

Moveable and Property Holdings of North and West Cameroon

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Abstract – During a very long time the richness and the beauty of African architecture were ignored. Despite a relatively low density of population, Africa, more than any other continent, has a great architectural complexity. According to atlas's of African civilizations, more than 2000 people live there and each one has practically its own singular material culture. To appreciate the African houses, it is not enough to know how and with what they were built. The way they are integrated into the landscape and tally with the needs and beliefs of the persons who elaborate it are also capital criteria. But given the prodigious variety of religions and rituals that occur in Africa, it is inconceivable to speak broadly of architecture, at most can one release from a certain number of common characteristics, some rare general information.

The architecture of Cameroun North has been chosen for the present study because of its richness and its artistic diversity: Mousgoum (houses shell), Matakam (stone houses), Moslems (soro); but mostly because of the fact that it has attracted little attention from researchers. The architecture of this part of the country constitutes a national and even worldwide heritage which would have absolutely to be safeguarded and also a tourist field to develop.

Keywords – Architecture, Art and Tradition, Conservation, Heritage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Perpetrate their lifestyle was the fundamental ideal of many African societies whose entire cultural heritage was transmitted orally. This does not imply the absence of changes. But those changes, either economic or social, were suddenly absorbed in a preservative system. It is within this context that architecture became the solution provided by a group to the specific problem of housing, solution tailored to each community and reaffirmed in every generation [1].

The houses strictly corresponded to the conditions of socio-economic life of those who lived there. They were built for that purpose by those who were to live there. The construction of the house was one of the main activities of the Matakam family, who spared no effort to carry out this task. We can therefore say without exaggeration that the Africa traditional habitation was considered as a genuine political priority. Everyone, without exception, owned his home and everyone was proud to live in his own house: this was seen as an external symbol or manifestation of community identity.

In many societies, the focus was on compliance rather than innovation, and those who succeeded too well aroused some suspicion. Nothing or not much was no incentive to consider the construction of a home as an investment or as an expression of success and wealth. This

is how most of them were identical: if necessary they could be more important from a quantitative than qualitative point. Villages became therefore groups of similar houses formed of an identical construction group, so that one could say quite often where was beginning the next.

II. METHOD

After several months of exploration in the field, between the North and the West of Cameroon, the various techniques used by the traditional architects have been confronted. Finally it appears that the technique is similar but the obtained materials are different from one region to another one.

The present study aims to examine and to show different architectural techniques of the North and West regions of Cameroon. The accent put on the traditional realizations answers the pressing need to adapt more the housing environment of today to the local conditions and the necessity of rediscovering the merits of the use of the natural materials, without refusing for all that the appeal to the modern techniques [2].

III. RESULTS

The architecture of the North Cameroon was the object of our choice because of its great wealth and of its artistic diversity. Especially as well as this one little drew the attention of the researchers [4]. All these constructions testify of an obvious artistic research, both by the choice of their setting-up in the natural site and in the control of the shape and the concern of the detail. The traditional architecture which uses natural materials (earth, wood, bamboo, straw and stone) was considered for a long time as rudimentary architecture, of shortage. It shows itself, in Cameroon, in all its magnificence, testifying of the well know-how of civilization with the preserved originality (Photos 1, 2, 3).

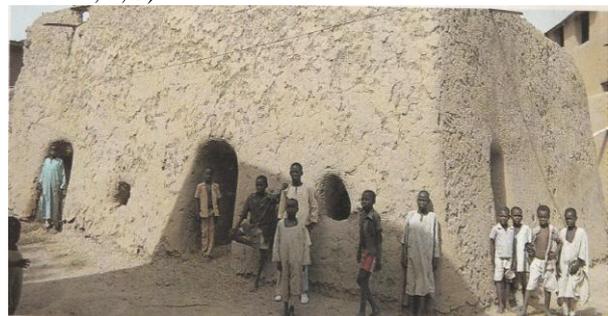


Photo 1: Kotoko House (North-Cameroon) (Moussima)

