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## Images of Monarchs in the Literary Works of Eastern Poets and Thinkers

### Abstract

This article examines the concept of the “Supreme Intellect” as an organizational principle for governing a utopian state structure. Since antiquity, the notion of the ideal, along with the image of the ideal monarch, has been considered within political, social, and philosophical-aesthetic frameworks. The issue in question defines the worldview and the ethno-cultural specificity of each nation.

Medieval Arab philosophy, closely interwoven with Islam, gave rise to the Arab-Islamic philosophical tradition. As a result of extensive scholarly work, the intellectual legacy of the ancient world was thoroughly studied and adapted within the framework of Islam. The collective intellect of that period gradually began to form on the basis of philosophical and social reflections on the purpose of human creation and the reconstruction of the model of the just ruler.

**Keywords:** “High intellect”, “*insan al-kamil*”, ancient world, utopian state, Farhad Kuntogdi, Aytoldi, Oghdurmish, Shu Khagan, Nushaba, Alexander the Great (*Dhul-Qarnayn*), spiritual and cultural values, East, West

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## Şərq şair və mütəfəkkirlərinin bədii əsərlərində hökmdar obrazları

### Xülasə

Bu məqalədə “Ali ağıl” anlayışı utopik dövlət quruluşunun idarə olunmasında təşkilati prinsip kimi araşdırılır. İdeal anlayışı və ideal hökmdar obrazı qədimdən bəri siyasi, sosial və fəlsəfi-estetik çərçivələrdə nəzərdən keçirilmişdir. Tədqiq olunan məsələ hər bir xalqın dünyagörüşünün və etno-mədəniyyətinin spesifikliyini müəyyənləşdirir.

Orta əsr ərəb fəlsəfəsi İslamla sıx şəkildə qovuşaraq ərəb-müsəlman fəlsəfəsinin meydana çıxmasına səbəb olmuşdur. Zəhmət tələb edən geniş fəaliyyət nəticəsində antik dünyanın irsi diqqətlə öyrənilmiş və islamlaşdırılmışdır. Həmin dövrün ictimai düşüncəsi tədricən insanın yaradılış səbəbinin müəyyənləşdirilməsi və ədalətli hökmdar modelinin formalaşdırılması ilə bağlı fəlsəfi-ictimai ideyalar əsasında inkişaf etməyə başlamışdır.

**Açar sözlər:** “Ali ağıl”, “*insanül-kamil*”, qədim dünya, utopik dövlət, Fərhad, Gündoğdu, Atoldi, Ögdülmüş, Şu Xaqan, Nüşabə, İsgəndər Makedoniyalı (*Zülqarneyn*), mənəvi-mədəni dəyərlər, Şərq, Qərb

## Introduction

The concept of “insan al-kamil” in philosophy represents a continuous process of self-education and self-perfection. An individual enlightened by knowledge and philosophy, endowed with all forms of virtue and moral-spiritual values, simultaneously appears as a wise ruler concerned with the happiness and well-being of his subjects. Therefore, in the concepts of Eastern faylasufs, the hypothesis was advanced that “a soul that has attained the Truth will no longer incline toward evil.”

As research methods, this study employs historical, sociocultural, pedagogical, and comparative analyses to provide a comprehensive description of the rulers’ portraits as philosophical phenomena. Literary and philosophical approaches allow for a detailed and holistic examination of the leadership qualities of rulers (caliphs). The study also investigates the texts of works by Eastern poets and thinkers, as well as historical chronicles.

Forms of political and legal state governance find vivid expression in Turkic literature. In the context of statehood, *Kutadgu Bilig* represents a unique phenomenon not only in Turkic verbal art but also in world literature. It is not without reason that the work is sometimes referred to as a “science (that is, a ‘book’) of governance.” Yusuf Balasaguni’s poem is imbued throughout with ideas and the spirit of statehood. Its central characters – Kuntogdı, Aytoldı, Oghdurmish – are khans (eliks) and viziers, the leaders of the state. In their conversations, interactions, lyrical digressions, and in the philosophical reflections of the author, the issues of social order and the structure of power predominate. As in runic inscriptions – primarily in epitaphic monuments – so in *Kutadgu Bilig*, the issue of the ruler, after God, is placed at the foundation of sociopolitical and social life, and indeed of almost all existence (Minnengulov, 2016).

