

## Prologue: Introduction to the Problem

The emotional and political extremes associated over the past 150 years with the Southern Italian city of Matera and its controversial cave quarters, called the *Sassi*, flavor the following two descriptions of the city published at roughly the same time in nationally distributed journals. The fact that the former is a travel journal and the latter is a newspaper, both having political leanings, informs the divergent portrayals of the city.

“A Semi-subterranean City” by Carmelo Colamonico in *Le Vie d’Italia* (April 1927):

... the houses follow one after another from top to bottom without any preordained arrangement, so numerous and reaching such heights that observed from the front ... they offer a wonderfully fantastic vista that enjoyed once, one never forgets. ... It is a confused and alternating succession of doors and windows of every type and dimension, of bell towers, of verandas, of small towers with terraces, and of flights of steps that are often attached to houses to permit access to houses built into the rock above. It is a continuous variety of light and shade, a picturesque game of color, a medley of streets, parapets, arches, window sills, gables, balconies, corbels, and galleries in which it is useless to seek symmetry, alignment, or order whatsoever. ... In this very beautiful and varied frame, human activity adds an even more beautiful tune ... . On these tortuous streets that climb in all directions, one sees peasants on asses and mules returning from distant fields and descending slippery steps at the hour of vespers. On the terraces, working women hang out clean washing from gable to gable, the people mount and descend the innumerable steps, and children chase each other, shriek, and wrestle in the streets and courtyards. In the street, people quarrel, laugh, shout, work, and sing. ... The scene is so rich and varied and is lit so differently by the sun at various times of day, that it holds your interest always captive, and the eye never tires. If observing the spectacle in the ... early evening, the effect is even more surprising: hundreds and hundreds of windows illuminate along the curved form that opens before you in many layers. One admires the continuous appearance and disappearance of lights, the profiles of human bodies in the illuminated windows, and the distant buzz that grows feeble with the advance of evening as one house after another drops into obscurity.<sup>1</sup>



P.1 The Sassi at night, described by centuries of visitors as resembling a “starry sky”

“The Horrible Sassi of Matera” by Salvatore Aponte in *Corriere della Sera* (1930):

He who would like to understand the atrocity of some of the heritage harvested by Fascism in the *Mezzogiorno* [Southern Italy] should come to Matera. Do you know what the “Sassi” of Matera are? Traveling today through our adored Italy, it is shocking to come across a spectacle such as this. Here, not in houses but in caves carved from the tufo of a mountain lie the other two-thirds of the population.<sup>2</sup>

The author proceeds to berate Fascism for not having done more to clear out these “tenacious incrustations.” After this, however, he enumerates the many progressive acts that this regime was conducting here at the time and the plan for total evacuation of the caves. Ending on an optimistic note, he writes: “Tourism? And why not? Matera is one of our most picturesque centers. Within a few years, it will be shown to visitors without making them blush: a very interesting troglodyte city finally no longer inhabited by polite human beings.”

The lively peasant town described in the first passage ceased to be in the years following the Second World War as a result of the concerns and the plan described in the second passage. I was unaware of Matera’s political history and social struggles, however, when I first encountered its vacated Sassi in 1990. I was enchanted. Here, sculpted into a cliff and innocuously and silently supporting the edge of the remote but bustling, modern city of Matera was a ghost town composed of thousands of part-cave, part-constructed homes, which were nearly all abandoned. Gaping open windows and doors allowed the inner darkness to spill out in contrast to the bright white stone. The skull-like effect increased the image of desolation. The place was deserted save for a few disheveled boys belonging to squatter families and offering to be my guides and a group of avant-garde architects. These resided at the border between the Sassi and the living city, which is located on the flat ridge above the Sassi and called the *Piano* [flat], named in contrast to the precipitous Sassi.



P.2 (above) Peasant residents of the Sassi navigating mule and carts on the road built by Mussolini, 1950; (below) Sassi house interior ca. 1930–50 with chickens and mule next to bed. By the twentieth century, sharing a roof with farm animals was defined as “promiscuous.”



