





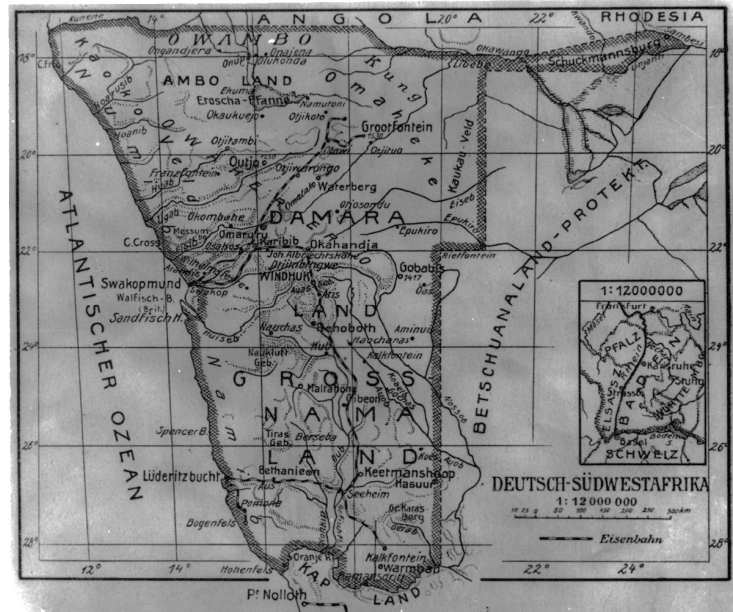






## Introduction

The German Empire, like other European powers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, had the ambition to establish and maintain colonies successfully. Due to Germany's late entry into colonialism, the German colonial period was relatively short and was effectively ended by World War I. Nevertheless, the efforts to maintain overseas colonies were enormous. In present-day Namibia, which the Germans administered as a de facto colony under the name *Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (German South-west Africa) as a so-called *Schutzgebiet* (Protected Area) from 1884 to 1915, the attempts to create a stable model colony were particularly pronounced. The challenging climatic conditions, along with conflicts involving Indigenous groups such as the Herero and the Nama, made it difficult to establish a stable colonial administration. This was further compounded by the fact that administrative offices in the capital, Windhoek, were spread across seven different buildings, significantly hindering communication between the respective administrative departments. To streamline governance, Governor von Schuckmann<sup>1</sup> appealed to the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) in Berlin in 1909, requesting approval to construct a building that would consolidate all these administrative branches within a single facility. This unusually large building, prominently located on a rocky plateau outside Windhoek's centre, was designed by state architect Gottlieb Redecker. The building, known as the *Tintenpalast* - The Ink Palace - was so named by German colonists in reference to the large volumes of ink used in administrative work. Completed in 1913, it continues to serve as the seat of the Namibian Parliament today.<sup>2</sup>



Map of German Southwest Africa, to the right a comparison to the German states of Baden and Württemberg, ca. 1904.  
Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 2)

To streamline governance, Governor von Schuckmann<sup>1</sup> appealed to the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) in Berlin in 1909, requesting approval to construct a building that would consolidate all these administrative branches within a single facility. This unusually large building, prominently located on a rocky plateau outside Windhoek's centre, was designed by state architect Gottlieb Redecker. The building, known as the *Tintenpalast* - The Ink Palace - was so named by German colonists in reference to the large volumes of ink used in administrative work. Completed in 1913, it continues to serve as the seat of the Namibian Parliament today.<sup>2</sup>

The existing literature on the *Tintenpalast* primarily builds on the works of Walter Peters (*Baukunst in Südwestafrika*, 1981) and Ariane Komeda (*Kontaktarchitektur*, 2020). Peters presents a detailed case study examining the transfer of architectural styles from the German Empire to its colonies. He refers to various colonial actors, including the German settlers in Windhoek, the local colonial administration, and the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) in Berlin, situating them within a linear narrative of

<sup>1</sup> Bruno von Schuckmann, Governor in German Southwest Africa from 1907-1910

<sup>2</sup> Justus Grebe, "Die Tintenpalast – Simbool van staatkundige ontwikkeling," *SWA Annual Jaarboek* (1986): 75–80.

events.<sup>3</sup> However, his research lacks a critical engagement with the relationships between these groups and the power dynamics embedded in the architectural design and decision-making processes. Komeda, on the other hand, focuses on the architectural design of the *Tintenpalast*, particularly its modifications through correspondence with Berlin, balancing cost and material limitations with architectural expression, an approach encapsulated in the chapter *From Magnificence to Practicality*.<sup>4</sup> While this perspective offers a valuable complement to Peters' stylistic analysis, it similarly overlooks the structural hierarchies and asymmetries that were embedded in the planning and realisation of the building itself.

In her contribution to *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell* (Cultural Heritage and Monument Preservation Transculturally), Komeda identifies groups of actors such as government personnel, artisans, settlers, and the Herero people, situating their power relations to each other.<sup>5</sup> Although the context of this article addresses the situation in German Southwest Africa as a whole, it only describes a few aspects that apply to the overall production of architecture in the colony. Being similar in approach, one could therefore ask how the *Tintenpalast* reflects the materialisation of colonial power relations and structure through the circulation of resources in German Southwest Africa?

Building on the foundations provided, this study moves beyond architectural analysis to situate the *Tintenpalast* within a broader socio-political framework. Using the building as a lens, it examines social structures, resource networks, and knowledge transfer from the colonial homeland, dimensions that have yet to be fully explored. By framing the analysis through the interconnected dimensions of people, knowledge, and resources, this paper seeks to bridge the gap between the main sources on the topic. It integrates these perspectives into a more comprehensive framework, while also drawing on broader scholarship that employs similar methodologies to analyse German colonial influence. Additionally, it sheds light on overlooked aspects, such as the role of German-trained architects in transmitting architectural knowledge and the material flows that shaped the construction of the *Tintenpalast*. By placing the building within these wider networks, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of its significance in the colonial context and contributes to a broader historiographical discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914* (Hannover: SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft Windhoek, 1981), 286–300.

<sup>4</sup> Ariane Komeda, „Das Gouvernementsgebäude in Windhoek: Vom Prunk zur ‚Zweckmäßigkeit‘“, in *Kontaktarchitektur: Kolonialarchitektur in Namibia zwischen Norm und Übersetzung* (Bern: Göttingen: VetR unipress, 2020), 219–238.

<sup>5</sup> Ariane Komeda, „Kolonialarchitektur als Gegenstand transkultureller Forschung. Das Beispiel der deutschen Bauten in Namibia“, in *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell*, edited by Michael Falser and Monica Juneja (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 119–137.

## People

### - The Colonial Office, the Governor, and the Populace -

The construction of the *Tintenpalast* in Windhoek was not merely an architectural project but a political statement by the German colonial administration. The choice of its location was accompanied by intense debates that reflected the tensions between the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) in Berlin, the local colonial administration, the German settler community, and the Indigenous populations. This chapter examines the power relations among those colonial actors by critically revisiting the debates surrounding the siting of the *Tintenpalast*.



