

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON SHARED BUILT HERITAGE

The “Cliff Block” in Tanga, Tanzania

History

The “Cliff Block” as former governmental hospital of Tanga in Tanzania, featuring a tropical architectural style with Arabian motifs typical of the former colony “Deutsch-Ostafrika”, was built according to designs of the former government architect, imperial senior civil servant and government building officer Friedrich Gurlitt. It is a massive construction of coral limestone with clay mortar and was finished on April 1, 1903 after a three-year construction period.

After the end of the German colonial rule, some replacements were carried out. However, since the British withdrawal in 1961, scant investments have been made for the maintenance of the building. Therefore, the building is still in need of rehabilitation. Until the year 2000, the building on the Bombo hospital ground, a regional clinic with 600 patients per day, was used as a hospital.

The “Cliff Block” features the following technical data:

Construction type:

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Walls: | rubble stone masonry |
| Ceilings: | Prussian cap ceilings |
| Roof: | double pitch roof, hipped with triangle dormer |
| Foundation: | plane, strip footing |

Materials:

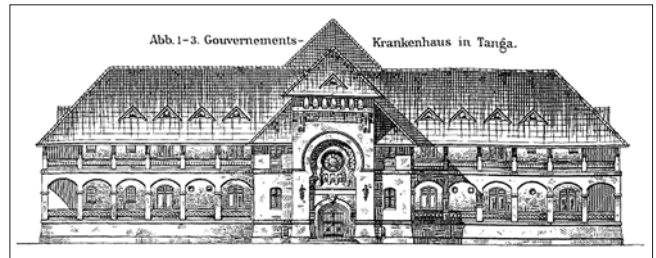
| | |
|----------------|--|
| Walls: | coral limestone, clay mortar, loam plaster |
| Ceilings: | moulded iron beams with arched caps of coral limestone |
| Facing: | tiles |
| Roof: | domestic hardwoods, covering of bricks |
| Windows/doors: | domestic timber |

Robert Koch and the “Cliff Block”

Robert Koch, Nobel Prize laureate of 1905 and until today a highly respected scientist worldwide, spent some time at the government hospital in Tanga during the years 1906 and 1907, in order to advance his research in the fields of malaria and sleeping sickness. The “Cliff Block” was the only hospital in Africa where Robert Koch worked.

The Present

In 2015, Interplast Germany, section Rastatt, travelled to Tanga together with two German engineers in order to evaluate the state of conservation of the abandoned building, to develop repair strategies and get a rough estimate of the costs for the revitalisation.



Cliff Block, contemporary drawing showing the original facade



Oriel window at the rear side

Together with the authorities and the clinic management on site, they worked out concepts for the utilisation of the “Cliff Block” and made joint suggestions for its realisation. Both engineers profited from the fact that comprehensive information about the state of conservation and the construction as well as an analysis of the damages and materials of the “Cliff Block” already existed.

In 2006, two students travelled to Tanga in order to prepare their diploma thesis about the prospects for a rehabilitation of



Front view

the “Cliff Block”. Engineers Ralph Egermann and Ralf Heuer now use this thesis as a basis for a further restoration of the hospital.

During the Tanga campaign in 2015, the building was thoroughly examined and compared with the condition in 2006: the building’s overall condition has not dramatically declined in the past few years so that a rehabilitation has been considered to be possible from the technical point of view.

The plastered walls of coral limestone are stable and very resistant. The walls show no serious structural damages; thus the stability is not at risk. In many areas, the roof bearing structure has been destroyed by insect damage, so that it needs to be renewed. Furthermore, the natural ventilation of the rooms, which ensures an air exchange inside and keeps the rooms cool in the summer, must be restored. The building equipment must be renewed completely.



Narrow side of the building



Operation theatre

The Future

After the completion of the planned restoration works, which in case of an unsecured funding could be in 2020, the building should once again be used as a hospital. The old operation theatre could be reactivated and a number of further practices could cover the increasing medical needs of the region. Hence the rehabilitation of the “Cliff Block” would be a fundamental contribution

to the development assistance in the region and at the same time would help to preserve German architecture of the early 20th century in Africa.

If it not possible to repair the “Cliff Block” and find an adequate use in the near future, this beautiful building will be lost sooner or later. This type of loss can already be seen at the old Boma near the “Cliff Block”, where apart from some foundation walls the building has already disappeared.

Ralf Heuer