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NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

An account of non-Christian architecture in Australia should begin with the ritual spaces of Indigenous Australia, whose complex belief systems vastly pre-date the structures of organised religion. This subject is discussed in the entry on Aboriginal architecture. The earliest contact between non-Christian peoples and Australians dates from long before European settlement. Sailors from what is now Indonesia were fishing off Australia's north coast, trading with local Aboriginal people and engaging in informal exchanges of language and technology. It is not known whether they imparted any architecture. The following account outlines Australia's main religious traditions outside of Christianity, and post European settlement.

The architecture of Islam in Australia

The earliest examples of Islamic architecture in Australia date from the 19th century, with the expansion of white settlement into the continent's interior. Afghan camel drivers started arriving, the first in 1860 to be part of Burke and Wills's expedition. Australia's oldest mosques date from this period. (It should be noted that 'Afghan' was a broadly used term, and many of these settlers were actually from Pakistan or India, and not all Muslim.) Because of the nature of early Muslim settlement, many of Australia's first mosques were in remote locations. In 1910 the Department of External Affairs determined that there were 11 mosques, all in SA or WA except for one in Qld and one in Broken Hill, NSW (which at the time was considered to be part of SA). The mosque in Marree, SA (1861) is reputed to be the first, and though it was demolished, a replica has recently been constructed as part of a historic 'Ghantown' district. It is a simple earth construction of mud walling with a timber-framed gabled roof. The other early Muslim community in Australia comprised the Javanese settlers in Mackay, Qld. Contemporary reports state that these imported indentured labourers had 'a Muslim church' (a mosque), but this has not survived.

The oldest extant mosque is the Adelaide Mosque (1888), though its four minarets were added in 1903. Located in the main port of entry into central Australia, this was for many years the largest mosque in the country, and was the focus for Muslims across outback Australia in the late 19th century, especially for important celebrations such as Eid ul Fitr, the commemoration of the end of the fasting month of...
Ramadan. Constructed of bluestone, it combines Islamic and Victorian-era architecture. The mosque is still in use, and in 2008 Adelaide City Council undertook to restore its minarets.

The majority of Australia's contemporary mosques date from the waves of immigration following WWII. These more recent Muslim settlers have come from a number of nations, including Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Albania, Bosnia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran and again, recently, Afghanistan. This diversity is reflected in the variety of traditions seen in Australian mosque architecture. The largest concentration of Muslim Australians is in western Sydney, where the Lebanese Muslim Association used a converted house in Lakemba as a mosque in the early 1960s. This was later developed as Imam Ali Mosque (or the Lakemba mosque) in 1977. Most Australian Muslims are Sunni, though there are small Shia communities with their own mosques. Founded in 1983, the al-Zahra mosque in the Sydney suburb of Arncliffe is Australia's first Shia mosque.

In formal terms, many of Australia's contemporary mosques have been influenced by the architectural traditions of the various immigrant cultures. The largest mosque in Vic., the Cypriot Turkish Mosque and Community Centre, designed by architect Max Chester, alludes to Anatolian mosque design, in particular the Ottoman ulucami, or 'great mosque', in the rectilinear arrangement of its domed roofs. The most specific aspect of this is the way in which the central dome is supported via the half-domes to a square structure, originally an innovation of the great Ottoman architect Sinan. Of similar design is the Auburn Gallipoli mosque, Sydney (1999) by architect Omer Kirazoglu.

The architecture of Chinese religions in Australia
Chinese religious buildings have been constructed in Australia since the mid-19th century. Based on a syncretic belief system, incorporating Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and ancestor worship, Chinese temples, known as 'joss houses', were established in many goldmining towns and other places of Chinese settlement. The temple in Bendigo, Vic. is a well-preserved example. Constructed in the 1860s, the building is divided into three pavilions and devoted to Guan-Di, God of Wealth. Guan-Di was a popular deity, also worshipped in Australia's largest Chinese temples, the Sze Yup Temples in South Melbourne and Glebe (Sydney). These temples were constructed by the Sze Yup 'Four Counties' society, the name referring to the area of Guangdong from which the settlers originated. The South Melbourne temple (1866), by architect George Wharton, has a tripartite layout like the Bendigo temple, though in a mixed Chinese-Neoclassical style.

Due to the intervention of the White Australia Policy and other restrictive legislation, there was little Chinese immigration from Federation until the mid-1970s. Since this time, increasing numbers have arrived, first mostly from the diasporic Chinese communities of Southeast Asia, and more recently again from China itself. These more recent immigrants are more likely to be Buddhist (or Christian), but the syncretic nature of Chinese belief systems means that many of Australia's Victorian-era temples are still in use.

