

*'Le petit belge a voulu faire grand'*  
**THE TROUBLESOME CONSTRUCTION OF THE**  
*'Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge'*  
**IN LEOPOLDVILLE, 1922-1960<sup>1</sup>**

Johan LAGAE

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1. This article was presented as a part of a doctoral study at the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Ghent University, examining the colonial architecture in the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi between 1920 and 1960. The research is carried out under supervision of Mil De Koonig, Bart Verschaffel, Geert Bekaert and Jean-Luc Vellut. The author expresses his gratitude for their expert guidance and to J-L Vellut for his comments. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French are author's.

The title is a paraphrase, a common expression in writings of Belgian colonials, on which Pierre Halen's study on Belgian

**BELGIAN COLONIALISM AND THE FAILURE TO INVENT AN IMPERIAL TRADITION**

As one of the smallest European nations with no previous colonial experience worth mentioning, Belgium paradoxically ruled over one of the largest colonies in Africa between 1885 and 1960. It was the Belgian court, more specifically king Leopold II, that had initiated the colonial venture, but Congo did not become a colony in the true sense of the word until 1908, when authority over the African territory was passed on to the Belgian government (2). No efforts were spared to mobilize the population's and politicians' interest in the colony. Yet the colonization of Congo remained largely the domain of a restricted circle of industrial leaders, missionaries and politicians. One might even legitimately wonder whether Belgium actually had any imperial ambitions, for the quintessence of Belgian colonization in Congo was the pursuit of profit, not the stimulation of national self-esteem (3). The number of Belgians residing in the Congo remained small throughout the colonial period and there was never an issue of a *colonisation de peuplement*.

colonial literature, entitled "Le petit belge avait vu grand: une littérature coloniale" (1993) first drew author's attention. The expression can be read in a double sense. Literally, it expresses the fact that a small nation like Belgium actually governed a huge territory in Africa. Yet, the expression also unveils a criticism, as it refers to the fact that Belgium's plans for colonization in the Congo often were grandiose, and hence unrealistic. If in some respects Belgian colonialism was a 'successful' enterprise (Americans often referred to the Belgian Congo as a 'model' because of its well-organized administration, or its educational system that offered the largest part of the Congolese population the opportunity to attend the primary school), it is precisely this characteristic of seeing things 'trop grand', that explains the sometimes disastrous ends of many a utopic plan for the Congo.

2. For general historical surveys of Belgian colonialism, see Vellut (1974), Cornevin (1989), Ndaywel é Nziem (1998). For a recent discussion of Congo under the rule of King Leopold II, see Hochschild (1998). An indispensable tool for any research on the topic is the recent bibliography prepared by Vellut (1996).

3. Besides this pursuit of profit, exemplified by the powerful influence of large Belgian firms on the political agenda of the colonial government, the social reform initiated by the government and missionary congregations, 'coloniser, c'est civiliser', can be regarded as a second element constituting the quintessence of Belgium's colonization of Congo. Yet this second element was not underscored by imperialistic ambitions, in fact, were limited to restricted circles of military officials and a few Belgian nationalists. This absence of imperial ambitions, however, is but another indicator of the total absence of a feeling of national unity and self-esteem in Belgium itself. Dessart (1959, 117) aptly described, this particularity of Belgians "Nous, le peuple le moins nationaliste de la terre, ...".

4. The housing for workers, employed in the large colonial industries like the Union Minière in Katanga, sets a good example of such major building programs. De Meulder (1996) has discussed how these constructions were developed by doctors and engineers, rather than by architects. Not even in the large building campaigns of the missionary congregations in Congo did architects play a role of importance.

For a discussion of the Moroccan case, see Wright (1991), and for the role of architecture in the Italian colonies, see Gresleri, et. al. (1993). The colonial architecture in the Belgian Congo has attracted the attention of a very few researchers up to now. The first review is by Van Loo (1986, 52-55). A through study on the planning and urbanism in the Belgian Congo was done by De Meulder (2000).

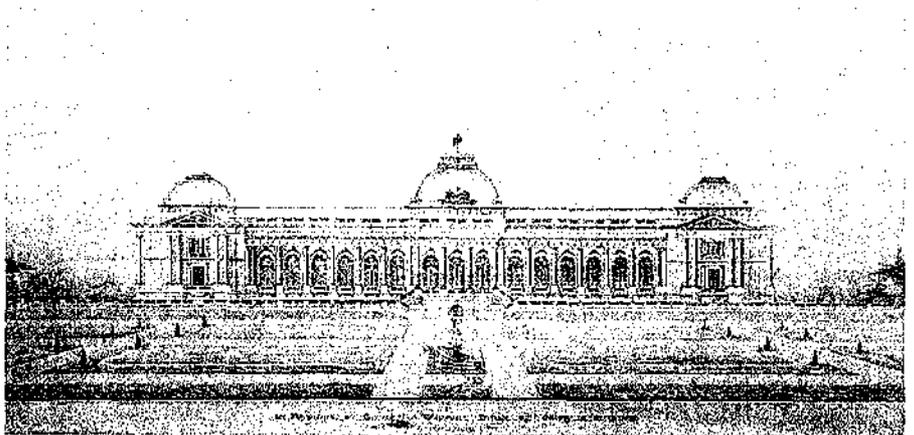
**Figure 1.** First residence of the General Governor of Congo Belge, Boma, 1888. Prefabricated construction by the Forges d'Aiseau (Buls, 1899, 12 right).

**Figure 2.** First project for the residence in Leopoldville, by architect M. Vander Elst 1924 (Africa Archives, Brussels).

Many important construction programs during the colonial period were utilitarian in character, and the Congo never turned into an architectural laboratory, as was for instance the case in French Morocco or Libya under Italian rule (4). Yet, the one building that was to mark the presence of the colonial government in Congo, the new *Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge* in Leopoldville, 'seems' an exception to this rule. Being 'the' major public building program of the colonial period, the commission nonetheless proved to be problematic (5). In fact, it took two architectural competitions and several more designs to get the building site started after more than 30 years of dispute (6). Because the building was meant to visualize colonial power, the commission also generated a discussion, albeit a restricted one, on the possible nature of colonial architecture in the Congo. As it is shown in this paper, the case of the governor-general's residence is particularly revealing of how Beaux-Arts conceptions of composition and style influenced the architectural expression of Belgium's 'blurred' imperial ambitions.

## BEAUX-ARTS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF COLONIAL POWER

Since the early days of colonization, the settlement at Boma had been the administrative centre of the Belgian Congo. The governor-general resided in a prefabricated metal construction, produced by a Belgian firm and erected in 1888 (Figure 1) (7). In 1922, the colonial authorities decided to move the



Some research has been done on specific aspects of the colonial architecture in Congo (the prefabricated metal constructions, the first colonial housing types), yet none of it has been published.

5. In this respect, it is important to note that from 1908 on, when Congo became a colony in the real sense of the word (i.e. a territory under the supervision of a national government) the centre of power always remained with the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels. The officials residing in the colony itself, of which the governor-general was the highest rank, had only limited authority. This specific characteristic is essential in understanding why the building of the 'Résidence du Gouverneur Général' in Leopoldville was to be such a troublesome undertaking.

6. During this 30 year period, a number of different general governors were appointed, all of whom had their part in the construction of the residence: M. Lippens (1922-3), M. Rutten (1923-7), A. Tilkens (1927-34), P. Ryckmans (1934-46), E. Jungers (1946-52), L. Pétillon (1952-8), Cornelis (1958-60), as indicated by Vanhove (1968, annex 1, 151-4).

7. Such prefabricated constructions were not only produced in Belgium, but also in other European countries. They were considered the best solution for temporary accommodation for the first colonizers, who often resided only for short terms on one location. Once they moved, the construction then be dismantled and to be reconstructed in the next post. For a brief discussion of the 'Résidence du Gouverneur Général' in Boma, see Pirson (1986, 120-122).

8. "Le caractère mequin du Palais du Gouverneur-Général à Boma nous ayant fait faire, dans certaines circonstances, figure de 'parent pauvre' au regard des représentants des colonies voisines", note observed in the Africa Archives, Brussels, FRED I426).

9. The earliest account the author has found on the program of the future residence, is a document of 9 Nov. 1922, 'Instructions reçues de mr. le Gouverneur Général', another of 30 Sept. 1924 'Note relative au projet du Résidence pour le Gouverneur Général à Kalina' is the first to mention a program that is closely related to that of further projects (Africa Archives, Brussels: C.P., boîte 15.944 & 14.943).

10. The concept of 'environmental control' has been borrowed from King (1976a, 365-390 and 1976b). Within the colonial milieu, the discussion on the ideal house for the colonizer, for instance, was far from ended. For an analysis

administration from Boma to Leopoldville (nowadays Kinshasa) and to erect a *Palais du Gouverneur Général* that would be worthy of the prestige of the King's representative in Africa. At the time, its prestigious character was considered an essential element of the undertaking by the colonial government, since officials of other colonies had mocked the shabby conditions at the Boma residence (8). The program, therefore, was elaborate. The future residence was not only to contain the offices and apartments of the governor-general, but several halls for festivities and receptions, with different *salons* for more private meetings, and apartments for prominent guests as well (9).

By 1920, experience had already proven that the design of buildings in the Congo, if they were to provide liveable environments for Europeans, had to take into account local climatic conditions. They had to be instruments of environmental control, but the opinions on how such control was to be achieved still varied widely greatly (10). Moreover, no constructions of an importance comparable to that of the governor-general's residence had been executed by that date. In fact, urbanization in Leopoldville was only at its beginnings (11). The first two designs for the future residence, made in 1924-25, closely followed metropolitan models (Figures 2, 3) (12). Both adhered to the stylistic tenets of the Beaux-Arts tradition (13). The first project, for instance, seems to be inspired by the *Musée du Congo Belge* in Tervuren (Figure 4), which had been built in 1910 for the Brussels World's Fair. The Congo Museum was the work of the French architect Charles Girault, who modelled its design on his well-known *Petit Palais*, built in Paris for the Universal Exposition of 1900 (14).

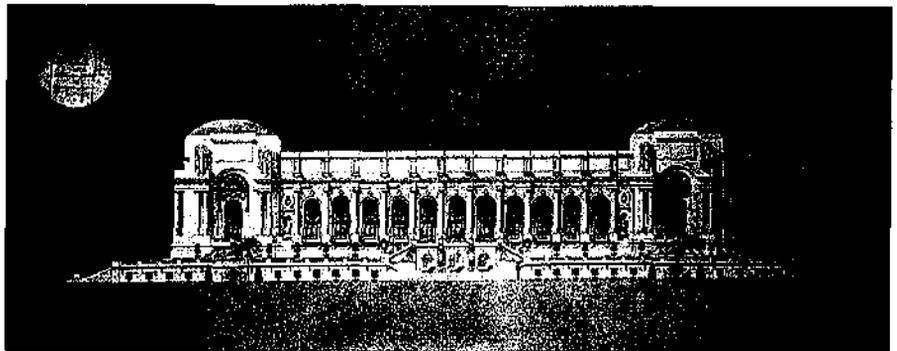


Figure 3. The second project for the residence in Leopoldville, by architect M. Vander Elst 1925 (Africa Archives, Brussels).

Figure 4. The Musée du Congo Belge, Tervuren, by architect Charles Girault 1904-1910 (contemporary brochure of 'Musée du Congo Belge, Tervueren', author's archive).

of this discussion, which during the 1910s and 20s mainly took place in the milieu of the 'Association du Perfectionnement du Matériel Colonial', see Lagae (2000a).

11. In fact, the building of the governor-general's residence was part of an urbanization plan (1923-1930) for a new governmental town with public buildings, offices and houses for colonial officials, in the new capital Leopoldville. The site chosen was the plot of land named 'Kalina', that at the time was vacant land, situated in between two existing colonial settlements. On the West of Kalina lay the first colonial post, 'Léopoldville-Ouest', while on the East of Kalina lay Kinshasa, the commercial center that was rapidly developing. It would take until the late 1940s however, before the three parts to merge into one large urban entity, that from then on was named Leopoldville.

