The final chapter deals with new phenomena and alternatives to historicism. Emphasized here are continuity and the “organic” transition of old into new, as was the case with architect Ödön Lechner, who represented a departure from historicism in some previous interpretations. However, the breaking points—when historicism definitively lost its validity and historic Hungary collapsed during World War I—remain outside this volume’s frame and are not the subject of reflection here.

With a few changes, the English edition follows the Hungarian original, including brief explanations of select historical facts and events. Rich and genuinely diverse illustrative material fits the text and aids the reader’s understanding of the authors’ arguments. The endnotes, ample bibliography (listing mostly Hungarian publications), and name and place index lend the book scholarly heft. The forty-three brief essays on significant individual buildings are informative and illuminating; unfortunately, similar portraits of the most important architects are not provided. Maps that might have aided readers in locating buildings are lacking, as is an international comparative chronology; these would have been of substantial benefit. That said, it is highly welcome that this thorough and demanding work has been made available in English, as its advent will help to integrate the nineteenth-century achievements of Hungarian architecture into an international conversation.

BÉLA KÉRÉKGYÁRTÓ
Budapest University of Technology and Economics

Notes
3. The title phrase is a Hungarian adage adapted from Ferenc Kökösy (1790–1838), one of the most important poets and liberal political thinkers of the Reform era (1825–48).
4. See Németh, Magyar művészeti történet 1890–1919.
5. However, in the introduction to the historicism chapter, Sisa admits that “even at this rate of development . . . Hungary had still not reached the level of the Western half of the Empire, while the Monarchy was also still behind the rest of Western Europe” (423).
6. For example, the classic essay “Magyar építészeti” (Hungarian architecture), by the Hungarian philosopher and art historian Lajos Füle is, which was first published in the literary journal Nyugat [West] 11, no. 8 (16 Apr. 1918), deeply influenced the evaluation of historicism and turn-of-the-century architecture until the 1980s. For a contemporary position, see János Gerle, “Hungarian Architecture from 1900 to 1918,” in Wiebenson and Sisa, Architecture of Historic Hungary, esp. 225–30.

Ioanna Theocharopoulou

Builders, Housewives and the Construction of Modern Athens


If the construction of Brasilia and Chandigarh has been explained—in James Scott’s seminal work—as the outcome of “seeing like a state,” then the twentieth-century transformations of Athens can best be understood, Ioanna Theocharopoulou tells us, from another point of view.1 As the title of her book Builders, Housewives and the Construction of Modern Athens hints, one must appreciate “seeing” like a builder, or a rural migrant, or a refugee—a person who is cash-short, in urgent need of shelter, and distrustful of a state whose officials, in turn, are eager to accommodate private initiatives and turn a blind eye to quasi-illegal urban developments. One must also understand, Theocharopoulou continues, “seeing” like a housewife who is coming to terms with her own modernity in the midst of these and other circumstances.

Theocharopoulou’s meticulous analysis connects the Greek authorities’ apparently erratic attitude toward planning with specific historical circumstances and cultural idiosyncrasies that produced the Athenian metropolis. Incorporating tools from social history, anthropology, and gender studies, her book provides a valuable historical perspective on Athens, one that highlights the entwinement of dwelling and urbanism and shows that the city’s anonymous residential architecture has a distinctive character and historicity: it emerged in response to internal migration and refugee influx due to war, cash shortages, particular legislative frameworks, linguistic debates, entrenched gender roles, and deregulation tactics—all combined with everyday actions by both residents and administrators (such as the notorious variances on building codes). All these disparate factors, Theocharopoulou shows, were bound up with issues of identity, nationalization, urbanization, and modernization. Even as these changes occurred in nature and intensity from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, they created the conditions for the proliferation of the type of multistory apartment building known in Greece as the polykatoikia, which constitutes the quintessential element of the city’s urban landscape.

In historicizing the building culture of Athens through multiple filters—the images give rich flavor to the fascinating archival material the author has investigated—the book skillfully synthesizes existing knowledge about the polykatoikia and its urban role. Further, it extends local and international scholarship that has contemplated the underappreciated qualities of the scale and diversity of Athenian apartment buildings. (Essays by Kenneth Frampton and Dimitris Philippidis are cited, but more recent discussions of the polykatoikia by Pier Vittorio Aureli and his colleagues also come to mind.)2 Theocharopoulou also draws on urban theory in discussing the benefits of the “part-exchange” system (a process whereby the owner of a piece of land could exchange it for units in a polykatoikia to be built there by a developer) and the social integration processes initiated by the polykatoikia (which allowed rural migrants and refugees to enter the lower middle class). These reflections highlight the Athenian polykatoikia as an alternative to the shantytowns of other rapidly urbanizing cities of the global South. Although more direct engagement with the insights of geography could be included, the book is a testimony to architectural historiography’s interdisciplinary achievements and its capacity to provide in-depth investigations of urban space.3 More important, this multifaceted investigation demonstrates how different actors have produced different forms of modernity. This is a crucial contribution. Among other things, it helps challenge interpretive models focused on the “transfer” or “importation” of planning and
architectural strategies—problematic perspectives that characterize not only the agendas of twentieth-century modernization but also some of the architectural and urban histories of modernization.

