

The Rulers of German Africa 1884-1914

L. H. GANN & PETER DUIGNAN



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Preface

The present work is intended as the first in a multi-volume work designed to elucidate the sociological and functional characteristics, the achievements as well as the shortcomings, of the white empire builders, civilian and military, during the age of the "New Imperialism" in Africa. The present volume on the Germans before 1914 will be followed by parallel studies on the British, the Belgians, the Portuguese, and the French. We shall later deal with the evolution of the colonial establishments, and end with the sociology of decolonization. We have concentrated on the white bureaucrats and military officers, their social backgrounds, general preconceptions, and *modus operandi*, but we soon found that we could not dissociate the rulers from the ruled, or the bureaucracies from the wider social and economic framework in which they operated. This study then evolved into one that shows how the Germans ran their empire and portrays the colonial elite and their work in Africa. It is meant as a contribution to Euro-African history or to the history of Europe in Africa.

The *Kolonialreich* extended over four separate and widely dispersed territories. It comprised many peoples—Stone Age hunters in the Kalahari desert, Nama pastoralists, Ngoni warriors with an Iron Age culture, Islamic lords in the Sudan, Swahili-speaking traders, and many others. The colonial dependencies were much smaller than those under British or French sway; nevertheless, they constituted an empire of impressive size. Largely acquired between 1883 and 1884, the African colonies extended over more than 900,000 square miles—considerably more than four times the area of the Reich, with about one-fifth of its population as shown in the following table:

The German Colonial Empire, 1913

Colony	Capital	Area (sq. mi. est.)	White population	Indigenous population (est.)
Togo	Lome	33,700	368	1,031,978
Cameroun	Buea	191,130	1,871	2,648,720
South-West Africa	Windhuk	322,450	14,830	79,556
East Africa	Dar es Salaam	384,180	5,336	7,645,770
Kiau Tschau (China)	Tsingtau	200	—	168,900
Pacific possessions	Rabaul and Apia	96,160	1,984	634,579
TOTAL COLONIES		1,027,820	24,389	12,041,603
German Reich in Europe		208,780	64,925,993	

SOURCE: *Statesman's Yearbook* (London, 1916), pp. 967-68.

This vast colonial empire was of only marginal significance to Germany's metropolitan economy. The various colonialist lobbies gained importance only after acquisition of the empire; Germany's pre-colonial trade with the African continent was small, and although the Kaiser's stake in Africa increased after the turn of the century, the colonies played a negligible part in German trade and foreign investment. German settlers in search of new homes overseas preferred the Americas or the British dominions to the German colonies. By 1913, thirty years or so after the establishment of the Kolonialreich, its European population numbered no more than that of a country town like Konstanz or Reutlingen.

The financial means available for colonial expansion were limited; hence the public treasury was forced to assume a considerable share of the burden. The total amount spent on the colonies by the German taxpayers in the form of imperial subsidies and subventions between 1884 and 1914 was 451.5 million marks. (1 mark = \$0.23.) This sum was considerably less than the revenue received from Germany's post and telegraph services in a single year, but it exceeded by a considerable margin the total funds placed in the colonies by private companies (346.6 million marks). Seen in terms of German capitalism as a whole, colonialism was at best a speculative investment and at worst a form of conspicuous consumption to be assisted at the general taxpayers' expense.

The German colonial empire also was marginal to German society.

There was no colonial tradition, no far-flung British-type "old boys' network" of men who wanted their sons to serve their empire overseas; no German ever talked as did his British neighbor of joining a

. . . Legion that was never 'listed,
That carries no colours or crest.
But, split in a thousand detachments,
Is breaking the road for the rest.

On the contrary, for many years the German colonies were widely regarded as places fit only for idlers and ne'er-do-wells, where young men supposedly met a rapid end from drink, fever, or venery.

