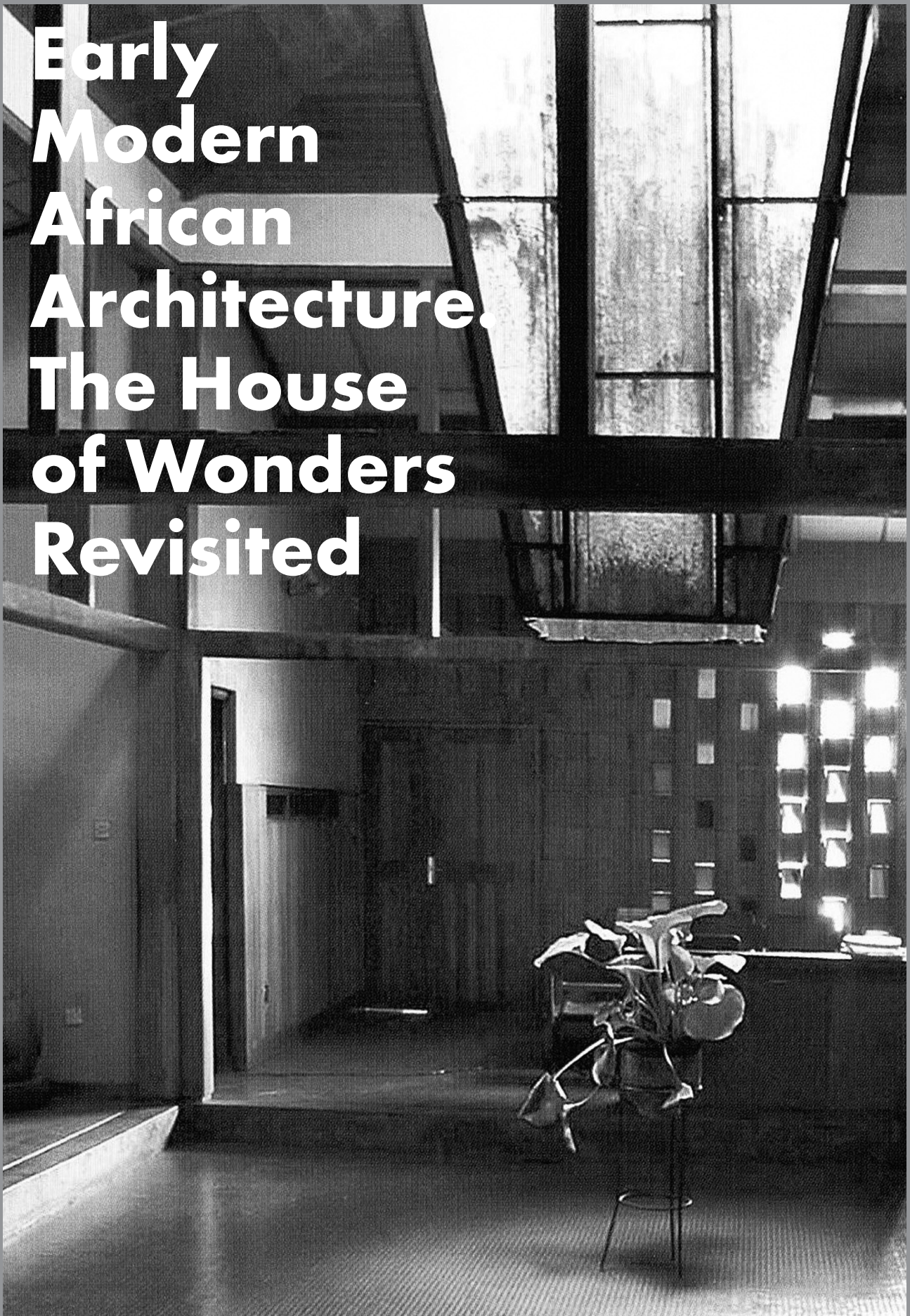


# Early Modern African Architecture. The House of Wonders Revisited

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This essay explores the various strands of the advent of Modernity in African architecture. It starts from the assumption that the history of Modernity in African architecture is a complex and rich subject that merits increased scientific attention.

By Antoni Folkers

The historiography of Modernity in African architecture is so far dominated by the focus on the advent and development of European Modern Movement<sup>1</sup> on the continent. This Modernity hesitantly commenced in the 1930s and gained serious momentum after World War II with the widespread application in the building of the backbone of the late colonial African Welfare State and the early independent nations.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite the apparent abnegation of African culture by Europeans in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it has been stated that 'Modern architecture' is by no means an exclusively European project. Giles Omezi takes this intriguing stance in suggesting that the Modern project is as much African as it is European. In his exposé on the work of Demas Nwoko he writes "[...] Demas Nwoko's architectural resolution of the ideology of Natural Synthesis sought to place Modernity beyond the ethnocentric confines of a purely European narrative, having successfully decoded its cynical nature through his art. The dwelling space he decided was also not subject to the constraints of this narrative. He sought to resolve in his architecture, a crisis at the heart of contemporary Africa; the nature of its Modernity. He seems to have understood, that the process of Modernity is not the sole property of Eurocentric thought and actions."<sup>3</sup> Omezi continues in quoting Demas Nwoko himself "the nature of technology is such that it is not the preserve of any race or time"<sup>4</sup> [figure 1].