Of particular importance to the book’s argument are the processes of improvisation that created the polykatoikia type and what Theocharopoulos refers to as “informal urbanism.” Intriguing propositions that allow new ways of contemplating both the history and the current resonance of the polykatoikia include the assertion that it might be seen as an example of Bernard Rudofsky’s “architecture without architects” brought to an urban sphere, and the observation that the polykatoikia anticipates the more recent adaptable building types of Alejandro Aravena’s Elemental in Chile. Conversely, it would be vital to further unpack notions of improvisation, spontaneity, and informality, especially in light of larger critiques of ad hoc, bottom-up, and self-help processes that remind us that informality does not necessarily equal neutrality. Even if one does not apply a Marxist critique—which might argue that the “individualization” of housing let the state off the hook, had a politically conservative effect in giving people “a stake in the system,” and celebrated as freedom of choice what was actually “compulsion in the absence of alternatives”—one still wonders about the merits of an urbanization that made housing construction and laissez-faire individual interests the chief drivers of the city’s economy.

In a similar vein, it would have been beneficial if Theocharopoulos had problematized the issue of modernization in as nuanced a way as she treats the issues of nationhood and identity. She is of course correct to highlight the polykatoikia as a modernizing agent, and perhaps right to argue that the modernization of Greek society was quite locally particular. But as it was elsewhere, modernization in Greece was subject to tensions between empowering potentials and processes of social control. While the polykatoikia became a mechanism for accommodating refugees and former rural dwellers, did it not also insert urban life into the logic of the market and economic speculation, with immense environmental and other consequences? Recognizing such paradoxes embedded in processes of modernization would not necessarily require reverting to the critiques of Athens’s urban character as random and inconsistent—critiques that Theocharopoulos rightly dismisses at the outset. Recognizing the paradoxes and ambiguities of modernization would, for example, allow a closer examination of other possible substrata of power, funding, and influence that shaped modern Athens. These ambiguities begin to surface in the chapter on housewives, where the author unpacks gender and social tensions.

Other chapters could push such analysis further. One wonders, for example, did not the United Nations or NATO have a role in Greece’s experience of the Cold War, which the author highlights as important in shaping the polykatoikia? The United Nations is acknowledged only in passing, even if it was instrumental in advancing the view of housing as nonproductive, an idea that was widespread internationally, and, as Theocharopoulos tells us, also professed by the Greek state. Even if foreign consultants were not responsible for the emergence of the polykatoikia, did foreign influences have no impact on the infrastructures, industries, economic models, and development policies shaping urbanization and modernization in Greece? Similarly, it would have been helpful if the author had supported her archival research on specific figures involved in Greece’s modernization with broader critical perspectives on modernization and development. Such an approach might have allowed one to unpack further the political investments behind claims of comprehensiveness and local empowerment and to elucidate how Greek architects’ ethno-historical interests and “detailed analyses of local building culture” (95) are not merely reflections of sensitivity to a locale. The discussion of modernization could have been supported by systematic engagement with current theories and critiques of the assumptions and tactics of development, informal or otherwise.

Theocharopoulos does well to insist on understanding Athens “in its own terms” (9). Indeed, her discussion of the particular significance of neoclassicism to the Greek context, analysis of debates on the Greek language, and investigation into the role of housewives, as well as the insightful connections she draws to the anthropological analyses of shadow theater, are all key to the contextualization of urban transformations as “expressions of Greek culture and everyday life” (15). One comes away feeling that the book successfully explains why housing in Athens did not take the direction of, say, the Berlin Mietskasernen or the Lima barriadas.

Still, in reading this book, one is reminded that a similar combination of factors (massive migration from rural areas and quid pro quo processes in which multiple small investors pool their resources, pursue exchanges, or push for amendments, all in the absence of direct government investment in housing construction) has had powerful influence on urbanization in other parts of the globe from the twentieth century to the present day. Although the Athens case is important in and of itself, an attempt at charting parallels with housing processes in other cities of the global South would allow for further contextualization, a historiographic pursuit that Theocharopoulos correctly emphasizes as important. For example, what are the differences between the type of “builder-developer” encountered in Athens and the yap-satç (builder-seller) of Istanbul, particularly in terms of how individual actors employ funding mechanisms and state policies? The pursuit of such questions could enable a more comprehensive and broader understanding of Athens’s urbanity.