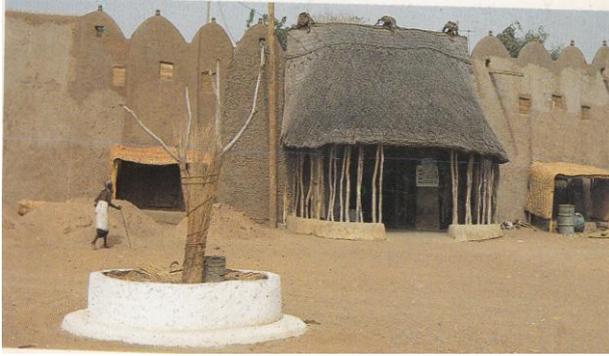


Photo 2 : Rey-Bouba Main facade of the Sultan Saré (Moussima)



Photo 3 : Set of Mofou habitations (Moussima)

III.1. Art and Architecture

Underlying what realize the human beings since the stage of the imagined idea until that of the material realization, the art and the architecture seem confidentially associated.

Architecture aims at meeting movable and immediate needs by providing appropriate and functional frameworks in the various activities of the human being; it is also an expression of beauty, or at least adds beauty to frame for a deeper enjoyment and more fruitful. So she makes one with the perceived and defined art as the set of processes to do something, or as an expression of an ideal of beauty in human works. Finally, the work of art usually refers to an object, an action, a gesture which has a minimum of logic in their approach and rigor in their processes. We thus find "useful and enjoyable"; it exists in Cameroon and more because art is directly involved in the world of symbols, beliefs and rituals.

The traditional architecture in Cameroon is a well-known from specialist because the geographical position of the country at the cross roads of major civilizations of black Africa, allows the meet of Bantu peoples of southern Sahelian and Northern Sudanese, and intermediate forms of Western Grassland, the sultanate and lamidats Northern or North Mousgoum peasants with their smaller boxes called telekboxes (shell boxes). All these buildings show an obvious artistic research, both in the choice of their location in the natural site as in controlling the shape and detail. Traditional architecture which uses natural materials (earth, wood, bamboo straw and stone) has been considered for a long time as a rudimentary architecture. It

reveals itself in Cameroon and in all its magnificence, reflecting the know-how of civilizations that have preserved their originality. As possible, it is necessary to collect and preserve these ancient skills [5].

During the last decades, the conservation of heritage has become a concern that affects all countries. The willingness to contribute has unanimous support. However, in so-called developing countries, it unfortunately appears to be a luxury reserved for the most favored regions. Conservation actually supports a dual approach: one maintains the testimony of a bygone era and located outside the memory, the other is the link alive between the past and the present. For example, the restored buildings will be rehabilitated preserving and showing the spirit of their design. Dedicated to new assignments, they can serve as transition guide and contribute to the upgrading of the modern world of business.

In this respect, experience has shown that development and urban planning projects that are not rooted in a familiar reality to the people cannot win the support of the population. In architecture, refusing to use tradition could also be very expensive. By abandoning the use of local materials and turning away from a secular know-how, technical and financial dependence is encouraged. Research conducted in collaboration with developing countries and industrialized countries have shown that traditional and appropriately treated materials are extremely reliable. It is not about an impossible return to the past, but a preparation of creative and operational synthesis between so-called modern techniques.

The human cost of contempt for the past, though rarely recognized by economists, is not negligible. Indeed, the traditional concept of habitat reflects societies to rigorous and subtle organization where oral, aesthetic and plastic communication is fundamental. The individual lives there surrounded by markers allowing him to be located within the human community, and stay in touch with the divine.

Art and architecture, reflections and expression of the totality of the human, are also realities in which the human being recognizes himself and acknowledges the unity of his essence in relation to other creatures. Sculptors and foundry workers who are working on wood and metal, the craftsman, these men of the savannah who create and build only show specific aspects of the mankind's genius.

From the fusion between human intelligence and community resources, will born what will destroy the existing harmony of nature, to build more tailored to the needs of men in society. Grasp what the art object is means to understand that it is a construction of signs, objects of mind containing spirit, witness and memory of the past time and space. The crudity of certain objects or the simplicity of expression is still hiding wealth of meaning which is grasped if one seeks to understand the subtlety of the formal composition, but also everything that surrounds the use of objects, especially in religious and social rituals. (We can see again the wealth of Cameroon.)

What wonders the Bamileke's chiefdoms provide us! Around the chief's hut there are multiple buildings with

very specific complex functions corresponding to a hierarchical social system in which everyone has a place, as many rites, as many symbols and decorations. Similarly, in the North, other types of habitats are developed, ranging from palaces (Sultans or smaller heads) to the village huts.