Omezi's positioning is not a mere thought to be discarded as will be shown. In taking a distanced view on the development of Modernity in African architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it does not need an expert to discern multiple strands that divert from and complement the advent of classical Modernity as described above.

Some important strands of Modernization in African architecture might be identified as follows:<sup>5</sup>

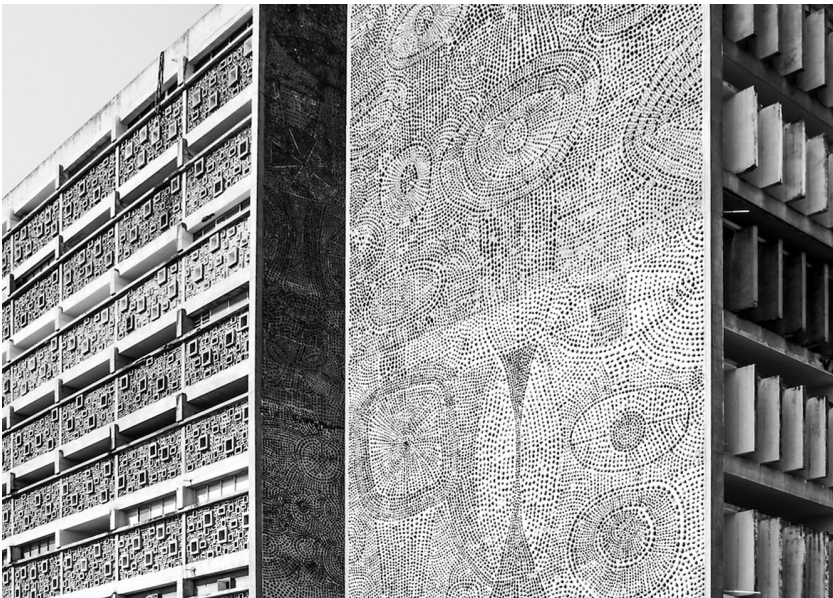
**Classic Modernity in Africa.** Modernity came relatively late to Africa due to many reasons. To the rare exceptions of this late coming belong the building of Asmara by the Italians,<sup>6</sup> the masterplanning of Casablanca by Henri Prost<sup>7</sup> and the work of Rex Martiensen and his colleagues

in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> Great momentum in the spread of Modern Movement in Africa was gained through the continent-wide investment in building and infrastructure in the late colonial period (1945–1965). Building in this period was an almost exclusive Modern affair, leaving Africa with a fantastic heritage of late Modern architecture. The work of Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew and colleagues in West Africa, of Ecochard, Candilis, Shadrach and Woods in Morocco, Le Corbusier in Algiers, Simounet in Addis Ababa, Claude Laurens in Congo, Ernst May in East Africa—just to name a few—proved Africa as a fertile laboratory and true playground for a Modern Movement that was not hindered by historical ballast or impeding context.<sup>9</sup>

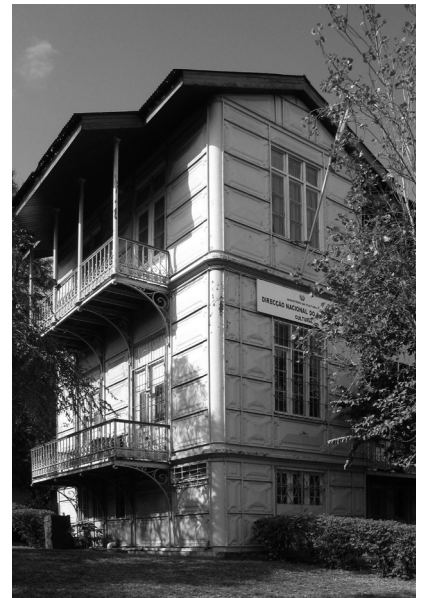
**African-track Modernity.** European Modern Movement was reacted upon and taken further on an 'African track' in the 1960s and beyond by a new generation of architects that were based in Africa, as well as by the very first generation of African-born architects.<sup>10</sup> This 'African track' Modernity is the next best known strand of African Modern Movement in architecture through, in particular, the work of Amancio d'Alpoim Miranda Guedes (born in 1925), better known as Pancho Guedes, in Mozambique<sup>11</sup> [figure 2]. Amongst other architects that advocated an African 'critical regionalism' in their work and writings are Anthony Almeida (born in 1921) in Tanzania, Jean François Zevaco in Morocco, Norman Eaton in South Africa and Demas Nwoko in Nigeria.

**Engineering Modernity in African Architecture.** Preceding any academic architectural involvement in Africa was the engineering Modernity in architecture exported by the European colonists in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The need of the fresh African colonies, the vast majority created after the 1884 Berlin Conference, commanded buildings that could be erected swiftly and yet befitted European pride and comfort. It were engineers and not architects who responded to this demand and who were responsible for a wide range of highly efficient and functional buildings that were often erected in imported materials and components.<sup>12</sup> The authors of these buildings are often unknown, although, for instance, the prefabricated *Casa de Ferro* in Maputo is said to be signed for by the enterprise of Gustave Eiffel [figure 3].

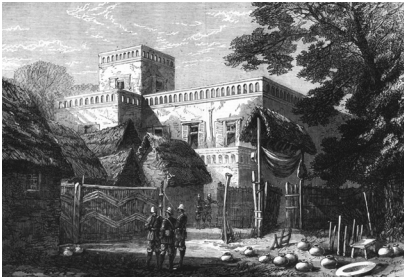
< Figure 1. Living area of the Idumuje House by Demas Nwoko.



