

RHETORIC OF RULE: ULUGH BEG'S IMAGE IN SEKKĀKĪ'S PANEGYRIC POETRY

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Abstract: Ulugh Beg (r. 1447–1449) occupies a unique position at the crossroads of science, governance, and literary culture, embodying the ideal of a philosopher–king in Timurid history. This study examines his patronage of poetry and engagement with literary traditions, drawing upon sources such as *Majālis al-Nafā'is* (Assemblies of Distinguished Men) by 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī, *Tadhkirat al-Shu'arā* (Memoirs of the Poets) by Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, and the *qaṣīdas* composed in his honor. Particular attention is given to *qaṣīdas* by Sekkākī and others, which construct an idealized vision of kingship rooted in justice, cosmic harmony, and intellectual authority. By situating Ulugh Beg within a broader tradition of poetic praise and intellectual patronage, this research re-evaluates his legacy, arguing that his cultural contributions were as integral to his reign as his scientific achievements.

Keywords: Ulugh Beg; Sekkākī; literary patronage; *qaṣīda* poetry; poetic praise; philosopher–king; intellectual legacy; cultural patronage.

1 ULUGH BEG: THE PHILOSOPHER–KING

Ulugh Beg (r. 1447–1449), a multifaceted prince–ruler (1409–1447) and later a sultan, is best known for his contributions to astronomy and mathematics. His legacy in these fields is exemplified by the Observatory he established in Samarkand and the astronomical tables that bear his name, *Zīj-i Jadīd-i Sulṭānī* (The New Sultanic Star Tables), also known as *Zīj-i Ulugh Beg* and *Zīj-i Gūrkhānī*. These achievements have largely overshadowed other aspects of his rule, particularly his engagement with literary culture, an essential attribute of rulers and elites in his time. Consequently, information regarding his patronage and literary interests remains scattered and limited.

Our knowledge of Ulugh Beg's involvement in literary culture primarily derives from three sources: 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī's (d. 1501) *Majālis al-Nafā'is*, completed in 1491–1492, which is the first Turkish-language biographical dictionary of poets; Dawlatshāh Samarqandī's (d. 900/1494 or 913/1507) *Tadhkirat al-Shu'arā*, completed in 1487 in Persian; and the *qaṣīdas* (panegyric odes) composed in his honor by various poets.

One of the most notable aspects of Ulugh Beg's literary patronage was his interest in poetry. 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī notes his affinity for poetry and provides an example of a Persian couplet attributed to him. However, doubts remain regarding whether Ulugh Beg was actually a poet. The couplet attributed to him reads (Nevayī, 2001: 194):

هر چند ملک حسن بزیر نگین تست
شوخی مکن که چشم بدار در کمین تست
Though beauty's realm lies beneath
your ring's girdle
Stay on guard—wicked eyes lie in wait.
Another indication of Ulugh Beg's engage-

ment with poetry is found in Dawlatshāh's account of a literary debate between Ulugh Beg and his brother Baysunghur (d. 1434). According to Dawlatshāh, Baysunghur regarded Amīr Khusraw Dihlavi's (d. 1325) *Khamṣa* (a *mes-nevi*-form five-poem narrative cycle) superior to Nizāmī Ganjavī's (d. 1214?) *Khamṣa*, a claim Ulugh Beg rejected (Devletşah, 2011: 314). As neither brother was willing to concede, they engaged in a verse-by-verse comparison of both works but failed to reach a resolution.

In the pre-modern period, rulers and elites frequently expressed emotions and ideas through well-known verses or their own compositions. Two instances of this practice involving Ulugh Beg are recorded by Dawlatshāh. Following the death of his father, Shāhrukh, in 1447, Ulugh Beg sought to bring the province of Balkh under his rule, which had been inherited by his nephews, Mirza Abū Bakr and Muḥammad Qāsim, sons of his deceased brother Muḥammad Jūkī (d. 1445). He ultimately orchestrated the assassination of Mirza Abū Bakr (d. 1448?) through deception (Barthold, 1958: 146). Before his execution, Mirza Abū Bakr sent a quatrain (*rubā'ī*) to Ulugh Beg, expressing his sense of betrayal, while Dawlatshāh also records a couplet that Ulugh Beg later repeated, reflecting his remorse (Devletşah, 2011: 495).

Here is Mirza Abū Bakr's quatrain:

اول که مرابدام خویش آوردی
صد گونه وفا و مهر پیش آوردی
چون دانستی که دل گرفتار تو شد
بیگانگی تمام پیش آوردی

First, you deceived me and lured me
into your trap;
You showered me with kindness and
affection.
But when you saw that my heart was
drawn to you,

You revealed your enmity in full force.

Ulugh Beg's regretful couplet:¹

وقت دریاب بهر کار که سودی ندهد

نوشدارو که پس از مرگ بسهراب دهند

Seize the moment, for after death,

The elixir that revived Sohrāb is of no use.

Dawlatshāh provides further insights into Ulugh Beg's literary taste. He favored the poetry of Jamāl al-Dīn Iṣfahānī (d. 1192) over his more famous son, Kamāl al-Dīn Iṣfahānī (d. 1240?), though Dawlatshāh disagreed with this preference (Devletşah, 2011: 204). He also admired the *Dīvān* of Falaqī-yi Shīrvānī (d. 1146), a poet known for his astronomical and astrological references, but questioned why Falaqī had chosen this name, remarking that "Falaqī is not a name that brings good fortune." (Devletşah, 2011: 160). His court hosted literary discussions, including a review of the 12,000-verse *Dīvān* of Sayf al-Dīn Iṣfarangī, which was considered superior to the poetry of 'Aṣīr al-Dīn Akhsikātī (d. 1181?), a Seljuk-era poet from Ahsiket (in modern-day Uzbekistan) (Devletşah, 2011: 185–186).

