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Philipp Meuser

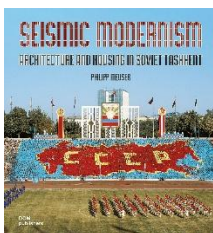
Seismic Modernism

Architecture and Housing in Soviet Tashkent

On April 26, 1966, an earthquake struck Tashkent, reducing the oriental Old City to rubble, while the Russian New City remained largely intact. Even back then, the Uzbek capital on the Silk Road was a city of contrasts: narrow, winding alleyways, mosques, madrasas, and clay-brick buildings in the organically grown Old City stood in stark contrast to an orderly New City with wide boulevards. Today, almost 60 years after the earthquake, Tashkent is considered home to some of the world's most beautiful prefabricated apartment blocks.

In his publication *Seismic Modernism*, Philipp Meuser focuses on the reconstruction efforts, which triggered an astonishing surge of innovation and accelerated the city's modernisation. While Tashkent's industrialisation, and consequently the influx of workers, had already been well underway by then, resulting in the construction of several prefabricated housing complexes – there were already several housing combines in the city – this urban development trend was further intensified. Urban planners were now able to implement their large-scale redevelopment plans for the approximately 300,000 homeless people. Twenty different planning institutes and construction combines from all parts of the USSR contributed to the rebuilding efforts. The architects incorporated regional building traditions into their modern socialist designs – a phenomenon unprecedented at the time, most clearly evident, for example, in the facade mosaics by the Jarsky brothers. Thus, the southernmost metropolis of the Soviet Union occupies a special position in Soviet prefabricated housing due to its quantity, diversity, and ornamentation. It found a parallel only in Slavutych, the successor city to Chernobyl, which was destroyed by a reactor accident exactly 20 years later (on April 26, 1986). The rebuilding of Tashkent is a perfect example of the Soviet ideas about urban planning, in which technical standardisation and consideration of social requirements complemented each other. This makes the topic more relevant today than ever.

Philipp Meuser, an expert on prefabricated housing in the Soviet Union, who has authored numerous publications on the subject and advocates for a recognition and reassessment of prefabricated housing, traces the history of modern urban development in Tashkent from its prehistory, through the beginning of prefabricated housing construction in 1956 and the post-earthquake building boom, to the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. This volume is a bibliophile reissue of the previous volume from the "Basics" series, which was published in 2016 and quickly sold out. A new architectural guide to Slavutych is also being published by DOM publishers.



Philipp Meuser
Seismic Modernism
Architecture and Housing in Soviet Tashkent
210 × 230 mm, 304 pages
500 images, Hardcover with dust jacket
ISBN 978-3-86922-993-5 (English) / Russian), 2. Edition
€ 48.00
December 2025. DOM publishers, Berlin