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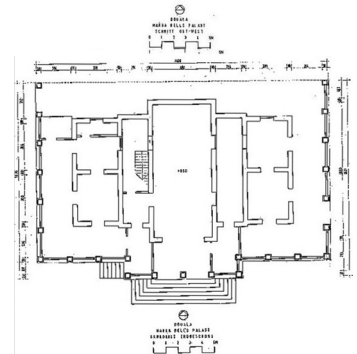
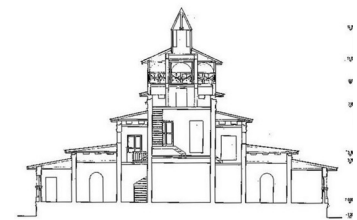
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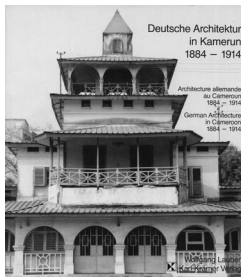
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**Popular Modernity in African Architecture.** Much less attention has been given so far to the development of Modernity in vernacular or popular architecture. In terms of quantity, informally built popular architecture makes up a vast majority of the African built substance. It cannot be stated at this time when Modernity gained influence in the informal building sector, but it probably started as early as the 1920s. The traditionally thatch-roofs proved to be of high fire risk and at an early stage thatch was replaced by corrugated metal sheets. By the 1960s, popular architecture in most African cities had completely changed in terms of typology, formal language and use of materials. A highly efficient and modern building system had silently developed, consisting of standardized building materials

Figure 2. Mac-Mahon building and square in Maputo by **Pancho Guedes**.

Figure 3. Casa de Ferro (Iron House) in Maputo is said to be signed for by **Gustave Eiffel's** company.

Figure 4. The King of Ashantee's Palace at Kumasi (Ghana), viewed from the east.

Figure 5. King Obong Eyo Honesty IX's house in Duke Town or Old Calabar. Photo by Jide Bello, <http://www.naijablog.co.uk/>

Figure 6. **Wolfgang Lauber's** book *Deutsche Architektur in Kamerun* with the Pagode proudly shown on the front cover.

Figure 7. The Palace of the King of the Cameroons or the Pagode. Photo by Richard Harding Davis, ca. 1902.

Figure 8. Plan and section of the Pagode in Douala, Cameroon, built by King Auguste Manga Ndumbe in 1905.

such as corrugated roof sheets, cement blocks and timber façade elements that show an amazing similarity throughout the continent.

**Traders' Art Deco.** The introduction of Art Deco in the trading quarters of the African cities is of predominantly Indian origin. It characterizes itself through pastel colored concrete and plastered masonry façades applied to often quite straightforward and simple buildings. Most of these buildings have a combined commercial and residential use. In East Africa, these are called the *duka*, shops kept by the Indian trader, the *dukawalla*, who lives in the apartment above his shop. This typology and style remained popular throughout the 1930s to the late 1950s

**Elitist African Modernity.** A separate strand in the development of Modernity in African architecture is witnessed in buildings that have been erected by the African ruling class in the pre- and very early peri-colonial period of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is this sixth strand—elitist African Modernity in African architecture—that forms the core of this essay. Preliminary research on late 19<sup>th</sup> century African architecture has unveiled a number of unique buildings, palaces that were erected by the (independent) African elite, prior or simultaneously to the 'Scramble for Africa', that display unmistakably Modern tendencies.

The reason that these buildings have not become known as 'Modern African' is that this African Modernization process was curtailed and subsequently appropriated by the colonial powers—Ethiopia excluded. Ola Uduku and Alfred B. Zack-Williams go as far as speaking of the colonial expeditions that were to subdue these emerging African modern powers as "ransacking and plundering of the African capitals by primitive colonial expeditions."<sup>13</sup>

### Early Modern Palaces in Africa

No rigorous research has yet been carried out to substantiate the existence and similarities in the building of these Modern palaces. A comprehensive inventory of these buildings is awaiting documentation and no analysis has been made of the relationships between the commissioners and designers of these palaces.

In this essay, the development of elitist African Modernity in African architecture is presupposed and analyzed in the case study on the Beit-el-Ajaib, the House of Wonders, in Zanzibar. Before touching base in Zanzibar, a quick journey is proposed along some other Modern palaces built by African royalty during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Douala in Cameroon, Tananarive in Madagascar, Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and Ibadan in Nigeria.

**Ghana: The Ashanti Palace in Kumasi** [figure 4].

Another great city, contesting European colonial power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Kumasi in Ghana. The palace of the Ashante King of Kumasi was destroyed by the British in 1874 on their conquest of Ghana.

**Nigeria: The Palaces in Calabar, Ibadan and Afin Ikere.**

King Obong Eyo Honesty IX's house in Duke Town, or Old Calabar, was erected in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It can be qualified as a late example of Victorian architecture and it diverts from the traditional and makes use of Modern materials and technology [figure 5].

Ibadan was founded in the 1820s and quickly grew to a great city, which was even called 'the Black Metropolis' at some time.<sup>14</sup> By mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it became a centre of Yoruba power and was strewn with royal and noble palaces. Following the 1886 Treaty, the city was 'pacified' under British colonial rule. Of the pre-colonial palaces, only few remain now, and recently a plea was made to protect the last remaining palaces such as the Adebasi Palace, probably dating from the mid 1860s.

