

Public Lecture Series



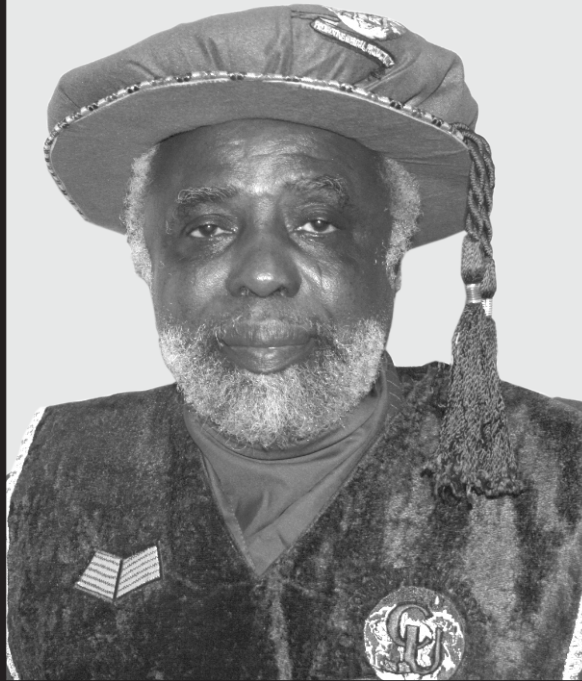
MEANING AND RELEVANCE IN NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE: THE DIALECTICS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE

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Introduction

Aside from the brief descriptions of some traditional dwelling types and settlements gleaned from the notes of early Europeans explorers and missionaries, few and scattered efforts exist to provide information on the African Traditional Architecture. The early assumption that the Africans lived in unstructured, isolated bush communities with little appreciation of the aesthetics in town design may have restricted enquiry into indigenous African Architecture. This lack in information would appear compounded as architectural history and the theory of Architecture have traditionally emphasised the study of monuments. The monumental work in Sir Bannister Fletcher's History of Architecture left out the rest of Africa after elaborating on the Architecture of Egypt which featured the pyramids and the temples.

The first comprehensive work on the indigenous Nigerian Architecture was published and released to the reading public by Ethnographica Publishers, London in 1984. It was Zbigniew Dmochowski's Corpus on the indigenous Architecture of the major groups in Nigeria. This lecture will emphasise some of the highpoints of Nigerian indigenous Architecture and also show that the traditional builder possessed the ability to evolve an architecture as unique in architectural history as the monumental buildings of the Western civilisation.

The Bias for the Monumental

Fig. 1: Plan of the Massallacci Juma'a Zaria Friday Mosque

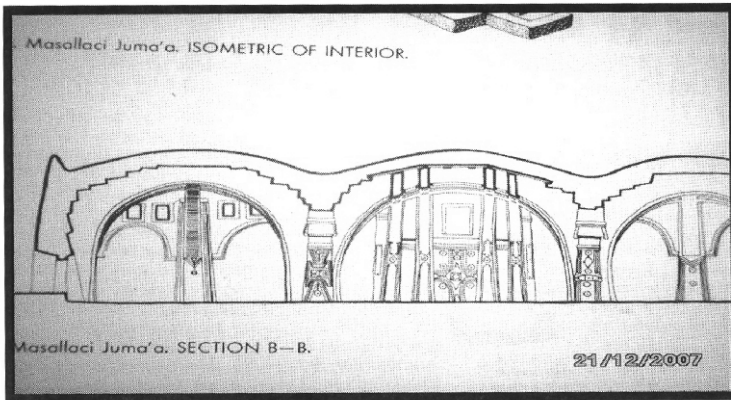
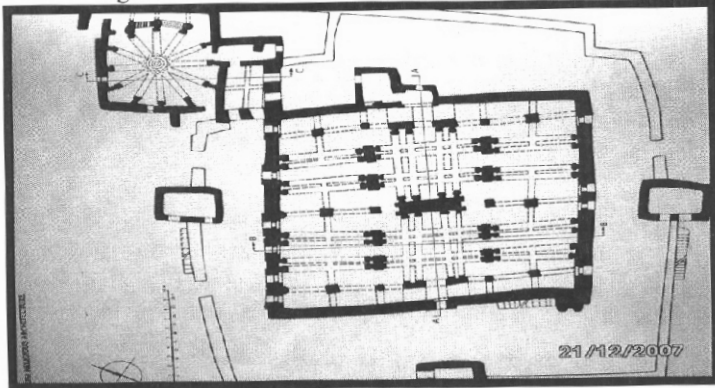


Fig. 2: Section through Mosque

Much as the study of monuments can hardly be ignored in architectural history, structures of modest scales may also be found to possess qualities of architectural literacy which endow them with the architectural accolade. In monuments however are usually embodied the sum-total of architectural thinking as they

symbolise and epitomise a people's technological achievement and cultural refinement.

The African Heritage in Monumental Structures

Not all African traditional buildings lack the monumental character, nor are all traditional buildings mud huts. The **Mopti** and the **Djenne** mosques and particularly the Zaria Friday Mosque, **Massallacci Juma'a** have a refreshingly monumental character that qualifies each for a prominent place in architectural history. The cities of Gao, Timbuktu, Djenne, Katsina, Bauchi and Kano, all located in areas historically known as the West Sudan still have some of the best examples of mud building tradition.