### Research

In this poem one feels the author’s skeptical attitude toward rulers: neither the main protagonist, Bogra-khan, nor such autocrats as Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar correspond to his ideal. This is most likely due to their lack of aspiration for self-perfection, humanity, and compassion. As the great singer of humanism Jalal al-Din Rumi insightfully noted, the enlightened human being possesses such moral qualities as understanding, benevolence, and self-restraint – even toward enemies (Tatli, 2013). Regardless of social status, every person must possess the quality of compassion. A particularly original work is Hisam Katib’s *Dastan Jumjuma Sultan* (1369), distinguished by its close attention to the passage of time. From its very first lines, the poem begins with reflections on the transience of life and the impermanence of human existence. To support his thesis on the ephemerality of earthly life, the author lists the names of many legendary and historical figures. According to Hisam Katib, all of them once possessed “the world”, yet ultimately were compelled to leave behind their “wealth, power, and life”, passing into the otherworldly realm. To artistically illustrate this thought, he recounts the story of Jumjuma (Minnengulov, 2016). The cultural heritage of antiquity has for centuries inspired writers of all nationalities and confessions to create masterpieces of world literature. In philosophical and political writings, the legendary image of Alexander the Great – Iskandar (Dhul-Qarnayn) – served as a prototype for constructing the model of the ideal ruler. Questions concerning the role and mission of the individual in society, the resolution of state problems, and the transformation of a ruler into an ideal sovereign occupied a central place in the works of medieval Eastern philosophers and poets.

The earliest novel about the legendary commander Alexander the Great, the *Pseudo-Callisthenes*, dates to antiquity (Aliyev, 1983). Gradually, in the poems of great authors, Alexander – identified with the Qur’anic figure Dhul-Qarnayn – acquired prophetic qualities. Hakim Abulqasim Ferdowsi was one of the first to turn to the Alexander narrative. His poem *Iskandarnama* consists of two parts: *Sharafnama* and *Igbalnama* (also known as *Karibnama*). Ferdowsi even included the Alexander cycle into the *Shahnameh*. As noted by Professor E. Bertels, Ferdowsi portrays Alexander as a brave and valiant ruler. Though not depicted as a tyrant, he is nevertheless not an ideal model of a just monarch. In the *Shahnameh*, he does not stand out significantly from the Sasanian rulers (Kuziyevna, 2016).

Subsequent works on Alexander include *The Mirror of Alexander* by Amir Khusrow Dehlavi, based on historical chronicles, and *The History of the Kings of Iran* by Alisher Navoi. Navoi

developed the historical image of Alexander in his own original manner. His Alexander is a composite figure embodying only the noble qualities of a righteous sovereign. Alexander in Navoi's works is unique in his realism. The poet skillfully describes a kurultay (council) at which, by general agreement, a ruler is to be elected – an episode corresponding to the ancient Turkic tradition of *tore*, through which a khagan was chosen. Through the unification of shariat and *tore*, Navoi succeeded in recreating a political model of state governance. The common saying “every medal has two sides” does not apply to Navoi's worldview; rather, his formula is: a just person = a just ruler. Inspired by Nizami Ganjavi's utopian ideas, Navoi reinterprets the *Khamsa* in his own way. Navoi's major poetic work, the *Khamsa*, opens with the poem *The Confusion of the Righteous*. This philosophical poem condemns such vices as cruelty, greed, arrogance, and injustice, while exalting the ideals of goodness and justice. For Navoi, the source of all good in life lies in justice – more precisely, in the justice of the ruler and his fidelity to the law. The entire poem is permeated with the idea of justice as the foundation of the nation's prosperity. In the twenty-sixth chapter, in the third discourse, he emphasizes the importance of having a just sultan on the throne, admonishing him in the following verses:

*O you, to whom authority is given like the heavens,  
You whose kettledrums are the sun and the moon,  
You hold the power to do evil or good today,  
And the sun of the whole land shines in your pavilion...  
But do not forget the inscription on the ring:  
'In justice lies the path to salvation'!  
And while praying, repeat the Quranic verse:  
'O ruler, govern with justice'!*

A just ruler, in Navoi's understanding, is one for whom the interests of the people stand above all else. Navoi placed his finest reflections on the ideal, just human being into the mouth of his beloved hero Farhad from the poem *Farhad and Shirin*. Farhad, the son of the Chinese khagan, is an honest, selfless, and humane individual, a fighter for truth and justice. For these qualities he has earned enduring admiration and respect. When his father offers him the throne, Farhad refuses power, for he, like Navoi himself, is utterly indifferent to authority (Zhoraboyev & Mamadiyoroova, 2022). Next in this “line of just rulers” stands the legendary commander Alexander the Great, for whom the well-being of the people is paramount. The book *The Quintet of the Perplexed* (1492) is dedicated to Jami. For the study of the history of Uzbek and Persian-Tajik literature and their interrelations, the anthology *Collection of the Refined* (1491–92), which contains brief characteristics of writers of Nizami's era, as well as *History of Iranian Kings* and *History of Prophets and Sages*, was of great importance. These works provide information about legendary and historical figures of Central Asia and Iran, as well as Zoroastrian and Quranic mythology. Important issues of literary theory, particularly versification, are discussed in the treatise *The Scales of Meter*. At the end of his life, Nizami wrote the allegorical poem *The Language of the Birds* (1499) and the philosophical-didactic work *The Beloved of Hearts* (1500), which discusses the ideal organization of human society. Nizami's book was notably influenced by the works of Yusuf Balasaguni and Saadi's *Gulistan*. The central idea of the book is the condemnation of “cruel, ignorant, and corrupt kings” and the aspiration to establish a strong centralized authority under a just ruler at the head of a prosperous country (Booksite.ru, n.d.).