Bruno von Schuckmann Governor of German Southwest Africa, ca. 1907. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 3)

The *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) favoured a representative position of the building in the cityscape to demonstrate the imperial presence of the German Empire. On the other hand, the German settler population demanded a central location within Windhoek's economic core. The primary goal of representatives of the local colonial administration, Governor von Schuckmann, and later Governor Seitz<sup>6</sup>, was to organise the administration efficiently under one roof, trying to mediate between the local German settler population and the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office). In contrast, the Indigenous communities had no voice in the debate despite being directly affected as forced labourers. This debate over location highlights the unequal power dynamics in German Southwest Africa and serves as a foundation for examining the various actors in this chapter.

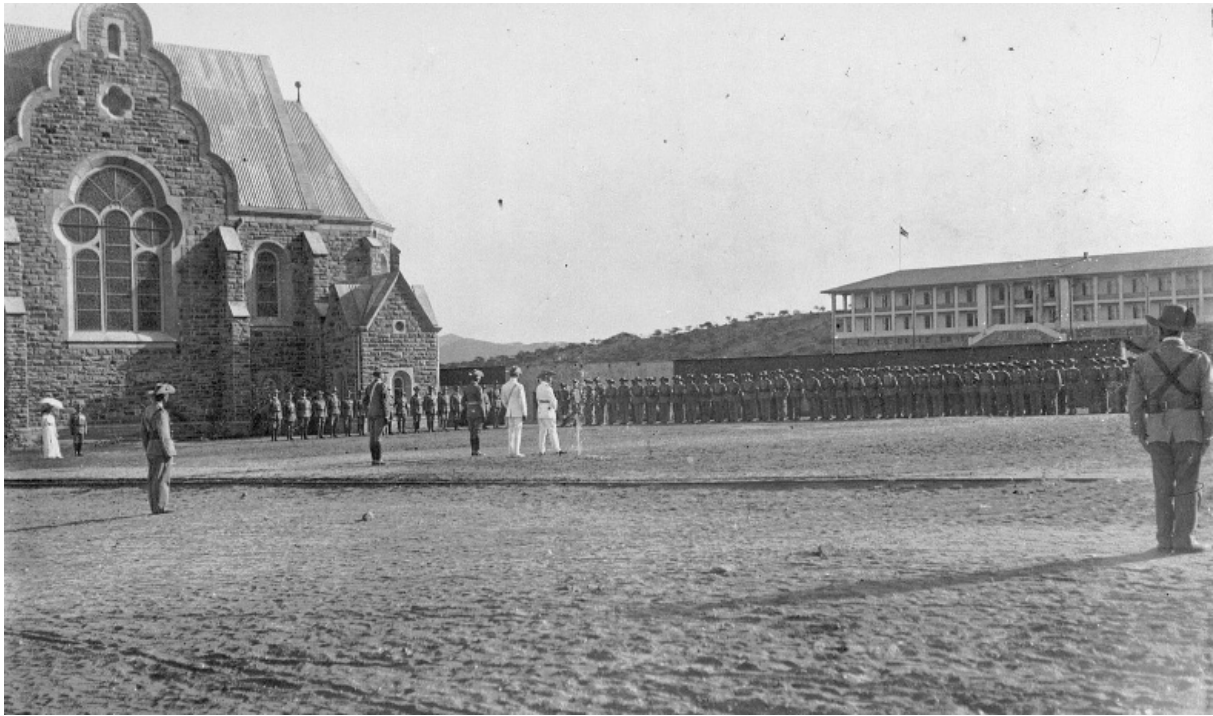
One of the primary actors in this debate was the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) in Berlin, which had the final authority over the planning and construction of the *Tintenpalast*. For the officials in the imperial capital, the building was more than just an administrative structure; it was meant to symbolise colonial rule. The selection of a hilltop site above the newly built *Christuskirche* (Christ Church), also designed by Gottlieb Redecker, was justified by Friedrich von Lindequist<sup>7</sup> and later Dr. Heinrich Schnee<sup>8</sup>. The then-Secretaries of State of the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) argued that the remote location would allow for future expansion if needed. Additionally, the elevated site would enhance the building's visibility and contribute to the city's aesthetic appeal more than a location among architecturally unremarkable private homes.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Seitz, Governor in Cameroon from 1907-1910, afterwards he was appointed Governor in German Southwest Africa from 1910-1915

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich von Lindequist, Governor in German Southwest Africa from 1905-1907, later State Secretary of the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) from 1910-1911

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Schnee (1871-1949), Governor of German East Africa from 1912 to 1918, temporarily functioned as a representative in the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office), where he continued to advocate for Lindequist's position following the latter's resignation from colonial administration in 1911.

<sup>9</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884-1914*, 294.



Parade in front of the *Christuskirche*. The Tintenpalast in the background highlights proximity between the two buildings, ca. 1913. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 4)

The *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) was an independent authority established in 1907, replacing the Colonial Department of the Foreign Office. The necessity of such an institution arose from the administrative challenges and increasing costs of colonial governance. Its responsibilities included regulating administration, economy, infrastructure, and political control in the German colonies, including German Southwest Africa.<sup>10</sup> Centralised decision-making was particularly important, allowing colonial affairs to be managed remotely. However, this often led to a misalignment between local needs and directives from Berlin, as decisions were made without direct knowledge of conditions on the ground. Despite reforms and the introduction of specialised advisors for construction, agriculture, and finance, inefficiency and rising administrative costs remained significant points of criticism against the agency.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Horst Gründer, *Die Deutschen und ihre Kolonien – Ein Überblick* (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2022), 179-185.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Schnee's arguments reflect the power dynamics of the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office); the elevated location was intended to emphasise the dominant position of the German administration over the city and its inhabitants, embodying the monumental aesthetics of the Wilhelmine Empire in Africa. These considerations, however, ignored local urban planning and economic needs.



Windhoek with the *Tintenpalast* and the *Christuskirche* on the hillside. In the foreground, the *Kaiserstraße* with shops and businesses, ca. 1914-1919. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 5)

The *Kaiserstraße* (Emperor Street) functioned as Windhoek's economic centre, home to banks, trading companies, and other German-run businesses. The *Reichskolonialamt's* (Imperial Colonial Office) decision to place the government headquarters outside this area was strongly resisted by the local German settler population.

In contrast to the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office), another group of actors involved in the discussion was the local colonial administration in Windhoek, which pursued a more pragmatic approach. Then-Governor Bruno von Schuckmann, who advocated for a central administrative building, preferred a location within the city's economic and social core in consultation with the local German settler community. His successor, Theodor Seitz, proposed an alternative solution, suggesting a location on the city's outskirts, near the courthouse. However, this proposal led to further protests as it distanced the administration even further from the German settler community.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 295.