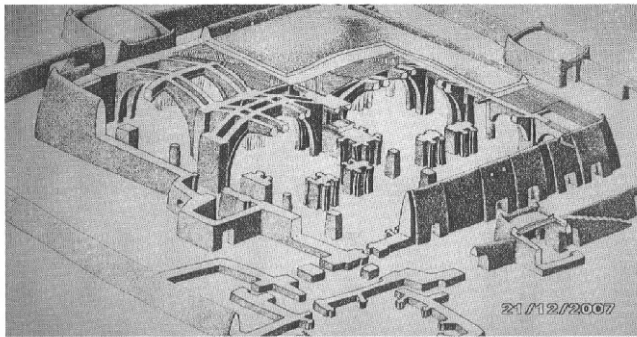


Fig. 3: Isometric of Mosque Interior

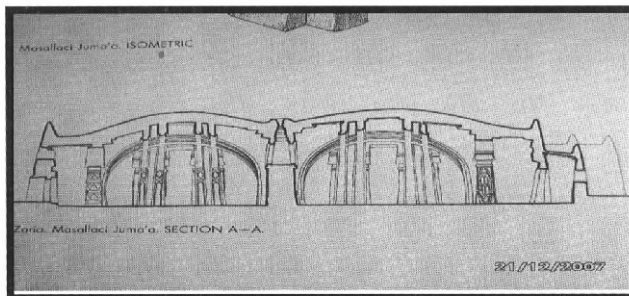


Fig. 4: Another section through Mosque

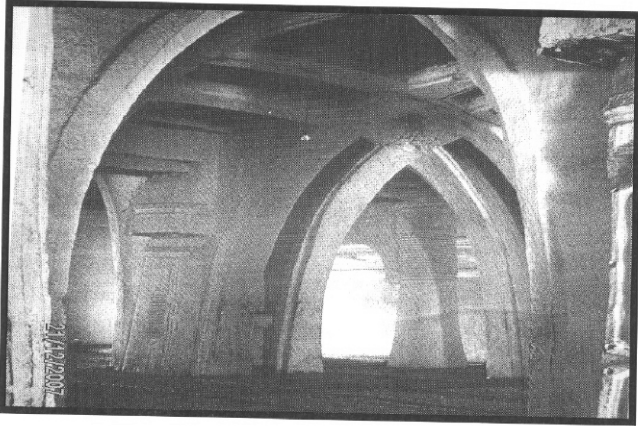


Fig. 5 (a): Mosque Interior showing interplay of arches

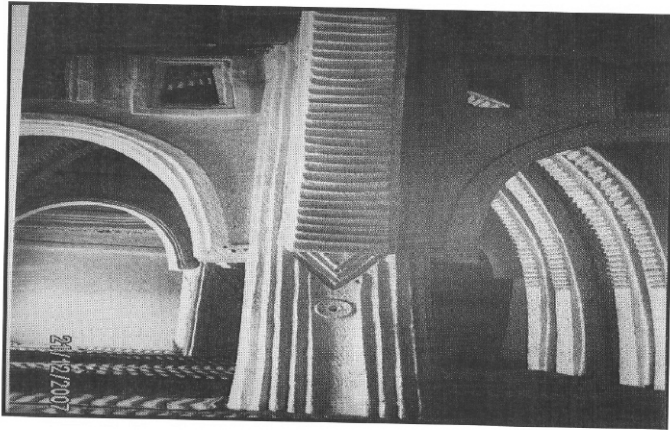


Fig. 5 (a): Mosque Interior showing decoration to arches

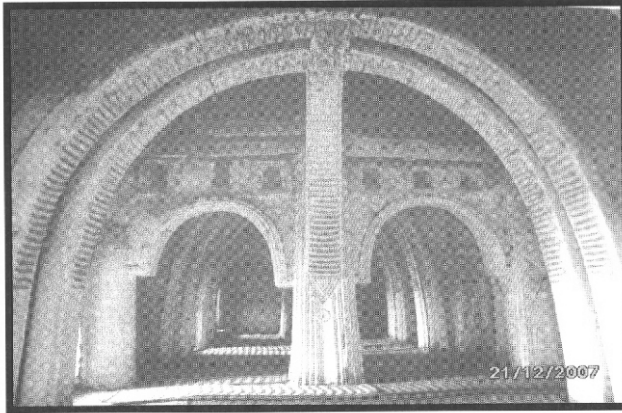


Fig. 6: Double Arch Formation in Mosque Construction

The African royalty built to impress and to overawe. The accounts of the early missionary explorers to Africa confirmed the magnificence of some of the royal palaces. The Palace of the Alaafin in Oyo was described by Clapperton to have covered approximately 640 acres, or one square mile. Edward Bowdich in 1817 described the Asantehene's Palace in Kumasi as,

“an immense building of a variety of oblong courts and rectangular squares, the former with arcades along one side, some of round arches symmetrically turned, the entablatures exuberantly adorned in bold fan and trellis work ”

Richard Hall (1976) provides examples of monumental urban Architecture of Africa and among the Architecture listed is the Deji of Akure's Palace, an elaborate layout of Ughas, complex in the intricate spread of apartments and preserved till this day

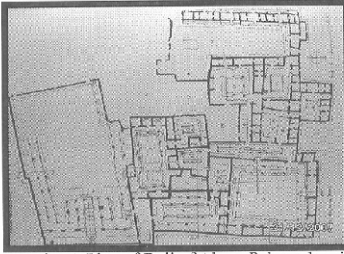


Fig. 7: Plan of Deji of Akure Palace showing multiple Courtyards used for sitting

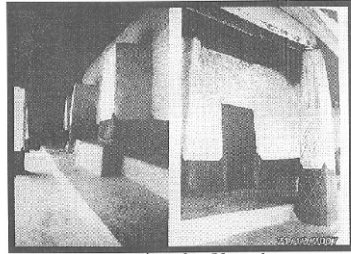


Fig. 8: Verandas to

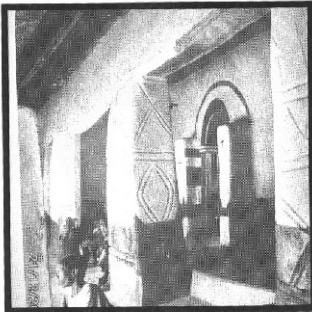


Fig. 9: Decorations to Interior



Fig. 10: Decorations to veranda walls

Hindham was said to have described the Oba of Benin's compound in the 16th century to be “as large as the town of Harlem,..... and divided into many significant palaces, houses and apartments and comprising beautiful and long square galleries about as large as the Exchange at Amsterdam”.