German colonialism was not without significance, however, and it profoundly affected the regions brought under its dominion. The changing colonial structure reflected profound changes within German society. German colonialism was begun on a shoestring as a limited-liability venture designed to benefit a few special interest groups. Gradually the Germans established effective rule over the vast territories they claimed for their own. The colonial armies and the colonial administration attracted a substantial number of aristocratic officers and administrators as well as marginal men, but over the years the administrative structure became more bureaucratic in tone and more bourgeois in composition. The rate of capital investment in the colonies increased. Germany made more deliberate attempts to develop her colonies in an economic sense, and Africans increasingly came to be looked upon not as foes to be conquered but as "economic men" to be prized as wage workers, cultivators, and customers.

The German impact was double-edged in its effect. Conquest involved violence and brutality—sometimes on a grim scale. While a people like the Ewe in Togo benefited from increasing Western contacts, the Herero and the Nama of South-West Africa suffered social disaster: their tribal organization was shattered and their lands were lost. But the Germans also made a number of positive contributions. They provided a basic infrastructure of modern transport; they encouraged new forms of economic enterprise; they promoted mining; they stimulated research; they imported new crops; to some extent they promoted peasant agriculture in export crops. They were responsible for the first feeble beginnings of secondary industry in their territories. They made a start, however slight, in providing Western-type education, hospitals, and dispensaries, government research in medicine,

agriculture, and veterinary problems. They built a Western-type civil administration; they laid the foundations of new states. Their colonial elite helped to force German Africa into the world economy; they introduced new skills and new occupations, and created new economic needs and new economic opportunities. German colonialism thus was an engine of modernization with far-reaching effects for the future. German rule provided African people with new alternatives and a wider range of choices.

There was a problem of colonial “backwash” to the mother country. Few Germans who served in the colonies settled there. The returning colonialists—angry, discontented—sometimes contributed to right-wing radicalism, and some ex-colonialists later joined the Nazi party; however, we could find no evidence to support Hannah Arendt’s thesis linking colonialism to the emergence of fascism. German colonialism was the product of an older tradition; it was created by the Wilhelmian era in Germany, with the strengths and weaknesses of a military empire that has passed into oblivion.

Our account is not an exhaustive one. Had we attempted to write a definitive examination of the German administrative and military impact on all the regions under the imperial flag, we should have had to devote half a lifetime to the perusal of surviving archives in East Germany, West Germany, South-West Africa, Togo, Tanzania, and Cameroun. It would have filled many volumes. Instead, we have tried to produce a briefer, interpretative study, making use of the extensive body of scholarly monographs already in existence. Our work is based on case histories and on selective samples in an attempt to cover Germany’s African empire as a whole, but with special attention to East Africa—the largest of the German colonies, reputedly the “German India.” Since numerous parallel topics have had to be covered, we have had to accept some repetition.

