

Fabrications

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Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice

by John H. Stubbs, William Chapman, Julia Gatley and Ross King, New York, Routledge, 2024, 592 pp., AU\$121.50 (hardback), ISBN 9780367654436

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BOOK REVIEW

Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice, by John H. Stubbs,

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Like the region it surveys, *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands* is vast – an ambitious overview of architectural conservation across an enormous geographical and culturally diverse space. The volume is the latest in the “Time Honored Architectural Conservation Documentation Project” which has generated earlier volumes including the global *Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation* (2009) and regionally focused volumes *Architectural Conservation in Europe and the Americas* (2011), and *Architectural Conservation in Asia* (2017). Like its predecessors, the current volume, edited and primarily authored by John H. Stubbs, William Chapman, Julia Gatley and Ross King, brings together a comprehensive survey of contexts, practice and policies operating in its field today. An additional 60 contributors, including academics and practitioners in archaeology, history, heritage, architecture and environmental planning, bring further expertise and commentary. The result is an invaluable resource.

The volume, spanning almost 600 pages, is divided into three parts. Part I introduces the geographic and cultural contexts of the larger region and conservation practices operating across it. As well as orienting readers, it highlights important themes dealt with throughout the volume. Moreover, it points to the wider relevance of conservation thinking and practice in the Pacific to places elsewhere, on the one hand, by focusing on approaches in cultural landscape conservation including customary management methods and, on the other, regionally based scholarship that has contributed to establishing the field of critical heritage studies. The inseparability of what is typically described as intangible and tangible heritage is also raised as a theme that is carried through subsequent chapters which emphasise the vital importance of supporting the maintenance of cultural memory and practice underpinning architecture. Though not unique to the Pacific, the impacts of colonisation, the Second World War and climate change have been, and continue to be, acutely experienced by the region’s island nations and peoples, generating places and inescapable questions for architectural conservation regionally and globally. Together, these issues (among others) present a compelling case for the region. Part II comprises two lengthy chapters on experiences in architectural conservation in the larger and most populous nations of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, respectively. Part III then brings together chapters on experiences in Hawai’i and the regional island groupings of Micronesia, Melanesia, South Pacific Polynesia and the Pacific polar regions.

The very different geographic and cultural conditions covered by the volume results in variable treatments across individual chapters. However, each comprises a chronological overview of architectural and conservation developments in the respective areas as well as contemporary challenges. Important and influential conservation contexts and projects are also highlighted. The chapter on Australia – the longest in the

volume – opens with the long continuity of Indigenous cultural practices that have modified, constructed and embedded meaning in Australian environments. Despite the community-led World Heritage inscription and conservation management of the Gunditjmara cultural landscape Budj Bim in 2019, threats to Indigenous cultural heritage are highlighted via the destruction of the Junkan Gorge by Rio Tinto in 2020. However, the Australia chapter mostly focuses on colonial and post-colonial urban and architectural history – no doubt valuable to conservation practitioners and students from disciplines other than architecture – interspersed with case studies of urban and architectural conservation projects and rounded out with summary reflections on architectural conservation questions emerging from particular periods. That discussion includes specialist contributions, among them an overview of the writing of Australia ICOMOS's *Burra Charter* (by Bronwyn Hanna, 173–75), the Australian values-based conservation paradigm (by James Lesh, 176–77), and the wider regional impacts of Australian conservation practice via heritage diplomacy (by William Logan, 200–02). Uncle Bryon Powell and David Jones write on the challenge of protecting the spiritual values of the Ankie Youang and Wadawurrung intangible heritage via legislative instruments of the post-colonial state (178–79). More views and voices on the many material and spatial, that is, architectural forms of Indigenous heritage and practices in their conservation in contemporary Australia would have been welcome.

A strength of the volume is the interweaving of architectural and conservation histories and practices. But there is something of an inversion to the format of the Australian chapter in those on Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai'i and the various Pacific Island groupings, wherein urban and architectural histories are more compressed allowing greater emphasis on the evolution of conservation practice, principles and legislation. The Aotearoa New Zealand Chapter concisely outlines historical architectural developments reserving focus for the development of conservation thinking and applications. It includes an overview of the writing of the *New Zealand ICOMOS Charter* (by Bronwyn Hanna, 265–69) as well as substantial contributed sections on the conservation of Māori architecture (by Ellen Andersen, 269–81) and the resilience of Māori culture, buildings and community (by Ambrosia Crum, 282–87). In terms of grasping contexts and conservation approaches and challenges in the various locations, this latter balance in favour of conservation is most constructive for architectural historians and conservationists alike.

The chapters on Hawai'i and the different Pacific Island groupings introduce the wealth of architectural heritage and conservation approaches across the region. They include ancient environmental engineering and architectural structures, such as those of Nan Madol off the south-east coast of Pohnpei, Micronesia (Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2016), and numerous customary architectural traditions and building types. In addition, these chapters introduce the breadth of colonial experiences, involving a variety of European nations and, later on, the United States and Japan, and their built legacies encompassing the full gamut of military, institutional, religious and industrial sites and structures. The fates of many of these structures are varied, at times to do with their materiality. Today some are also prompting contestations concerning the application of western heritage doctrines and processes in contemporary post-colonial situations. Writing on practices in the ongoing use and conservation of nineteenth-century missionary churches in the Cook Islands, Carolyn Hill highlights some the complexities in locally- and community-based place management within traditional social structures of land tenure (518–22). Also documented are some of the sites, buildings and artefacts, on land and at sea,

associated with the Second World War Pacific Theatre, and deeply challenging conservation questions that come with them. In the section on the Marshall Islands, Mia Kaplan provides a brief, but sobering account of the cultural heritage impacts of the United States atomic testing on the Bikini Atoll (and other atolls subsequently) between 1946 and 1958, forcing the displacement of the islands' peoples (432–33). In 2010, the Bikini Atoll nuclear test site was inscribed on the World Heritage List and, as the inscription notes, in this context conservation has particular meaning. It is also complicated by today's rising sea levels threatening the stability of entombed radioactive waste on the atoll. As Kaplan notes, amid an uncertain future the work of historians and cultural heritage practitioners is crucial to preserving Marshallese heritage – tangible and intangible – until the islands are safe for the return of people. Finally, the short chapter on the Pacific's polar regions presents very different environmental settings, structures and conservation efforts and challenges in *extremis*.

Of further interest are the spheres of influence at play in architectural conservation within the region arising from colonial and postcolonial relationships and alliances, especially Europe from the west, in large part via Australia and New Zealand (and their influential heritage charters), and the United States from the east and via Hawai'i. They invite us to contemplate shifting geo-politics of the region and their potential impacts on perception and practice in heritage as we enter a dynamic and unstable future. *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands* is an invaluable reference for students, practitioners and others involved or interested in heritage and conservation in the Pacific region. Extensively illustrated, meticulously footnoted, and carefully cross-referenced it presents a firm foundation in the region's cultures of architectural conservation and entices to further explore this evolving field of practices.

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