Friedrich von Lindequist, ca. 1903-1907. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 6)

Although the governors and officials on the ground were formally part of the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) and were sometimes transferred between different colonies,<sup>13</sup> they are considered a distinct group of actors in this analysis. They were often interested in solutions that aligned with the interests of the German population in the colony, as they themselves had adapted to colonial life. To enhance governance, the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) occasionally recalled officials to Berlin to leverage their colonial experience, allowing it to benefit from their on-the-ground experience. However, this practice was only gradually implemented, as exemplified by Friedrich von Lindequist, who served as Governor of German Southwest Africa from 1905 to 1907 before becoming Secretary of State in the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office). Over time, this exchange of personnel could have contributed to a steady accumulation of knowledge and increased efficiency in colonial administration.<sup>14</sup>

The German settler community in Windhoek was also a significant group of actors in the location debate. While the administration favoured a remote site, the settlers demanded a more central location. Their main argument was that the government should be easily accessible and intricately linked to the economic hub along *Kaiserstraße* (Emperor Street).<sup>15</sup>

The influential businessman Gustav Voigts, chairman of the municipal building committee, played a leading role in the protests against the hilltop location. In a collective telegram to the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) on October 10, 1911, the settlers argued that choosing a remote site would hinder economic interactions between the administration and the local business sector.<sup>16</sup> Despite this opposition, the decision remained unchanged. This decision underscored the administration's prioritisation of symbolic power over economic pragmatism, reinforcing its broader colonial objectives.

Rudolf Kindt, editor of the newspaper *Südwest* (Southwest), took this criticism further, writing:

*'The path was steep, and the sun was shining. Anyone who had to climb to the Acropolis of Windhoek with multiple transfers will have reason to sing. The palpitations caused by such an ascent will force many who often have to go there to schedule their vacation trips to the sea or the homeland much earlier than necessary. How about a*

<sup>13</sup> Gründer, *Die Deutschen und ihre Kolonien*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur*, 221.

<sup>16</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 296.

*cable car from Kaiserstraße down below to the top? One thing is certain: no one will ascend to the clouds where the gods reside for fun. And the authorities up there can be sure they are well shielded from a great deal of public discontent.*<sup>17</sup>

Although this comment was extremely critical, it did not attract significant attention beyond the colony. It illustrates that the German settlers viewed themselves as a distinct group, separate from the bureaucratic apparatus and the imperial metropolis. This group gradually developed its own identity and began demanding a say in decisions, a demand that the imperialist German Empire did not grant.

An underrepresented group of actors in the debate around the location of the *Tintenpalast* was the Indigenous population. Although Herero, Nama and other indigenous groups lived in government and residential cities such as Windhoek, they were excluded from any decision-making processes related to the placement of the building. Moreover, they were spatially segregated from the white settler population through deliberate planning measures. This urban segregation was not incidental but a direct expression of the racial hierarchies and segregationist ideology by the colonial government. Windhoek exemplifies how urban design reinforced systems of control and social exclusion through spatial means.<sup>18</sup> The absence of archival records concerning the colony's Indigenous communities further underscores their marginalisation within the colonial system. It reveals the systematic disregard of imperial authorities for their rights, and perspectives.

The location debate highlights that economic efficiency was not the primary concern here, but rather the placement of a government building that would symbolise the power ambitions of the homeland and reflect the governmental and societal order of the Wilhelmine Empire. The *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office), which managed the colony from afar, was the final authority. At the same time, the interests of local settlers were ignored, even when they aligned with the economic objectives of the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office). Despite the goal of eventually making the colonies economically viable,<sup>19</sup> the symbolic representation of power outweighed pragmatic economic considerations in choosing the *Tintenpalast's* location.

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<sup>17</sup> Mossolow, quoted in Justus Grebe, "Die Tintenpalast – Simbool van staatkundige ontwikkeling," *SWA Annual Jaarboek* (1986), 78.

<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Beese, *Experten der Erschließung: Akteure der deutschen Kolonialtechnik in Afrika und Europa 1890 bis 1943* (Paderborn: Brill, 2020), 209.

<sup>19</sup> Gründer, *Die Deutschen und ihre Kolonien*, 88.



## Knowledge

### - Adaptation and Transfer -

After the site selection had been determined, three designs were submitted to the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) in February 1910 under the direction of Gottlieb Redecker. The *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) had to be consulted and approve the design since it was responsible for infrastructure development and, in this case, administrative buildings. The approach to present three distinctive design solutions aimed to increase the likelihood of approval by the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office). In general, the *Tintenpalast* exemplifies how German colonial architecture was shaped by a process of negotiated knowledge transfer, particularly by architects trained in Germany who adapted metropolitan design principles to the financial constraints set by the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office) and the environmental, material and technological limitations of construction in German Southwest Africa. To better understand how this adaptation was achieved, the careers of several key actors involved in developing the *Tintenpalast* will be examined to elucidate the broader colonial development processes.



Gottlieb Redecker (1871-1945). Source: Moritz Walter, *Vier Generationen Redecker in Namibia seit 1866*. (Figure 7)

Gottlieb Redecker was a key figure in colonial architecture in German Southwest Africa, significantly shaping the appearance of Windhoek. His career was linked to the German colonial administration and was based on a transnational education and professional experience in Germany and German Southwest Africa. His life trajectory exemplifies the career and training of a colonial official: Redecker was born as the son of a German missionary of the *Rheinische Mission* in German Southwest Africa and grew up in an environment heavily influenced by German missionary work. He attended school in *Otjimbingwe*, where he learned the languages of the Nama and Herero, which he mastered fluently.<sup>20</sup> After his mother's death, his father sent him to Germany to live with relatives, where he attended higher educational institutions. While it is certain that he received his university education in Germany, it is believed that he trained to become a civil engineer in Duisburg, where he also gained his first work experience.<sup>21</sup>

During his time there, he immersed himself in the architectural movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly the *Wilhelminischer Historismus* (Wilhelminian Historicism) and *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau).<sup>22</sup> Upon returning to German Southwest Africa, he joined the colonial construction administration and was eventually appointed chief architect of the

<sup>20</sup> Moritz Walter, *Vier Generationen Redecker in Namibia seit 1866* (Windhoek: John Meinert Printing, 2011), 70-84.

<sup>21</sup> Ariane Komeda, „Kolonialarchitektur als Gegenstand transkultureller Forschung. Das Beispiel der deutschen Bauten in Namibia,“ in *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell*, edited by Michael Falser and Monica Juneja (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 119-137.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Peters, „Wilhelminian Historicism and Objectivity: The Reception of German Architecture during the Period 1882 to 1914 in the Former German Southwest Africa (Namibia),“ *Restorica*, no. 14 (October 1983): 13-23.



