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Adam Smith Albion is an Institute Fellow writing about Turkey's regional role in the former Soviet bloc and the emergence of independent Central Asia. He is based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

My House in Samarkand

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan

July 10, 1996

By Adam Smith Albion

1. Water

We are in the third week of *chilla*, the hottest part of the year: forty days of punishment stretching from June 26 to the night of August 4. With the temperature hovering around 104°F (40°C) Tashkent simmers and pulses in the heat. To make matters worse, it is simultaneously smothered under an all-pervading blanket of dust blown in off the steppe. A deadly combination, heat and dust: the streets are full of people gasping and choking on the pavements, like fish newly hauled out of the water and gorging to death on a plank. Still, walking in the sun is preferable to being boiled like lobsters in the overcrowded busses. Tashkent is the only place I know where there is scalding hot water in abundance, but regular shortages of cold. Air conditioning is extremely rare, either in homes or in public buildings. I have installed the only model available, actually a type of Soviet-manufactured air-blower called the BK-1500, beside my desk in my apartment. In the other rooms, however, it remains oppressively hot. Once, sitting at the telephone in my own kitchen and glistening with perspiration, when I was concentrating intently on the tiny voice at the end of the line — Tashkent connections are awful, even for in-city calls — the receiver began to slide in my hand from the sweat until inadvertently I squeezed it, like a bar of soap, right out of my grasp.

Chilla, interestingly, is also the term used to describe the forty-day period after a woman has given birth. Uzbek tradition calls for strict confinement of mother and child during *chilla*. Only close relatives may set eyes on the newborn, while the *chillali* mother is forbidden to participate in housework or exert herself in any way. She is waited upon hand and foot and fed choice foods to restore her strength — a rare quadragesimal holiday in the otherwise toilsome life of an Uzbek wife. It would be interesting to know which meaning of the word came first. In either case, *chilla* calls for lethargy, shelter and recuperation.

Torpid passivity is the only way to survive summer in Tashkent. If the refinements of city life had caused me to forget that Uzbekistan is essentially a desert republic, situated in a hostile environment enjoying at most eight inches of rain per year, I remember it now. The weather is continental, exhibiting extremes of temperature inversion: freezing in winter, blistering in summer. Life here, as in much of Central Asia, wholly depends on sources of water. All major settlements, Tashkent included, have historically been concentrated around oases — those rare islands of fertility scattered in river basins or tectonic troughs, wherever there is loess sufficiently irrigated to make it wet and loamy and suitable for agriculture.

Otherwise, apart from some mountain spurs, Uzbekistan is the kind of place that is tedious to cross by bus, presenting the bored traveler little of interest beyond the occasional sighting of a jackal or a jerboa. It is a land, about the size of California, of semi-arid steppes and deserts that offer some sparse grazing for pastoralists (mainly sedges and ephemeral blue grasses) and not much else — unless you happen to fancy yourself an explorer of the old school, eager to prove your mettle against the elements. At least two intrepid souls, Dutch and Turkish, have recently crossed the Kizilkum/Karakum ["Red-sand"/"Black-sand"] deserts by camel and donkey in order to recapture the Silk Road "experience." Needless to say, they were trailed by television crews in air-conditioned jeeps carrying iceboxes. Lord Curzon, who really had the sort of authentic Turkestan adventure in 1888 that these men were seeking to emulate a century later, would have found them faintly ridiculous. He very sensibly rode the Transcaspian Railway, bringing his bathtub with him, and described the Karakum desert as "the sorriest waste that ever

met the human eye" in his memoir of the trip, *Russia in Central Asia and the Anglo-Russian Question*.

Modern life in Tashkent reenacts the perennial Central Asian story, the search for water, by massing around the city's many "microclimate" fountains, which are designed to cast curtains of spray and coolness of evaporation over grateful pedestrians. By unwritten law, children under ten are permitted to strip to their underwear and bathe in them. As for the rest of us, the sun beats down endlessly — an average of 2,980 hours per year, in fact, a saturation of sunshine comparable to southern California's. Although there are a few ice-cream parlors, the traditional Uzbek response is to sit under shelter and consume gallons of steaming green tea. In theory, hot fluids bring on perspiration that cools you down. In practice, I became so overheated drinking tea last week that I collapsed for a day with sunstroke.

The sunlight is blinding but, like everything in Tashkent, not quite clean; the quality of light has a unique tone to it, a tinge of sepia-gray from the suspension of dust particles in the air. They are deposited on everything and everyone in a fine patina of dirt. For instance, the capital's trademark mulberry trees are in bloom. Half-naked children run through the parks rummaging for berries, while serious-faced *babushkas*, invariably wearing print dresses bought off the racks at the State Department Store (Tsum), harvest them more methodically in metal pails. But even the mulberries are grimy with dust, and many trees along the major thoroughfares — planes, chestnuts, weeping willows — look as if ash-trays have been emptied over them, their leaves and bark powdered with a sediment of filth in which you can trace your initials with a finger.

I think the sunstroke pushed me over the edge, and I began to have dreams about crystal waterfalls and shady pools. I also began pining for my balcony in Trabzon, bathed in spray thrown up from the Black Sea. In comparison to Turkey, Tashkent started to feel stifling, a bottled-up heat trap situated in the middle of the Eurasian landmass. Uzbekistan is not merely land-locked — it is the sole country on the planet all of whose neighbors are land-locked as well.

Imprisoned in the empty heart of a vast continent! How one can long sometimes for a breath of sea breeze, or any gentle movement of air whatsoever to cool the brow! But when wind does come, it brings its own brand of punishment. The only sea breezes available in Uzbekistan, unfortunately, are draughts of airborne salts like sodium sulfate and man-made poisons blowing off the ecologically dead Aral Sea, asphyxiating the Karakalpak population in the northwest of the country. In Tashkent, thankfully, gusts are less deadly but much more violent. As soon as the crowns of the trees begin to sway, apprehensive pedestrians step up their pace. Those who have been sand-blasted once too often break into a sort of brisk trot, as one imagines Pharaoh doing when he caught sight of the plague of locusts darkening the horizon. For one must be quick about getting to shelter. There is a sudden pulse of air and — pof! — great handfuls of sand and grit are launched in your face as if somewhere, far off in the desert, a thermonuclear weapon has been exploded.

Under these circumstances, one might have expected Tashkent to empty out in July. Not so long ago, apparently, Tashkent during *chilla* was as abandoned as Paris in summer. A sort of claustrophobia would drive Central Asia's pent-up inhabitants in a Gadarene rush into the sea — more precisely, to the beaches and sanatoria of Yalta, Sochi, Dagomysh and Varna. So, clearly, I am not the only one fantasizing about the Black Sea. (Another destination, marginally less popular, was the shore of Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan. The water there is cleaner, but chillier.) These annual vacations, considered a Soviet citizen's rightful due, were financially accessible to practically everybody up to and through most of perestroika, and were typically available through one's *profsoyuz* (approximately, "trade union"), which subsidized about 90 percent of the cost of the trip. Since the collapse of the USSR, however, they are beyond the reach of all but the very richest. The *profsoyuzy* themselves are so impoverished that they are only offering package holidays (*putyovki*) — and poor ones at that — to a vast minority of their members. The only *putyovki* available at present seem to be 10-day stays at worker's rest homes within Uzbekistan (Kumishkam, Khumsan, etc.), costing about \$8, where everyone lucky enough to have secured places has complained upon their return that the buildings were ill-maintained and the complimentary three meals a day were practically inedible.

