

1 PIAZZA DUOMO VIEW POINT

We are looking at the town from Largo Duomo, the wide courtyard of the cathedral that occupies the summit of Matera's first urban nucleus.

From this point, it is possible to admire the complex structure and layout of the ancient town and glimpse the monuments that we shall visit: the Sasso Barisano, where, on the right, the monastery of Sant'Agostino stands and, looking slightly to the left, the church of San Pietro Barisano, immersed in a cluster of houses and buildings; in front of us, the three arches looking on to Piazza Vittorio Veneto, surmounted by the facade of the complex of the Annunziata.

On the left, looking carefully, it is possible to also make out the battlements of the Tramontano Castle and the gables of the bell tower of the church of San Francesco.



2

In 1203 Matera was raised, along with Acerenza, to the status of archbishopric and, at the will of archbishop Andrea, the new church was built by 1270, in Apulia Romanesque style, on the highest point of the Civita.



3 CATHEDRAL (EXTERIOR)

*We saw it from
a distance.
Its silhouette
dominates the view
of the town...
and now, here
we are
in front of it.*

The side facade is the one that first attracts our attention.

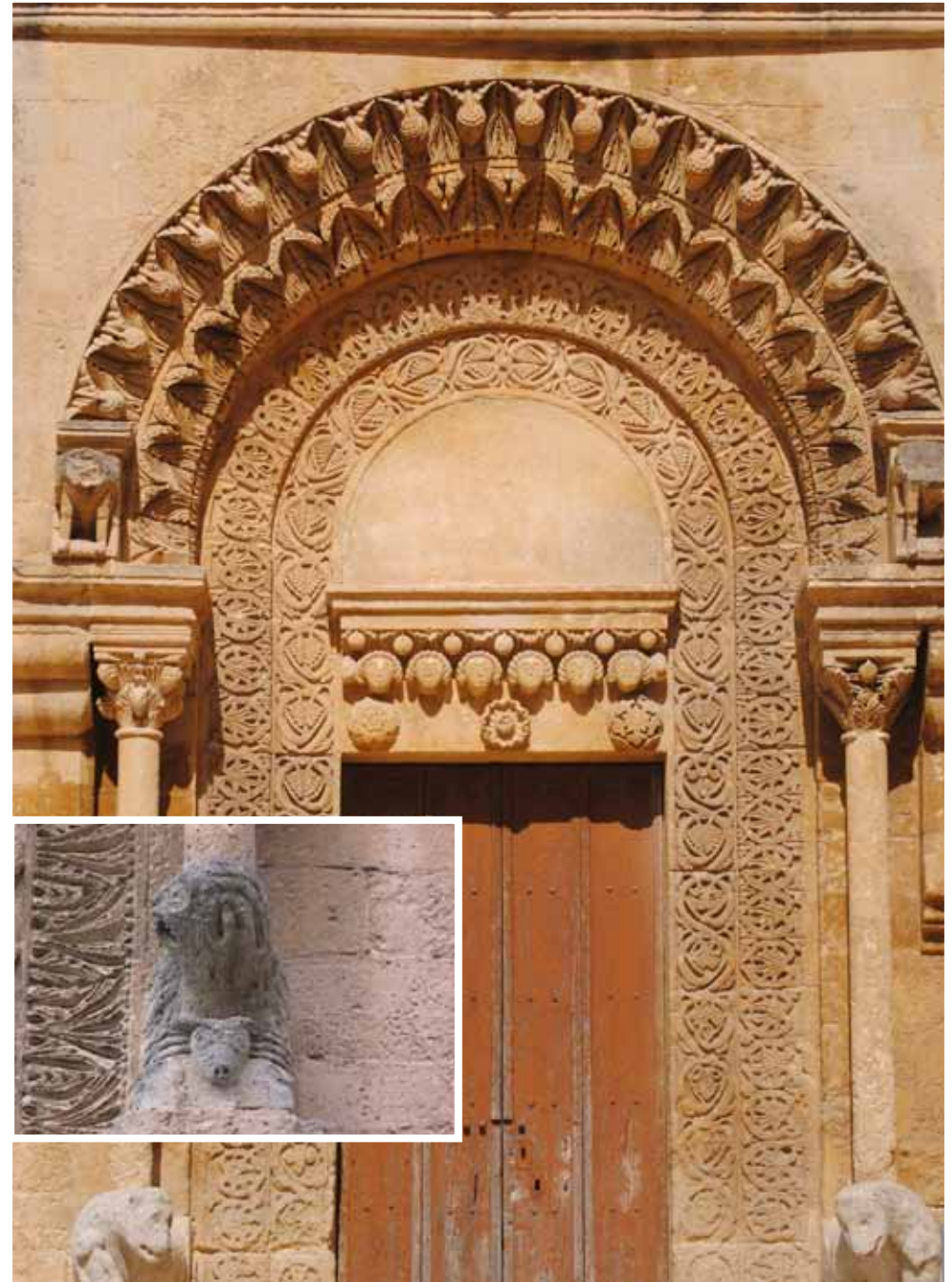
The monks and the patriarch, the sphinxes and the judge, the eagle and the lions.