Though devoid of life and littered with refuse, the extraordinary and energetic stone formations infused with human creativity and vestiges of life were welcoming to the wanderer. I spent hours here climbing, sketching, and feeling at one with both nature and humanity in this organic architecture woven into and out of the living stone. The sense of peace was incongruously haunting, however, as if this were the abandoned site of an ancient battle. Little did I know how close to the truth this was—and that the conquest continues.

In his poem, “*Statue di Pietre*” [Statues of Stones], Mario Trufelli portrays a similar impression of the Sassi in 1959 when the evacuations were in full tilt.



P.3 Abandoned  
Sassi structures,  
1990

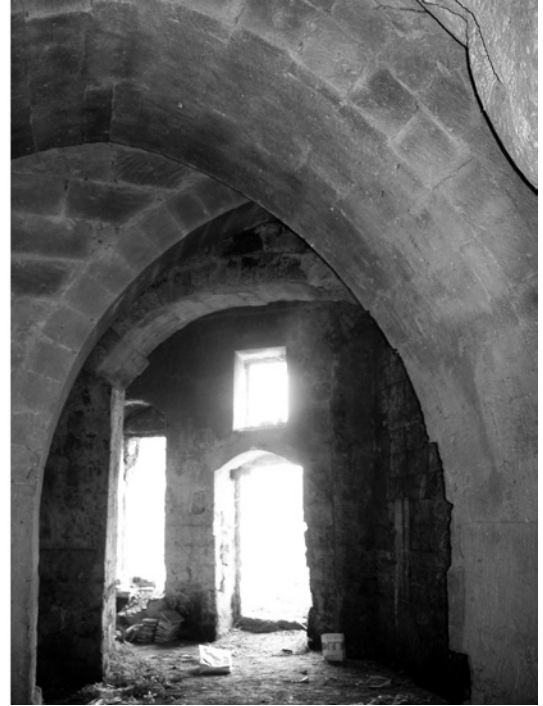
*Bevono il sole i pini di Matera  
al di là dei palazzi di tufo.  
Desolati i Sassi alla Gravina  
sono statue di pietra crocifisse  
ad una sola croce  
e si danno sommessi la voce  
d'una strana paura che rovina  
ai fossati spaventosi.*<sup>3</sup>

[The pine trees of Matera drink the sun  
beyond the palaces of tufo.  
Desolated, the Sassi of the Gravina  
are statues of stone crucified  
to a single cross  
and give a subdued voice  
to the strange fear that brings ruin  
to the frightening cavities.]

Also writing in Matera at this time, American poet Cid Corman describes the Sassi and the peasantry they contained as “honeycombed huts of stone,” a “prehistoric slum,” and “a world conspicuously futile.”<sup>4</sup>

Shaped by encrusted layers of development spanning millennia, Matera is the ultimate palimpsest, in both the additive and subtractive senses of the word. In the soft limestone walls of the ravine into which the ancient city is sculpted, occupiers and invaders have left their marks and constructions. The same malleable character of the stone, however, has allowed successive intruders to erase traces of their predecessors. The resultant menagerie of forms possesses a surprising visual uniformity and an ineffable allure. Visitors are spellbound by the Piranesi-esque sight—despite their preparation through detailed portrayals of the Sassi in growing numbers of tourist accounts and guidebooks, and despite their dramatic representations in films (for example,





as the setting of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*). Except for two stunning panoramic views (one of them remotely located on the southern end of town and the other, though central, only dating to 1997), the cave areas are not visible from public spaces within the functioning city of Matera. This hidden quality increases their perceived remoteness and fascination.

P.4 Abandoned  
Sassi structures,  
2006

Though composed of the same limestone, the intricacy of the Sassi's carved labyrinth contrasts powerfully with the simple and bold outlines of the surrounding barren hills (called the *Murgia*). Contrasts such as this augment the site's sense of tension. Both contrasts and tension infuse its historic and as well as its present social and physical conditions.