Traditional House Forms

Though not monumental in form, the traditional house-forms provide the bedrock of indigenous Architecture. The African compound reflects the extended family structure, promoting a family cohesion much more than a modern bungalow can ever do. In spite of the onslaughts of modern life, the family compound

remains, unaffected by the storms of change. It has become a haven for family members who sometimes find city life oppressing and thus seek to escape into the safe environment of the family compound, at least, once in a while.

European or American writers have often arrogated to indigenous creations a curio-factor, a tendency to see such creation as curious or vulgar. For as long as alien writers interpret African creations in the context of their value systems and culture, the curio-factor will continue to persist. An example of such misconceived interpretations as reported by J.F. Ade-Ajayi (1965), of the way houses were built in Badagry without any regard to anything like order or convenience can be read from a Missionary's complaint:

“Several times I followed what I supposed to be public thoroughfare but found it to terminate in a private yard”.

The missionary went further to even put a theological question on life in family compounds. “Is it proper”, he asked, “to apply the name of a home to a compound occupied by two to six or a dozen men each perhaps with a plurality of wives?”. This is the extent to which differences in culture values could affect meanings and the interpretation of intentions of a creative work. Interpretive meanings and value judgements based on the value systems of the critics, even with the best of their intentions, can and do often breed misconceptions and prejudices.

African indigenous Architecture is more than instinctive. It has developed from conscious efforts at creating functional as well as psychological space, both coming to terms and creating an aesthetically satisfying three-dimensional form. The African creative effort is therefore not an exception in creative thinking.

Nigerian Traditional Architecture

Professor Zibgniew Dmochowski's long-awaited corpus on the Nigerian Traditional Architecture was finally published and released to the public in 1984. Professor Dmochowski is now dead, after a long battle with death. It was this lecturer's privilege (my privilege) to announce to the World Community at the International Union of Architects (IUA) Congress held in Cairo in 1985 the arrival of this three-volume corpus and to review the published work at the Nigerian Museum in Lagos also in 1985. The posthumous launching of the volumes was a befitting tribute to the prodigious efforts of a great scholar, a visionary with a deep appreciation and understanding of the indigenous creativity of Nigerians. Those of us who were privileged to know him and to work with him on this monumental classic continue to learn from his unshaking belief in the purity of indigenous creations and from his penchant for accurate documentation. In spite of his failing health, towards the end, and of the doctor's prediction of his approaching death, he worked feverishly to complete the manuscript just before the cold hands of death snatched him away.

His enthusiasm for the work was infectious. In the Preface to the Corpus, Professor Dmochowski perceived Architecture as a “**technical activity by poets**”. Poetry, he explained, has the kind of value that perishes when translated into a foreign language. **True Architecture, like poetry cannot be copied from foreign patterns. It must grow out of its own root, expressed in its own language.** He also believed in the purity of traditional creation, in its poetry and in its relevance. The survey of the Nigeria Traditional Architecture was planned to last eight years (1958-1966).

Sir Bannister Fletcher, author of another monumental work on

architectural history described Architecture as a “**lithic history of social conditions, progress and religion and of events which are landmarks in the history of mankind**”. The different epochs in architectural history are intimately related to a nation's life. The genius of a nation is unmistakably stamped on its architectural monuments. It is in a people's traditional Architecture that one is able to discern its social and cultural milieu. Buildings are analysed in terms of their geographical, social and cultural context. Value judgements are best avoided in situations that critics know nothing or little about.

The Study of indigenous Nigerian Architecture must assume a mentality that rejects African societies as “Curios” which values and cultural heritage must be studied through the anthropologist's microscope. Indigenous creations are more than instinctive.

The Yoruba Courtyard Houses

In the courtyard houses of the Yoruba, spaces are organised not only to accommodate the activities of sleeping, cooking, storage etc. but are so disposed as to promote family cohesion. The centripetal nature of the Yoruba compound allows rooms to be organised round the ancestral resting place usually located in the centre of the courtyard. The bigger the family and the more diffused the lineage, the greater the number of courtyards, each courtyard forming as it were, a meeting point for family members. A visitor to the Yoruba compound is instantly admitted into the centre of family activities and becomes a welcome beneficiary of the family hospitality.

The layout plan of the indigenous house is significant for its socio-cultural relevance, an attribute considered of greater importance than the technology of the house construction. The layouts have deep socio-cultural meaning and the decorations that go with the

building are equally steeped in the culture phenomenon. The sculptured roof supports along the veranda's enclosing the courtyard bear images of revered gods or personalities and the murals on walls may be graphic representation of human experience or symbols of religions or of cultural relevance. These decorations give distinctive identity and character to the Architecture.

The language expressed by these seemingly insignificant aspects of the architectural character is perhaps stronger and more meaningful in creative thought and expression than the anonymous language of the international style. Regrettably, global acculturation is quietly but surely creeping into the African Societies and dangerously replacing the creative genius of the African and which may in the long run lead to creative indolence and cultural impoverishment

Fig. 11: Plan of Oba's Palace, Owo

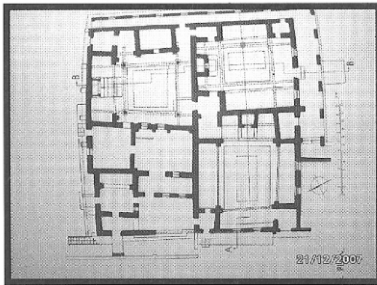
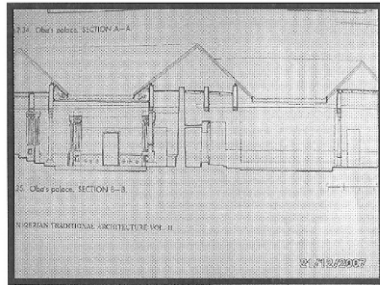


Fig. 12: Section through Palace Building



This cohesive plan composition of the Yoruba courtyard house is also indicative of an urban culture and tends to confirm the widely held notion that the Yorubas are an urbanised group of people. The more cohesive and bigger the plan, the closer is the affinity to the urban. In contrast, small isolated buildings tend to reflect the transient and almost rural. Such contrast is more profound in the dwellings of the Fulani Bororo and the more sedentary buildings of the Hausa, suggesting the transition from the rural to the urban.