Faced with such unappealing prospects, there are those who prefer to toil on without a summer break for the sake of an extra month's salary. Impaired by physical sluggishness and mental hebetude in offices equipped without even a fan, such people's work is probably worse than useless, so I have felt no guilt in wasting hours of their time drinking tea. Then there are others who find themselves *forced* to take a holiday without wages when they are turned out onto the streets by state enterprises relieved not to have to pay them. Although Uzbek law guarantees the right to paid leave, I have been surprised to encounter many people unwillingly at leisure in this way, usually for 24-26 days — from civil servants and state bank officials to theater administrators and even a group of men I met on the metro who turned out to be disgruntled (*i.e.* unpaid) workers at Tashkent's Chkalov Aircraft Factory, once famous throughout the USSR and the corridors of the Pentagon for its gigantic cargo planes (especially the Ruslan, the IL-76, and the IL-114). I asked the men how they intended to spend their month of involuntary vacation. Deprived of the Black Sea, they would be searching out the life-giving element closer to home: perhaps riding the busses to "TashMor" ("Tash-Sea"), a large lake on the outskirts of the city; or farther afield to Chimgan; or to the Chatkal Mountains in order to bathe in the Charvak dam-reservoir's two billion cubic meters of fresh, bracing, mountain-cold WATER.

2. A talk in a garden

I traveled to Samarkand to buy a house.

A shady place of my own where I could escape from the heat. A town that used to be the cynosure of the world.

I had tossed off the idea one afternoon to my friend No-

dira, an elegant young woman in her forties. It was a sweltering day in June. We were sitting together beside a luxurious vegetable plot on a *sori*, the raised wooden platform that is a mandatory piece of furniture in any proper Uzbek garden. Sheltering us from the sun was a roof of vine-trellises that in a month or so would be dripping with ripe, bullet-shaped white grapes called Ladies' Fingers. It was quiet, and for a whole two hours we were almost cool. The bustle of Tashkent's Old Town seemed far away, screened from us by high mud walls. It would have complemented the scene perfectly if we had been sipping from goblets of sherbert, but, alas, only porcelain bowls of green tea.

The house belonged to one or another branch of Nodira's improbably extended family. A grandfather had built it with his own hands, and they were proud of it. Nine people in all were living in five rooms, the walls painted azure blue, the doors and window-frames a striking titanium white, set around the central courtyard. Nodira and I dutifully toured the eggplant and tomato plants, the cherry and pomegranate trees. We picked *Shah-tut* — giant, king-size mulberries — and confessed to one another that we were jealous. Like me, she lives in a faceless apartment block made of concrete — the least desirable housing in modern Tashkent, since concrete heats up like a furnace in high summer. Brick buildings are cooler, and consequently more expensive. Mud houses, however, are the coolest and most comfortable of all, not to mention the easiest to repair, although of course Soviet planners scorned them as feudal hold-overs and the ethnic Russian population disdains to live in them.

Nodira wistfully recalled that she had been brought up in a house virtually identical to this one. "We grew all our own vegetables, and raised chickens. We even had our own cow."

"Let's go visit it," I said with genuine enthusiasm. "I'd like to see your childhood home."

"It's gone. Destroyed in the 1966 earthquake, when I was fourteen. Where our *mahalla* [Uzbek, tight-knit neighborhood] used to be, they erected apartment blocks and made a road." Her family, temporarily homeless, had been taken in by relatives until the state assigned them new housing in southwest Tashkent — a stuffy, cramped flat in Chilanazar district. "We lost most of our possessions. Had to start practically from nothing. My father's painting survived, though — the one hanging in my living room." Her father had been an amateur artist, and the picture she referred to was a small study in oils. I had always assumed it depicted a remote cottage somewhere in the country, overhung with trees whose branches laced the verandah with shade. "That was our house," she explained, "not far from where Tsum is now. Oi-oi-oi! We lived well then! Fresh milk and eggs, everything ecologically clean... And ever since then I have had to pay for vegetables — can you imagine! I have to haggle for them in the markets. My parents never had to buy vegetables until we were moved into an apartment..."

"What happened to the cow?" I asked.

"I don't know. It survived the earthquake, if that's what

you mean. My father sold it, probably." She ran her gaze over the garden once again — not the garden of her childhood now, which she saw so clearly in her mind's eye, but the physical patch around us — while I poured tea. She seemed to take umbrage at the sight of so much orderly and peaceful cultivation. Her expression indicated, "This tranquillity could have been mine — had fate not intervened and spoiled everything."

Her own life, I was aware, was beset with distractions and troubles. Nodira often claimed she was an unlucky person. She never blamed others for her own misfortunes. She did nurture a sense of being uniquely ill-fated, though, which had an unfortunate tendency at times to shade into envy. It was her single bad trait, in my opinion, clearly in operation now, as she surveyed the relative comfort in which her relatives were living: a secure domicile and a vegetable garden providing a cushion against spiraling food costs and the decline in real salaries. "Why them and not me?" she seemed to be thinking.

Furthermore, it is my impression that the house, the sense of place, the desire to be settled, operates strongly in the Uzbek psyche. I find the Uzbeks, on that score, to be the British of Central Asia. The cultures of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz, more recently sedentarized than the Uzbeks, more naturally prioritize the freedom that comes of having no fixed abode. So I felt I understood the tenor of Nodira's thoughts when she muttered, "Yes, there's nothing to compare with living in a house."

"Let's buy one," I suggested cheerfully. "Where shall it be?"

This sudden proposal of mine may strike one as somewhat unexpected, absent the context. It may seem less radical in light of the fact that Nodira and I are already old hands at purchasing Tashkent real estate. We have bought a food-processing plant and a tea factory, both of which we stripped bare and re-outfitted with astonishing new technology. Moreover, we established Tashkent's first American pizzeria, called "Samantha's," on the roof of the History Museum, and are co-owners of a fashionable chain of hard-currency massage parlors with a fancy clientele to match. A number of metro stations are also named after our acquaintances.

Nodira, however, was not biting that afternoon. "You buy one," she said. "I'm too tired today."

Anyway, she continued in a more serious vein — and obviously with her own housing difficulties in mind — real estate prices in Tashkent have skyrocketed during the last three years. A two-room apartment in the center that used to cost \$3,000 is worth nowadays over \$10,000. A four-room house downtown by the river will set you back \$35,000. Then we must look farther afield, I persisted; the purlieus of Tashkent, or the provinces. Chances of a bargain are better there, naturally, she admitted. If you were willing to forgo the capital to live in the *second* city of Uzbekistan, you could purchase a house for under \$6,000.

