

BOOK REVIEWS

Materan contradictions: architecture, preservation and politics, by Anne Parmly Toxey, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, 380 pp., £75.00, ISBN 978-1-4094-1207-6

The city of Matera in Basilicata was dubbed a national shame in the immediate post-war period and became a symbol of Italy's southern question. This was due to the political, intellectual and media focus on Matera's infamous cave dwellings, or Sassi, which housed an estimated 15,000 people in 1945. Following political and media pressure, the Christian Democrats (DC) passed special legislation for the Sassi in 1952. Its primary aim was to evacuate Matera's cave homes and rehouse their inhabitants in purpose-built agricultural villages and residential quarters. This building work saw the city become a testing ground for post-war town planning theories and emblematic of the DC's efforts to tackle the southern question. The rehousing programme, however, which went on for over two decades, was never fully completed. Matera's labyrinth of cave homes became a ghost town associated with petty crime and used as an illegal rubbish dump. Discussions about what to do with the 29-hectare site ranged from its demolition, to the establishment of an open-air museum. A preservation order was passed in 1986 and the Sassi became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993. As a result, Matera's former slums were rebranded a cultural treasure that needed to be conserved. The 1990s heralded a process of urban regeneration and today the Sassi are a popular tourist destination.

There is a large body of existing literature on Matera's turbulent post-war history, pioneered by local researchers (Pontrandolfi 2002; Raguso 2007; Sacco 1982). Architectural and urban historians have also examined the city in detail (Restucci and Tafuri 1974; Restucci 1991). These studies, however, have primarily concentrated on the period 1945–70. Hitherto there has been little work carried out into the official preservation efforts undertaken at Matera from 1986 onwards. Anne Parmly Toxey looks to fill that gap with her original and beautifully illustrated study. The book's primary aim is to examine the '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' (p. 8). Toxey argues that preservation acts as a catalyst for change to the existing urban morphology, influences collective memory and shapes popular attitudes towards the preserved area's past at local and regional levels. Matera's post-war urban history is used to examine this hypothesis. The methods employed are wide-ranging, ambitious and innovative in the context of previous research on the city. Toxey's study, as the title suggests, is situated in the field of preservation studies and architectural history, but it also draws on methods from urban geography, cultural studies, ethnography and memory studies at different points throughout the text.

The range of primary sources examined is impressive and includes archival material, local and national newspapers, architectural journals and a number of interviews with former Sassi residents, government officials and preservationists. Moreover, the book's scope is extensive. It is divided chronologically into six chapters which trace the city's urban, social and economic development from Italian unification up to the present day. The first two chapters introduce Matera's physical and social geography. They are augmented by photos, illustrations and maps which provide the reader with a sense of Matera's distinctive urban layout and its historical development from medieval times onwards. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Matera's social and urban

history between 1953 and 1970. They examine the complex process of rehousing the Sassi's estimated 15,000 residents in purpose-built agricultural villages and urban neighbourhoods. Toxey expertly situates the rehousing process in the context of national and international debates in contemporary architecture. The two final chapters focus on the preservation of Matera's troglodyte dwellings from 1986 up until the present day. They provide the book's most original contribution to the historiography of post-war Matera, examining the social, urban and economic changes that conservation efforts have generated at local and regional levels. Toxey convincingly argues that attempts to preserve the Sassi have paradoxically resulted in rapid changes to the conserved site's social, urban and economic fabric.

The book's treatment of Italian politics, however, is lacking in depth by comparison to its handling of the themes of architecture and preservation. Toxey presents a reductive image of Italy's complex post-war political topography, and this ultimately restricts her otherwise insightful analysis. For example, she describes the official intervention programme at Matera as a deliberate government strategy of social control in which the DC aimed to 'transform the orientalised peasants who lived a communally sufficient lifestyle ... into Italian citizens and consumers dependent on the state political and economic systems' (pp. 55–56). This contention, however, overestimates the Christian Democrats' political interest in Matera. At a national level, the Sassi rehousing programme was primarily important in the context of political propaganda and the promotion of the governing party's twin reforms for southern Italy: the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and land reform legislation. Rather than a systematic operation, the implementation of Matera's *risanamento* programme was reactive, beset by a lack of coordination, official disagreements and ultimately waning political interest at a national level once the Sassi's value in terms of official propaganda began to fade in the late 1950s. Toxey's analysis, moreover, overlooks the internal rivalries and power struggles within the DC itself as well as the governing party's difficulty in controlling public bodies such as the Puglia-Molise-Lucania land reform board. Instead, the book presents a picture of an all-seeing and all-controlling DC that pursued a coherent strategy of social control in southern Italy. This line of argument draws heavily on architectural historian and PCI member Manfredo Tafuri's ideologically charged 1989 critique of official intervention at Matera and land reform more generally. As a result, the complexities of post-war Italy's political landscape are reduced to an oversimplified, Manichean struggle, with the DC cast as the villains of the piece. The survey of additional primary sources, and the use of a broader range of secondary material, would arguably have provided a more nuanced account of the political complexities which helped to shape Matera's social and urban history post-1945.

Despite these minor criticisms, *Materan Contradictions* makes an important contribution to the study of post-war Matera and the field of preservation studies more generally. In particular, its focus on the wider effects that conservation has had on the city and on popular attitudes towards the Sassi constitutes an innovative and welcome addition to the body of existing scholarship on Matera. Finally, as the first English-language academic study of the Sassi, Toxey's book provides non-Italianists with a solid introduction to Matera's complex post-war history.

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Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944–1968, by Wendy Pojmann, New York, Fordham University Press, 2013, 234 pp., \$35.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8232-4560-4

Italian Women and International Cold War Politics is a detailed analysis of the delicate relationship that tied together Italian feminism and Cold War politics in the immediate postwar period. In particular, Pojmann examines how this relationship influenced the activities of the two main women's organisations in postwar Italy, the Unione delle Donne Italiane (UDI) and the Centro Femminile Italiano (CFI). Her research is certainly welcome, since it not only fills a gap in the international history of the UDI and CIF but also integrates previous studies on international feminism and the interconnection between feminism and international politics (such as those by De Haan, Gabrielli, Scarantino, and Willson).

In particular, Pojmann draws attention to the effects that the process of internalisation of Cold War dynamics had upon the evolution of post-war women's organisations. She argues that the opposing political attitudes that were characterising the Cold War divide fuelled a parallel conflict within the feminist movement. Ideological and political contrasts created a 'feminist conflictuality' which extended from the international level to national association (p. 8). In Italy, this process was further amplified by the intense struggle between the Communists and Christian Democrats. This opposition was to shape and influence the ways and forms of feminist participation in Italian public life.

In line with the widespread tendency after the Second World War whereby 'transnational cooperative efforts among women suffered because of Cold War hostilities', in Italy also the political confrontation of the Cold War produced a shift from a condition of 'alliance' to one of 'competition' among women divided by opposing ideological perspectives (p. 2). This is demonstrated in Pojmann's account by the growing divergence between the UDI, politically close to the Communist Party, and the CIF, which instead represented women united by a common Christian inspiration and whose referent in the political scenario was Christian Democracy. However, Pojmann observes, the unexpected result of this increasing politicisation of the role of feminist associations and their involvement in the Cold War was to transform women into 'visible political actors responding to competing political and religious tendencies' (p. 7).

In the period covered by the book (from the end of World War Two to the outbreak of the protests of 1968) the differences between the two organisations 'proved formidable and insurmountable' (p. 187). The main points of 'ideological disparity' that divided Italian postwar