*Direktorat für Bauwesen (Directorate of Construction Affairs)*. In this role, he was responsible for numerous public construction projects, including administrative buildings, churches, and infrastructure projects.<sup>23</sup>

Parallel to Redecker, Wilhelm Sander was also a defining figure in the development of colonial architecture in German Southwest Africa. As co-founder of the construction firm *Sander & Kock*, which was commissioned to build the *Tintenpalast*, he was directly involved in the building's execution. Sander studied architecture in Höxter, Westphalia, and gained professional experience in Germany before emigrating. After World War I, both Redecker and Sander only occasionally returned to the former protectorate but continued working on various Construction projects.<sup>24</sup>



Wilhelm Sander (1860-1930),  
Source: *Namibiana Buchdepot*. (Figure 8)

The careers of Redecker and Sander exemplify the process of knowledge transfer from Germany to its colony, through colonial officials and German entrepreneurs. In *Experten der Erschließung (Experts of Expansion)*, a work that does not focus exclusively on the architectural development of the colonies but on the necessary infrastructural work performed by engineers of all kinds, Sebastian Beese describes colonisation as not only a physical but also an intellectual process, in which technical expertise from the German Empire had to be adapted to the specific conditions of the colonies. Colonial engineers faced challenges that required climatic and material adjustments and a reorientation of technical norms to local conditions. Central to this process of adjustment to the local context of the colonies was informal knowledge transfer. While formal technical education and certifications were crucial, experiential knowledge also played a decisive role. Sebastian Beese describes how colonial engineers often developed independent technical practices that went beyond classical engineering schools and relied on immediate adaptation to tropical conditions. Such adaptations were necessary in the construction of administrative buildings like the *Tintenpalast*, as standardised European building methods were often not directly transferable.<sup>25</sup>

Technical infrastructure served as a means of power consolidation. Engineers were not only planners and construction managers but also agents of a specific colonial order. Technological progress was interpreted as a civilisational mission, portraying German engineering as superior and necessary for the colonies' development.<sup>26</sup>

Redecker's and other actors' architectural education and career trajectory, when viewed through the analytical framework developed by Sebastian Beese, allow for a more nuanced understanding of the design variants he proposed. Beese's concept of the *Kolonialingenieur* (Colonial Engineer) as a technical expert navigating between imperial expectations, local material constraints, and professional self-assertion helps

<sup>23</sup> Walter, *Vier Generationen Redecker*, 76.

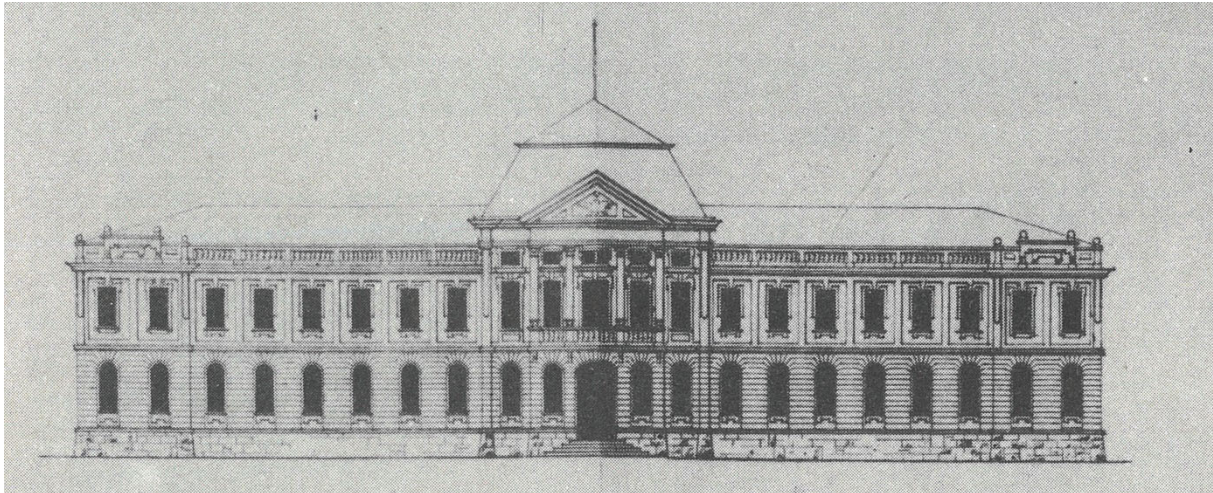
<sup>24</sup> Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914* (Hannover: SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft Windhoek, 1981).  
Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft Swakopmund, „Er baute den Tintenpalast,” *Berichte Jahrgang 47* (2015): 26–29.

<sup>25</sup> Sebastian Beese, *Experten der Erschließung: Akteure der deutschen Kolonialtechnik in Afrika und Europa 1890 bis 1943* (Paderborn: Brill, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

illuminate the rationale behind Redecker's architectural decisions and adaptations.<sup>27</sup> These design proposals will be examined in the following section to illustrate how these competing demands were negotiated in practice.

The first design featured an elongated main wing with two narrower wings extending towards the back. The rooms were symmetrically arranged along a central corridor. The meeting hall of the *Landesrat* (District Administration Council)<sup>28</sup> was located on the first floor and opened onto a balcony overlooking the garden.<sup>29</sup> Stylistically, this design exhibited Neo-Baroque influences, with the central risalit emphasised by a pediment featuring the imperial eagle.<sup>30</sup>



West Elevation of the first design showing imperial insignia, February 1910. Source: Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*. (Figure 9)

The second design was fundamentally based on the previous but included an open colonnade and a surrounding veranda on the courtyard side to suit the climatic conditions better, showing a gradual adaptation to the local climate. Verandas served to intercept the intense solar radiation, thereby shielding the interior spaces from direct sunlight and mitigating heat exposure. The central risalit was simplified, featuring an entablature instead of a pediment. This design was stylistically associated with Neo-Renaissance architecture.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

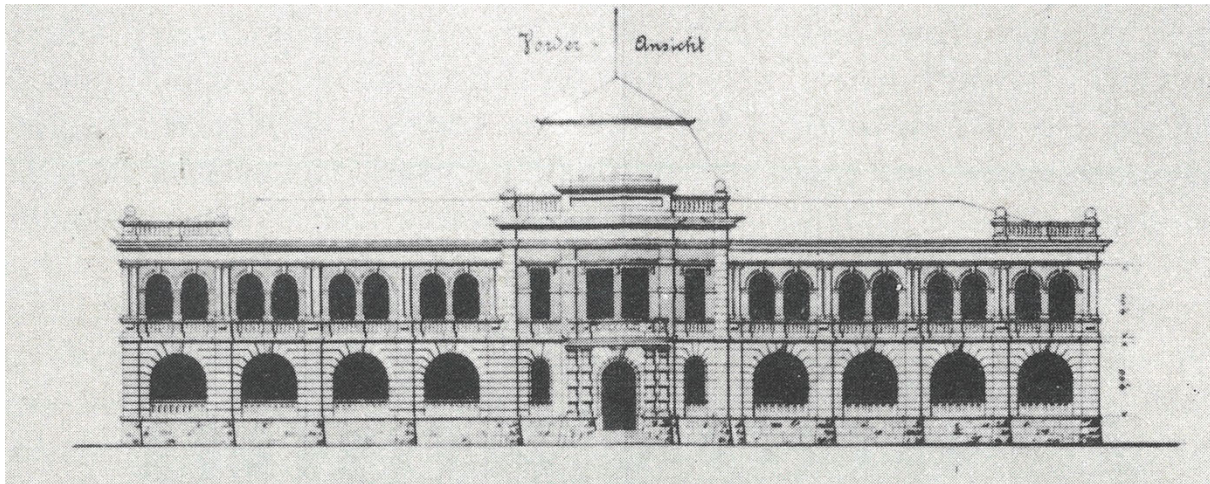
<sup>28</sup> The *Landesrat* (District Administration Council) functioned as the advisory legislative body of the colonial administration in German Southwest Africa. Established to advise the governor, it consisted primarily of appointed officials alongside elected representatives of the German settler population. Although its powers were limited, the council provided a forum for settler interests and deliberated on budgetary and administrative matters.

<sup>29</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 299.

