new area until one of their leaders called Ngam visited Bambui for traditional treatment at Ndzembue quarter and used the opportunity to ask *fon* Acheyifor (the *fon* of Bambui at the time), if his people could be allowed to relocate there. Because Ndzembue at the time was essentially virgin land made up of kola nut forests and raffia palms for the *fon* and some of his notables and citizens, *fon* Acheyifor granted Ngam's request and his people left Kifem in Big Babanki in about 1925, settling in Bambui under the same name of Finge, and retaining the Kom language.

Prior to their relocation, Ngam and his people entered an agreement with the *fon* of Bambui in which they accepted that they would obey and respect the *fon* of Bambui and all its institutions, such as *Kwifor* or regulatory society, *Takembeng* or the society of princes. Respecting these institutions meant that the Finge were never going to form rival institutions such as *Kwifor* because they were accepted as a sub-chiefdom under Bambui and sub-chiefdoms normally don't have a *Kwifor*. Besides, two *Kwifors* are not allowed to exist side by side in one kingdom in Grassfields traditional ideology. Hence, the terms of the agreement were to be strictly followed. The founding chief of Finge, Chief Ngam, respected and enforced the terms of the agreement until his death. After his death, his successor Chief Waze began going against the terms of the agreement. Shortly after taking over Chief Waze created a rival *Kwifor*, which greatly provoked *fon* Acheyifor and the Bambui traditional authorities. Chief Waze's actions were interpreted not only as a violation of the terms of the agreement but also as an indication that Finge was never going to recognise Bambui as its overlord. Hence, Chief Waze and his people were advised to leave Bambui in about 1932. From Bambui, they settled at Kedjom Ketingoh or Small Babanki, situated precisely between Mile 14 and Mile 16 on the Bamenda-Kumbo Highway, part of the Bamenda Ring Road.

At their new site, Chief Waze and his people thought they had found a solution to the problem of autonomy because they were not answerable to anyone as their host. For one, the *fon* of Kedjom Ketingoh and his people pretended to be different from Kedjom Keku and Bambui, by remaining silent, thinking Chief Waze and his people had learnt lessons from their

previous encounters. But, this was short-lived because Chief Waze tried again to re-establish his *Kwifor* at the new site. Kedjom Ketingoh saw this as a threat to their sovereignty and cautioned Chief Waze about the implications of his actions. Besides, Chief Waze and his people soon realised that the region did not possess most of the resources that could support their survival. Bonu (2012) explains that life was unbearable at their new site due to:

- Poor soil—it was only good for Irish potatoes, cabbages and herding.
- Farmer grazer problems—Sabga is inhabited by the Fulanis whose livelihood is cattle rearing. Their cattle graze all over the place.
- Climatically, the area is cold and windy.
- Lack of firewood for domestic purposes—it is an almost treeless location characterised by shrubs and brush (112-113).

Against this background, Chief Waze and his people started the search for a new site which also extended to a reconsideration of some of the previous sites. Eventually, Ndzembue, the previous site in Bambui came up as one of the most suitable, resulting in Chief Waze sending some of his men to appeal to the *fon* of Bambui and ask if he could allow them to return. This was followed by successive pleas until *fon* Acheyifor decided to reciprocate by also sending two of his notables, Mbunuo Mayah and Solomon Beloke, to Chief Waze.

As royal messengers, the two notables took with them two calabashes of palm wine “stocked with raffia palm leaves”— as a symbol of royalty (Bonu 2012, 113). Their message was simple and straightforward: it stated that “*fon* Acheyifor and the Bambui *Kwifor* had heard the Finge plea with great sympathy and therefore granted their request” (ibid.). This was welcomed with a lot of alacrity and in about 1941 Chief Waze and his followers started the process of returning to Bambui. The return and eventual resettlement of Chief Waze and his followers is described in the following extract:

Upon their arrival in Bambui, some of the Finge people such as the parents of Aban Mbu took refuge with old friends while *fon* Acheyifor housed their leader Chief Waze at his former compound at Mandzembang. A new site, called Ndzemesang, an area that was used in cultivating guinea corn was allocated to Chief Waze and his people.

The new site was rich in agricultural resources such as raffia palms and kola nut trees planted by Bambui people such as Pa Ngeh Langsi, Pa Asogofa, Pa Yigha-a, Pa Zoghochu, Pa Chiembife and also the *fon* of Bambui at the time.