The Great 'Umar Khayyam

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An ‘Umar Khayyām Database

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Introduction

There is still a vivid interest in ‘Umar Khayyām and his rubāʿiyāt: new editions, new translations, and a steady flow of articles in academic journals, magazines and newspapers, not least triggered by the events held in 2009 to commemorate the birth of Edward FitzGerald in 1809 and the first publication of his Rubāʿiyāt translation in 1859. This interest has led over the years to an enormous body of documents. It is not unreasonable to estimate the number of editions of the Rubāʿiyāt today at 2,000.1 In his study In search of Omar Khayyām (1971), Ali Dashti suggested that more than 2,000 books and articles had been written about Omar Khayyām at that time, which is suggestive of how large the number would be today. Several attempts have been made to catalogue this material. The first was ‘A list of English versions and editions of the Rubāʿiyāt of Omar Khayyām,’ in the Bibelot Series edition of the Rubāʿiyāt by Thomas B. Mosher in 1894. This list was updated in subsequent editions of the Rubāʿiyāt in Mosher’s Old World Series. Next we may consider the two volume edition by N.H. Dole in 1896 and of course the bibliography published by A.G. Potter in 1929. More recently bibliographies have been published by C.J. Weber (1959), H. Halbach (1975) and F. Angouráni and Z. Angouráni (2002), but there is no comprehensive, general survey, either of the numerous editions of the Rubāʿiyāt,3 or of the books, articles and other material about Omar Khayyām, Edward FitzGerald or the Rubāʿiyāt.

In their recent study, W. Martin and S. Mason (2007) presented an analysis of the way artists have dealt with the imaginative features of the Rubāʿiyāt. The analysis, though restricted to editions of FitzGerald’s translation, shows the popularity of the book. There are many, many more illustrated and decorated editions. It is evident that Omar Khayyām has played, and still does play, an important role in the Netherland’s literary and cultural history, even if no overall statistics are available to back this up. It has sometimes been claimed that Omar Khayyām is a household name in the Netherlands. This is not strictly true, but it is remarkable to see how often and intensively the Dutch have let themselves be carried away by Omar Khayyām. Statistics regarding the publishing of material
relating to the rubáiyát are a matter of utmost delicacy, but if we consider for example a total of 63 Dutch editions (including reprints), we can say that the Netherlands, a relatively small country, ranks among the global top ten in Rubáiyát production.

**The editions of the Rubáiyát of ‘Umar Khayyám**

The bibliographer collects his data from a wide variety of material and resources: private collections, special collections in libraries and institutions, earlier bibliographies and so on. But however important and helpful a bibliography may be, it is not the proper vehicle for the kind of information we have in mind. After all, what we really want to know, for example, is this:

*How many translations of the Rubáiyát exist, how many editions exist of every translation, how often are they reprinted or reissued? In which languages is the work translated, and in how many countries is it published? How many illustrated or decorated editions are there? Here we need statistics as well, regarding artists, time periods and numbers, reprints and reissues. And of course, how large is the FitzGerald corpus in this entire domain.*

Statistics should also deal with the number of commercial or officially published editions versus privately printed, limited or pirated editions. How many copies were printed of a specific edition, and in which series was it published? Is it a verse or a prose translation, does it follow the usual rhyme and metrical schemes. Is it a popular edition or an academic, critical, or scholarly edition? Who has contributed to each edition, be it by means of an introduction or in other materials such as forewords, prologues, epilogues etc. And finally, for this moment at least, from which text or source does the translation originate.

For many editions and translations it will probably be impossible to obtain all required data, especially data on publishing houses, as this kind of information is hardly available.

**The secondary literature**

The number of articles, books and other sorts of publications on Khayyám is even larger than the number of editions of the rubáiyát. The questions that we might wish to have answers to, are for instance: how many theses have been published on the subject, what are the most important academic and critical studies, when and where have they been published. What portions of the Khayyámiana belong to the popular and to the academic domains. Countless shorter articles were published in newspapers and
magazines in the first decades of the 20th century, but there is no decent survey of this material. The online archives of the New York Times for example, give access to hundreds of articles on Khayyām and his *rubāiyāt*, but as they are not equally relevant, a selection is necessary. There are various other resources to search but first we will have to identify and locate them. This secondary material has even been more neglected in terms of cataloguing than the numerous editions of the *Rubāiyāt*.

**The quatrains**

Suppose we want to know whether the quatrains in the manuscript, known as Supplément Persan 823, in the French National Library, have been translated and who is the translator. Or which translators used the Whinfield editions for their own translations? It seems that the French translation by Franz Toussaint was used more than once in Spanish versions published in South-America, but in how many exactly. Which quatrains occur in all of the important old manuscripts? And where can we find the existing translations of these quatrains? It is obvious that a bibliography or library catalogue cannot provide answers to this sort of questions without becoming a multi-volume encyclopedia.

Scholarly or critical editions, such as those by Whinfield, provide references for each quatrain to parallel manuscripts and editions. In these works references are given as footnotes, or as tables with corresponding manuscripts, identifying each quatrain in other manuscripts and editions. But there is no uniformity and in each edition these parallels differ greatly.