<sup>30</sup> Ariane Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur: Kolonialarchitektur in Namibia zwischen Norm und Übersetzung* (Bern: Göttingen: VetR unipress, 2020), 219–238.

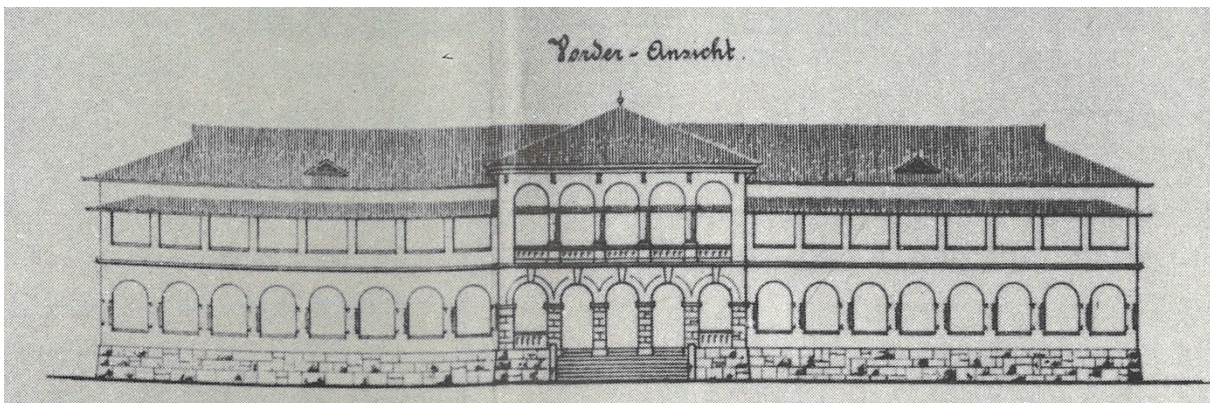
<sup>31</sup> Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur*, 229.





West Elevation of the second design with implemented colonnade, February 1910. Source: Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*. (Figure 10)

The third iteration deviated more significantly from the previous ones by adding an additional wing along the central axis, housing the staircase and the *Landesrat* (District Administration Council) meeting hall. The central risalit was covered by a gable roof. A round-arched colonnade protected the ground-floor rooms from direct sunlight, while a separate-roofed veranda on the upper floor provided additional shade.<sup>32</sup> This version was more straightforward and restrained in design, differing significantly from typical German or European models.



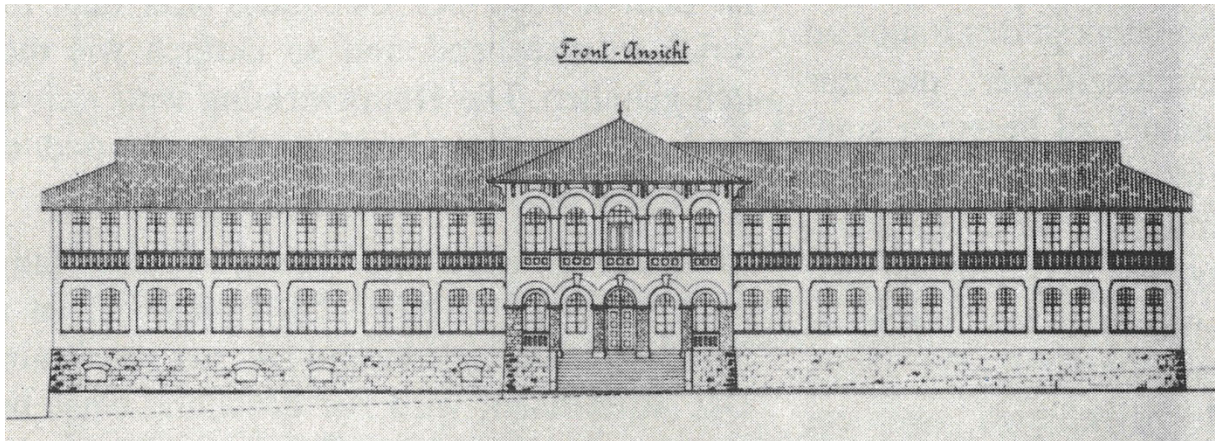
West Elevation of the third design with separate-roofed veranda, February 1910. Source: Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*. (Figure 11)

After being reviewed by the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office), it was decided that the third design option would be pursued and further developed. In contrast to the earlier debate over the building's location, which had centred on symbolic and spatial concerns, the selection of the third design draft reflected a clear shift toward economic pragmatism, as a solution was prioritised that imposed less financial strain on the metropole and adhered to principles of functional clarity and cost-efficiency. However, revisions were necessary, particularly regarding the size and practicality of the office spaces. Additionally, Secretary of State von Lindequist criticised the access via a corridor leading to a staircase as unsuitable, likely because this layout was not coherent with the *Reichskolonialamt's* (Imperial Colonial Office) understanding of a representative entrance space. A revised fourth design was presented in August of

<sup>32</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 300.

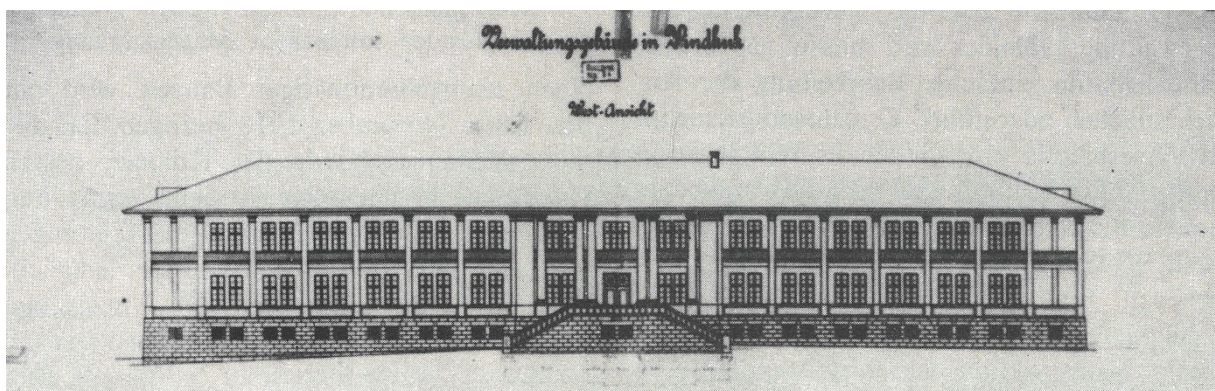


1910, incorporating functional improvements from previous versions. The veranda was integrated into the main roof structure, simplifying construction and aligning more closely with the available technical expertise in the colony. The meeting hall was given a ceiling height of seven meters and opened towards the courtyard. Special attention was paid to lighting and ventilation by incorporating French doors leading to the verandas and additional ventilation grilles in the exterior and corridor walls.<sup>33</sup>



West Elevation of the fourth design with the veranda integrated into the main roof structure, August 1910. Source: Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*. (Figure 12)

The fifth and final design, which was ultimately implemented, featured a functional, pragmatic architectural language, distinguishing it from its more historicist predecessors. The main facade was emphasised by broad, open staircases that created an imposing entrance, reflecting the representational aspirations of the German Empire and embodying its notions of authority and imperial grandeur. Instead of earlier roof variations, a gently sloping hipped roof was chosen to underline architectural unity; this choice further simplified the roof form, thereby facilitating construction within the technical and material limitations of the colonial context. A continuous colonnade with six Ionic columns gave the building a monumental yet clear structure. The surrounding veranda was further refined to protect the interiors from direct sunlight and improve air circulation. The internal administrative rooms were arranged along a clear central axis, ensuring optimal lighting and ventilation.<sup>34</sup>



West Elevation of the fifth design that was built, February 1912. Source: Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*. (Figure 13)

<sup>33</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 299.

