

Preface

I had the good fortune to teach Economic Organization at the University of Sierra Leone for a period of nearly ten years. This work opened my eyes to the great gaps in printed information about the economy of Sierra Leone. This explains the original objective of this book: *to prepare a careful description of a neglected topic*. Needless to say, I was convinced that of all neglected topics in the field of economics the role of the Lebanese was the most important. Many Sierra Leoneans have encouraged me by sharing this view.

A second objective emerged in the course of my research when I discovered that the Lebanese should not be studied in isolation but against the background of the economy of Sierra Leone as a whole. I realized that I had to learn a great deal more about the economic history of the country. This meant extra work, but has enabled me to present their activities as being *closely interwoven with the economic history of Sierra Leone*. Economic factors and relationships dominate in this book. It differs therefore from other studies of immigrant trading communities which are mainly sociological or political in character.

My third objective has been to give *a fair and unbiased account*. This has not been easy because the Lebanese have come in for a lot of criticism and they have not defended themselves in writing.

I must point out here that I have not tried to write a survey of the Lebanese in West Africa. I hold the view that the economic histories of the various countries in West Africa differ in certain important respects and I am convinced that the operations of the Lebanese in these countries reflect these differences to some extent, so that general conclusions are not permitted. When occasionally I have felt that a comparison with the Lebanese elsewhere was appropriate or stimulating, I have used a note to point this out.

VI *Preface*

The printed information which I consulted posed three problems. The first one was practical. The references to the Lebanese are scattered over numerous publications and in many cases the relevant passage consisted of only one sentence so that I found it hard to decide in what way the author considered it significant. A second problem was posed by publications on West Africa. How far could I assume that general conclusions and observations about West Africa applied to Sierra Leone? I had lived in this country long enough to know the hazards of doing so without considerable care. However, I had to study these publications and, in fact, I owe a great deal to them. I have listed the more useful ones in the second section of the bibliography. The third problem resulted from a serious bias in my sources, which were written by Europeans and Sierra Leoneans, but hardly ever by Lebanese. Moreover, many of the references to the Lebanese consisted of criticisms, as I have already mentioned. On examination I found that though these negative comments were rarely totally invalid, they unduly accentuated the faults of the Lebanese. At the same time there was a tendency to overlook the merits of the Lebanese. I had to overcome this bias by interviewing many Lebanese, so that in the end I could reconstruct their point of view. This was the most difficult aspect of my research, but it was also the most rewarding one. I was compelled to look at incidents and developments — whether well-known or obscure — from a stand not previously occupied by other scholars. In several cases I gained new insights which may be stimulating to those who are primarily interested in the role of European enterprise in colonial Africa or in the process of African emancipation in the 20th century.

I worked in Sierra Leone from 1959 to 1971. During the first five years of this period I paid some, but no special attention to the Lebanese. The idea of writing this book was conceived in 1964. For the next five years I achieved little in the form of tangible results because of my teaching and administrative obligations at Fourah Bay College. These were years of gradual orientation towards the subject based on newspaper items, casual conversations, and haphazard observation. There was no need to reach conclusions quickly — something which I have come to appreciate in retrospect. Since September 1969 when I joined the Afrika-Studiecentrum in Leiden I have been able to work full time on this subject.

My fieldwork was done between September 1969 and March 1971 and consisted of interviews and systematic observation. I interviewed 273 Lebanese in Sierra Leone and 70 other people (Sierra Leoneans, Europeans, Indians, etc.). The interviews gave me an opportunity to assess the competence of the Lebanese and to discover the things that mattered to them.

Events and subjects which figured largely or repeatedly in interviews I have tried to trace in reports and newspapers, often with success, but, of course, much of what I heard had never been put on paper because it had seemed unimportant at the time or it had been done stealthily, or because the Government had chosen not to publish it. I was therefore left with much oral information that was not confirmed by any documents. Most of it I abandoned with regret but some remarks which I considered reliable and essential have been included in this book.

The plan of the book is as follows. The historical introduction in Chapter 1 is followed by ten chapters which are economic in character. Chapter 2 presents those aspects of the economic history of Sierra Leone which were significant for the Lebanese while Chapter 11 summarizes my conclusions about the Lebanese entrepreneur. Thus Chapters 2 and 11 form the two cores of the economic argument which I present. The intervening chapters describe the activities in which the Lebanese have participated and the role they have played in them. Although there is a great deal of detail in these chapters, the interaction between the Lebanese entrepreneur and the Sierra Leonean environment is always the central theme.

Chapters 12 and 13 are mainly sociological. They present in a simple way the information which I gained in interviews and from observation. This seemed the best solution for an author who has no formal training in sociology. For readers who know little about the Lebanese it may be useful to read these two chapters immediately after Chapter 1.

Chapters 14-17 are political in character. The attitudes of and measures taken by the authorities in Sierra Leone are described and their implications for the Lebanese are discussed, in particular the economic ones. The final chapter supplements the economic conclusions of Chapter 11 in the light of the social and political information in Chapters 12-17. In conclusion there are some remarks about the future of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone.

Fourah Bay College has contributed to this book in several ways and I am glad of this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the College Authorities. It was the College that gave me the opportunity to teach in Sierra Leone for many years, without which this book would never have been written. The College also granted me two sabbatical terms which I devoted to the initial research for this book. Later, during my fieldwork, the College accorded me the status of Visiting Research Fellow and provided me and my family with housing and other facilities.

I am grateful to the Afrika-Studiecentrum for accepting my research

VIII *Preface*

project fully and unconditionally when I joined it, and for giving me the opportunity to complete this book without being encumbered by other duties.

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Mr. F. Salloukh, the Lebanese Chargé d'Affaires in Freetown, and Mr. G.B. Haddad, Secretary in the Embassy, answered many questions and introduced me to many Lebanese businessmen. I greatly appreciate their help. I cannot mention all my informants by name, but I shall long remember the kindness and frankness which so many of them showed to me.

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