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Philipp Meuser

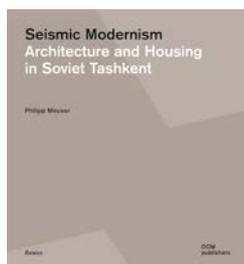
Seismic Modernism

Architecture and Housing in Soviet Tashkent

On 26 April 1966 an earthquake devastated Tashkent and reduced the oriental Old City to ash and rubble, while the Russian New City remained largely intact. The Uzbek city on the Silk Road was at the time already a city of contrasts: narrow winding alleyways, mosques, madrasas and buildings made of clay in the established Old City stood in contrast to an orderly New City featuring wide boulevards. Today, fifty years after the earthquake, Tashkent is regarded as the home of the most beautiful prefabricated buildings in the world.

In the publication *Seismic Modernism* by Philipp Meuser, the reconstruction efforts which triggered an astonishing wave of innovation and forced through the modernisation of the city are pivotal. Although the industrialisation of Tashkent and thus the immigration of workers was already in full swing earlier, meaning that a few serial residential buildings already existed (there were already several local house-building factories) this urban trend was intensified. Urban planners could now implement on a large scale their remodelling plans for the roughly 300,000 homeless people. Twenty different design institutes and building collectives from across the USSR contributed to the reconstruction effort. The architects integrated regional construction traditions into their modern socialist designs - an unprecedented phenomenon which is illustrated most clearly on the facade mosaics by the Zharsky brothers. Therefore, the southernmost million-strong metropolis of the Soviet Union occupies a special place in Soviet prefabricated construction owing to the quantity, diversity and ornamentation evident therein. The reconstruction of Tashkent is a prime example of Soviet ideals in urban planning, whereby technical standardisation and the taking into account of social needs complement one another. Today, this makes the subject more topical than ever before.

Philipp Meuser, expert on serial housing construction in the Soviet Union who is already the author of numerous publications on the subject and who advocates an appraisal and reassessment of prefabricated construction, traces the history of the modern urban development of Tashkent from preceding events and the beginning of serial housing construction in 1956 to the construction boom following the earthquake until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.



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