

ORIGINAL
ARTICLE

***Rashid al-Din Fadl allah Hamedani*
(1247-1318/648-718) was Vizier and
Historian or Physician?**

Abstract

During the Medieval Iranian history, many of courtiers were aware of medicine. By the thirteenth and fourteenth century, under Mongol yoke, a lot of minorities emancipated of Abasid Caliphate ties and could perform his religious deed. Because of his jewish affiliation, *Rashid al-Din* could join as an apothecary in the Mongolian circles. Large though Mongol numbers were, they employed Iranian sages to manage of bureaucratic affairs. First thing first, his position culminated when he acquired title of special medic and proved his competency. Under Ghazan reign, he gained bureaucratic occupations gradually. A part from his historical work, *Jame al-tawarikh*, *Rashid al-Din* wrote some treatises in medical science, music, agriculture and astronomy. Eventually, during the last Ilkhanid king, Abu said, he was blamed for death of öljeytü to wrong prescription. In this study, the investigator tries to survey of *Rashid al-Din* endeavors and contributions on medicine and introduce his works by using descriptive- analytical method.

Keywords: *Rashid al-Din*, Medicine, Mongol, Vizierate

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Introduction

Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah Hamedani, was one of Ilkhanid viziers that burgeoned his aptitude in historiography and medical science. Many of scholars believed he could not be historian while undertook heavy affairs of bureaucratic assignment. Anyway, *Rashid al-Din* in his vizierate built several public utility collections among them in *Rabe Rashidi*, he ordered to construct some hospitals and observatory. He employed medics in hospitals and obliged them to serve without charge for certain days a week. In this regard, he applied Grecian medical experiences and his Iranian predecessor medics.

Prior to this study, several of investigations were done about *Rashid al-Din* activities and his medical life by *Masood Kasiri* and *Morteza Dehghan Nijad* and *Reuven Amitai Preiss* who regarded as pioneers of my research and they marked many aspects of *Rashid al-Din's* character, in all respects, their works are worthwhile. However, In spite of their coherent statement, the mentioned scholars are accused of having not presented *Rashid al-Din's* role and status in incorporation of the Bedouin ceremonies with Islamic rituals in medicine or the other aspects. In addition, he argued about Mongol dance for their triumphs.¹

On the other hand, simultaneously *Menku* the great Khan (1209–1259) announced in his enthronement rescript that every grassland creature, including the plummy or the four-legged, under-water or on-land, must be kept away from the threat of hunter's arrow or noose. They should be let fly in air or swim in water freely. The earth should not be disturbed by the knocks of horses' hoofs. Running water should never be contaminated by dirty things.

After conquest of Iran by Mongols, ritual of conquerers should be interpreted and subsequently incorporated with Islamic practice and Iranian custom. *Rashid al-Din* applied these thoughts in his medical treatises and maybe it was one of the major factors which facilitated Mongol converting to Islam. In this paper, the author set out to portray *Rashid al-Din's* approaches about Mongol life style and assert his ideas about warm and cold food.

Who was *Rashid al-Din*?

Rashid al-Din was born c.648/1247 in Hamedan (the Ancient Ecbatana) (Figure 1). He was son of a Jewish apothecary. For a long time before Mongol invasion, Hamedani's Grandfather, *Moufaq Dawleh* (who had Jewish religion) with

1. Emsheimer and Carroll, 1986: 2.



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Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi (advisor and financial manager of Mongol khans) subsisted in Ismaili castles. When the fortresses captured by Mongols, they surrendered and served to *Holaku khan* in 654/1256.² Thereafter their family served as bureaucratic member of the courts. we have no information about *Rashid al-Din*'s youth. Like many other politicians, he absorbed as a courtier of the Mongol king due to his expertise in medicine.³ *Abaqa khan* conferred him title of *Rashid al-Dawleh* and Under reign of *Arghun Khan* his dignity promoted. Unlike *Reed*'s claim, he did not embrace Islam in his early life.⁴ However some of historians contend his father (*Abu Al-faraj Ali Imad Dawleh Ebn Abu al-Khayr*) converted to Islam before birth of his son. *Shabankarehei* claimed *Rashid al-Din* accepted Islamic teachings under rule of *öljeytü*.⁵ When *Geikhatu khan* (690-94/1291-95) gained power, *Rashid al-Din* obtained the title of special physician.⁶ However, during reign of *Ghazan Khan*, he undertook various responsibilities and employed in bureaucratic services.⁷

2. Spuler, 1997: 68.
3. Homadani, 1985: 77.
4. Reed, 1937: 252.
5. Kasiri and Dehghan Nijad, 2010: 3.
6. Jackson, 2009: 111.
7. Yule, 2009: 115.