Since my first visit, the Sassi have changed significantly as have people's attitudes toward them. Marked by new, green shutters and doors, a majority of the houses have been renovated and are inhabited, looking as alive today, two decades later, as they did dead before. They bear no resemblance, however, to the humble existence described by Colamónico. Four and five-star hotels offer guests the experience of living in caves padded with the comforts of luxury resorts. Bars and restaurants line the single paved road that leads through the Sassi, and honking cars jam its passage. The specter of death and decay has largely evaporated. (Figs P.5–6)

The newer city on the Piano, above, has also changed. There, too, new restaurants and elegant boutiques open every year. Arts organizations flourish. The streets of the city pulse with a sense of dynamism and anticipation, and



P.5 Panorama of Sasso Barisano largely restored

residential construction marches unbridled, rapidly stretching the linear city northward and southward along the edge of the canyon. Although the 2008 global economic turndown cost the city jobs, Matera maintains the appearance of prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2008, local bureaucrats and the unemployed have been looking to tourism for economic relief. Until this time, however, credit for the region's prosperity had been given to industrial and agricultural production (despite their relatively small and diminishing importance within the scope of the region's economy) and to such external factors as general global economic growth, government gifts (for example, a new regional hospital as well as southern youth entrepreneurial grants), and European Union development funds. I, on the other hand, posit that since the 1990s, the preservation of the Sassi has contributed and continues to contribute most directly and significantly to changes occurring in the larger city and its surroundings, including increased prosperity. My perception is not generally shared by Materans, however, many of whom see the Sassi as insignificant to the modern city. Physically speaking, the Sassi represent less than 5 percent of the contemporary city's physical limits (29 out of 780 hectares) and currently house less than 3 percent of the population (1,800 out of 61,000 residents).<sup>6</sup> Socially speaking, the Sassi recall decades of abandonment and the insurmountable shame that they provided (and continue to provide) for many citizens. These people enact their disrespect, even today, through use of the Sassi as a dump.

Although the plan for evacuation described by Aponte did take place, his prediction that a thriving tourist market would soon follow did not take place. Beginning in 1950, modernist expansion of the city and emptying of the



caves accompanied wholesale dismissal of the Sassi and rejection of the city's history. The old city was put to rest under a garbage heap and forgotten, and Matera was recast as the model modernist Italian city, an Italian Utopia. This shine faded, however, with the disillusionment of the 1960s. Despite previous periods of fame, Matera spent the next several decades generally unnoticed by the world and known within Italy as a remote, backward, southern capital.<sup>7</sup> Among Italian architects, however, it was a place of pilgrimage to study the 1950s buildings of such notables as Ludovico Quaroni, Giancarlo De Carlo, and Luigi Piccinato.

Although Matera's reputation as a nursery for Neorealist architecture continues to survive in architectural circles,<sup>8</sup> the city's general public image in the last ten years has been eclipsed by a new one—or rather an older one. With the passage of the Sassi preservation law in 1986, the pendulum has swung in the other direction: from new, modernist construction to historic preservation. The story now presented to national and international audiences is of a city of cave structures dating back to the Paleolithic. These vernacular dwellings have been rediscovered and are enthusiastically being refurbished—especially since their 1993 inscription as a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Monument. More than 100 million euros (both public and private) have been invested in this extensive renovation project. Aware of the greater tourist draw that the unique caves have over the mundane and by now drab modernist apartment blocks, the city of Matera actively markets the Sassi, calling itself *Città dei Sassi* [City of

P.6 Renovated interior of Pietro Laureano's house in Sasso Barisano

the Sassi].<sup>9</sup> At least as presented to outsiders, this image trumps its former pride in being the modernist Italian Utopia.

In my perspective, the site exemplifies the contemporary paradox that preservation generates change, influencing the social processes, economy, and politics of a place and its surroundings. As preservation has become a major agenda of local, national, and international agencies and as its object has grown to urban scale, the problem of unanticipated effects and social consequences has intensified. Despite dramatic evidence of this phenomenon worldwide, preservation literature remains myopic. It focuses on: 1) materials conservation and preservation technologies, 2) disciplinary histories and theories, which ask the tired questions of what and why to preserve, 3) building or historic society monographs, 4) legislative and economic guidelines, and, more recently, 5) cultural resources management guidelines that study the relationship between planning and the industries of heritage and tourism that envelop preserved sites. While the recently established preservation journal, *Future Anterior*, is influencing a more critical assessment of the field, broader consequences and societal changes caused by preservation are neither planned for nor studied. With increasing interest in preservation and its institutionalization by governments, these unexpected effects and social consequences are intensifying.

