

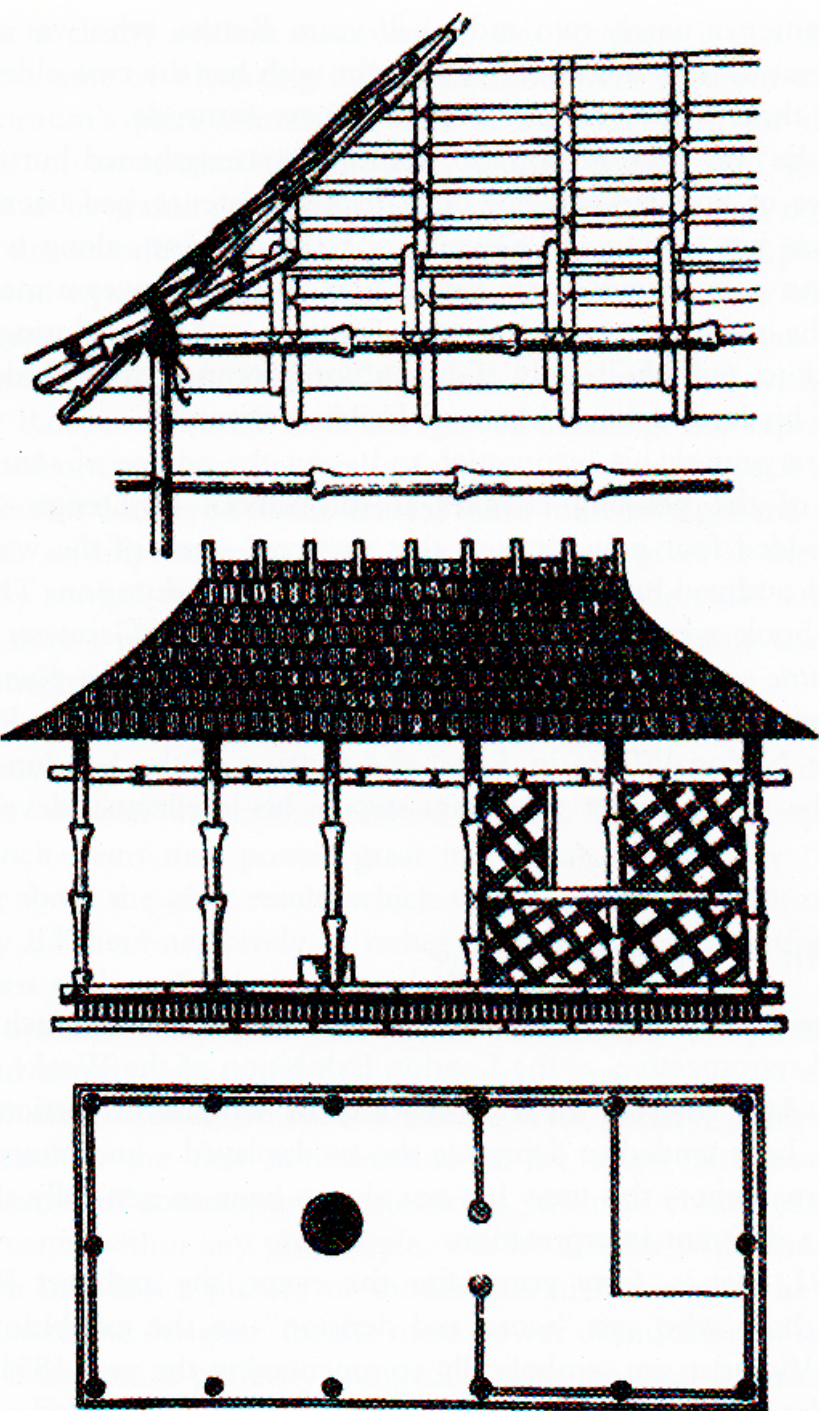
# Postcolonial Perspectives in History of Architecture