Two crouched monks seem to remind the Square of the distant filial relationship between God and man, of which the Patriarch Abraham, commemorated in the lunette, is the first of a long list.

Two sphinxes and two lions honour the memory of the Saracen Judge who worked in the town in the middle of the thirteenth century.

Two lions support a pair of columns and give the name to this entrance door, even if above them an eagle stands out, but, having lost its head, cannot show its regalness.



CATHEDRAL (EXTERIOR)



The statues of Saint Paul on the right and Saint Peter on the left, who protect the Madonna with Child, honoured by Saint Eustace and his wife Theopista.

If the figure of this "Lady" has already fascinated us ...all we need to do is win her heart.



Let's go to the main facade. We'll turn our back on the Sasso Barisano and admire the ornaments of this "beautiful lady".

The small arches of the crown and the four small columns; perhaps signs that no longer talk of ancient times: the Apostles who follow Christ with his Cross positioned above and the Evangelists, witnesses of the story of Salvation.

The rose window with sixteen spokes, the wheel of Life or of Fortune, surrounded by the Archangel Michael who looks over it, and the three social strata of the Matera community who turn it.



The cathedral, as is written in the inscription on the architrave above the bell tower's entrance door - was completed in 1270 and later dedicated to the Madonna della Bruna, who was nominated patron saint, without forgetting the original patron, Saint Eustace.

To fully understand the devotion of the people of Matera to the town's two Patron Saints, let's listen to a passage of the chronicles by Francesco Volpe:

"In Matera there is age-old veneration for the glorious martyr Saint Eustace, a great General at the time of Trajan and Hadrian.



4 CATHEDRAL (INTERIOR)



stace, a great General at the time of Trajan and Hadrian.

It is said that, before the year 1,000, when the town was besieged by the Saracens, the Saint appeared with his glorious Family, came to the town's aid and saved it, and the Matera people, later told of the miracle that had occurred, rapidly acclaimed them as their Patron Saints and Guardians. Every year, on the 20th of May, when it is said that the apparition took place, their Feast day is formally celebrated with veneration and splendour.



It is celebrated in a more decorous manner on the 20th of September, when their glorious martyrdom occurred. A long time ago, it was an ancient custom for the Knight Commander of the town to go on the 20th of May to the Church of Saint Eustace for the first Vespers, taking an offer - a tribute - consisting in a torch covered in silver coins and numerous baskets of fruit, flowers and other things, and accompanied by music and songs in honour of these Patron Saints."

In exchange for this offer, the Commander was given "a loaf of bread, a barrel of wine and numerous hard ricotta cheeses, plus a torch of pure wax."

The Cathedral preserves "The image of the Vergine della Bruna", so-called due to the darkness of her face, and also known as Santa Maria di Matera in a testament, or Santa Maria dell'Episcopio.

His Holiness Pope Urban 4th [who was Bishop of Matera from 1365 to 1377], having seen the great devotion of the people of Matera for this Holy Image, in 1389 established a festivity in its honour, on the 2nd of July [making it coincide with the celebration of the Visitation, established that same year].