<sup>34</sup> Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur*, 229; and Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 300.

The example of Redecker and other actors illustrates the blending and reinterpretation of German architectural styles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, navigating imperial administrative demands and material limitations on site. The design iterations of the *Tintenpalast* exemplify this dynamic: imperial demands shaped its representative function, while local constraints and Redecker's professional ambitions informed its material and formal articulation. Particularly noteworthy is the implementation of covered verandas and ventilation systems, facilitating better temperature regulation in Namibia's hot and dry climate.<sup>35</sup> These adaptations demonstrate an understanding of local conditions and a deliberate effort to merge European architecture with the challenges of the African environment, an environment Redecker was very familiar with. The technical education received in the metropole, along with the recognition that such knowledge could not be directly applied in the colony without modification, reflects the efforts of professionals to transform traditional architectural forms and adapt them to the local context.

This interplay of knowledge transfer, technological adaptation, and colonial ideology is essential for understanding the architectural and administrative structures in German Southwest Africa. The *Tintenpalast*, as the seat of administration, is therefore not only an architectural symbol of German presence but also a product of this specific form of colonial knowledge circulation and adaptation.



Topping-out ceremony of the newly completed Tintenpalast, based on Redecker's fifth design proposal, April 1913. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 14)

<sup>35</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 299–300; and Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur*, 229.

## Resources

### - Colonial Construction, Material Logistics, and Intercolonial Network -

The scarcity of resources in German Southwest Africa was recognised early on, and the region was long considered economically worthless. Nevertheless, *Reichskanzler* (Chancellor of the Empire) Caprivi<sup>36</sup> prohibited the colony's abandonment, solidifying the decision for its colonial development.<sup>37</sup> Namibia was often referred to by European colonists as the *Sandbüchse des Deutschen Reichs* (Sandbox of the German Empire), a metaphor that reflected the colony's arid and inhospitable landscapes.<sup>38</sup> Dominated by the vast sand dunes of the Namib Desert, the rugged central highlands, and the barren expanses of the Kalahari, the territory offered little natural vegetation and was composed mainly of desert or semi-desert terrain.<sup>39</sup> Indigenous communities, however, had long developed effective techniques for constructing dwellings using locally available materials like clay and interwoven branches. German colonists dismissed those practices as primitive and unworthy of emulation, as they were unsuitable for developing a modern model colony.<sup>40</sup>

Given the challenging environmental and logistical conditions in the colonies, construction efforts focused on functionality and resource efficiency, with the use of locally available materials considered essential and to be prioritised. The construction conditions necessitated adaptation to regional resources, as transporting building materials from the metropole involved significant costs and logistical challenges. At the same time, building resources and labour were to be sourced from the colonies as much as possible to ensure economic and resource-related independence from the German metropole. This strategy aimed to adapt construction methods to local conditions while fostering economic self-sufficiency within the colony.<sup>41</sup>

The example of the *Tintenpalast* particularly highlights this strategy, as both imported and local building materials were used in its construction, with some of these materials even originating from other colonies. This demonstrates the exchange of resources within the colonies and the associated interconnection of the colonial economic system. Through this intercolonial trade, not only was the availability of building materials improved, but the economic dependence of the colonies on the metropole was also gradually reduced.

Although natural building materials such as clay and natural stone were available, the harsh environmental conditions and lack of infrastructure and knowledge amongst the local population, who were used as workforce, made their extraction and use complex. Particularly problematic was the scarcity of construction timber, which was hardly available in German Southwest Africa. This posed a significant challenge, especially when

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<sup>36</sup> Leo von Kapviri, Chancellor of the German Empire from 1903 to 1912.

<sup>37</sup> Horst Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh GmbH, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Martin Kalb, *Environing Empire: Nature, Infrastructure, and the Making of German Southwest Africa* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022) and Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, 121

<sup>39</sup> Sebastian Dürrschmidt and Kathrin Dürrschmidt, *Info-Namibia*, 2021, [www.info-namibia.com](http://www.info-namibia.com) (accessed 6 March 2025).

<sup>40</sup> Michael Falser, *Deutsch-koloniale Baukulturen: Eine globale Architekturgeschichte in 100 visuellen Primärquellen* (Passau: Dietmar Klinger, 2023).

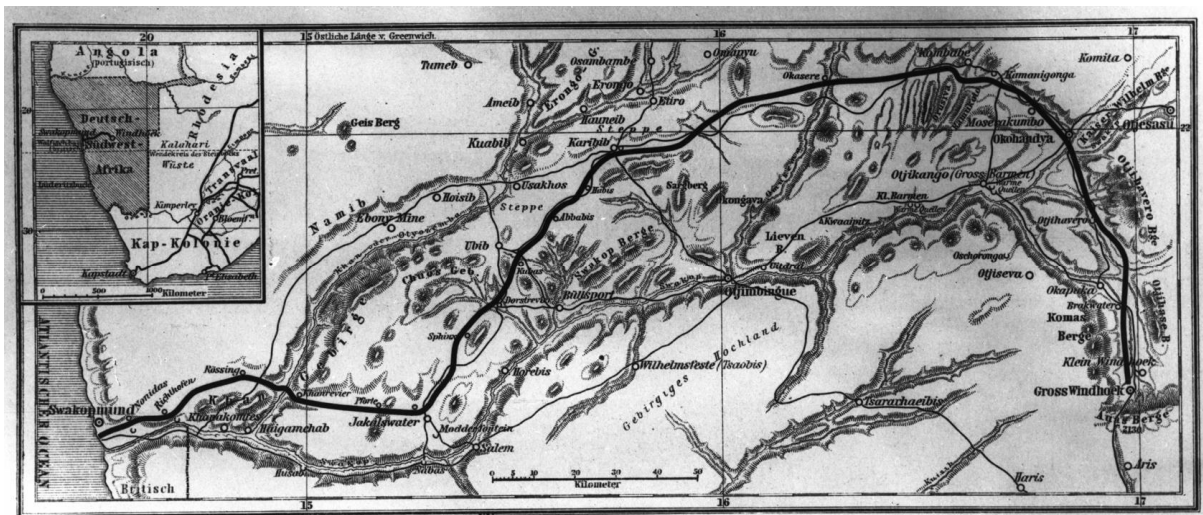
<sup>41</sup> Heinrich Schnee, *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1920), 146.



constructing elaborate roof trusses in European styles. Additionally, the presence of numerous species of termites made the use of wood near the ground risky, which is why it was strongly recommended to use exceptionally durable hardwood for load-bearing structures.<sup>42</sup>

The foundation, basement, and plinth area of the *Tintenpalast* were constructed from solid rubble sandstone. This choice was obvious, as sandstone was abundantly available in the region and was considered a suitable building material for a multi-story masonry structure due to its stability. However, the masonry of the upper floors consists of cement sandstone<sup>43</sup>, which was produced directly in Windhoek.<sup>44</sup> The choice of cement sandstone demonstrates the deliberate use of an exceptionally durable material designed to withstand the climatic challenges of the region. At the same time, this material selection illustrates the attempt to work with locally available resources while applying industrial manufacturing processes to ensure high-quality masonry. Particularly remarkable is the indication that each mason was required to lay 1,000 stones daily—an enormous amount from today's perspective.<sup>45</sup> By comparison, the maximum number of bricks a mason can process daily, in a contemporary working environment, is around 500.<sup>46</sup> It is assumed that forced labourers from the surrounding area were used to construct the *Tintenpalast*. This human resource was exploited by the German colonial rulers in the same way as material resources.

