

# Public Discipline and Security System in The "Old City" of Tashkent (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)

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**Abstract:** During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the responsibility for maintaining peace and security in the "Old City" of Tashkent rested with the district oqsoqol, who carried out these duties by relying on mirshabs and yigits. The appointment of yigits was made by the city chief based on the recommendations of the oqsoqol. This study examines the evolution of public discipline and security systems in the "Old City" of Tashkent during the late 19th and early 20th centuries under Russian colonial rule. It analyzes the imposition of new administrative and legal frameworks, the transformation of traditional forms of social control, and the impact of these changes on the daily lives of the local population. Key aspects explored include the establishment of police forces, the implementation of regulations concerning public order, and the responses of the local community to these measures. The research draws on archival documents, contemporary accounts, and scholarly literature to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of power and social control in this critical period of Tashkent's history.

**Keywords:** Qurboshi, Mirboshi, Mirshab, Yigit, Oqsoqol, Ellikboshi, Tashkent, Security Service

## Introduction

The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a period of significant transformation for the city of Tashkent, particularly its "Old City," as it came under Russian colonial rule. This period witnessed the imposition of new systems of governance, public discipline, and security measures that profoundly impacted the social and cultural fabric of the local population. This study delves into the intricacies of these changes, examining how the traditional structures of order and security in the Old City were reshaped by the colonial administration. By exploring the mechanisms of control, the interactions between the colonizers and the local community, and the socio-economic factors at play, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics of public discipline and security in a critical period of Tashkent's history.

Since ancient times, it has been one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state maintaining peace and stability within society, as well as ensuring order and discipline among the population,. This has primarily contributed to the stability of the country while

also preventing internal conflicts, various disturbances, and violations of the law. Due to the unique mentality of the population of Central Asia, their traditions imbued with humanistic values, and their deeply rooted beliefs, peace and tranquility have historically prevailed among the people. Particularly during the periods of the khanates, military attention was primarily directed toward preparing for confrontations with external forces. Internal order was maintained by officials such as qorboshi, muhtasib, qorovul, mirshab, night guards, yuzboshi, and yigit.

## Methodology

According to research conducted by the renowned historian F. Ozadayev on the history of Tashkent, during the khanate era, "the responsibility for maintaining order in the city at night was entrusted to the qorboshi, who had 400 mirshabs under his command (100 in each district)". Similarly, A.I. Dobrosmyslov, who provided valuable sources on the history of Tashkent, states that during the Kokand Khanate, the qorboshi was responsible for internal order and security in the city. He commanded 44 mirboshi (mirbasha), four of whom were designated as leaders overseeing groups of ten. V.V. Barthold corroborates these details but uses the term "mirshab" instead of "mirboshi". Writing about internal order, A.I. Dobrosmyslov describes how, after evening prayers, the qorboshi, along with his men, would patrol the streets, bringing individuals engaged in improper activities before the city bek, preventing thefts and fires, and ensuring the peace and safety of the population.

In the process of writing the article, methodologies such as historicism, systematic-comparative analysis, problem-chronological approach, and quantitative analysis were employed.

After the Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia, numerous challenges emerged amid changes in the administrative system and social life. Alongside the imperial government's policies, foreign cultural elements, as well as negative notions and customs unfamiliar to the local population, were introduced. This phenomenon was especially pronounced in Tashkent, which served as the administrative center of the Turkestan General-Governorship. Naturally, such societal transformations necessitated various measures to maintain public peace. In the "Old City" area of Tashkent, inhabited by the local population, these responsibilities were not carried out by colonial administrators but rather by representatives of the local community. Within the "Old City," each neighborhood elder (oqsoqol) had "yigits" under their supervision, ensuring order and security. The oqsoqol was regarded as the chief authority overseeing law and order, while a head mirshab also commanded the yigits.

Initially, during the early years of imperial rule, the oqsoqol was assisted by neighborhood leaders, first called "tovg'och" and later "ellikboshi." However, these individuals did not perform police functions. Instead, the oqsoqol relied on the yigits to implement local policies. Historically, the role of the yigit during the khanate period corresponded to that of qorovuls or mirshabs—essentially night guards. Following the establishment of imperial rule, changes in the socio-political life of the population led to the

interchangeable use of the terms "mirshab" and "yigit" in the context of security and law enforcement. The term "mirshab" had traditionally been associated with night patrolmen, whereas "yigit" referred to military personnel. The yigit was conceptually close to "navkar," signifying a warrior or servant in military service. For instance, historical sources indicate that the renowned military leader Alikuli, who demonstrated heroism in resistance against the Russian Empire's invasion, was recruited as a yigit and navkar to Kokand Khan Mallabek at the age of 22.