— She was therefore confirmed as the patron Saint and worshipped with the name of Maria Santissima della Bruna, with such a wonderful, characteristic and baroque celebration that she seems mid-way between legend and reality.



5

Let's go down towards Via San Potito until we reach Via San Giacomo and, before arriving at the Gravina, we can visit the MUSMA – Matera Museum of Contemporary Sculpture.

6

PIAZZA POSTERGOLA VIEW POINT

The panorama we have in front of us is dominated by the rugged cliff on our left, which plunges into the Gravina River below. On the right-hand side, on the other hand, the cliff rises like a vertical wall, which forms the foundations for the town, which follows its lines to the Casalnuovo district. The rock on which the church of san Pietro Caveoso stands soars upwards, to end in the spur of Monterrone, which hosts the cave churches of the Madonna dell'Idris and of San Giovanni.



7

Let's follow Via Madonna delle Virtù to Piazza San Pietro Caveoso.

The requests of the people of Matera for new space in which to live, in which to meet and in which to pray were increasingly frequent... and that dull noise of the tuff quarrymen's work that resounded in the Sassi was joined by that of the stonecutters and masons hard at work, building houses, palaces and churches..

8

CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO CAVEOSO

"The Parish Church of San Pietro e Paolo is commonly called Chiesa del Caveoso, as this is the name of the district or Sasso in which it stands. It is located on the ridge on one side of the dark river called Gravina. If for Matera chronicler Francesco Volpe the Gravina river is dark, the historical importance of this church is clear. It was one of the town's four parish churches, along with the Cathedral, San Giovanni Battista and San Pietro Barisano.

Before being lastly given to this church, the title of Collegiate of Saints Peter and Paul was originally given to the small ancient church below San Francesco di Assisi and, later, to that of San Giovanni in Monterrone. The laws for the evacuation of the Sassi reduced it to an empty container for a community that no longer existed.

It was however to be reborn, as happened with the Sassi, following the process of deaths and resurrections that human events seem to trace periodically.



9

Let's continue for a few metres along Via Bruno Buozzi until we reach the steps of Via Madonna dell'Idris.

...the new parish churches managed to hold a larger number of worshippers, but the ancient cave churches, proof of a remote ancestral bond with the inhabitants who had lived centuries before, were never abandoned, on the contrary, the ancient devotion to the Saint of the Byzantine tradition brought comfort and tranquillity and, instead of being abandoned, those spaces were expanded by places in which people entrusted themselves completely to their protection.



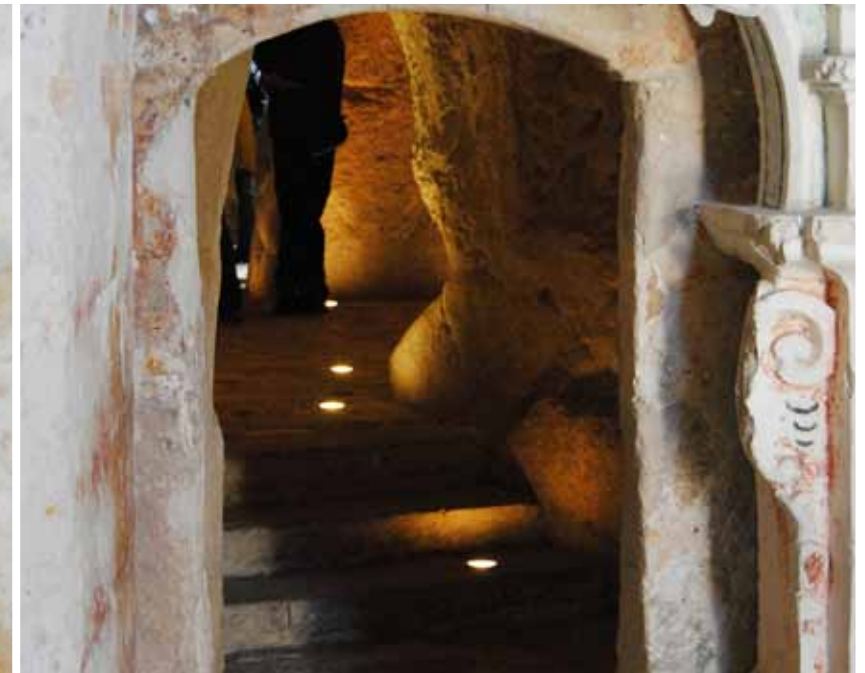
10 CHURCH OF THE MADONNA DE IDRIS & CHURCH OF SAN GIOVANNI IN MONTERRONE

We climbed up the steps leading to this spur of naked rock, unaware of what we were doing. For some people it was just physical exertion, for others it assumed characteristics that were mystic and celestial.

