



## COLLECTANEA INSTITUTI ANTHROPOS

David Zeitlyn  
**Sua in Somié**

Aspects of Mambila Traditional Religion  
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This work is an analysis of Mambila religion based on fieldwork in Somié village, Cameroon. An ethnographic and historical introduction to the Mambila is followed by an account of their religious concepts. It is argued that, despite their adherence to Christianity (and to Islam), traditional practices continue to be of great importance in everyday life. In order to examine traditional practice descriptions are given of the masquerades and the different oath-taking rites. Translated transcripts of the different forms of the *sua*-oath form the empirical core of the book. The transcripts illustrate the way that Mambila experience and understand the meaning of *sua*. Finally, problems are examined inherent in the analysis of non-literate societies lacking a reflective tradition, and in particular, societies lacking precise, structured religious concepts. These problems have important implications which are discussed in the final discussion of the relationships between religion, politics, and "symbolic power".

David Zeitlyn is a British Academy Fellow at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford and a Research Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford, U.K. He has been researching the Mambila since 1985 and has undertaken several periods of fieldwork mainly in Cameroon but also in Nigeria. He is working on a book on divination developing some of the arguments of "Professor Garfinkel Visits the Soothsayers: Ethnomethodology and Mambila Divination" (*Man* 25, 1990: 654-666). His research among the Mambila is currently examining the use of naturally occurring language as evidence for the anthropological analysis of kinship structures, as outlined in "Reconstructing Kinship or the Pragmatics of Kin Talk" (*Man* 28, 1993: 199-224).

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