Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010). 368 pp., $27.95 (pb), ISBN 978-0-8229-4394-5.

As the book title suggests, Paul Stronski's "Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City" documents the history of making an exemplary Soviet city out of a divided "European" and "native" city that Tashkent used to be before the revolution. The book joins the series of several excellent historical studies of Central Asia, which includes Adeeb Khaled's the *Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform* and Jeff Shahadeo's *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923*. While following in the steps of the above-mentioned studies Stronski's work also fills an important gap that was left un-researched in the post-Soviet years: in the last two decades, the historiography of Central Asia tended to emphasize Islamic movements, identity issues, and distant history while the modern history of Central Asia, especially the Soviet modernization of Central Asia was neglected.

The extraordinarily meticulous archival research for the book covers the period from the beginning of the 1930s to the 1966 earthquake and the following reconstruction effort. However, in his narrative Stronski manages to encompass a much longer period making important connections with the periods before and after and also highlighting continuities between the Soviet urbanization project and the previous Russian colonial project of building "European" Tashkent as well as between the Soviet and post-Soviet urban development in the city. Throughout the history of Tashkent's modern urban planning that Stronski documents it appears that political expediency and the need to make a political statement was always placed before the real needs and desires of citizens. Even under Khrushchev, when monumentalism and excessive ornamentation prevalent in Stalin's period came under fire and when raising the quality of life of the citizens and finding solutions to the housing crunch finally became the first priority for the government, in Tashkent by inertia the imperative of designing and beatification of central public spaces continued to supersede the need for creating comfortable conditions for the city residents. As Paul Stronski writes, while gardens and fountains were built in the city center, newly built Khrushchevka microdistricts like Chilanzar remained conspicuously naked (223). The emphasis on the public, administrative, and cultural buildings at the expense of residential areas continued to prevail in Tashkent not in the least because of the ideological positioning of the city as a model for post-colonial nations. With the guests from Asia and Africa descending on Tashkent to marvel at the Soviet "Eastern fairy tale" city, there could be no economizing on public building designs (239, 243).

In some broader sense, Paul Stronski's book is yet another documentation of the messy and complicated history of the global project that James Scott termed "high modernism." Following Scott, Stronski explores the inner workings of the so-called "rational" urban planning behind Tashkent's transformation and reveals that at least in the period the book is devoted to the planning of Tashkent both in its conception and implementation was far away from rational –underpinned by the lack of organization and continuity within the planning agencies and as a consequence by ad-hoc planning decisions and temporary solutions to city's problems. The urban transformation of Tashkent is revealed as such a messy and disorganized process that in the end of the book the reader is left wondering how if at all Tashkent managed to emerge as an impressive and orderly looking city that it remains even now.

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Paul Stronski himself concedes that the most of Tashkent that we know today was built after the earthquake when the nature itself gave Soviet planning authorities the "blank state" (270-271) from which they had always wanted to start the transformation of the city. This brings us to the question of why the author chose to limit his archival-historical endeavor with 1966. Can we then assume that the period between 1930 and 1966 was a period of trial and error for the Soviet planning authorities and, after the earthquake, Soviet authorities finally got a chance to pull their act together and deliver all the urban infrastructural achievements for which Tashkent has been and is still known today? As Stronski himself writes in the epilogue, "this success in quickly feeding, housing, educating, and finding healthcare for the city residents in the late 1960s and early 1970s was truly remarkable for the system that traditionally had proven so ineffective and inefficient" (272).

"Forging the Soviet city" draws on a variety of archival documents –from urban plans and statistics, party communiqués and government documents to newspaper and journals' articles, personal correspondence, and memoirs. Perhaps, as a result of the author's moving between the two types of sources –the official and the unofficial –the book seems to oscillate between the official vision of what Tashkent should have been and the reality on the ground which seemed to be continually inadequate to the vision. Official sources themselves often reveal the frustration with the constant unbridgeable duality –between the modern city center and the "old city," between the Uzbek and Russian urban areas, between the promised "modern" and the real conditions of overcrowded-ness, poor sanitation, and lack of transportation that city residents had to cope with up until Brezhnev era. Although, as Stronski himself notes, "no Soviet city or Soviet institution lived up to the high standards and socialist ideals that propagandists, urban planners, and ideologists had created" (267), the gap between the propaganda and the reality seemed to be especially palpable in Tashkent, a mythical "city of bread" during the war where the people who escaped the horrors of war had to compete with each other for bare survival and a "model city" of the late 1950s and the 1960s which showcased achievements to the newly de-colonized nations of Asia and Africa while trying to hide its inadequacies. What was remarkable regarding Soviet institutions' failures in Central Asia is that, as Stronski notes, all the problems of Tashkent were always readily blamed on the "backwardness" of the natives – even if these problems were caused by the chaos of evacuation or widespread corruption in the Soviet distribution system network (so-called 'blat').

Stronski's book contains in itself not just the history of urban planning but also the social history of some of Tashkent's landmark institutions, neighborhoods, and public places. For example, we follow the fascinating social history of Textile Kombinat, the place and the institution, from its emergence to neglect and criminalization during the war when the evacuated heavy industry became the first priority, and then to its reemergence as a marker of new socialist modernity, which employed (albeit in lower than desired numbers) "emancipated" Uzbek women who, nevertheless, stubbornly continued to quit their jobs in the Kombinat after marriage.

In Stronski's narrative, Sovietization of Tashkent was a two-way road with Soviet authorities eventually learning to accommodate cultural differences and appreciate local knowledge and with the native population adopting Soviet institutions for their own needs –for example, expecting Soviet doctors to perform circumcision and examine underage brides to permit marriage (195). By the beginning of the Brezhnev's rule Tashkent, Stronski argues,

had become very central to the Soviet project and being now a Sovietized city, had also become a focal point from which not only the rest of the republic but the rest of the world was to be enlightened and "civilized."

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