Both building types however do have architectural validity to them and any suggestion of the rural and transient to complete the primitive image cannot be acceptable.

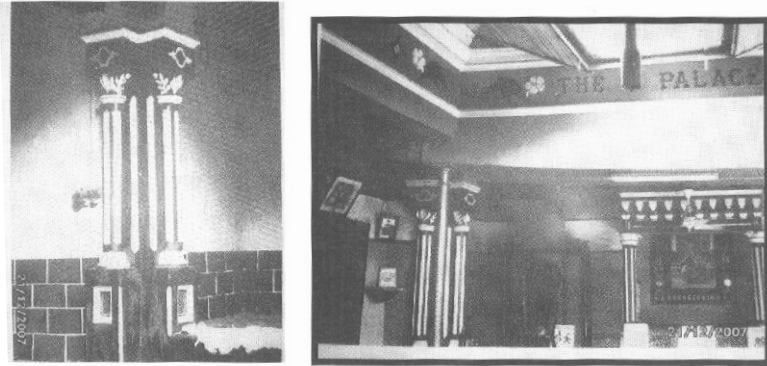


Fig. 15: Decorations to Palace interior

The Islamic Connection and the Hausa Architecture

The Islamic connection in Hausa Architecture is generally accepted to be bipartite. The first connection was through ancient Mali and Songhai, a link that was very much reflected in the Kano Chronicle. Songhai notables and scholars visited Katsina and Kano towards the end of the 15th century and possibly left impacts of their Islamic beliefs. The second link was established with the Arab merchants in the late 16th century. The Arab merchants had come from the far-north through Tripoli and Kano and settled in Kano, establishing a direct contact with Arab-Moorish Architecture.

In Mosque building, the early similarities with the Mali and Songhai types gave way to Hausa innovations in the construction of the Bauchi Mosque (1812), the Sultan Bello Mosque in Sokoto and the Zaria Old Friday Mosque (1836). The Zaria Mosque is said to incorporate all the architectural forms and techniques of the

Hausa culture.

The Malekite Common Law has implications in Hausa building practice as well as in the primacy of the private domain. The Privacy of the domestic domain must be preserved by closing it from outside view. These Islamic notions affect also the design of Mosques and have implication for the design of Palaces of the Emirs and even the compounds of the common man. The derivation of the Hausa mud vault is based on a structural concept as logically valid as the development of the Gothic Vaults. It is in the construction of the Friday old Zaria Mosques that we find the higher level of excellence in mud construction. Basically the structures are of framed construction of arches, domes and vaults ingeniously built to fulfil their particular functions of creating beautiful interiors, absolutely resplendent with the ornately composed ceilings, arches and corbels. Hausa builders have, through these structures, demonstrated not only their skilled craftsmanship but also their excellent abilities to shape splendid forms in space

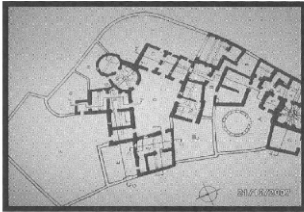


Fig. 14: Typical Hausa Compound Compound

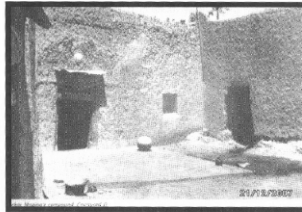


Fig. 14: Interior of Hausa

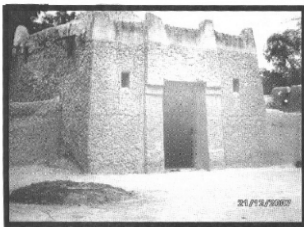


Fig. 16: A Typical Hausa Entrance Hausa Compound

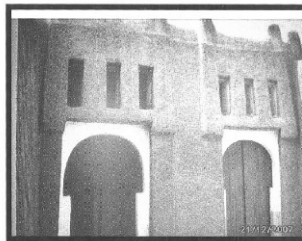


Fig. 17: Double Entrance to

Babban Gwani, Mikaila the Hausa builder of the Friday Zaria Mosque had a most intuitive knowledge of the behaviour of his special branch of arch and of how to resolve the various forces that could be acting on the structure. This is perhaps the most indicative of his genius since he took his structure and constructional decision on site without the aid of drawings. Perhaps the highest point of his genius was in the construction of the six domes over the main mosque building covering a total area of above 340 square metres. In this, he was able to achieve a sober building which intricate play of light and shadow produces a sublime effect that accentuates its structural and visual beauty. It was a culmination of a long process of architectural development, as all other buildings that were to be built later had nothing to add to this architectural master-piece of all time.