Iskander (Alexander) is described in *The Mirror of Wisdom* as a seeker of truth. His duties involve restoring the former moral code of the people by suppressing robbery, violence, dishonor, crime, theft, and immorality. Remarkably, Alexander–Iskander is identified with the Quranic figure Dhul-Qarnayn. In the 18th sura *Al-Kahf* (“The Cave”) of the Holy Quran, several verses mention this personality: “We strengthened him upon the earth and gave him all means; and he followed a way” (Minengulov, 2016).

The masnavi *Ilahinama* by the prominent Eastern Sufi poet Farid al-Din Attar is imbued with profound Sufi philosophy. Virtually all chapters of this poem are structured as dialogues between a father-ruler and his six sons, who express their desires. Notably, the fourth son desires the Water of

Life, which, according to legend, Alexander the Great unsuccessfully sought. The chapter contains twenty-four stories narrated on behalf of the father. These feature both well-known historical and legendary figures, such as Iskandar (Alexander the Great), the righteous Caliph Umar, Majnun (in love with Layla), Sultan Mahmud and his beloved slave Ayaz, as well as nameless characters: a tax collector of non-Muslims, a handsome youth and an old man in love with him, a deceitful merchant, a thief at the foot of the gallows, and a fox caught in a trap (Gaseemovna, 2020). The desire to drink from the Water of Life (*abi-hayat*) is associated with the aspiration for immortality. It is undeniable that the poet, when composing this scene, was inspired by the legend of the Two-Horned Alexander (Alexander the Great). The philosophy of this episode is conveyed uniquely: the caliph represents the human soul, and the six sons symbolize six emanations such as *nafs* (ego), the devil, *logos* (reason), poverty, and *tawhid* (monotheism). Through the caliph, Attar seeks to convey the transience of worldly life, guiding the reader toward the “Absolute Truth.”

Alexander, as depicted by the Golden Horde writer Rabhguzzi, plays the role of the Quranic prophet Dhul-Qarnayn. In search of the Water of Life, he embarks on a journey to the Land of Darkness. This theme also forms the basis of a poem by another Golden Horde poet, Mawlana Ishaq. Mahmud al-Kashgari likewise addressed the ancient story of the legendary conqueror. In the work *Shu Khan*, the meeting of Iskander with Shu Khan is described. Here, the author praises the wisdom of the khan, who defeats Alexander’s numerous army not by sword but by intellect. Struck by the nobility of his opponent, Iskander repents and atones for his actions. In Nizami Ganjavi’s poem, this incident is presented as correspondence between Alexander and the Turkic khan. The khan’s wisdom is manifested in the letter addressed to Iskander. The conqueror not only renounces his desire to destroy the khan’s country but also develops genuine friendship for him (Khalilov, 2021).

In the context of political and legal thought in Azerbaijan, a number of legendary scholars, philosophers, and jurists lived and worked. Among them, Nizami Ganjavi occupies a leading position as the founder of a new direction in politico-legal concepts, making an invaluable contribution to the formation of management culture based on spiritual and cultural values and humanistic ideas of the East and West: “I became the king of kings in the realm of wise thoughts. I became the ruler of space, the shah of time...” (Mamedov, 2022). Almost all works of this genius poet carry the message of multiculturalism. He was among the first to believe in the special mission of man as a caliph. A noble ruler governs justly, protecting his people and state from internal and external enemies. The image of an ideal ruler with progressive ideas, though seemingly utopian, was borrowed from the rulers of flourishing states in contemporary Azerbaijan: the Shirvanshahs and the Eldegizids.

Nizami’s political and legal views are vividly reflected in the *Khamsa*, consisting of five poems: *Treasury of Mysteries*, *Khosrow and Shirin*, *Layla and Majnun*, *Seven Beauties*, and *Iskandarnama*. The prototype of the ideal ruler for him was the figure of Alexander the Great, shrouded in glory. *Iskandarnama* is a utopian poem reflecting humanistic perfection. The artistic interpretation of this figure was addressed by many major poets and thinkers of the Middle East, such as Ferdowsi, Nizami, Jami, and Navoi (Nikolaevich & Makasheva, 2023).