Figure 1. Statue of Rashid-al-Din Hamedani in Soltaniyeh, Zanzan Province, Iran.



In the newly position, *Rashid al-Din* confronted with his rival, *Zanjani*. They spent a long time in double harness. Eventually, the struggle ended in favor of the former, afterwards he acquired title of vizier in 697/1298 and *Ghazan Khan* ordered him to compose *Jame al-tawarikh* subsequently. he initiated a major financial reform that stabilized the country's economy and provided it with forty years of prosperity. He founded a medical complex in his native town of Hamedan and added palaces and public buildings in Tabriz and the newly created capital of Sultaniyya. By death of *Ghazan Khan*, *öljeytü* gained the throne in 703/1304 and held *Rashid al-Din* on his previous position. He could complete his history in this respite and dedicated to his majesty. By crowning of the last king, *Abu said*, many of conspiracies was done against him. Although *Taj al-din Ali Shah* aided *Rashid al-Din* in early days, he changed his approach and became his archenemy gradually. Finally the intrigues was influenced on the capricious king and they convicted him to death in *Jamadi Al-Aval* 718/ July 1318.⁸

Rashid al-Din in some ways represented a culmination of pervious development in vizierate because he could eradicated vandalism among the raiders and implanted sense of standing against outer enemies instead. In *Jame al-tawarikh* he tried to introduce Mongols who had ethnic relation to turks, henceforward he could reinterpreted the world based on Iranian perspective.⁹ In the Iranian myth, *Ferydun* divided his kingdom among his sons: *Salm*, *Tur*, *Iraj*. *Rashid al-Din* rendered the narration and introduced Mongols as a Tur offspring. According to *Melville*, his work the same as *Ferdowsi's*.¹⁰ *Ferdowsi* in his masterpiece, *Shahnameh*, referred *Darab shah* as father of *Alexander* the great.

***Rashid al-Din* as a bureaucratic agent and historian under Ghazan rule**

If this *Rashid al-Dawleh* is not the future statesman and historian, it is strange that a man of the latter's talents should have remained in total obscurity from his entry into *Abaqa's* service until his appearance, some twenty years later, in the Spring of 1298, as a deputy to *Sadr al-Din Zanjani*, the vizier of *Abaqa's* grandson *Ghazan* (1295-1304).¹¹ *Rashid al-Din* himself recounts the circumstances which led to the execution of *Sadr al-Din*, perhaps the most perfidious and unprincipled of the Il-Khanid viziers. It emerges from the account that he already stood high in the Il-Khan's favor and was on terms of friendship with his commander-in-chief the Mongol

8. Ibid: 165.

9. Pfeiffer, 2013: 66.

10. Melville, 2007: 57.

11. Boyle, 1971: 20.



*Qutlugh-Shdh.*¹² In the autumn of 1298 *Sa'd al-Din Savaji* was appointed *Sadr al-Din*'s successor with *Rashid al-Din* as his associate. We next hear of *Rashid* as accompanying *Ghazan* on his last expedition (1302-03) against the Mamluks'; in March 1303, he played a prominent part in the negotiations which led to the surrender of *Rahbat al-Shim*, the present-day Syrian town of Meyadin on the west bank of the Euphrates. It was now too that he was commissioned by *Ghazan* to write a history of the Mongols and their conquests, a work completed and expanded under *Ghazan*'s successor *öljeytü* (1304-16). Under the latter, we saw him with the powerful general *Amir Chupan* in siege of *Rahbeh*.¹³ Afterward he commissioned to form the *Jami' al-Tawarikh*. However one of authors states he did not write the mentioned book probably and served as a supervisor:

It seems indeed unreasonable to assume that *Rashid al-Din* was the sole author in the modern understanding of the term, given the immense work that has gone in to *Jame al-tawarikh*, and the immense time that was necessary to compose it, time that *Rashid al-Din* probably did not have, given his other obligations as a vizier and diwan official and occasional court physician. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume multiple contributorship under a lead editor.¹⁴

In spite of the mentioned hesitancies, However, *Rashid al-Din*'s historical book is unique and worthwhile. It is the first world history including Chinese, Turks, Franks and etc.¹⁵ In fact without writing *Jame al-tawarikh* would be unexamined a great part of Mongol history.¹⁶

