

CONFERENCE PAPER

Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani al-Lahijani, An Iranian Physician and Astronomer in Ottoman Court and His Heritage

Abstract

One of the less known physicians in ottoman emperor was a great Iranian scientist, Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani al-Lahijani who was originally from Gilan region of Iran and worked as a chief astronomer and great physician of three ottoman kings. He wrote some books and treatises in astronomy and medicine and they remain as a manuscript today. All of his treatises are composed in Arabic and Persian. Due to his position in court as an important scientist and educator of princes, studying and analyzing his books will enhance our understanding of the mutual influence between Iranian and Ottoman medicine. In this article we will introduce this physician and his treatises through both new and old written sources and manuscripts.

Key words: History of Medicine, Iran, Ottoman, Hakim Unsuri al-Gilani

Received: 10 Aug 2025; Accepted: 4 Sep 2025; Online published: 7 Oct 2025
Research on History of Medicine/ 2025 Oct; 14(Suppl. 1): S61-S64.

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Citation:

Tabatabaei, S.H., and Arezaei, H., 2025. Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani al-Lahijani, An Iranian Physician and Astronomer in Ottoman Court and His Heritage. *Res Hist Med*, 14(Suppl. 1), pp. S61-S64. doi: 10.30476/rhm.2025.51268.

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Introduction

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries marked a period of not only wars and diplomatic and economic relations but also dynamic intellectual exchange between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, particularly in medicine and the natural sciences. During that period and amid the wars, numerous Iranian scientists immigrated to Ottoman lands and the Ottoman kings accepted them as distinguished persons. These scientists from the Iranian world received patronage within the Ottoman court (Mohammadi, Shojaeinia, and Zarghamian, 2024, pp. 3-8). Among these notable figures, Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani, originally from Lahijan in the Gilan region of Iran, stands out as a significant yet under-researched figure. Serving during the reigns of Mehmed II (r. 1444–1481), Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), and Selim I (r. 1512–1520), he served as a physician and mathematician and astronomer (Ihsanoğlu, 2023, p. 109). His surviving works in Persian and Arabic manuscripts reflect the intersection of Iranian traditions with Ottoman scholarly atmosphere.

This article aims to introduce his contributions to medicine and astronomy, and to evaluate his role in fostering intellectual connections between Iran and the Ottoman Empire.

Materials and Methods

The present study is focused on a review of manuscript sources attributed to Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani, as well as secondary scholarship on scientists and scientific literature of the Ottoman court. Primary emphasis was placed on his medical treatises, which are preserved in manuscript form across various libraries. Through the analysis of his writings certain details regarding his life were uncovered.

Results

His real and full name was Husayn ibn Shamsuddin Muhammad ibn Yahya al-Lahijini al-Gilani (Ihsanoğlu, 2023, p. 109), and he introduced himself in his books under different names such as Hisam ibn al-Shamsaddin al-Khatib, al-Khattabi al-Gilani, Unsuri al-Tabib al-Gilani, Unsuri al-Motatabeb al-Gilani and so on.

Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani's writings illustrate his wide-ranging scholarly activity:

Medical Works

1- *Alvāḥ al-ṣiḥḥa*

A medical treatise in Persian language concerned with practical aspects of hygiene, as well as health and disease management. This book comprises an introduction, three sections, and a concluding part, with each section containing subparts named Lavhe. Hence, the book is titled *Alvāḥ al-ṣiḥḥa*. Unsuri composed this treatise in Bayezid II period. This book has been published twice in Iran, with the author's name listed as Habib Motatabeb Gilani, although the reason for this attribution is not clear in the printed version (Ihsanoğlu, 2023, p. 109; Unsuri al-Gilani, n.d.).

2- *Jāmi' al-Qismayn al-Sulṭānī fī al-'Alāqa bayn al-Nujūm wa al-Ṭibb*

A book in Persian language that explores the relationships and connections between astronomy and medicine, reflecting the deep connection between astrology and medical



theory in the Islamic world. The author composed this book in Bayezid II period in Tokat. (Ihsanoğlu, 2023, p. 110; Unsuri al-Gilani, 1479).

3- *Risāla fī ḥifẓ al-ṣiḥḥa*

An Arabic treatise on preventive medicine, highlighting the importance of hygiene, balanced diet, and lifestyle in maintaining health. This treatise is a free translation of *Alvāḥ al-ṣiḥḥa* to Arabic language and is written in Sultan Selim I kingdom period. (Ihsanoğlu, 2023, p. 111; Unsuri al-Gilani, 1502 AD).

4- *Sharḥ Qānūnche li'l-Chaghmini*

An Arabic book as a commentary on al-Chaghmini's *Qānūnche*, an abridged and widely used medical handbook. This commentary testifies to his role in transmitting and expanding upon standard texts of medical education (Ihsanoğlu, 2023, p. 111).

In addition to his medical works, al-Gilani wrote at least six books on astronomy, calendars, and mathematics. Although these remain less studied, they indicate his expertise in time-keeping, astronomical tables, and mathematical methods—all essential for both medical astrology and courtly service.

Al-Gilani's presence at the Ottoman court and his promotion to the position of chief astronomer during the reign of Bayezid II indicates the position of Iranian scientists in Anatolia. His Persian and Arabic works show how Iranian scientific traditions were continued by Iranian scholars in Ottoman world. His treatises reflect an intellectual milieu where physicians were expected to master both bodily health and celestial influences.

Through his writings and his position in court, al-Gilani acted as a transmitter of Iranian medical knowledge into the Ottoman scholarly world. His Persian-language treatises reveal that Persian remained an important scholarly language alongside Arabic, while his Arabic writings allowed his works to reach a broader Ottoman audience.

Conclusion

Hakim Unsuri al-Khattabi al-Gilani represents an important but underappreciated figure in the history of medicine and science in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. His works demonstrate how Iranian physicians contributed to the intellectual vibrancy of the Ottoman court by introducing Persian and Arabic medical traditions and commentaries. His career reflects the deep entanglement of Iranian and Ottoman scientific cultures, where knowledge was not bound by political borders but circulated through scholars, manuscripts, and royal patronage.

Further research on the surviving manuscripts of Gilani will provide valuable insight into the transmission of Iranian medical heritage to the Ottoman world and help illuminate the broader networks of knowledge exchange in the early modern Islamic world.

Authors' Contribution

The idea and title of the article were chosen jointly by both authors. Seyed Hadi Tabatabaei wrote the text of the article, while Hamed Arzaei collected the manuscripts, contributed to the textual analysis of the manuscripts, and carried out the final revision of the article. All authors read and approved the final version of the work.



Funding

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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