The internal order system was established based on both the imperial government's laws and the traditional services of the local population after the Russian Empire's conquest of Tashkent. However, on August 14, 1881, the decree named "Regulation on Measures for the Protection of State Order and Public Tranquility" was announced, introducing a "reinforced" security regime. Although this document was issued on a national scale, its primary focus was on colonial territories, as maintaining internal order was crucial for strengthening imperial rule. In this regard, reforms in the central city of the region, Tashkent, continued. According to research by F. Ozadayev, in the "Old City" area, responsibilities such as maintaining nighttime security and stability, monitoring unreliable and temporarily residing individuals, searching for criminals and suspicious persons were assigned to a newly established position. Beginning in 1883, the city chief appointed a junior assistant from among the local population to oversee these tasks. This position remained in effect until January 1, 1887, after which the responsibility was transferred to the head mirshab of each neighborhood.

In what kind of conditions yigits were selected? According to each district, oqsoqol selects them through youth, and the candidate was announced to the city ruler. On the basis of the selection, the most nimble and initiative men were sat on the responsible work. There are a plethora of samples from archive documents.

*Хурматли Тошкент шаҳар ҳокими хизматларига Себзор оқсоқолидан рапорт.*

*Ушбунинг илан жанобингизга маълум қиламан, мулло Раҳматилло Бўтабой ўғлини Мирхалил Эрназар ўғлини ўрнига мазкур мулло Раҳматиллони йигитлик хизматида 25 январдан мустақкам қилмоққа фармойиш қилсангиз экан деб Себзор оқсоқоли мулло Калонбек махзум мулло Нормуҳаммад охунд ўғли муҳрим босдим. 1891 й. 19 январь.*

*Report from the Sebzor oqsoqol to the Honorable Mayor of Tashkent. Through this document, I inform Your Excellency that it is requested to formally appoint Mullah Rahmatillo Botaboy's son to the position of yigit in place of Mirhalil Ernazar's son, effective from January 25. Therefore, I, Sebzor oqsoqol, Mullah Kalonbek Mahzum, son of Mullah Normuhammad Akhund, affix my seal to this request. January 19, 1891.*

From this document, it is evident that the appointment of a yigit was carried out through an official decree based on the recommendation of the neighborhood oqsoqol. Naturally, there were cases when an appointed yigit became ill or was unable to fulfill his duties. In such instances, the oqsoqol would submit a request to the city chief, specifying the full name of the new candidate. Upon approval by the city chief, the appointed yigit would commence his service. This process is reflected in the following document.

*Жаноб шаҳар ҳокими Бешёғоч оқсоқолидан рапорт.*

*Ушбунинг илан маълум қиламанким маним хизматимда йигитлик қилиб турғувчилар яъни Мирҳамид Мирёқуб ўғли хизматга ёролмаган сабаб ўрнига Муҳаммад амр Мир Муса ўғлини, Исабой Муҳаммад ўғли хизмат қилмасдин жавоб сўраган сабабли ўрнига Муҳаммад розоқ Ёқуббой ўғлини, Мулло Аъзамбой Ой муҳаммад ўғли бетоблиги сабабли ўрнига Абдулқодир Ғофуржон ўғлини мустаҳкам қилмоққа фармойиш берсангиз. 1891 й. Февраль”.*

*Through this document, I inform Your Excellency that the following changes are requested regarding the individuals serving under my supervision as yigits: Mirhamid Miryoqub’s son is unable to perform his duties, and it is requested to appoint Muhammad Amr Mir Musa’s son in his place. Isaboy Muhammad’s son has requested to be relieved of his service, and therefore, it is proposed to replace him with Muhammad Rozoq Yoqubboy’s son. Additionally, Mullah Azamboy Oy Muhammad’s son has fallen ill, and it is requested that Abdulqodir G’ofurjon’s son be appointed in his stead. February 1891.*

From the document above, it is evident that a yigit could voluntarily petition the oqsoqol for dismissal from his duties. In another document, it is recorded that the Shaykhontohur mirshab requested the appointment of Sobirbek Ishoqbek’s son to replace Samiaziz Muhammad’s son, who had fallen ill.