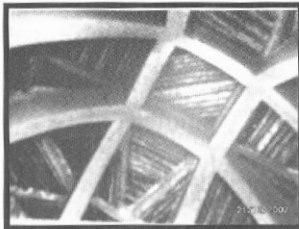


Fig. 18: Network of arches to form dome Hausa Dome

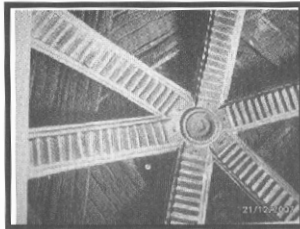


Fig. 19: A ceiling soffit of

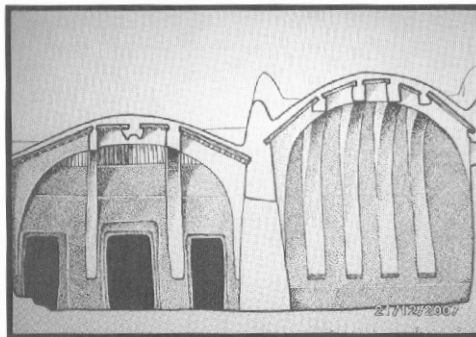


Fig. 20: Section through Dome and Arches

Professor Olieskiewicz one-time head of the Department of Civil Engineering at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was intrigued by the ability of the mud structure to sustain itself for more than a century in spite of the tremendous load carried by the arches. After careful investigation, he offered an explanation of the phenomenon as follows:

“...The arches are to carry the actual load in the first stage of the construction only, then the clay layer takes over. Due to creep phenomenon, a redistribution of internal forces takes place until equilibrium is achieved. After this, the clay layer work as dome structure assisted by the arches. The horizontal forces and the local tensile stresses are taken by the 'azara rods”. Olieskiewicz (1978)

The full explanation of the phenomenon could only be obtained on the basis of the then developed “limit state theory”. Really, the more one contemplates the architectural beauty of Hausa vaults and domes, the more one appreciates its unlimited potential to evoke pleasurable feelings of the sublime.

Traditional Monumental Master-Pieces

Aside from the Hausa mud mosques and palaces of the Emirs other master-pieces of traditional Architecture are found in the palaces of the ancient kingdom of Benin and the “Afin” of the Yoruba Obas. Essentially the “Afin” consisted of a network of courtyards linked one to the other and surrounded by a run of verandas covered by lean-to roof and supported by timber posts which were decoratively carved. These timber posts were of sculptured compositions usually of human figure one on top of the other.

These were not much different from the caryatids of the Greek temples. Afin Owo is reputed to have twenty-seven courtyards, fourteen of which were said to have been pulled down when the modern house of the Olowo was erected. The Palaces of the Benin Chiefs were more than domestic 'in scale' in that they contained spaces for the numerous altars for worship and for the performance of religious rites. This Architecture had been described as mature, truly functional in which the personal, the social and the sacred aspects were mirrored in the carefully thought-out plan.

The Igbo Architecture, on the other hand was described to have reflected the heterogeneity of the Igbo Culture and so also did the architectural monuments which included shrines to the ancestors, native shrines called the “Mbani” houses with their profuse decorations in bright paints and the sculptural images. The domestic architecture was somewhat different, constructed mainly of heavy thatch roofs and having an enormous quality of variations in the form; from the two-storied complex of the Aros to the almost open buildings of Nri-Awka and the beautifully ordered components of “Umuaroli”. The heavy thatched roofs were constructed with such exquisite skill that the texture of palm-ribs and grass was itself an adornment. The patterns on the carved doors and wooden posts, each pattern having not been repeated and in thousand, symbolised the immense variety of the Igbo Architecture.

The Jabba Houses

The JABBA houses had been described by Dmochowski as the most fascinating of traditional Nigerian Architecture. CK Meek had earlier described the JABBA tribe and the KAGOMA as the most expert builders. The JABBA house was carefully documented by Dmochowski; oval in plan and with ingeniously differentiated space in the various interiors. The shape of the roof

which was to conform naturally with the plan was no less cleverly contrived. It was designed to adapt to the changing height of the individual parts of the building. It is an intricate business in itself but the singular character of JABBA houses was to be found in the creative skills applied in the roof solution and the manner in which the interiors were differentiated. These houses are found in the village of NOK, the village that gave its name to the ancient NOK culture.

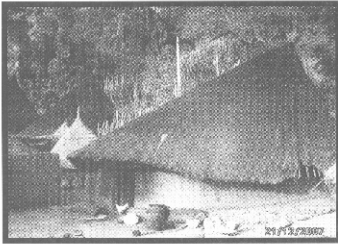


Fig. 21: A JABBA hut

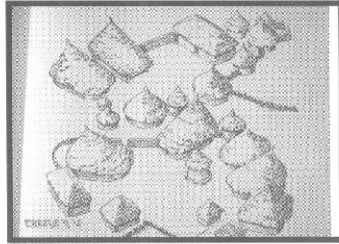


Fig. 22: A JABBA compound

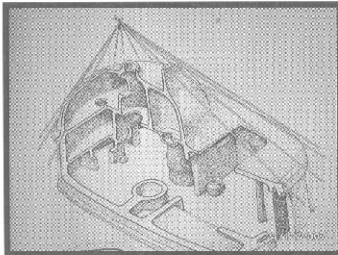


Fig. 23: Section through JABBA hut

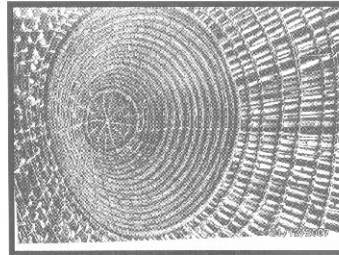


Fig. 24: The Soffite of a beautifully woven JABBA conical roof

Fig. 25: Influences of Brazilian Architecture

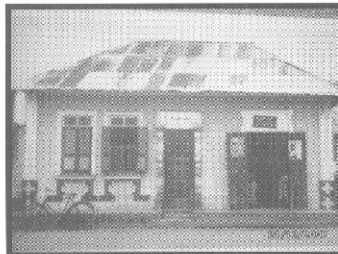
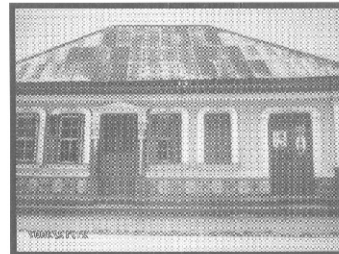


