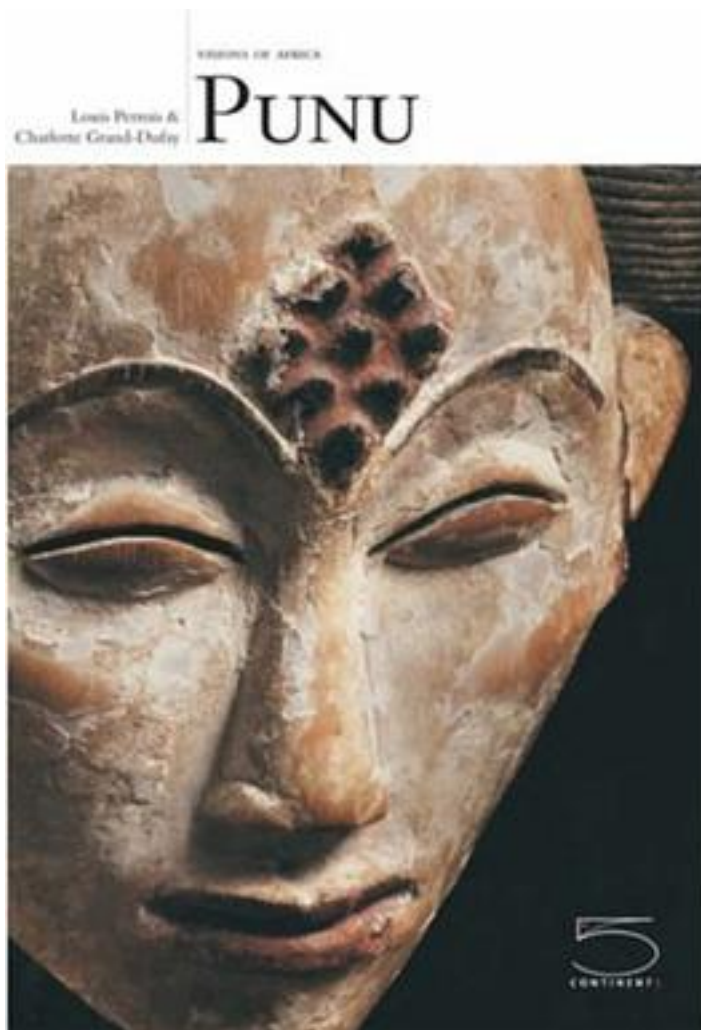


Punu



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Situated in the south-west of Gabon, the Punu are part of a group of people known

essentially for their white masks. These objects, which have never ceased to impress collectors and enthusiasts of African art, had already fascinated Western artists at the start of the 20th century; Picasso, for instance, owned one. The idealized realism of the face covered with white clay, the slightly narrowed eyes, the mouth with finely-edged red lips and the sophisticated head-dress composed of several locks of plaited hair are some of the stylistic features of these masks. The volume studies the context of ritual use of these important objects, which the Punu and related peoples would bring out for their dances, one of which is called mukuyi. The masks belonged to the bwiri, a secret society of men, and those wearing them were only chosen amongst initiates. They would perform acrobatic dances on stilts, most frequently at funerary rites and in honor of the ancestors embodied by the masks. These would take on a policing role and could force the forces of evil to retreat. The dances still exist but within a context of rejoicing, and the anonymity of the wearer is no longer respected. This study of the Punu traditions and of their overlapping with other peoples in this region of southern Gabon, is also pursued through an examination of other, far less well-known objects, such as the guardian statues of the bones of the deceased, amulets, musical instruments and some other elements of their material culture.

作者介绍:

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