Ulugh Beg's most favored and frequently read book, as noted by Dawlatshāh, was *Nigaristan* (completed in 1334) by Mu'tinī Juvaynī (d. 1379 or 1381), a *naẓīre* (parallel work) to Sa'dī Shīrāzī's (d. 1292) renowned *Gulistān*. Dawlatshāh mentioned that though simpler than the *Gulistān*, it contained rare expressions and wise anecdotes, making it well-known in Transoxiana but rarely found in Khorasan. Ulugh Beg received this book as a gift from prominent figures in Bahrābād² during his campaign in Iraq. He subsequently commissioned calligraphers to produce a lavishly illuminated manuscript of the work (Devletşah, 2011: 432).

Dawlatshāh mentions two Persian poets who dedicated *qaṣīdas* to Ulugh Beg. Mawlānā Badakhshī, a prominent poet in Samarkand during Ulugh Beg's reign, composed brilliant *panegyric* odes in his honor (Devletşah, 2011: 522). Ismat-i Bukhārī, who initially composed *qaṣīdas* for his patron Khalīl Sulṭān (ruler of Samarkand, 1404–1409), ceased writing poetry following Khalīl Sulṭān's death in 1411. However, Ulugh Beg personally requested him to compose *qaṣīdas* in his honor. While he complied for a time, he ultimately abandoned poetry and returned to Bukhara, where he died in 1436–1437 (Devletşah, 2011: 229). Of Ismat-i Bukhārī's 95 surviving *qaṣīdas*, 45 were dedicated to Khalīl Sulṭān, and 16 to Ulugh Beg (Yağan, 1993: 13).

While it is presumed that *qaṣīdas* in the Turkic language were composed for Ulugh Beg, only the works of two known poets have sur-

vived: Mawlānā Sekkākī, whose *qaṣīdas* are the focus of this study, and Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Hudāyād Ṭarāzī, whose recently discovered work, *Funūn al-Balāgha* (*The Arts of Eloquence*), contains poems dedicated to Ulugh Beg (DeWeese, 2005: 74, 91; Seyhan, 2019: 190). Completed in 1436–1437, this work was presented to Ulugh Beg, indicating a direct connection between his patronage of poetry and his interest in rhetoric.

Lütfi (d. 1492?), recognized as the first major poet of Timurid-era Turkish literature, does not appear to mention Ulugh Beg with certainty in his poetry. In the published edition of his *Dīvān* and some manuscript copies, a different verse replaces the line where Ulugh Beg's name is allegedly mentioned (Barthold, 1958: 136; Karaağaç, 1997: 91, 320; Ghazal 113, couplet 7). Additionally, while Lütfi's *Dīvān* includes two *qaṣīdas* and a *ghazal* dedicated to Ghiyāth al-Dīn Baysunghur (d. 1433) (*qaṣīdas* 3 and 4, *ghazal* 236), as well as one *qaṣīda* each for Mīrzā 'Alā' al-Dawla (d. 1460) and Shāhrukh (*qaṣīdas* 5 and 6), and a *ghazal* for an unnamed prince (*ghazal* 237), no poem has been identified in which Ulugh Beg is explicitly mentioned in any couplet. This suggests that Lütfi was likely not part of Ulugh Beg's immediate circle, or closely associated with his court.

The writings of 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī and Dawlatshāh indicate that Ulugh Beg possessed a deep appreciation for literature, was capable of critical literary evaluation, and actively patronized poets and scholars.

2 SEKKĀKĪ AND HIS QAṢĪDA POETRY

Due to limited biographical information, Sekkākī's real name and exact date of birth remain unknown.³ Regarding his place of birth, 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī's statement that he was from Mawarannahr (Transoxiana) refers to a broad region rather than a specific city (Nevayī, 2001: 70).⁴ Sekkākī is known by his pen name (*maḥlaṣ*), derived from the Arabic root *s-k-k* (سكك), meaning "to mint," "to engrave," or "to forge metal." The name Sekkākī is formed by adding the Persian possessive suffix "-ī" to *Sekkāk*, which itself can mean "a minter of coins," "a knife-maker," or "a blacksmith who crafts iron rings." It remains uncertain which of these meanings influenced his choice of pen name, or whether it was adopted due to his family's profession or for another reason entirely.

Though the exact timing of Sekkākī's arrival in Samarkand is unclear, his presence there by 1407 is confirmed by a *qaṣīda* he composed to mark the birth of either Muḥammad Bahadur or 'Alī, sons of Khalīl Sulṭān (r. 1405–1409), grandson of Tīmūr (Tamerlane) and ruler of Samar-

kand.⁵ Another of Sekkākī's *qaṣīdas*, written in honor of Muḥammad Pārsā, a Naqshbandī sheikh from Bukhara who was also a *mufasssīr* (Qur'anic commentator), *muḥaddīth* (traditionist), and *faqīh* (jurisprudent), and who maintained good relations with Shāhrukh before his passing in 1420, suggests that Sekkākī had been in Samarkand prior to this date. Expressing deep reverence and admiration, Sekkākī addresses the wind, asking it to visit Pārsā in Bukhara on his behalf. He also expresses his regret for not being present at Pārsā's circle, lamenting his own condition. The exact date of their acquaintance remains unknown, yet the sixteenth couplet of the *qaṣīda*, as seen below, sheds light on their relationship and implies that Sekkākī took part in the sheikh's gatherings (*qaṣīda* 3, couplet 17; p.104/11).