With this book I fill the lacuna through documentation and analysis of physical, economic, and social changes that are associated with Sassi preservation and that are occurring within the Sassi, the larger city, and the surrounding region. I analyze consequences of the city's monumentalization through conservation, renovation, and the establishment of cultural tourism. I approach this study through the documentation and analysis of: impact on local and regional economies; alterations in social relations, local culture, and physical urban fabric; and reformulations of municipal image, collective memory, and perceptions of the city's past.

In addition to contextualizing physically Sassi preservation within these geographic parameters, this study also contextualizes temporally these events within the history of postwar Italy, giving particular attention to Matera's location in the South. It tracks the urban history of the city from the 1950s introduction of modernist architecture to a vernacular city through the present-day preservation of the vernacular city and expansion of the modernist city. Matera's story of urban expansion and preservation extends from city and regional planning policies developing in Italy since its unification in 1870. These, in turn, respond (sometimes in opposition) to the trajectory of urbanism and modernization in other European countries, their colonies, and the United States. Analysis of the urban history of modern Matera brings new light to the relationships between planning policy and politics and between nation building and industrialization as they relate to Italy and its northern neighbors and allies, and as they relate to northern and southern Italy and her colonies.

Through these two correlated analyses—that of contemporary effects of preservation in and around Matera and that of the history of Matera in relation



to late nineteenth and twentieth-century Italian social and urban histories—I show the interdependence of preservation and modernization within the discourse on modernity. My argument illustrates that preservation is not a passive, antiquarian hobby, but like its ally, modernization, it is a powerful tool that can be used to control societies and economies. Contrary to those who define preservation as the benign curatorship of heritage or as a form of communal commemoration, I define it as integral to the political economy of a city or nation. Like such related rhetorical constructs as commemoration and heritage, preservation serves the present and the future. Recalling the words of George Orwell, “Who controls the past controls the future.”<sup>10</sup> As we see in the example of Matera, different groups competing for power wrestle for control of this tool, as well as for control of such correlated concepts as the interpretation of communal history and designation of municipal identity.

Not only does preservation not arrest change—contrary to what the term implies—but it also generates changes. These include physical changes to the object and its broader context as well as social changes between viewers and the object, and beyond the object. The problem with preservation is that the concept and the term mislead: the purpose of preservation is not to curate art and history. Preservation is only activated within the context of city and regional development, even when its initial intent is artistic protection or, less obviously, social control. It therefore needs to be conceived as a branch of planning.

By illustrating the breadth of changes that are occurring in and around Matera as a result of Sassi preservation, I show that an architectural or urban preservation project cannot be circumscribed and controlled in the manner in which a painting is preserved. Through the political and economic events that it motivates, an urban preservation project’s impact extends beyond the geographic limits of the project, regardless of its initiators’ intentions. Stated more crassly, a preservation project often does not generate broad support until it is believed to provide personal gain (in the form of financial or social power). When it acquires this momentum, changes accelerate and emanate ever farther from the source. These consequences are antithetical to the logic of curatorship. The paradox is particularly poignant in the case of UNESCO’s World Heritage list whose stated purpose is to preserve notable sites<sup>11</sup> and yet whose effect is to bring tourism and rapid alteration to these areas.

### Sources and method of research

Canonical preservation texts do not consider the context of the preserved building, apart from a social awareness that appeared in professional literature beginning in the 1980s due to social displacement associated with gentrification.<sup>12</sup> Deviating from the standard, this study expands the object of inquiry to include a site’s surroundings at city and regional scales. Employing an inclusive approach to analyze the Sassi of Matera, I mitigate the site’s

objectification by weaving it back into the social, economic, and political fabric of its setting. I broaden the study of preservation using disciplinary tools of anthropologists and geographers. I invoke, for example, geographer Neil Smith's *The New Urban Frontier*, which analyzes the centrality of the political economy in gentrification, urban renewal, and urban policy.<sup>13</sup>