In this regard, the variety of habitats of the North, and the Far North is remarkable: round or square boxes, isolated or in series contained in an enclosure, conical roofs or sides or on the terrace, or residue cover clay, etc. All materials are employed here: wood, stone, plants. It is the same with methods: masonry, weaving, basketry, pottery, etc.

Among these artistic and architectural achievements the Bamoum Kingdom, located west of Cameroon, has shaped for more than five centuries something unique, and that as well in continuity, both in terms of artistic creation than on architectural designs. Wood, metal, stone, earth, straw, tree resins, barkstoo, ivory, bones are the materials used for the production of utilitarian objects that areas much works of art.

“These materials also appear for constructions which give an idea of the possibilities of the genius of each people. These materials also appear for constructions which here give an idea of the possibilities of the genius of each people. The former palace of the Bamoum’s Kings whose reconstruction model through the center of Artistic and Technological Creativity (in Foumban and Yaoundé) is exposed. It involved nearly 90units assigned to specific activities, excluding the courtyards, the whole being enclosed. Inspired by external forces while retaining its African identity and Bamoum, King Njoya built the new palace [6].

III.2. Traditional Houses

In Europe and North America, houses are a closed space sheltered by walls and a roof. In Africa, it was hardly the case. Houses were generally formed of several similar buildings gathered with each other and surrounded by a wall or a fence, each building being designed for a specific use: kitchen, bedroom, and warehouse. Outwardly, nothing much distinguished the different constructions: the warehouse and the bedroom looked alike. Boxes for house holders were often not particularly elaborate or larger than the others, and sometimes the attic or barn were the most important buildings of the whole. The vernacular or traditional architecture is usually designed according to the environment. This requires for traditional communities a long-term view which results in respect of habitat resources: they do not loot it to obtain the necessary materials, but to collect as their needs that they must, in limited quantities at certain times. African houses were often rebuilt in every generation to suit the new social distribution of family groups. This fact combined with the ideal of equality and compliance mentioned, deeply determined the type of buildings that arose in a given site. In fact, that each might acquire in the environment, and from beginning to end of the year, the necessary materials. It is not surprising; therefore, that a high proportion of African homes are built from plant still available, since

they grow and renew themselves naturally (Photos 5 and 6).

The temporary nature of many types of homes does not appear as reflecting the instability and insecurity of societies. Instead, the constant transformation of temporary buildings creates a sense of permanence and security. It is also not an indication of a housing problem hastily resolved. The houses are designed in fact as very long-term solutions to the needs and constraints to which is subjected a particular community in a given environment [3].

Archaeological researches, as they grow, provide evidence and new explanations to the history of art and African architecture.

African art is manifested in a number of media features: stone, metal, wood, stuff, bone, ivory, shells of mollusks. All these materials do not offer the same storage capacity; stuff for example can deteriorate very quickly. Art is not a simple realization on a physical medium; it is primarily a form of human speech with more or less well-off structures to study.

Conservative by nature, African architecture has always been however able to adapt itself to ecological upheavals and social transformations. But the changes it has faced in the last century are more radical and irreversible than ever. In many regions, tin roofs and cement block definitively swept away all traces of traditional architecture. This, paradoxically, survives in the richest country in West Africa where dried mud, which has the advantage of being relatively fireproof, remains the basic material. Its survival depends not so much on the pace of economic growth as a change of mind, which will revive interest in the traditions and arts materials which, transcribed and published, will become accessible documents to be used to develop the history of African peoples. A significant line of thought to this great work manifests itself internationally.

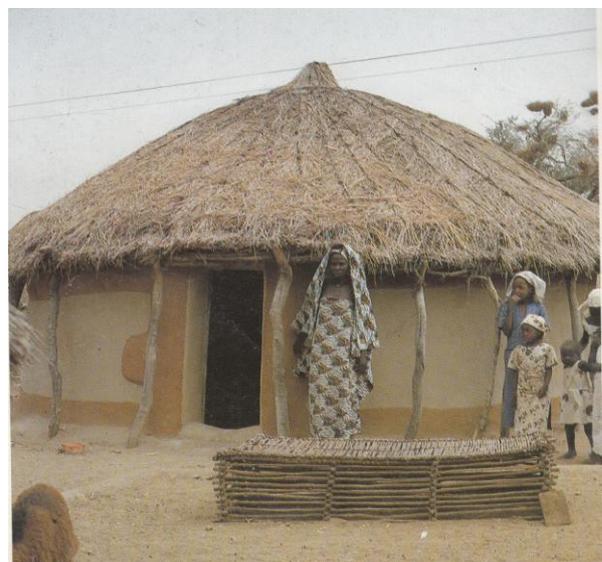


Photo 4 : Foulbé House (Maroua Region) (Moussima)