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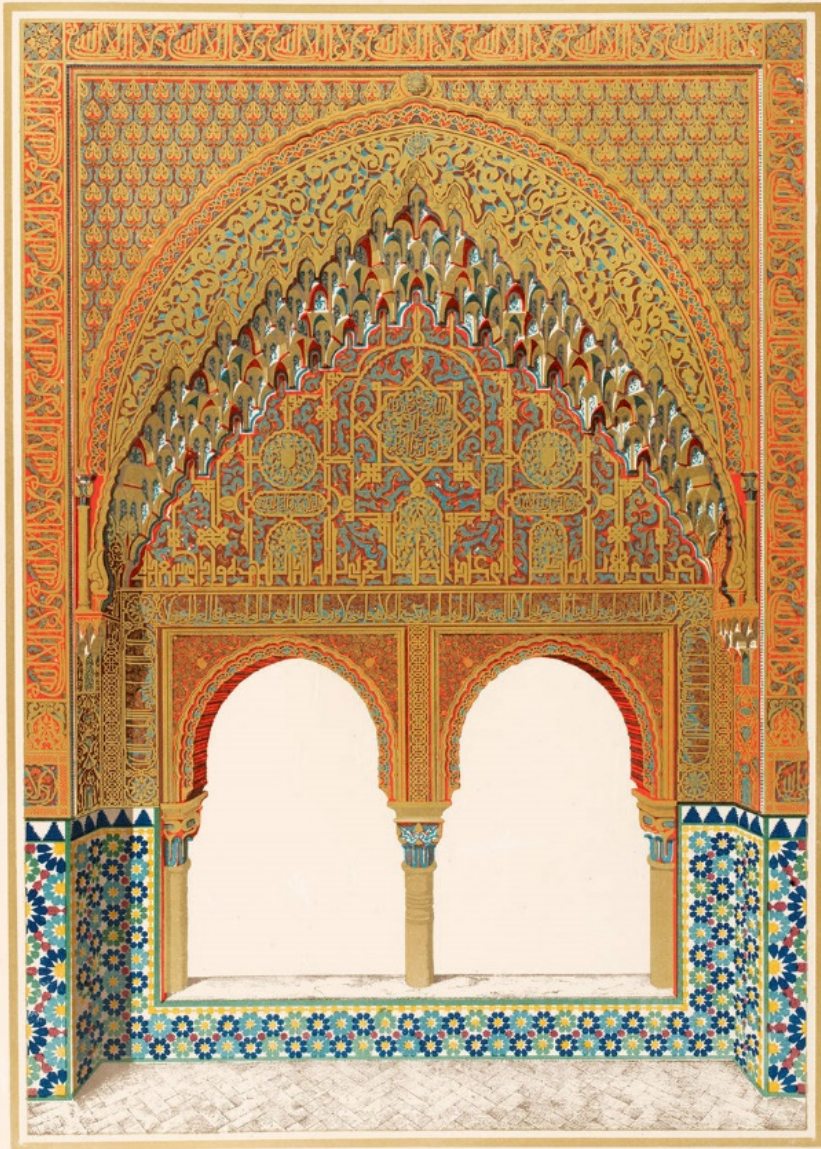
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# Eurocentric View: „Influences“ of non-European architecture



← Gottfried Semper used „a Caribbean hut“  
from the island of Trinidad displayed at the  
1851 Great Exhibition in London in his 1878’s  
*Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts*

LA VENTANA SALA DE LAS DOS HERMANAS.



LA + ALHAMBRA +



Devan. — Pulo de la Alhambra

**O. Jones,  
Plans,  
Elevations,  
Sections  
and Details  
of the  
Alhambra  
(1842–  
1845)**



**O. Jones,  
The  
Alhambra  
Court at  
Crystal  
Palace,  
1851**

# Owen Jones: *Grammar of Ornament*

- introduced non-European ornaments and forms to European public and contributed to their important place within the design reform, but:
- Jones and his contemporaries knew very little about the social or political context of non-European countries
- often based on homogenous racial stereotyping and condescending, over-generalised assumptions - Chinese art “so nearly resembles the principles of the Mahomedan race”

→ Plate XCIV: “From a painted china jar. Composition on the fragmentary principle; remarkable for the bold treatment of the top and bottom of the jar.”



# **Anthony D. King, *Writing the Global City.* *Globalisation, postcolonialism and the urban* (2016)**

- to understand any built environment we need to understand the economic, social and political formations on which it is based; we need to understand both a social and spatial division of labour
- „There is no adequate explanation of, for example, the growth in the nineteenth century in northern England of industrial ‘cotton towns’ (sic) without reference to the transformation of Egyptian agriculture, the huge rise of cotton exports (under colonialism) and the creation of colonial Cairo from the 1880s. They are both part of the same mode of production and the built environment and architecture is one of the major clues. Not because it is the ‘same’, but because it is complementary: the Classical revival banks are in the City of London, loaning money (at prohibitive rates) to the Egyptians to import manufactured goods; the Classical Revivalist mansions are in Cairo and Alexandria belonging to the Egyptian comprador bourgeoisie or the families of European officials or merchants.”

# Architecture in the Colonies

- architecture brought to the colonies by the colonizers
- „colonial“ hotels in India - for the British coming from the metropole, they functioned largely as platforms, or springboards into an unfamiliar environment
- in the same time the hotels served as “imperial tools” – private spaces, which maintained their superiority through use of ornaments or luxurious spaces such as „tropical gardens“

- Imperial Hotel, New Delhi, India, 1936



# Canonical Architects and Their Designs outside of Euro-American Context



- Le Corbusier in his office at Chandigarh, India, 1952

(with Pierre Jeanneret and Jane Drew (to his right) and engineers G. C. Khanna, P. L. Varma and Maxwell Fry (to his left))