This crag is known as Calvary, and the wrought iron cross above it completes the image.

Without knowing it, however, someone guided us in the climb. Our Lady guide of the way, the Odigitria, which in this place has become "Idris".

Let's go in the door: The Madonna on the throne with the Child greets us and thanks us for coming, but she seems to announce that the journey is not yet finished.



CHURCH OF THE MADONNA DE IDRIS & CHURCH OF SAN GIOVANNI IN MONTERRONE

That is in fact the case. We must enter the darkness of the narrow corridor and, once our eyes are accustomed to the light of the new environment, we enter the age-old church of San Giovanni in Monterrone.

The environment is totally different from the one we have left behind us: the lights, the shadows and the colours that are now faded, show the periods of the stages of excavation and enlargement of the spaces surrounding us.

It is a cave church where different languages and cultures echo among the lights and shadow. While the church with its structure speaks Greek, San James communicates by means of characters that resemble those of the Prophet's language. Greek returns with the image of the Christ Pantocrator, while the bishop of Mira, Saint Nicola, creates constantly the cultural bridge between East and West, making us realize that this stage of our journey is over.



11

Let's go back towards Piazza San Pietro Caveoso and turn right into Vico Solitario.

...the moments in which the people of Matera found comfort in prayer were, however, small pauses in an intense day of hard work. Returning home was the moment in which everything ended, everything stopped, before starting again at the first light of dawn.

To immerse ourselves in this dimension of family intimacy, let's visit the Casa Grotta in Vico Solitario or we can postpone the visit to this typical peasant location until the Casa Grotta di Casalnuovo, which we shall soon reach.

...the same serenity that filled the homes of the Matera families was perceptible in places of monastic prayer. The religious communities were truly an important integral part of Matera society. Their work of prayer for the outside world and their care for the poor was a richness that no citizen wanted to relinquish, on the contrary, it was to be supported and ensured above all by the more socially fortunate classes...

Going up along the edge of the Gravina, the cave monastery of Santa Lucia and Sant'Agata and the relative church are reached. Extraordinary places of revealed holiness and profound mysticism. Here, in 1093 the Blessed Eugenia dies and in 2008 the church became the sepulchre of Christ in a television program on the life of Pope Paul VI (**).



12 MONASTERY OF SANT'AGATHA AND CHURCH OF SANTA LUCIA ALLE MALVE

Saint Lucia alle Malve (named after the town's Le Malve district), an integral part of the Benedictine monastery of Sant'Agata and Santa Lucia, is another important example of a cave church that Matera offers ... the invitation can only be to visit it...

... as we walk through in its spaces, we peep through its openings and admire the frescoes preserved in it, we listen to the story of a Matera noblewoman who wanted to leave it all his possessions and, following the example of the blessed Abbess Eugenia, who died here in 1093, took her votes as a Benedictine nun:

"The nuns needed to go round the town, and outside it, in order to provide for their needs. However, their Order was very correct, and they rightly met with public esteem for this.

Baroness Matthias Bartinico, wife of Eustachio Santoro of Matera having chosen to lead the rest of her life religiously, decided to shut herself in this Monastery. The Nuns, seeing such generosity, wanting to show her their gratitude, on the same day as they came into possession of her donation, made her the Abbess."



MONASTERY OF SANT'AGATHA
AND CHURCH OF SANTA LUCIA ALLE MALVE



In the following centuries, the monastery received many donations, increasing the initial patrimony created by Baroness Mattia and eliminating definitively any fear of poverty from the cloistered life of the nuns of Sant'Agata and Santa Lucia even after the move to the current Sant'Agata and Santa Lucia convent premises in Piazza della Fontana.