"With a garden?" I asked, thunderstruck at the figure.

"With a garden," replied Nodira, testily. "A fine, spacious, fruitful garden. But who would want to live in Samarkand? she concluded.

Who would not want to live in SAMARKAND? was the question clanging in my head.

3. A loss of heart

Have you never allowed yourself the pleasure of being lured on by a grand and beguiling thought, an idea too absurd to be taken seriously, too improbable to be worth pursuing, yet so inherently attractive that you found yourself inching toward it? All the way to Samarkand I shook my head with bemusement over this impractical, insouciant figure who was myself. Foreigners are not even permitted to buy property in Uzbekistan. But I would find a way.

For the third time I stood in the Registan, dubbed "the noblest public square in the world" by the aforementioned Lord Curzon in 1889. I found myself, once again, drawing a breath at the glorious color and the vision of the architects. I had seen it before, but it was still fresh and exciting. It was early morning. There was no one to enjoy the great arched portals, the leaning minarets ribbed in Kufic script, or the glazed, bulbous domes bursting with turquoise — no one but I. Bounded on three sides by Islamic seminaries rioting with ornamentation, loaded with majolica and alabaster mosaics, decked out with marble and gold, the Registan surely deserved the grandiloquent praise and aureate descriptions that tourists have always lavished on it.

Then I remembered I had not come as a tourist but as a potential resident, and set myself the task of seeing my surroundings from this novel perspective.

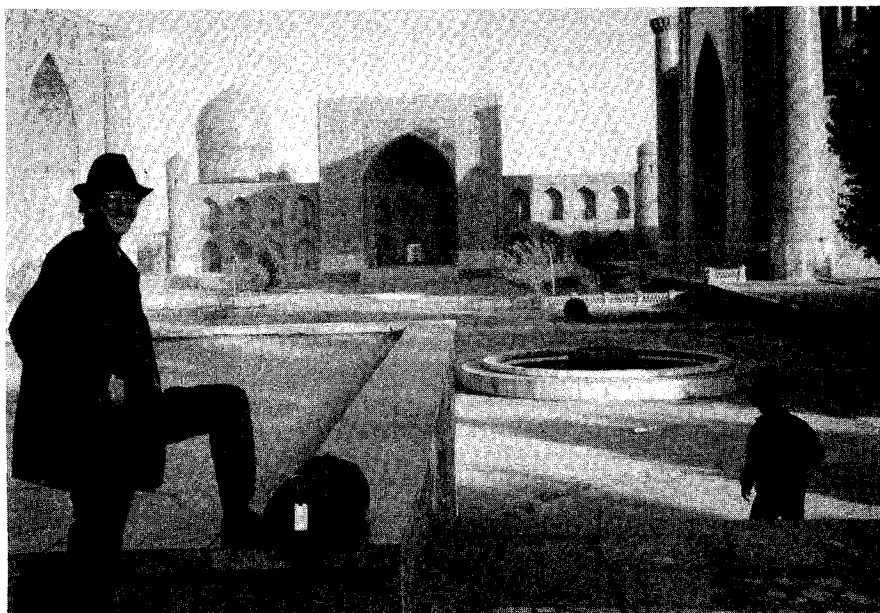
At 8:45 a.m. the first workers arrived. Taking up their paint-pots, they ranged themselves along the south side of the Ulug Beg Madrasa. Soon they were busy touching up a repeating polychrome design on the wall. It was not long before a second party was at work on the building oppo-

site. Their job appeared to be scraping gilded stucco off door-jambs. More and more people arrived until my eyes were fairly popping at the size of the workforce spread across the Registan. Within an hour the square was full of the sound of hammers clinking. From every direction there came a resounding din. Above, men on scaffolding chipped away at the age-old tile revetments and replaced them with modern imitations. Below, they pulled up paving-stones and tinkered with the plumbing and underground electric cables. Commotion on all sides: swarms of laborers engaged in hammering, drilling, stripping, scrubbing, plastering. It proved the same story on every historical monument in Samarkand.

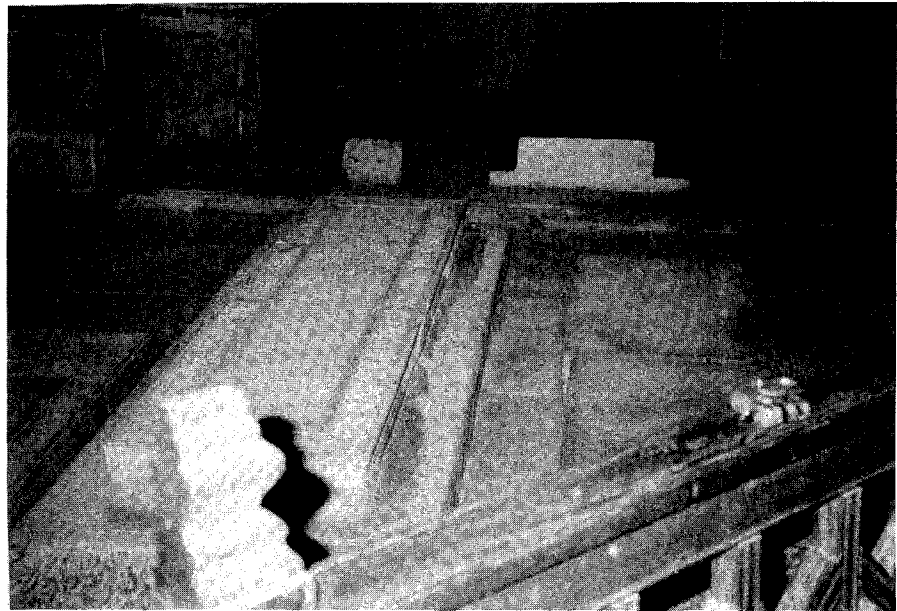
For example, when I entered the Gur Emir, Tamerlane's mausoleum, I had hoped to enjoy a quiet meditation over the conqueror's tomb and to experience again the musty smell of ages past. Instead, upon crossing the threshold I was dazzled by lights bright enough to illuminate a film set. The place reeked of paint and whitewash — not smells to inspire any confidence that restoration is proceeding slowly and carefully, with due regard for historical accuracy. And in fact men were clambering over a huge pile of scaffolding that reached to the ceiling, daubing at ancient designs with ruthless haste. Outside, the front courtyard had been torn up from its roots and was being relaid with new stone. I was told that 250 men were working on the Gur Emir alone! They, like their colleagues elsewhere in the city, were engaged in a headlong sprint to make Samarkand spick-and-span in time for the Amir Timur jubilee festivities in October.

Restoration is surgery on the past. It is a discipline that, like archeology, simply cannot be conducted in a slapdash fashion, if it is to have any chance of remaining true to the monuments it purports to be bringing to life. It is no secret in Samarkand that artistic authenticity is being sacrificed to expediency. I even met artisans who lamented their own complicity in committing various degrees of outrage on buildings they personally respected.