Rashid al-Din as a medic

Rashid al-Din Fadl allah, often referred to by his contemporaries as *Rashid Tabib*. He became at the age of 30 a convert to Islam in 1277. His conversion may well have coincided with his entry into the service of the *Il-Khan Abaqa* (663-80/1265-81), the second Mongol ruler of Iran, in the capacity of a physician, and he is perhaps to be identified with the Jew called *Rashid al-Dawleh* (a variant form of his name). Of course, today there is some doubt about his converting under *Abaqa* and *Geikhatu* based on Egyptian source.¹⁷ *Nasir al-Din Tusi* emphasized importance of medics in a letter to *Abaqa* khan.¹⁸ Subsequently he was appointed steward to the *Il-Khan Geikhatu* (690-94/1291-95) "to prepare food which was suitable... , of every kind, which might be demanded, and whosoever it might be demanded".¹⁹ Under *Ghazan*,

12. Ibid.

13. Amitai-Preiss, 1996: 29.

14. Pfeiffer, 2013: 58.

15. Boyle, 1971: 22.

16. Pfeiffer, 2013: 68.

17. Amitai-Preiss, 1996: 29.

18. Minovi and Minorsky, 1940: 758.

19. Reed, 1937: 253.



furthermore Vizierate and historiography, he had another duty; *Rashid al-Din* served as a chef. He and his son were *Ghazan*' confidant.

However, *Menku Khan* had announced in his enthronement rescript that every grassland creature, including the plummy or the four-legged, under-water or on-land, must be kept away from the threat of hunter's arrow or noose. They should be let fly in air or swim in water freely.²⁰ The earth should not be disturbed by the knocks of horses' hoofs. Running water should never be contaminated by dirty things.²¹ The construction and use of the earth by the nomads, especially by the Mongolians consume limited timber and can last for decades. It is forbidden to wash clothes too frequently in order to save water, washing dirty things in rivers is also forbidden to prevent water pollution and curb the spread of epidemic diseases. *Rashid al-Din* use the decree and incorporated Islamic teaching with Mongol ritual. *Rashid al-Din* when acquired vizierate did some changes in Mongol structure. It was during *Ghazan*'s brief reign that he carried out the fiscal reforms which go under his master's name but of which *Rashid* himself may well have been the real author, reforms intended to protect the sedentary population from the rapacity of the Mongol nomad aristocracy.²² He established *Rabe Rashidi* that included bazaar (which contained about 1500 shops), 24 caravanserais, some factories (paper and clothing factory), hospitals and employed medics. As it comes from *Vaqfnameh Rabe Rashidi* (Rashidi quarter),²³ can provide information on other features of this now-vanished masterpiece that allow us to reconstruct the complex's buildings. physicians were divided two branches: The full-time and part-time medics. Full-time physicians who were expert in different fields of medicine, including a doctor and a medical assistant, an eye doctor (ophthalmologist) one or several surgeons and physicians bonesetter (Mojaber), Moreover, fifty proficient physicians of India, China, Egypt, Syria and other provinces who worked under *Mohammad Ebn Al-Nabil*.²⁴

According to the *Rabe Rashidi's sufa* connected the khnaqeh the hospital (Figures 2, 3). Although its function is clear-teaching, and the care and housing of the sick-the terminology used in describing it is often inconsistent and confusing. The most common designation was a "house of remedies", The more complete title is *dar al-shurb, sharabkhana* (literally "potion house") and *bayt* or *makhzan-i adwiya*. The building also had a *riwdq al-murattabin*, arcade for patients, used for the preparation of medicines and potions (*adwiya*

20. Ch'en, 1970: 139.

21. Zhang et al, 2007: 24.

22. Homadani, 1940: 240.

23. Spuler, 1997: 78.

24. Boyle, 1962: 133-137.



wa ashriba) and gruel for the sick (*mazurat*), medical lessons and housing for some of the workers. The plan of the hospital is never described, but it did have a vestibule (*dihliz*) and, to the right of the entrance, the doctor's room or residence (*bayt* or *dara al-tabib*) the sweeper lived in the same *sarycha*. The *riwaq* was probably an arcade surrounded by various rooms. The one used for storing medicines was an *iwan* (*suffa*) which was closed off by a grill (*shabakat*). To the south of this grill, two resident trainee physicians (*muta callim*) gave medical lessons in the *riwaq*. Clothing was not provided for the *Rabe Rashidi* residents, but medical care was. The doctor in charge made house calls to all the sick, whether residents, visitors or workers. The hospital was open every Monday and Thursday for the distribution of a list of medicines, requiring the presence of the superintendent (*khazin*) and apothecary (*sharabdar*). The drugstore was kept locked and sealed, and only the superintendent was allowed inside. The patients came to the door of the grille and sat in the *iwan* (*suffa*) which was blocked by the grille door. The doctor sat near the grille and wrote a prescription, which he passed through the grille to the superintendent, who then passed the medicine back through the grille to the patient.²⁵