The monastic complex of the Malve was used until 1283, when, following the increase of the religious community, the nuns move to a new structure, build at the foot of the Civita, near the Postergola gate.

From the small primitive 14th century church, the monastery was expanded until it occupied an adjacent urban area that extended over the entire present-day square.

The rebuilding work lead to the Postergola gate being moved to the right-hand extremity of the current open space, where it still stands to this day.

In 1797, due to the unhealthy fumes from the Gravina River, the nuns, in procession through the town and abandoning their obligations as cloistered nuns, moved to the convent of Sant'Agata and Santa Lucia in Piazza della Fontana, which currently hosts the School of Restoration.



13

Let's go back to Via Bruno Buozi, by means of a small ramp of steps, and continue to the left along Vico San Leonardo, following the tourist signposts for the Convicinio di Sant'Antonio.

Solidarity, reciprocal aid and a common social feeling are all characteristic aspects of the peasant civilization that filled the houses of the Sassi and is also perceptible in some places of worship particularly important for the life of the Matera peasant community.

14

CONVICINIO DI SANT'ANTONIO



Convicinio means an area characterized by neighbouring buildings, in this case relative to the closeness of four cave crypts located in a rectangular enclosure: Saint Anthony, Saint Donatus, Saint Eligius and Saint Primus, now known as di Tempe Cadute, in other words a area of continual rock falls and landslides.

The closeness is not only physical; the churches' dedications also have a sort of religious closeness: they are four popular Saints.



All four have a role in the varied universe of popular religiousness, with its religious expressions and manifestations that have not always coincided with the ecclesiastical authorities' requirements.

Four Saints close to the needs of a peasant society such as that of Matera: the protection of the crops, domestic animals and babies.

Matera families, above all on Saint Anthony's day and Saint Eligius' day, went first thing in the morning to the courtyard of the Convicinio to wait for the holy water of the blessing to wet them along with the animals they had brought with them, which wandered round the perimeter of the courtyard.



15

Let's go back to Via Bruno Buozzi, and after a few metres turn right, following Via Casalnuovo until we reach some steps that take us on to Via Ridola, where we turn right into small square that can be made out between the buildings.

16

PIAZZETTA PASCOLI VIEW POINT



The panorama in front of us is a sort of hollow crammed with houses one above another.

On the left, looking up towards the summit of the Civita, dominated by the bell tower of the cathedral, it is possible to make out the impressive square shapes of the nobility's palaces, among which the Torre Capone can be glimpsed.

The right-hand side, on the other hand, is occupied by the rear part of the spur of Monterrone with the churches of the Madonna de Idris and San Giovanni and by its steep flight of steps that leads to Piazza San Pietro Caveoso.



17

Let's go back on to Via Ridola. The palace we are walking along was built by Monsignor Vincenzo Lanfranchi and, following precepts of the Council of Trent, was used as a seminary for teaching the local clergy. The building was later used to host the National Boarding school and the Grammar School, continuing its utilization as a place for cultural education. The Matera School's teachers included Giovanni Pascoli and Giuseppe Lipparini and among its pupils there were Giuseppe De Robertis, Nicola Festa and Eustachio Paolo Lamanna, who became the Chancellor of Florence University. The building nowadays hosts the National Museum of Medieval and Modern Art.

On our right we find the church of Santa Chiara with the adjacent monastery that is currently the home of the National Archaeological Museum dedicated to Domenico Ridola, father of Matera's archaeological discoveries.

...to build, to pray, to protect, terms that as infinite verbs enable us to raise our words to the mystic dimension of the relationship between man and the here-after at the moment of the transition between this life and the afterlife... and the church at the end of Via Ridola represents the architectural proof of this.



18 CHURCH OF THE PURGATORY

"Misereмини mei...saltem vos, misereмини mei, amici mei"

"Have pity on me, at least you, have pity on me, my friends"

A church dedicated to death and pity. Everybody on the same level: kings, popes, bishops, citizens – Death makes no distinction and all the 36 panels into which the entrance door is divided bear witness to this. Skulls, skeletons, time that passes and flies.



CHURCH OF THE PURGATORY



Let's enter, let's allow ourselves be enshrouded by darkness to immediately reopen our eyes to the light of salvation.