In the Tillya-Kari Mosque off the Registan, one man



*The author at the
Registan, Samarkand*



Tomb (they say) of Tamerlane

pointed out how the blue and red paint on the walls, and the gold on the honeycomb pendentives in the *mihrab*, were already peeling away despite two rounds of restoration, in 1979 and earlier this year. "Rising damp and salt attack," he said, shaking his head. "No one thinks ahead. You do a job, although you know it's only a temporary fix, you get paid, and you leave it to the next generation to clean up. That's the mentality here. Like the prefabricated apartment blocks Krushchev slapped up in the 1960's [*Krushchovy*, a play on the word *trushchoby*, "thickets," slang for "cheap apartment blocks."] The engineers and architects knew that they would start disintegrating 25 years later, but they said to themselves, 'It won't be our problem.' That's how the restoration is proceeding here too. Everything will be sparkling for when President Karimov and the foreign dignitaries come, but after they've left and forgotten about Samarkand, the place will probably all fall to pieces again."

Short-term thinking can lead to decisions that are breathtakingly insensitive to broader concerns. Last year the so-called Indian caravansaray, a historic structure standing on Silver Street between the Chorsu pavilion and Timur's Citadel, was demolished in order to sell off its constituent parts as building materials! This decision, made by the mayor, was in fact countermanded by the Ministry of Culture in Tashkent, but the Samarkand city council overrode the order and destroyed it anyway. (One hears of other instances where central government's writ does not carry much weight outside the capital.)

More disturbing is the story of the latest restoration project for the Tillya-Kari Mosque (completed 1647). The internal arcades were repaired as recently as 1993, but the mosque as a whole needs to be shored up against collapse. Its foundations, lying over older buildings and a dried-up river bed, are variable and unstable. Recent soil settlement brought on by rainstorms have exacerbated the situation. The government was advised by the Restoration Institute in Tashkent that the problems required a considered, delicate approach. Imagine the shock when it was announced that the contract for strengthening the foundations had been awarded to Uzmetroprojekt, the state metro-building company! The news, which smelled strongly of the pork-barrel, was one more piece of evidence that cultural decisions in Uzbekistan are not made by people concerned with culture.¹

Uzmetroprojekt's proposal was to apply the same technology that had proven successful for blasting out subway tunnels in Tashkent to stabilizing a mid-seventeenth century structure. They had begun to push steel pipes reinforced with concrete horizontally under the Tillya-Kari's foundations when a horrified UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] stepped in. I gather from UNESCO's on-site architectural consultant, Mr. Boccardi, that his organization was obliged to lobby all the way up to Karimov's office before the Uzmetroprojekt tender could be canceled, despite reports already in Uzbek hands that the metro company's gentle ministrations would have resulted in the complete

1. Consider the way large swathes of Tashkent's Old Town have been torn down ("redeveloped") to build apartment blocks, which are often populated by the same people whose houses stood on those sites. Thus, in some instances, whole *mahallas* that used to extend horizontally now live vertically. Historical structures earmarked for preservation by the Board of Monuments, and appearing on the Ministry of Culture's own register of listed buildings, are being demolished! The official explanations given by the *hokimiyat* [Town Hall] concern either the need for improved sanitation, or the requirement to "modernize" Tashkent and bring it into conformity with "European standards." A more likely consideration is that the head of the construction company concerned is said to be a relative of the mayor. Moreover, I have been reliably informed that many of the officials who gave the nod to the destruction of the Old Town are not from Tashkent — they came into their positions from President Karimov's power bases in Samarkand and Bukhara — and so harbor no sentimental feelings about the capital's heritage.

collapse of the mosque (destroying it to save it?). The new plan, drawn up by a joint Uzbek-foreign team, tackles the problem from a wholly different direction. It calls for vertical reinforcements using piles with hydraulic jacks inserted between them to control leaning and dampen any structural reverberations.

Glimpses “behind the scenes” are almost always unpleasant, whatever the context, but a resident in any place has more of a responsibility to know what is going on than a tourist. After a while I began to envy the casual visitor. I too wanted to let the wool be pulled over my eyes — to admire the buildings and enjoy the show without hearing tales of desecration and human ineptitude. Most travelers only see the surface. The Registan’s majestic facades are worthy symbols in this regard, since it will be observed that their *obverse* sides are as blank as pasteboards of stage-scenery. Determined exploration through the rooms of the madrasas not generally open to the public reveal that many of them are as bare as the walls of a lazaretto.

Meanwhile I strolled the town and investigated the markets and residential districts, forever titillating myself with the question in which *mahalla* I would best like to live. I fancied the Tajik quarters. I soon discovered to my delight that the majority of the inhabitants of Samarkand, a town of around 400,000 people, spoke Tajik (an Indo-European language similar to Persian) more readily than Uzbek. I had pleasant visions of myself mastering this obscure tongue as an entree to Persian. Samarkand has long been subject to Persian influences. It came to prominence in the 9th century AD under the Samanid dynasty named after Samankhoda, a Persian noble. In the mid-16th century Samarkand was incorporated into the Khanate of Bukhara, where Persian was considered the language of elegance, and to this day many of Uzbekistan’s Tajik citizens (4.8 percent of 22.2 million) and Tajik-speakers live also in Bukhara. More recently, Samarkand has been swelled by tens of thousands of displaced people fleeing from nearby Tajikistan, when that country’s communist president was effectively overthrown by an “Islamic-led alliance” in September 1992. A second wave of refugees was created only three months later when the alliance was itself overthrown with the none-too-secret help of the Uzbek military acting in concert with the Russian army, professing to fear “fundamentalism.”

Despite the concentration of Tajiks in Samarkand, I heard quite a few disgruntled voices raised about language rights — the inability to speak Tajik in front of a magistrate, for example. I am not sure how much justice there is to these complaints. Anyone who wished to attend Tajik-language school seems to have done so without let or hindrance, although it is true that I failed to spot any Tajik-language books on sale in shops. Another grumble I heard had to do with “lack of respect toward Shiite mosques,” but unfortunately my informant could not be drawn to say more.