The architecture of Buddhism in Australia
While there are traces of Mahayana Buddhism in the Chinese temples of colonial Australia, most notably in the presence of the deity Guan Yin (an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokesvara), the earliest Australian Buddhist temple was one constructed by Sinhalese pearlers on Thursday Island around the end of the 19th century. At this time the local Sinhalese Buddhist community numbered around 500. As well as building the temple (no longer extant), they planted two bodhi trees (*Ficus religiosa*, a species of fig), traditionally considered to be descendants of the tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment. These early Buddhists dwindled in number in the early 20th century, though in Broome, WA and Darwin, NT, pearling was taken up by Japanese who managed to stay on and practise their own Shinto/Buddhist traditions until 1941.

Between Federation and the relaxation of the White Australia Policy, the main impetus for Australian Buddhism came from Western Buddhists. The earliest group of Western Buddhists was the Little Circle of the Dharma, founded in Melbourne in 1925. In 1952 the Buddhist Society of NSW was founded (the oldest extant Australian Buddhist organisation) and they established the country's first Buddhist monastery in the Blue Mountains in NSW in 1971. These buildings were modest in scale and understated in architectural expression, using natural materials and Australian neo-vernacular typology, rather than drawing on any Asian temple tradition.

The arrival of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s and 1980s led to the first instances of buildings derived from Buddhist architectural traditions being constructed in Australia. Early examples were generally converted residences. The Chua Phước Tôn in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond was converted from a Victorian-era cottage and functions as both a residence for its abbot (in the two front rooms), worship (in the central former living area) and space for community celebrations (in the former backyard).
Most large cities now have purpose-built Vietnamese чiựa (temples). The Chía Quán Minh in Braybrook, Vic. is an interesting example that blends an Australian suburban homestead typography with that of a Vietnamese pavilion. Rectangular in plan, its walls are brick, its hip-gabled roof is tiled and it is flanked by rows of solid timber verandah posts. However, the roof eaves are upturned at the corners, and the verandah posts rest on bases moulded to form lotus flowers. Outside, overlooking the nearby Maribyrnong River valley, is a large statue of the bodhisattva Quan Am (the same figure as Guan Yin in Chinese temples).

Vietnamese temples are generally in the Mahayan tradition. However, since the 1980s there have been numbers of Theravada Buddhists of various traditions, with increasing migration from Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. A Sri Lankan example is the Dhamma Sarana vihara (temple/monastery) in Keysborough in Melbourne’s outer south-east. The building (2001) is formally composed as two connected pavilions. The front pavilion, octagonal in plan, contains the shrine with a seated Buddha figure as the altar centrepiece. This is the space for puja (worship) and vandana (meditation). Next to the building is the bodhi-garba, a small timber-framed and shadecloth-covered enclosure surrounding a bodhi-tree and a white stupa, a hemispherical reliquary mound and symbol of the Buddhist cosmos.

In contrast, the Wat Buddharangsi is a temple and community centre for the nearby Cambodian-Australian community. Its main building is an assembly hall, with a tiered gabled roof in the contemporary Khmer idiom. The gables are distinguished at their apexes by sinuous gold-coloured mythological snake-figures that perform a protective role in the Cambodian Buddhist tradition. The largest Buddhist temple in Australia (and Southern Hemisphere) is the Nan Tien Temple near Wollongong, southern NSW (2001). It is traditional in style, derived from Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. The development of Sikh architecture has followed a similar pattern in Australia’s cities, though it also has an interesting rural history. There were a number of Indian workers labouring on Australia’s sugar and banana plantations in the late 19th century. Many of these were Punjabi Sikhs, and some managed to stay in the country through the early 20th century. By the 1960s the town of Woolgoolga on the NSW north coast had become a local centre for this Sikh population, and Australia’s first and second gurdwaras (Sikh temples) were constructed there in 1968 and 1969. These buildings, which have been successively altered and enlarged, are contemporary adaptations of Sikh traditional buildings, whose onion domes, cbhatri balconies and scalloped arches, show the influences of Indo-Islamic architecture.

The architecture of Judaism in Australia
The synagogue has always been the place of assembly for prayer and study. (‘Synagogue’ is Greek for the Hebrew Bet HaKnesset, house of gathering.) Because of the insecurities of Jewish experience, grand synagogues generally stood only in major cities (in Australia in Melbourne and Sydney) where Jewish life came to appreciate some permanence, while other places (often country communities) had small, sometimes makeshift shibels (conventicles). The Jewish community in Australia numbers about 120,000 (2001 census). Melbourne has the largest community in Australia, followed by Sydney and Perth, with smaller communities in Adelaide, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Canberra, the South Coast and in Hobart and Launceston, Tas.