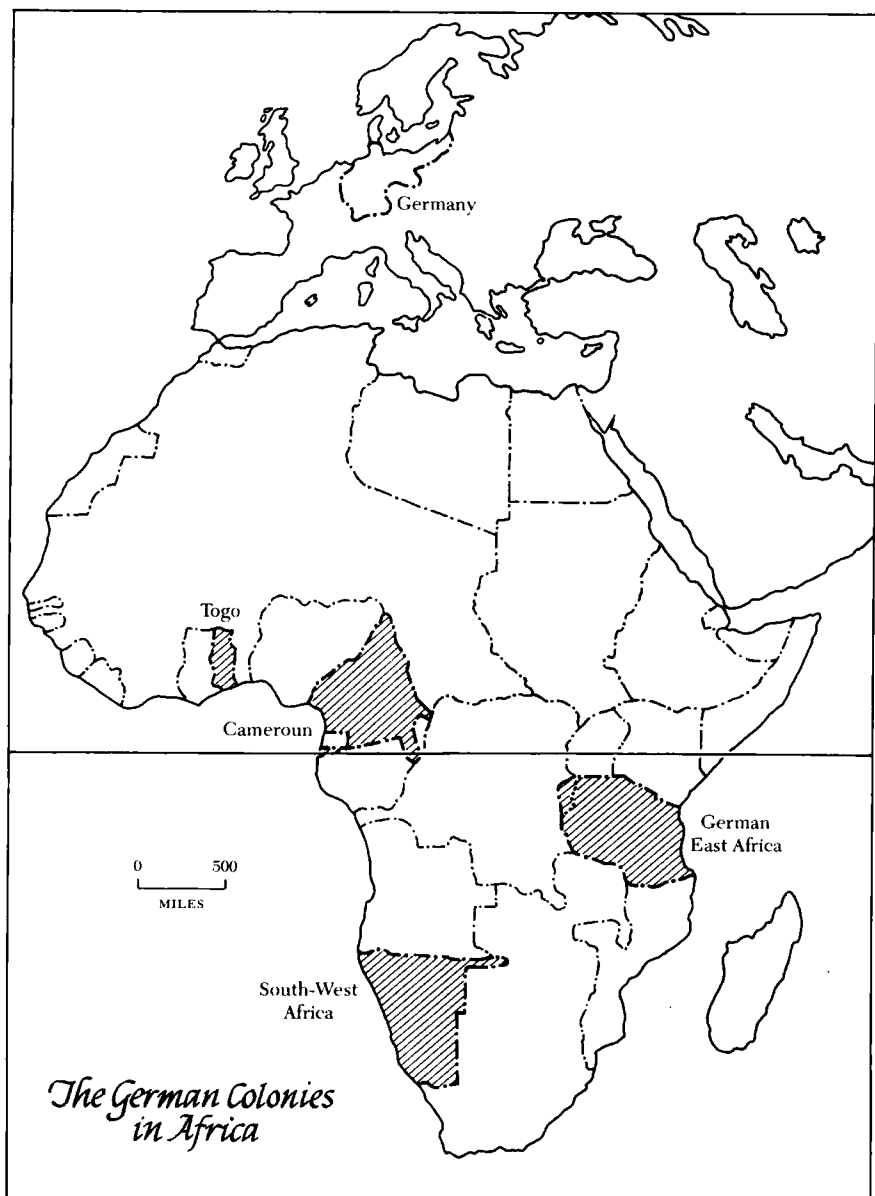
Our work has been lightened by the generous aid received from many institutions and from many individual scholars. Thanks are due to the respective heads and staff of the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz; to the Militärarchiv of the Bundesarchiv in Freiburg im Breisgau; to the Geheime Staatsarchiv, the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, the library of the Kammergericht, Witzlebenstrasse, the Berliner Senatsbibliothek, and the library of the Museum für Völkerkund—all

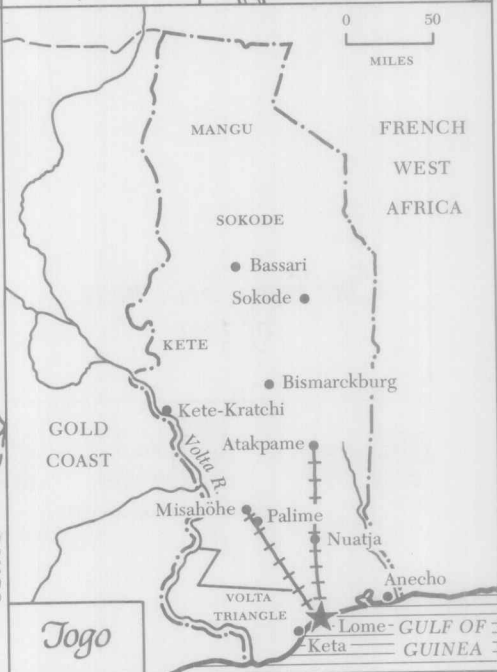
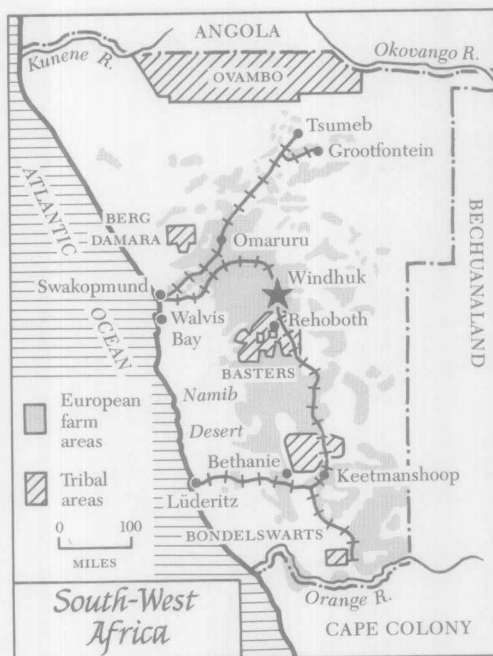
in Berlin; to the Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes in Bonn; and to the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Munich.

