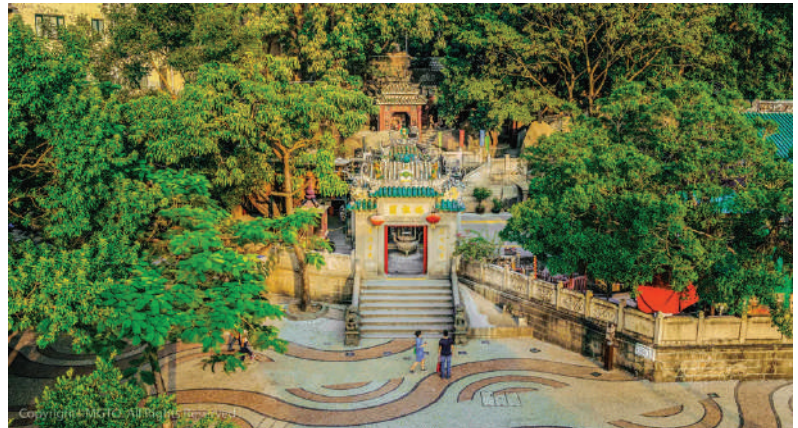


A MA TEMPLE



CONSTRUCTION

MATERIALS & SYSTEMS

The construction of the A-Ma Temple stands as a powerful demonstration to the sophisticated traditional Chinese architectural and artisan skills during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The primary skill was traditional Chinese carpentry, centered on an intricate timber framing system. Master carpenters have an advanced understanding of interlocking wooden joints, primarily the mortise-and-tenon technique, to create the main load-bearing structures without relying on modern nails or fasteners. This required precise measurement and cutting to ensure both stability and flexibility, especially against Macau's humid climate. This framework was often crowned by the dougong bracket system, an intricate network of interlocking wooden brackets that skillfully transferred the weight of the heavy roofs down to the wooden columns. The choice of wood was itself a specialized skill, involving the selection of durable timbers like camphor and their treatment for longevity. Complementing this wooden skeleton is the masonry and stone work. Artisans utilized local granite to build robust foundations, walls, and paving, with highly skilled stone carvers embellishing gates, columns, and cliff faces with ornate depictions of dragons, floral motifs, and inscriptions, often integrating the natural rock formations of Barra Hill directly into the temple's design.

The temple's iconic silhouette is defined by its roofing, requiring its own set of specialized knowledge. Craftsmen needed to know how to construct the large, overhanging, and curved roofs, which involved careful structural support and layering of ceramic tiles. This included the installation of vibrant green glazed tiles and the placement of decorative, sculpted figures along the roof ridges. Finally, artisans crafted detailed plaster reliefs depicting mythological scenes. Skilled painters applied vibrant, protective lacquer and traditional mineral pigments like cinnabar and lead white to the wooden elements, creating durable and symbolic designs.

WORKERS & SKILLS

The origins of the A-Ma Temple date back to 1488, when it was founded by the local fishing and seafaring community. Initially, the complex consisted of just the Hall of Benevolence. Although no historical records confirm the builders, it is widely held that the fishermen acted as patrons, funding the project rather than performing the specialized construction themselves. The intricate woodwork, masonry, sculpture, and painting would have required the skills of professional artisans. The fishermen likely contributed basic labor, utilizing their practical craftsmanship from boat repair, resulting in a true community effort.

The temple expanded over the centuries. A prayer hall was added in 1605, funded jointly by the government and locals. The most significant development came in 1828 with a major restoration that introduced new structures, including the Hall of Guan Yin and the Zhengjiao Chanlin.

BUILDING

Author: No record

Date: 1488

Location: Macau

Promoter / Owner: Government

Contractor: Not a standard Practise during that time

Funding / Cost: No Record

Function: Temple

Area: Largo do Pagode da Barra

Current state: Temple

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nestled on the slopes of Barra Hill, the A-Ma Temple built in 1488, during the Ming dynasty is the oldest temple in Macao. This temple honors A-Ma (also known as Mazu or Tin Hau), the goddess of seafarers and fishermen. Legends says that a humble girl, through a miraculous display of power, saved a fishing boat from a catastrophic storm. Upon reaching the shore, she ascended Barra Hill, and revealed she was the goddess herself, inspiring the locals to build a temple in her name.

The temple is not only a spiritual centre but also the very source of Maca's name. When the Portuguese explorers first arrived during the mid-16th century, they landed near the temple and asked for the name of the place which caused a misunderstanding between the locals and Portuguese sailors. The locals most likely thought the Portuguese were asking for the name of the temple nearby, and replied with "A-Ma-Gau" or "Maa-gok". The Portuguese, unfamiliar with the Chinese language, heard this and adopted it as the name for the territory, which became "Macau".

A MA TEMPLE