Mecliste özi ay irür aşhāb ke'n-nücūm
Ḥūrşid tig zāmīri cihānga birür ziyā

In the assembly, he (Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā) is like the moon, while those around him are like stars; his presence illuminates the space like the sun.⁶

Apart from Ulugh Beg and Muḥammad Pārsā, the third key figure in Sekkākī's life was Amīr Arslan Khwāja Tarkhān, to whom he dedicated four *qaṣīdas* (*qaṣīde* 8, 11, 12, 13). Although a complete biography of Tarkhān remains elusive, he was a senior courtier during the Timūrid era, serving in the Royal household (*enderūn*) during Tīmūr's reign before later joining Ulugh Beg's *dīvān* (Ando, 1992: 140–141; Barthold, 1958: 96, 100, 102). He also participated in Ulugh Beg's 1425 campaign in East Turkestan and served as Governor of Siġnak (Sighnaq) and Sabran (Savran, Sawran).⁷ Recognizing Tarkhān as his patron, Sekkākī likens him to Rustam and 'Alī in bravery and heroism, and to Ḥātem in generosity (*qaṣīda* 8, couplet 18; p.140/2–3). He elevates their bond to a divine level, asserting that just as God predestined Tarkhān's court as a sanctuary for scholars, He destined Sekkākī to be his panegyrist (*qaṣīda* 12, couplet 32; p.186/12). Sekkākī's poetry vividly describes Tarkhān's gatherings (*meclis*), highlighting his recitations of the Qur'ān, eloquent speech, expertise in theological and philosophical discourse, and skill in resolving complex issues (*qaṣīda* 12, couplet 20–23; p.184/14–15, 1–3).⁸ These poetic references confirm that Sekkākī was part of Tarkhān's circle. However, it remains uncertain whether he accompanied Tarkhān during his governorship in Sighnaq and Sabran.

The exact date of Sekkākī's death has not been definitively determined (Eraslan, 1999: 16, 18), but he is generally believed to have

passed away around 1460.

Sekkākī's prominent role in Timurid-era Turkic literature, along with examples of his poetry, is highlighted in later sources, including Nawā'ī's *Majālis al-Nafā'is*, *Khuṭba-i Devāvin* (Preface to the Divans), and *Muḥākamat al-Lughatayn* (Comparison of the Two Languages), as well as Yaqīnī's (d. before 1500) *Oḳ Yayning Munāzarası* (The Debate of the Arrow and the Bow) (İz 1962). When compared to his contemporary Lutfī, it is generally acknowledged that Sekkākī excelled in the *qaṣīda* form, while Lutfī was more accomplished in the *ghazal* form.⁹ The success of Sekkākī's Turkic-language *qaṣīdas* is further demonstrated by the parallel *qaṣīdas* (*naẓīres*) composed in response to his 9th *qaṣīda* in honor of Ulugh Beg by Ḥaydar Tilbe (d. before 1450?) and 'Abd al-Razzāq Bakhshī (d. before 1481?) (Sertkaya, 1999: 177–190).

A total of 13 *qaṣīdas*, 60 *ghazals* and couplets attributed to Sekkākī survive today, preserved in two manuscript copies of his *Dīvān* (British Library Or. 2079 and Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies 7685), a *mecmū'a* (a miscellany of poems by different poets), and various biographical sources. Since Sekkākī's *Dīvān* has already been extensively analyzed and published in Uzbekistan and Turkey, this study will focus specifically on his *qaṣīdas*.¹⁰

The *qaṣīdas* in the *Dīvān* are arranged hierarchically, following the prevailing literary conventions of the time: a praise and glorification (*taḥmīd*) of God (*qaṣīda* 1); a *na'ī* in honor of the Prophet Muḥammad (*qaṣīda* 2); praise of the religious figure Muḥammad Pārsā (*qaṣīda* 3); and *panegyrics* dedicated to rulers and patrons, including Shāhrukh (*qaṣīda* 4), Khalīl Sultān (*qaṣīda* 5), Ulugh Beg (*qaṣīdas* 6, 7, 9, 10), and Arslan Khwāja Tarkhān (*qaṣīdas* 8, 11, 13).

It should be noted that while most studies identify the fourth *qaṣīda* in Sekkākī's *Dīvān* as a work dedicated to Ulugh Beg, a more detailed textual analysis suggests that it was, in fact, composed to commemorate Shāhrukh's capture of Samarkand and his accession to the throne in 1409.¹¹ The uncertainty regarding the poem's intended recipient arises from the title found in manuscript copies, which states, "In Praise of Ulugh Beg Mirza—May God Illuminate His Grave", as well as from references to both Shāhrukh and Ulugh Beg within the verses. However, an analysis of the *Dīvān*'s structure suggests that these headings were likely added by later copyists rather than by the poet himself. Moreover, the arrangement of *qaṣīdas* within the *Dīvān* follows a hierarchical order, a common convention in the compilation of poetry

collections (*Dīvāns*). In this framework, poems in praise of God, the Prophet Muhammad, and a prominent religious figure (Muḥammad Pār-sā) typically precede those honoring the reigning sultan. In this case, the expected structure indicates that Shāhrukh is the sovereign being praised. The content of the following couplets further supports this claim:

Cihāndın kitti teşvīş ü mebādī-i emān kildi

Halāyık 'ayş iting bu kūn sūrūr-ı cāvidān kildi (qaşıda 4, couplet 1; p.108/3)

Conflict has vanished from the world, and security has taken its place;
O people, celebrate today, for the time of eternal joy has arrived.

