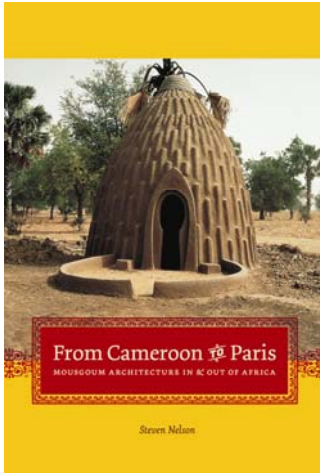


**From Cameroon to Paris : Mousgoum Architecture In & Out of Africa** / Steve Nelson.—Chicago, IL : The University of Chicago Press, March 2007.—261 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-0-226-57183-6 (cl., alk. paper): \$50.00.



The architecture of Sub-Saharan Africa is relatively unfamiliar to most audiences, even to students of African art, so general surveys of the subject are the norm in this field. Steven Nelson's book on the architecture of the Mousgoum peoples of northern Cameroon and Chad, based on fieldwork gathered for his 1998 Harvard dissertation, is a notable exception to this approach.

Nelson's broad introduction to Mousgoum architecture in chapter 1 primarily serves to contextualize the *teleuk* (pl. *teleukakay* in the Munjuk language), one special type of domestic structure within the Mousgoum building vocabulary. Made by skilled, mostly male masons, from earth, dung and grasses, and decorated by women, the *teleuk* has traditionally been one of the highest expressions of Mousgoum aesthetics. The aesthetic qualities of this domed building were recognized even by early twentieth-century European visitors such as Heinrich Barth and Andre Gide, who admired the "mathematical precision" which underlay the construction,

even as they ultimately classified the *teleuk* as a wonderful piece of handicraft, and not really proper architecture at all. It is through the publication and distribution of such travel writings, images and, finally, the appearance in 3-D of the *teleuk* itself at the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris that the building virtually traveled "from Cameroon to Paris."

Nelson's book is compact and the overall design is pleasing, particularly the ridged, mustard-colored endpapers that recall the *teleuk's* textured exterior. The judiciously selected images originate from a wide range of sources; in addition to his own field photographs of Mousgoum architecture, Nelson uses popular lithographs, banknotes, posters and postcards to demonstrate how the building's meaning changed throughout history and in different geographic regions. Nelson's great strength is that he can provide a close reading of the images, as well as examine the *teleuk* within the established canon of architectural history.

Nelson's scholarship is informed by post-structuralism, feminism, and psychoanalytic theory; however, his writing remains refreshingly free from obfuscatory rhetoric and accessible to upper division undergraduates. In addition to Africanists and architectural historians, this book also will appeal to students of gender studies, popular culture, and post-colonial studies.

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