# 1. Le Corbusier, Chandigarh

## The Capitol Complex: Palace of Assembly (1952–1961)



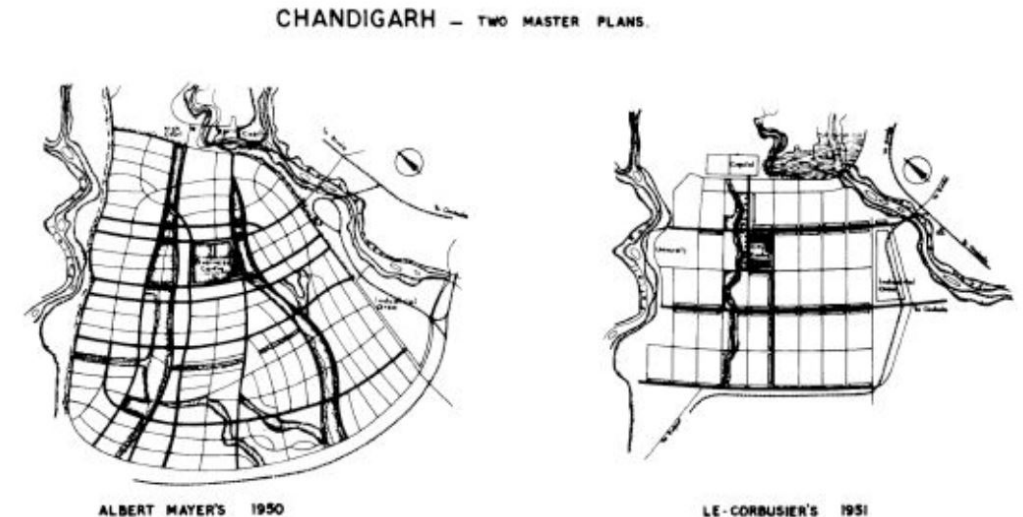


- Le Corbusier with India's 1st Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, 1952
- Nehru: "We cannot keep pace with the modern world, unless we adopt the latest techniques. We cannot keep pace with the modern world unless we utilize the sources of power that are available to the modern world."
- "Countries of the West may have been colonial powers. They may have done injury to us. But the fact is that they have built a great civilization in the last 200 or 400 years."

# Le Corbusier and the Master Plan for Chandigarh, Punjab, India

- a traditional narrative is Corbusier-centric (even though Corbusier worked with a plan designed previously by Alfred Mayer)
- a team of 20 young local co-workers, who continued to design buildings esp. in North India – associated with Le Corbusier and later rebelling against him
- denies agency of local administrators and politicians

→ plural authorship



- in many aspects supposed to serve as the Indian counterpart to the Imperial Capitol of New Delhi, glorifying the British colonial Empire
- designed as a monument to the machine age, its supposedly universal values and its political institutions

New Delhi (left) and Chandigarh (right)



# Open Hand Monument, Chandigarh

- in letters to Nehru, Le Corbusier comments on the origins of this symbol and of its significance to Chandigarh specifically:  
“The modern world has made all things interrelated. The relations are continuous and contiguous around the globe, affected by nuances and diversity.... The question is man and his environment, an event of local as well as of global order.”



# Criticism of the Chandigarh project from the 1970s onwards

- progressive, socialist planning, outstanding architectural achievement

X a symbol for the arrogance of Western planning ideology inflicted upon the „Third World“: a city designed according to Western standards (emphasis on social progress and economic growth) – little respect to the traditional way of life of those who have to live in the new environment

- Le Corbusier frequently blamed for not having been interested enough in local customs: “What is the meaning of Indian style in the world of today, when you accept machines and trousers and democracy?”
- designed for cars and public transport, but there were not many car owners still in the 1970s, most of the people walked, rode a bike and used horse-drawn carts
- some sectors were severely overcrowded with 10 families living at the places for 2
- not enough schools and facilities
- separation of industrial and commercial zones did not correspond to Indian reality
- wide spaces did not offer any cover from sun
- green space only to look at, not offering place for leisure and sports

# Missing Parts of Famous Stories of Architecture



- Guo Gongxi, student of architecture at St. John's University in Shanghai, next to his "Pattern and Texture" assignment, 1951

# Bauhaus Ideas and Pedagogies Outside of the Euro-American Space

The canonical story:

- focuses on the Bauhaus Masters
  - from the US perspective
  - emphasizes the roots of International Modernism
  - tends to overlook: women, craft
- 
- the Bauhaus model spreaded to many countries outside of Europe and the USA, its students came from and later worked in Nigeria, Brasil, China, Morocco, ...



# China and the Spread of the Bauhaus

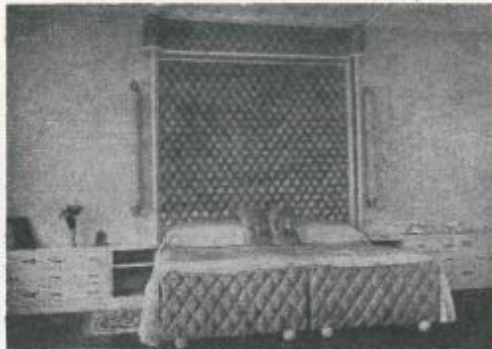
- the Westernization Movement started at the end of the nineteenth century
- China's two earliest national art colleges were the National School of Fine Arts of Beiping (now the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, est. 1918) and the Hangzhou National College of Art (now the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, est. 1928)
- no Chinese architect studied at German Bauhaus, but its ideas travelled to China through the USA and Japan
- modernism spread through contacts with the USA such as Chinese modernist architects Liang Sicheng and Yang Tingbao, who studied at the University of Pennsylvania

# Huang Yulin, Wenyuan Building at Tongji University, 1953



# Walter Gropius, Richard Paulick and China

- the Bauhaus transfer: a version of „Vorkurs“, workshops, idea of a high-quality design accessible to everyone
- many students from China at Harvard: HUANG Zuoshen, WANG Dahong (\*1918), CHANG Chao-Kang (1922–92), leoh Ming PEI (\*1917), CHEN Chi-kuan (1921–2007) and others
- Gropius' assistant Richard Paulick and his student Wang Dahong transferred to the Architecture Department at the na St. John's University in Shanghai in 1943 – adopted the Bauhaus model
- Walter Gropius, Richard Paulick and others received design commissions from China from the 1920s up until the 1940s
- in 1933, Paulick fled to China, where he sought political asylum and in Shanghai he worked for an interior design company “Modern Homes” (led by Rudolf Hamburger) and founded his own architectural practice



Bed Room: Wood Buff duco, Turquoise tufted Silk, all Metal Work in polished Copper, Bedspread beige and turquoise.