12. Metropolitan in this context refers to what the French during the colonial era called the 'métropole', i.e. the mother country, or more generally, the European continent.

13. Beaux-Arts tradition here refers to David Van Zanten's (1977, 111-115) description as the third phase in French academic architecture, the phase that started in the 1870s and was also the period in which the idea of an all-embracing Beaux-Arts system became internationally influential. This tradition stands for a design conception of composition and style based on a clearly definable set of rules or a technique.

14. Façade drawings of both designs were published in 'Illustration Congolaise' (1925: 4, 647), without any comment on their architects. However, in the files of the Africa Archives, the plans of the first designs and correspondence were traced by the author (boîte 15.944). Both designs were made by architect Vander Elst, who was appointed as head of the governor-general's Bureau of Governmental Buildings in Kalina. The official report on the colonization in Congo for the year 1927 indicates that there must have been three subsequent projects for the residence between 1925-1927, yet the author could not trace a third project in the official archives ('Rapport Annuel sur l'Activité de la Colonie du Congo Belge pendant l'année 1927, présenté aux Chambres Législatives', 32).

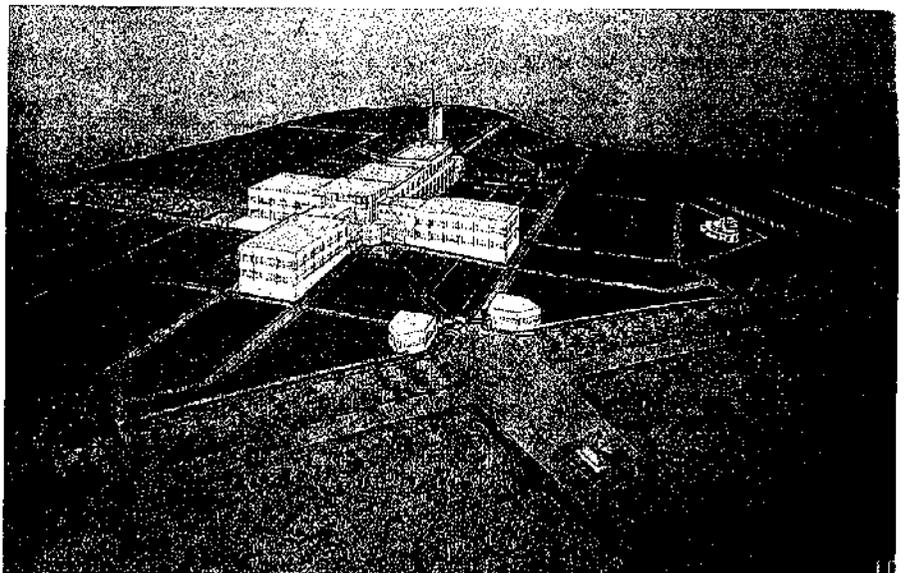
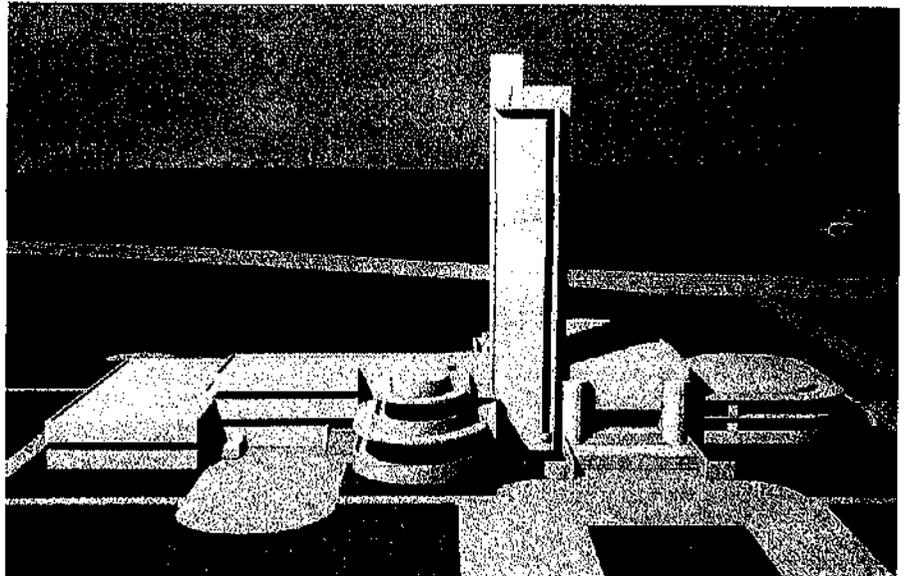
15. This politics of 'indirect rule' in the Congo was related to associationist model of colonial policy, and based on an adjusted version of the traditional system of 'chefferie'. This meant

Figure 5. Perspective of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Léon Stynen, 1928 (computer model based on original drawings by Ruben Van de Walle, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Ghent University, 2000).

Figure 6. Perspective drawing of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architects Simon and Malcause, 1928 (l'Emulation, 1929: 4, 38-39).

Keeping in mind that the Belgian Colonial Government practiced a politics of 'indirect rule', which claimed a respect for the social and cultural framework of the colonized population, the total lack of reference to native culture in both designs is striking (15). This design approach differs greatly from that used in contemporary French Morocco, where architectural and urbanistic politics explicitly underscored *maréchal Lyautey's politique indigène* of associationism, which prescribed the preservation of historical city-centers and the integration of typological and morphological elements from Islamic building traditions in the official architecture (16). A similar approach proved to be problematic in the case of the Belgian Congo. Even though ethnographic research on Congolese peoples had received a great deal of attention in the colonial milieu as early as the end of the 19th century, colonial officials, architects and critics all agreed that the Congo lacked a proper 'architectural tradition' worthy of attention.

Central African building forms were considered unsuitable sources of inspiration, not only for the design of exhibition pavilions to represent the Belgian Congo at World's Fairs, but also for the elaboration of a contemporary colonial



that local 'chefs' retained a certain authority, but were supervised by colonial administrators who were trained to speak the local language. It is evident however, that such system of 'chefferies' generalized in the Congolese territory since 1910 was a method of transforming traditional frameworks of power into an instrument of colonization. The early ethnographic studies of Congolese people, then, became the necessary tools of this colonization method, as the study of indigenous people easily be understood to have served the motto 'être connus pour être dominés' (Ndaywel è Nziem, 1997, 369-373, 392-398).

16. For a discussion of Lyautey's 'politique indigène', the importance of architecture and urbanism for implementing that policy and the formal characteristics of French colonial architecture in Morocco, see Wright, 1991, 78 and 110). According to this source, a similar approach was also used in Indochina and Madagascar.

17. In the display of Congo at the international expositions, the presumed absence of an architectural tradition in the Congo has forced Belgian architects to invent an architecture capable of evoking the Congolese environment, while at the same time representing the achievements of Belgian colonization (Lagac, 2000b). The article by the author was initially presented at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in Houston, Texas (April, 1999).

18. One could argue that Belgian architects, confronted with the commission of the 'Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge' were put in what Heynen and Loeckx (1998, 100-108) have described as a 'condition of displacement'. "A condition of displacement necessitates that people rely on resources of creativity and imagination that they normally would neglect. When no appropriate schemes are available to guide their practical behaviour, people are likely to construct new ways of behaviour or new modes of signification".

architecture. These buildings forms, the mainstream and ethnocentric argument ran, lacked the necessary durability and, more importantly, monumentality (17). The definition of an architectural style capable of evoking the prestige of the colonial presence in the Congo, while simultaneously expressing the claimed respect for local culture and traditions, thus presented a particular challenge for Belgian architects. Because no appropriate schemes were available to guide their design, it should come as no surprise that many architects relied on Beaux-Arts compositional techniques. As the following projects will reveal, however, they often did so undogmatically (18).

#### THE 1928 COMPETITION: IN SEARCH OF A COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

In 1928, the Ministry of Colonies organized an architectural competition for the commission of the governor-general's residence in Leopoldville. Remarkably enough, the promising prospect of this commission attracted little attention among Belgian architects. Only twelve competitors submitted

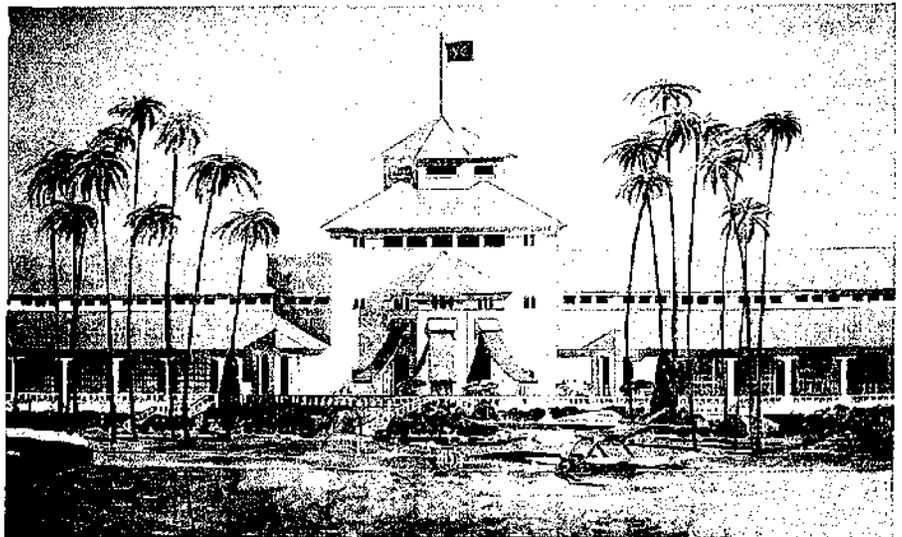
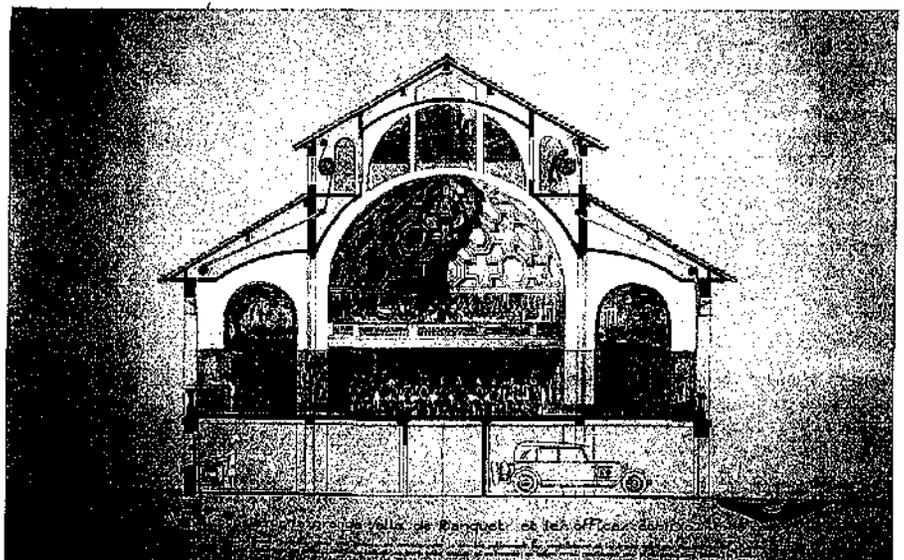


Figure 7. Façade of the main pavilion of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Henri Lacoste, 1928 (Archives d'Architecture Moderne, Brussels).

Figure 8. Section across the 'Salle de Banquet' of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Henri Lacoste, 1928 (Archives d'Architecture Moderne, Brussels).



19. This lack of success can in large part be explained by a general disinterest among the Belgian architectural milieu for the colony. However, the author has found indications that in the colony, the announcement of the competition was not well organized, so that it passed unnoticed for several architects residing in the Congo at the time.

20. Moore (1977) already indicated the influence of the academic system in Belgium. For a thorough discussion of the training at the Brussels Academy, see Martiny and Mosselmans (1989). This exhibition catalogue, together with the publication of Martiny and De Hens (1992) offers a broad survey of the work by architects trained at the Brussels Academy. The Beaux-Arts system of education in Belgium was largely confined to the academies. There were other institutions offering architectural training that was in direct opposition to the classical ideal. Sint-Lucas Schools were the centers of the Neo-Gothic movement (De Maeyer, 1988).

