CHAPTER FOUR

THE MALLAM AND THE QADIS: A POSTING TO ZINDER, 1900–1903

Setting a Course for West Africa

In October 1900, Gaden found a berth on the steamer Mananhao to travel from France to West Africa. He was part of Gouraud’s new mission under Colonel Peroz to Zinder in Niger, an area of increasing importance now that Chad had been stabilised. An outbreak of yellow fever had occurred in Dakar, and this prevented Gaden from disembarking at the port and head- ing overland through Senegal to the Niger and beyond. Instead, he went around the coast into the Gulf of Guinea, calling at the port of Conakry and then on to Kotonou in Dahomey. From there the column of men and supplies would travel directly north along the border with Nigeria until it reached the Niger River, where it would have to make its way east towards Zinder on the fringes of the Sahara desert.

Gouraud had left France about ten days earlier than Gaden and with him were travelling the two Lieutenant-Colonels who were responsible for the new mission: Gaden’s superior officer from Bandiagara, Destenave, now promoted in rank; and Peroz, a tall, thin man of Spanish origin with a hooked nose, piercing eyes and a moustache in the style of Louis XIII. Destenave was to take charge of the mission to Chad, now ‘pacified’ after the defeat of Rabah and his armies. His party continued on board their ocean-going steamer until the mouth of the Congo, which they would navigate up as far as its tributary, the Ubangi, following its course until they reached the area around the Chari River. From there they would descend the river in the direction of Chad. Peroz, who headed up the mission to the region now designated the ‘Third Military Territory’, would be based in Zinder, a town perched above the frontier of British-held Nigeria almost exactly halfway along its east-west axis. The Third Territory was to be divided into two regions, with Peroz allocating himself the eastern part and the western part he gave to Gouraud, under whose orders Gaden envisaged himself serving once they arrived.

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1 A mallam is the title of a respected Muslim religious leader or scholar in West Africa, and a qadi is Muslim judge with jurisdiction over religious and secular matters, who operates in relation to the prevailing consensus among the community of scholars, the ulama.
Map 3. Missions to Zinder 1900–1903 and to Chad 1904–1907.