A crucial element of the construction was the lime mortar used as a binder for the sandstone. The lime was supplied from *Okahandja*, about 70 km north of Windhoek. The high quality of the mortar was essential to ensure a durable and weather-resistant structure. The facades of the *Tintenpalast* were coated with light lime plaster to protect



Map of the Swakopmund-Windhoek Railway. One of the stops is Okahandja, ca. 1904. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 15)

<sup>42</sup> Schnee, *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, 145.

<sup>43</sup> Cement sandstone is an artificial building material made from sand and cement, pressed together under high pressure and heat.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914* (Hannover: SWA Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft Windhoek, 1981), 300.

<sup>45</sup> Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft Swakopmund, „Er baute den Tintenpalast,” *Berichte Jahrgang 47* (2015): 26–29.

<sup>46</sup> [www.buildingmaterials.co.uk](http://www.buildingmaterials.co.uk). 2025

the massive walls from erosion.<sup>47</sup> This choice not only served a protective function but also had a visual purpose: the bright surface reflected sunlight and reduced heat absorption, thereby improving the indoor climate of the building. The delivery of lime was also facilitated by the railway line between Okahandja and Windhoek, which had been completed in 1902<sup>48</sup>, marking the starting point of industrial inner-colonial networking and, thus, the exchange of goods.

A remarkable aspect of the construction is the use of wood for various load-bearing elements. Since wood was only scarcely available in Windhoek and its surroundings, the decision was made to import building materials from the German colony of Cameroon. This decision was based on a suggestion from the then-Governor Theodor Seitz, who had previously served as Governor in Cameroon. Cameroonian hardwood was used for floors, verandas, and the roof structure.<sup>49</sup> The verandas played a vital role, as they served as a climatic adaptation to protect the interior spaces from direct sunlight. The import of wood from another colony demonstrates that the German administration was willing to undertake significant logistical efforts to meet construction requirements. Notably, this exchange was initiated by a former colonial official—a representative figure of the German Empire in the colony. This illustrates the aforementioned practice of the *Reichskolonialamt* (German Colonial Office), which flexibly transferred officials between colonies, thereby equating the individual territories to some extent and managing them according to uniform principles.



Theodor Seitz as Governor of Cameroon, ca. 1910. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 16)

While the *Tintenpalast's* exterior appearance relied on traditional building materials such as sandstone and wood, reinforced concrete was used in the interior for ceilings, load-bearing structures, and the staircase connecting the ground floor with the upper floor.<sup>50</sup> This shows that the building was not only focused on representative elements but also adhered to modern construction standards that guaranteed stability and durability. This was an advanced solution for an administrative building at the time and reflects the influence of new construction techniques applied in German colonies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>47</sup> Ariane Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur: Kolonialarchitektur in Namibia zwischen Norm und Übersetzung* (Bern: Göttingen: VetR unipress, 2020), 229.

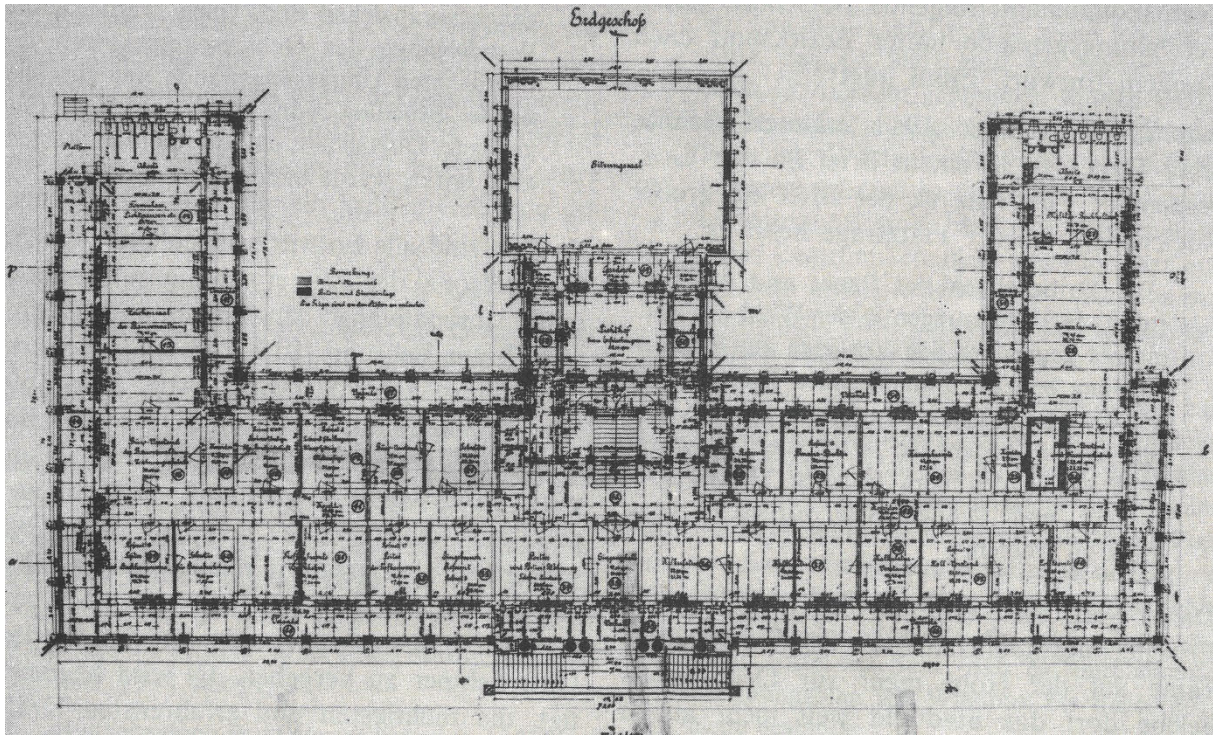
<sup>48</sup> Martin Kalb, *Environing Empire: Nature, Infrastructure, and the Making of German Southwest Africa* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 110.

<sup>49</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*, 301.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



The roof of the *Tintenpalast* was covered with corrugated iron, which was imported from Germany. Its thickness was 0.75 mm thicker than the corrugated iron usually used in German Southwest Africa, which came from the British Cape Colony.<sup>51</sup> This choice of material suggests that a long-lasting and low-maintenance solution was preferred to withstand the challenges of the local climate, particularly extreme temperature fluctuations and occasional heavy rainfall.