Certainly there are earlier examples of palaces that were erected in Nigeria that divert from the traditional. An important source for Modernization was the so-called Brazilian style, introduced in the 1840s by freed Yoruba slaves who had spent time on Brazilian plantations and who returned to Nigeria. An example of this is King Ogo-ga's Palace in Ikere.<sup>15</sup>

**Cameroon: The Pagode at Douala** [figures 6, 7, 8].

King Auguste Manga Ndumbe built his palace in Douala in 1905. Due to its strikingly uncommon appearance, it was christened '*le Pagode*'. King Ndumbe studied economics in Bristol and is said to be influenced by British colonial architecture in the Indies.<sup>16</sup> Cameroon became a French Protectorate after World War I, and the Pagode was converted into the offices of the Compagnie Forestière de Sangha-Oubangui. Louis Ferdinand Céline was employed by this firm and wrote about the Pagode in his famous book *Voyage au bout de la nuit*.

In 1940 the Paradis Cinema was built as a lean-on structure to the rear of the palace. In 1995 this cinema was converted into the Doual'art Cultural Centre by Danièle Diwouta-Kotto.<sup>17</sup> The President of Doual'art is the great granddaughter of King Rudolf, Princess Marilyn Douala Bell.

The palace is qualified as an important example of German colonial architecture notwithstanding the fact that the client was an African King, nor that this king was inspired by British rather than by German Modernity.<sup>18</sup>

**Madagascar: The Royal Rova Palace complex in Antananarivo** [figures 9, 10].



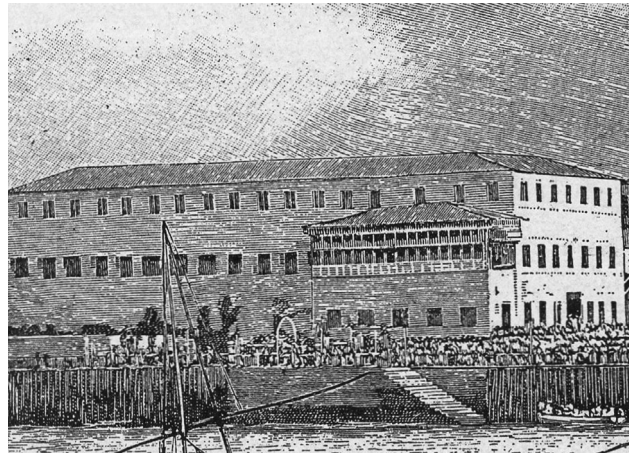
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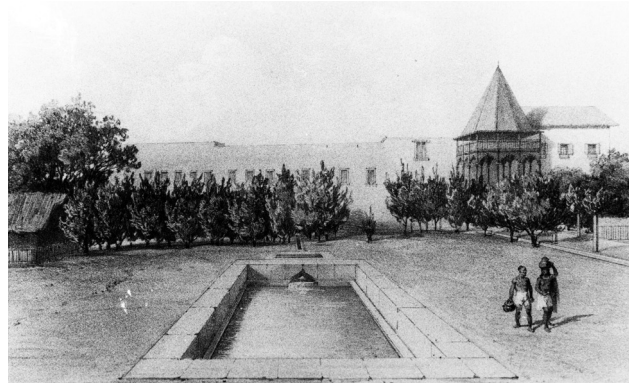


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Figure 9. The Royal Rova Palace complex in Antananarivo around the year 1900.

Figure 10. Queen's summer Palace at Ambohimanga Rova in Madagascar, from the last years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Figure 11. The Menelik Palace in Addis Ababa. Photo by filippo\_jean, <http://creativecommons.org>

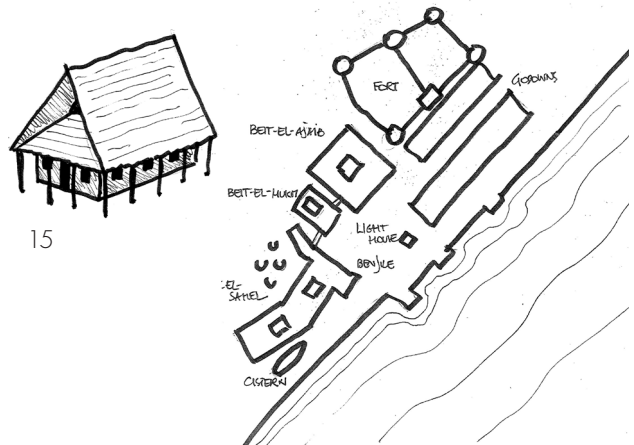
Figure 12. Engraving of Beit-el-Sahel.

Figure 13. The Ibadhi mosques are often plain white cubes with flat roofs and without minarets. Drawing by the author.

Figure 14. Beit-el-Mtoni Palace with benjile on the right

Figure 15. Swahili traditional house with typical shaded baraza. Drawing by the author.

Figure 16. Zanzibar Palace complex scheme. Drawing by the author.