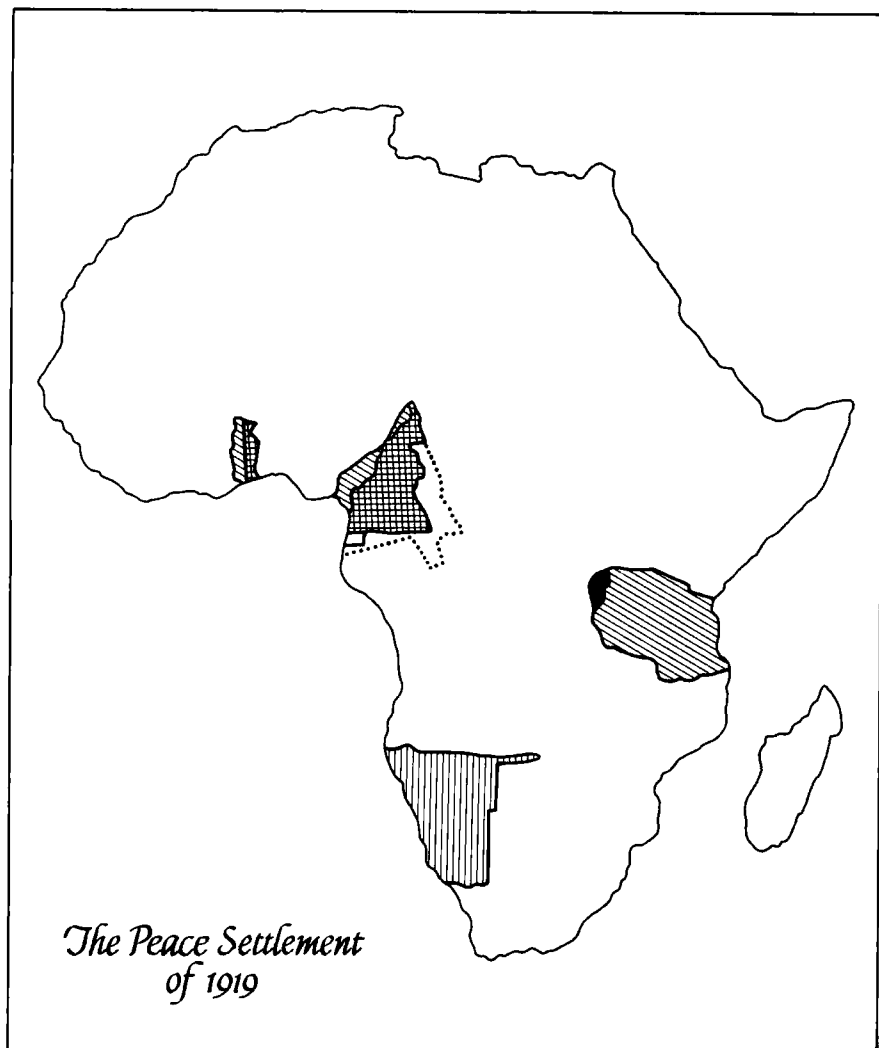
Professors Franz Ansprenger, Ralph Austen, Gordon Craig, Arthur D. Knoll, Jake Spidle, and Woodruff D. Smith have read parts of our manuscript. Mrs. Agnes Peterson and Mrs. Monika Wölk read our original position paper. This work was made possible through the assistance of a research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, but the findings and conclusions here do not necessarily represent the views of the Endowment. We are especially indebted to the Historische Kommission zu Berlin, and particularly to Professors Otto Büsch and Hans Herzfeld, whose advice and whose institutional help—including financial assistance—have been of particular benefit to us.

