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Celebrating the Rubaiyat in 2009 Review and assessment

The year 2009 marked the 150th anniversary of the publication of Edward FitzGerald's first edition of his *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám*. The year also saw the 200th birthday of Edward FitzGerald himself. This coincidence of anniversaries encouraged a number of Rubaiyat enthusiasts in different countries to stimulate a renewal of interest in FitzGerald and the Rubaiyat, by creating events of various kinds that would make 2009 a real Year of the Rubaiyat.



This note reviews the main Rubaiyat related events that took place either during or shortly after the year, and makes some assessment of what they have achieved. A full listing of all the events known to the authors can be seen on their Rubaiyat website¹. Inevitably there were good ideas for celebrations that fell by the wayside. However, some 50 different events took place and their range was wide, falling into the following main categories: exhibitions; lectures and conferences, broadcasts on radio and TV; verse recitals and music performances; creation of new plays, paintings and other artworks. Several new editions of the Rubaiyat were published during the year, and there was coverage in national newspapers and other media. The interest in the Year of the Rubaiyat was international, but with a particular focus on the UK, the Netherlands and the United States, reflecting the active interest of various people in these countries. There was also some activity in Iran, with two specific events to celebrate the anniversaries. These were the unveiling in May 2009 of a bust of Edward FitzGerald near Omar Khayyám's tomb in Nishapur, and a special exhibition of calligraphy based on verses by Khayyám and FitzGerald shown in Tehran in December 2009.

The first celebratory events actually started before 2009 began. West Virginia University Press in the United States published an Anniversary Issue of their journal *Victorian Poetry* in Spring 2008. This

volume, edited by Professor Erik Gray, provided a useful updating of the state of FitzGerald and Rubaiyat studies mainly from the point of view of English literature. In November of the same year, the first commemorative exhibition was opened in Phoenix, Arizona, when the Phoenix Art Museum presented the original artwork of Elihu Vedder's famous illustrated Rubaiyat published in 1884.

The programme of exhibitions took off from the beginning of 2009 with five different exhibitions opening in January and February, three in the United States, one in the Netherlands and one in the UK. They were followed by eight more openings in the course of the year, including a final



Saba Ensemble at the British Library

one at the British Library in London, whose exhibition began in December and continued to February 2010. The exhibitions varied greatly in both their size and emphasis, which added to the interest and variety of the programme. There were first editions and illustrated versions of the Rubaiyat and much more. In the Netherlands, the Museum Meermanno in the Hague showed a large number of early and fine printed editions of the Rubaiyat, as well as a highly decorated and illustrated manuscript version by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, borrowed from the British Library. The Bernard Quaritch

exhibition in London focused specifically on the book dealer's historic links with FitzGerald's Rubaiyat, while exhibitions in Suffolk and Cambridge also put a particular stress on FitzGerald, his life and letters. In contrast the US exhibitions, notable the major display in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin Texas, pre-



From the Deventer exhibition

sented some fascinating material on the wider impact of the Rubaiyat in American society in the early 20th century, while the exhibition in Deventer in the Netherlands contained much little known information about the many Dutch translations of the Rubaiyat and their background.

A number of additional celebratory events, such as lectures, readings and performances, took place in different venues to coincide with the exhibitions. The Harry Ransom Center had a programme of Rubaiyat related films and in April 2009 there was a special evening of music for the Rubaiyat, including some new compositions. The whole gamut of music for the Rubaiyat was reviewed in an evening in October at the Ancient India & Iran Trust in Cambridge, with performances from CD's of works from the late 19th century up to the present day. There was also a special birthday party for Edward FitzGerald on March 31st 2009 in Cambridge at the University Library, with readings from the Rubaiyat in Persian and English, and from other FitzGerald works, including some letters.

Various lectures on different aspects of FitzGerald and the Rubaiyat were organised independently, including two in FitzGerald's home town of Woodbridge, Suffolk. The major academic event of the Year of the Rubaiyat was a conference organised jointly by Leiden University and Cambridge University's Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Faculty of English and Victorian Study Group. During a week in July 2009, some 50 leading academic and independent researchers gathered, first in Leiden in the



Conference party at FitzGerald's grave

Netherlands and then in Cambridge, England, to discuss Omar Khayyam, Edward FitzGerald and the Rubaiyat. The exchange of views by international scholars approaching the subject from different and complementary standpoints, was enormously valuable, and friendships were made and reinforced in the many discussions that took place. There will be a lasting contribution from the conference in the form of publications of collections of the papers presented.