Livingroom - Corner: Woodwork gray Oak, Covers beige velvet and dark brown Tapestry with beige Leaf-Design.



Bed Room Desk in Ash, Chair-Cover vermillion, Hangings multi-coloured Vase-Design.

Designs on this page by R. Paulik of Modern Homes.



Showroom on Functionalistic Lines, a Case where crystal, and chrome will prevail. Colours: black, white, gray and rust.



Photographs by Lefebvre.

# Living room, Bedroom and showroom, „Modern Homes“ design published in *China Journal*, Vol. 3, 1936

„From the beginning of his years in Shanghai, Paulick demonstrated his stylistic versatility and an ability to keep pace with changes in popular fashion, becoming highly successful as a commercial designer. He mainly referred to classic decorative styles—with necessary modifications, if required by clients—e.g., designing in the Louis XIV style, the most popular style among Shanghai’s merchant class.“

- Li Hou, Richard Paulick and the Remaking of a Greater Shanghai 1933–1949

# Huang Zuoshen (1915–1975)

- studied architecture in London and Walter Gropius at Harvard (1938–1941)
- 1942 established an architecture department at the St. John's University in Shanghai
- labeled as a reactionary and bourgeois academic during the Cultural Revolution
- most of his buildings and texts were destroyed

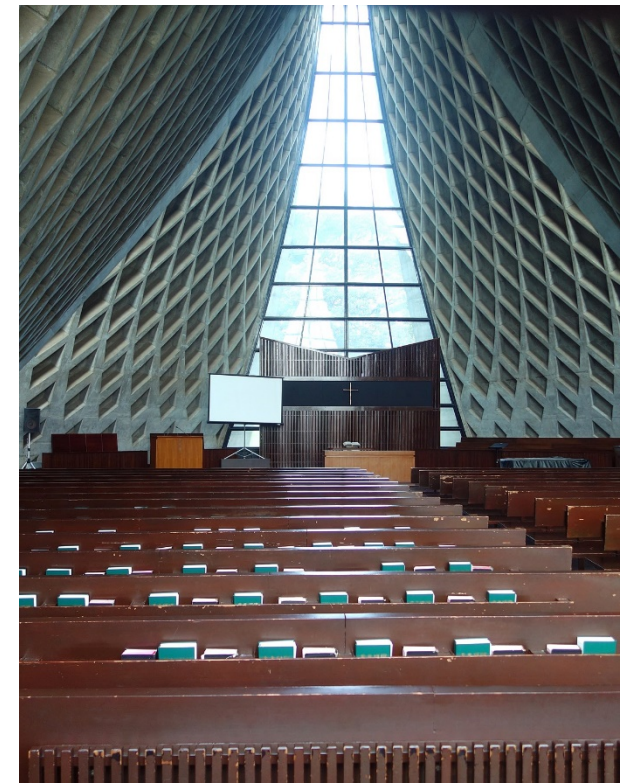




**Dormitory  
building  
for the  
Bank of  
China,  
late 1940s**

# leoh Ming (I. M.) Pei (1917–2019)

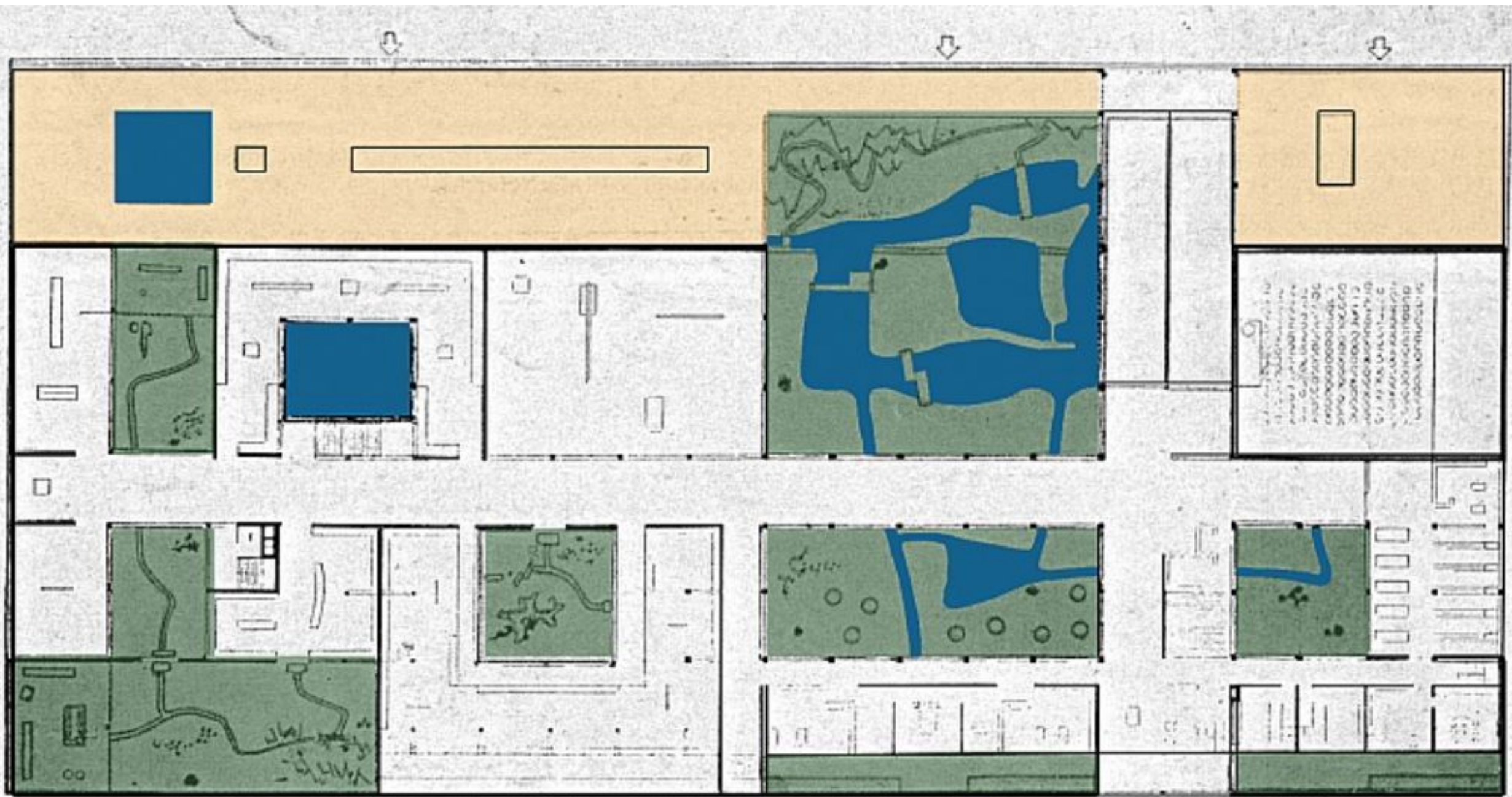
- studied at Harvard with W. Gropius (1942–1946)
- 1983 Pritzker Prize
- Le Grand Louvre, 1989; Luce Chapel, Taichung, Taiwan, 1963