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The history of the Royal Rova Palace complex commences in the last years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the palace complex, the various stages from the traditional timber buildings to Modern interpretations in stone and iron buildings can be seen.<sup>19</sup>

### **Addis Ababa: The Menelik Palace** [figure 11].

Addis Ababa was founded as capital of the Ethiopian Empire in 1886. Emperor Menelik II built his palace in the late 80s and it was later extended, but the original core, consisting of a number of two-storied pavilions, still remains. These pavilions are based upon the traditional Ethiopian housing typology such as the *tukul* and consist of single-room stories connected with bridges and stairs. In the materialization and technology they are Modern. The light-weight steel and cast iron structures are clad with timber boarding and corrugated metal sheets.

### **Case Study: The House of Wonders (Beit-El-Ajaib) in Zanzibar.**

#### **From Beit-el-Mtoni to Beit-el-Ajaib: Typological Developments**

Seyyid Said of Oman ruled a vast empire at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1804–1856), stretching from Oman in the north to the Mozambican borders deep south. For strategic reasons, he decided to transplant his throne from Muscat in Oman to Unguja, the main island of the Zanzibar archipelago. He built his new palace, Beit-el-Mtoni, as an almost copy of Bayt-el-Falaj.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, in the late 1830s or early 1840s, he erected a second palace in the centre of Zanzibar town, the Beit-el-Sahel [figure 12].<sup>21</sup>

Seyyid Said was not only the worldly leader of his empire, but also the religious leader, the Iman of the Ibadhi muslim sect, known for their sober architecture, void of ornament and monumentality. Their mosques are often plain white cubes with flat roofs and without minarets [figure 13]. Notably, the southern Algerian Ibadhi villages composed of introvert white cubes with internal courtyards were of great influence on Le Corbusier and his contemporaries.<sup>22</sup>

Mtoni and Sahel Palaces in Zanzibar followed the Ibadhi tradition, but the Omani soon found their architecture—with its flat-roofed heavy structures and small windows—ill-fitted for the wet and warm Zanzibari climate. Consequently, pitched *makuti* roofs, covered with palm leaves were erected as well as *benjile*, airy pavilions inspired by the local Swahili architecture, generous in shaded outdoor living space, *baraza*.

As an answer to the Zanzibari climate, Seyyid Said had to make modifications to his Omani-style palaces in Zanzibar. To secure the flat roofs against the frequent

downpours on the island was a nightmare and the fierce sun turned the flat roofs into radiators that gave off their heat during the clammy nights of Zanzibar. Therefore, pitched *makuti* roofs were erected on top of the palaces. Furthermore, air pavilions were also added to his palaces, to pass the day in the cooling sea breeze. These pavilions were called *benjile*, a name possibly derived from the Indian bungalow [figure 14].<sup>23</sup> It was a fitting answer to the climate and life style on the island, clearly inspired by the local Swahili architecture [figure 15].

Mtoni Palace was deserted upon the death of Seyyid Said, whereas Beit-el-Sahel was expanded into a large palace complex, consisting of ceremonial and residential buildings, a court, a mosque and a bath complex. The main building of the palace complex, erected under Seyyid Said's successor Sultan Seyyid Majid (rd. 1856–1870) was Beit-el-Hukm, the Government Palace, which though of typical Omani style was adapted to local conditions, with the traditional *makuti* roof replaced by a *mbati* roof, clad with corrugated metal sheets. To the front of Beit-el-Hukm, a porticoed veranda over the full height of the façade was added. This veranda can be seen as a mid-way development between Beit-el-Sahel with the semi-detached *benjile* to what would be the splendid new palace of Seyyid Majid's brother and successor Sultan Seyyid Bargash (rd.1870–1888): Beit-el-Ajaib, the House of Wonders.

### **Beit-el-Ajaib**

Following a family feud (whereby the British intervened to force a split up of the empire) the Said's empire was divided between the brothers Seyyid Thuwain and Seyyid Majid, who would henceforth rule Oman and Zanzibar respectively. Seyyid Bargash thus began his reign over a much reduced though fertile and prosperous empire, acting as the main trading entrepôt for the north-western part of the Indian Ocean.

Inspired by visits to Paris and London in 1875, he energetically took on the modernization of Zanzibar, installing, a piped drinking water system, amongst other infrastructure projects. Around 1880, he started the construction of a new palace that became a lengthy and problematic process according to the Zanzibar based architectural historian Erich Meffert. He even records the palace project being referred to as "an eternal building site" due to the repeated collapse of the high walls. Meffert dryly concludes that, due to this erratic process "[...] no world class building was created."<sup>24</sup>

The largest of its kind in Zanzibar, it was conceived by Seyyid Bargash himself, possibly assisted by a Scottish (maritime) engineer,<sup>25</sup> as a ceremonial palace, not as a residence:<sup>26</sup> "it dominates the waterfront, which is the

most important space in the city [...] The House of Wonders is an expression of domination, the city is the arena of display."<sup>27</sup> It formed the centre of a complex of residential (Beit-el-Sahel) and administrative (Beit-el-Hukm) palaces, a mosque, a lighthouse, extensive gardens, a bath complex, a graveyard and ancillary structures, amongst which an enormous boat-shaped water cistern, all connected by sky bridges.

The plan of Beit-el-Ajaib [figure 16] is that of a traditional Omani palace-square, introvert, with galleries facing an internal courtyard and giving access to long and shallow rooms. In addition to its impressive size are the deep verandas around the full perimeter of the palace [figure 17], assembled from prefabricated elements imported from the United Kingdom: cast iron columns, universal steel beams and corrugated metal sheets, also used to construct the courtyard galleries, main staircase and the skylight over the inner court. The ring beams tying the columns together may qualify as the earliest use of reinforced concrete in East Africa.