21. For a short portrait of Léon Stynen (1899-1990) see De Meyer (1999). The most complete survey of Stynen's work remains Bontridder's monography (1979). The only documents remaining of Stynen's competition entry are contemporary photographs of the submitted drawings and an explanatory note (file Léon Stynen, Provinciaal Architectuurarchief, Antwerp). In both monographies, Stynen's project for the residence is mistakenly dated in 1931, thus after his seminal project for the 'Pavillon des Arts Décoratifs' at the Antwerp World's Fair of 1930, with which it shares so many formal characteristics. In fact, the chronology between the two designs is to be reversed.

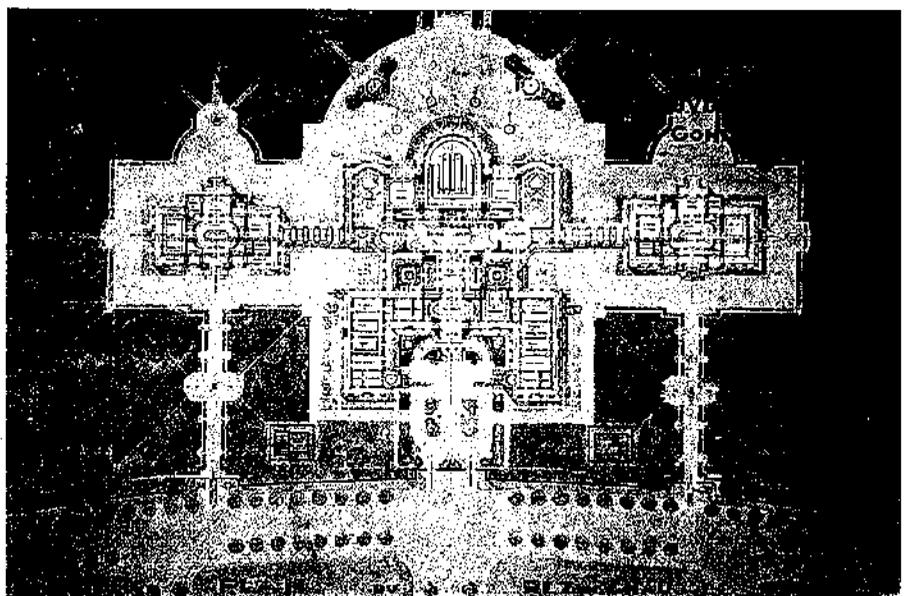
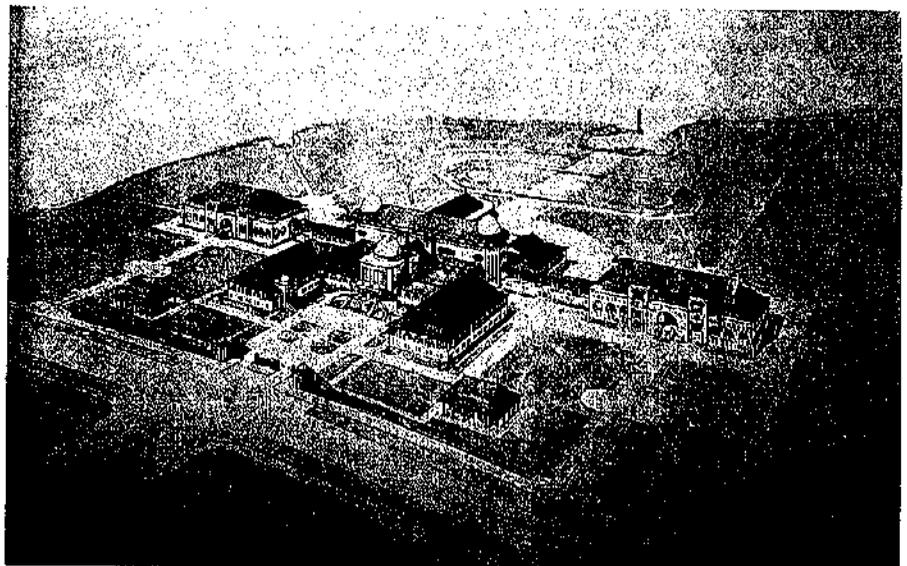
22. A brief review of the work produced by 'anciens' of the Brussels Academy reveals that in the 1920s and 30s, this tendency was rather widespread. It led to a mainstream modernism that was in turn rejected by the Belgian avant-garde. Yet one should also remember that some of the foremost modernists in Belgium, like Victor Bourgeois and L. H. De Koninck had received their training at this institution. It was only at the end of 1926 that Henry Van de Velde would found La Cambre, commonly known as the Belgian Bauhaus. For the most recent historical analysis of the architecture of this period, see Vandebreden and Van Laethem (1996). The book by Martiny and De Hens (1992) is more revealing because it also offers illustrations of lesser known, albeit often less talented, 'anciens' of the Brussels Academy.

Figure 9. General view of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Henri Derée, 1928 (l'Emulation, 1929: 4, 36).

Figure 10. Plan at ground level of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Henri Derée, 1928 (l'Emulation, 1929: 4, 35).

projects (19). Most of them were architects who had received degrees from the Belgian academies, where educational systems were modelled on that of the Paris *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* (20). Nevertheless, several designs questioned the viability of a strict Beaux-Arts style for the representation of colonial power. The project of Léon Stynen, who was trained at the Antwerp Academy, and later to become one of Belgium's more prominent modernists, for instance, was an early attempt at a monumental architecture inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, and De Stijl (21). But, as the jury aptly remarked, the project illustrated Stynen's ignorance of the climatic conditions of the African environment (Figure 5).

The same holds true for the team of architects who won the third prize with a design that reflected the contemporary tendency in academic circles towards a more modernist idiom (Figure 6) (22). Henry Lacoste, an *ancien* of the Paris Academy who had just been instated as professor of architectural composition at the Brussels Academy, presented a highly evocative design (23). The several program components were housed in separate pavilions and linked by means of covered galleries (Figure 7). Lacoste followed the typology of the colonial bungalow,



23. For a short biography and list of selected works of Henry Lacoste (1885-1968), Martiny and De Hens (1992) could be a reference. Lacoste first studied under Ernest Acker at the Brussels Academy (1904-1908), completed his training at the Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the atelier of Umdenstock and Deglane (1909-1913). According to his son, Lacoste became aware in Paris that his training in Brussels had been a mere waste of time (interview with Denis Lacoste, Lille, February 1999). The Lacoste archives have been donated to the 'Archives d'Architecture Moderne' (AAM) in Brussels. In several recent publications by the AAM, Lacoste's 1928 competition entry for the residence was mistakenly referred as 'project de pavillon pour le commissaire du gouvernement dans la ville nouvelle de Banane au Congo Belge, ca. 1930', because 'Banane' the code-name of Lacoste's entry also was the name of a town in the Congo. Author's research in the personal archives of Lacoste's son has revealed that this project was identified as his competition entry for the governor-general's residence.

24. For a short biography and list of selected works of Henri Derée (1888- 1974) see Martiny and De Hens (1992, 154-155). Derée's project was published together with that of the first, third, and fourth prize-winning entries in 'Emulation' (1929, number 4) Only contemporary photographs of the submitted drawings remain in the files of Henri Derée, in the AAM, Brussels.

25. Apart from representatives of the Ministry of Colonies and experts appointed by the government-architects with colonial expertise, or prominent figures of the architectural establishment, 2 external experts chosen by the competitors completed the jury. The latter were Victor Horta (1861-1947), the well-known Art Nouveau architect and pioneer of Modernism in Belgium (who in late 1920s would return to a more Monumental Classicism) and Joseph Van Neck (1880-1959) who had just built the 'Pavillon des verreries Fauquez' at the 'Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs' and in 1925 also appointed architect-in-chief of the Brussels World's Fair of 1935. Both Horta and Van Neck were influential figures in the academic milieu in Belgium.

26. For a short biography and list of selected works of Raymond Moenaert (1882-1977) see Martiny and De Hens (1992, 270-271). Raymond Moenaert was also active as an architectural critic, and contributed to several architectural periodicals.

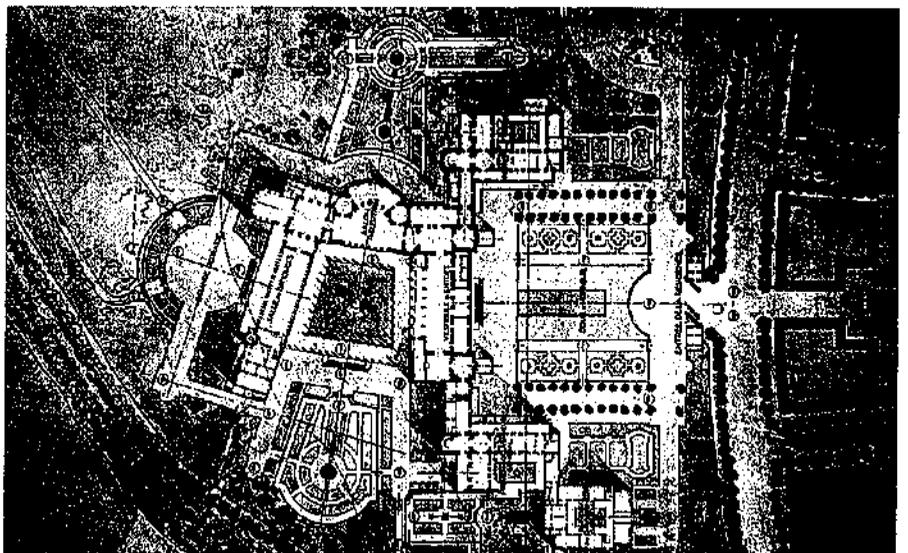
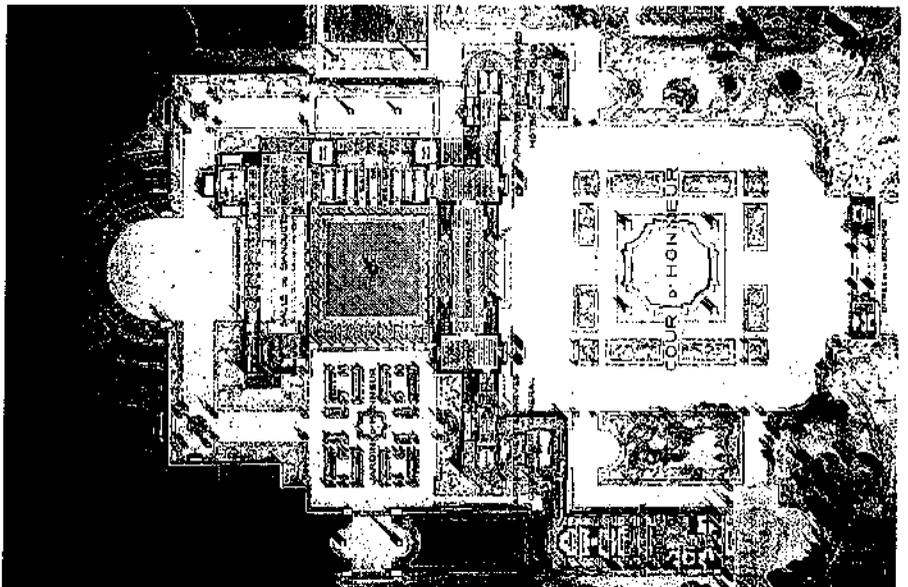
Figure 11. Plan at ground level of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Raymond Moenaert, 1928 ('Emulation', 1929: 4, 33).

Figure 12. Site with plan at ground level of the second design for the governor general's residence by architect Raymond Moenaert, 1931 (Bulletin de l'Information de la S.C.A.B., 1977: 40-42, s.p.).

protecting the different rooms by an encompassing veranda and treating the roof to permit natural ventilation. But while on the outside the design was reminiscent of colonial architecture in Dutch or British tropical colonies, the interior was of quite a different nature (Figure 8). The sections reveal classical domes and half-domes decorated with deep reliefs, mural frescoes depicting classical themes, and decorative friezes. Black servants dressed in livery complete Lacoste's unbridled fantasy of colonial *grandeur*. The second prize went to Henri Derée's project, an interesting attempt at defining a new formal vocabulary that took the climatic conditions into consideration (Figures 9-10). (24). The jury, of which Victor Horta was a member, however, criticized the design's rigid bisymmetrical layout and its lack of frontal monumentality (25).