Photo 5 : Entry House North-Cameroon (Moussima)



Photo 6 : skeleton of a Mafa House (Moussima)

III.3. Habitat of Northern Cameroon

In northern Cameroon, as elsewhere in Africa, crafts or art, it is first of all putting objects and their reality into existence. In a country where the landscape is continually sculpture or tapestry, man, architect of instinct, becomes an accomplice of nature. How sensitive appears this dialogue of man with his space? For what surprises most probably immediately in the progression of our routes is the presence of a nature which sometimes manifests such perfection in the random whims that we are worried about what it tiny spot can still leave to the imagination of men. Demanding and hard, it requires to be its measure, the equal of his strength or beauty, and suddenly you do not know, who between nature or man dominates the other, both the fusion appears large, preserved harmony, "the Fali house is the home of peasants deeply connected to the land. »

We believe that it is the product of a rustic functional architecture that flows to the cross roads of the social and economic symbol. Arts are seems to be a function of a cosmology and a social system that, with the economic phenomena corresponding to the organization of the company, order its evolution in the same frame symbol where man and universe, the microcosm and the macrocosm meet and balance to the point of confusion. Fruits of the physical experience of generations of builders, slowly developed clever rules have, once fixed, apparently not changed for centuries.

In this rigorous and passionate technique, everything is a sign wanted by tradition that respects the architecture. Carefully tailored to a specific environment and needs, Fali housing is primarily a family house and the stranger, when he enters it, is not so fit, because of its complexity (Photos 5 and 6). It is the expression of daily necessities and social values of family life that flows out of sight. It brings together all the family members whose existence continues at the same pace as the universe, and the ancestors, present in stone, mock or ceramic, participate in all actions of the living. In addition, it ensures the consistency and continuity of a social, economic and religious system [7].

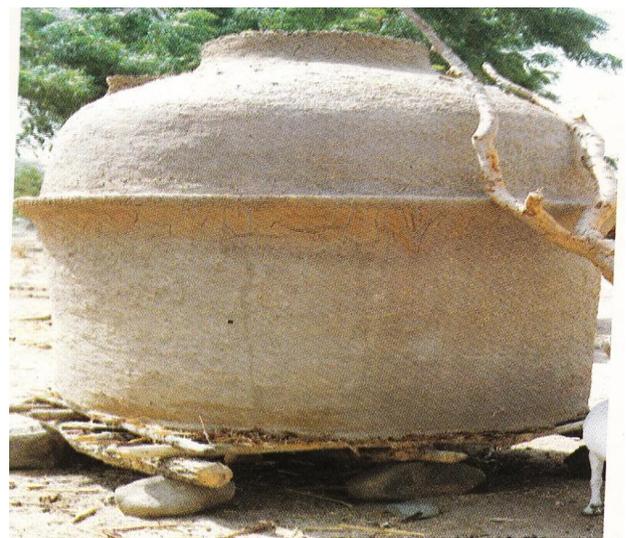


Photo 7 : Massa Attic (Moussima)

III.4. Diversity

What stands out the most is the diversity of North Cameroon homes due to the vicinity of mountains and vast plains of specific environments such as Eastern approaches of Mount Mandara and spreading areas of Logone and its banks beads. In fact, the materials provided by the environment influence least the size and perhaps the form (Photos 6 and 7) than the longevity of buildings which is often a differentiating criterion.

Highland farms where the majority of elements are mounted with stones see a succession of several generations. But the Kotoko's buildings, with large walls of mud, also inherit with building land, which are the subject of transaction in the Kotoko villages, which tends to prove that other elements, particularly economic, come in. Concessions of plains and plateaus change throughout a lifetime. They move very easily, especially plant concessions of the Guiziga. Some are systematically abandoned at the death of their owner (Massa, Toupouri). The kind of life can beat the origin of the number and complexity of the buildings.