Another event linked to the July conference was the organisation of a major musical performance of Rubaiyat related compositions in the Netherlands by the Netherlands Chamber Choir, which was subsequently broadcast on Netherlands Radio. The conference itself was partly recorded by the BBC Persian Service and some extracts from the programme were included in a film entitled *The Genius of Omar Khayyam* which has been shown both on BBC World News and on BBC Four Television. The film, presented by Sadeq Saba, brings together Western and Iranian views on Khayyam, FitzGerald and the Rubaiyat. It includes footage of the unveiling of the bust of FitzGerald at Nishapur.

The BBC marked the anniversary year of the Rubaiyat in a number of other programmes. Professor Daniel Karlin and Professor Tony Briggs, who were respectively editors of two of the new editions of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat published early in 2009, took part in a discussion on the Radio 4 arts programme *Front Row*, and there was a full reading of the Rubaiyat on Radio 4's *Poetry Please* during the summer. The poem was read in its entirety at least twice more at public events, first in Ipswich in June, and then in February 2010 at the British Library in London. This last reading, which was combined with two lectures and a series of Persian readings from Khayyam's work with Persian music, provided a powerful climax at the effective end of the Year of the Rubaiyat.

One further aspect of the celebration in 2009 which should not be neglected is the creation of new art works to mark the anniversaries. We have referred above to the new bust of Edward FitzGerald in Nishapur, and new musical compositions. At the end of the year, a new limited edition of the Rubaiyat was published by the Folio Society with specially created illustrations and fine bindings; it was on dis-

play at the British Library exhibition. An art competition themed on the Rubaiyat at the Machynlleth based Museum of Modern Art in Wales stimulated more than 200 entries of a high quality, including around 30 from the under 18's. The paintings and drawings were on show at the museum for several months. Meanwhile, new plays drawing on the story of Fitz-



*Dancers at
Cambridgeshire schools*

Gerald and the Rubaiyat, written and directed by Rani Drew, were put on in Cambridge in July and De-

December. In another involvement by young people, three Cambridgeshire schools took the Rubaiyat as a theme for various artistic and discussion projects during the academic year 2008-09. The results of the projects were summarised in a booklet, and presented at an art exhibition and evening of performances, which was attended by participants at the July Cambridge conference.

What have all these celebrations of FitzGerald and the Rubaiyat in 2009 achieved? For those of us who are Rubaiyat enthusiasts, 2009 will live long in our memories, as a year when we saw and heard so many new things related to our interest, visited new places and met many other enthusiasts, some of whom have now become old friends. But the year achieved more than that. It undoubtedly brought the name of FitzGerald and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam back into

more general discussion. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people have, through visiting the exhibitions, or hearing lectures, readings and broadcasts, become aware of the heritage that the Persian poet/astronomer and the Victorian English man of letters have left us. There will be permanent records of the anniversary year in the form of publications, catalogues and artworks. But, even more, we believe that new people will be inspired to read, study and learn more about the famous poem. From the opposite ends of the academic scale, the Leiden-Cambridge conference and the Cambridgeshire schools project have shown that there is real ongoing interest in the Rubaiyat and its relevance to the modern world. We hope to see fruitful results of this interest in the years ahead.

We should like to pay tribute to the many people and organisation who worked so hard to create the celebratory events in the Year of the Rubaiyat in 2009. Those involved are far too many in number to mention by name but their efforts deserve acknowledgement. We hope that they enjoyed the year as much as we did.

Bill Martin & Sandra Mason

Independent researchers and Rubaiyat enthusiasts

April, 2010

1. Web address: http://www.omarkhayyamrubaiyat.com/2009_events.htm

Communications

RECTIFICATION

In the previous issue of *Omariana*, I commented on an essay by John Drew, published by Cambridge Poetry Workshop, as *The Dog and the Mongoose*. In this essay John Drew investigates Whitley Stokes' contribution to the history of the *Rubáiyát's* fame. One facet in this history is the anonymity of the translator's identity, and here John Drew pointed to the fact that already in 1864, it was known that this translator was Edward FitzGerald. In my imagination, John Drew was not the first to notify this, but when challenged by Mr. Drew to come forward with evidence, I must admit that my statement was probably based on nothing more than imagination. Should there be an actual source, then I have not been able to recover it.