25. Blair, 1984: 74-77.

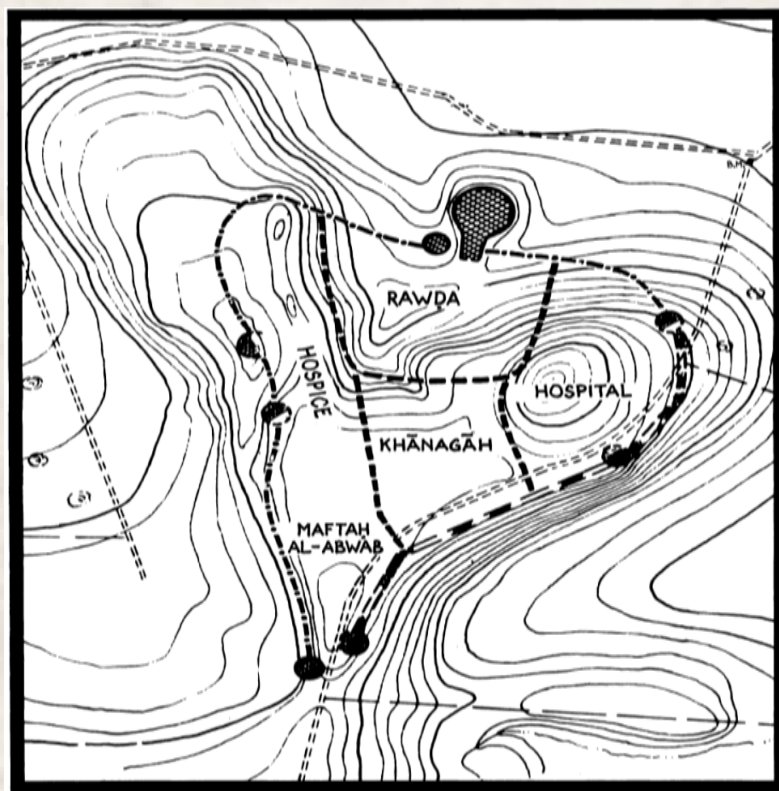
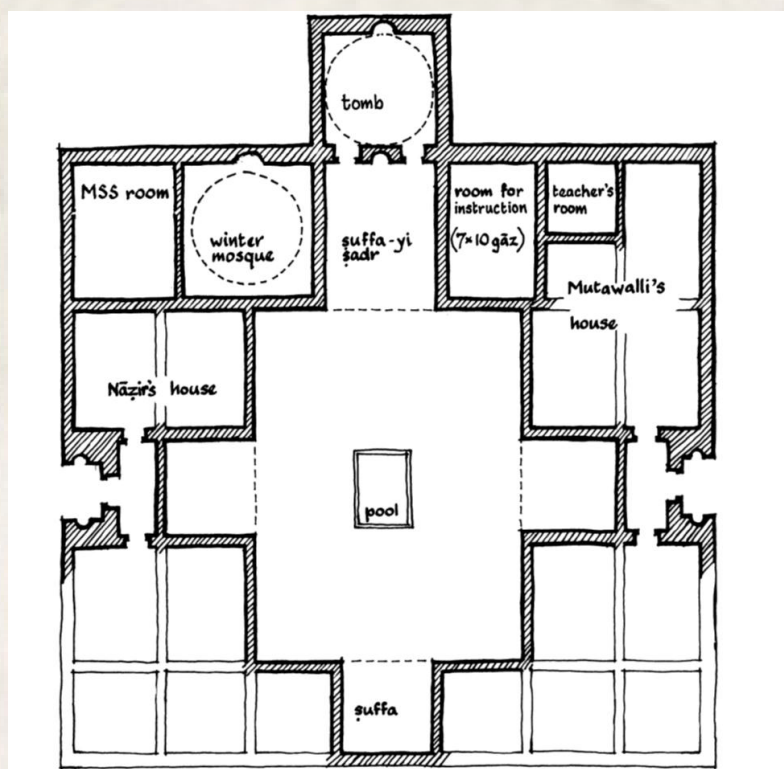


Figure 2. The plan of Rabe Rashidi





- 26. Homadani, 2006: 55.
- 27. Spuler, 1997: 110.
- 28. Klein-Franke, 2007: 267.