## Result and Discussion

In the “Old City” of Tashkent, the law enforcement and security personnel known as “yigits” carried out their duties in two distinct categories: mounted yigits and foot yigits. Mounted yigits were required to be physically strong as well as skilled horsemen. Their responsibilities and authority were greater than those of foot yigits. Consequently, mounted yigits received 25% higher wages compared to their counterparts on foot. During the 1860s and 1870s, yigits earned a monthly salary of 10-12 soms, which increased over time. For instance, records from 1891 indicate that a mounted yigit earned 20 soms per month, amounting to 240 soms annually, whereas a foot yigit received 15 soms per month, totaling 180 soms per year. By the early 20th century, their wages had risen to 20-25 soms per month. Additionally, the chief mirshab – referred to by Russian administrators as a “strazhnik” – was paid a monthly salary of 25 soms, accumulating to 300 soms per year. These positions were also assigned to local residents. For example, in 1891, Abduholiq Olimboy’s son served as a strazhnik in the Sebzor district, Saifulloh Mirhakim’s son in the Shaykhontohur district, and Umar Olimboy’s son in the Kukcha district.

Although the total number of security service personnel was seemingly determined by the oqsoqol, it is evident that their appointment was carried out under orders from representatives of the Tsarist government. The number of security personnel increased during the colonial period based on the needs of the population. For instance, in 1868, the oqsoqols of the four districts formally petitioned the city governor to request an increase in the number of guards. Prior to 1868, 54 guards served in the Shaykhontohur district. Considering the rising incidence of theft and other crimes, the district oqsoqol, Mullah

Mirjalil, requested Governor Rossitsky to issue an order to add 37 more guards [9, 5]. In the same year, the Kukcha district had 70 guards, and its oqsoqol, Mirafzal, petitioned for an additional 35. Similarly, the oqsoqol of Beshyogoch, Salimboy, requested the addition of 25 guards to the existing 50, while in Sebzor, the oqsoqol Nodir Muhammad sought to expand the force by 35 guards, raising the total from 70. Governor Rossitsky approved these requests on February 26, 1869, with his signature. In subsequent years, the number of security personnel was further adjusted. By the time of the "cholera uprising" in 1892, each district had two mounted yigits and seventeen foot yigits under the command of a strazhnik. Additionally, each oqsoqol had an independent group of ten foot yigits serving under his direct supervision. 1892 йил содир бўлган “вабо исёни” ёки “тошотар воқеаси” империя маъмурларини сергак торттирди. The “Cholera Uprising” or “Toshotar” (stoning) of 1892 heightened the vigilance of imperial administrators. In response, the “Regulation on Reinforced Security, announced later that year, provided a legal foundation for further strengthening the internal order and security system, as well as implementing a series of reforms.

As part of the administrative measures, the “Old City” area was initially divided into two sections. The first section comprised the Shaykhontohur and Sebzor districts, where a newly established position, assistant to the Tashkent city pristav (introduced after the uprising), was assigned to Krishkov. The second section, consisting of the Beshyogoch and Kukcha districts, was placed under the authority of assistant pristav Rubinsky [8, 97-100]. Both assistants reported directly to the chief of city police (since 1868, the city chief also served as the head of police). Additionally, each district was assigned Russian administrative officers known as “okolotochnys” or district inspectors. These officers were given command over ten yigits. From this arrangement, it is clear that the uprising of 1892 caused significant concern for the Tsarist government, prompting them to seek direct control over the internal affairs of the “Old City.” By the end of that year, as the situation stabilized, the position of assistant pristav was abolished. However, the role of an “okolotochny” for each district remained intact. These officers received a monthly salary of 35 soms.

In the all types of “yigit” post they had to know religious rules. Because in some cases they were to solve some problems by themselves. Moreover, they were ought to informed about the new decrees of the empire. Yigits defended each doors of the districts as well. Since the city was protected day and night, they used to work by queue.

The security service of Tashkent’s twelve city gates was also carried out by yigits. Later, as the city walls were dismantled, this necessity disappeared. It is worth noting that the gates of Tashkent were locked with special keys, which were made of pure gold. When General Chernyaev captured Tashkent, he demanded that the keys be handed over as a symbolic representation of the city's conquest. According to historical sources, the keys presented to the imperial government were crafted by the goldsmith Abdurahmon from the Pichoqchilik neighborhood. The keys were gilded, measuring 16 cm in length and weighing between 165-167 grams. The gates were guarded by specialized security personnel who



rotated shifts at designated times. Inside the gates, facilities for meals and rest were available. Some sources indicate that the gates were opened at sunrise and closed by the yigits at sunset. Their duty was “to patrol the fortress every evening after dusk, ensuring security until the break of dawn”.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the “Old city” area of the Tashkent was done significant issue by yigits to keep the whole nation peaceful and sincerely protected. Although in modern society the activities of law enforcement officers have significantly improved in ensuring public peace, the contributions of past guardians such as yigits and mirshabs also played a crucial role in safeguarding the security of the population and shaping the development of this sector.

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