The nomadic Fulani and their close relatives, the Bororo, are satisfied with just natural refuges; is the degree zero of home. Choa Arabs have only a large box for the family, so the architectural complexes are not

confined to a family, but the village. In addition, sedentarization asserts itself, more units are, the more the complexity increases.

Architectural differentiation is highest among people of plateaus and mountains: case-hall of man, box store, room of the wives, dining attics, walled box for the beef, fold topped by a box for the son or a niche for ashes. This complexity can exist within the same unit as in the case of the Moundang woman. The greater or lesser abundance of decorations is not necessarily linked to the phenomenon of mobility of the groups. Semi-nomads decorate of course what they take with them: such as gourds.

The decoration is sparse among the groups with plant houses (Guiziga, Toupouri). This does not mean that the mountaineers have many decorative motifs except few punctuate and wall around the kitchen doors. These are the people of the river and the people of the plateaus once established along the Benue: Ngeu, Fali, which decorated most willingly their homes and it is in them that we still find some decorating bits. The diversity of homes has its roots in ethnic fragmentation due in large part to the partitioning of the mountain where each group has composed its own house sometimes resembling that of the neighbors or being downright different. In addition, the Habé concessions are diversified by topography with maximum deviations in the units but comparable family and economic structures give these dwellings of similar organizations. A key differentiation is given by the coexistence of two worlds, Muslim and "Habé", which is reflected in the original residential structures. [8].

These differences in the structures are essentially due to what roles each society assigns to the woman and her place in the house is not materialized the same way.

Among animists, women work, have fields and seem to be economically more independent. They are spread in the concession according to their order of arrival. They usually have more units than among Muslims, an attic and sometimes a barn over the entire room-kitchen. The first woman always has a determined position that emphasizes its importance in the regulation of the concession and compared sacrifices the other wives are placed in relation to it. Among Muslims, there is no precedence among women, marital instability, much stronger than in animist, accentuates these aspects. Muslim women have no attic or so, at most, a small collective millet silo working; everything is housed in an enclosed field with a well.

Among the animists indications of wealth and power fall on concessions that are reserved for women; its development and its decoration were once the most prominent signs. For Muslims, it is on the other hand the domain of man: they are storey houses by the Kotoko; among the Fulani, the man's box is large and subdivided into parts such as receptions and halls. Finally, the difference is that the animistic concession is a place of worship with altars, while for Muslims the Sare is a sign of secularism, despite the prayer area blasted by spiritual purity.

For "Habé" the ancestors are represented around vital places of the concession, at the entrance, at the base of man's loft, protecting the house and reserves.

For Mofou an altar dedicated to the deceased father and grand-Father is installed near the human silo while the great-great grandfather ensures at the entrance. At the time of the inheritance there is a transfer of sacrifices: the altar of the great-grandfather is out of the concession and is replaced by the grandfather's one. In other ethnic groups, the charms that protect the concession are in form of piles driven close to the entrance (among the Toupouri for example) or like various other "drugs", widespread in North Cameroon, especially *Cissus quadrangularis* that is *real gardens* in Fali. *Cissus* is also present in Guidar, Mundangs Guiziga and even in populations such as Niellim Chari (in Chad). As for Muslims, they drive verses from the Koran into the straw, above the lintel of the entry boxes and those of wives. But sometimes the *Cissus* reappear as well as the *Calotropisprocera*, which stays at the bottom of the Sare and prevents robbery.

III.5. Major sets

An overall typology of architecture is difficult to bring out. Perhaps it would be appropriate to define more. The one of roofs for example conical, made of high grass, not wood frame for people of plateaus, wicker floor mounted bulb for Toupouri and Massa groups, land of standing arch which has virtually disappeared for Mousgoum, argamassero of of Kotoko, haystack roof non-bedded for Arabs Choa and Mandara and finally conical roof rafter that spreads and is gaining ground everywhere. A classification from silos offers the same difficulty. The most common are the attic bottle on stilts or wooden frame (Massa, Mousgoum) mounted on a base of stone (Guiziga mountaineers; Vame, Ourza) and finally the attic arched found in both Mundangs the Mofou the Zoulgo and Minéo... Other types are also represented like multipodes of njen, Goude.