JC

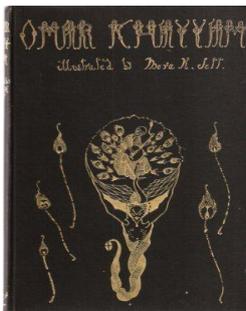
A CANADIAN CELEBRATION

April 8 2010, an evening was held by Toronto Public Library, to celebrate to 150th anniversary of the *Rubáiyát*. Actor David Calderisi recited the poem, as part of a programme in which he tells the story of how the poem came to be written and what it went on to become. The second part is a presentation of the poem, not as a reading nor a recital: he presents it from memory as the voice of Khayyam. An interview for Radio Canada International is available at: <http://www.rcinet.ca/radio/index.php?langua=ge=en&type=program&media=audio2&id=570> (Drag the vertical time bar in the top right toward the right until the timer registers 23:35, where the interview begins.)

A Cautionary Tale

One of the most bizarre editions of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam to be published was drawn by an Indian Parsee named Mera Ben Kavas Sett who, according to his publisher, became well-known as an artist and interior designer in Europe. His version was published in two formats.

The best known is a slim book privately printed and published in a limited edition of 250 by Galloway & Porter, the famous Cambridge bookshop, in 1914. The 75 verses of Fitzgerald's first edition are in a hand-written script on 15 single-sided pages, accompanied by ornamentation and drawings in Sett's somewhat idiosyncratic style. Another 15 pages each have one of Sett's drawings in black and white as well as a tissue guard page with the text of the appropriate ruba'i printed on it. Sett's drawings are undoubtedly reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley, although he denies that. The publication was financed by Sett's father, for English publishers found the explicit drawings far



Galloway & Porter, 1914

too shocking for their readers' susceptibilities, and Sett was not prepared to add the fig-leaves they required for decency's sake. Some years ago, I saw mention of a second version of the book in a completely different format - a series of unbound cards contained in a binder rather like a miniature artist's folio. According to the source that I had seen, this was published in 1911 by D.B. Taraporevala of Bombay (now Mumbai), but I had never seen a copy.

I was delighted when I saw what seemed to be a copy of this card version for sale on E-Bay, and placed my bid with what I thought was a generous maximum, although on many occasions recently my idea of generous had not matched that of other collectors.

This time I was fortunate and a week or so later unwrapped my parcel. Inside was a green cloth-covered folder containing 30 cards and a 12 page leaflet with the text of the Rubaiyat and an introduction. The cards were unmistakably the same designs as in the Galloway and Porter book, but with a slightly wider margin. Even more significantly, the 15 cards with the hand-written text per printed in two colours; the text was in green and the drawings and ornamentation were in dark

red. Overall, the effect was far less like Beardsley than the Galloway & Porter book.

It was with considerable interest that I opened the leaflet to see what more information I could find. To my surprise it was almost immediately evident that it could not have been written in 1911. For one thing it started with a publisher's note paying tribute to M.K. Sett's achievements and leaving the reader in no doubt that he was no longer alive. And, in his own introduction that followed, Sett himself refers in the past to "two global wars, destroying the cultured middle and upper classes". The earliest he could have written that was 1945, and he also refers to D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co requesting him to allow them to bring out a reprint. It seemed like another case of *caveat emptor*; apparently what I had bought was a reprint that was much more recent than the 1911 original. Even so, I was not too disconsolate, the book might be a reprint but it was still rare enough and I had apparently identified yet another edition.

It wasn't long before I showed my new acquisition to a couple of other collectors



Taraporevala, q. 20-23



Taraporevala, Card. # 3

(one of them the editor of this publication); they both had copies of the card version and seemed as surprised as I was at the apparent publication date of my copy. Before long I emailed them a scan of the introduction so that they could compare it with their own copies. I think we were all surprised to discover that all three copies were exactly the same, printed not in 1911 but in (or after) 1946. The puzzle was obvious - where had details of the 1911 version come from? I knew I had originally seen it in an article or book somewhere but it took me a long time to identify where. I scoured all the material I had collected over the years

without success, then remembered an article I knew I had used which seemed to be missing from my shelf. It had been published in an English publication called *Book and Magazine Collector* and had provided a good introduction to collecting Rubaiyats, especially illustrated editions. A visit to the local branch of W.H. Smith provided the most recent edition, in which there was a comprehensive index of the subjects of articles in back-numbers, as well as details of availability and ordering instructions. The copy I wanted, with an article on the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, was published in 1997. Back numbers of that edition were available so I ordered one with a phone call – delivery was not as quick as ordering, but eventually it a couple of weeks later. The article was just as I remembered it and there, towards the bottom of a table of “Collectable Editions of Edward Fitzgerald’s Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám”, was my original source which read:

