GREEK COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA

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SUMMARY

The thesis analyses the history of Greek ethnic communities in Australia from the 1890's to the present. During the intervening period important changes took place: Australia's Greek population increased from approximately six-seven hundred to over a quarter of a million; each of the Greek communities of Sydney and Melbourne grew from two-three hundred members to tens of thousands; and most of Australia's cities experienced Greek community formation though on a smaller scale than in Sydney and Melbourne.

The process of Greek community formation was born of many forces which are to be found in both the country of origin and settlement. Some of these are outlined in Chapter I which gives the background of Greek immigrants and defines the field to be investigated. Greek migration occurs largely through the process of chain migration, a movement of relatives and friends towards their successful sponsors in Australia. Under favourable conditions the consequent chain settlements may grow rapidly and coalesce into ethnic communities. When communities grow sufficiently large the settlers combine formally into social organisations because of the need to practice and preserve their native culture, to help one another, and to assist their cherished former fatherland. This has always been the way of the Greeks who lived abroad.
The Greek communities which had formed by 1923 (and which are traced in Chapter II) grew slowly and were small. The main chain settlements served from the three small islands of Kythira, Ithaca and Kastelorizo. Most immigrants were males and many had taken readily to the catering trades. Despite their small size each of the four main ethnic communities of Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane was assuming the normal structural form. This included a Greek Orthodox Community (the principal immigrant organisation) embodying and practising through its church school and other agencies much of the national culture; one or more chain settlements and the formation of district, island or regional fraternities; pan-Hellenic societies to satisfy a variety of needs; numerous coffee-houses, representing a favourite pastime and domain of males; a consulate and even a Greek newspaper.

After 1926 the fragmentation of ethnic communities into organised groups increased, due to a greater influx of immigrants, resulting in new chain settlements, and because of the institution of a Greek Orthodox Church diocese, at the head of which was an uninvited bishop. Earlier the elected councils of Communities decided questions of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and authority over their churches. After 1926 this right was assumed and enforced
by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, Turkey, though
not without considerable opposition particularly from the
dominant groups, the Kytherans in Sydney and the Ithacans in
Melbourne. The consequent religious schisms, analysed in
Chapter III, plagued ethnic communities for a whole decade.

The 1920's, discussed in Chapter IV, witnessed a
comparatively settled period: there was no great influx of
Greek immigrants; a new bishop did much to restore faith
in the church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Greek
Orthodox Communities grew in size, prestige and authority,
uniting ethnic communities and immigrant organisations
along pan-Hellenic lines.

The 1940's, discussed in Chapter V, saw some
important changes. The united and proud communities of
the war period became divided politically after the war.
The entry of Greeks into factories and other unionized
industries from which they had been noticeably absent in
the pre-war period was also significant as it paved the
way for the post-war immigrants from Cyprus and Greece to
enter industry and contributed to the growth and diversif-
ication of communities.

Much more significant were the changes wrought
by the new and larger migration chains unleashed by Common-
wealth assistance to Greek immigration after 1952 and which are
dealt with in Chapter VI. With the rapid growth of existing
communities and the formation of new ones came a new church
system which underlined the power of the old Greek Orthodox
Communities. Post-war migration also brought some important
changes in the structure of the larger ethnic communities, an
intensification of ethnic community organisational fragmenta-
tion and further political, cultural and social divisions.

All of these changes culminated into a great schism
among Australia's Greeks which is the subject of Chapter VII.
Although the schism took a religious form the issues were more
pragmatic: the rights and prerogatives of the Community
institution and those of the Orthodox Church and clergyman;
the ideological division of post-war Greeks which also
reflected those of the world at large, and the conflicting
interests of organised groups and social classes.

Somewhat similar schisms and conflicts though on a
smaller scale had occurred in previous decades. These, too,
stemmed from numerous causes not least of which was the effect
of the forces of Australisation on Greek immigrants.
Although the study of ethnic communities was simultaneously
a study of Greek immigrant assimilation these two interrelated
questions are discussed more specifically in Chapter VIII.