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Heimatstil Architecture between Namibia and Eastern Prussia

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the development of *Heimatstil* (literally "homeland style") architecture between circa 1890 and 1910 in two different, but interrelated spheres of action: the construction of new agricultural villages by the Prussian Settlement Commission, and the planning of colonial settlements in Namibia, then Deutsch-Südwestafrika (German Southwest Africa). Despite crucial differences and discordances, both spheres were shaped by similar building styles and settlement strategies. Between its establishment in 1886 and 1909, the Prussian Settlement Commission settled more than 120,000 Germans in farming villages, mostly in the eastern provinces bordering Russia. These projects would counter the depopulation of the countryside, increase agricultural productivity, strengthen the rural middle classes, and, perhaps most importantly, re-Germanize lands inhabited by Polish peasants. Heimatstil architecture played a central role here. Building elements such as half-timbering and clipped-gable roofs were deemed to instill German culture and local rootedness (*Bodenständigkeit*), and thus make new settlers feel at home in their new environment.

This approach also shaped overseas colonial architecture and planning in Namibia, where the buildings and landscape interventions of settlers and the colonial state in the region's highlands and deserts legitimized colonization by aesthetic means. The paper focuses on the actors and institutions that promoted the Heimatstil and the closely related discourse of Heimatschutz in Germany and its foremost settler colony. Beyond well-known architects such as Paul Schultze-Naumburg, these include scientists and academics, colonial administrators, local builders, and state engineers. As such, the paper traces hitherto unexplored relations between German colonialism, agricultural modernization, and the development of modern architecture.



Villa of Dr. G. Fock, ca. 1912, Okahandja, Namibia (2014)



Illustration from Paul Fischer, *Ansiedlungsbauten in den Provinzen Posen und Westpreußen* (1904).

Website for the 2016 Conference: http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/global_regionalism