# leoh Ming Pei, Museum of Chinese Art for Shanghai, 1950 (unrealised)

- Pei: “It was at that moment that I said I would like to prove something to myself, that there is a limit to the internationalization of architecture. There are differences in the world, such as climate, history, culture, and life. All these things must play a part in the architectural expression.”
- his thesis supervised by Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius
- for both of them, the project’s importance clearly lay in reconsidering tradition and in its application to contemporary solutions
- typical for Chinese tradition: interior closely tied to exterior and exhibiting of smaller works of art made of porcelain, jade or ivory rather than large pieces
- Western museums housed art objects intended to be on continual public display and required vast galleries and copious wall space. Chinese art museums, by contrast, housed art objects historically intended to be brought out of storage and shown only on rare occasion and as an intimate, private experience





# Implications of Postcolonial Theory for East Central Europe

- the growth of cities was based on material imported from other continents as well
- Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as a „pseudo-colonial“ power (Clemens Rutner) – „inner colonies“ – imperialistically inhabited territories to rule and economically exploit – but: important differences in scale and intensity in comparison to actual colonies
- Bosnia (1878, 1908)
- Osterhammel, 2001 – new definition: „Colonialism is a power relationship between collectivities in which elementary decisions about the life course of the colonized are exploited by the colonizing power primarily with external interests in mind because of the cultural otherness of the minority and its willingness to conform. Linked to this in modern times are ideological justification doctrines that rely on the colonial masters' belief in their own cultural superiority.“