### THE EXAMPLE OF MOROCCO

The winning project of the 1928 competition was a design by Raymond Moenaert, an architect who had been trained at the Brussels Academy (26). Moenaert was one of the few competitors who had some colonial experience, a point he seemed eager to emphasize, since he started his design comment with



27. "Nous avons habité Kinshassa" Moenaert had received a commission to develop an urbanisation scheme for the harbour of Matadi, Congo, a few years earlier. His project has shown at an architectural exposition, organised by the S.C.A.B. (cited at 'l'Émulation', 1929 (5) 41). The author could trace that only four of the 12 competitors had been to the Congo, or had a professional knowledge of building conditions in the colony at the time of the competition.

28. In the analysis of Moenaert's project, the author is indebted to Alan Colquhoun's essay 'Le plan des Beaux-Arts', in which he pointed at the way we 'read' a Beaux-Arts plan, that is, first as a 'Gestalt' or scheme, secondly as a two dimensional space that is experienced 'par séquence', to finally translate it into the third dimension. This essay was first published in English in 'Architectural Design Profiles', 17 (48) 1978, numbers 11-12, 50-65. The author has used the French translation in Colquhoun (1985, 169-176), and was also influenced by Colin St. John Wilson's (1983, 22-25) comparison between the 'poché' of Asplund's Stockholm Chancellery project (1922) and Albert Speer's Berlin Chancellery (1936), which clearly reveals the difference in skill with which both architects solved the coming together of two geometrical systems. The same comparison was taken up in Wilson's (1988, 7-13) essay.

the phrase 'we have lived in Kinshassa [sic]' (27). As a result, Moenaert was very much aware of the peculiar climatic conditions at the site, as well as the beautiful vistas it offered. To the South and East the new residential areas of Leopoldville emerged, while towards the West, across the Congo river, the capital of French Congo, Brazzaville, could be seen. Playing on Beaux-Arts compositional techniques of axiality, the *parti* of Moenaert's design combines all the interesting views in a planimetric layout that simultaneously allow all parts of the building to be cross-ventilated (Figure 11) (28). As the jury rightly noted, the inventiveness of Moenaert's scheme lies in the use of a *symétrie subdivisé*, rather than a *symétrie en bloc*, which was what most competitors used. To the South, the design presents an almost bisymmetrical volumetric composition following the axis generated by the main *boulevard* of the site. The *cour d'honneur*, with the vestibule that houses the main entrance, is enclosed by the apartments and the offices of the governor-general on the left, and by the wing for the *hôtes de marque* (the prominent guests) on the right. The major public rooms, the different *salons* and the *salle de banquets* are organised around a patio and *jardin d'honneur*, whose main axis introduces a ninety-degree shift in orientation. Thus, the view opens to the grandiose Congolese sunsets, while this orientation also lets the breeze in. In a further

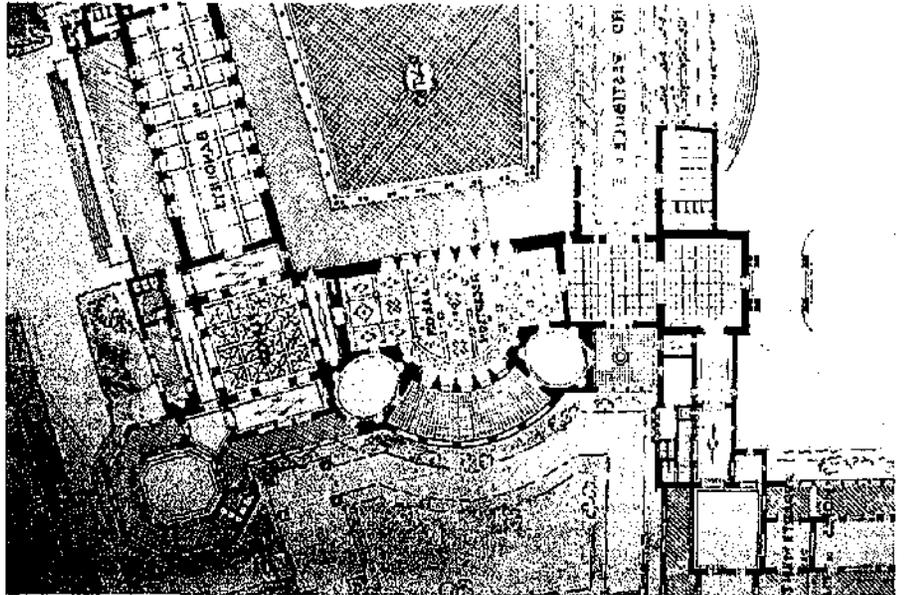
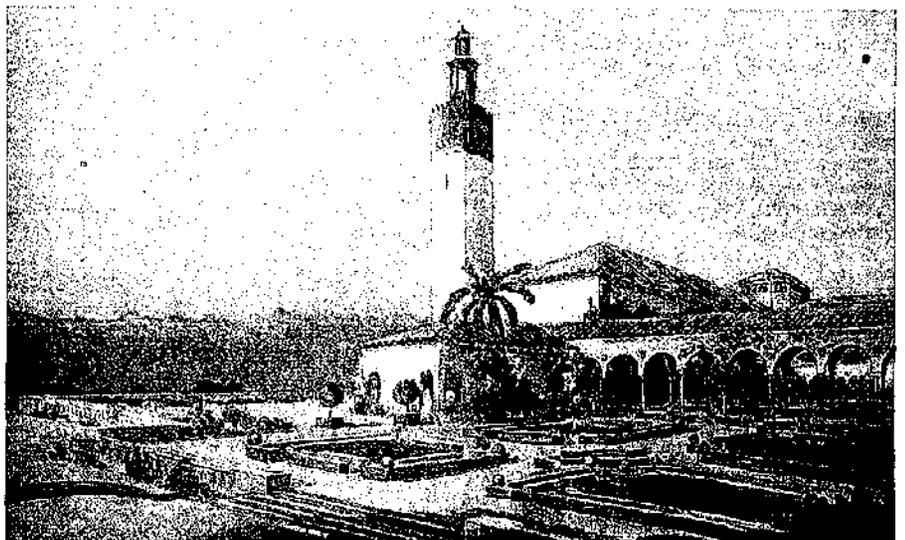


Figure 13. Fragment of the 'Salon de Réception' in the second design for the governor general's residence by architect Raymond Moenaert, 1931 (Bulletin de l'Information de la S.C.A.B., 1977: 40-42).

Figure 14. Perspective drawing of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Raymond Moenaert, 1928 (l'Émulation, 1929: 4, 31).



29. "Le caractère des façades s'apparente à l'architecture espagnole, si l'on veut convenir que les Arabes ont pris leurs meilleurs exemples en Espagne. A la réflexion, ce n'est pas de l'importation. Il y a une architecture spéciale aux pays chauds. Quoiqu'on fasse pour s'y dérober, l'expérience rappelle bientôt à l'architecte qu'on méprise en vain les lois de la nature." Raymond Moenaert, 'mémoire descriptif', undated design comments attached to his competition entry of 1928 (Africa Archives, Brussels - FRED 1433). His design winning entry, together with those of the other three award winning projects, was published in 'Emulation' (1929: 4, 29-34). 'L'illustration Congolaise', a popular colonial periodical, devoted one page to Moenaert's design (1929: 91, 2406). The Africa Archive in Brussels contains several drawings and extensive correspondence on the design of Moenaert. Unfortunately, the author has not yet been able to consult the original documents, donated to the 'Société Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique' by Moenaert's son. However, it was possible to reproduce contemporary photographs of Moenaert's second project, including pictures of the model, from the personal archives of the Moenaert family.

stage of the design, which Moenaert developed in the following years at the request of the Ministry of Colonies, this *symétrie subdivisée* would become even more explicit (Figure 12). A new perspective was created by adding a second geometrical system to the initial orthogonal grid. The design of the *salon de réception*, along with the two *salons privés*, was subsequently modified to make the two resulting geometries merge (Figure 13).

There was, however, a peculiar aspect to Moenaert's competition design. Its formal treatment was inspired by Castilian architecture (Figure 14). In his comment the architect provided the following explanation:

The character of the façades refers to Spanish architecture, if one is willing to agree that in their best achievements, the Arabs were influenced by buildings in Spain. [But] on consideration, this is no import. There exists a specific architecture for hot regions. Whatever one does to neglect it, experience quickly confronts the architect with the fact that it is in vain that one does not take into consideration the laws of nature (29).



Figure 15. View of the patio with allround arcade of the 'Résidence Générale de France' in Rabat, 1918-24 by architects Albert Laprade and Henri Prost (Encyclopédie de l'Architecture, Constructions Modernes, Tome I, Editions Albert Morancé, Paris, Plate 27).

Figure 16. Reconstruction of the 'Salon d'Honneur' of Moenaert's project for the governor general's residence, presented at the Antwerp World's Fair of 1930 (Marcel Schmitz, 1937, Plate 62).



30. "Dans tous les pays du monde, la forme des baies fixe le caractère de l'architecture" Moenaert (1929, 3).

31. In his lecture, Moenaert vehemently reacted against the 'outranciers de l'art moderne qui voudraient nous imposer une architecture internationale', a point of view he was to repeat during the 'Conférences sur l'Architecture moderne', organized by the 'Société Centrale de l'Architecture de Belgique' in 1931 (see, 'Réponse de M. Raymond Moenaert', in 'l'Emulation' (51: 8) 1931, 262-267). For a discussion of Moenaert as a 'régionalist', see also Flament (1929).

32. That Raymond Moenaert visited Morocco on his way to the Congo was confirmed by his son. "Les négres du Congo n'ont aucune architecture" (Moenaert, 1929, 4).

33. For an introduction to Albert Laprade (1883-1978) and a short description of the 'Résidence Générale de la France' in Rabat, see Culot (1991, 181-215). For a discussion of 'Arabisanoes', the tendency to arabicize European architectural forms, see Béguin and Baudez, 1980, 41-52, and Béguin (1983).

34. Considering the hot-humid climate of Leopoldville, the façades of Moenaert's design still remained quite closed, so that one may legitimately wonder how well the cross-ventilation Moenaert spoke of would have worked in reality. Yet, at the time, his claims of having taken climatic considerations seriously in his design were widely acknowledged, even by the jury among which several members had building experience in the region.

35. For Schmitz' praises, see 'Rapport de M. Marcel Schmitz: Les Arts à l'Exposition Internationale, Maritime et d'Art Flamand Anvers 1930', in 'Rapport Général', Antwerp, 1930, 209-215, and Schmitz (1931, 19). A model of Moenaert's residence projects was also shown at the 'Prima Mostra d'Arte Coloniale' in Rome, 1931.

36. If everyone agreed upon the quality of the planimetric lay-out, the local administration in Léopoldville vehemently reacted against the adopted style, which in their view was 'fortement influencé par l'architecture mauresque' (Note 'Résidence du Gouverneur Général à Léopoldville. Honoraires Moenaert', 15-12-1931, Africa Archives, Brussels - FRED 1426).