Bargash had thus developed the traditional Omani residence, a typology that had not changed since the Middle Ages, into a truly contemporary, Modern palace, equally austere in aspect but responding to climate and providing comfort using Modern materials and amenities such as piped water and electrical lighting [figures 18, 19, 20, 21, 22].

The Zanzibari praise for the palace was however not unanimous. Former British Resident to Zanzibar, Major F.B. Pearce commented in 1919 that it had "[...] architecturally [...] no merit, but it evidently startled the Arab population, who gave it the name it bears."<sup>28</sup> Meffert continued his comments on the palace in 2008 "[...] an architect could not be identified yet. This is no surprise, as the basic deficits of the building would not have occurred if a trained architect had been involved. Thus it remains an amateur's dream, with its faults, however, a rather impressive one."<sup>29</sup>

### The Centre of British Colonial Administration on Zanzibar

Seyyid Bargash died in 1888, shortly after the completion of the palace. Subsequently British influence over the island grew steadily, with Zanzibar becoming a British Protectorate in 1890. Although the Sultan was allowed to continue living in his palace, his role was reduced to a ceremonial one. Later, in response to the seizure in 1896 of the throne by one of Bargash's successors, Prince Seyyid Khaled, the palace was bombarded by a British navy squadron who regained control of the complex in 38 minutes (the shortest war ever in history).

The bombardment severely damaged Beit-el-Hukm,

Beit-el-Sahel and the lighthouse. Beit-el-Sahel was partly restored, but the lighthouse and Beit-el-Hukm were not rebuilt. Beit-el-Ajaib was cut loose from the other buildings and became a 'stand alone' palace henceforth. The repairs to the palace itself proceeded in an unexpected direction with the modification or removal of some of the verandas and the addition of a clock tower typical of the Eclectic Victorian style in fashion in Great Britain at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>30</sup> both gothic and classicist in reference. The intervention, an anachronistic appliqué, nonetheless denies the innovative and highly Modern, almost proto-Modern, architectural achievement of the original African-Arab building.

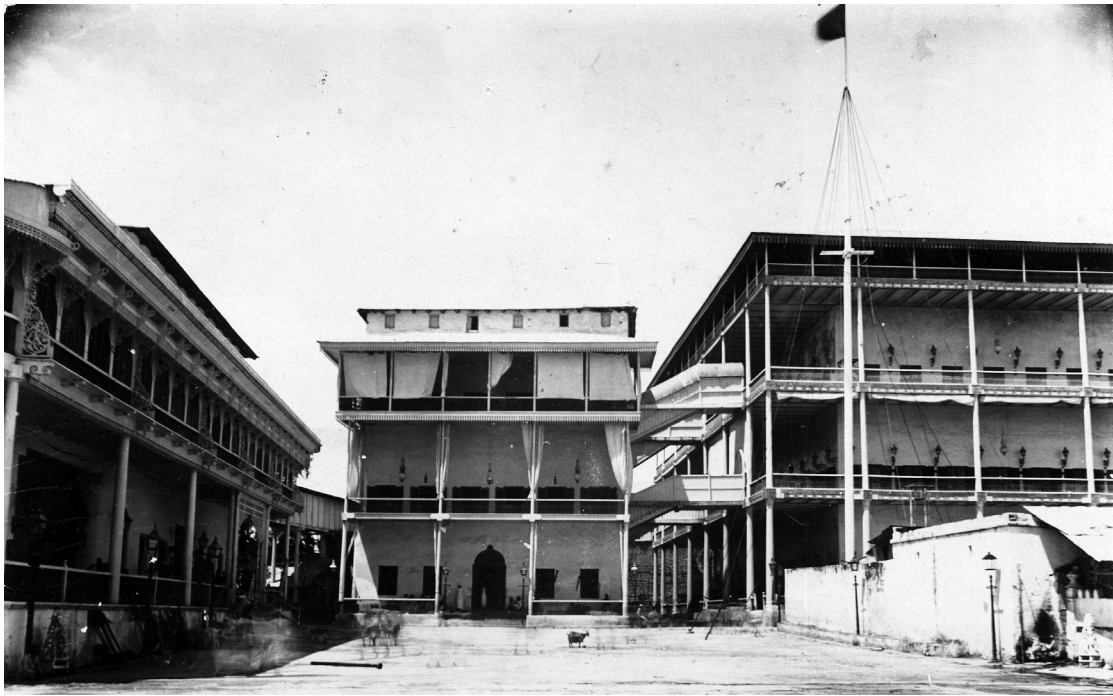
The palace would serve the British colonial administration of Zanzibar until independence in 1963. The central Zanzibar telephone and telegraph Exchange were installed and the internal arrangement of rooms was altered to accommodate its new function. The façades possibly underwent considerable rehabilitation works in the 1920s, most likely under the supervision of architect J.H Sinclair, responsible for all major architectural work commissioned by the British colonial government in Zanzibar during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The roof terraces on the corners were removed, the main roof foreseen with a monumental parapet, and the clock tower was stripped of any ornamental features.