The internet proved its value once again, and it took only a short search to find that the author of the original article was still

M.K. Sett Edition (D.B. Taraporevala c. 1911)£ 60-80

in business as a book dealer in London, and was contactable through ABE Books. I sent him an email explaining our predicament; fortunately he remembered his article, he was extremely helpful, and he replied almost by return as follows:

I have a set of the Sett... which looks to me older than 1945 and has pencilled on it 1912 from a previous owner. this I took as the basis for my c.1911. Roughly A4 cards inside a folding green case with gilt lettering. The booklet has rusty staples and, even allowing for Indian produced paper products aging quickly, it certainly has the feel of 1911 rather than post-1945.

That sounded very encouraging, so I soon sent him my scans, and asked him to

send me his in return so that we could compare our copies. Alas, there was no need for that step, for his next email read as follows (I have not corrected any of the inevitable email typing errors):

Having now read the intro to my set of prints i can confirm that it the same as yours and must be post WW2. The conclusion is then that there was no such c.1911 edition and the Bombay copies are all much later than the UK ed. Sorry to have been inadvertantly responsible for creating a ghost!

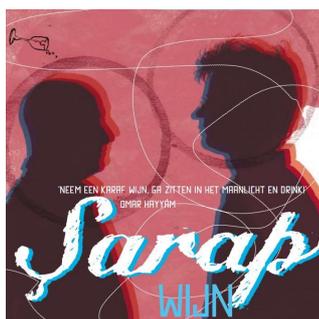
You may notice that I have omitted the dealer’s name to avoid him unnecessary embarrassment, he had made a genuine mistake and he could not have been more helpful in resolving the mystery! We could call that the end of the story, but we can all learn something from the exercise: never depend on a single unverified secondary source of information, and glean every snippet of information that you can from the content of a book (especially the introduction)

As a final thought, purely circumstantial evidence suggests that a version on cards in a folder with an accompanying leaflet would have been quite consistent in 1911. The previous year, the first edition of the 12 drawings for the Rubaiyat by Abanindro Nath Tagore was published by The Studio in precisely that format, and things like that tend to follow fashion. However, it seems as though fashion and consistency can provide a mere chimera that we might all have continued to chase.

Garry Garrard
April, 2010

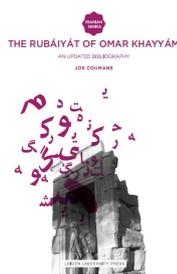
Garrard is the author of ‘**A book of verse. The Biography of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám. Sutton, 2007**

Miscellaneous



Last year **Baraná**, the musical crossover concept of Turkish singer and multi-instrumentalist Behsat Üvez and Dutch reed player Steven Kamperman, toured the Netherlands to perform a program called “Şarap”. Now a CD will presented in a new series of concerts, starting October 2010. For a schedule of concert dates, see <http://barana.nl> and open Agenda. To order the CD contact info@barana.nl and enter name and address and the title of the CD that you are ordering

New editions and publications



JOS COUMANS

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám. An Updated Bibliography. Leiden, Leiden University Press, 2010.

ISBN 978-908-72-8096-3. 252 pages, paperback. €34,95.

Soon available.

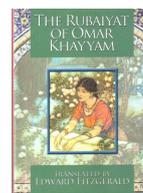
This book provides a bibliography of editions of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, published from 1930 till 2008. More than 1.000 editions in 80 languages are listed. Also included are numerous editions published before 1929, which are not found in Potter's bibliography of 1929.

Read more on: www.lup.nl

CHARTWELL BOOKS

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Edward FitzGerald. Chartwell Books, 2010. 128 p. ISBN: 9780785826118.

Text from the fifth edition, with explanatory notes and variations, and an introduction by John Baldock, who briefly discusses the factors that contributed to the popular success of the Rubáiyát in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



PAUL CLAES

Omar Chajjaam. Kwatrijnen. Vertaald door Paul Claes; naar de Engelse versie van Edward FitzGerald (1859). Antwerpen, Meulenhoff|Manteau, 2010. 61 p. ISBN: 9789085422259. €19,95.

A new translation into Dutch by the well known Belgian translator Paul Claes. Together with the text of FitzGerald's first edition.

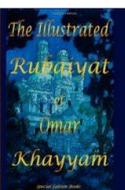


AZILOTH BOOKS

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Edward FitzGerald. Aziloth Books, 2010. 90 p. (Cathedral Books) ISBN: 978-1907523199.