This study also approaches a similar problem to that of anthropologist Michael Herzfeld in *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town*, which "is about the efforts of the present-day inhabitants of an old but well-preserved town, Rethemnos, to come to terms with the significance that others have foisted on the physical fabric of their homes."<sup>14</sup> As do I, Herzfeld analyzes a Mediterranean town whose architecture reflects a history of rule by numerous political regimes and which is struggling with enforced preservation. Also germane to my work is his discussion of nostalgia's role in realizing communal identities through disputes over ownership of history. Like Herzfeld, I disclose debates over ownership and control of historic properties and urban form, conflicts resulting from clashing interests, the negotiation of identities against the framework of nationalist discourse and tourism, and the impact on local lives from the monumentalization of their homes. Unlike Herzfeld, I am not an anthropologist, and I do not position myself as a participant-observer with "the people," a group portrayed in opposition to "the government." While he develops an ethnography of social practices and interactions among household and kin groups, I consider preservation practices and their differences among social groups. From my perspective as a preservationist, architect, and historian, the role of the political economy is central to the problem of preservation.

To study this issue, I do divide Materan actors into several groups; however, I observe considerable fluidity among them. I have created an ethnography of preservation through extensive discussions with: members of all levels of society and all ages; current and former Sassi residents; government officials and employees; academics; employees and owners of hotels, restaurants, shops, travel agencies, and museums; tour guides; realtors; transportation professionals; architects, engineers, and artisans involved in the preservation of the Sassi; artists; and other members of the community. Adding concrete support to this subjective material, I have collected evidence documenting physical, social, and economic changes inside and outside Matera, including data supplied by various offices of the *Comune* [city government] covering economic growth, demographic statistics, housing permits, commercial permits, city zoning and planning (recent and historic), and Sassi preservation. My professional work as the director of an academic program that collaborates with the state government (*Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici*) in the study and preservation of the Sassi augments my first-hand knowledge of this process.<sup>15</sup> I have also followed city debates over urbanism, tourism, and civic identity and representation as discussed in local and regional newspapers since the mid-1990s. Contributing to the study of tourism development in Matera and recording outsiders' impressions of

the city over the past three centuries are the numerous guidebooks and travel journals that I have catalogued. Finally, since 1998, I have thoroughly photo-documented the Sassi—as they have changed through preservation—and the city—as it has developed.

Other primary materials that I use are treatises (local, national, and international) in architecture, planning, and preservation that influenced the various phases of the city's construction and preservation, in particular the charters developed at *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) conferences.<sup>16</sup> Included in this category is the modernist architectural discourse that I follow from the 1950s forward in Italian professional architectural and planning journals and publications, for example, *Casabella* and *Urbanistica*. I also base my knowledge of the city's history on primary archival and secondary historical materials found in Matera's state archives (*Archivio di Stato di Matera*), in its provincial library (*Biblioteca Provinciale "T. Stigliani"*), and in the Roman library specialized in Southern Italy (*Biblioteca Giustino Fortunato*). I buttress this information with secondary research exploring Southern Italian history, the Southern Question,<sup>17</sup> Italian nationalism, Fascist and postwar urban planning and social policies, Italian and French colonial expansion, modernism, and modernity.

From recent scholarship on the Southern Question, this book draws most notably from the work of Nelson Moe, John Dickie, Jane Schneider, Robert Lumley, and Jonathan Morris.<sup>18</sup> These publications contribute to a revisionist history of the South undertaken especially in the past two decades and reacting, in part, to efforts of the Northern League to alienate Southerners and the South. The surprisingly broad support of this Lombard-Veneto political party's regional separatist policies has led to a rekindling of Southern Question sentiments among Italians and to review of the problem by academics.

As these authors document through literature (academic, political, literary, popular, and tourist), economic data, and land ownership accounts, the Southern Question evolved as an orientalizing discourse that culturally, economically, socially, and politically isolated Southern Italy from the rest of the nation following unification in 1861 (the *Risorgimento*), if not earlier.<sup>19</sup> They challenge the previously accepted belief that the Southern Question resulted from the modernizing and industrializing North's ethnocentric and economic motives for dissociation with the "primitive," "African," "barbarian," agrarian South. These scholars, instead, emphasize the seminal role of Southern intellectuals in this construction, as well as social, political, and economic flaws of the Lombard-led unification process that brought, for example, the demise of the South's functioning socioeconomic system of *latifondismo*.<sup>20</sup> They also expose the complicity of the emergent Northern bourgeoisie, the government's goal of nationalism and its policy of colonization, and, by extension, the nation's construction of Italian and European identity in the rhetorical production of the Southern Question.