Donkey-drawn omnibuses carrying ten passengers at a time ply up and down Tashkentskaya, a lively street of small shops, kiosks and *mors* vendors — *mors* is soda water flavored with a sweet syrup tasting of licorice. The pace of life has picked up in Samarkand since perestroika launched

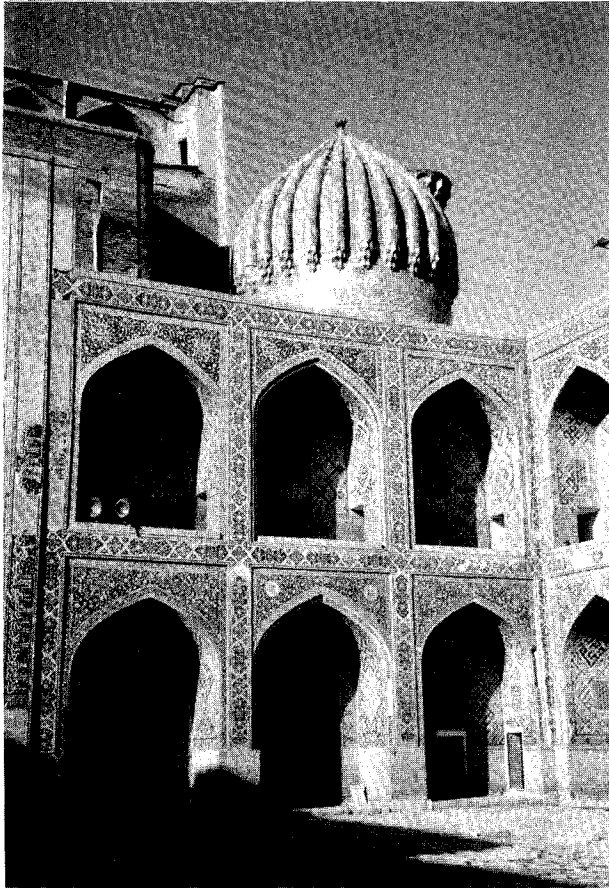
the “cooperative sector,” allowing for small-scale private business (earlier castigated as “speculation”) in 1989. Otherwise, it is a conservative, provincial town where traditional dress is common on the streets, with none of Tashent’s experiments in miniskirts and décolletage.

Cheap Western products are abundant on the stalls, but it is important to realize that is traditional too. Fully 150 years ago British adventurers in the region were complaining that St. Petersburg’s merchants were filling the Turkestani bazaars with shoddy Russian goods. Modern romantics eager to experience “uncorrupted” Central Asia bemoan the imported items in today’s markets. Perhaps they even fancy themselves latter-day versions of those intrepid nineteenth-century travelers to Central Asia, forgetting that often a dominant concern of said travelers was to displace the shoddy Russian goods and fill the Turkestani bazaars with shoddy Anglo-Indian goods.

Every age imagines that the “good old days” have just passed, when a given people or ethnic group were culturally pure and economically innocent, and the moderate interest that the West is beginning to take in Central Asia — guidebooks, popular history books, organized tourism — conforms to this pattern. Visitors want to see the shepherd in his astrakhan hat, not the young Uzbek woman wearing Nikes under her harem pants. However, with the rare exceptions of truly isolated tribes (the highlanders of Papua New Guinea?), few societies are stagnant, and this remark is especially true for Central Asia, which commanded the world’s key overland trade routes for the majority of the last two millennia, long-distance commerce conducted by sea and air being relatively recent phenomena. Thus, an antiquarian may admire a daguerreotype of a fierce-looking Turcoman, wrapped in a sheepskin robe with a rifle over his shoulder, and lament how cheaply commercialized the modern world has become. But on closer inspection he may discover that those are cast-off Tsarist cavalry boots the Turcoman is showing off so proudly, while his new weapon is a 7.62mm Mosin rifle bought from a Russian depot.

The point is that not such a wide gulf divides him, in his cavalry boots, from his descendants promenading through Samarkand sporting Nikes. The town has not yet “sold itself” to the West, any more than that Turcoman had turned his back on his culture by bartering for some foreign products. There are plenty of sheep-skin robes and *atlas* silk gowns yet to be seen on Tashkentskaya. Their owners are no less exotic for wearing sneakers under them — more exotic, perhaps.

And yet... There is a great emptiness at the heart of the city, which the tourist at first does not perceive. My thoughts kept turning to the troubling enigma of the Registan. As an open-air museum, it is magnificent. But it is no longer “the noblest public square in the world” as it was in 1889, for it is no longer public. Despite the appearance of frenetic activity created by squads of workman, it is a silent, lonely, desolate place. Admission is by ticket. Once this space and the adjoining streets had been a jammed market area buzzing with craftsmen and merchants: a sprawling Central Asian bazaar, even after its annexation by the Russian Empire in 1868. It continued as a noisy,



*Interior courtyard of a Madrasa
(Islamic school) at the Registan*

smelly, colorful hub of public life until the communists' scorn of petit-bourgeois traders and "primitive" folk crafts sealed its fate. Certain economic practices were "backward" and consequently ideologically unsound. The Soviets rigidly distinguished between the economic life of a city, and those parts of it that were suitable for tourists. Moscow's cultural policy determined that certain monuments were worth preserving as works of art, but did not hesitate to tear them out of the socio-economic fabric that established their context and meaning. In the case of the Registan, this meant that Lenin personally took a generous interest in ensuring the buildings were restored, but helped found a policy that well-nigh hounded out of existence many of the "feudal" handicrafts that had contributed to the Registan's construction and decoration in the first place.

A Soviet propaganda book on the Uzbek SSR captures the communist hostility to folk skills and the traditional Uzbek economy, boasting how much that was attractive and valuable in Uzbek culture has been stamped out. The writer is almost hilariously oblivious to the revulsion his gauche rodomontade is likely to generate in the Western reader, the audience for which it is intended:

"During the five-year plan periods the Uzbek people,

led by the Communists, made great progress:... From the wheel on which potters shaped their ware, to large machinery works manufacturing hydraulic turbines...; From primitive weavers' shops where coarse fabrics were made on ancient looms, to the largest silk and textile mills in the Soviet Union...; From the *maktab* [elementary school] where the sons of *bais*, the native rich, learned by rote Arabic words they did not understand, to the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan; From strolling singers and musicians to an opera house...²

For good or ill, the hydraulic turbines and textile mills won out over potters' wheels and weavers' shops in Uzbekistan. Samarkand was collectivized and industrialized. A city once known for its ceramics, faience, ganche, stucco and gold work — not to mention an artisan population in the 16th-century consisting of Persian miniaturists, Indian jewelers and Damascan glass-blowers — is now home to tea-curing, fruit-canning and silk-weaving factories. As elsewhere in the country, traditional arts and crafts are almost dead, officially discouraged for so long that the requisite skills are almost forgotten. Some folk art was specifically generated for museums devoted to depicting the cultures of pre-Soviet indigenous nations as rather childish and vaguely decadent. But Uzbek wood and alabaster carving, lace-like fretwork or ornate plasterwork are hardly living arts any more — although they enjoyed a brief revival after the earthquake in 1966, when the strictures on excessive adornment, frowned on in the 1950's, were somewhat relaxed in light of the need to rebuild and redecorate Tashkent.

Here is the restoration work that the Uzbek government should be undertaking. The Uzbeks will renovate their heritage far better if they ignore the monuments for the nonce, and devote themselves to reviving those human skills, energies and enthusiasms that originally made those grand buildings possible. I am not demanding a return to the Registan *only* of those folk trades that would make it picturesque. Although that might please the romantics and the antiquarians, it would be patronizing to today's citizens of Samarkand as well as naive. Let them sell Nikes; but let there be potters' wheels spinning and anvils ringing too, if there is still an interest among Uzbeks and Tajiks in reviving these guild-crafts that were recently, artificially destroyed. I believe there is — so do the UNESCO representatives here — but at the moment it requires government encouragement and nurturing.