Fig. 26: A typical Brazilian style house



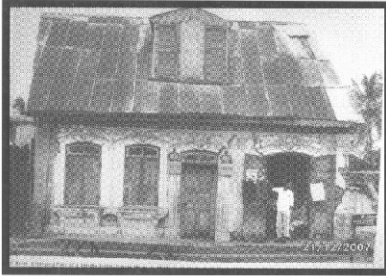


Fig. 27: Another example of Brazilian Influence

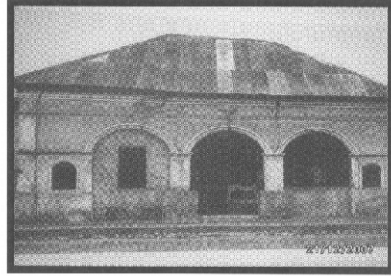


Fig. 28: Introducing the arch in Brazilian type building

Problems and Prospects of African Architecture

The future of any Architecture depends on the extent to which it is acceptable to the people for whom it is intended. The notion that buildings of traditional materials are substandard, is the main obstacle to the development of an authentic African Architecture that is truly indigenous to the people. Richard Martin once summarized the story of the African past as one of destruction of traditional values and their replacement with alien ones. Many even consider this trend as inevitable. The visual manifestation of the African fondness of alien culture is confirmed in the picture painted by Richard Martin – the picture of the “Wabensi” in Kenya, the “Apambwaba” in Zambia the “Nana Benz” in Togo and in recent times the “Mandarin Millionaires” of Nigeria. A seeming confusion may have arisen, particularly this head-on plunge into alien values and cultures. However many aspects of our African life still seem untouched and unpolluted in spite of the confusion created by culture contact. A renaissance may yet begin in the re-education and the mobilisation towards her re-establishing the African personality.

Cultural decadence may have had its root in the colonisation process, in the inculcation in the African mind through decades of

tutelage, that the African, as well as his heritage, comes last in the global scheme of things. This mentality must be shaken off and the creative talent of the African restored.

The Future of Mud Structures

More than 50 percent of the world population live in mud buildings. The majority of people living in Nigeria in all probability, will continue to live in mud buildings well into this century. Because of the rising cost of cement, more buildings will probably have to be built in mud or clay. Traditional building materials, because of their cheapness and ready availability offer greater advantages and potentials for increased housing. Disadvantages of traditional building materials are being taken care of particularly in the stabilisation of earth in modern construction. Research into earth or clay bricks had been in progress for more than five decades and results of such researches have been applied in improved clay construction technology.

At a recent Conference on the “Study and Conservation of Earthen Architectural Heritage-Terra 2008 in Bamako, Mali organised by Getty Conservation Institute, USA and the Ministry of Culture in Mali, discussions centred on how this seemingly weak material has been used to produce buildings which have stood for centuries. Nigerian participants presented papers on the earth construction practice in the ancient city of Daura, the training of traditional Hausa master masons and the use of rice husks as building material for earth products.

The recent inclusion of earth material in the Nigerian National Building Code among recognised Building materials places it alongside other industrial materials. **Architectural Curriculum may henceforth extend the study of industrial building materials to include earth material. It should be possible to**

build good quality buildings including all modern fixtures, given the benefits of research thus far.

A recommendation of that conference which has implications for the future of earth buildings is that **“attention should be paid not only to the preservation of traditional building skills and practices but to the way that such skills are learned and passed down”**.

Traditional Building Methods as Source for Modern Design

Modern Architecture evolved from a progressive ethos, a rejection of the past and a search for new forms, new materials and new construction methods. Tradition was however not lost sight of. To look back to the past for a revival of forms or styles and adapting them or their supposed excellencies according to William Curtis (1982) to a new epoch can be fraught with dangers. An architect who adopts this approach is likely to copy the externals without reproducing the essence or the core qualities of the copied style. Such an approach, according to Curtis might result in a pastiche or “tired academicism”. To collect the best features of a past epoch and amalgamate them into a new synthesis is likely also to end up with what was termed “eclecticism”; a state of chaos, a bizarre concoction of past elements. Were Nigeria to provide a tradition of significant architectural styles discernible from her traditional Architecture, there is likely to be a problem of the appropriateness of such synthesis to the present needs. A situation may even emerge which places greater authenticity on the superficial clothing in a plurality of styles and features or elements rather than on the lasting qualities of architectural excellence.

An emerging question in the adaptation of traditional building styles to modern Architecture is this:

What stylistic features are identifiable in the Nigeria's building tradition which may inform our search for authentic Nigerian forms? Were we to amalgamate a collection of these features into a new synthesis, which features provide a promise for lasting qualities of Architectural excellence? It was this kind of questions that were to engage the minds of the European architects of the 19th century and yet the answers were as eluding as the desert mirage. Even where the answers were to be found, they were to manifest in the individual works of geniuses only at the instance of inspiration. A universal language was to elude the architects until well into the 20th century at the coming of age of the “International Styles”. A few Nigerian architects or perhaps architects resident in Nigeria have sometimes succeeded in capturing in their designs the essence of traditional Architecture in moments of inspirational revelation. The question remains however, whether the creative genius of few architects has provided or may provide rules for the synthesis of their creative efforts into a clear idea of a typically Nigerian Architecture.

Perhaps, a search for national vocabulary of architectural expression may not have been so elusive had the Nigerian tradition in building design and perhaps construction been so imbued with images and forms adaptable to a new modern vocabulary. The significance of the Nigerian tradition in building is emphasized more in its socio-cultural content rather than in its technological excellence. Lack of appropriate traditional experience in building technology has limited the possibility of a modern Architecture with a distinctly Nigerian variant. Question is, Can we turn this obvious liability into an asset to produce an Architecture that is distinctly Nigerian?