# 4. Subcarpathian Ruthenia as a part of interwar Czechoslovakia

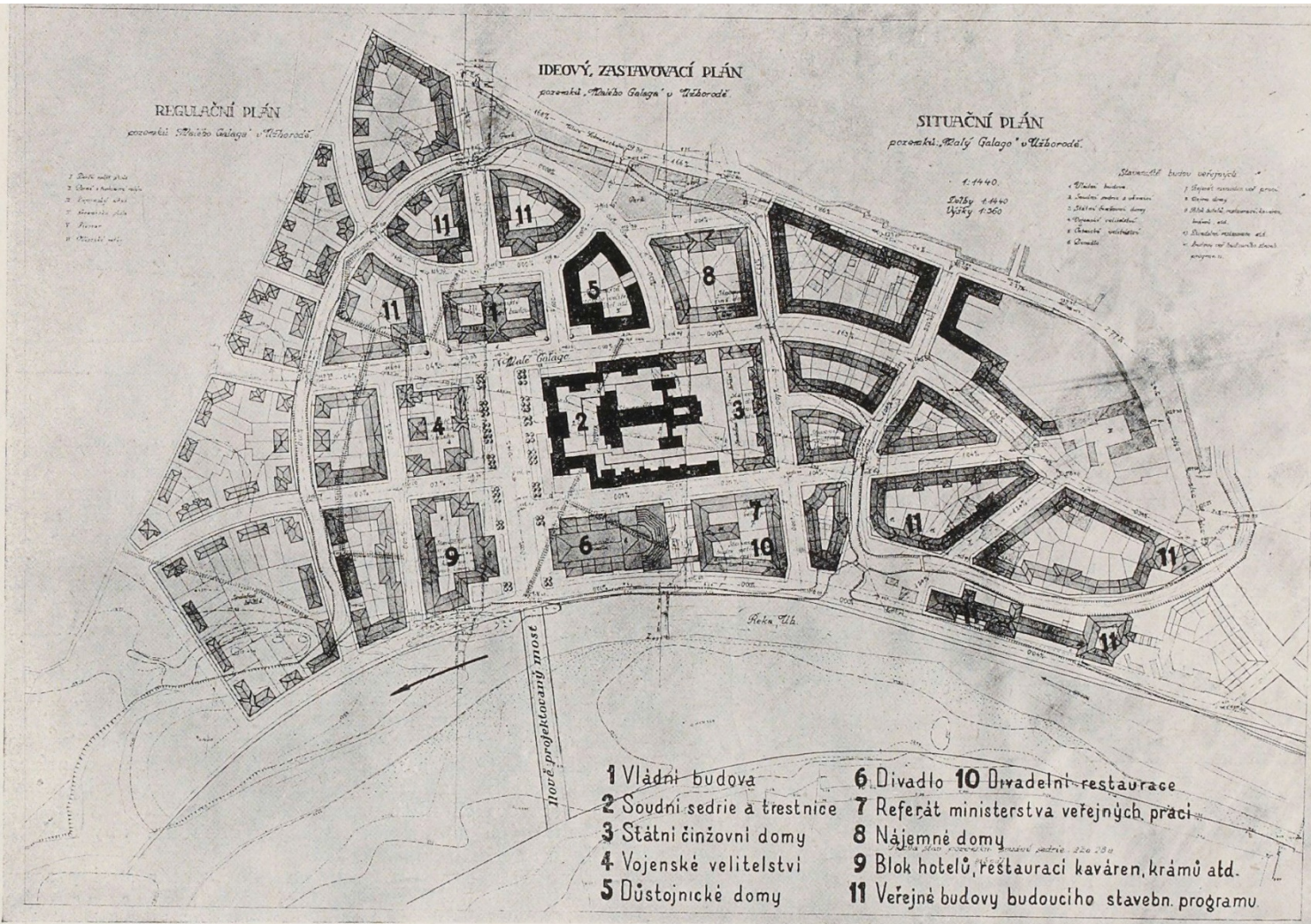
- the myth: Czechoslovakia bringing democracy, culture and modernity to Subcarpathian Ruthenia to „save the Rusyn people“
- X leftist intellectuals, esp. Ivan Olbracht – comparing Czechs to Hungarians as two colonising powers: „Czech masters came in 1920 to bring freedom. ‚At the beginning, every Czech was dear to us,‘ Rusyns told me. But since ‚freedom‘ is a very fragile term, they were only preaching about culture later on and nowadays they do not operate with it either. They do business with things more real than that. Why should they care about lost sympathies? Does anyone go to any colony with a sentimental heart? People hate them. Not Czechs, because the slogan ‚Away with the Czechs!‘ is a very recent one. They hate masters.“

# Czechoslovak Tahiti

- from the newspaper and books on Subcarpathian Ruthenia: „uncultured East of our Republic“, „the darkest part of Africa“, „utter disorder and colonial colourfulness“
- at the end of the 1920s: Czechs made up roughly 2 % of total population in SR, but 1/3 in Uzhhorod and occupied the most of the qualified positions

# Uzhhorod, Subcarpathian Ruthenia

← Adolf Liebscher, Maly Galagov City Plan, 1920s



- a modernized city with electricity and running water, regulated river Uzh etc.
- but: was it a city for Rusyns?
- Frantz Fanon: “The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans (...) Yet if we examine closely this system of compartments, we will at least be able to reveal the lines of force it implies.”



## Josef Gočár, Post and Telegraph Administration Building, 1928–1930



# František Krupka, Regional Government, 1932–1936



**What are the limitations of presented perspectives?**



# What are the limitations?

- broaden our perspective
- uncover the unspoken hierarchy of values, shows Eurocentric view as not natural, but situated

But:

- still focused on the European/North American context and tradition
- still tends to be hierarchical
- cements the canonical view on architecture with star architects in the centre
- tends to overlook the specifics and ignore the local context, generalizes different sources into broad groups (e.g. „African“ masks, „Asian“ porcelain etc.)
- we need to focus on colonised peoples as not only passive recipients, but active participants in the proces, which was not stable, but ever-changing

# Walter Mignolo, Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom (2009)

- urges to change the terms of the conversation, not only its content
- who has constructed the canon of architecture?
- if to speak a language means to carry the weight of a civilization, then to engage in disciplinary knowledge-making means to master the language of the discipline
- what 1st World scholars think of the post-colonial world X what scholars in the 2nd and 3rd World thought of themselves not taken into account - Third World is scientifically providing data to be processed in the metaphorical laboratories of the First World

- Partha Chatterjee: proposes to build the future of 'our' (non-Western) modernity – not independent from 'their (Western) modernity' (because Western expansion is a fact), but unashamedly 'ours'
- shifting the geography of reason and enacting geo-politics of knowledge: 1st world scholars should not feel they have a right to „guide“ the locals
- colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe

- What is missing?