L.H.G.
P.D.

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May 1977







French
Mandate



British
Mandate



Belgian
Mandate



Mandated to Union
of South Africa

The dotted line indicates parts of the former German empire that were reincorporated
into French colonial territory

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Introduction

Germany and the German Colonial Service

The Bismarckian empire emerged in 1871 after a victorious war had stripped France of Alsace-Lorraine and deprived her of any claim to European primacy. As a result of unification at home and military victories abroad against Denmark (1864), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1866), and France (1871), Germany had become the world's most powerful military state, but the Reich was a union of disparate parts characterized by great regional, religious, economic, and constitutional differences.

The *Länder* (states) retained their separate administrative structures and their own identities. The ethos of a state like Bavaria, which was monarchical and Catholic with a numerous peasantry and a substantial petty bourgeoisie of small traders and craftsmen, differed greatly from that, say, of Baden—a grand duchy in southwestern Germany, which was liberal in its traditions and strongly influenced by the French Revolution—or of a free city such as Hamburg, which was Protestant in religion and dependent on shipping, banking, and overseas commerce. The wide variety of administrative and legal traditions took considerable time to coalesce. The *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (German legal code), for instance, did not come into force in its entirety until 1900—nearly three decades after unification of the Reich.

Rapid economic change added further to the disparities of life in the German empire. Industrial development centered principally in the Ruhr region, Saxony, and Silesia. Urbanization proceeded at a slower pace in the south than in Prussia or in Saxony, and small and medium-sized farms played a much more important part in agriculture there than they did in the east. The Reich, once predominantly an agrarian

TABLE 1
*Comparison of the Growth of Key Industries in Germany,
 France, and Great Britain, 1870–1914*

Industry	Germany	France	Great Britain
Coal production ^a			
1870	34.0	13.3	112.0
1914	277.0	40.0	292.0
Pig-iron production ^a			
1870	1.3	1.2	6.0
1914	14.7	4.6	11.0
Steel production ^a			
1870	0.3	0.3	0.7
1914	14.0	3.5	6.5
Manufacturing (1913 = 100)			
1870	16.0	31.0	44.0
1914	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery of Europe* (Oxford, 1954), pp. xxix–xxxi.

^a Millions of tons.

state, became the greatest industrial power of Europe (see Table 1). By 1914 the Germans had taken the lead in Europe in many branches of industry—steel-making, chemical engineering, electrical enterprises; German shipyards were capable of building the largest and fastest vessels in the world, such as the giant passenger liners of the *Imperator* class—270 meters long and 30 meters broad, displacing 50,000 tons.

When the Franco-German War broke out in 1870, the total population of the various German states was 41 million, compared with 36 million in France, and in economic terms the struggle between France and Germany was a contest between equals. Forty years later, the economic power of France was considerably overshadowed by that of her neighbor across the Rhine, and Germany's population of 65 million was larger than that of any European country except Russia.

The German empire was dominated by Prussia, the largest and wealthiest state within the Reich. Prussian traditions, with their emphasis on efficiency, economy, and military might, pervaded the administrative practices of the Reich and had considerable influence even within the smaller south German states. As shaped by Bismarck and his successors, Prussian power rested on a tacit alliance between the various segments of the rural aristocracy and the more conservative upper middle classes. The nobility, which continued to play a major