The interior space has regained its original colours. Green, the colour of hope, welcomes us and nourishes the trust of being able to ascend to the presence of God.

Let's stand in the centre.

The Death that looked over our entrance, the flames that surround the busts of men, women and children above the portal give way to a road to ascension for souls and the painting on the right-hand altar by Matera artist Vito Antonio Conversi, which shows the death of Saint Joseph, bears witness to this. The carpenter from Nazareth has received the gift of ascension to heaven and was therefore able to defeat earthly death,

but the painting at the main altar by the same artist, in which Saint Gaetano intercedes with the Virgin for the souls in Purgatory, is a gift that is made to all of us.

The search for intercession for the defeat of earthly death is transformed into concrete reality when, leaving the church, we are enveloped by the celestial blue of the inner door.



19

Contemporary man now has the knowledge of the respect and protection of what time has passed down to us. Unfortunately, however, this was not always the case! In the past, the arrival of a new artistic fashion automatically overshadowed the previous expressions of arte, considering them outdated by then and creating a sort of stratification in which the new structures were laid on those already existing.

In Matera this stratification of various eras and various building techniques can be seen at every step, because the new town and the ancient one live in a sort of artistic fusion.

20

CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO D'ASSISI

Some Matera chroniclers relate that this church, dedicated to Saint Francis, was built by the Saint himself, who passed through Matera during his journey to the Holy Land:

"This place wished by the Saint on his arrival in town, had been denied to him by the University of Matera, who refused to disturb the sleep of the Priests who lived there.

[...] However, the miracle of a deceased damsel brought back to life by his fervent prayers in Pomarico, where he had passed, aroused such respect and veneration for him in the people of Matera, that without any delay [...] they fully satisfied his desire."

However, Francis had already ended his earthly pilgrimage when the church was built.

The church is built on a pre-existent 11th century structure dedicated to Peter and Paul. There are even older traces of man's presence in the square, which hides a Longobard cemetery.



Let's go in.

Let's look at the main altar.
On the right there's a small door. It is the access to the belfry, the ancient church.

In the crypt, a fresco shows the stay in Matera of Pope Urban II during his journey calling on support for the Crusade. It recalls San Francis' stop during his Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, reported in the Chronicles: both are the invitation to continue our journey after the stop in this place where time has left conspicuous traces inscribed in the stone.



21

From the square, let's follow Via del Corso to Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

The square is the physical place in which everything is known, everything has a public dimension. In a square privacy, does not exist, the intimacy ensured by one's home does not exist either, every single person is part of a larger whole – the town, to be precise.

The square is a place for celebrations, fights and liberation...





22 PIAZZA VITTORIO VENETO

The Convent of San Domenico, the Monastery of the Annunziata and the Mater Domini church define an ample space with numerous underground structures.



Under the square, there are the cisterns that have served the town for centuries.

Water, the most precious asset to be protected for a town like this, arrived here from the hill called "del Castello" or "del Lapillo" and was gathered in a large cistern at the foot of the ex convent of Santa Lucia and Sant'Agata, and from the hill of Macamarda.

The latter, at the end of the nineteenth century, when the population living in the Plain reached its maximum level and the need for water was therefore greater, was channelled into a new larger water container called "Palombaro Lungo".



A passage from the Chronicles of the town of Matera published by Gianfranco De Blasiis in 1635 informs us of these characteristic structures:

"In the whole town there is a huge mass of stone called tuff, suitable for digging wells or water, grain, cheese and wine stores, which are so perfect in this town that they are unequalled, and in particular that for the wine, meaning that the wines are so cold for the excellence of the cellars, that in the height of the summer, there is no need for snow, as is in fact true. Of the grain stores and their perfection, it is sufficient to say that the grain is preserved for up to ten, twelve or fifteen years, as if it was in a chest."