To go into this in more detail: The editions of Anet (1957), Arberry (1949, 1952), Christensen (1905, 1920, 1927), Csillik (1934), Dole (1896), Heron Allen (1898, 1899), Kasra (1975), Mahfuz-ul-Haq (1939, 1986), Rodwell (1931), (Roe, 1906), Saidi (1991), Thompson (1906), Tirtha (1941) and Whinfield (1882, 1883), contain tables of corresponding quatrains in, or references to, manuscripts and published editions. For example, for his 1882 translation, Whinfield used the edition of Nicolas (1867), the Lucknow edition (1878), the Bodleian ms. of 865 A.H. and a few smaller collections. Each quatrain in the Whinfield edition has a reference to these collections. Quatrain 1 has N. 4 as a reference code, which means that this first rubā‘i corresponds with quatrain number 4 in Nicolas’ translation. Quatrains corresponding with the Bodleian and Lucknow collections are only indicated with a single letter, B or L. The sources for this translation are only briefly mentioned on page 4-5 in his introduction. For the bilingual edition of 1883, Whinfield extended his translation with material from additional sources, or authorities as he called them. A list is given on page xviii in the introduction. Here Whinfield indicated for each quatrain in his translation in which other authority it can be found, however without giving the corresponding number in that collection, as he did with the
Nicolas quatrains in his earlier edition. If we want to locate each of the Whinfield quatrains in the other authorities, there is a lot of work to be done.

More helpful in this regard are the editions by Christensen. In the *Critical studies* of 1927 Christensen analyzed quatrains from eighteen collections. For each quatrain in this edition not only the authorities are given but also the corresponding number in that collection. All these numbers and references are collected in a separate table. This allows us to identify corresponding quatrains in various authorities immediately.

To illustrate this in further detail, we can give the following characteristics regarding references or tables from a few of the above mentioned editions.

**Anet 1957**: table, including Cambridge ms. (Arberry 1952); Christensen 1927; Furughi-Ghani 1942; Hedayat 1942; Rosen 1925; Nicolas 1867; E’tessam Zadeh 1934; Guy 1935.

**Arberry 1949**: list, including FitzGerald 1859 and 1879; Whinfield 1883; Heron-Allen 1898; Rosen 1930; Christensen 1927; Mahfuz-ul-Haq 1939; Furughi 1942. For each quatrain references are given in the text to corresponding quatrains, when available, including quatrain number.

**Arberry 1952**: table, including Cambridge ms. 604 (1207); Ch. Beatty ms. 658 (1259-60); Bodleian ms. 856 (1460-1); Christensen 1927; Furughi 1942; Ghani anthology. 14th cent.; Nicolas 1867; Qazvini anthology 741 (1341); Rosen 1925; Rosen App. I anthology 930 (1523-4); Rempis anthology 731 (1331); Nafisi anthology ca. 750 (1349); Whinfield 2nd ed. 1901; FitzGerald 1879.

**Csillik 1934**: four tables, of which the first is the most relevant, including Suppl. Pers. 1417; Anc. Fonds 349; Suppl. Pers. 823; Suppl. Pers. 1366; Suppl. Pers. 1637; Suppl. Pers. 1435.

**Heron-Allen 1898**: list, including Calcutta Ms. no. 1548; Suppl. Persan 823; Bankipur Ms., Lucknow lithogr. 1894; St. Petersburg lithogr. 1888; Bombay lithogr. 1880; Nicolas 1867; Whinfield 1883; FitzGerald 1859, 1868, 1872, 1879, 1890; De Tassy 1857, FitzGerald (Letters and literary remains) 1889, Dole 1896, Cowell (Calc. Rev.) 1858 and a few others. For each quatrain references are given in the text to corresponding quatrains, when available, including quatrain number.

**Heron-Allen 1899**: list, including Ouseley Ms no 140; Calcutta Ms no 1548; Lucknow lithogr. 1894; Whinfield 1883; Nicolas 1867; St. Petersburg lithogr. 1888; Bombay 1880; Ms Publ. Lib. Bankipur 1553-4; Suppl. Persan 823; Suppl. Persan 745; Suppl. Persan 793; Suppl. Persan 826; Ancien Fonds 349; Ms Lib. Nawak of Tonk; Cowell (Calcutta Rev.) 1858; De Tassy 1857; Payne 1898. For each quatrain references are given in the text to corresponding quatrains, when available, including quatrain number.
The next step may be to see which sources are dealt with in the various editions. For example, the Lucknow lithographed edition, dated A.H. 1312, is mentioned in Christensen 1905, Heron-Allen 1898 and 1899, Roe 1906, Saidi 1991 and Thompson 1906. The Bodleian MS (Ouseley 140) is mentioned in Heron-Allen 1899, Roe 1906, Christensen 1927, Rodwell 1931, Tirtha 1941 and many others.

We can now easily find the various translations of a quatrain, for example:

Nr. 13 in Heron-Allen (1899) reads:

Now that there is a possibility of happiness for the world,
every living heart has yearnings towards the desert,
upon every bough is the appearance of Moses' hand,
in every breeze is the exhalation of Jesus' breath.