The formation of political and legal thought in Azerbaijan was marked by the adoption of Islam. Among the talented masters of word and thought, Sheikh Nizami Ganjavi occupies a prominent place. His ideas on ideal city planning are articulated in the philosophical-literary works of the *Khamsa*. The utopian society is presented as a contrast between the nations of Yajuj and Majuj, lawless cannibals, and the inhabitants of the happy country, who enchant Iskander with their humanism.

In 1197, Nizami Ganjavi began work on the foundational poem *Iskandarnama*. Despite differing opinions on the intended addressee, most researchers agree that it was dedicated to the Azerbaijani atabeg Abu-Bakr Nusrat ad-Din Bishkin (Aliyev, 1983). In Nizami, the hero is a just ruler seeking a happy land, traveling the entire world. Like a “thread of Ariadne,” Nizami leads his hero from the realm of darkness into the light. Following the example of his predecessor Ferdowsi, Nizami does not overlook Alexander’s eastern campaigns, which caused suffering among the people. However, his portrayal is idealized rather than historical. The multifaceted image of Alexander–Dhul-Qarnayn in Nizami’s work appears as a prophet, possessor of *ilm al-ladun*, and conqueror of territories from the

Maghreb to the Mashriq. A Quranic reference in this poem is also the mention of the two wild tribes, Yajuj and Majuj, and the construction of the iron wall. In *Iskandarnama*, the nations of Yajuj and Majuj symbolize evil in all its manifestations: “They are of the human race, yet the spawn of darkness” (Evseev & Makasheva, 2023). Nizami’s main task was to recreate not a historical, but a composite image of an ideal ruler, a golden standard for emulation across all times and peoples. In his view, only a wise, just, noble, and courageous person can formulate a political system serving the welfare of the people.

The search for the legendary ruler culminates in the acquisition of centuries-old human wisdom. Alexander’s acquaintance with the ruler of Barda (a product of the poet’s imagination), the beautiful and wise Nushaba, opens new horizons previously unknown to him. Through Alexander, the poet answers his own rhetorical questions. Driven by the desire to comprehend the universe, Dhul-Qarnayn realizes that the entire cosmos is created for man and placed at his service. Man’s duty is to maintain balanced harmony between nature and society. In the second part of the poem, he understands that the meaning of life is to serve humanity:

“Our wealth is shared equally among us.

We are equally endowed in this life.

No one mocks another’s grief...

The heavens guard each of our children.” (Yakubenko, 2008).

Without a doubt, Nizami Ganjavi’s *Khamsa* became a model for emulation and study by subsequent generations of poet-thinkers. His successor, Qazi Burhaneddin, drew on Nizami’s wisdom not only in literary creativity but also in governing his own state (Veliev, 2014). In *Seven Beauties*, Nizami masterfully depicted the diversity of all cultures; in *Iskandarnama*, he recreated social idylls. In the ideal city, there are no class distinctions: “all are equal before the Creator and the law.” Everyone bears responsibility for their actions, from the ruler to the laborer. Initially favoring a monarchical institution, the poet later advocated for popular sovereignty. Citing Ibn Rushd on the redundancy of courts and police, he asserted that citizens of the ideal city live in love and harmony. Friendship among peoples reigns in this utopia. Thus, Nizami constructed a model of human coexistence in Eastern countries. Being well-informed about society’s socio-political problems, he elevated the political-legal theory of humanism and governance for the public good to a new level.

Throughout his life and work, the Sheikh’s thought was permeated by humanism and multiculturalism. He consistently defended the rights of workers and residents worldwide. Following Islamic teachings and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), he encouraged knowledge, equality, mercy, spiritual enrichment, and, above all, love. There is an undeniable correspondence between his ideas and Sufism and the Ahi brotherhood. “The heavens have no altar except love”; “The world is love, all else is play”; “Everything in the universe is interconnected, philosophy calls it love”; “Love is the soul of the world” (*Khosrow and Shirin*) (Gadzhieva, 2013). His tolerance-inspired ideas laid the groundwork for later doctrines of multiculturalism. In *Iqbal-name*, he describes models of ideal human society with morally upright citizens. Until the end of his life, the thinker sought a happy society governed by a just ruler. In this context, he developed a utopian doctrine, representing the logical culmination of his entire creative path.

## Conclusions

From the above, it can be boldly stated that the great poets of the East, ahead of their time by centuries, laid the foundations not only of humanism and gender equality but also of multiculturalism. Thus, concepts such as political, socio-cultural, and legal ideas, along with the demands for justice promoted by the West, are in fact products of the politico-legal culture of Eastern geniuses. This is confirmed by a deep study and analysis of the historical roots of these concepts. These evolutionary ideas later found expression in the works of Imadeddin Nasimi, Muhammad Fuzuli, Yusuf Karabakhi, Jamaledin Rumi, Yunus Emre, Sirajeddin Urmavi, Nasir al-Din Tusi, Avhadi Maraghi, Fazlullah Na’imi, and others (Ismailov, 2021).

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