23



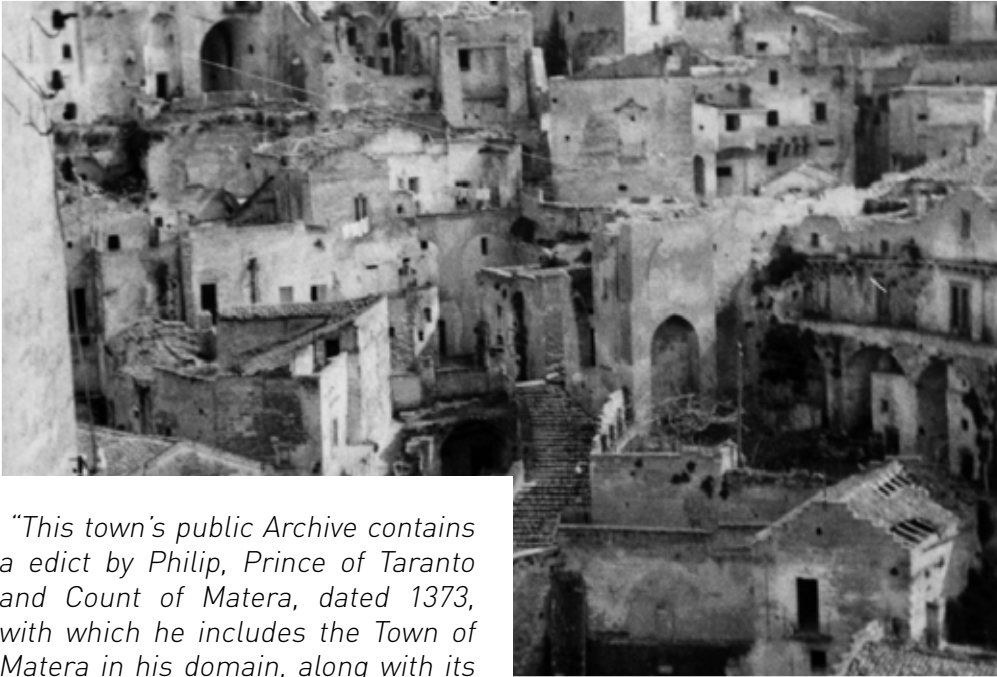
*The Civita and Sassi:
a breathtaking
panorama.*

TRE ARCHI VIEW POINT

It is an extraordinary result of settlement activity by man who, through the centuries, was able to discover, appreciate and make use of what the surrounding nature offered him, to the point of recognizing himself in that Heritage of caves, cliffs and homes that now belongs to humanity.

We know of its historical developments thanks to the story by Francesco Volpe who, shedding for a moment the role of strict historian, decided to end his description with a dream-like image of the town:





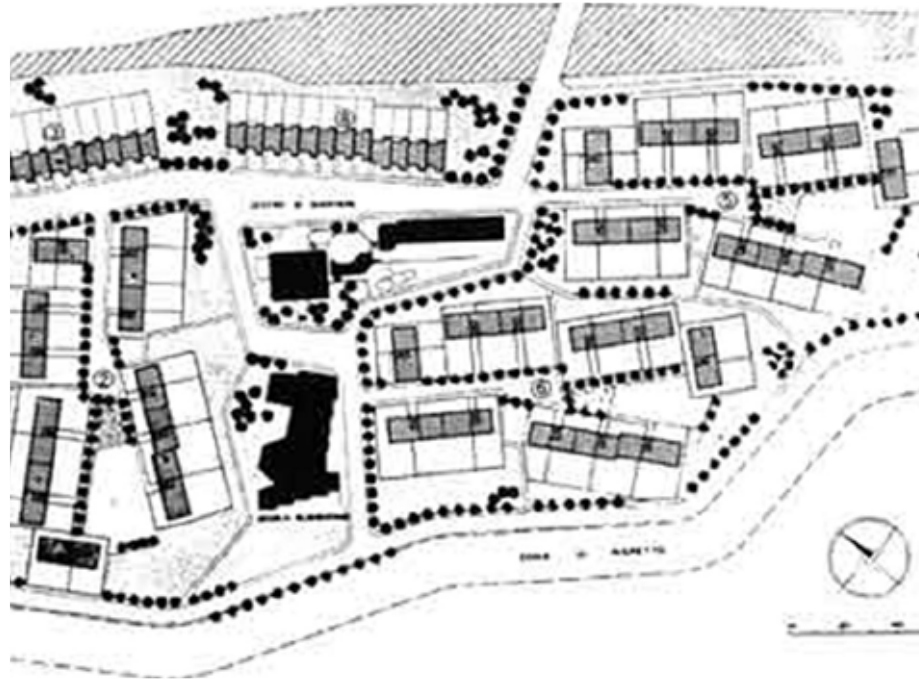
"This town's public Archive contains a edict by Philip, Prince of Taranto and Count of Matera, dated 1373, with which he includes the Town of Matera in his domain, along with its farmhouses, possessions, holdings, jurisdictions and competencies. From that period, the town changed appearance.