Ground Floorplan of the *Tintenpalast*, Construction Drawing, February 1912. Source: Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914*. (Figure 17)

The earlier reference to the exploitation of human resources as analogous to material extraction demands a closer examination of the colonial labour system. Following the Herero and Nama War,<sup>52</sup> approximately 90 % of the adult male Indigenous population were subject to forced labour under European supervision by 1910.<sup>53</sup> The colonial regime regarded the education and training of indigenous people as a threat to its authority and prohibited them from acquiring formal qualifications.<sup>54</sup> As Helmut Bley has argued, the relationship between colonisers and colonised in German Southwest Africa was marked by a fundamental anonymity, structured as one between master and servant, devoid of recognition or reciprocity. Despite racist hierarchies that deemed Africans inferior, the colonial project depended heavily on indigenous labour. Due to the limited availability of workers, the German administration relied on the

<sup>51</sup> Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur*, 230.

<sup>52</sup> Uprising of the Herero and Nama against the German colonial power between 1904 and 1908, during which a genocide was committed against the Herero and Nama, which the German government only officially acknowledged in 2021

<sup>53</sup> Helmut Bley. *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894-1914*. Hamburg: Leibniz Verlag Hamburg, 1968, 285.

<sup>54</sup> Ariane Komeda. "Kolonialarchitektur als Gegenstand transkultureller Forschung. Das Beispiel der deutschen Bauten in Namibia." In *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell*, by Falser, Michael and Monica Juneja, 119-137. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013. 129

exploitation of local populations to build and maintain the colonial economy.<sup>55</sup> The phrase 'with white heads and black hands' encapsulates the ideological framework of colonial development: Africans were to provide physical labour.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, strategic and managerial control remained in European hands. This division reflected and reinforced the systemic inequalities at the heart of the colonial order.

The same extractive logic that governed the use of indigenous labour also structured the procurement and deployment of building materials. The construction of the Tintenpalast exemplifies this logic: a deliberate combination of locally sourced and imported elements tailored to serve both practical and symbolic purposes. While sandstone, cement sandstone, and lime were sourced from the region, wood, reinforced concrete, and corrugated iron were procured from other German colonies or directly from Germany. This combination illustrates the colonial construction practice, where local resources were used while at the same time relying on supra-regional material flows to achieve a specific architectural quality. The choice of materials also underscores the technological progress that the construction represented in the colonial context. While traditional building materials such as stone were used, modern construction techniques like reinforced concrete ceilings and imported corrugated iron were integrated. The inclusion of Cameroonian hardwood suggests that the building was not merely an administrative structure but also a symbol of colonial interconnectedness within the German Empire.

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<sup>55</sup> Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894-1914*, 136-146.

<sup>56</sup> Komeda, In *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell*. 126

## Conclusion

This study showed that colonial architecture cannot be viewed in isolation but rather as an expression of the complex interplay of political, economic, and cultural factors. The *Tintenpalast* was not merely an administrative tool but also a means of manifesting and legitimising colonial power. This study has approached the building as a manifestation of interactions between multiple actors – imperial authorities, colonial officials, German settlers, and local labourers – as well as the circulation of knowledge, architectural norms, and material resource networks. By considering the *Tintenpalast* not as the product of a singular colonial will but as the outcome of conflicting priorities and negotiations represented by different actors, we gain a more nuanced understanding of its historical significance.

A key insight of this analysis lies in the duality between top-down and bottom-up processes. While the decision regarding the *Tintenpalast's* location – elevated and separated from Windhoek's economic centre – reflected a top-down imposition by the *Reichskolonialamt* (Imperial Colonial Office), the development of the architectural design was shaped more pragmatically. Although Gottlieb Redecker was an official in the colonial administration, he actively negotiated between the representative ambitions of the German Empire and the pragmatic, utilitarian approach of German settlers among whom he was raised. His architectural decisions reflect a bottom-up, context-sensitive logic shaped by material constraints and environmental considerations. This interplay between centralised authority and local adaptation challenges binary conceptions of colonial domination and instead foregrounds a complex agency structure.<sup>57</sup>



View of the Tintenpalast, including the surrounding gardens and staircases, which suggest the photo was taken after 1934, when landscaping began. The South African flag, used from 1928 to 1994, further indicates that the image likely dates to the South African administration period. Source: *Colonial Picture Archive Frankfurt, University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg*. (Figure 18)

<sup>57</sup>Ariane Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur: Kolonialarchitektur in Namibia zwischen Norm und Übersetzung* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2020), 219–238; Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914* (Windhoek: SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, 1981), 286–300.

This complexity does not end with the building's colonial origins. In the postcolonial period, after the occupation by South Africa, the Tintenpalast became the seat of the Namibian Parliament. This transformation illustrates both the persistence and the re-signification of colonial infrastructures.<sup>58</sup> Rather than being demolished or replaced, the building has been integrated into the fabric of the newly implemented independent state. This continued use raises questions about architectural inheritance, symbolic power, and the relationship between physical structures and state legitimacy, which can be explored in future research.<sup>59</sup>

The tradition of the Nama and Herero, who, during their wars of resistance against the German *Schutztruppe* (Protective Force) from 1904 to 1908, adopted the uniforms of their enemies to absorb their strength symbolically, offers a fitting analogy for the repurposing of the Tintenpalast.<sup>60</sup> For decades, the building represented the ideological and political ideals of colonial or apartheid rule. However, after Namibia's independence, it was neither rejected nor abandoned. Instead, it integrated into the national culture and social life—a process of appropriation that transformed a symbol of oppression into an element of national identity. Its continued presence in Namibia's political landscape illustrates how colonial symbols are appropriated and recontextualised rather than being discarded. Both are artefacts of colonial domination transformed into emblems of a new national narrative while still negotiating their relation to the past.

In this way, both the building and its representational aesthetics serve as a reminder that the colonial project operated not only through domination and exclusion, but also through more insidious mechanisms of circulation, appropriation, and adaptation—strategies that reinforced colonial hierarchies and excluded certain groups of actors.

. The historiography of the Tintenpalast, much like its physical structure, remains layered and incomplete. As with the colonial entanglements from which it emerged, its postcolonial legacy continues to evolve in a landscape marked by unresolved tensions and reappropriated meanings.

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Peters, "Appropriation and Politics of German Colonial Heritage: The Tintenpalast in Windhoek, Namibia – an Intact Survivor of Imperialism, Constitutional Monarchy, Apartheid and Democracy," in *Monuments and Sites De-Colonial! Approaches to the Built Heritage of the German Colonial Era*, ed. Michael Falser, Gabriele Horn, Tino Mager, and John Ziesemer (Munich: ICOMOS, 2023), 153–159.

<sup>59</sup> Vanessa Jane Rühlig, *Colonial Architecture as Heritage: German Colonial Architecture in Post-Colonial Windhoek* (MPhil Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2018), 14–24.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Kalb, *Environing Empire: Nature, Infrastructure, and the Making of German Southwest Africa* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 267.

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## Figures

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