PANAYIOTA Pyla
University of Cyprus

Notes
Women Architects in India: Histories of Practice in Mumbai and Delhi

In 1936, Perin Jamshedji Mistri (1913–89) was the first woman in India to graduate with a degree in architecture. She went on to work as an architect in her father’s office, which, with her inclusion, if not earlier, became a family practice. Eight decades later, female students constitute the majority in many Indian schools of architecture, yet there is still no history of the practice of architecture by women in India. Female Indian architects lack the national and international visibility of their male counterparts, some of whom, such as the eminent architects Charles Correa (1930–2015) and Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi (b. 1927), have achieved global prominence.

Recently, women architects across the world have begun to receive attention, but only three (two in partnership with male colleagues) have received the Pritzker Prize, the so-called Nobel Prize of Architecture, awarded annually since 1979. With her edited volume Gender and the Built Environment in India, Madhavi Desai has been a pioneer in drawing attention to the role of women architects and builders in India. Yet much work remains to be done. It is no coincidence that two books now aim to fill this lacuna in our knowledge: Mary N. Woods’s Women Architects in India and Desai’s Women Architects and Modernism in India. These books are the result of a project originally undertaken jointly by these two scholars. Later, after parting ways, they shared the research they had gathered together. It is Woods’s timely book that is the subject of this review, and it constitutes, as she declares, “the first history of how women architects made a modern India” (3).

In Women Architects in India, Woods contests the dominant global historical narrative on women architects, patrons, and clients, which privileges European women and women of European descent. Thus, she makes a significant contribution that will aid in upending the Eurocentric account of the history of women’s architectural practice, helping to shape a new narrative that also reckons with multiple modes of architectural practice across the world, including the global South.

Approximately 27 percent of the architects practicing in India are women, a higher percentage than in the United States or Great Britain, where the field is largely white and male, and professionally educated women serve as employees rather than hold positions as partners or principals.

Focusing on two cities, Mumbai and Delhi, Woods’s account juxtaposes the personal and professional lives of twelve women architects representing several generations as well as some significant moments in Indian history. Between its introduction and short conclusion, the book is organized into three major chapters, each of which discusses the work of four architects. In presenting their work, Woods also pays attention to the absorption and translation of modernism in India. Given the lack of architectural archives in India (a lack that is only now beginning to be rectified), research for this book was undoubtedly challenging, especially in regard to early architects. Woods has thus relied on oral histories and interviews as important sources in writing this history, which attends to women patrons and clients as well as to architects. This research is timely.

For example, although Mistri had died by the time Woods embarked on her research, the author was able to garner information on the architect through interviews with colleagues and an interview with Mistri’s brother available on the website of the HE-CAR Foundation, which supports education on South Asian architecture; she also visited and photographed two of Mistri’s extant buildings.

Chapter 1, “Designing for a Post-Independence India,” profiles Mistri and Pravina Mehta, the first female architects in India, who graduated in the 1930s and 1940s, when India was in the midst of its struggle for independence; also discussed here are Hema Sankalia (1934–2015) and Smita J. Baxi (n.d.), who came of age in the following two decades. All four women were graduates of the Sir J. J. School of Art in Mumbai, which gives Woods the opportunity to discuss the school’s architectural program from its inception in the 1890s to the independence struggle of the 1940s. The section on each woman opens with a subhead that includes her name and a characterization suggesting her significance or contribution. For example, the subhead for Mistri is “The First Woman Architect,” while that for Mehta is “A Practice of One’s Own.” Apart from subdividing individual sections to discuss aspects of each architect’s life, practice, and projects, Woods uses the subheads as springboards for other thematic issues. In her discussion of Mehta, who was arrested in 1942 at a Quit India demonstration, we get glimpses of the independence movement, urban planning in India, and the Festival of India in the 1980s. In the section on Baxi, who moved to Delhi to become an exhibition designer at the new national museum, Woods discusses museums and their management in the newly independent nation-state, where women emerged as the “tarisias of Indian culture” (53). This sort of contextualization allows for a rich and deep appreciation of each individual architect and also links each one to broader cultural and social currents.

The format used in the first chapter provides the template for the next two. Chapter 2, “Building a Practice in Indira Gandhi’s India,” highlights four architects from the middle generation, all now in their sixties. Having begun their careers in the 1970s, these architects benefited from the huge expansion in construction in the 1990s, which enabled them to build substantive bodies of work. Woods finds a commonality in the works of the members of this generation, noting that Brinda Somaya, Neera Adakar, Revathi Sekhar Kamarath, and Nalini Thakur “all articulate social, cultural, and architectural values that are either explicitly or implicitly Gandhian” (130); here she is referring not to controversial Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of the chapter’s title, but to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the great freedom fighter and...