Cihāndın Ehrimen kitip musahhar bolgay ins ü cān

Kim uş tahtını yil kötrüp Süleymān-ı zamān kildi (qaşıda 4, couplet 5; p.108/7)

Ehrimen, the adversary, has been cast away, and both mankind and jinn have submitted to his rule,
For the Solomon of this age—whose throne is carried by the wind—has come.

Köngüller boldı hoş rūşen körüp kalmadı bir zerr

Karaṅguluk kitip hālī çü hūrşid-i zamān kildi (qaşıda 4, couplet 10; p.110/12)

Every heart has been illuminated, and no darkness remains,
For the sun of the era has risen [Shāhrukh has taken the throne].

Sivinsün husrev-i 'ālī-güher Sulṭān Ulugh Big kim

Şehen-şeh Şāhruḥ Big tig şeh-i Husrev-nişān kildi (qaşıda 4, couplet 11; p.110/13-14)

Let the noble sultan Ulugh Beg rejoice,
For the great king Shāhrukh has become the ruler, just like Khusraw.

Given these textual clues, it is reasonable to conclude that the *qaşıda* was primarily composed for Shāhrukh rather than Ulugh Beg. The next section will examine how Sekkākī's four *qaşıdas* in honor of Ulugh Beg portray him, analyzing them under specific thematic headings.

3 PORTRAYAL OF ULUGH BEG IN SEKKĀKĪ'S QAŞİDAS

The earliest examples of the *qaşıda*, both as a poetic form and genre, can be traced back to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, where it was used to

praise tribal leaders, warriors, and patrons. Over time, it evolved into a sophisticated literary form within Persian and Turkic traditions, becoming a fundamental element of courtly culture. Poets such as Rūdakī (d. 9141) and Sanā'ī (d. ca. 1131) laid its foundations, while figures like Sekkākī further refined its conventions, integrating established themes into their compositions.

In the pre-modern period, the themes and vocabulary used to praise rulers in *qaşıdas* closely parallel those found in mirrors for princes—advisory texts written for rulers.¹² The metaphors and rhetorical strategies common to this shared cultural repertoire vary in prominence depending on the poet's relationship with the patron. In his four *qaşıdas* dedicated to Ulugh Beg, Sekkākī draws upon the ideals of rulership outlined in such texts while incorporating references specific to Ulugh Beg's time, geography, and personal attributes. A comprehensive analysis of Sekkākī's portrayal of Ulugh Beg lies beyond the scope of this study; therefore, the discussion below will focus on select themes.

3.1 Sekkākī's Use of Imagery and Themes

Sekkākī's *qaşıdas* construct a multi-layered image of Ulugh Beg, blending cosmic, philosophical, and historical motifs to depict him as a philosopher-king who embodies both intellectual brilliance and just governance. His consistent comparisons with prophets and legendary rulers elevate Ulugh Beg's status, linking his leadership to divine wisdom and cosmic order. Through these motifs, Sekkākī not only exalts Ulugh Beg's reign but also embeds his legacy within the broader tradition of Islamic and Hellenistic thought.

His verses do not merely reflect historical reality but shape an idealized vision of kingship that pervaded medieval Islamic literature. By weaving together themes of cosmic harmony, justice, and philosophical wisdom, Sekkākī elevates Ulugh Beg to the status of a timeless ruler whose authority rests upon both knowledge and power. More than mere praise, these *qaşıdas* demonstrate how poetry functioned as a tool of historical portraiture in medieval Islamic literature. Through Sekkākī's verse, Ulugh Beg is immortalized not just as a ruler, but as a symbol of ideal governance, where intellectual pursuits and just leadership converge in harmony with the cosmic order.

3.1.1 Ulugh Beg and the Literary Representation of Ideal Kingship

Sekkākī presents Ulugh Beg as the quintessential ideal ruler, following a well-established literary tradition that aligns sovereigns with

esteemed historical and religious figures. In the first two couplets, he associates Ulugh Beg's virtues with those of Prophet Muḥammad, Yaḥyā, Moses, Jesus, Khidr, Āṣaf, Jamshīd, Alexander, and the Four Caliphs—leaders revered for their wisdom, righteousness, and governance. By doing so, Sekkākī not only glorifies Ulugh Beg's attributes but also situates him within a lineage of divinely guided rulers, reinforcing the legitimacy of his reign and the ethical foundation of his sovereignty:

Muḥammed-hulk u Yaḥyā-şidd u Mūsī-yed Mesīhā-dem

*Ḥizr-ilhām u Āṣaf-rāy u Cem-fermān
şeh İskender (qaşida 9, couplet 15;
p.148/1)*

In character, he is like Muḥammad; in loyalty, like Yaḥyā; In gentleness, like Moses; and in healing, like Jesus. He has the insight of Khidr, the wisdom of Āṣaf, the decisiveness of Jamshīd, and the sovereignty of Alexander.