→ buildings, which are not: up-to-date modern, great architect + enlightened contractor, idea of originality and uniqueness

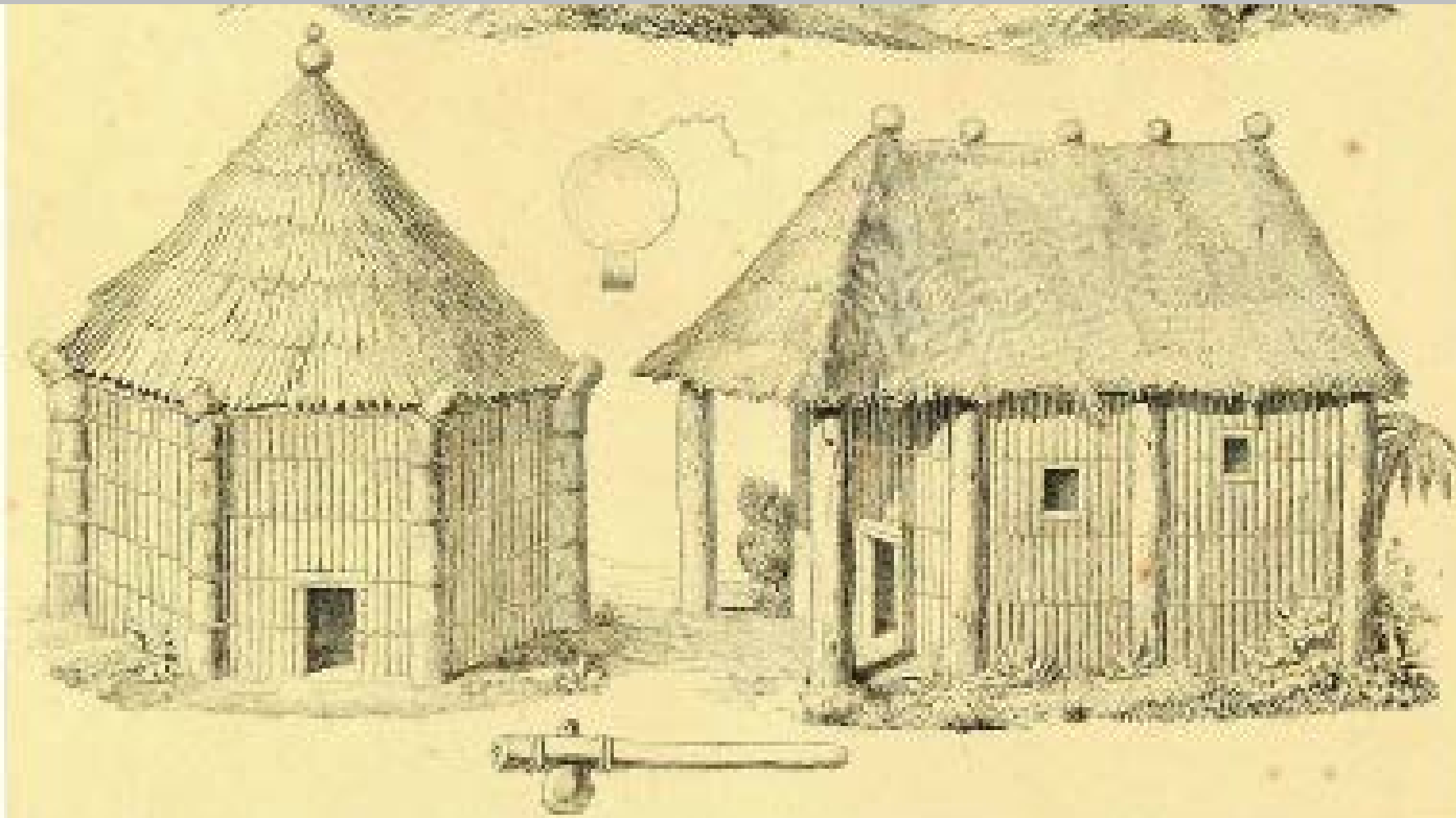
- Challenges: fragmentary narrative instead of a cohesive story, syncretic and complex buildings and contexts instead of distinct theories and ideas
- concept of quality and originality
- concept of progress (alterity)

# Implications for History of Architecture

Postcolonial debate shifts focus:

- from single achievements (luxurious villas) to commonplace, more typical buildings
- from star architects to more „common“ architects, engineers – broadens the pool of creators to include more women, ethnic and racial minorities
- a need to re-evaluate our vocabulary and categories – quality, originality – should we give those up? Redefine them?