Figure 3. The plan of Rabe Rashidi



When *Rashid al-Din* noted his beliefs about medicine, relied on *Razi* treatise (*Risalat al-Judari va al-Hasbeh*) in some of earlier discussions on smallpox and also conformed Galenic view drastically, in the case of smallpox and measles contend some medical observation (chapter 12 of *Bayan al-haqa'iq*).²⁶ According to the experimental observations among the Mongols, *Rashid al-Din* created challenge through the accepted Mongol belief in the diagnosis and treatment. After stating that (following *Razi*)²⁷ it is not advisable- in fact, it is highly detrimental, if not fatal- to consume warm food such as red meat, when affected by smallpox or measles as that would further exacerbate the heat (which is thought to be already there in excess, thereby causing the disease), *Rashid al-Din* then observed that he had witnessed the opposite practice among the steppe- dwelling Turks and Mongols, who consume great amounts precisely of red meat during such times in the belief that this would strengthen the sick. In fact, *Rashid al-Din* stated they do not suffer, but recover quickly.²⁸ (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Ruins of Rabe Rashidi in North Eastern part of Tabriz, Eastern Azerbaijan Province, Iran

Qams were experts in the science of magic; *Rashid al-Din* too speaks of their treating the sick. He stated the nomads greatly esteem the physicians... and, whenever they see them, venerate them..., and these doctors have command over their lives... and property... . In addition, *Rashid al-Din* wiped out some of the aberrant thoughts and cure among Mongols. Henceforth, he supported erudites and sages to use Chinese science versus Mongolian style.²⁹ In the first stage, he encouraged *Ghazan* to settle his subjects and therefore he reined Mongol brutality³⁰ and persuaded *Ghazan* to incorporation of Chinese-Persian medicine. *Rashid al-Din* asserted Chinese used their seal to contracts and added finger-prints of anyone is not similar to another. Therefore, that is the first hint about difference of fingers and identity.³¹ However, he employed some Chinese and Iranian medics to translation and rendering the Chinese book, *Tansuq nameh*.³² subsequently *Rashid al-Din* offered it öljeytü in 713/1314. *Javahirnameh* is an abbreviation of this Chinese book. The book includes some details about advantage of materials (pearl, ruby, diamond, Chinese dishes...).³³ Another area *Rashid al-Din* proved his expertise was agriculture and veterinary. In *Al akhbâr va Al âsâr* he substantiate his skill³⁴ in which suggested his theo-

29. Boyle, 1972: 191.
30. O'Kane, 1993: 250.
31. Kasiri and Dehghan Nijad, 2010: 7.
32. Homadani, 1970: 44.
33. Ibid: 78.
34. Homadani, 1886: 90.



retical ideas about mines and plague of plants, cold and heat seasons, irrigation of orchards. He wrote his assertions about agriculture when he depicted some notes about a type of rice;

There is a small type of rice which grows in India where called Senta. During the reign of *Ghazan Khan*, I ordered to cultivate. After occasions the seeds bloomed and I cook some, it seemed to be better than our rice.³⁵

All in all, he was a vizier by extensive knowledge in medical fields. Even he is well known for his interpreters of Quranic verse. Totally he was an exception among his contemporaries.

Conclusion

On the whole, *Rashid al-Din* Fadl allah was one of the greatest viziers of Mongol era which tried to incorporate Mongol rituals with Irano-Islamic traditions. First thing first he was reputed to his knowledge in medicine. Hence he compiled some treatises on medicine according to his experience, Chinese tradition, and Mongol ritual and Islamic principles. In this regard he ordered to build of hospitals to train of medics to treatment of diseases. Moreover when *Menku khan* declared his ban about detergency, *Rashid al-Din* position elevated as a medic, Mongol kings followed of his welfare politics since the monarchs sought solidarity in Iranian society. Following *Ghazan khan* reforms he performed some enterprises in plantation and agriculture to deteriorate plague.

Rashid al-Din as a historian, wrote some historical narrates on Mongol ceremonies about their treatment style. In the next step, he defied of Persian ambition by participation in political negotiations and subsequently he tried to approach Mongol life style with Muslim procedure. So it can be said his enterprises were to achieve certain conception. All in all, his aim was reconstruction of an interrupted society which needs to revitalize.

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35. Ibid: 91.



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