İrür şidd u şalābetde irür cūd u şecā'atda

*Ebū Bekr ü 'Ömer 'Osmān Emīrū'l-mū'minīn Ḥayder (qaşida 9, couplet 16;
p.148/1)*

In sincerity and righteousness, in generosity and courage, He mirrors Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful.

Sekkākī further elevates Ulugh Beg by comparing him to legendary rulers of the past. He likens him to Keyūmars in lineage, Nushīrvān in justice, Jamshīd in dominion, and Farīdūn in majesty, positioning him alongside history's most celebrated sovereigns:

İrür aşı u 'adāletde irür mülk ü ḥaşem birle

*Keyūmers ü Anūşīrvān u Cemşid ü Ferīdūn-fer (qaşida 9, couplet 17;
p.150/3)*

He rules with lineage, with justice, with the vastness of his lands, With majesty—his strength rivals Keyūmars, Nushīrvān, Jamshīd, and Farīdūn.

The fourth couplet extends this portrayal by drawing a direct parallel between Ulugh Beg and Prophet Solomon, renowned for his dominion over all beings. Through this analogy, Sekkākī asserts that Ulugh Beg's rule transcends worldly limitations, encompassing all of creation:

Sānga boldı Süleymān tig vuḥūş u ṭayr u ins ü cān

Cihān bende zamān ḥādīm kader der-

*bān kaṣā çāker (qaşida 9, couplet 25;
p.150/11)*

Like Prophet Solomon, wild beasts, birds, men, and jinn submit to your command;

The world is your servant, time your attendant, fate your gatekeeper, and destiny your thrall.

3.1.2 Cosmic and Celestial Imagery

Sekkākī, as evident in the following couplets, highlights Ulugh Beg's dual authority as a ruler who commands both the Earth and the heavens. In the first couplet, he highlights Ulugh Beg's grandeur by likening him to the vastness of the sky. The second couplet extends this celestial imagery, likening him to various heavenly bodies, each distinguished by a specific role: the Sun as the sultan of the sky, the Moon as the vizier, Jupiter as the judge (*qāḍī*), Mars as the commander of the army, Mercury as the scribe, Venus as the servant, and Saturn as the treasurer. Through these cosmic metaphors, Sekkākī not only illustrates Ulugh Beg's sovereignty but also alludes to his intellectual influence, aligning him with the very stars and planets he studied with scientific precision. This imagery reinforces his stature as a ruler whose wisdom mirrors the order and majesty of the cosmos:

*İrür mecd ü te'ālī irür leyl ü nehār içre
Felek-şadr u felek-ḡadr u meh-i bedr ü
şeh-i ḡāver (qaşida 9, couplet 18;
p.150/4)*

In grandeur, as vast as the celestial sphere; In majesty, as lofty as the heavens.

By night, a radiant full moon; By day, a sun that reigns supreme.

İrür Keyvān u hem Bercīs irür Behrām u hem ḡurşīd

*İrür Çeşnīd ü Nāhīd ü 'Uṭarīd mīh u dü-
peyker (qaşida 9, couplet 21; p.150/7)*

He is Saturn and Jupiter, Mars and the Sun, Venus, Mercury, the Moon, and Gemini.

3.1.3 Comparison with Great Philosophers and Scientists

In the following couplets, Sekkākī elevates Ulugh Beg above the greatest intellectual figures of antiquity, asserting that even the most celebrated philosophers and scientists failed to match his level of knowledge and mastery.¹³ By incorporating both Islamic and Hellenistic scholars, he underscores Ulugh Beg's unique position as a thinker who transcended the intellectual boundaries of his time, uniting diverse traditions of wisdom and scientific inquiry:

Aristālīs u Eflātūn u Baṭlīmūs u Cālīnūs
'Alī Sinā vū Fīlākūs Aristō vū Ebū
Ma'sher

Aristotle, Plato, Ptolemy, and Galen,
 Avicenna, Philoxenus, Aristo, and Abū
 Ma'shar,

Riyāzī-hišt ü hikmet-raşad İksīr ü
Uqlīdes

Bedī' vū şanāyī'ni senīng tig bilmedi
anlar (qaşīda 9, couplets 27–28;
 p.152/13–14)

Masters of mathematics and celestial
 wisdom,

None possessed knowledge of the arts
 and sciences as profoundly as you.

3.1.4 On Justice and Governance

Sekkākī frequently highlights Ulugh Beg's commitment to justice and governance in his poetry. The following couplets exemplify how he portrays Ulugh Beg's just rule and the order he upholds. In the first couplet, Sekkākī praises Ulugh Beg's reign, depicting a world free of sorrow, where security is unwavering, joy is limitless, and contentment reigns supreme. He attributes this to the ruler's embodiment of essential virtues—righteousness, justice, grace, and generosity:

Ki kıldı dād u 'adl u luṭf u ihsāndın şeh-
i 'ālem

Cihān gamsız emān kemsiz şarab
hadsız hoşī ber-ter (qaşīda 9, couplet
 12; p.148/12)

Because the ruler of the world has estab-
 lished righteousness, Justice, grace,
 and generosity—

The world is without sorrow, secur-
 ity unbroken, entertainment without
 bounds, and contentment at its peak.