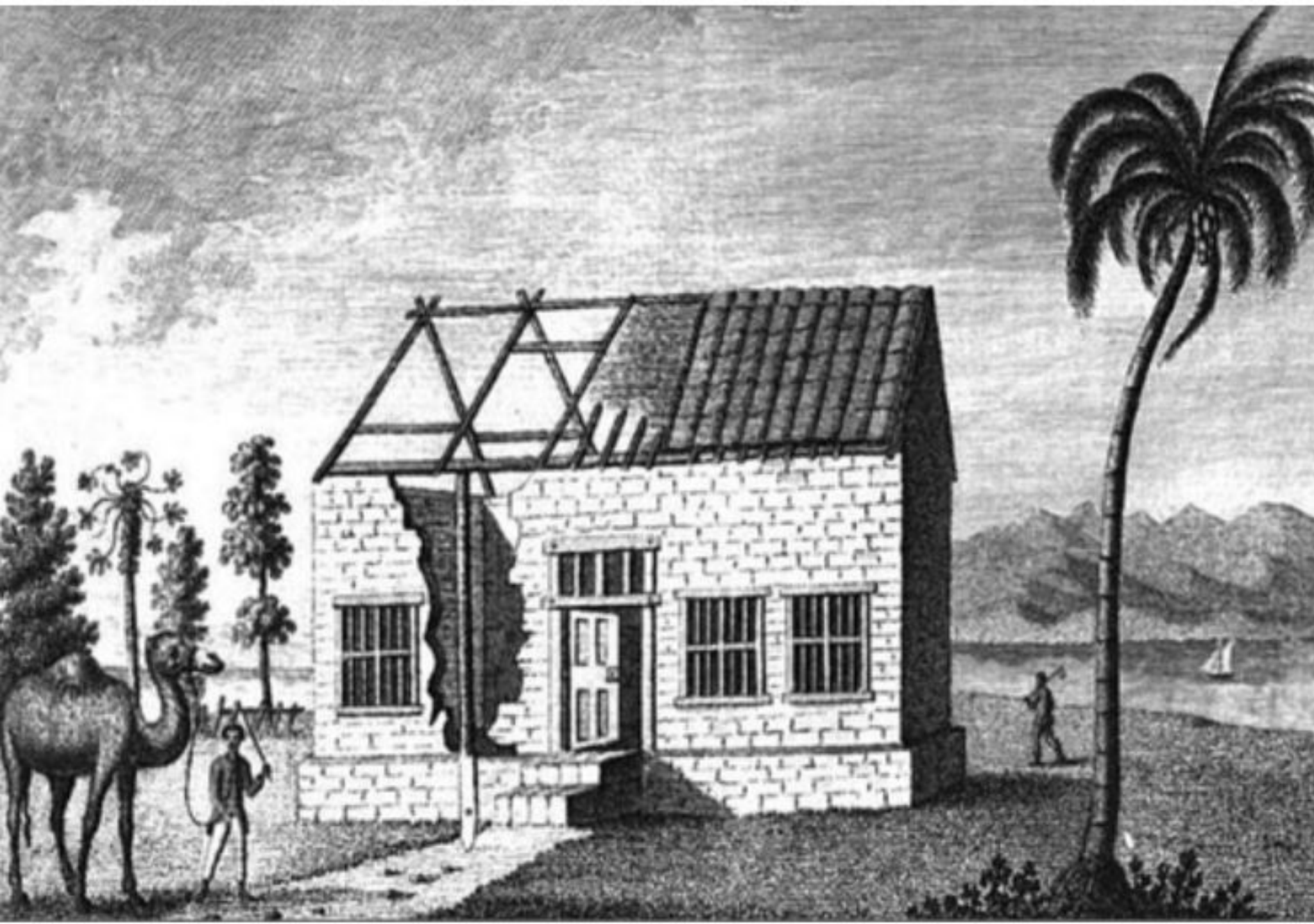
## 5. Beyond the Canon Case Study: Architecture in the Caribbean



- a *buhio*, 1851-1855, and a late 19th-century illustration of the hip roof extended to incorporate a porch or veranda, suggesting an African contact influence

# Creolization

- the Caribbean: the Greater and Lesser Antilles independent states
- under British, French, Danish, Dutch, Spanish, and the US rule after 1492
- creole and vernacular manifestations of distinct architectural forms from Indigenous, European, and African peoples
- hybridity / syncretism / creolization = a process by which elements of different cultures are blended together to create a new culture
- a model used after 2000



Spanish  
Creole  
Architecture:  
stone  
masonry  
building +  
timber-  
framing  
(1774)



- the literature on Caribbean architectural history has often been dominated by its European heritage, which excluded other influences
- the existing typological categories of Caribbean architecture tend to have anthropological elaborations such as ‘primitive’ and ‘native’; cultural distinctions such as ‘great houses’ and ‘huts’; and ethnic and racial categorizations implying imposition and coercion in the derivation of Caribbean architecture
- stylistic categories of the Caribbean architecture heritage – such as ‘Spanish colonial’, ‘French creole’, or ‘Dutch roof’ – have only tenuous relevance to architecture in many Caribbean territories
- Did the Indigenous communities and their settlements prior to and immediately after the European arrival provide a legacy for the Caribbean architectural development?

# Creole architecture in the Caribbean

- stone as a building material
- an exact layout, building practice, and material of European architecture – typical for the Hispanic Caribbean (Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Cuba): identifiable 16th- and 17th-century European-designed churches, convents, and residences;
- and/or: more intuitive use of European architectural elements – typical for Jamaica and other non/Hispanic territories

→ the oldest surviving house in Havana, Cuba



# English Jamaica: Old Court House, ca. 1807, St. Andrew, (left); a single-storey house, Spanish Town

- a continuous hip roof to cover both the masonry core building and the piazza creating a single entity, with the roof vented for hurricane relief and with a bifurcated step leading into the principal entry



# a fretwork-buhio two-storey building with brick ground floor and timber-framed upper floor, Spanish Town, English Jamaica



- after the 1834 Emancipation declaration from slavery, the buhio began to carry ornate decorative timber cut-work motifs called ‘fretwork’
- the emancipated Africans exercised their freedom on the architecture with the fretwork

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