ALEX QUERALTÓ BARTRÉS

Khayyam, Omar. Quartetes. Translated from the Persian by Alex Queraltó Bartrés. Adesiara Editorial, 2010. 120 p. ISBN: 9788492405268.



DON DIEGO

The Illustrated Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Edward FitzGerald. El Paso, Special Edition Books, 2010. 50 p.

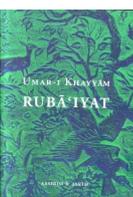
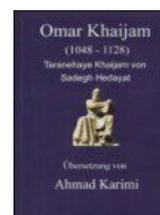
ISBN: 978-1934255322.

With illustrations by Dulac. Graphic design by Don Diego.

SADEGH HEDAYAT

Vierzeiler von Khajjam. Ahmad Karimi. Übersetzung des "Taranehaye Khajjam" [von Sadegh Hedayat. Hrsg. Hossein Faraji]. Hamburg, AgeOf-Intelligence, 2009. 139 p. ISBN: 9783000286186.

143 quatrains, in German and Persian. Illustrated with 6 miniatures in black and white. Translation into German of Sadegh Hedayat's "Taranehaye Khajjam" by Ahmad Karimi. 143 quatrains, in German and Persian. Illustrated with 6 miniatures in black and white. Available through www.buchhandel.de



HALIMA NAIMOVA

Umar-i Khayyam. Rubaiyat. Selecção, tradução de Halima Naimova. Assírio & Alvim, 2009. ISBN: 978-972-37-1316-9.

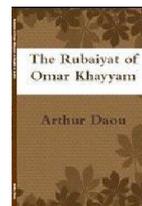
GILBERT LAZARD

A four-language version of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is to be released by Parseh book publication which will be based on **Gilbert Lazard's** French translation. Read more on: <http://www.ibna.ir/vdcepX8f.jh8voik1bj.html>

ARTHUR DAOU

Edward FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. First edition in colloquial Lebanese Arabic. By Arthur Daou. Black Cat Ventures, 2009. 100 p. ISBN: 9780982566619.

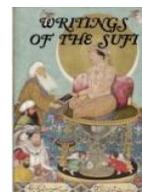
Illustrated. 150th anniversary of FitzGerald's 1st Edition, the 50th of Arthur Daou's translation into spoken Arabic on the 10th anniversary of his passing in 1999.



WRITINGS OF THE SUFI

Writings of the Sufi. The Mystical Tradition in Islam. A Sufi message of spiritual liberty by Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan. Congress of birds by Farid ud-Din Attar. Songs of Kabir. The rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. St. Petersburg, Red & Black Publishers, 2009. 126 p. ISBN: 9781934941546.

90 quatrains from FitzGerald's translation.



RICHARD DALBY

Edward FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. A 150th Anniversary Celebration by Richard Dalby. In: Book and magazine collector, December 2009, Nr. 314, p. 44-61.

Dalby presents a short history of the Rubáiyát and highlights the most important and best known illustrated editions, also giving prices that were realized at recent auctions. The article is illuminated with sixteen illustrations from these editions, mainly by artists from the first decades of the previous century, such as Greiffenhagen, Palmer, Robinson, Dulac, Brangwyn, Bull, Geddes and Balfour. Back issues available at £ 3.50

Read more on the website of the Book and magazine collector:

<http://www.collectors-club-of-great-britain.co.uk/magazines/articleitem.asp?article=300>



NAGHI NAGHACHIAN

The quatrains of Omar Khayyam. Frankfurt, Privately printed, 2008.

A beautiful edition in four languages was produced in 2008 by Iranian artist Naghi Naghachian.

The work consists of 88 illustrated pages with 22 colour plates, and verses in Persian, English, French and German. It took five years of creative and intensive study to produce the book.

Mr. Naghachian, born in Tehran, completed high school education in Iran, and studied illustration and book design in Germany. The selections are taken from translations by Avery and Heath-Stubbs and FitzGerald, from the German translation by Alavi and Remané, and the French translation by Mahdi Fouladvind. The Persian verses are selected from the edition by Sadegh Hedayat. The work was printed in a limited edition of 150 copies, hand-bound, and signed by the artist. The complete edition was sold to a large company, that preferred to stay anonymous, and who presented copies as a business gift. According to information provided my Mr. Naghachian, each unique copy was priced at € 15,000.

A selection from the work is available at:

http://www.irandokht.com/images/Khayyam_English.pdf