"The silos can be unique as in Mousgoum or many people at home trays, simple as those of the Massa, Mousgoum or Mofou or subdivided as those of the majority of women in the plains or in the mountains. In fact, the difficulty in establishing a typology has confronted us to an ethnic group that this architectural form has and which decided the priority use of such materials..." [9].

"An architectural element-or set-can be used to define a geographical area. The different types of buildings and layout of the houses were not unchangeable. Like the ethnic group that is their support, they have something very fluid, that evolves, and their area of expansion has been able to fluctuate. The box with terrace of Moundang was much more widespread, not only among Guidar and Mambay but also among Zoumaya, a group that has completely disappeared under the raids of the Baguirmis and above all the Fulbe, who had brought up the box with terrace to the north of Toupouri countries up to Mindif, Yoldéo and the gates of Maroua. A concession that is found in the residual mass and northwest of Maroua: Molkoa; Mokeri, Tchéré whose main architectural features are present in Mofou with the lofts and kitchens grafted by the drums, seemed to have a much broader dissemination area [10].

According to old informants in Badjava and Moutouroua the Guiziga reportedly found the latter type of housing upon their arrival at Moutouroua. In southern Bidzar drawings etched on hard lime stones labs offer remarkable similarities with the plans we have raised in Mekeri, Tchéré with students of fine arts in architecture...We attempted to establish a typology of houses and the only classification that results is the one based on the organization of the concession. It offers the advantage to cross on the one hand major geographical units of northern Cameroon such as mountain, Plateau and plain, and on the other hand the "Habé" and the Muslim societies'. The plan is segmented: interconnecting boxes are commanding one another and sometimes follow the contour, sometimes climb the slope; the entrance is facing up while the bottom of the concession consists of the area of barns surrounded by kitchens as in Mbo and Nkongsamba before. The most diverse plans are those of the people of the plateaus. Their concessions, however blocked against mini-reliefs, are divided into two parts, one slightly overlooking and reserved for men and the other tending towards individualized sets and for women. The plain house is organized on a circular plan, from the draft to the perfect circle always at the center of the court attics. As for Muslims, except the nuances between farmer and rancher, tribal stereotype is a little strong. The boxes are versatile and accept the circular plan as well as the quadrangular plan. Nevertheless we observed a permanent feature, which is a large partition plans inside the Sare.

"In the Mofou architecture, the principle of ay (or concession) is a maze of boxes. After the hall box of the house hold head, comes the dormitory room of women... These two buildings have the one and the other the right to bud: it can graft a store where peanuts are stored, a stable for a beef...The sheepfold, which houses small cattle, is brought to get her in the women's room. The loft sand kitchens are all unquestionably the most original of Mofou architecture. It is at the connection between lofts and kitchens that are manifested both social expressions for Housing in the Mofou group.

The Fali house is the home of peasants deeply connected to the land. It is the product of a rustic functional architecture that flows to the cross roads of the social and economic symbol. Art seems to depend on a cosmology and a social system that, with the economic phenomena corresponding to the organization of the society, order its evolution in the same frame symbol where man and universe, the microcosm and the macrocosm meet and balance to the point of confusion. Fruits of the physical experience of generations of builders, slowly developed clever rules have, once fixed, apparently not changed for centuries.

III.6. Moousgoum's pottery House

That is, in the perfection of expertise that characterizes it, the most surprising and most famous probably called spontaneous architectures (Photo 8). It is like no other, it is true; but it is not only strange, it is beautiful ...it's pure line, which doesn't stop from the base to the summit, is obtained as mathematically or fatally...This box is made

by hand, such as vases: it is a non-mason work, but potter. If it was so often repeated, that's because indeed it is difficult to talk about it better in so short words. How often admired, photographed, and filmed? ...Listed in the archives and presents in exhibitions, it has continued to attract researchers and curious. At the Museum of Man in Paris, photos taken in 1912, where there are great circles concessions formed by alternating different sizes of domes that connects an earth wall, allow the viewer to dream (Sketch 1). This is, indeed potters gestures that Mousgoum appear to have been the only ones to master in such an original way: some of these clay tiaras up to 8-10m high, that is to say, the equivalent of 12 to 15 large jars, shaped by hand and only one litter. Key hole Entries, beautiful flutes shaped of sticks or arrows, round halls preceding the box, all the interior ornamentation were being scarce. Today, on this territory where the Germans had set that people in 1911, it is threatened by Maga Dam and development of rice fields: its life style changes without really seem to affect him.