Because of Matera's significant position in this national discourse, these studies prove especially useful to me. They generally focus, however, on the genesis of the Southern Question and the causes of its formation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My study introduces the contributions of architects and planners to this discourse and advances the investigation to the 1950s, when the Southern Question was reiterated under different conditions in the post-Fascist, postwar period. I also concentrate on the role of one city in this dialogue and its effects upon that city.

Another body of work that influences my study examines modern European urban planning. This includes the growth and institutionalization of urban planning and sanitary engineering—especially in the context of Fascist, colonial, and postwar urbanisms—and changing conceptualizations of society. In particular the work of Guido Zucconi, Paola Di Biagi, Mia Fuller, Paul Rabinow, Anthony King, Carl Ipsen, Hélène Vacher, Janet Abu-Lughod, David Horn, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, and François Delaporte provide comparable examples to my study of modernization, its relationship to colonization, and the social effects of overlaying “modern” over “premodern” ideologies.<sup>21</sup> These authors describe the planning policies, practices, and laws in place in Italy and France in the decades prior to my study, many of which continued to inform planners of the 1950s. I am especially interested in their discussions of *risanamento* [meaning, variously, land reclamation, urban renewal, renovation, and restoration—as well as its more literal meaning of healing (from re-health)], *bonifica* [a term predating but especially employed under Fascism—and carried out by this regime and its successor—that also means land reclamation, large-scale public works, and urban renewal],<sup>22</sup> and hygiene, all of which dramatically impact Materan urban and social history in the 1950s–70s. Hygiene is particularly important to the stories of preservation, modernization, and colonization, as it was the primary mode of knowledge for nineteenth to twentieth-century social theory. It provides the language, motivation, and excuse for these and other processes and events.

Comparison of Matera to these Italian *bonifica* studies shows the striking resemblance of social and physical planning policies that occurred during the Fascist regime but that were cloaked in republican rhetoric during the postwar period. In fact, I discover that plans carried out in Matera in the 1950s–70s had existed in a slightly different form under the previous regime and been discussed since the turn of the century. It is worth noting that many of the Italian planning professionals defining post-war Italy under the Christian Democrat-led republic were the very same planners at work under prior governments, most notably, the Fascists.

Hélène Vacher explains that the principal importance of colonial infrastructure (roads, railroads, canals, and, ports) is to exploit and export the natural resources of the colony.<sup>23</sup> Matera strays from the colonial model in this regard: having few resources to tap (only grain, labor, and voters/tax-payers), it did not receive these state transportation systems, with the exception of a few roads. (This absence is still resentfully discussed today, especially within the



context of lost tourism revenues.) Like the foreign colony, however, Matera's potential for developing an ancillary tourism industry was recognized, as we saw in Aponte's 1930 article. This in part drove the decision to build the modern city next to the ancient one rather than modernizing it, consciously following the colonial example.<sup>24</sup> In both cases, the formula repeats: 1) an elite element builds new housing outside the old city; 2) the population within the old walled city grows; 3) the old city degrades as the population pauperizes; 4) a discourse on hygiene arrives, and the government systematically displaces people from the old city; 5) the old city becomes a museum conserved for tourism.

Also like the colonial story, Matera lacks ethnographic records of how the displaced people felt about this process while it was occurring. Through contemporary ethnographic research, I have recorded people's memories of their feelings during this event, but, as I will discuss, memory has inherent flaws and does not provide reliable evidence of the past. Their stories would differ, however, from those of foreign colonized people since the Italian government did want to transform Materans from "oriental," "African" southerners into Italians, that is, modern, Western Europeans.

Matera is a fascinating topic of research because it is both an urban renewal project and a colony. The overlap of the two projects resonates beyond their fields and produces fertile ground for comparative study. In addition, Matera provides an example of how the colonial project plays out because it experienced no de-colonization—unlike the foreign colonies. My research, therefore, takes these studies forward.