Technology as Hand-Maiden of Architecture

Technology is the tool that enables the translation of an

architectural concept into a physical reality. Many of the seminal works of the master architects were an exercise in the appropriate use of the emerging technologies and the new conception of space. They were preoccupied,

“not with rearranging lines, not with finding new mouldings, new architraves for doors and windows, not with replacing columns, pilasters and corbels with caryatids, hornets, frogs, but with raising the new-built structure on a sane plan gleaned every benefit of science and technology”. The ultimate aim was establishing new joints, new lines, new reasons for existence, solely out of special conditions of modern living and its projection as aesthetic value in our sensibilities”.

The much-famed Hausa Architecture of mud structure was made possible by the Hausa builders thorough understanding of the nature of the mud as building material over a long period of its application. The external features of the Massallacin Juma'a is far from striking to the observer but the interior creates a totally different impression. The closely-spaced interior columns rise to support an intricate arrangement of arches and it is difficult to believe that the entire structure is of mud, reinforced with beams of 'azara' wood cut from the daleb palm. The columns, piers and arches are decorated with mouldings of varying geometrical patterns and pervading the decorations is a restrained aesthetic discipline that characterises most Hausa decoration patterns. The Zaria Mosque is undoubtedly the highest point of mud technology.



Fig. 29: Earliest example of Modern Architecture



Fig. 30: The Modern House as country home of (House for Professor Adeyemi, Iyin-Ekiti)

Modern Architecture as Symbolic of Growth and Change

The progressivist view which gave rise to modern Architecture in the industrialised countries of Europe and America made an in-road to the developing countries and facilitated its ready acceptance. A cultural transfer has taken place including a technological transfer, bringing with it all its failures and successes. This is to be expected in a country of strong colonial influence. The 1950's and the 1960's were periods of great architectural achievement and modern Architecture as an agent of progress was to be reinterpreted and articulated to suit the special requirements of Nigerians. Architects in the country accepted the challenges of modern Architecture as a progressive ideal and introduced variations dictated by climatic and socio-cultural imperatives. The developments at the time were succinctly summarised by Alan Vaughan-Richards:

“The year 1957 saw the establishment of the modern style and most major subsequent buildings testified to this. Among them were the United States Embassy in Board Street, the Bristol Hotel in Martins Street and the BP Headquarters in Board Street ... it was a collection of buildings remarkable for the variety of architectural designs – the old, the new and a mixture

of both....” the Cooperative Bank in the Marina stood in a class by itself as being the first building that was designed exactly in the new modern movement enhanced with African art. The Godwin and Hopwood Building in Boyle Street and the Crusader House in Martins Street belonged to this period”.



Fig. 31: Modern Architecture: NYSC Secretariat Abuja, designed by Professor Adeyemi

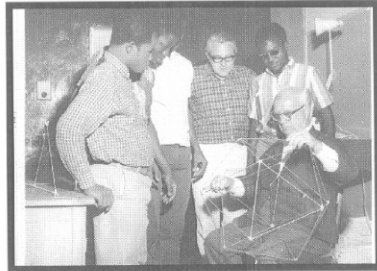


Fig. 32: World-renowned Buckminster Fuller



Fig. 33: Professor Adeyemi as ABU Lecturer

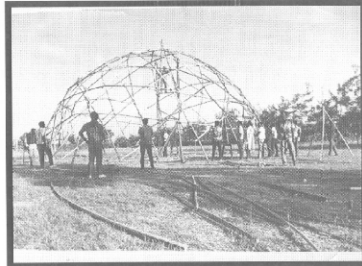


Fig. 33: A Fuller-inspired Geodesic Dome by Zaria students

These were good buildings no doubt, but there were also bad buildings, lacking in the poetry and depth of meaning found in the works of the International Style. The multi-storey air-conditioned offices and the expensively furnished public buildings might often have served as status-symbols, yet the architectural results of such buildings were not always successful with some lacking in sensitivity to local conditions, values and climate. Some criticisms of these buildings may sometimes not be justified, the most

pungent being “the lack of sensitivity to national traditions. One may be tempted to ask, which national traditions? Even if there had been architects keen on reinterpreting national traditions, they still would have had difficulty finding local precedents for the functions served by these buildings. In any case, and as experience has often indicated, cultural introspection has not been high on the list of priorities of the typical client. Modernism was synonymous with the rejection of old values only in so far as financial liquidity did not pose a problem.

Prospects of National Identity

Hopes are still alive for a truly indigenous Architecture in a rapidly industrialising third world. The slogan, 'the world is flat' should be taken with caution since, to accept this hook, line and sinker, is to submit to a somewhat anonymous world. It will be interesting to have a forestate of the glory of a world that is not flat, an alternative civilisation to the present one dictated by somewhat anonymous technology. Hassan Fathy, an Egyptian architect, wearing a thoroughly conservative cloak raised the ire of his modernist colleagues by challenging the validity of modern Architecture in a peasant community:

“Modernity does not necessarily mean liveliness, and change is not always for the better. Tradition is not necessarily old-fashioned and is not synonymous with stagnation ...Tradition is the social analogy of personal habit and in art, has the same effect of releasing the artist from distracting and inessential decision so that he can give his whole attention to the vital ones”.

Many share this viewpoint and the number is increasing. It is often easier to insist on change than to show by practical examples the direction in which change should occur. It is equally difficult, while stressing the need for the traditional, to show by practical

demonstration, how to achieve the traditional in our creative work. Hassan Fathy was faced by overwhelming obstacles from government officials and powerful politicians in his country but went ahead with the Gournia village project to demonstrate how the local people can be mobilised to build for themselves cheap buildings using the cheapest and oldest building material-mud. He simply refused to accept the myths of progress and insisted that in most third world countries, the peasant is able to build better and cheaper buildings for himself than an architect would. This indeed, may be true of a peasant economy where emphasis is placed on the provision of shelter rather than a house. To them, this idea should have an appeal.