The valleys were no longer considered as two boroughs of the ancient town, but as the main body of this town: and the name was changed to Sasso (Stone), due to the huge number of homes built on and hewn from the natural rock; as an indication, the one opposite of the town of Montescaglioso was called Sasso Caveoso, and the other, opposite the City of Bari, Sasso Barisano. Img11 116 The ancient town's name remained Civitas, nowadays Civita.

The houses that stand in these valleys are not on the same plane and level. They are one above each other, so they seem to be hanging above one another. So, when evening dusk arrives, spectators on the high ground can see the lights burning inside them like countless stars fallen from the sky."



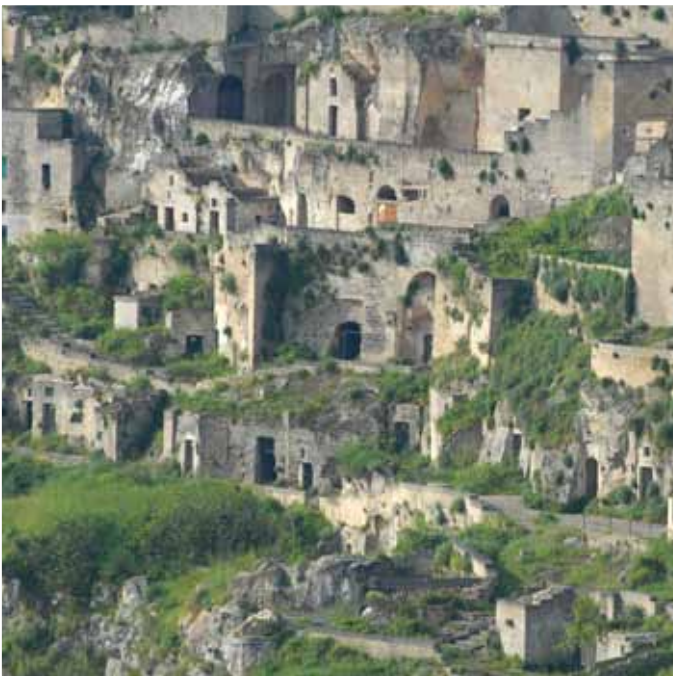
24 THE DISTRICTS OF THE MODERN NATIONAL TOWN-PLANNING



The "Città Del Piano" - Plan Town: this is the idea that followed the evacuation of the 20,000 inhabitants of the Sassi of Matera in the 1950s. The new districts, planned to host the evacuees of the place described as a "national disgrace", became a real town-planning workshop.

The most important designers were called in to build the new town. The Serra Venerdì district, designed by architect Luigi Piccinato, was the first to be built in chronological order.

The design ideas of the Neorealist school linked with Italian Rationalism led to the realization of Borgo La Martella - which was built a few kilometres from the town - and the Spine Bianche district.



The Villalongo, Lanera and Agna districts, and the other suburban district - Borgo Venusio - completed Matera's new town planning layout.

Around the seventies there was a new phase of town planning that led to the town assuming a narrow elongated layout stretching along a north-south axis, to avoid the natural obstacles represented by the Gravina and the steep slopes of the hills of the valley of the River Bradano.

The "new" Matera could not do without the "old" one and this necessity led to the start of the recovery of the Sassi district and the Murgia plateau facing it. The 1986 law marked the beginning of the work for the recovery and safeguarding of the Matera Sassi and the inclusion of the town in the UNESCO World Heritage List was the highest acknowledgment for this renewed feeling of identity that ties the town to its inhabitants and the people of Matera to their history.