A subset of this body of work addresses the role of preservation in Italian urbanism including Fascist and colonial urbanism. Scholars contributing to this investigation include Mia Fuller, Roberto Dainotto, and D. Medina Lasansky, as well as Françoise Choay, who broadens the scope to Europe.<sup>25</sup> As do I, these authors explore different governments' service of preservation to achieve political, economic, and ideological goals. They illustrate preservation's role as integral to economic (that is, tourism, real estate, and commercial) development and the resultant objectification of historic centers. I take these studies a step farther by investigating the resounding effects of preservation beyond the conserved site. This broad perspective reinforces even more strongly the relationship between preservation and the political economy.

## Contribution

Through criticism of the field of preservation and broadening of preservation's object of analysis, this work wicks preservation from unreflectivity into dynamic theoretical debate. Profoundly affecting preservation policy, this study arms readers with an understanding of preservation's potential for creating change and its potential use as an implement of control. It also

contributes to architectural history through study of Matera's very rich array of vernacular, preserved, and modernist architectures as well as this city's intricate history of urbanism and Southern Italian urban problems. In addition, the study adds to the significant body of work on modernity by exploring the relationship between preservation and modernization. It is also relevant to discourse on the Southern Question through analysis of a city that has played a critical role in this construction over the past century and through investigation of architects', planners', and preservationists' writings on the South from 1950 to the present. The study also contributes to post-colonial discourse: analyzing the metropole-periphery relationship within the setting of Europe, it updates this scenario by tracking its mature form into the present. Finally, it is perhaps the first Anglophone scholarly work on Materan history and society.

### **Outline of following parts and sections**

Chapters 1–2, respectively, provide descriptions of the physical and social geographies of Matera and its Sassi. The reader's comprehension of the thesis relies upon understanding these intertwined spaces and histories, which have emphatically influenced each other's development.

Chapters 3–6 present the study's historical and field research. Focusing on the period of 1945–52, Chapter 3 provides the intellectual and political context of postwar Italy that leads to evacuation of the caves. This analysis demonstrates how postwar political discourse revolving around Matera builds the essential bridge between the popular media's construction of the Sassi problem and a legal structure that will allow for its solution. Chapter 4 analyzes the playing out of this solution in the 1950s–70s with the modernization of the vernacular city through architectural debates, designs, and constructions. It sets these within the context of postwar European modernism while discussing continuities with previous iterations of modernism. Chapter 5 tracks this history into the present with the polemics and dialogues of the Sassi preservation movement. This, too, is considered in relation to similar trends in Western Europe and the United States (US). Chapter 6 catalogues contemporary physical, social, and economic changes occurring in the Sassi, the city, and the region that relate to Sassi preservation.

Finally, the epilogue considers the previous three historical phases within the broad scope of twentieth-century Western modernity. Through historical and theoretical lenses, it shows preservation to be inextricably tied to the political economy in Matera, as elsewhere. To resolve ideological paradoxes built into this discipline, the work concludes by rethinking preservation and recasting it within the larger field of environmental conservation.