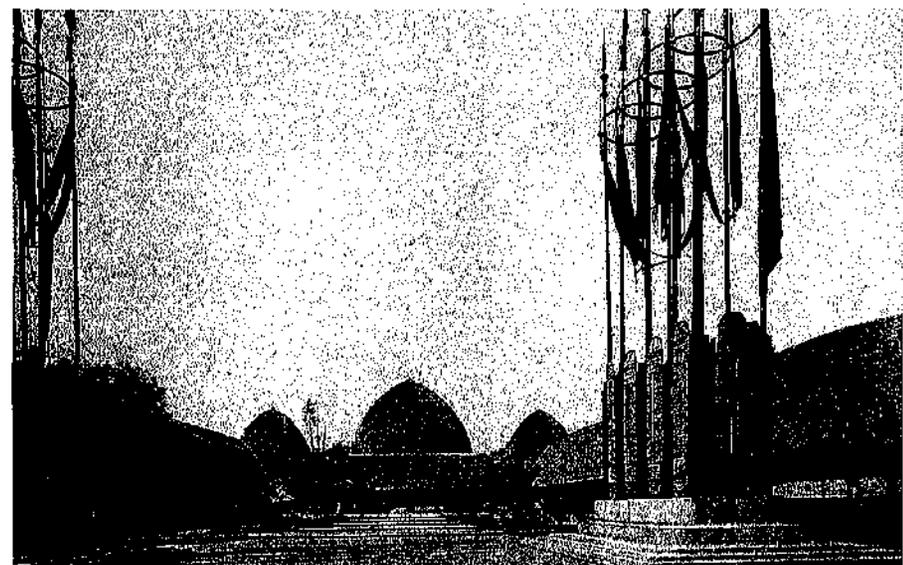
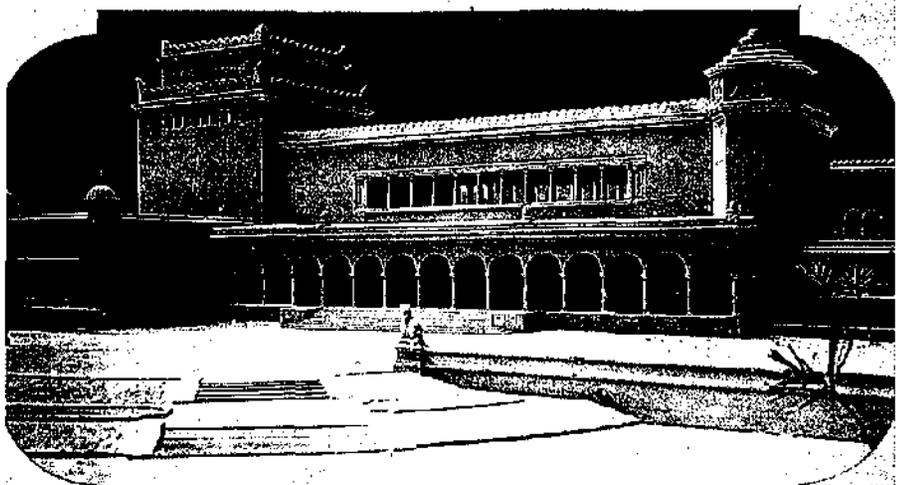
Figure 17. Model of Moenaert's second project for the governor general's residence presented at the 'Prima Mostra d'Arte Coloniale' in Rome, 1931 (Bulletin de l'Information de la S.C.A.B., 1977: 40-42, s.p.)

Figure 18. General view of the Congo pavilion at the 'Exposition Coloniale Internationale' in Vincennes, 1931 by architect Henri Lacoste (l'Emulation, 1931: 12, Plate 29).

To prove his point, Moenaert referred to a common practice he had seen in Congo. Colonials often transformed the verandas of their houses by hanging rugs or bamboo screens between roof supports of the veranda, in order to change the outdoor space into a comfortable living area. The main issue of building in the tropics, according to Moenaert, thus consisted in developing a specific type of arcade, whose form would keep out excessive sunlight while permitting sufficient cross-ventilation. These arcades would then become the constitutive element of what he saw as a new colonial architecture for the Congo. Because the arcade can be considered one of the basic elements of classical composition, it appears that Moenaert was trying to root his design solution in an academic tradition. Still, the argument also had contemporary motivations, which the following quote from Moenaert's 1929 lecture, '*le Congo vu par un Architecte*', reveals:

In every region around the world, the form of arcades defines the character of its architecture (Moenaert, 1929, 1-3) (30).

In other words, Moenaert was making a case for a more regional approach in architecture, thereby taking a stand against the universalizing claims of the contemporary modernist movement in Belgium and Europe (31).



37. In a desperate effort, Moenaert tried to save his design by proposing to erect its 'enveloppe' at the Brussels World's Fair of 1935. In his view, it could have served well to house the official section of the Ministry of Colonies that was to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of Belgian colonialism at this event. His demand, however, was declined. For a discussion of this proposal, and the executed Congolese section at the Brussels World's Fair, see Johan Lagae, 'Celebrating a Cinquantenaire: The architectural representation of the Belgian Congo at the Universal and International Exposition in Brussels, 1935', in Johan Lagae and Jef Vervoort, 'The 1935 Universal and International Exposition of Brussels', website: Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Ghent University, <http://arch.rug.ac.be/expo35>.

38. The author has developed this argument in Lagae (2000), see also note 17.

39. Exotism has had very little influence on production of buildings in the Belgian Congo. The author found only a few projects in which such an approach is present in the architectural design itself. However, in decorative arts and interior decoration, the influence was more widespread. Some exceptions are also to be found in the buildings of missionary congregations, see Morimont (1995, 60-110).

Yet, it can not be denied that Moenaert's competition design of 1928 bore little reference to the traditional culture of the Congo. The architect himself argued that, after thorough study of the local culture, he had been forced to conclude that 'the negroes of Congo do not possess an architecture of their own' (Moenaert, 1929, 4-5). Moenaert tried to defend the Arab influence in his design by suggesting that Arabs were the first of all Africans and that their influence had spread across the African continent to reach as far as Eastern Congo. He admitted, however, that he had been highly impressed by recent colonial architecture in French Morocco, where he had passed through on his way to the Congo in the late 1920s (32). In his view, French architects had succeeded perfectly in blending modernism and regionalism. There can be no doubt that his own 1928 design for the governor-general's residence was highly influenced by the *Résidence Générale de France* in Rabat, a building by Albert Laprade and Henri Prost, executed between 1918 and 1924 and a fine example of what François Béguin has called 'Arabisations', the tendency to Arabize European architectural forms (Figure 15) (33). In both residences, the main public functions are organized around a central patio with an encompassing arcade. While Moenaert opened up his façades to a larger degree to permit cross-ventilation, the formal treatment of those façades, as well as roofs and awnings over windows, was still very similar to that in the Moroccan building (34). Even the garden of Moenaert's project was laid out according to the guidelines of French garden design.

In 1930, Marcel Schmitz, an important critic, praised Moenaert's residence project, stating that its 'style hispano-colonial' offered a rare example of a 'modern' colonial architecture for the Congo. He even included a photograph of the residence's *Salon d'Honneur*, displayed at the 1930 Antwerp World's Fair, in his book *L'Architecture Moderne en Belgique*, which was published in 1937 (Figure 16) (35). Yet, critical acclaim did not allow the government to build Moenaert's design. In fact, the Ministry of Colonies, as well as the contemporary governor-general of the Congo, were no advocates of the 'Arabisations'. No doubt, this was because the formalism of that style offered no mental link to the Congo. But one has also to keep in mind that, according to one of the founding myths of Belgium's colonial history, colonization in the Congo had been initiated by the so called anti-slavery campaigns against Arab traders at the end of the 19th century. *Arabisations*, thus, conflicted with a major message of official colonial propaganda. Consequently, in subsequent design phases, Moenaert changed the outer appearance significantly by eliminating the most explicit references to Arab architecture, such as the minaret-like tower (Figure 17) (36). Despite these modifications, colonial officials remained critical, and the economic crisis in 1932 finally put an end to all plans of actually building the residence in Leopoldville (37).

## THE EXOTIC APPROACH

The *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, held in Paris in 1931, marked a turning point in the architectural display of the Belgian Congo at international expositions (38). For the first time an architect had successfully 'invented' a Congolese architecture. The Congo Pavilion by Henri Lacoste was a skillful combination of Beaux-Arts compositional techniques and an exotic formalism that was directly inspired by the Central African culture (Figure 18). It was a direct source of inspiration for the official Congo Pavilion that René Schoentjes, an engineer-architect who worked for the Ministry of Colonies, designed for the Brussels World's Fair of 1935 (Figure 19). Both pavilions received acclaim because they were in tune with the exotic *vogue* that pervaded colonial displays at international expositions during the 1930s. They did not, however, set a new standard for a colonial architecture in the Congo (39). Still, when in 1937 the governor-general asked Schoentjes to make a study of the future residence, the architect resorted precisely to an exotic approach. The outer and inner appearance of his first project was closely reminiscent of the design for the 1935 Congo Pavilion (Figure 20). The planimetric organization, laid out according to a Z-shaped pattern, places

40. René Schoentjes, an engineer-architect trained at the Ghent University, worked in the technical department of the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels until 1937. In 1930s he made several trips to the Congo, and presented a lecture on urbanism in the Congo at the international conference 'l'Urbanisme aux Colonies', held in Paris in 1931. In 1937, he received the commission to make a study of the future governor-general's residence, and settled as an independent architect in Brussels. He would realize several large buildings in the Congo, among which several schools. For a short biography of Schoentjes, see 'Rythme' (June 1949, 21).

41. "Le style est complètement moderne, sans rappel aucun de style historique. La ligne horizontale est accentuée partout et les courbes, sous forme d'arcades, ou autres, en sont entièrement absentes". René Schoentjes, letter to the 'Directeur Général Camus, Ministère des Colonies', 7.7.1938 (Africa Archives, Brussels - FRED 1427). Schoentjes' emphasis on the absence of arcades in his new design not only refers to the formal appearance of his earlier project, but should also be understood as an attempt to detach his new design from the projects by Raymond Moenaert, who accused Schoentjes of plagiarism. The Schoentjes-archives in the A.A.M. contains some information on the early residence projects of Schoentjes. Most drawings and extensive correspondence, however, are to be found in the Africa Archives.

the different public spaces *en enfilade*. An analysis of the plan quickly reveals Schoentjes' clumsiness (Figure 21). Unlike Moenaert, Schoentjes does not succeed in controlling the very spaces where the different geometries resulting from his *parti* meet. In this respect, it might be significant that Schoentjes was trained at the architectural department within the Faculty of Applied Science of the Ghent University, an institution which did not put as much emphasis on compositional techniques as the Beaux-Arts Academies did (40). Yet, when Schoentjes further developed his first scheme, the planimetric lay-out was largely retained. It was the exotic appearance that was rejected in favor of a more cubist idiom (Figure 22). The new design of 1938-39 was defined by undecorated volumes of simple geometry, from which any reference to Congolese culture was absent. As Schoentjes himself put it,

its style is completely modern, without any reference to historic styles. The horizontal line is emphasized throughout and curves, in the form of arcades or other features, are totally absent [in the design] (41).