This quatrain is nr. 194 in the Supplément Persan, nr. 823, nr. 116 in Whinfield, 1883, nr. 2 in De Tassy, 1857 and nr. 4 in the four FitzGerald translations. In Roe (1906) it is nr. 7 and here is reads as follows:

But lo, without, the year is young and fair,
And yearning hearts to stilly meads repair;
The hand of Musa shines on ev'ry bough,
The breath of 'Isa rises on the air.

Roe identified this quatrain as nr. 2, in Buch VI, Bodenstedt, 1889, nr. 40 in Cadell, 1899, nr. 1, in the 2nd series in Garner, 1897, and nr. 454 in Payne, 1898.

Rodwell (1931) gives for two variants (a and b) of this quatrain as additional authorities: MS, O.R. 10.910 in the British Museum (est. 16th century), MS in the Cambridge Library, MS 906 in the India Office Library, 1811, Lucknow lithograph, 1878, Lucknow lithograph, 1924, Nicolas 1867, Amritsar lithograph, Ouseley MS 140 in British Library, Supplément Persan, nr. 1417, Calcutta printed edition of 1836 and Whinfield 1883. Unfortunately, the quatrains in Rodwell are not identified with individual numbers in these authorities, but as we know from Roe that the quatrain in question is nr. 4 in FitzGerald, we can find editions that have comparative tables that link the FitzGerald versions with other authorities.

Probably the most extensive edition, if we look at the number of authorities, is Tirtha 1941. The bibliography of manuscripts and editions includes 111 works. For each quatrain the number in corresponding authorities is given, but as one quatrain may have more than 50 correspondences it would be a painstaking job to find quatrains from other sources, for example nr. 4 in FitzGerald, in this work.
Another issue, or problem, is the fact that all of these editions use different codes or abbreviations for the same authority. The Bodleian manuscript for instance is 'BDa' in Tirtha, 'O' in Heron-Allen (1899) and Rodwell, 'B' in Roe and 'Bodl.I' in Christensen 1927.

This problem can be solved if we collect every quatrain in a database, including all relevant metadata, such as bibliographic details of the edition in which they are found, the codes for corresponding authorities. Of course, the database should also provide the text of each quatrain,\(^6\) which should allow us to find all the variants of one and the same, oldest example. In the end we will have a large network of quatrains that are connected to each other.

As there is no definite, limited and established body of quatrains that are undoubtedly Khayyám's, this super table represents a floating corpus of quatrains. To prevent it from extending without limits, there has to be some generally accepted agreement on this question, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

It would take us too far here to suggest every possible index that could be searched, but at least we should be able to retrieve all the parallels in all sources of a certain quatrain in any source, including the texts of these parallels and the details of their sources.

## The database

Although we have three different sorts or sets of information, i.e. on the Rubáiyát, on secondary material and on the quatrains, they exceed the possibilities of a simple bibliography. In a database, links can be constructed between the items in each set. For example, we should be able to find which translation or edition is the subject of a certain study, and, in the next step, consult the various quatrains in these editions themselves.

For the time being, we will not consider the technical details regarding the database, but there is a number of relevant ownership and management issues.

1. **Contents** – what does the database contain? We can think of (1) manuscripts; (2) editions of the Rubáiyát; (3) literature on the Rubáiyát, Khayyám, FitzGerald and other translators; (4) parodies, works of art, music, drama, commercial spin-off etc.
2. **Output** – search and select; output on screen and in print.
3. **Form** – it should be a long term project by way of an online database; to be published as a website; the database grows as it is online.
4. **Users** – professional interest: students, professors, researchers; book collectors; libraries, publishers, bookshops and bookdealers; the general public.
5. **Ownership** – who will own copyrights, take decisions, allow access: an institution (library, university or faculty), a society or a private undertaking should hold.

6. **Publisher** – obviously the database will have to be commercially interesting for a publishing firm.

7. **Access**: is it freely accessible or will some form of subscription be necessary?

8. **Additional products** – advanced search options; print and download record lists or selections; links to full text or web-documents; additional data on translators, illustrators, publishers.

9. **Costs** – database software, costs for maintenance, administration, hosting the database.

### Conclusion

Not only the number of editions of the *Rubáiyát* tells us something about the popularity of the book, we also need statistics on related material such as critical studies, essays, articles in journals, magazines and newspapers. Another category that provides important clues is that of the parody, of art and drama, and of course the domain of the commercial spin-off: wines, restaurants, bars, mugs, t-shirts, shoes, jewelry etc., that are connected to the Omar Khayyám phenomenon. This material deserves to be documented if we want to understand Omar Khayyám's 'influence' on our society not only in a qualitative way but also statistically. But even this would not be enough: we should be able to compare it to other literary and cultural phenomena. But that, while important, is beyond the scope of this paper.

### Notes


2. There are other bibliographic studies, but these are some of the more important. For more information see Coumans (2010).

3. A new bibliography is in preparation, see Coumans (2010).

4. Of course there are more editions with tables and reference lists, notably in Tirtha 1941, but they are not considered here.


6. Of course, copyright issues need to be respected.

### Bibliography