## Notes

- 1 This monthly magazine, *Le Vie d'Italia*, was published by the Touring Club Italiano. This and all translations are mine unless otherwise noted or taken from published English translations.
- 2 Quoted in Pontrandolfi 2002: 24–25. *Tufo* is the local appellation for the two varieties of limestone (*calcarenite* and *calcare*) that compose the hill supporting Matera and the structures defining the city.
- 3 Trufelli 1959: 22. Born near Matera in Tricarico in 1929, Trufelli was a nationally recognized journalist who published this book of poems. The *Gravina* is the canyon—and the river that created it—which defines the edge of the Sassi.
- 4 Corman 1970: no page numbers, but the quoted phrases derive from the poems: “Buona,” “the dignities,” and “the certificate.” Corman was an American poet drawn to Matera in the 1950s. Living and teaching there for a year and a half, he interpreted the changing peasant culture into rhyme. These poems were published as a collection in 1970.
- 5 Despite the obvious expenditure and investment of excess income and steadily rising living standards over the past six decades, Materans consistently describe their situation as one of economic crisis. This may be a general Mezzogiorno lament, but with the closure of several large local factories between 2006 and 2008, this attitude can be understood. Even though 70% of the economy is based in the service sector (largely composed of steady government jobs) with only 5% in agriculture and 25% in industry, the economic identity of the region is one primarily of agriculture and secondarily of industrial production (ISTAT-Basilicata 2009: 124).
- 6 Claudio Montinaro, Ufficio Sassi, personal communication, January 24, 2011. The Ufficio Statistica reports a higher number of Sassi residents (2,298 residents on November 11, 2010). Montinaro explains that this tally includes residents in surrounding neighborhoods.
- 7 Even today, its isolation is mocked as the “Capital of Nowhere,” as seen in Let’s Go, Inc. 2005: 620.
- 8 See, for example, Reichlin 2001, 2002, Casciato 2000.
- 9 This appellation actually dates back to the title of an article by Puccini (1946) from the Communist journal, *Vie Nuove*. The intention of the title was derisive, and it, like such other titles as Capital of Peasant Civilization, was buried along with the Sassi in the 1950s. Even the name Matera became tainted at this time. A person reared in Genoa during the postwar years told me that “Materan” was used as a derogatory term to mean a barbarian, caveman, heathen (Isolina Douglas, personal communication, February 2003).
- 10 Orwell 1949: 204.
- 11 “The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity” (<http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=160>, accessed January 24, 2011).
- 12 For example, Fitch 1982.
- 13 Smith 1996.

- 14 Herzfeld 1991: xi.
- 15 The Arc Boutant Historic Preservation Program has been based in Matera since 1999.
- 16 CIAM was a loose organization of primarily European architects active between 1928 and 1959. The group formalized what is often termed the Modern Movement, the rationalist version of architectural modernism associated with CIAM's leaders, for example, Le Corbusier. It had considerable impact on twentieth century architecture worldwide, especially through dissemination of its *Athens Charter*. Created by UNESCO in 1965, ICOMOS "works for the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places" (<http://www.icomos.org/>, accessed November 12, 2010).
- 17 Resulting from economic and political restructuring of the nation during its unification and industrialization during the nineteenth century and already identified in academic discourse in the 1870s, the conditions producing the Southern Question intensified throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Focused on the economic imbalance between Northern and Southern Italy and the associated, strained, social and political relationships, the discourse was catalyzed by the interwar writings of Antonio Gramsci published after the Second World War. Thought to have been resolved by the late 1970s–early 1980s, political developments since then show that this question continues to haunt the fragile relationship between North and South.
- 18 Moe 2002, Dickie 1999, Schneider 1998, Lumley and Morris 1997. Not being a scholarly work but a passionate best-seller, Aprile (2010) is not invoked in this study, but it popularizes ideas presented by Manfredo Tafuri, which do appear here.
- 19 Marta Petrusiewicz (1998) argues that it began in 1848 among Southern intellectuals. The discrepancy between 1861 and 1870 for the date of Italy's unification comes from the fact that the North and South were unified in 1861, with the exception of the Veneto and Rome, which were annexed in 1866 and 1870, respectively.
- 20 *Latifondismo* was a quasi-feudal, quasi-capitalist system of vast estates [*latifondi* from the Latin, *latifundium*] held by wealthy landowners and worked by peasants. While critics in the late nineteenth century accused this system of being largely responsible for the South's poverty, an interpretation that persisted until recently, Petrusiewicz (1997, 1996) argues for its stability, collective security, socioeconomic symbiosis, and "moral economy." She claims that it was a rational and functional—though socially unequal—mechanism that was misunderstood by Northern economic reformers and that it was a casualty of unification, leading to Southern poverty.
- 21 Zucconi 1999, Di Biagi 2001, Fuller 2004, 2000, 1988, 1996, Rabinow 1989, King 1976, Ipsen 1996, Vacher 1997, Abu-Lughod 1980, Horn 1994, Ben-Ghiat 2001, Delaporte 1986.
- 22 For definitions of *bonifica*, see Ipsen 1996: x and Fuller 2004: 178.
- 23 Vacher 1997: 42, 57.
- 24 As described in later chapters, politics and real estate speculation were other reasons for the decision.
- 25 Fuller 2004, 2000, Dainotto 2003, Lasansky 2004a, 2004b, Choay 1996.