### Beit-el-Ajaib Today

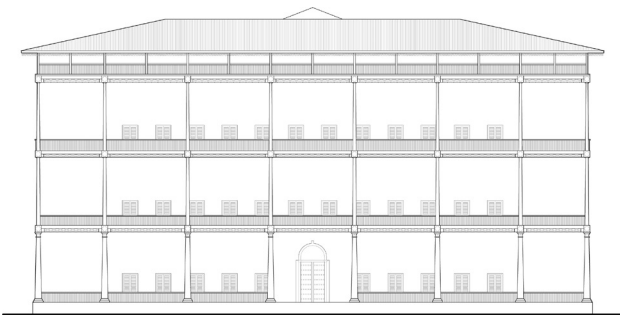
Upon independence, on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1963, Beit-el-Ajaib was restored to its function of ceremonial and administrative palace for the government of Sultan Seyyid Jamshid, a descendant of Sultan Seyyid Said. Shortly afterwards however, on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1964, the Revolution broke out and the sultan had to flee the island. The palace was looted and the new government was installed elsewhere. President Karume decided to turn the building into the Afro Shirazi Party Ideological College and Revolution Memorial Museum to the Revolution and the ruling Afro Shirazi Party. Even though the palace kept this exhibition until the 1990s, it was perceived as a closed bastion. In 1992, the building was returned to the Zanzibar Government, and much of it was dismantled in a fit of anger, and a large part of this collection was destroyed or dispersed.<sup>31</sup>

Today, very little remains in terms of contemporary documents or photographs, but for a photograph of an enormous banner displaying President Karume and the Revolutionary flag hovering over a cheering crowd [figure 23].

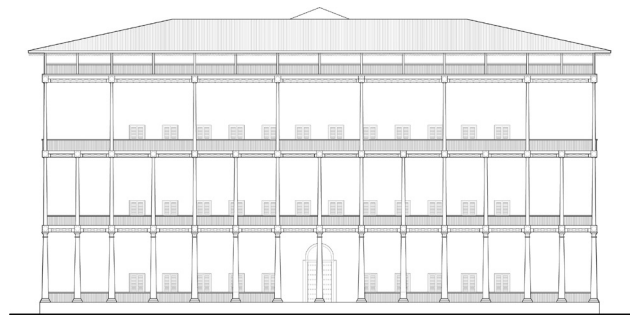
In 2000, the palace was converted into the Zanzibar House of Wonders Museum. The museum houses a broad collection on the history of Zanzibar [figures 24, 25].



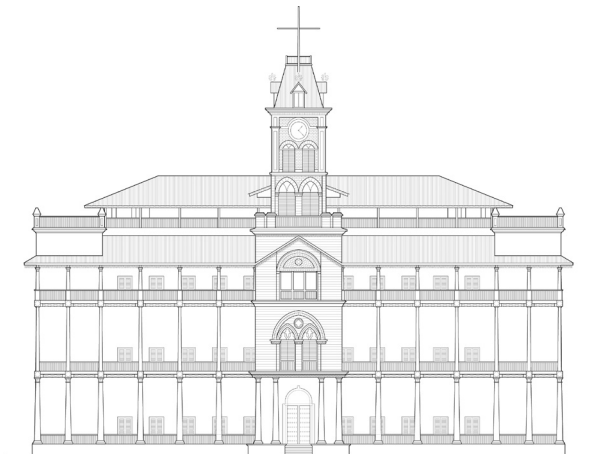
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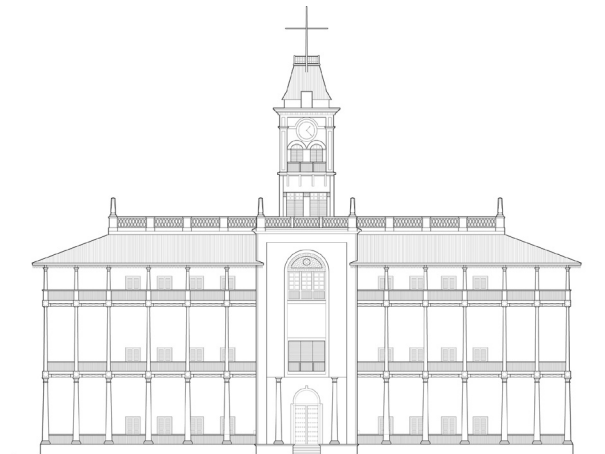
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Figure 17. Palace complex ca. 1890. Photo courtesy of the Zanzibar National Archives.

Figure 18. House of Wonders façade ca. 1888. Original building.

Figure 19. House of Wonders façade ca. 1892. Modifications: additional columns.

Figure 20. House of Wonders façade ca. 1900. Modifications after bombardment: verandas lowered, addition of roof terraces and clock tower.

Figure 21. House of Wonders façade ca. 1920. Final modifications possibly by **J. H. Sinclair**.

Drawings by Folkers and Cominetti.





Figure 22. House of Wonders around 1900. Photo courtesy of the Zanzibar National Archives.

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Figure 23. Banner of President Karume in the House of Wonders, 1960s. Photo courtesy of the Zanzibar National Archives.

Figure 24. Inner court of the Museum.

Figure 25. Floor plans of the House of Wonders Museum.