Hobart has the oldest synagogue building in Australia: the building (1843) was designed in the Egyptian Revival style by James Alexander Thomson, a Scot transported in 1825. A synagogue, also in the Egyptian style, was built in Rundle Street, Adelaide and opened in August 1850, but does not survive. Three well-established synagogues emerged in Melbourne: the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation (1844), the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation (1857) and the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation (1871). While Jews had their own liturgical requirements, synagogues differed little from nonconformist Christian churches, as they were otherwise culturally British in their immediate origins and their architects tended not to be Jewish. While earlier buildings held allegiance to the Renaissance, or specific classical precedents, the present East Melbourne synagogue, designed by Crouch & Wilson (1877), is in an eclectic Renaissance Revival style.

The Great Synagogue in Sydney dates from 1878, though the congregation was established in the 1820s. Architecturally it proclaims a Byzantine heritage, has allegiances to the architecture of early Christian basilicas, and features a rose window in a Gothic arch between twin towers and domes at the front. The cultural make-up of the Jewish population did not change dramatically until the arrival of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Europe in 1938–9. The further influx of Holocaust survivors after WWII revitalised Australian Jewish communities and led to the establishment of a large number of suburban synagogues. Further waves of immigrants from Hungary in the mid-1950s, and from South Africa, Russia and Israel in the 1970s and 1980s have continued to enrich the population. The Perth Hebrew Congregation (established in 1892) moved from...
The Great Synagogue, Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW (c1910). Architect: Thomas Rowe. Source: State Library of NSW.

Northbridge to Menora in the 1970s and during the 1980s the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation built a new synagogue in Glenside after 140 years of worship at Rundle Street. Architecturally it appears as a Postmodern interpretation of a traditional centralised building.

What is evident, in looking at the architecture of Australia’s non-Christian communities, is that most derive their form and detail from particular ethnic and regional traditions, correlating with the places of origin of their instigators and users (Jews being the exception). However, adaptations have been made: the first physical, involving the necessary employment of Australian materials and construction techniques; and the second spatial, through the different social and cultural conditions that diasporic communities create and negotiate. This adaptation and negotiation is, of course, an ongoing process and it is inevitable that this multitude of architectural traditions will be the exception). However, adaptations have been made: the first physical, involving the necessary employment of Australian materials and construction techniques; and the second spatial, through the different social and cultural conditions that diasporic communities create and negotiate. This adaptation and negotiation is, of course, an ongoing process and it is inevitable that this multitude of architectural traditions will

The enduring remnant: the first 750 years of the penal settlement (1788–1814) at Kingston and the earlier Polynesian settlement on Norfolk Island was abandoned in 1814. Numerous sketches of the first settlement buildings held in London and on Cockatoo Island. Kingston today retains the isolated setting that is evident in the views of the wreck of "Sirius" painted in 1790.

The penal settlement had been established with the aim of supplying masts, sails and rope for the Royal Navy, but the Norfolk Island pine proved unsuitable for mast or building timber and the plan to establish an industry producing linen from flax founded. The Maori had been observed producing linen and two tribesmen were kidnapped and taken to Norfolk Island to impart information on this subject. However, weaving was women’s work, of which the men claimed to have no knowledge. The pair were returned to New Zealand and their accounts of agriculture and building techniques inspired other Maori to travel to Sydney to inspect previously unknown techniques.

To deter other foreign settlers, all of the buildings at Kingston visible from the sea were destroyed when the settlement on Norfolk Island was abandoned in 1814. Numerous sketches of the first settlement buildings held in London and in Australia show the character of the fledgling settlement. The modest buildings resemble rural English cottages, most with a central door flanked by two windows. The most substantial building was the Commandant’s Residence, constructed for Captain Foveaux in 1802 on a rise overlooking the settlement. The present Government House incorporates ruins of Foveaux’s house, rebuilt after the settlement was reopened in 1825.

NORFOLK ISLAND

NORFOLK Island has a diverse architectural history. The archaeological record provides a wealth of information regarding the location and construction of the buildings of the first penal settlement (1788–1814) at Kingston and the earlier Polynesian settlements in Emily Bay. The local calcarenite stone, a form of limestone, was utilised as a building material and to produce building lime. A number of English vernacular building techniques, such as wattling, were adapted to suit the locally available materials. Lime kilns were built in the cliffs near Emily Bay and the convicts quarried building and drip stone. Used to purify water for drinking, drip stones were carved from calcarenite quarried from the ‘wet quarry’ on the reef. A number were exported to Sydney and examples can still be found at Elizabeth Farm and on Cockatoo Island. Kingston today retains the isolated setting that is evident in the views of the wreck of the Sirius painted in 1790.

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E. Adam and P.J. Hughes, The Buddhists in Australia, 1996.

M. Chester, 'Mosque and Community Centre project. Cyprus Turkish Islamic community', Architect, Vic., June 1996.