The second couplet emphasizes that true fortune and happiness are only possible through the unity of religion and state, presenting Ulugh Beg as the sovereign of both East and West, of land and sea:

Bolup baht u sa'adet dīn ü devlet birle
haddi teng

İrūr sultān-ı şark u ğarb u şāhenşāh-ı
baḥr u ber (qaşīda 9, couplet 13;
 p.148/13)

Fortune and happiness are bound to
 the union of religion and state;

Thus, he reigns as the sultan of East
 and West, the sovereign of land and
 sea.

The third couplet further elevates his status, portraying him as the protector of faith (Mu'īnū'd-dīn), under whose just rule even natural adversaries—deer and lions, sheep and wolves—live together in harmony:

Mu'īnūddīn Uluğ Big Hān şeh-i şehzāde
devrinde

Keyik arslan u koy böri bu kün bir yerde
hoş otlar (qaşīda 9, couplet 14;
 p.148/14–15)

Under the reign of Ulugh Beg Khān, the
 supporter of religion,

Deer and lions, sheep and wolves, now
 graze together in harmony.

In the fourth couplet, Sekkākī proclaims that Ulugh Beg's justice is so absolute that oppression has been eradicated entirely, leaving only the beloved's flowing tresses as the sole 'plunderer' of hearts:

Şanemler zūlfidin özge anīng 'ahdıda
yok zālīm

Olarning közleri kılğay meger Türk
ilidin yağmā

In your era, no oppressor remains but
 the beloved's flowing tresses;

Only their eyes now plunder the land of
 Turks. (qaşīda 6, couplet 7; p.126/1)

Finally, he affirms the enduring nature of Ulugh Beg's governance, asserting that sedition has been so thoroughly suppressed that it will not reemerge until the end of time.

3.1.5 Patronage and Poetic Legitimacy

In the pre-modern period, patronage—particularly of literary culture—was considered an essential quality of a ruler. The relationship between a poet and a patron was not one-sided; rather, both parties had expectations of each other. The following couplets illustrate how Sekkākī positions Ulugh Beg as a patron and expresses his own expectations. Beyond material support, Sekkākī finds satisfaction in the prestige and recognition his poetry gains under Ulugh Beg's patronage, highlighting the importance of royal favor in elevating a poet's status.

Sekkākī acknowledges Ulugh Beg's indispensable role as a patron whose support has fostered a flourishing literary and artistic environment within his court:

Eyā şāhā hūner-perver hūnerīng
qadrın arturdung

Muḥassen kıldı eltāfung bu kün
şīrimğa şī'rānı (qaşīda 10, couplet 46;
 p.166/15)

O King, true protector of the arts, you
 have elevated the worth of talent;

Through your generosity, my poetry
 has gained admiration among poets.

Senīng vaşfında sözlerüm kamuğ sihr-i
helāl oldı

Emānda tutsun ol Mevlā sini vū hem bu
mevlānı (qaşīda 10, couplet 47;
 p.166/1)

The words I speak in your praise are
treasured like sacred enchantment;
May God safeguard both you and your
devoted servant.

The next couplet reflects Sekkākī's deep sense of loyalty and gratitude toward Ulugh Beg, emphasizing the intimate bond between poet and patron. He also suggests that divine favor ensures the ruler's legacy, portraying their relationship as an extraordinary convergence of royal wisdom and poetic excellence. By emphasizing the rarity of such an alignment, Sekkākī not only elevates his own contributions but also reinforces Ulugh Beg's unique role as a patron of the arts:

*Felek yıllar kirek seyr itse vü kiltürse
ilginge
Mening tig şā'ir-i Türk ü sinîng tig şāh
dānānı* (qaşīda 10, couplet 48; p.166/2)
For fate to witness a Turkish poet like
me and a wise ruler like you, O King,
Would take many years of wandering.

3.1.6 Generosity and the Eternity of Sovereignty

At the heart of the patronage system lies the notion of generosity, a fundamental expectation of rulers. The following five couplets illustrate how Ulugh Beg's subjects express gratitude for his justice and magnanimity. The verses convey a desire for his rule to endure until the end of time, with divine protection, assistance, and victory granted to him. Sekkākī's words align with the broader expectation that a patron's name and virtues should be widely known and remembered for as long as the world endures.

In the first couplet, the repeated invocation of the number seven—which appears eight times in conjunction with various concepts—reflects its symbolic significance in both Islamic and pre-Islamic traditions. The recurrence of this number, commonly associated with wisdom and cosmic order (Schimmel, 1993: 127–155), underscores Ulugh Beg's connection to a divinely structured Universe:

*Yiti yevm ü yiti leyl ü yiti deryā yiti iklīm
Yiti kök ü yiti yıldız yiti hayy u yiti nev-
ber* (qaşīda 9, couplet 37; p.154/8)
Seven days, seven nights, seven seas,
and seven realms,
Seven heavens, seven stars, seven
lives, and seven fruits.
*Ayur medh ü ayur na't u du'ā-güyüñg
senā-hvānūñg
Bolupdur ins ü cinn ü vahş u tayr u
cümle cānver* (qaşīda 9, couplet 38;
p.154/9)
All creatures—humans, jinn, wild
beasts, and birds—

Offer you praise, eulogies, and prayers.