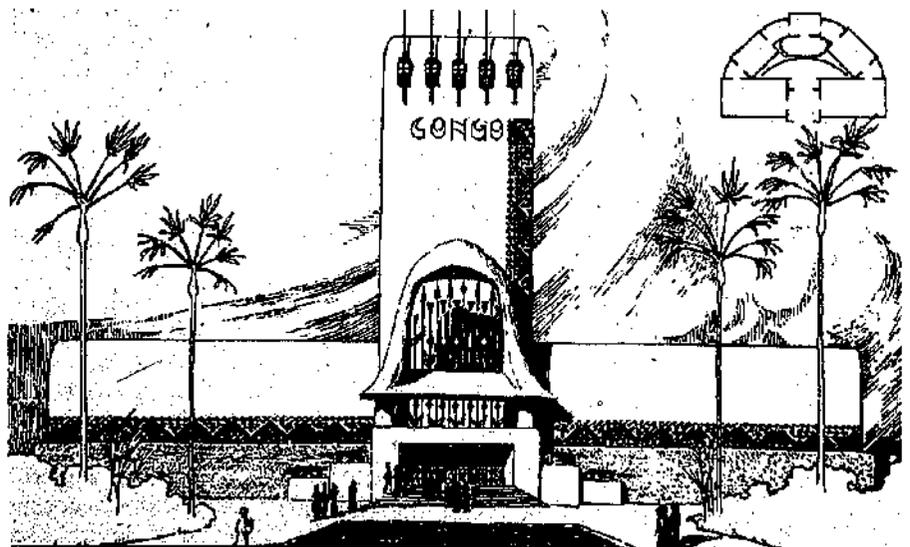
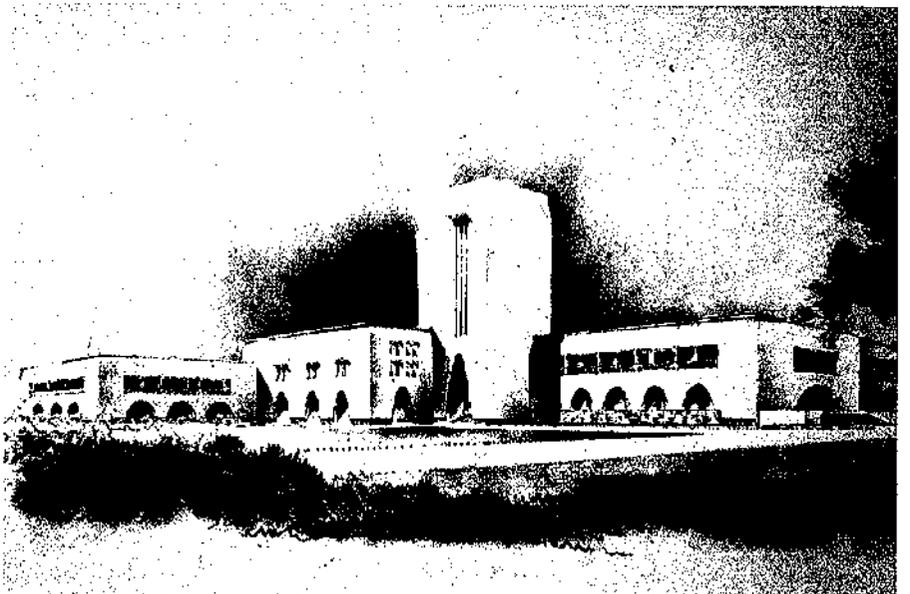


Figure 19. Final design for the official Congo Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair of 1935 by architect René Schoentjes ('Bulletin Officiel de l'Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles' 1935: 11, 15 June 1934, 382).

Figure 20. Perspective drawing of the first project for the governor general's residence by architect René Schoentjes, 1937 (Africa Archives, Brussels).



42. "Il eut été préférable d'adopter une architecture plus classique plutôt que des effets de volumes créant un ensemble terne et nu peu en harmonie avec le cachet d'un bâtiment public [...]" quoted from the governor-general in 'Note pour monsieur le ministre. Objet: Projet de Résidence pour le Gouverneur Général à Léopoldville', 31.3.1947 (Africa Archives, Brussels, FRED 1427).

43. This project was designed by architect Strapart in 1947-48. Documents on this project were found in the Africa Archives, Brussels - FRED 1428.

44. This 'retour à l'ordre' in the arts and architecture in the Europe of the 1930s is a well-documented phenomenon, that has generated a lot of publications, among which Franco Borsi's 'L'Ordre Monumental: Europe 1929-1939' of 1986 remains a classic. Still, Cohen (1997) has rightly remarked that one should be aware of all too simplifying analyses of this era. For the Belgian case, such a nuanced historical analysis of the architectural production and thought of the 1930s is yet to be written. A useful introduction to such an analysis is given by Van Loo and Zampa (1994). For a more complete survey of the architectural production, with little attention, however, for political and ideological influences at work see Vandembreden and VanLaethem (1996).

### THE RETOUR à L'ORDRE

After the Second World War, Schoentjes resumed his work on the residence project. Times had changed, however, and the new governor-general disapproved of Schoentjes' 'modern' design because, in his view, the project lacked *caractère* and *grandeur*.

It would have been preferable to adopt a more classical architecture rather than [recurring to] a play of volumes creating a dull and stripped ensemble that does not harmonize with the appearance of a public building (42).

The governor-general further regretted that Belgian architects still had not succeeded in creating a proper colonial style, as was the case in other colonies. His criticism of Schoentjes' design leaves little doubt that in his view this style should be above all, classical in inspiration. Because the following project for the residence was designed in 1947 by an architect working in the Bureau of Governmental Buildings, it should come as no surprise that it exemplified precisely the governor-general's preference for classical design (Figure 23) (43). This preference was no coincidence, but results from a *retour à l'ordre* which became apparent as early as the 1930s in the official architecture of many European nations, among which Belgium also took place (44). Two

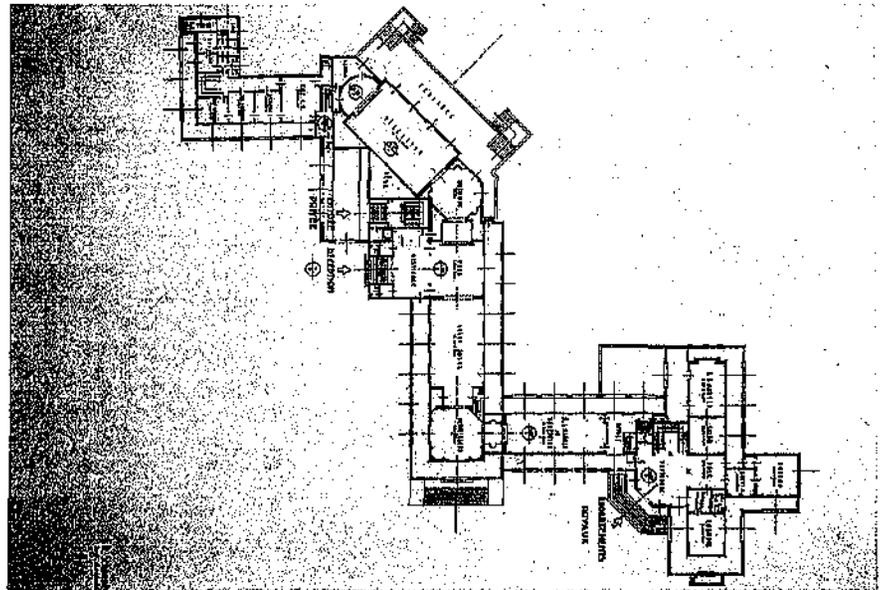


Figure 21. Plan at ground level of the first residence project for the governor general's residence by architect René Schoentjes, 1937 (Africa Archives, Brussels, FRED 1427).

Figure 22. Model of the second residence project for the governor general's residence by architect René Schoentjes, 1938-39 (Africa Archives, Brussels).



45. In some respects, the Belgian 'Prix de Rome' was different of its French counterpart. In the 1930s, students for instance, only had to execute a minor design with a fixed subject 'en loge', while they were able to choose the topic of their major entry themselves. For a history of this prize, while up until 1925 was linked with the Antwerp academy, see 'K.M.B.A. Maandschrift der Koninklijke Maatschappij der Bouwmeesters van Antwerpen' (5) 1934 (1, 7-9). Since 1862, when the theme was a 'Palais pour le gouverneur de l'Algérie', the imposed program of the 'Grands Prix de Rome' at the Paris Academy had, at several occasions, been of explicit colonial nature, for instance in 1923 ('la résidence du représentant de la France au Maroc') and in 1939 ('Palais de l'Empire colonial'). See the complete list of the 'Grand Prix de Rome' in Egbert (1980). For a discussion of the 'Prix de Rome' in this period, and the growing influence of Modernist design conceptions in Beaux-Arts circles, see Vigato (1982), and Brucculeri in Cohen (1997, 219-223). The design of Louis Stynen, a 'hôtel-relais sur un noeud de grande communication en Afrique' was published in K.M.B.A. (5) 1934 (1), and in 'l'Emulation' (54) 1934 (4); the design of Jozef Schellekens in K.M.B.A. (8) 1937 (2).

prewar entries for the Belgian *Prix de Rome* are significant for the apparition of this *retour à l'ordre* in the colonial context. In 1933, Louis Stynen, who was trained at the Antwerp Academy and continued his studies at the *Institut Supérieur de Beaux-Arts*, won the *Prix de Rome* with a design for a hotel complex located on a major crossroad in Africa. (Figure 24) Four years later, in 1937, Jozef Schellekens' design for a museum in Elisabethville was awarded third prize (Figure 25). Both designs embody the shift from a Neo-Baroque Beaux-Arts style towards what Franco Borsi described as 'L'Ordre Monumental'. While some of the programs for the *Grand Prix de Rome* at the Paris *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* during the 1920s and 30s endorsed the prestige of the French colonial empire, the fact that these two designs are the only *Prix de Rome* designs in Belgium during this period with a colonial building program (and that this program was chosen by competitors themselves), illustrates that in contrast to France, the development of an architectural expression of Belgian colonialism was not a major issue for the professional, let alone of a public debate (45). The designs for the governor-general's residence by Schoentjes and his successor, in fact, never were presented outside the closed circles of the colonial administration.

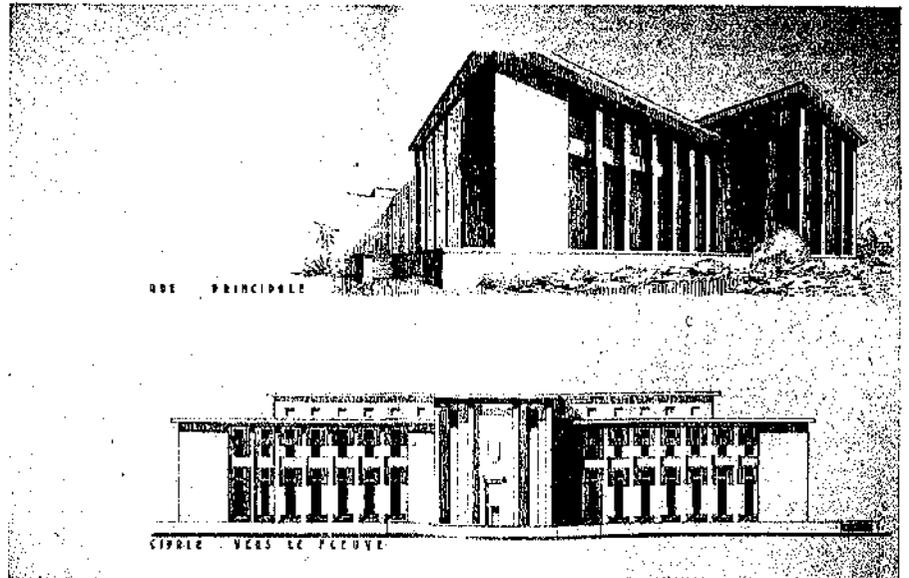
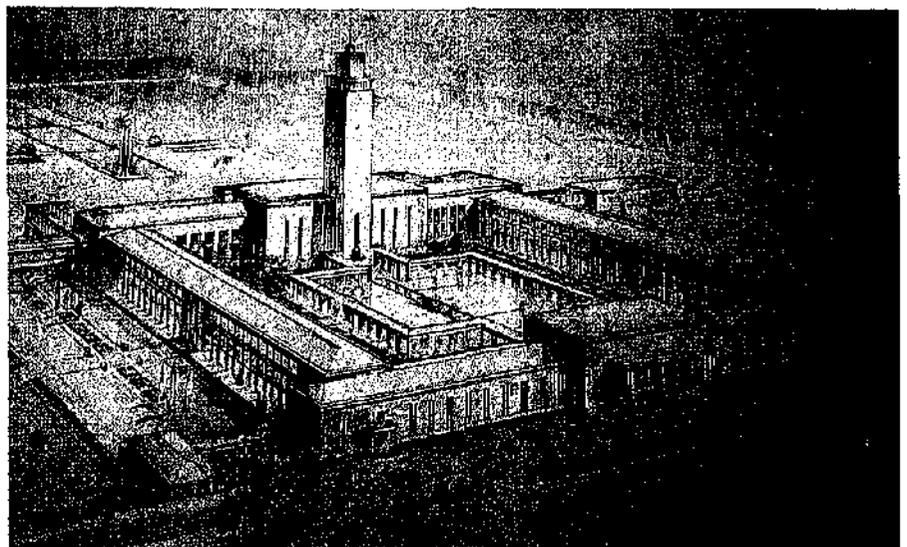


Figure 23. Main façade and perspective of garden façade of the new project for the governor general's residence by architect Strapart, 1947 (Africa Archives, Brussels).