Historical buildings and museums are *not* culture; they are the backdrops to culture. No amount of new paintwork and meretricious ornamentation will breathe life into the Registan, as long as it remains sterilized and segregated from the essential business of the city. If the town squares of Prague or Brussels (and the Registan is as impressive as either) were emptied out and encircled with fences, so that no sound resounded from their cobblestones but the occasional tread of silent, awestruck tourists, the living spirit of those cities would have been dealt a near-fatal blow. Samarkand is alive but crippled. Abolish the open-air museum, reestablish the public square, and an important step towards the town's rejuvenation will

2. Victor Vitkovich, *A Tour of Soviet Uzbekistan* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p.14.

have been taken. Its heart will be beating again when the clinking of workers' hammers is replaced by the din and clamor of a thousand people greeting one another, haggling, arguing, exchanging news. Not until then, I sadly concluded, did I feel I could take up residence and participate heart and soul in the civic life of Samarkand.

4. Nodira carries through

Meanwhile, a place to live was also occupying Nodira's thoughts. In fact, her housing difficulties, which I mentioned in passing earlier, had been weighing on her heavily for a long time. While I was in Samarkand, she was entering the final stages of her struggle for her apartment. Things were not looking good for her.

Her story is as follows. In 1977 she applied to the state for a three-room apartment. Her name was added to the Tashkent *hokimiyat*'s housing list in the normal way, at the end of a queue that she well knew was many years long. Nodira stoically settled down for an extended wait. She married, produced two children, divorced, and continued to wait, living first with her husband's family, then with her brother, and finally for many years with her widowed mother. She waited for seventeen years.

In 1994, soon after her forty-second birthday, a note from the Town Hall informed her that there were no three-room apartments available, as she had requested in 1977. However, the state in its magnanimity was now prepared to offer her a single-room apartment within walking distance of her mother's home. It was presented as a take-it-or-leave-it proposal: if the offer did not suit her, the housing office pledged to keep her in mind in the future, but since the record would state that she had once already snubbed their generosity, there could be no promises that a second opportunity would arise within her lifetime. Under these conditions, she accepted. She also bought the apartment from the state for \$1,200, a sum that represented much of her savings, since she believed purchase gave her the right to dispose of it as she chose.

She and her children had been installed in the new apartment for six months when an interesting new complication arose. She was summoned to the Chilanazar *hokimiyat*. There an official blandly informed her that a claimant to the apartment had surfaced. A woman named Natasha was alleging that she was the long-lost daughter of the old lady whose death had liberated the apartment in the first place. As the heiress, she had priority over Nodira. Thus the original award of the apartment to Nodira had been declared null and void. Nodira remonstrated that she had purchased it and had a deed to prove it. The long-suffering official had the honor to inform Nodira that, according to Uzbek law, the state had the right to revoke the sale since, whether one bought a house or an apartment, the land beneath it remained the state's in perpetuity. Consequently, the state was within its rights to reclaim that land, and whatever may happen to be above it, whenever the greater good required. The word "compensation" was not mentioned. Nodira's vituperative protests fell on deaf ears.

Nodira got off some wounding barbs about the office's

failure to make a thorough search for a possible heir before matters had come to this pass. The official, climbing down a little, confessed that the situation was a little irregular. He stressed, however, that the neighbors had positively identified Natasha as the old lady's daughter, and that his superior, from whom the order had come, had also been persuaded that Natasha's claims were genuine. Nodira was convinced at the time (and remains convinced to this day) that such a persuasion, both on the part of the superior and the neighbors, had suggested itself in exchange for envelopes liberally stuffed with cash. She ascertained, meanwhile, that Natasha and her family already had not one but two apartments of their own.

Nodira toyed with the idea of lodging a complaint with her district prosecutor's office but was reliably advised that any such effort would be fruitless. Her sixteen-year old daughter, newly returned from a one-year exchange program at an American high school, and full of enthusiasm for our alien ways, blithely recommended that her mother approach the press. Nodira did discuss the possibility of taking her story to the papers, but journalists laughed at her naivety in imagining that the state-controlled media would listen to her. They also mocked her presumption in believing that her experiences were in any way unique. Nodira retreated, wounded. She wondered vaguely whether the *hokimiyat* had somehow violated her "human rights," a popular new buzz-word in Tashkent, but she had no recourse to any appropriate organizations in order to ask and find out. Finally, grimly concluding that her situation was hopeless, she barred the apartment door and waited to see what would happen.

For once, she did not have long to wait. Natasha's first visit was not auspicious. She demanded to see evidence that Nodira was packing and preparing to move out. She would be denied that satisfaction, Nodira hotly replied, until the *hokimiyat* gave her some assurance that a new apartment would be forthcoming. Natasha erupted in colorful fulminations promising, in jist, to drive her rival out of the apartment in short order. She would camp in the living room — the apartment's only room, in fact — until this aim had been achieved. Nodira was preparing to expel Natasha by brute force, when suddenly of her own accord Natasha turned on her heel and was gone. Nodira slammed the door after her and, with the virago's threats still ringing through the room, burst into tears.

Natasha continued to badger her, principally by telephone, for the following nine months. Nodira's relief that the police made no moves to eject her was matched only by her mortification when they evinced no interest either in protecting her against future trespass, or in intervening to stop Natasha's campaign of telephone harassment, which they chose to regard as "a personal affair." One friendly officer did suggest, in his private capacity, that if she believed Natasha had resorted to bribery, Nodira's best solution would be to make the housing office a counter-offer.

Outraged and humiliated, Nodira took the slightly unusual step of approaching her district's *Oksokollar*, or "White Beards." Once the "wise old men" of any Uzbek *mahalla*, who in the past used their authority and influence

to adjudicate informal disputes, the *Oksokollar* today act as neighborhood committees typically offering advice and help from their offices 4 p.m. - 8 p.m. MWF. They wrote a petition to the housing office, and more than one small delegation discussed her troubles with the *hokimiyat*. Although they ultimately failed to turn the tide in Nodira's favor, she credits their intercession for delaying the date of her eviction. Developments climaxed when she returned home from work one evening and discovered a note, dryly informing the addressee that, if the apartment was not evacuated by the morning of Saturday, June 15, the undersigned would take the law into her own hands and break down the door. The police, once again, refused to be involved. The *Oksokollar* pledged to send an observer.