The romanticisation of the traditional may not have an enduring appeal in a fast-changing economy. It had earlier been indicated how culture contact affects a people's values and the Architecture. Hassan Fathy's solution to the Gournia village project was no doubt successful but could a similar success be recorded elsewhere? However, an important lesson to be learnt here is that the avoidance of the use of foreign imported materials and a wise utilisation of locally available, naturally occurring materials could lead to significant reduction in building cost and that a revival of appropriate indigenous technology, developed and appropriately applied, could produce results which possess strong local character and traditional aesthetics.

Conclusion

Amidst the paradox of fostering traditional values and of growth and change lie possibilities for a better life and lasting qualities of an enduring Architecture. Bright stars of modern Architecture have, through patient application of pure architectural principles, evolved variants of modern Architecture which claim close identity with their natural or traditional character. The emerging

new urban patterns require a new Architecture that neither apes the traditional nor the imported forms. Architects are to address the problem of fashioning an Architecture that will be a direct expression of new life patterns.

Curtis has described very succinctly the values of such a pure Architecture:

“As always, architectural value will reside in the continuing synthesis of the practical the aesthetic and the symbolic, and in the creation of a unity in harmony with the setting”.

Traditional structures will continue to provide many basic clues in achieving authentic architectural values since they reveal age-long patterns of adaptation. Master architects like Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier have turned to vernacular and traditional sources in earthing elements for handling design problems posed by extremes of climate and translating these into a new architectural vocabulary. Charles Correa, a disciple of Le Corbusier drew inspiration from traditional sources without imitating the past. To understand his work, one has to understand the traditional Architecture in India, an Architecture of recession of in door and outdoor spaces that merge into one another, the use of which is determined by the climate or the seasons and not by the activity within them. It is not necessarily a matter of inventing new idea, since what mattered was whether an idea, old or new can be made to work in the content of a locality.

In the long run, the idealist tendency that national or rural traditions be preserved and used as a basis of a new Architecture particularly in developing countries like Nigeria is bound to be ignored by those who associate peasant traditions with backwardness. The machine, has already caused a revolution of its own and Architecture does not operate in a society vacuum.

Architecture tradition reflects the mirror of societal values and technological development. Most minds are agreed that a more lasting solution lay in attempts at unearthing the fundamental lessons in local traditions and blending them with an already evolved modern language. The creative genius is therefore faced with translating those basic elements expressing national or regional adaptation and meanings of the past into a form appropriate to changing social condition. This is a task for creative talents, because lesser talents run the risk of producing buildings which are pastiches of both modern and traditional forms.

Zbigniew Dmochowski: A Tribute

A detailed documentation of traditional Nigerian Architecture would not have been possible but for the dogged persistence and passion for the traditional, of one man, Professor Zbigniew Dmochowski. Through a staff of the Department of Antiquities in the 1950s, his research into Nigerian traditional Architecture was more than a mere office job. He devoted all of his time to the study of the subject and carried us, students of the then Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology (NCAST) in the 50s with him in the accomplishment of the task.

Professor Dmochowski would tolerate no mistake in our field work and would check and cross-check our drawings and measurements until he was sure that there were no mistakes. A European, working in the tropics, would normally want to avoid working exposed to the tropical sun. Not with Professor Dmochowski. He would work relentlessly making sure however that he had his straw hat on, the type used by the Fulani herdsmen.

The Survey of the Emir of Zaria's palace concluded, Professor Dmochowski disappeared and we did not hear from him. When I was Head of Department of Architecture at the Ahmadu Bello

University, I suddenly heard from him in 1977 when he expressed a wish to spend some time in the Department and complete his manuscript on the earlier surveys. I was delighted and felt greatly honoured by his request. For reasons quite obscure to me, he failed to turn up. Later he sent an emotional request. He was dying; the long-awaited corpus on his work remained uncompleted and the doctor had given him three months in which to live before he suffered another heart attack that could prove fatal. I got a group of students together to assist in completing the drawings in Jos and I personally got involved. He had developed a special liking for me and showed me all that he had accomplished so far. He wanted to know if I could complete the work should death take him away. I responded in the affirmative. Professor Dmochowski had problem trusting any one particularly as it related to his research work. But he trusted me so much that he wanted no one else but me to present his prepared paper at the Silver Jubilee Anniversary celebration of the Museum of Traditional Architecture in Jos. I was also to give the keynote address as Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Design of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. That was in 1977.

His fears were justified. Much of his work had leaked to some unscrupulous scholars. It was uppermost in his mind that the work to which he had devoted more than two decades of his life should remain intact to avoid all sorts of interpretive meanings being read into the creative efforts of the traditional skilled Nigerian builder and artists as most Western writers were wont to do. The launching of the three volumes that finally emerged from his work was a befitting tribute to the relentless efforts of a great scholar, a visionary with a deep appreciation and understanding of the indigenous creativity of Nigerians. We have learnt from his industry, from his dogged insistence on moving forward obstacles notwithstanding. In spite of his approaching death, he continued to work feverishly to complete the draft of the manuscript. Then came death, and took away a great scholar of our time.

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I retired from the University Service in January 2002. Two years into my retirement, providence brought me into the service of Covenant University. It was a Divine will made possible by the Servant of God, Dr. David Oyedepo. My first comment on stepping the soils of Covenant University was that the instance of the University was a miracle, a special wish of God, the Almighty. I want to thank the Chancellor, Dr. David Oyedepo, a dedicated Servant of God for making things happier in God's own special way.

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My colleagues, eminent Professors and the entire Faculty continue to inspire me into making more contributions to the development of the University and I want to thank them all. Tomorrow's leaders of Nigeria and Africa, fledgling eagles, may God continue to guide you to your chosen destinies.

Thank you and God bless.

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