Figure 24. General view of the 'Prix de Rome' project for a hotel complex on an important cross-road in Africa by architect Louis Stynen, 1933 ('l'Emulation', 1934: 4, 34).



46. For a short biography and list of selected works of Marcel Lambrichs (1917-1986), see Martiny and De Hens (1992, 245-246). Drawings of the executed design are kept in the Africa Archives (Brussels). The original drawings have not been preserved, yet they were published in the 'annuaire' of the Société des Architectes Diplômés de l'Académie de Bruxelles of 1952 (S.A.D.Br., 1952, 2-3). Bohdan Samulski, collaborator of Lambrichs at the time of the competition, was so kind to lend me some of his own photographs of the original documents and the model. From the analysis of the accounts of the jury's deliberations, it can be concluded that Lambrichs' project initially was only ranked fourth. In the end, the jury would award three projects, among which that of Lambrichs, 'ex-aequo' first prize. Thus, the final decision of appointing the architect for the commission was left to the Minister of Colonies, who appointed Lambrichs as the sole executing architect.

47. The concept 'lieux de mémoire' as defined by Nora (1984, xviii-dii) is referred to. In a recent article, Çelik (1999-2000) has discussed how this concept provides a useful tool for architectural historians. The statue of King Leopold II, as well as the governor-general's residence itself, can be regarded as prominent 'lieux de mémoire'. This approach could not be developed explicitly in this paper, but such an analysis of residence is under preparation in the context of the author's doctoral dissertation.

## MONUMENTAL CLASSICISM

Yet, by the end of the 1940s, this approach came under attack from professional circles in Belgium, as well as in the Congo. In the end, the governor-general and the Minister of Colonies were forced to organize a new competition, which took place in 1951. It was more successful than the 1928 competition and attracted 33 competitors, among which several prominent figures of the architectural establishment. Significantly, among the four highest-ranked entries three adopted a stylistic conception in tune with the still current trend of monumental classicism. Marcel Lambrichs, the privileged architect of the Minister of Colonies, finally got the commission, after apparent manipulation of the jury's decision (46). Far from the most interesting design, the selected project exemplifies all the features of a mediocre, stripped-down classicism: a simplistic symmetrical composition, an uninventive formal appearance dominated by colonnades composed of slender unadorned columns, and a cupola clad with shiny copper from Katanga marking its center (Figure 26). The cupola functions as a counterpart to the equestrian statue of king Leopold II, which stands on the plaza in front and is one of the major *lieux de mémoire* of Belgian colonialism (47).

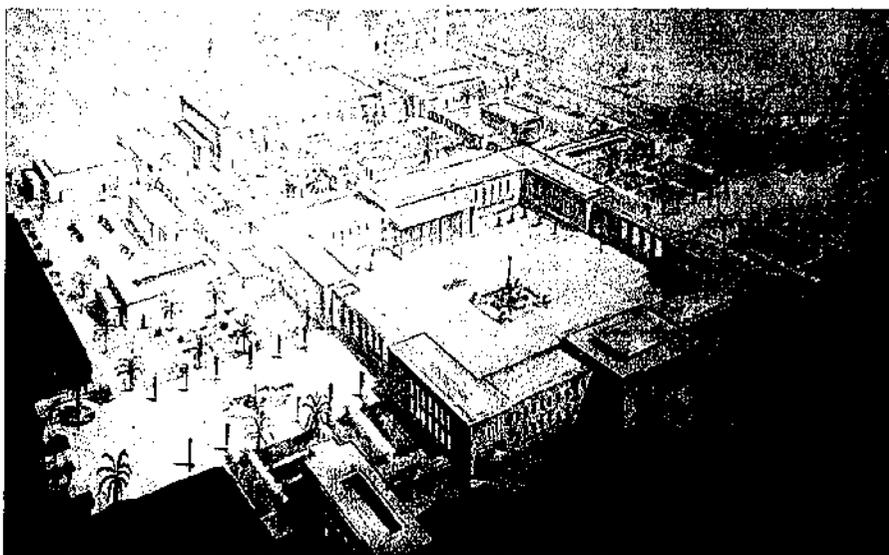
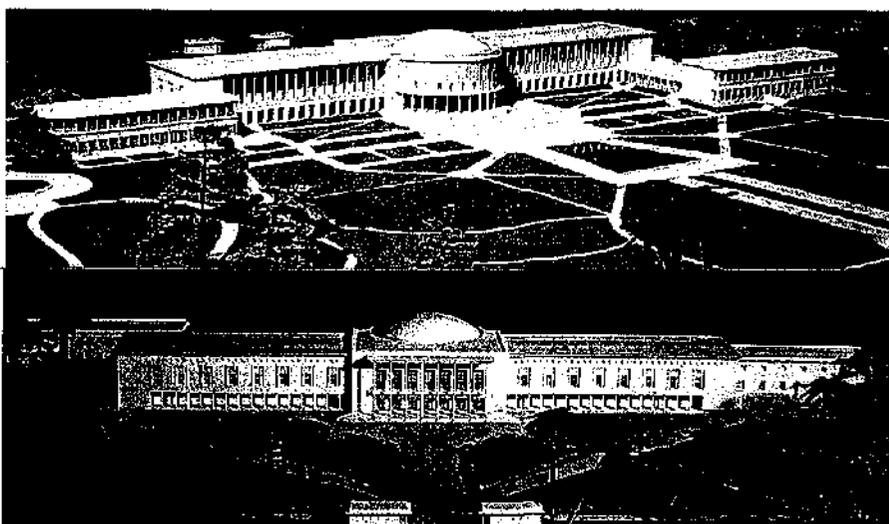


Figure 25. General view of the 'Prix de Rome' project for a museum in Elisabethville by architect Jozef Schellekens, 1937 (K.M.B.A., 1937: 2, 38).

Figure 26. Model of the competition entry for the governor general's residence by architect Marcel Lambrichs, 1951 (contemporary photograph, author's archive, Ghent).



48. Moenaert actually was among the competitors of the 1951 competition. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to consult the Moenaert archives that supposedly are in the possessions of the S.C.A.B., Brussels. In the archives of the Moenaert family, no documents on this 1951 competition entry remain.

49. The discussion referred was initiated by the text 'Nine Points on Monumentality' by Sert, Léger and Giedion of 1943, and would lead to other texts by Giedion, Lewis Mumford and Henry-Russell Hitchcock. Wilson (1988, 1989) wrote on the 'Dilemma of Classicism' in the context of an analysis of the nordic classicism of Asplund and Lewerentz. Wilson's critique is in essence a critique on Beaux-Arts architecture, and can be compared to the point of view expressed by Rykwert (1982, 8-17). While both analyses offer interesting insights, the argument could not be followed to the end. The Beaux-Arts approach offered some valuable starting point to define a colonial architecture for the Congo, if only the 'right lessons' were learned from the Beaux-Arts (Scott-Brown, 1977; reprinted in 1984).

50. The Tropical Modernism in Congo, that was reminiscent of the Brazilian Modernism of architects like Oscar Niemeyer or Alfonso Reidy, only emerged in the course of the 1950s. It was, of course, part of the more general internationalisation of the modernist idiom in the postwar period. Yet, it was also influenced by new scientific insights on the conditions that governed the human comfort in buildings located in the tropics, see Lagae (in print). Claude Laurens (1908), an architect of French origin who executed several seminal buildings in the 'tropical modernist' style in the Congo has, as Kultermann (1963) already remarked, to a large extent defined 'the city-image' of the modern Leopoldville. In the many colonial periodicals of the 1950s, which propagated the new era of colonization, photographs of Laurens' building occupy a dominant place (see Lagae, 2002). For a survey of the work of Laurens, see Lagae and Laurens (2001).

Lambrichs clearly had not learned any lessons from Moenaert's design of 1928, especially not in terms of its subtle relationships between the different building parts and the beautiful site (48). His project also failed to connect with the discussion on monumentality that had become a major theme of the international architectural debate during the 1940s. Lambrichs' project is typical of an architectural production in which 'the Dilemma of Classicism', as Colin St John Wilson called it, was not an issue (49). Marcel Lambrichs, together with most competitors in the 1951 competition, stuck to the classical tradition though it were the only way to represent a colonial presence. What these architects failed to see was that the postwar period heralded a new colonial era. Congo was rapidly being modernised, turning Leopoldville into a colonial *métropole*, and it was a 'tropical modernism', of which the buildings by Claude Laurens are the most telling examples, that would produce the most appealing image of the 'new Congo' in the years to come (Figures 27, 28) (50).

It was not until 1956 that the building site of the governor general's residence was actually started (Figure 29). Ironically however, the building never served its initial program. It was not even finished when Belgian colonialism abruptly came to an end. In fact, the unfinished residence provided the stage on which the Belgian King announced the independence of the Congo on June 30, 1960 (Figure 30). As such, the troublesome construction of the *Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge* clearly reveals the blurred imperial politics of the Belgian government. That it took so long to build the major public building of the colonial period illustrates that if *le petit Belge a voulu faire grand au Congo*, architecture actually had no part in this colonial policy.

#### CONCLUSION: 'le petit belge a voulu faire grand'

In this paper the case of the *Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge* has been used to illustrate how Belgian architects, during a period of more than 30 years, tried to define a colonial architecture. Because of the very different climatic conditions in the Congo, specific planimetric layouts and façade treatments were necessary to provide comfortable living conditions for

Figure 27. Cover of 'la Revue Coloniale Belge', showing the 'Immeubles Sabena' by architect Claude Laurens, typical examples of the tropical modernist style in the Congo of the 1950s ('la Revue Coloniale Belge', 1956: 262, December, cover).

Figure 28. Cover of 'Belgique d'Outremer' showing the 'Immeubles Sabena' by architect Claude Laurens, typical examples of the tropical modernist style in the Congo of the 1950s ('Belgique d'Outremer', 1958: 277, April, cover).

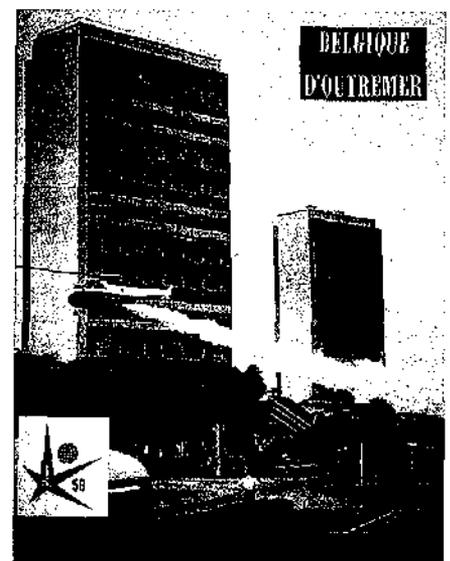
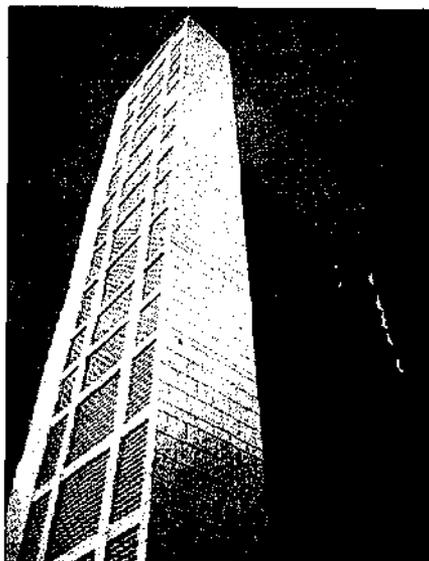


Figure 29. The executed 'Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge' in Léopoldville, ca. 1960 architect Marcel Lambrichs (contemporary photograph, author's archive).



Figure 30. June 30th, 1960. The declaration of independence of the Congo; King Baudouin, flanked by the newly appointed president Joseph Kasavubu (on the left) and prime minister Patrice Lumumba (on the right), after bringing a salute to the statue of King Leopold II in the background, the cupola of the 'Résidence du Gouverneur Général du Congo Belge', from then on known as the Palais de la Nation ('Le Soir Illustrée', issue 1463, 7 July 1960,).