Regarding the care and maintenance of this majestic art, we are very sorry; cultural and artistic heritage of northern Cameroon is dying day by day. We draw on the alarm so that the officials of the Ministry of Culture and other structures can help. Heritage is all the wealth of the natural world, cultural or historical inherited of the past and sent to a community that must preserve it for transmission to future generations.

Traditional architecture loses more and more its place at the expense of reinforced concrete. Heritage is a good, a common wealth. It cannot belong to one person. Its value is priceless, we cannot give him price and it cannot be bought or sold.

Men are responsible for the architectural heritage bequeathed to them. Their duty is to respect and care for it. They may need to change their way of life to successfully leave future generations with this work, which is very dear, with all its charm and for the development of tourism in the North.

The need to preserve all the wealth transmitted by past generations and awareness of the dangers that threaten this heritage led the Paris UNESCO Conference to establish, in 1972, a list of elements heritage whose survival must be guaranteed. It is strongly expected that the North be part of the list, and also the traditional African buildings!.

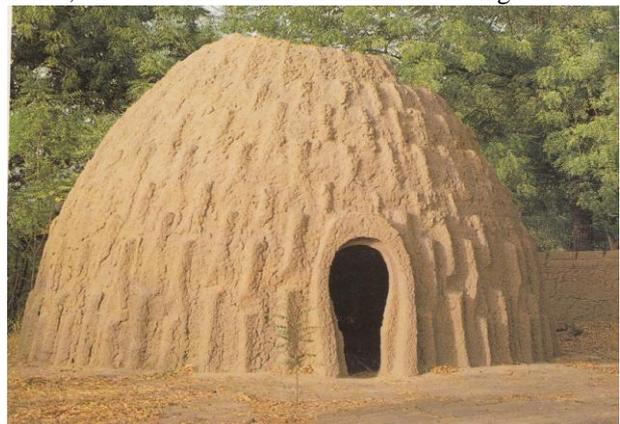
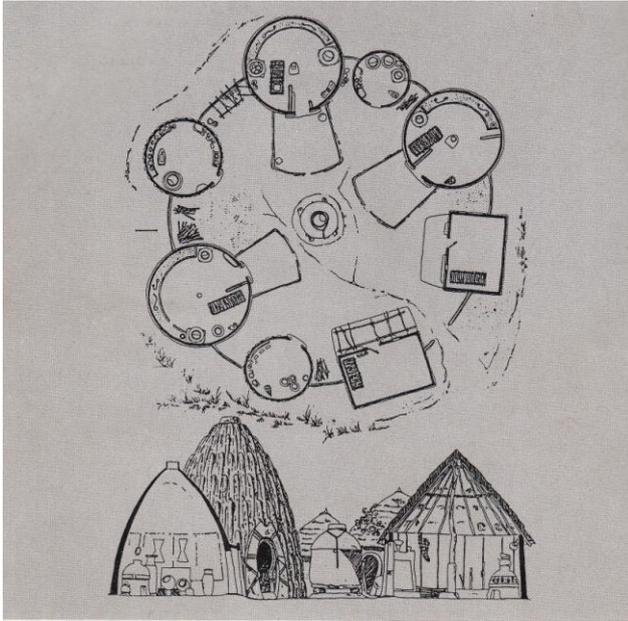


Photo 8: Mousgoum: obus case (Moussima)



Sketch 1: Habitation of a family unit Mousgoum
(Moussima)

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IV. CONCLUSION

Conservative by nature, African architecture has always been however able to adapt itself to ecological upheavals and social transformations.

Rapid African and worldwide urbanization, which often reproduces a Western model does not take into consideration the cultural traditional housing data, either ignores them or do not recognize their value. These data are nevertheless necessary for social balance and that of the individual. Their misconception is probably the first cause of what has been called the "poor development". An urbanization which defines itself as an evolution and not as a break should be, according to people it is responsible to welcome, studying the possibility of integrating these cultural landmarks in the urban landscape, town or country. Such an approach assumes that these references exist and refers to the necessary architectural conservation. The issue of traditional architecture for development in Africa is of the first importance. International organizations in the past few years have stressed emphatically. Awareness wakes up at both national and regional level.

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