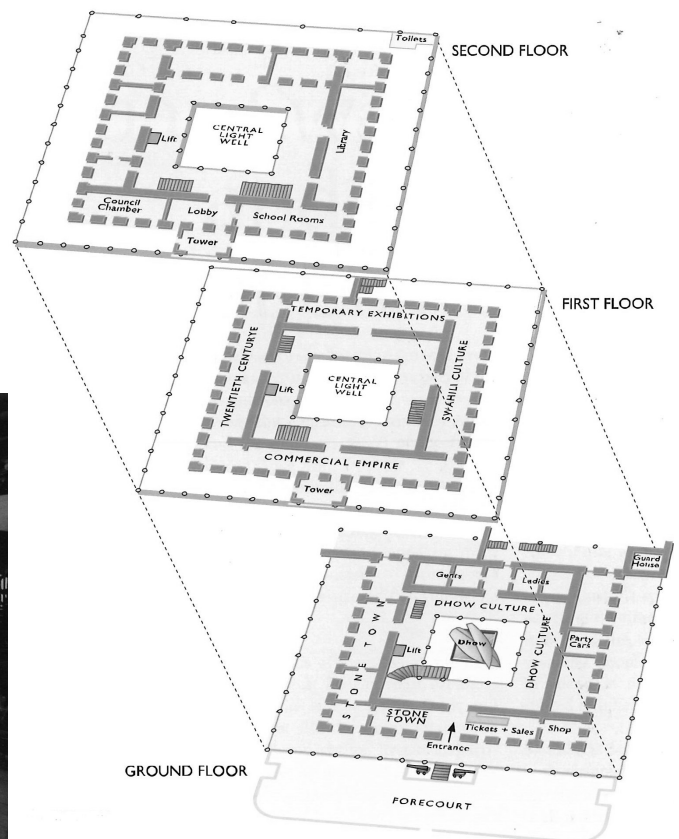
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## Conclusions

As seen in the House of Wonders, early Modern palaces commissioned by African royalty during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bear witness to a strong desire to innovate amongst African rulers. Traditional typologies were quickly developed into contemporary translations, responding to local climate, culture and *Zeitgeist*. Though calling upon the technical expertise of European engineers and architects, these palaces were conceived within an African context, from African thought.

Knowledge of this 'strand' in the Modernization of African architecture may be of importance in the understanding of the subsequent 'strands' of the well known history of Modern architecture in Africa.

## Notes

1. European Modernity in this essay defined as the 'classic' architecture of the Modern Movement of the 1920s and related off-springs of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Functionalism, International Style, up to late Modernity such as Team X Structuralism of the 1950s and 1960s.
2. Kultermann, Udo, Delft, *Oase*, n° 82, 2010.
3. Omezi, Giles; Sola Ogunbanjo, "Synthesising the Appropriate; Architectural interpretation of Natural synthesis—Demas Nwoko to Bukka". Paper presented at Africa Perspectives in Delft, December 2007 (not published), 7. See also Omezi, Giles, *Towards a New Culture; Rethinking the African Modern—The Architecture of Demas Nwoko*, London, 2008, and on the oeuvre of Demas Nwoko: Godwin, John; Hopwood, Gillian, *The Architecture of Demas Nwoko*, Lagos, Farafina, 2007.
4. Nwoko, Demas, *The Impoverished Generation*, London, New Culture publications, 1992, 4
5. This division is meant to be non-discriminatory and is not set in chronological order. This first attempt is open to adaptation and extension upon experts' viewpoints. It is not meant to be all-inclusive or deterministic, but rather to point at the diversity in parallel and subsequent strands of modernization in African architecture.
6. Denison, Edward; Yu Ren, G.; Gebremedhin, N., *Asmara, Africa's secret modernist city*, Merrell Publishers, 2003.
7. Cohen, Jean Louis; M. Eleb, *Casablanca, mythes et figures d'une aventure urbaine*, Paris, Editions Hazan, 2004.
8. See for instance: McIntosh, Gordon; Hanson, Norman; Martiensen, Rex, *Zero Hour*, Johannesburg, Hayne and Gibson, 1933.
9. See for instance: Avermaete, T.; Karakayali, S.; Osten, M. von, *Colonial Modern, Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions for the Future*, London, Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2010. Avermaete, Tom, *Another Modern, the post-war architecture and urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2005.
10. Except South Africa with a strong architectural school tradition which started well before World War II.
11. Kultermann initially discards Guedes' work "[...] it must be regarded as a ridiculously exaggerated form of the European Jugendstil." Kultermann, Udo, *New Architecture in Africa*, New York, Universe, 1963, 20. He changes his mind in his later book *New Directions in African Architecture*, New York, Brazillier, 1969. For Guedes' work: Guedes, Pedro (ed.), *Pancho Guedes. Vitruvius Mozambicanus*, Lisbon, Museu Coleção Berardo, 2009.
12. Folkers, Antoni, *Modern Architecture in Africa*, London, BPR Publishers, 2010, 243–245.
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## Antoni Folkers

Architect and urban designer, specialized in African architecture. He studied Art and Art History at John Carroll University in Cleveland, and obtained his Masters in Architecture at Delft University for Technology in 1986. He started his career as researcher and designer in Ouagadougou before joining the Institute for Tropical Building (IFT) of Dr G Lippsmeier in Starnberg, Germany. In 1988, for Lippsmeier, he became Resident Architect for East Africa.

He has been a cofounder of various foundations: in 1992 FBW Architects with offices in the UK, the Netherlands, and Uganda; in 2001 ArchiAfrika; and recently, in 2010, he cofounded African Architecture Matters. The main aim of these foundations is the promotion of African architecture and the conservation of it.