Europeans. But since the residence was to house the King's representative in Africa, the building commission was also fraught with notions of power and prestige. Not surprisingly, the first projects were designs in the purest Beaux-Arts tradition. However, because the history of the making of the residence coincided with a period in which academic circles in Belgium were continuously influenced by new conceptions of composition and style, subsequent projects illustrate how Beaux-Arts design rules were gradually adapted and transformed. The most problematic aspect of the commission, however, remained the definition of a colonial style proper to the Congo. All of the architects discussed here took ethnocentric preconceptions about native architecture for granted. They did not consider the local building forms of Central Africa as suitable models for representing prestige and *grandeur*, and thus were forced to invent new models. It is mainly in the pre-war projects of Moenaert, Derée and Schoentjes that conscientious efforts were made to define a contemporary colonial style, by applying Beaux-Arts techniques in a non-dogmatic way. Most postwar projects were characterized by a simplistic *retour à l'ordre*. Architects resorted to a Monumental Classicism, devoid of a contemporary meaning to mark the colonial presence in Congo with. But then, could any architecture have been defined to evoke the essence of Belgian colonization, with its blurred imperial politics?

## BELÇİKA KONGOSU'NDA KİNŞASA (LEOPOLDVILLE) VALİ KONAĞININ SORUNLU YAPIM SÜRECİ

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Anahtar Sözcükler: Kongo, Sömürge Mimarisi, Beaux-Arts, Anıtsal Mimarlık, Temsilîyet Sorunu, Emperyalist Gelenek, Siyaset ve Mimarlık.

Avrupa'nın küçük bir ülkesi olan ve sömürge yönetimi deneyimi bulunmayan Belçika, 1885-1960 yılları arasında Afrika'daki en büyük sömürgelerden birine hükmetmiştir. Çok sınırlı bir kesimin çıkarları dışında, Belçika'nın gerçekten sömürgeci özelemler taşıyıp taşımadığı tartışma konusudur. Kongo'da çok az sayıda Belçikalı yaşamış olduğu gibi, Belçika'ya bağlılığın yerel topluma benimsetilmesi de temel bir hedef oluşturmamıştır. Kongo'da bu dönem boyunca inşa edilen çok sayıda yapının hemen hepsi yararlı bir yaklaşımın ürünleri olmuştur. Ne var ki, bunlardan biri, 'Belçika Kongosu Genel Vali Konağı' ayrıcalıklı bir geçmiş ve kimliğe sahiptir. Başlıca kamu yapısı olarak bu konağın yapım süreci, kendi içinde büyük bir yönetim sorunu olmuştur. Bir yanda sömürgeci gücü temsil etmesi, diğer yanda da Kongo kimliğini taşıması istenmiş olan bu yapı, iki ayrı yarışma ve birden fazla tasarım girişiminin konusu olmuştur. Dönemin egemen *Beaux-Arts* tasarım kavrayışlarının, üslup ve kompozisyon yaklaşımlarının, Belçika'nın sömürgeci heveslerini yansıtmada pek yardımcı olduğu da söylenemez.

Boma'da 1888'de kurulan metal prefabrik geçici yapıdan kurtulup, Leopoldville'de prestijli bir konağın yapılması düşüncesiyle önerilen yapının mimari programında, bürolar, vali evi, resepsiyon ve kutlama salonları, özel toplantı salonları, misafirhane birimlerine yer verilmişti. 1920'lerde yaşanabilir bir çevre yaratmak için, Kongo'nun iklim koşullarına uygun bir mimarinin zorunlu olduğu anlayışı artık iyice yerleşmişti. Ancak bunun nasıl sağlanabileceği konusu tartışılmaktaydı. Ayrıca Kongo'da o güne kadar bu önemde bir yapı da yapılmamıştı. Yapılan yarışmada dikkat çeken ilk iki sıradaki tasarım da *Beaux-Arts* geleneğinde Avrupa modellerini izleyen önerilerdi. Birinci, 1910 Brüksel Dünya Fuarı'nda kurulan ve Fransız mimar Girault'un eseri olan Belçika Kongosu Müzesi'nden büyük ölçüde esinlenmiş görünüyordu. Belçika sömürge yönetiminin, yerel topluluklara saygılı olarak 'dolaylı yönetim' politikasına bağlı olduğu akıldaki tutulursa, bu önerilerin yerel kimlikle hiçbir bağlantı kuramaması şaşırtıcı bulunabilir. Bu durum, Fransız egemenliğindeki sömürgelerde uygulanan ve Mareşal Lyautey'in 'yerel kültürle bütünleşme' siyasetinin ürünü kabul edilen mimarlık yaklaşımından farklıydı. Örneğin, Fas'ta uygulanan resmi mimarlık, yerel yapı ve kent kültürüne dayalı tarihi kent merkezlerindeki İslami çevre geleneksel öğelerine uyumlu tutulmaktaydı. Belçika bunu Kongo'da başaramamıştı, çünkü iddiaya göre Kongo'nun mimari bir geleneği yoktu. Orta Afrika yapı formları ne Dünya Fuarları'nda, ne de ülkede, özgün bir sömürge mimarisi yaratacak kalıcı ve görkemli bir öze sahip bulunmamıştı.

Sömürge Bakanlığı'nın 1928'de 'Kongo Genel Vali Konağı'nı elde etmek üzere düzenlediği yarışmaya Belçikalı mimarlar ilginçtir, ilgi göstermediler. Yarışmaya yalnızca 12 proje katıldı. Katılanların hemen hepsi *Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts* eğitimine bağlı Belçika mimarlık akademileri mezunları idi. Buna karşın, katılımcılardan kimileri bu yaklaşımın sömürge gücünün temsil edilmesindeki yararını sorgulamışlardır. Örneğin, Stynen'in anıtsal mimarisi Frank Lloyd Wright ve De Stijl'den etkilenmiş bir yaklaşımdır. Ancak bu öneri, jüri tarafından yerel iklim koşullarını görmezden geldiği gerekçesiyle dışlanmıştır. Lacoste ise, verandalı yerel 'bungalow' tipini kullanarak, pavyonlardan oluşan bir kompleks önermiştir. Ancak bu yaklaşımda da yapı dışı ile yapı içi karşıt anlatımlara sahiptir. Dışarıda, çevreye ve yerel koşullara uyum ilke edinilmişken, içeride klasik kubbeler, yarım kubbeler, 'zenci' hizmetkarların gösterildiği duvar resim ve kabartmaları işlenmiştir.

Jüri birinciliği, sömürge deneyimi olan ve 'bölünebilir bir simetri geliştirmiş' olan Moenaert'a vermiştir. Arsanın doğal, hava alma ve manzara verilerine duyarlı bir proje sunan Moenaert, bölgesel mimari yaklaşımını savunmakla birlikte, modernist hareketin evrenselleştirme söylemini kullanmıştır. Ancak bu önerinin de Kongo geleneksel kültürü ile bir bağ kurduğu söylenemez.

Mimarın iddiasına göre, Kongo'nun kendine özgü bir mimarlığı yoktur. Moenaert bu eksikliğin, Afrika'nın kuzey kıyılarından Doğu Kongo'ya kadar uzanan bir coğrafyada yer alan ve Fas'ta Fransızların yararlanmakta oldukları Arap mimarlığı ile giderilebileceğini öngörmektedir. Dönemin önemli mimarlık eleştirmeni Schmitz ise, Moenaert'ı İspanyol sömürge mimarlığına uymakta başarılı görmüştür.

Ancak gerek Bakanlık, gerekse günün Kongo Genel Valisi, bu Araplaştırma siyasetini Kongo ile bağdaştırma yanlısı olmamışlardır. Bu yaklaşımın uygunsuz görülmesinde bir güçlü gerekçe vardır. Belçika'nın Kongo'daki varlığına özür olarak ileri sürülen ve Kongo'nun koruma altına alınmasındaki temel nedenlerden biri, Arapların yürütmekte olduğu 19. yüzyıl köle ticaretinin sona erdirilmesiydi. Bu nedenle Moenaert, yarışma sonrasında Arap mimarlığı çağrışımını yapan elemanları, örneğin bir minareyi anımsatan kuleyi kaldırmıştır. Ancak bu uyarlamalara karşın, yönetimler eleştirel tavırlarını sürdürmüşlerdir. Bu projeden 1932 ekonomik krizi ile vazgeçilmiş ve sömürge mimarisi arayışları son bulmuştur.

Öte yandan, Belçika Kongosu'nun mimarlık temsiliyeti konusu 1931 Paris 'Uluslararası Sömürgeler Sergisi'nde, Lacoste'un Kongo pavyonu ile yeniden canlanmıştı. Lacoste, *Beaux-Arts* kompozisyon teknikleri ile Orta Afrika kültürü öğelerini buluşturan egzotik bir biçimsellik sunmaktaydı. Bu yaklaşım, 1935'te Brüksel Dünya Fuarı'nda Schoentjes tarafından yinelenmiştir. Beğeni kazanan bu yaklaşım, 1937'de Kongo Genel Valisi'nin Schoentjes'ten Valilik Konağı için bir çalışma istemesine yol açmıştır. Schoentjes çalışmasını geliştirdikçe, yerleşim düzenindeki yanlışlıkların düzeltilmediği gibi, egzotik öğelerin de atılıp kübist bir anlatıma geçildiği görülmektedir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı ile kesilen bu çalışmalar, savaş sonrası yönetimler tarafından 'karakter ve görkemlilik yoksunu' bulunmuştur.

Genel Vali, Belçika mimarlarının hala bir sömürge mimarlığı geliştirmemiş olmalarından yakınarak işin 1947'de Kamu Yapıları Bürosu mimarlarından birine verilmesine yol açmıştır. Sonuç, Valiliğin eğilimleri doğrultusunda klasik bir tasarımdır. Bu durum, 1930'larda başlayan ve özellikle resmi yapılarda kendini gösteren, Avrupa ölçeğindeki 'geleneğe dönüş' hareketinden ötürü raslantısal değildir. İki önemli yarışmanın sonuçları bu durumda etkili olmuştur. Prix de Rome ödülü alan Afrika'da otel kompleksi ve Elisabethville'de müze, Borsi tarafından 'Anıtsal Klasik Mimarlık' olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ancak bu girişimlerin gerisinde yatan, meslek tanımında, ya da kamuoyunda bir sömürge mimarlığı arayışı endişesi hiç değildi. Genel Vali'nin elde ettiği Valilik Konağı projesi de, yönetimin kapalı ve dar bir çevresi dışında, hiçbir biçimde konu edilmemiştir. Ancak 1940'lı yıllar sonlarında Anıtsal Klasik yaklaşım ciddi eleştirilere hedef olmuştur. Böylece Sömürgeler Bakanlığı 1951'de yeni bir yarışma düzenlemeye zorlanmıştır. Bu kez 33 projenin katıldığı yarışma, mimarlık çevrelerinin tanınmış isimlerinin de ilgisini çekmişti. Yarışmada öne çıkan dört öneriden üçünün yine Anıtsal Klasik üslupta olmaları ise, bu işte yine kimi terslikler olduğunu düşündürmektedir. Sonunda, zorlamalar altında kalan jüri, işin Bakanlık Mimarı Marcel Lambrichs tarafından yapılması kararını vermiştir.

Seçilen proje, basit bir simetriye ve resmi öğelere sahip, sıradan bir kompozisyondur. Lambrichs'in, Moenaert tasarımından birşey öğrenmemiş olduğu ve 1940'lardaki uluslararası mimarlık çevrelerinde tartışılan 'anıtsal yaklaşım' konularıyla ilgilenmediği anlaşılır. Sömürgeci bir otoritenin temsil edilmesinde Klasisizmin tek yöntem olduğu indirgeyici anlayışı egemendir. Yapım işlerinin başlaması 1956 yılından önce olamamıştır. Zamanla özgün programdan uzaklaşmış ve Belçika varlığı Kongo'da sona erdiği sırada bile yapı henüz bitirilememiştir. Buna karşın, Belçika Kralı Baudoin 30 Haziran 1960'ta Kongo'nun bağımsızlığını burada açıklamış ve sömürgeciliğinde mimarlığa yer veremeyen Belçika'nın Kongo egemenliği burada noktalanmıştır.

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