*Hemīşe tā ki sāl u mäh u köp leyl ü
nehār ötkey*

*Ajunda devr-i yaz u yay u küz u kış [u]
köp yıllar* (qaşīda 9, couplet 39;
p.154/10)

As long as years and months pass, as
countless nights and days unfold,
As long as spring, summer, autumn,
and winter turn in this world,

*Firāvāndur yaz u yay u küz ü kış uşbu
taht üzre*

*Hezārān sāl u köp mäh u telim leyl ü
nehār ötker* (qaşīda 9, couplet 40;
p.154/11)

May you sit upon your throne through
many springs, summers, autumns, and
winters,

For thousands of years, through count-
less months, nights, and days.

*İdi'm bolsun tün ü kün ü yıl u ay ırte vü
kiçe*

*Mu'ın ü nāşır u yāring bolup hoş hāfız
ü yāver* (qaşīda 9, couplet 41; p.154/
12)

May my Lord, by night and day, in every
year and month,

Be your helper, supporter, protector,
and victorious ally.

3.1.7 Sekkākī's References to His Time's Events

To conclude, two historical references in Sekkākī's praise of Ulugh Beg offer insight into the political and cultural landscape of his time. The first refers to Ulugh Beg's suppression of a disturbance (*fitna*), though the exact time and place remain uncertain:

*Siyāseṭ yoritip şāhā anīñg tig fitneni
basting*

*Yok ol imkānı kim kopsa kıyāmetğa
tigin aşıla* (qaşīda 6, couplet 10;
p.126/4)

O King, with wisdom and might, you
quelled the storm,
So utterly that it shall not rise again till
Judgment's dawn.

The second reference draws on the imagery of the horse, a revered creature in the pre-modern world, to symbolize Ulugh Beg's supreme rule. Here, fate itself becomes a stallion bent to the ruler's will:

*Felekñing tevseni[n] bahtıñg ligām urup
kıliban rām*

*Koyupdur devletiñg anıñg surūnı üzre
ay tamğa* (qaşīda 6, couplet 20;
p.128/14)

Your fate seized the reins of fortune's

steed, bowing it low to your sovereign decree.

And by the power of your command,
stamped a crescent upon its flank.

This couplet reflects the Turkish tradition of branding horses, as each tribe and family had its own distinctive mark. These lines suggest that Ulugh Beg's horses bore a 'crescent-shaped' insignia, reinforcing both his Royal authority and celestial association.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ulugh Beg's legacy extends beyond his renowned contributions to astronomy and mathematics; his role as a patron of literature and the arts is equally essential for understanding his place within the Timurid intellectual and cultural *milieu*. His court functioned as a vibrant hub for poets and scholars, fostering an environment in which literary discourse could thrive. Although the historical record of his literary patronage remains fragmentary, sources such as the *Majālis al-Nafā'is* and *Tadhkirat al-Shu'arā'* offer valuable insights into his engagement with poetry, as do the *qaṣīdas* composed in his honor. Among these, Sekkākī's poetry constructs an idealized image of Ulugh Beg as a philosopher-king, emphasizing themes of cosmic order, justice, and wisdom—aligning with the broader literary tradition of *qaṣīda* poetry, which frequently associated rulers with prophetic or historical exemplars. However, we have no information on how Ulugh Beg responded to Sekkākī's portrayal of him in these *qaṣīdas*. While Sekkākī presents Ulugh Beg in terms that resonate with the ideal of the 'philosopher king', further research is needed to determine whether Ulugh Beg himself consciously embraced this model—or whether he aligned more closely with the framework of Chinggisid legitimacy.

While it remains uncertain whether Ulugh Beg composed poetry himself, his deep appreciation for literature and his direct patronage of poets such as Sekkākī, Mawlānā Badakhshī, and Ismat-i Bukhārī highlight his commitment to fostering literary culture. His engagement in literary debates, his interest in both Persian and Turkic poetry, and his commissioning of illuminated manuscripts further underscore his investment in intellectual and artistic pursuits.

This study has sought to reposition Ulugh Beg within the broader framework of Timurid literary culture, challenging the tendency to view him solely through the lens of his scientific endeavors. By recognizing the interconnectedness of knowledge, poetry, and governance in his reign, we gain a more nuanced understanding of his contributions to the cultural and intellectual landscape of his time.

5 NOTES

1. At present, the only source stating that Ulugh Beg and Mirza Abū Bakr recited these poems is Devletşah's *Tezkire*. Therefore, it is unclear whether they actually composed these poems or if they were simply attributed to them. The second *hemistich* of the couplet attributed to Ulugh Beg references the story of Rustam and his son Sohrab, as narrated in the *Shāhnāme*.
2. Bahrabad, the birthplace and burial site of the renowned Kubravi shaykh Shaykh Sa'd al-Dīn al-Ḥammūya/Ḥammawayh (d. 1252–1253), is situated between Nīshāpūr and Jājam. The exact dates of Ulugh Beg's visits to this site remain uncertain. Although not explicitly mentioned, he may have been present during Shāhrukh's visit to Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥammūya's shrine in September 1420, when Shāhrukh embarked on his first western campaign, see (Aka, 1994: 117; Melville, 2013: 291–292).
3. The information provided by 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī regarding Sekkākī in *Majālis al-Nafā'is* (Nevayī, 2001: 70), *Khutba-i Devāvin* (Preface to the *Divāns*) (Nevayī, 2003: 8), and *Muḥākamat al-Lughatayn* (Comparison of the Two Languages) (Nevayī, 1998: 188) has been the subject of detailed scholarly analysis. Therefore, rather than reiterating the same material, this study aims to present evaluations based on his poetry.
4. Drawing on Tarazī's *Funūn al-Balāgha*, DeWeese finds the claim that Sekkākī may have been from Sayronī or Sabronī (Hasanova, 2011: 163–164) or Seyran or Sayram (Seyhan, 2019: 190) problematic, see (De Weese, 2005: 122).
5. The *qaṣīda* was evidently composed to celebrate the birth of one of Khalīl Sultān's two sons whose birth dates are unknown—Muḥammad Bahādur, born to his first wife Jahān Sultān Bīkī, or 'Alī, the son of a concubine named Ṭuqmaq (Woods, 1990: 34). The 30-couplet *qaṣīda*, composed in 810 AH (1407 CE), states both the reason for its composition and the date in its 20th and 21st couplets (Eraslan, 1999: 116–122). Additionally, the poet notes that the prince was born on the 27th of Ramaḍān 810 AH (25 February 1408 CE) (*qaṣīda* 5, couplet 20–21; p.120/13–14):