The defenders took up their positions at 7 a.m. on Saturday morning. They consisted of Nodira, her two children, her mother, her brother, and myself in the capacity of a "foreign journalist." The morning dragged on in an agony of anticipation. The clock had struck one o'clock when we heard voices on the stairwell. We stormed out onto the second-floor landing to encounter Natasha climbing the stairs accompanied by a quadron of beefy boys, who turned out to be her sons and their friends. To my astonishment, I saw that one of them really was carrying an ax. A violent shouting match ensued. Nodira's brother led the counterattack, with an extraordinary flood of abuse in Russian and Uzbek, while Nodira, on the edge of hysteria, called them all uncivilized animals. Chaos broke out when the neighbors joined in on Natasha's side. The foreign journalist's presence was of no avail whatsoever. Seriously alarmed that the situation was getting out of hand, I dispatched the sixteen-year-old daughter to telephone the police again. In the midst of this stand-off, one of the *Oksokollar* arrived bringing a *hokimiyat* representative in tow. A meeting in the official's office between himself, Nodira and Natasha was arranged for the following week. Although the level of bitterness had reached a new high, the tension was temporarily diffused. Natasha's forces dispersed, claiming a victory out of this stunning exercise in intimidation. As we collapsed into chairs, the daughter reported that she had been unable to reach the police: the emergency line had been busy.

The next week, at the tripartite summit in the *hokimiyat*, a proposal at last was forwarded to break the impasse. In exchange for peacefully renouncing the apartment, the state was willing to grant Nodira a piece of land. She was presented with a choice between one of three contiguous plots in northeast Tashkent. As in the case of the apartment, the offer was final. The housing office would consider itself free of all obligations toward her forthwith if she rejected the proposition. She had two days to inform them of her decision.

I accompanied her the next afternoon on the bus to Sobir Rahimov district to inspect her choices. Behind the bus depot at the end of the line, we found ourselves at the edge of huge fields filling up with half-built houses. We were seeing a *mahalla* a-borning. We descended into an irregular landscape formed by piles of building materials

and the shells of new homes. Timber lay across heaps of stones and sacks of concrete. Many empty spaces were laid out with mud-bricks drying in the sun. We passed fragments of walls and doorways, where men bathed in sweat labored with hods and trowels. We trod heavily through muddy sumps that one day would be lanes and roads. Finally, threading our way past the outermost houses, we reached a wide open meadow. Somewhere in the midst of that overgrown expanse was Nodira's land.

She chose the largest plot, Plot 151 (20m x 30m), wondering in her heart what in the world she would do with it. Although the *hokimiyat* was visibly pleased to have washed its hands of her, she could hardly regard this development as a satisfactory resolution to her housing difficulties, unless she was willing to live with her children in a tent. Actually erecting a house with her own hands was out of the question, and she could not afford to hire laborers. In better times, she might have relied on the *hashar*, the Uzbek version of mutual cooperation, whereby the whole extended family assembled to lend a hand to a major construction project undertaken by one of their members, not unlike a barn-raising. In the dismal environment inaugurated by the end of the USSR, however, she appreciated that her relatives barely had the energy and resources to meet their own needs, much less make a significant contribution to helping her. In order to build, she estimated that she would require, at minimum, 30,000 bricks costing seven Uzbek *sum*[UzS] (U.S.\$0.13) apiece.³ Adding in the cost of wood, stone, paint and cement (130 UzS for a 50-kg sack), not to mention plumbing and wiring, she calculated that constructing a small two-room house with kitchen and facilities would set her back U.S.\$8,000. Her salary as chief accountant in a small government concern is 1,750 UzS (U.S.\$33.65) a month.

She had communicated her decision to accept the land within two days, as she had promised. However, although she had signed a document at the *hokimiyat* confirming her decision, she was still very far from actually *possessing* the land. Only someone who has never been blooded by bureaucracy and red tape in the former USSR could be so naive as to believe that.

(1) Nodira's first stop was ZhEK (*Zhilishchno-Ekspluatatsionnii Komitet*), the "Housing-Operation Committee" in Chilanazar. This is where she paid her quarterly telephone and utility bills. More pertinently, ZhEK housed records of her residence history, and was able to issue her with a certificate (*spravka*) confirming that she was legally registered (*propisana*) in Chilanazar. Attaining the *spravka* cost 285 UzS.

(2) She presented this certificate at UKS (*Upravlyeniye Kapital'nogo Stroitel'stvo*), the "Major Construction Work Administration." UKS processed papers for her that endorsed her intention to change her registration to a new district of Tashkent. This endorsement was necessary, since otherwise she would be asking for registration at an address that did not exist yet, since her residence was not *in esse* but still *in posse*. For helpful confirmation of this

3. Mud bricks would have been cheaper, but she would have been starting construction too late in the year to use them: there would not have been sufficient time to raise a roof over them before the rains begin in October.

metaphysical truth, and assistance in breaking out of a potentially vicious circle, Nodira was obliged to pay 315 UzS.

(3) Armed with UKS papers, she was sent to TGIITI (*Tashkentskii Gosudarstvennii Izyskatel'skii Issledovatel'skii Tekhnicheskii Institut*), the "Tashkent State Technical Prospecting Research Institute," where she paid 959 UzS for a mandatory survey of her plot of land. They measured it and tested it for groundwater. Fortune, for once, smiled on Nodira, for not only was there water but it was nine meters underground (300 meters away the water rose to only two meters below the surface, making laying foundations difficult). Moreover, her land was flat. The *hokimiyat* often issues land unsuitable for building, without water, or on steep slopes, and leaves the new owners to cope as they may.

(4) With proof that she had visited TGIITI, she was able to return to ZhEK. It will be remembered that her first visit to ZhEK had confirmed only that she lived in Chilanzar. Nodira had not actually got legal permission (*vypiska*) yet to leave Chilanzar and register herself elsewhere. ZhEK now signed her application for a *vypiska*, formally discharging her from Chilanzar and leaving her temporarily district-less. Astonishingly, this procedure was free.

(5) Her next job was to attach herself to her new district. Her destination was the Sobir Rahimov Mahalla Committee, which handles applications for registrations involving privately-owned houses in their district. To be cleared for registration there, she had to pay 950 UzS.

(6) The PZI office (*Proizvodstvenno-Zhilishchnaya Inspekt-siya* — "Production-Housing Inspection") reviewed the documents she had collected so far and conceded that she had run the course set out for her fairly, and had successfully fulfilled the labors expected of her. A single task lay ahead of her — to get her file "notarized." Without asking why or what any more, Nodira dutifully trooped to a notary who signed, annotated and stamped the requisite pages. The services of PZI and the notary cost together 1,970 UzS.

All together, negotiating the labyrinth cost her 4,479 UzS (U.S.\$86.13), which represents a little over two and a half month's salary. Today the land is hers — but she cannot build on it yet. In order to win *that* privilege, she must secure approval for her building plans from GUKS — the head office of UKS (see #2, above). The cost of having a blueprint drawn up and the necessary stamp affixed to it depends on the size and unconventionality of the house, and probably the mood of the presiding official at the time. One lady of my acquaintance, Valentina, who fancied having an "American-style" two-story residence with a glassed-in porch, abandoned her idea when she found herself charged \$700 for building permission. Probably the term "American-style" led the GUKS worker to conclude that she was rich and ready to be gouged. Valentina's tale went some way towards explaining to me why Uzbek *mahalla* houses are practically identical, built to a traditional plan that admits no room for invention, innovation or even ostentation. Besides such viable explanations as the Uzbeks' conservatism, the proven conven-

ience of the kind of house that has evolved, and the nature of Uzbek society, which does not readily regard the physical home as a vehicle for conspicuous consumption on the Western model, are GUKS's prices.