*Tārīḫa sikkiz yüz dağı on irdi vü
Kadr aḥşamı*

*Bir ay toğdı dünyāda kim memle-
ketke ḥān irür*

The year was 810, and it was the
Night of Power; a moon appeared
in the world and became a khan to

the land.

*Bu Qadr tūni 'izzet ü qadr irdi da'vī
kılsa haq
Çün şāh-zāde maqdemo da'vīsine
būrhān irūr*

If one were to claim that this Night of Power was exalted and full of virtue, indeed, the birth of the prince serves as proof of this claim.

6. The couplet may allude to an intellectual exchange between Ibn al-Jazarī's (d. 1429) and Muḥammad Parsa, a meeting documented solely in later Naqshbandi sources and notably absent from the autobiographical writings of Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 1429) ([Binbaş 2014](#)). This encounter likely occurred during Ibn al-Jazarī's visit to Samarkand, where, as a preeminent authority on Qur'anic recitation and *ḥadīth*, he sought to study chains of hadith transmission (*isnād*). At Ulugh Beg's request, Muḥammad Parsa was summoned from Bukhara to engage in scholarly debate and address Ibn al-Jazarī's inquiries. Despite the intellectually rigorous and possibly contentious atmosphere, Parsa demonstrated his erudition by offering well-substantiated responses (see [Barthold, 1958: 117](#); [Subtelny, 2001: 91](#)).
7. Sighnaq (Siḡnak) and Sawran (Sabran, Savran), situated near the Syr Darya (Seyhun) River, marked the frontier of the Timurid Empire with the Dasht-i Qipchaq ([Bregel, 2003: 45](#)).
8. Amīr Tarkhān holds a distinguished position as a literary patron, as evidenced by his commissioning of a copy of Edib Aḥmad Yūknekī's (d. twelfth century) renowned ethical and didactic work, *Ata-betū'l-Ḥaqqā-yiq*, in Old Uyghur script. This manuscript was transcribed by the calligrapher Zeyn al-'Ābidīn in 848 AH (1444 CE), with Tarkhān himself adding ten verses providing information about the poet. Additionally, during his tenure as governor of Sabran, he facilitated the translation of Shāṭibī's work on Qur'anic recitation in 816 AH (1413–1414 CE), with the translator dedicating the work to him (*Tercüme-i Müttefik-ı Şāṭibī*, SK-Laleli 3681-009, fols. 74a–103b). ([Arat, 1951: 16–19, 100–101](#); [Köprülü, 1963: 279–280](#)).
9. The debate over whether Lūtfi plagiarized Sekkākī's poetry or vice versa, which preoccupied literary historians for some time, was ultimately resolved in favor of Sekkākī (see [Sertkaya, 2011](#)).
10. The poetry of Sekkākī has been the subject of numerous studies by Uzbek scholars. As a comprehensive review of these works falls beyond the scope of this study,

readers may refer to Israilov's 2024 doctoral dissertation, *Sakkokiy adabiy merosi va poetik mahorati*, which provides both a critical analysis and a bibliographic record of relevant scholarship. This paper is based on the *Divān* text published by Eraslan in 1999, with all references corresponding to this edition, see also ([Vohidov and Eshonqulov, 2006: 178–184](#)). Each couplet reference includes three elements: first, the *qaṣīda* number; second, the couplet's sequential number within that *qaṣīda*; and third, Eraslan's page number and couplet number. All translations of the poems are the author's own, prioritizing contextual meaning over literal accuracy to ensure clarity.

11. It is noteworthy that Togan was among the earliest scholars to briefly mention Sekkākī's compositions in honor of Shāhrukh ([Togan, 1949: 528](#)). Among Uzbek scholars, Mashkhura Khasanova proposed that the work was composed for Shāhrukh, though this view does not appear to have gained widespread acceptance (see [Israilov, 2020: 331](#); [Israilov, 2024: 20](#)).
12. For a comprehensive analysis of the key themes and terminology in pre-modern advice literature for sultans in both the Islamic and Christian worlds see [Blaydes et al. \(2018\)](#).
13. For a study exploring the portrayal of Timurid–Mughal rulers, particularly Ulugh Beg, as philosopher–kings and sultan–scientists, see [Melvin-Koushki and Matthew \(2024\)](#).

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