From the first, Nodira had ruled out the possibility of living on her land. She simply regarded it as an asset, likely to grow in value, that she could cash in one day:

However, at TGIITI she had been appraised of two dismaying pieces of intelligence. The first was that she did not have the legal right to sell it the land — for, it was patiently repeated to her, land never belongs to individuals, only to the common weal, *i.e.* the state. The second item of information came as a revelation. The *hokimiyat's* gift of land to her was hedged around with an unforeseen restriction: she enjoyed the right of usufruct only on condition that she built on it within four years. If she was not actively resident on her plot in a GUKS-approved structure within that time, she forfeited her title and it automatically escheated to the state. In other words, she was obliged to build whether she willed or no. As she reflected miserably on the trap she had fallen into, the TGIITI employee she had been dealing with took her aside and told her not to worry. Although it was technically illegal for her to sell her land, TGIITI could help her do it! Their salaries were so low that they regularly supplemented them by acting as black market real-estate agents. Nodira inquired in wonder what he thought her land might be worth. After reviewing her papers, he guessed about \$10,000 net, after the TGIITI commission for clinching the sale and doctoring the necessary papers.

Now a great and ingenious plan began forming in Nodira's head, for precisely five days previously the state's *Tashzhilsberbank* (*Tashkentskii Zhilishchno-Sberagatel'nyi Bank*, "Tashkent Housing-Savings Bank") had unveiled to an admiring Uzbekistan a new and wondrous banking innovation, the mortgage. As a government accountant, she had been one of the first to get wind of this bold idea and appreciate how it worked. *Tashzhilsberbank* was in fact offering mortgages of a highly circumscribed nature. The bank was in partnership with a construction firm that had just begun erecting a complex of apartment blocks not far from Chorsu market, due to be completed in seven months' time. The down payment, approximately 30 percent of the cost of the apartment, was made directly to the bank, in exchange for which one would be penciled in as a potential tenant. One was offered two possible payment schedules covering the remaining 70 percent-plus interest payments, extending over either three or ten years. Nodira felt that with the cash realized from selling her land, she would have enough money to buy a new apartment.

Nodira and I hurried to the bank (situated downtown directly between the Palace of People's Friendship and the Circus) to con the details. In a miserable, airless room lit by a single fluorescent bulb, droves of people waited at a wooden table to see the blueprints. We waited our turn, pouring with sweat. By the time we reached the front, all the first- and second-floor housing had already been spoken for. But on the third floor, in a building made of brick, was the three-room apartment (74 sq. meters) that Nodira had dreamed of for almost twenty years. It cost

445,000 UzS (U.S.\$8,558). A hasty decision was required. When the doors opened the next morning, Nodira brought a plastic bag full of cash (the only method of paying the bank would accept) and emptied it out onto the wooden table. It was counted and the papers were drawn up at once. She had made a down payment of 141,000 UzS (U.S.\$2,712), the last of her savings, supplemented by her brother's. She agreed to pay the remainder of the cost of the apartment, 304,000 UzS (\$5,846) over ten years. According to the ten-year schedule, interest payments add 20 percent to her debt *i.e.* a real debt of 364,800 UzS (U.S.\$7,015). The true cost to her of the apartment after a decade, in other words, will be 505,800 UzS (U.S.\$9,727).⁴

Nodira, no fool, was aware of the risks she was taking. For a start, the contract makes no provisions for the eventuality, depressingly predictable in Uzbekistan, that the apartment will not be built on time, or perhaps never completed at all. Furthermore, the price is not final. Incredibly, to my mind, in the small print the bank reserves to itself the right to make any adjustments to the price of the apartment it sees fit to compensate for inflation, rise in the cost of building materials, new legislation about workers' salaries, etc. Nodira and her fellow tenants appeared to be completely at the bank's mercy. To add to this was the uncertainty whether her land really could be liquidated, and how much it would yield.

Yet Nodira's spirits have never been so good. She has moved back in with her mother, leaving Natasha to rule the roost, but she is not downcast in the least. "Let her have that miserable, one-room hole-in-the-wall," she said

to me only last week. It was the second day of *chilla*: I had met her after work for a stroll in the park. I was already flagging, but she was invincible. "Khodzhayeva Uighura #1, Apt. 13," she exclaimed happily. "Only seven more months! A brick building! It will be cool in summer," she said, and with such wondrous passion, so unlike Nodira-the-unlucky, Nodira-the-stoic, that I felt I was witnessing a conversion, as if Sonya from *Crime and Punishment* was being brought alive in front of me in her moment of epiphany: "But she was so happy that her happiness almost frightened her. Seven years, *only* seven years! At the beginning of their happiness, at certain moments, they were both ready to look on those seven years as if they were seven days..."

And if the land did not fetch a decent price, or no price at all? If one of a dozen complications intervened to ruin her plans and dash her hopes to the ground? "I will work. My daughter speaks English: she'll find a good position. She'll help me. We'll get through. And if the worst comes to the worst," she concluded, with a twinkle in her eye, "we will take up residence in your house in Samarkand."

I smiled and averted my gaze. When I thought of the course she had run to reach this point and the emotional fortitude the constant struggle must have required, just for the chance of risking all to achieve her dream, and when I compared her determination with my dilettantish whims and fancies, casually adopted and easily abandoned, I felt suffused with shame. I have not yet had the courage to confess to her my change of heart about Samarkand. □



4. If she had chosen, or moves onto, the three-year schedule, interest payments come to only 10 percent of 304,000 UzS, *i.e.* a real debt of 334,400 UzS. In this case, the total true cost of the apartment after three years is 475,400 UzS (U.S.\$9,142).

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Institute Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey and Central Asia, and their importance as actors the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Christopher P. Ball. An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

William F. Foote. Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and

Reporter for the *Buenos Aires Herald* from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

Sharon Griffin. A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration [sub-SAHARA]

John Harris. A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two years of postgraduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Pramila Jayapal. Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber and an accounts man

ager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, but most recently managed a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS [SOUTH ASIA]

John B. Robinson. A 1991 Harvard graduate with a certificate of proficiency from the Institute of Kiswahili in Zanzibar and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Brown University, he and his wife Delphine, a French oceanographer, are spending two years in Madagascar with their two young sons, Nicolas and Rowland. He will be writing about varied aspects of the island-nation's struggle to survive industrial and natural-resource exploitation and the effects of a rapidly swelling population [sub-SAHARA]

Teresa C. Yates A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARA]

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Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin
Program Administrator: Gary L. Hansen
Publications Manager: Ellen Kozak

Phone: (603) 643-5548
Fax: (603) 643-9599
E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net

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